# SOCRATIC VIRTUE

*Making the Best of the Neither-Good-Nor-Bad*

NAOMI RESHOTKO

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Socrates was not a moral philosopher. Instead he was a theorist who showed how human desire and human knowledge complement one another in the pursuit of human happiness. His theory allowed him to demonstrate that actions and objects have no value other than that which they derive from their employment by individuals who, inevitably, desire their own happiness and, in addition, have the knowledge to use actions and objects as a means for its attainment. The result is a naturalized, practical, and demystified account of good and bad, and right and wrong. Professor Reshotko presents a newly envisioned Socratic theory residing at the intersection of the philosophy of mind and ethics. It makes an important contribution to the study of the Platonic dialogues and will also interest all scholars of ethics and moral psychology.

NAOMI RESHOTKO is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Denver. She has published articles on Socratic ethics and Platonic metaphysics and edited *Desire, Identity and Existence* (2003). She serves on the editorial board of *Apeiron: a Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science*.

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*For PB*

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# *Preface*

I was born with an appetite for metaphysics and action theory, but my taste for ethics has been slow to develop. I am uncomfortable (and often frustrated) with the initial steps taken in ethical theory. The foundations of ethical theory can be understood as forcing a choice between two horns of a dilemma: either we embrace relativism, or we acknowledge the existence of universal ethical principles. Both of these horns are problematic. The difficulties of ethical relativism have been understood at least since Plato's *Euthyphro*: ethical relativism does not allow us to ask why any particular culture or person exhibits a particular ethical practice. The only explanation that can be offered for why a practice has been adopted is that its practitioners believe it is correct. But relativism does not invite us to give a philosophical answer to the interesting and important questions about why any particular person or culture believes a particular practice is correct. On the other hand, if there are universal ethical principles, we are equally at a loss to explain why *these* principles exist and not others. We can no more say why these principles govern ethics than we can say why these laws of physics govern the physical world. In neither case can we uncover a reason to invest in a given set of moral principles or a particular ethical practice. Why are we supposed to adhere to a particular ethical system and entreat others to do so?

After many years of studying and defending the unusual theory of desire and action that my mentor, Terry Penner, has diagnosed in Plato's Socratic dialogues, I became intrigued by Socrates' equally unusual tripartite distinction between the good, the bad, and the neither-good-nor-bad. It is difficult to read the dialogues without noticing that Plato has Socrates make this division. Still, no scholar has treated Socrates' understanding of the neither-good-nor-bad as a distinct force in his psychology of action and ethics.

Over time, I came to see that in exposing his unique understanding of good, bad, and neither-good-nor-bad, Socrates has removed the falsely

dichotomous ethical framework of relativism versus universalism. A proper understanding of Socrates' contention that all human beings have a contingent, but natural and objective, goal toward which they are inevitably driven, combined with an exposition of his theories of how scientific knowledge allows human beings to make objectively better or worse choices in light of this goal, demystifies the abstract notions of good and bad, and right and wrong. Together, these ground the supposition that there is a viable, objectivist, foundation for ethics – without forcing us to embrace universal moral principles.

When I completed my doctorate in 1990, there were, as far as I knew, only two monographs which took themselves to be examinations of the philosophy of Socrates as represented in Plato's early dialogues. One was G. X. Santas' *Socrates* (1979); the other was Richard Kraut's *Socrates and the State* (1984). C. D. C. Reeve's *Socrates in the Apology* came out in 1989, but remained under my radar for a year or two. Gomez-Lobo's *The Foundations of Socratic Ethics* also existed before 1990, but appeared only in Spanish in 1989; the English edition did not come out until 1994.

These were, of course, quickly followed by Vlastos' two posthumous publications *Socrates*: *Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (1991) and *Socratic Studies* (1994). Brickhouse and Smith's *Plato's Socrates* arrived in 1994. And now there are many more. It is amazing and exciting that in fewer than twenty years we have come to the point where an author must explain to her readers why she is taking the time to write, and imposing upon them the opportunity to read, yet another book on the philosophical views of Socrates.

I would like to think that it is easy to make the case for the present book: this book starts on a completely different footing from those that have come before. I have found that most previous treatments of Socrates (and especially the book-length ones) read a post-Kantian notion of morality back into his ethical theory. My awareness of this is due to the teaching and scholarship of Terry Penner. He has always made it clear that this sort of "moralism" is foreign to Socratic ethics. Penner has provided the foundation upon which I build my own view.

To say that a Kantian notion of morality is *foreign* to Socratic ethics is not *necessarily* to claim that such a reading of Socrates is *anachronistic*. Some scholars argue that, to the extent that contemporary authors read Socrates to support a Kantian or Christian notion of morality, these readings are anachronistic. However, others might argue that Kant did not simply *invent* morality: Kant was analyzing and theorizing a foundation for a

certain tendency to think in what we now consider "moral" terms. This tendency has been around for many years, existing not only in a Christian framework, but in any culture that made use of notions like shame, blame, or punishment. Thus, it is possible that some of Socrates' contemporaries and ancient interpreters were also operating within what we would now call a Kantian framework; I take no stand on this issue. If his contemporaries did operate in this way, then Socrates' way of thinking about ethics was a radical departure from their approach as well. I will refer to these notions of ethics as "neo-Kantian" even while acknowledging that I might also be referring to thoughts and thinkers who pre-dated Kant. I think that, for we, who live in a post-Kantian world, our immersion in a society that embraces an almost completely segregated notion of moral good makes it hard for us to understand Socrates' approach to the good while biasing us against it. Throughout this book, I also describe this Kantian tendency to segregate moral good from any other kind of good as "moralistic."

One reason for finding a Kantian notion of morality off the mark when it comes to Socratic ethics is Kant's embrace of universal moral principles. But this is not the most important reason. In the *Laws* II, at 662e, the Athenian comments that a lawgiver would appear in an odd light if he were to separate the life of greatest pleasure and happiness from the just life, for he would be making it sound as if the two were separable – as if a person could lead one life without leading the other. No one who appreciates a contemporary, post-Kantian, notion of morality would think it odd to separate these two; according to that conception, one's pleasure and happiness are necessarily connected to the contingent events of one's life, while one's justness is determined by how one reasons about *a priori* truths. This separation now typifies the intuitions of the Western layperson, as well as the student of philosophy. It is the adoption of Kant's categorically unique notion of moral good – transcendental, otherworldly, *a priori*, and inexplicable in scientific terms – that will do the most harm to our understanding of ancient ethics generally, and Socratic ethics in particular. We must not knowingly import it, and we must be vigilant lest we allow it to creep in unawares.

I believe that such vigilance will be rewarded – not only through the realization of a more satisfying explanation for our concern with ethics, but also with a more concrete understanding of what Socrates relates about things that we find very important – like good, bad, virtue, and happiness. I defend what I say both as an interpretation of Socrates' views and as a viable philosophy of motivation and goodness in human action. I hope that those

who reject it as a reconstruction of the thought represented by the Socrates of Plato's early dialogues will nevertheless be intrigued by it as an original view. It lays out a theory of human motivation and its consequences for ethical behavior that challenges and eclipses many of the assumptions that have been, and continue to be, made in the discourse which constitutes the intersection of ethics and action theory.

# *Acknowledgments*

Eric Brown, James Butler, and Mark McPherran each served as an APA commentator for a paper that was a predecessor of one of the chapters in this book. Each allowed me to string him along far beyond the commitment required for his presentation, so that I could milk him for more of his incisive and helpful reactions to my work. James Butler also read five of the chapters when they were closer to their present form. His keen eye helped me refine my view, in many places. George Rudebusch was an APA commentator for an earlier version of Chapter 8, he has, in addition, been a stimulating, provocative, and understanding interlocutor concerning these ideas for many years. Christopher Shields provided illuminating feedback on the paper that became Chapter 6, followed by loads of helpful advice and moral support during the time that I was revising the material for the book. Nicholas Smith read an early draft of the book and gave me copious notes, for which I thanked him by pestering him with further questions – which he always took seriously and answered at length – for many months. Gerasimos Santas' warm and enthusiastic response to my original proposal gave me the courage to shop it around. Antonio Chu has made himself available to offer an educated and critical reaction to every stage of every idea that has entered my mind for the decade that we have both lived in Denver. I have already made clear the scholarly debt that I owe to Terry Penner. His interest and support – for which I am more grateful than I can say – have made as large a contribution to this endeavor as has his scholarship. Christopher Rowe always seemed to know what I was trying to say better than I did myself, and he often amazed me by causing me to suddenly see a new way through a passage or an argument with only the briefest and most subtle comment. Friends, colleagues, and mentors like these make working in the field of Socratic philosophy not only productive but also enjoyable. I am enormously grateful to all of them.

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My colleagues, Nancy Matchett and Todd Breyfogle read the penultimate draft of the manuscript; it was a treat to receive their rigorous and enlightened comments on content and style.

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Any elegance in my prose is due to PB Schechter, who went through what was supposed to be my final manuscript line by line. With all of this expert help from so many corners, I sometimes wonder if I can take credit for anything other than whatever mistakes undoubtedly remain.

I am grateful for the loving support of my parents, my sisters, and my friends. I am particularly grateful to Sanford Watzman who moved to Denver just in time to look over the first full draft of the manuscript with an editor's eye. I also offer a deep and loving thank you to my nearest and dearest, PB, Sasha, and Yevanit, who, all three, in innumerable and sometimes surprising ways, guide and assist me in making the best of the neither-good-nor-bad.

CHAPTER 1

# *Introduction*

There is a story that I have heard told many times.

A very poor farmer lives in a small town on the outskirts of a large kingdom. One morning, the farmer awakens to find that a beautiful and wild stallion has wandered into his field. The farmer catches the stallion and puts it in his corral. The townspeople come to the farmer and say, "This is good, you have managed to catch a beautiful stallion." The farmer replies, "I don't know if it is good, what I do know is that I now have a stallion."

The next day, the king himself happens to be passing through the farmer's village. Upon seeing the stallion, the king feels he must own this beautiful animal. He sends his servant into the farmer's home to offer him a large amount of gold in exchange for the horse. But the farmer refuses to sell the animal at any price and the king rides away very angry. Seeing what has happened, the townspeople go to the farmer and say, "This is bad, you might have a beautiful horse, but you are still a poor farmer and the king is now angry with you as well." The farmer replies, "I don't know if it is bad, what I do know is that the king is angry with me."

That night while the farmer is sleeping, the stallion breaks free from his stall and vanishes into the surrounding forest. The next day, when the townspeople hear what has happened, they gather around the farmer and say, "This is bad, not only is the king mad at you, but now you don't even have the horse." The farmer replies, "I don't know if it is bad, what I do know is that I no longer have a horse."

The next morning, the beautiful stallion returns to the poor farmer's field and with him he has five of the most beautiful mares that the townspeople have ever seen. When the farmer opens the corral, the majestic stallion leads them all in. The townspeople are in awe. "This is good," they marvel, "you are a poor farmer, but you have six of the most beautiful horses in the world." "I do not know if it is good," replies the farmer, "what I do know is that I now have six horses to train and feed."

That very afternoon, the farmer and his oldest son take the stallion out into the field to break him for riding. The stallion throws the farmer's son from his back and the boy's legs are broken. When the farmer carries his son home and puts him in his bed the townspeople gather round and say, "This is bad, your son is injured and cannot work." The farmer replies, "I do not know if it is bad, what I know is that my son must stay in bed for a while."

That evening the king's men come to the town and conscript every able-bodied young man to serve in a war that the king has declared upon a fierce and brutal enemy to the far north of the kingdom. But the farmer's son is not taken because he cannot walk. The townspeople say, "It is good that your son was injured, now he will not be killed in this brutal war." The farmer replies, "I do not know if it is a good thing, what I do know is that my son will not have to go to war."

I have heard this story told many times in different contexts and for different reasons,[1] Whenever I hear it, I appreciate the lovely way in which it illustrates Socrates' views concerning the good, the bad, and the neither-good-nor-bad.

Contrary to accepted lore, Socrates was not the first moral philosopher. He was not the *first* moral philosopher because he was not, in fact, a *moral* philosopher at all. *Socratic ethics*, the theory which can be attributed to the Socrates of a certain group of Plato's dialogues,[2] is not a moral theory. It is not prescriptive. It does not consider any actions, intentions, or agents to be necessarily, or by definition, good. It does not tie successful human activity – human flourishing – to any moral sense of goodness. It does not divine what is good from some set of moral principles or some one overarching moral mandate. It does not decide what is good through purely logical or transcendental arguments. Rather, the theory describes human nature and the natural world, and makes observations about the way in which they interact. Socratic ethics is remarkable because it is not itself a prescriptive theory, and it actually eliminates the need for (or possibility of) a prescriptive theory.

Given the way that human motivation works according to Socrates, it is inevitable that anyone who comes to understand the connection that he elucidates between knowledge and happiness will be compelled to become as virtuous as possible. Thus, while Socrates' is not a prescriptive theory, it does influence human behavior and does shape human behavior for

[1] I am grateful to Daniel Bennett for telling me this particular version.

[2] The justification for the isolation of these particular dialogues as "Socratic" will be addressed in the next section.

the better. To say that Socrates' theory shapes human behavior for the better, however, is of course not to say that it makes human beings more moral. Rather, it is to say that it helps them to flourish. It helps them to approach – and maybe even attain – the ultimate ends for which they strive. These ultimate ends are not to be identified with virtue, although the account holds virtue to play an important and unique role in shaping human activities. The ultimate end that constitutes human flourishing is to be associated with happiness. Our comprehension of how we fit into the world combines with our desire for happiness to compel our pursuit of virtue.

Socratic ethics does not supply motivation and it does not produce mandates. Its capacity for shaping human behavior is completely parallel to that of any scientific, descriptive theory. My knowledge of gravitational theory does not – by itself – mandate any particular action on my part. However, in concert with an independent source of motivation, I find that my grasp of the laws of gravitation persuades me to pursue some projects and to avoid others. Socratic ethics simply combines a more comprehensive scientific theory with an ultimate and overarching source of motivation.

What does it mean to say that Socrates does not tie human flourishing to any moral sense of goodness? Socrates does tie human flourishing to *arete*, which we generally translate as "virtue." The English word "virtue" does have a moral connotation. It is not clear when that moral connotation became attached to the Latin *virtus*. It is clear that *arete* always maintained a sense other than a moral one, even in Plato's text.[3] There is debate over whether Plato (and even Aristotle[4]) ever came to use it in a distinctly moral way. I believe that how it was used in the Socratic dialogues can be settled by looking at these works in a philosophical light; this is what I propose to do. I will conclude that Socrates was not narrowing the use of *arete*, or treating it as a moral commodity. Socrates used *arete* as a label for human excellence at the same time that he used it for the excellence of a horse or a knife. He often talked about how to improve a knife or a horse. A horse or knife are improved when they become more able to do what they do best. When it comes to human excellence, human beings become more excellent when they are more able to engage in purposeful activity that secures some degree of human good. As *arete* helps us procure what is good, it is also

[3] See the entry in Liddell and Scott 1996: 238.

[4] As Anscombe (2002 [1958]: 530) remarks: "If someone professes to be expounding Aristotle and talks in a modern fashion about "moral" such and such he must be very imperceptive if he does not constantly feel like someone whose jaws have somehow got out of alignment: the teeth don't come together in a proper bite."

good. But there are two reasons why we should not interpret this as a moral pronouncement.

First, while *arete* is importantly connected to human flourishing (which is often labeled *eudaimonia*), Socrates' motivational theory requires no logical (analytic or conceptual) connection between the two. There need only be an *actual* connection, a connection that results from the way that the world, including its human inhabitants, happens to be. This is a nomological connection and need be no stronger than a causal connection.

Second, Socrates says nothing about either *arete* or *eudaimonia* that – without anachronistic embellishment – imports into them anything beyond a practical or prudential notion of good. Happiness is good because it is what each human being inevitably seeks for him or herself. *Arete* is good because it enables human beings to have a chance at getting, or at least getting closer to, what is sought.

For these reasons, it is probably misleading for me to continue to translate *arete* as "virtue." It is more appropriate to lean toward the less value-laden "excellence." But to do so would make it unnecessarily difficult for a reader to map out and compare my discussion with those of other scholars. So I will continue to use the term "virtue" with the stipulation that it simply refers to Plato's "*arete*."

I hope that what I have said makes it clear that the acceptance of Socratic ethics entails the rejection of further conclusions that are often associated with moral theories. To enumerate some of these: people's goodness does not reside in their intentions, sincerity, or character, but in their happiness, which results from their having put their knowledge to practical use. We need not examine and apply categorical imperatives, but must explore hypothetical ones. Goodness does not come from having "other-focused" motivations.

The foundation for the view of Socratic ethics that I describe in this book has been laid by Terry Penner. This interpretation begins on a completely different footing concerning Socrates' account of human motivation and its consequences than is found elsewhere in the literature. It is Penner's theory of Socratic desire and intellectualism that I describe in the next three chapters.[5] I cannot, however, promise that he would agree with the specific ways in which I have characterized the view, filled in the details, or defended it against its opponents.

I use Penner's contributions to anchor and develop some new and further theses concerning Socratic ethics. I contend that, once the appropriate

[5] Except where noted, the nicknames, terminology, and examples are my own.

account of human desire is in place, and once we understand that Socrates equates virtue with knowledge,[6] it is Socrates' doctrine of the good, the bad, and the neither-good-nor-bad that functions as the central reference point for the rest of what he says about ethics. To the extent that Socrates' views concerning ethics have been interpreted without a proper appreciation for this critical element, they have been misunderstood. Socrates' pronouncements on the neither-good-nor-bad form the core of his descriptive and amoral theory concerning human good because it is his reasoning in this area that allows him to conclude that virtue and happiness are not only logically distinct but are *each unique and distinct kinds of goods*.

By establishing the thesis that virtue and happiness are unique and distinct kinds of goods, I can further explore their relationship in illuminating ways. In particular, I can place some of the traditional debates which have dogged Socratic theory for generations on a new footing, and I can remove others from their distracting and unwarranted central positions.

Ultimately, I contend that Socrates equated virtue with knowledge because he saw a craft-like knowledge as the key to a person's ability to make the best of the resources and materials available to her by using them in ways that contribute to her well-being. I call this craft-like knowledge *scientific knowledge*, using that term in a general and ancient sense. I mean for it to cover careful and methodical thinking about both the natural world and what lies beyond it. This includes, but is not limited to, empirical investigation and the forming and testing of empirical and other hypotheses through empirical and other means. Socrates assumes that what is best is also determined by a comprehensive study of the natural world. This study would necessarily include the objective, albeit elusive, nature of personal happiness. My understanding of Socrates reveals an ethical perspective that has contemporary relevance and is more coherent and plausible than those that others have attributed to him.

One virtue of studying an ancient theory of ethics and psychology is that it allows us to examine ethical intuitions that have not been affected by the supposed lessons of philosophers who have been influential in the times after the theory was expounded. However, in order to reap these benefits we must be vigilant as we work through these ancient views. We are more unaware than we would like to admit of how many philosophical assumptions we bring with us when we read a philosophical text. In the case of an ancient text, the author's intentions and intelligence can often be obscured because we end up reading his work through a lens that imports assumptions and

[6] An important element of my view that is widely endorsed throughout Socratic scholarship.

strategies that came on the scene recently and that obfuscate rather than clarify the work's substantive claims.

I believe that the theories concerning ethics and human psychology that emerge through the study of Socrates are strikingly elegant, suitably sophisticated, and eminently plausible. Certainly they are no less plausible than – even more contemporary – competing theories. Failure to recognize the significance of the neither-good-nor-bad is a major factor that has allowed Socrates' theories to remain in the dark. However, this failure is not the only factor that impedes the understanding of Socratic ethics.

I opened this chapter by discussing what is, perhaps, the major assumption which impedes the understanding of Socratic ethics: there is a tendency for contemporary readers to place an unwarranted overlay of post-Kantian morality back upon Plato's text. This is the notion of morality that emerges in the preface to the *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*. There, Kant proposes the project of constructing a "pure moral philosophy, perfectly cleared of everything which is only empirical."[7] The justification for this approach is that "if a law is to have moral force . . . it must carry with it absolute necessity." Kant elaborates:

> The basis of obligation must not be sought in the nature of man, or in the circumstances in the world in which he is placed, but *a priori* simply in the conceptions of pure reason.

Indeed, Kant believes that moral law cannot be motivated by anything the least bit empirical. Moral duties do not derive from contingent facts about us as humans, they stem from pure rationality and constitute imperatives for all rational beings; they are not particular to humans. He summarizes his discussion by making a categorical distinction:

> Thus not only are moral laws with their principles essentially distinguished from every other kind of practical knowledge in which there is anything empirical, but all moral philosophy rests wholly on its pure part. When applied to man, it does not borrow the least things from the knowledge of man himself but gives laws *a priori* to him as a rational being.

Kant advises that goodness must be analyzed independently of the beings that want to personify and achieve it. Anything we need to know about them, from a moral point of view, can be figured out by the rational person *a priori*. I will show that this is far from the advice that Socrates would heed or offer. Socrates thinks that human virtue and human good are to

[7] I use T. K. Abbott's translation (1949:5)

be discovered empirically and that their relationship is a contingent one. There is no room in Socratic ethics for any notion of moral good that derives from Kant.

In addition to Kant's "fundamental principles," several other assumptions – some anachronistic and others simply foreign – concerning morality, epistemology, and psychology inhibit many people from seeing in Plato's dialogues a Socratic notion of ethics that might otherwise emerge more straightforwardly. These imported assumptions are responsible for the fact that even those who recognize the presence of viable Socratic philosophical theories in some of Plato's dialogues have tended to highlight certain features of these texts at the expense of others.

A subset of these further anachronistic assumptions has led readers to wed Plato's words with post-Cartesian assertions about epistemology and psychology, particularly the assumption that we know what we desire. Modern philosophers like Descartes and, more recently, Frege, have had a tremendous impact on the assumptions that we make about the epistemology of human psychology. Descartes' arguments for our incorrigibility when it comes to the content of our psychological states have been so embedded in our philosophical perspective that we no longer recognize this incorrigibility as an assumption, or even as controversial. The result is that we adopt – without question – the claims that we *know* what we desire and that we *know* whether or not we are happy.

Frege's assertion that the object of an intentional verb must be understood to be the sense and not the reference of the term has further encouraged our adoption of the assumption that the object of a desire is known to the subject of that desire. After all, the verb "desire" places its object into an intentional context. Thus the object of a desire can be understood to be a Fregean sense. Since a Fregean sense is an intentional object, Cartesian epistemology suggests that the object of desire is incorrigibly known. This interpretation of desire-statements leads us to conclude that the subject of a desire cannot be mistaken when it comes to isolating the object of her desire. The steadfastness with which we hold this assumption, even while we interpret Plato's text, obscures the work of a philosopher who, I argue, rejected this assumption and its consequences. My exploration of the neither-good-nor-bad, and of the theory of desire which governs our use of good, bad, and neither-good-nor-bad things, results in an exegesis that overcomes and disarms several of these anachronistic assumptions.

Further distortion results from our easy integration of religious pronouncements (like the Ten Commandments) into Socrates' ideas. Popular

discussions of morality and ethics flood our everyday sensibilities with codified evaluations of actions.[8] Abstract actions like "killing" are categorized and labeled "good" or "bad" without reference to the context in which they might be performed. In this case, we are not guilty of anachronism: in the dialogues, Plato's characters make similar determinations. Socrates often counsels his contemporaries to resist the urge to evaluate actions and objects categorically in the absence of information about the context in which they are performed or used. Socrates urges his interlocutors to think critically about what others have deemed "good" or "pious" before embracing and extending those opinions. I think that it is fair to say that Socrates saw this sort of abstract evaluation in the absence of contextual information as a sign of the worst kind of ignorance – it is made by those who don't even recognize that they know nothing.

Another foreign presupposition is that a good person puts the benefit of others before her own. Figures who loom larger than life (like Jesus and Kant) have made it seem obvious that we are delinquent if we take the consequences of our actions – particularly with respect to benefits that accrue to ourselves – into account when we decide whether or not to perform them. Christian philosophers are fond of pointing out that virtue – if it is *really to be virtue* – must be its own reward. Notice, however, that in order for it to be a concern that I put anyone's benefit before anyone else's, I must hold the further assumption that there is likely to be some *conflict* between the benefits that accrue to me and those that accrue to others. A person who rejected this further assumption, one who believed that the benefit of an agent couldn't be obtained at the expense of others, would not find these admonitions compelling. Socrates' view that what is of actual benefit to any one person cannot be in conflict with what is of actual benefit to others, renders these statements about self-benefit and virtue incomprehensible.

In addition, preoccupation with the distribution of benefit imports another assumption that clouds our vision when we try to understand Socrates' views. This is the assumption that human good is necessarily a scarce commodity. Many ethical questions in today's world have been reduced to discussions of "lifeboat ethics." They have been regarded as questions of how we should allocate scarce resources to various populations. While Socrates would agree that these are important questions, I think that he would reject the assumption that our pursuit of what we actually desire – namely happiness – is part of a zero-sum game.

[8] Anscombe connects religious ethics to our current tendency to codify ethical conduct claiming that any notion of moral obligation is a vestige of divine law (2002 [1958]:532).

Individually, and as a group, these assumptions might seem so reasonable that it is hard to believe that Socrates would go against such wisdom. Yet, when we insist that Socratic philosophy must be consistent with all of these assumptions, we find the texts to be internally incoherent and more puzzling than enlightening. Some of the most troublesome puzzles that crop up in discussions of Socrates' philosophy concern the relationships among four things that he clearly holds to be of unique importance: knowledge, virtue, pleasure, and happiness. In fact, interpretations of Socrates' views concerning knowledge, pleasure, virtue, and happiness have produced conundrums that appear to admit of no completely satisfying solution. But there is hope, once we have sorted out Socrates' psychology of desire – and given up our commitment to a *moralistic* interpretation of such central components of the theory as virtue and pleasure – the stark and elegant doctrine of the good, bad, and neither-good-nor-bad will provide the key to a more straightforward understanding of knowledge, virtue, pleasure, happiness, and their relationships with one another.

## WHAT IS SOCRATIC PHILOSOPHY?

Before we can discuss Socrates' doctrine of the neither-good-nor-bad, we must first agree that it is possible that there is such a thing as a "Socratic" theory or doctrine. We must acknowledge that Plato has the character "Socrates" advance a distinct group of philosophical theses in certain dialogues. This proposition has not always been readily accepted. A number of the claims that Plato puts into Socrates' mouth in many of the dialogues that have come to be regarded as "Socratic" strike us as counterintuitive, paradoxical, and even absurd when we come upon them for the first time. Occasionally,[9] this has led scholars to say that the thrust of these dialogues is largely negative. They have taken it that, here, Plato did not even attempt to offer a defensible account of how human beings operate with respect to such things as desire, virtue, knowledge, and happiness. Rather, they contended that the goal of the character "Socrates" was only to undermine the preconceived views of those with whom he interacted; they assumed that this Socrates had no positive philosophical views to offer. They concluded that Plato's goal in writing these dialogues was to rescue readers from the

[9] This was the treatment given the dialogues by the "New Academy" (c. 269 to the early or middle first century BCE). See Rowe 2003.

precarious position of believing themselves to know what they do not know so that they could enter the preferable state in which one knows only that one knows nothing.

This view of the "Socratic" dialogues might be said to have been prevalent among Plato scholars from the start of the nineteenth century until relatively recently.[10] Yet, I think it is also safe to say that this thesis underwent major reconsideration in the latter half of the twentieth century. Since that time, many books and articles have been published regarding Socrates as a philosopher in his own right – not merely as a character used by Plato as a mouthpiece in dialogues that communicated Plato's own particular views. The authors of these works argue for many different Socratic positions. However, these works are all similar in that they attribute positive philosophical views to Socrates and cite the text of many of the same Platonic dialogues in order to show that Socrates held the views that they attribute to him.

Not all authors who have focused on the distinctive philosophical views that are found in these dialogues will agree that they are uncovering the views of the historical Socrates. In fact, a decidedly "unitarian" thesis was advanced in the early twentieth century[11] and is now being revisited.[12] It is arguable that many of Plato's ancient commentators were also unitarians. But, those who support unitarianism put themselves at odds with Plato's most intimate interpreter, commentator, and critic. As I will discuss shortly, the major support for calling any philosophical view that was written by Plato "Socratic" is the testimony that Aristotle provides concerning an historical Socrates. Aristotle had contemporaries who had had direct contact with Socrates, thus it is reasonable to suppose that Aristotle's occasional attempts to distinguish between the views of Plato and his character "Socrates" and those of the actual Socrates are based on credible evidence.[13]

The main approach to establishing the relative chronology of Plato's dialogues is stylometry. Stylometry analyzes the trends in an author's habitual use of language independent of content. Thus, it has the potential to identify works that are similar at a minute (and presumably unconscious) level. The operative assumption is that such similarity carries the implication that the works were written at about the same time. Stylometric evidence divides the dialogues into the following three groups:

[10] See Rowe 2003 and Taylor 2002.
[11] See Shorey 1904.
[12] See Kahn 1996 and Annas 1999.
[13] Although Kahn rejects the notion that Aristotle was a reliable historian (1996: 83–7).

Group 1 *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Crito*, *Cratylus*, *Euthydemus*, *Euthyphro*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Major*,[14] *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Menexenus*, *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Protagoras*, *Symposium*.

Group 2 *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*.

Group 3 *Sophist*, *Politicus*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Laws*.[15]

The *Laws* is assumed to be Plato's last work (unfinished at his death), and so Group 3 is taken to have been written last. Other internal evidence that relates various dialogues to independently recorded events also suggests that the Groups 1, 2, and 3 were written in that numerical order.[16] There is no convincing stylometric evidence concerning the internal chronological order within any of the groups of dialogues.[17]

It is notable that all of the dialogues that are Socratic by Aristotle's criteria fall into Group 1 stylometrically.[18] On this basis, I suspect that the views that I discuss in this book did originate with the historical Socrates.

For many years interpreters have used the presence of "separated"[19] Platonic Forms as a reason to treat three dialogues which seem to contain them – *Cratylus*, *Symposium*, and *Phaedo* – as chronologically (even though not stylometrically) part of Group 2 rather than Group 1.[20] This was thought appropriate because Aristotle specifically distinguishes Plato from the historical Socrates with respect to this issue.[21]

But this move has always been problematic. Other important philosophical doctrines are to be found in some but not all of the Group 1 dialogues. These include the immortality of the soul, the doctrine of recollection, the positive characterization of epistemology, and the claim that our voluntary behavior can be influenced by something other than what we think is best for us (like behavioral conditioning resulting from

[14] If it is authentic. See Kahn 1988.

[15] These groups are the agreed result of the independent work of Dittenberger, Ritter, Campbell and Von Arnim in the late 1800s. See Brandwood 1990.

[16] Some familiar examples: the *Apology* and other dialogues that discuss Socrates' trial and death we presume were written after 399 BCE. The *Theaetetus* mentions the death of Theaetetus, which took place in 369. *Meno* 90a refers to an event that took place in 395. For a comprehensive treatment of all such instances see Rutherford 1995:4–6, 35–6.

[17] Although some relatively objective evidence can be gleaned from content; one example is that the *Meno* presents recollection as a novel theory while the *Phaedo* presents it as one with which the interlocutor is already familiar. This suggests that the *Meno* preceded the *Phaedo*. Again, see Rutherford 1995:4–6, 35–6.

[18] For a more thoroughgoing discussion of this coincidence see Penner 2002c.

[19] The term "separated" is Aristotle's. I find the claim that any of the dialogues contain "separated" Forms a misleading characterization of Plato's metaphysics.

[20] Dodds presented a Group 1 that followed this strategy as long ago as 1959 (p. 18). Vlastos continues to find it uncontroversial in 1991 (46–7). Benson followed Vlastos without qualification as recently as 2000 (8–10). Vlastos and Benson assume that the *Meno* is the final Group 1 dialogue.

[21] *Metaphysics* XIII.4.1078b27–32.

punishment). Taken together, these philosophical (as opposed to stylometric) considerations do not serve to divide the dialogues neatly. Dialogues that look as though they should be placed together due to one philosophical feature do not appear similar when another of them is under review. Also, a single dialogue might contain parts that are both Socratic and Platonic, and these parts might be labeled differently when different philosophical theses are taken into account. For example, all the characteristics mentioned above are strikingly absent from the *Apology*, but all are found in the *Phaedo*. However, the *Meno* supports recollection, immortality of the soul, and – perhaps – the conviction that it is possible for human beings to have some knowledge[22] at the same time that it rejects the notion that people can voluntarily act against their own self-interest.[23] The *Gorgias* and the *Cratylus* both include myths that seem to be influenced by Plato's travels in Sicily. Yet the *Gorgias* contains much to support – and the *Cratylus* contains nothing to deny – the proposition that "all desire is for the good." This thesis is identified with Socrates both because it is prominent in other Group 1 dialogues (*Apology*, *Meno*, *Protagoras*, *Lysis*) and because Aristotle identified it with the historical Socrates.[24] To make matters more complex, despite the *Gorgias*' endorsement of the view that only intellectual factors can influence voluntary behavior in some places, other parts of the dialogue have been read as an endorsement of corporal punishment.[25] Both the *Symposium* and the *Cratylus* are clearly concerned with Platonic Forms, yet both are consistent with Socratic intellectualist notions of motivation.

Several scholars have recently acknowledged that the only exegetically neutral evidence is that of stylometry and have reasserted the original Group 1.[26] They accompany this with the acknowledgment that our assessment of what can be singled out as Socratic can and must be delicately nuanced. Rather than trying to argue that a distinctive Socratic view of human motivation is decided by chronology, these scholars focus on delineating dialogues and even parts of dialogues as "Socratic" based on the coincidence between Aristotle's testimony and stylometry. Aristotle outlines several philosophical claims which he identifies with Socrates and not Plato.[27] To

[22] This is quite different from Socrates' conclusion, drawn in the *Apology*, that he is both the wisest man in Athens and knows only that he knows nothing.

[23] Not to mention the fact that it contains explicit reference to the Pythagorean theorem (80–6). Assuming that Pythagoras' writings came to Plato's attention during his travels in Sicily (*Letters XII* and *XIII*) this would seem to be a Platonic element.

[24] *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.2.1145b26–7.

[25] See Brickhouse and Smith 1997 and 2002.

[26] Kahn's 1996 and 2002 seem to have provided the impetus for this movement.

[27] See nn. 21 and 22, above.

the extent that these lines of thought are to be found in entire dialogues or in sections of dialogues, they are in those that stylometry isolates as Group 1. Still, if we are to follow Aristotle, we will have to understand some dialogues as both Socratic and Platonic. In addition, Plato's own *Seventh Letter* points to elements in both the *Meno* and the *Gorgias* that suggest that they were composed after Plato's first trip to Sicily. These same elements seem out of keeping with Aristotle's picture of Socrates.[28] This indicates that these two dialogues have both Socratic and Platonic elements.[29] There is no reason to imagine that Plato changed his thinking about every philosophical issue at once. Hence, it is only realistic to suppose that some dialogues layer Socratic psychological views with Platonic metaphysical explorations.[30]

I attempt here to extract a unified Socratic theory from many of these Group 1 dialogues. All of the dialogues that serve as my sources are in Group 1. Most of those upon which I focus (*Euthydemus*, *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Protagoras*, *Lysis*) are unambiguously Socratic according to Aristotelian evidence. Two of the most fruitful for discerning a Socratic notion of the relationship between virtue and human motivation are the *Meno* and the *Gorgias*. Unfortunately, these, especially the *Gorgias*, are also replete with internal tensions between what might be described as "Socratic" and "Platonic" lines of thought.

The evidence shows that the complete story that would "solve" the "Socratic Problem" remains untold. My interest in writing this book is not fueled by any desire to solve the Socratic Problem. Still, one vehicle for engaging in such an effort at this point is to give a careful, detailed, and comprehensive account of plausible Socratic theories.[31] The more we can do this, the more reasonable criteria we will have for establishing the signature of any part of a dialogue that discusses human motivation. So while I rely on certain previous determinations concerning what makes a line of thinking "Socratic," no project, including my own, is independent of establishing what considerations might be taken into

[28] A thorough treatment of this subject would also take into account the testimony of Xenophon and perhaps other ancient authors. For an example of how that would be incorporated, see Taylor 1998: 21–32.

[29] See Dodds 1959: 25–9 and Kahn 1996: 48–59. Even if its authenticity is doubted it is still likely that the *Seventh Letter* does date Plato's trips to Sicily.

[30] See Penner 2002c and Rowe, 2002 and 2003 for lengthier discussions of this approach to the isolation of Socrates' views from within the Group 1 dialogues.

[31] See Penner 2002c and Rowe 2003. Although they see the evidence as pointing in a different direction, this also seems to be the motivation behind Brickhouse's and Smith's 1997 and 2002.

account in figuring out where the historical Socrates has influenced Plato's writings.

## THE ARGUMENT OF THE BOOK

The argument of the book can be expressed succinctly as follows: given Socrates' specific theory of desire, once we appreciate fully Socrates' method for appraisal of the good, bad, and the neither-good-nor-bad, we will see that Socrates found virtue and happiness to be distinct and unique kinds of goods. The distinctness of these two goods entails that they are not connected analytically. One is not part of the concept or the definition of the other. Their relationship is contingent and nomological. As a result, these dialogues don't advance a *moral* and *prescriptive* theory, rather, Socrates is putting forward a *descriptive* theory. Yet, because of the motivational structure he has presupposed in his theory of desire, it is a description that persuades those who understand it to endeavor to become as virtuous as possible. This is because everyone wants to become as happy as possible, and knowledge is the only means that can allow one to control one's happiness. To be as virtuous as possible is simply to accumulate as much knowledge as possible. This knowledge is to be understood as scientific knowledge, the same in kind as the knowledge required to perform any other task successfully. The task in this case is to become happy. Human happiness is an objective goal. It can be approached using one's appreciation of what the world is like and how one can work within the constraints that nature places upon us (in the form of such things as natural laws), in order to change it.

Let me now explain how the argument will be advanced in each of the succeeding sections and chapters:

The foundation for all that I argue is Socrates' unique theory of human desire and motivation. I describe and defend it in Part I (Chapters 2–4). Chapter 2 unpacks Socrates' contention that all desire is for the good. Most of our contemporary and familiar theories – and even some of our pre-theoretical intuitions – find that people can desire a wide range of things (including bad things). Many have taken Socrates' argument that all desire is for the good in the *Meno* to indicate that Socrates believes that all desire is for *apparent* good. Indeed, contemporary theories concerning intentional or psychological contexts bolster the impression that this must be what Socrates had in mind. However, I will argue that such an understanding would render an important distinction in the *Gorgias* – that between doing what one wants and doing what seems best to one – incomprehensible.

In addition, I argue that these contemporary theories (I call them "inside/outside" theories),[32] which suggest that desire is for an apparent object, leave us no way to identify any actual object with the object of our desire. I explain that these theories were developed in order to resolve a certain tension: on the one hand, we want to credit an individual with some expertise about what she wants; on the other hand, we must explain how it can be the case that this same person, on occasion, performs actions that fit neither her own stated goals nor her overall desire for the good. But, resolving this tension with inside/outside theories exacts too high a price. It is implausible to think that my desires connect me only with my own perceptions or "senses" of objects and not with the actual things out there in the world that play a causal role in my success or failure when it comes to satisfying the goals that structure my motivation.

A far more congenial resolution is found if we follow the Dominance theory of desire. Penner takes the Dominance theory to have been developed by Socrates in both the *Meno* and the *Gorgias*. In fact, this theory drives the distinction between doing what one wants and doing what seems best to one in the *Gorgias*. An understanding of the Dominance theory helps us appreciate the plausibility of Socrates' claim that all desire is for the good, and his rejection of the view that a person's virtue is connected to her intentions when she acts. Contrary to commonly held beliefs, all people act with the same intention: to achieve as much happiness as possible over the course of their lives. All intentions are good.

The Dominance theory does not encounter the same tensions as inside/outside theories. It abandons the assumption that the person experiencing a desire is the best expert concerning what that desire is for. While it might be true that an individual has *more* information about what she desires, it is wrong to think that she cannot err; she does not necessarily have better information than an outside observer can glean. There is no reason to suppose that individuals are incorrigible concerning what they themselves desire.

In order to understand Socrates' thesis that all desire is for the actual good, we have to recognize that Socrates' views concerning human motivation make him a psychological egoist; he believes that every action by every person is motivated by a desire for that individual's own personal benefit. This is the aspect of the Socratic theory of motivation covered in Chapter 3. In addition, Socrates holds that doing what is in one's self interest is never inconsistent with doing what is beneficial to others. Thus, his views concerning

[32] Following Penner 2005.

egoism coincide with a central thesis of ethical egoism: he believes that when people do what is in their own self interest, they do what is right.

Socrates also argues that only belief can guide human activity. This is known as Socratic Intellectualism and is covered in Chapter 4. All behavior is rational. No purposeful action can be the result of a non-rational element (like emotion) except insofar as the non-rational element has influenced the agent's beliefs. Furthermore, motivation will use beliefs in the service of producing actions which provide the maximum benefit available to the agent. Thus, no one ever acts contrary to what she believes is best for her. What we call "weakness of will" is impossible. If it weren't for Socrates' rejection of *akrasia*, he would not be able to maintain his thesis that all desire is for the good. Some scholars have contended that Socrates' denial of *akrasia* is tantamount to a denial that we have the sorts of feelings that are associated with a lack of self-control. I argue that this needn't be the case.

With the Socratic theory of motivation in place, I move on (in Part II, Chapters 5–6) to discuss how Socrates evaluates the various possible objects of desire. In Chapter 5, I elucidate Socrates' tripartite classification: the good, the bad, and the neither-good-nor-bad. In all of the relevant discussions, found in the *Gorgias*, *Euthydemus*, *Lysis*, and *Meno*, Socrates treats every object and action as neither-good-nor-bad. I defend the inclusiveness of this neither-good-nor-bad category. This leaves open the question of what will fall under the good and the bad. Happiness, misery, virtue, and vice are the candidates for which a determination must be made. Guided by the *Euthydemus*, we will see that in order to classify these we will have to make a fourfold distinction. On the one hand, we will have to distinguish *conditional* goods and bads from *unconditional* ones. On the other hand, we will have to separate *self-generated* goods and bads from *other-generated* ones. We can now deepen our understanding of what it is to be a neither-good-nor-bad. When Socrates says that all actions and objects are neither-good-nor-bad, he is saying that they are all conditional, other-generated goods.

In this chapter, I also begin a discussion which continues for the next two chapters. The fourfold classification renders another distinction (which is familiar from contemporary moral theory) inapplicable to Socrates' theory: the idea that there is a strict distinction *in kind* between means and ends – the distinction between that which is intrinsically valuable and that which is instrumentally so – turns out to be untenable. It distorts Socrates' views concerning the relationship between happiness and those things which derive their value from it.

But what of virtue, vice, happiness, and misery? I show how to classify these in Chapter 6. The *Euthydemus* is instructive here as well. While

virtue is an unconditional good – and, therefore, superior to all of those things deemed neither-good-nor-bad – virtue and the neither-good-nor-bad things share the same status as other-generated goods. Only happiness is both an unconditional and self-generated good. Ignorance has a parallel position to virtue's – it is an unconditional, but other-generated, bad. Misery is unique for the reason that happiness is – it is an unconditional and self-generated bad. Most importantly, we now see that virtue and happiness are both goods (in contrast to the neither-good-nor-bad), but they are not the same kind of good, let alone two different names for one and the same thing. Since they are logically distinct, the nature of their relationship cannot be gleaned through conceptual analysis; a more empirical investigation is required.

Now that we understand why virtue and knowledge stand out as the only persistent and unconditional objects of our desire, we are ready to understand their relationship to one another, and more about what each is in itself. This is the work of Part III (Chapters 7–9). In Chapter 7, I demonstrate that, in the *Euthydemus*, Socrates establishes the nomological relationship between virtue and happiness by examining – in practical terms – why our pursuit of happiness is enabled by our possession of knowledge. Knowledge is the only thing that allows us to control what happens to us. Having as much control over our future as we can will help us to become as happy as possible. For this reason, we try to become knowledgeable – which is just another way of saying that we try to become virtuous. I argue that we cannot find clear, textual, support for any claim that Socrates considered virtue and happiness to be logically connected (in the way they would be if virtue were either necessary or sufficient for happiness). I also argue that such claims are irrelevant to Socrates' project. Given Socrates' views concerning how desire for happiness manifests itself, a contingent, nomological connection – like the fact that virtue offers the only hope for controlling one's happiness – is sufficient to motivate Socrates' audience to endeavor to become virtuous.

In Chapter 8, the text of the *Charmides* is my vehicle for developing an even more complete understanding of Socrates' identification of virtue and knowledge. Socrates' theory of valuation eliminates any possible distinction between virtue and scientific knowledge and, indeed, between science and morality. This might invite concerns that Socrates' theory is purely psychological and descriptive (telling people what they actually do, but not helping them decide what they should do). However, Socrates – through his theory of motivation – has already shown that we each approach the world with a pre-established goal. I argue that, in a goal-directed system, mandates can be deduced from bodies of facts. If Socrates is right that we

are each inevitably motivated to pursue our own happiness, then he is right that our beliefs about the world will motivate us to pursue one course of action as opposed to another.

Although we come to understand the relationship between virtue and happiness to be a nomological and contingent one, happiness itself can seem to be a rather otherworldly thing. In Chapter 9, I bring Socratic happiness down to earth by examining his treatment of it as a specific kind of pleasure that is not sensate pleasure. In fact, I argue that it makes sense to think of sensate pleasures and pains as additional neither-good-nor-bads. Happiness consists in what George Rudebusch (1999) has called "modal" pleasure. It is constituted by activities that are performed through the employment of further neither-good-nor-bad things. In contrast to Rudebusch, I find that sensate pleasure *can* be constitutive of happiness, but that it needn't be. In pinning happiness – our goal – down, we also gain a more specific appreciation of virtue as knowledge. Virtue is – at least largely – the science of measurement of present and future modal pleasures and pains.

In Chapter 10, I return to reflect on some of the advantages of the kind of goodness that is delivered by Socratic ethics over its more "moral" competitors.

Learning philosophy from the works of Plato necessarily involves engaging in two interconnected tasks. We must try to figure out what Plato is trying to communicate to us, but we must also try to determine whether or not what is communicated is philosophically viable and even plausible. If we neglect this second task, or save it for "later" (when we have completed the first), then we will not fulfill the requirements of the first. It is only when we are engaged with the text in a manner that insists on finding the most philosophically plausible interpretation of it that we are likely to interpret what Plato was saying correctly. Of course, there is never any guarantee that we will succeed in uncovering Plato's actual intentions. Still, all is not lost if we have disclosed a philosophical perspective that is viable and plausible – for viable and plausible views are valuable for clarifying the issues that we seek to analyze, no matter who came up with them first. I stand behind what I say in the next nine chapters as an honest attempt to figure out what Plato wrote about human good and bad in a specific set of dialogues. However, I am also confident that it is worthy of examination as a free-standing theory of when, how, and why human actions and physical objects should be regarded as either good or bad. I hope that my readers will examine and evaluate what I say on both of these counts.

PART I

# *The Socratic theory of motivation*

CHAPTER 2

# *Socratic desire*

Informal discussions of human motivation typically start with several common assumptions that are generally considered uncontroversial: while we often want what is best for us and for others, there are also times when we want things that are bad for others and (or) for ourselves. In fact, our desires for bad things often compete with our desires for good things, and the former often overcome the latter. There are bad people – evil ones even. They are bad because their desire to do what's bad almost always wins out over their desire to do what's good. They seek to harm others as a way of benefiting themselves. The most dangerous are those who are very knowledgeable. Smart but evil people are far more effective in harming others than are the ignorant and foolish ones. Even if we focus on good people (people who want to be good and benefit themselves and others), we find that many of them allow their desires for the bad to overwhelm their desires for the good. Weakness of will is a major reason why even good people often do bad things. One of the major problems with the world is that most people usually think about themselves and what is good for them, personally, when they act. The world would be a better place if, rather than focusing on our own self-interest, we were to focus on what is good for others. When we evaluate people's actions to figure out if they are good or bad, we should focus on whether or not they meant well in addition to the outcome of their behavior.

Certainly this characterization is overly simplistic. Also, in giving this description of human desire and motivation, I am not assuming that everyone agrees with every part of it. I do assume that, for the most part, it coheres with a popular, common-sense, or folk-psychological description of human behavior to which many people subscribe. These assumptions have also been part of rigorous psychological and philosophical analyses of human behavior. Plato himself appears to embrace some of these assumptions in *Republic* IV. What makes many of Plato's Socratic works either incomprehensible, or (at least) incredible, to many readers is Socrates' rejection of

these assumptions – and, indeed, the picture they paint of human motivation. Still, I will argue that when we look carefully at Socrates' account of human desire and motivation, we find that he offers a coherent and plausible alternative explanation for much of our behavior. In doing so, he provides evidence against some of the most popular and persistent assumptions about human nature and psychology.

Let me rehearse these assumptions again, this time dividing them into three groups:

(A) While we often want what is best for us and for others, there are also times when we want things that are bad for others and (or) for ourselves. There are bad people – evil ones even. When we evaluate people's actions to figure out if they are good or bad, we should focus on whether they meant well in addition to the outcome of their behavior.

(B) Bad people seek to harm others as a way of benefiting themselves. In fact, most people usually think about themselves and what is good for them personally when they act. The world would be a better place if, rather than focusing on our own self-interest, we would focus on what is good for others.

(C) Even good people (people who want to be good and benefit themselves and others) often allow their desires for the bad to overwhelm their desires for the good. Weakness of will is a major reason why even good people often do bad things. Our desires for bad things compete with, and often overcome, our desire for good things. For some people, their desire to do what's bad almost always wins out over their desire to do what's good – this makes them bad people. The most dangerous bad people are those who are very knowledgeable. Smart but evil people are far more effective in harming those around them than are ignorant and foolish ones.

In this chapter and the two that follow, we will see Socrates challenge every one of these assumptions. This chapter will challenge those in group (A); Chapter 3 will take on those in group (B); in Chapter 4, we will see how Socrates argues against those in group (C).

## *MENO*: ALL DESIRE IS FOR THE GOOD

At *Meno* 77b3–78c2, Socrates develops a surprising and often misunderstood argument for the conclusion that all desire is for the good. This claim, if he argues for it effectively, would refute many of the popular assumptions mentioned above. For example, it would mean that we needn't take a person's intentions into account when evaluating her behavior because

all people act with the same intentions: all people desire, and ultimately intend to bring about, their own good. Also, it would mean that we can't have desires for good and for bad that are in direct competition with one another. Let's look carefully at this argument, to see if Socrates succeeds in undermining these assumptions.

The occasion for this argument is a hypothesis, offered by Meno, as an answer to the question "What is virtue?" At 77b3–5, Meno proposes that virtue is to desire beautiful things and to have the ability to acquire them. At b6–7, Socrates asks him if beautiful things are good things, an emendation which Meno readily accepts.

Socrates responds at 77c1 by asking Meno whether or not he thinks it's the case that all people desire good things. Meno responds quickly that there are many people who desire bad things. This makes it sound as though he also subscribes to at least some parts of the popular picture of human motivation described above. Socrates questions further: if people desire (to procure for themselves)[1] bad things, do they desire them thinking them bad or thinking them good? Meno replies that both instances occur. Socrates counters by arguing that people never pursue bad things while thinking that they are bad. His argument goes like this:

If the person who desires something bad is thinking that the thing that she desires is bad, then she must be thinking that this desired thing will either benefit or harm her. If she is thinking that the thing she desires will benefit her, then she cannot be thinking that it is actually bad. If a thing is beneficial, then it is good.

> Then it is clear that those who do not know these things to be bad do not desire bad things. Rather, they desire the things they think good. But they are actually bad (the things they think good). So that those who do not know these things [are bad] and believe they are good clearly desire good things.[2] (77d7–e4)

Socrates has argued against the first apparent case of desiring something bad. He has shown that it is actually a desire for good. What is bad is not beneficial, so if something is beneficial then it is both beneficial and desired because it is good.

Socrates then proceeds to take on other apparent cases of desire for the bad in an effort to show that they, too, when properly analyzed, constitute instances of desire for the good. What about people who desire to procure bad things knowing that they are bad and believing that they will harm

[1] Socrates clarifies "to desire" as to desire to procure for oneself at 77c.
[2] All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

them? Socrates points out that these people would have to be understood as desiring to be harmed. Since harm makes a person miserable, we would also have to understand them as desiring to be miserable.[3] Misery makes one unhappy, so in desiring to be harmed, these people desire to become unhappy. Socrates has no problem in securing Meno's agreement that no one desires to become unhappy (78a).[4] So, since bad things make a person unhappy, no one desires bad things.

At this point, Socrates concludes that establishing the reference of virtue by identifying it with the desire for good things will get Meno nowhere. Socrates has just shown that everyone desires good things. This desire will not distinguish those who are virtuous from those who are not. But has Socrates really established that all people always desire good things? Hasn't he merely established that everyone always desires either something good or something bad that they mistakenly think is good? Does Socrates expect us to accept his claim that all people desire what they think is good as a fulfillment of his promise to show that everyone always desires what is actually good?

## IS DESIRE FOR THE APPARENT GOOD?

Socrates has promised to show that (1) everyone desires what is *actually* good. But he seems to have been able to show only that (2) all people desire what they *think* is good.[5] There are two ways to reconcile these apparently different statements. The first approach would go something like this:[6] "Desire" is what we call a *psychological* or *intentional* verb. When such a verb is the operative verb in a sentence, the object of that verb must be interpreted as standing within an *intentional context*. Imagine that I am standing at the board, and I say, "I need chalk." Then, seeing a cylindrical piece of white cheese in the chalkboard tray, I pick it up. My students would, it seems, be correct in surmising that, in order to figure out what I wanted, they should pay more attention to my conception of the object that I picked up than to the object itself. It seems correct to infer that, though I picked up cheese, it was chalk that I desired. I picked up the cheese because the cheese appeared to me to be chalk. The students should pay attention to my intentions, not my mistaken act of grabbing the cheese.

[3] Because those who are harmed are "made miserable to the extent that they are harmed" (78a1).
[4] The presupposition that no one wishes to be harmed is also familiar from *Apology* 25d3–5.
[5] This is a result of Socrates' assessment at 77d7–e2 (quoted above) that some people desire things which are actually bad, because they *think* they are good.
[6] Here I follow Santas 1979: 186–8.

The theory to which the above explanation adheres is of a sort that Penner (1996, 2005) describes as an *inside/outside* (I/O) theory.[7] Frege originated these theories when he first distinguished sense from reference and claimed that the object of an intentional verb (like "desire") is the sense and not the reference of that term.[8] Penner calls them "inside/outside" theories because they

> . . . break down the description of the desire to do the action into two different ways of thinking about the action – one via the 'outside' of the action (how it is with the action regardless of the way the agent may view it) and an 'inside' (how the agent views the action, regardless of how it is with the action, where, in addition, it is assumed that the agent pretty much *knows* how he or she views the action). (2005: 6–7)

From the perspective of an I/O theory, Socrates is recognizing that in the sentence "everyone desires good things," the verb "desire" places its object "good things" into an intentional context. As a result, there is effectively no difference between making the statement that "everyone desires good things" and the statement that "everyone desires things that appear to them to be good (even if they are sometimes actually bad)." This is because the "good things" in "everyone desires good things" is governed by a psychological verb and so already refers to the *inside* of the verb's object. It appears that Socrates has established that everyone desires good things on the basis that everyone always desires either something good or something bad that they mistakenly think is good. An I/O theorist might conclude that Socrates is intuitively adhering to the view that, since the verb "desire" places its object into an intentional context, it makes no difference whether the "apparently" in the claim "everyone desires *apparently* good things" is voiced or unvoiced.

## DESIRE FOR THE ACTUAL GOOD

When we discuss the *Gorgias*, we will see that the above way of understanding Socrates' *Meno* argument and his conclusion that all desire is for the good does not cohere with the theory of desire that underlies Socrates'

[7] According to Penner, I/O theories include, ". . . those that make use of (a) the opaque/transparent or oblique/transparent distinction, (b) the *de dicto/de re* distinction, (c) the formal object/material object distinction, or (d) the internalism/externalism distinction." He also includes a more recent variation (which he attributes to Fodor – following Perry) which in effect treats the object of a psychological state as "transparent or *de re*," so that the theories of Russell, Carnap, Church, Quine, Kaplan, and Fodor are all I/O theories (2005: 4, 7, n. 8).

[8] Frege 1892.

discussion at *Gorgias* 466a–468e. In fact, unpacking Socrates' statements in this part of the dialogue demands a completely different philosophy of language from the kind offered by I/O theories. There is textual evidence that the *Meno* passage is consistent with the *Gorgias* and therefore should also not be interpreted with an I/O theory. In addition, many philosophical considerations will help us to see that the assumption that the object of desire must always be understood in an intentional context leads to an unsatisfactory theory of desire.

I will argue that Socrates is showing us that we always desire what is actually (not only apparently) good – whatever those good things happen to be.[9] When we pursue actually bad things, it can still be the case that our desire is for what is actually good. While desiring an actually good thing, false beliefs and poor reasoning can lead us to treat an actually bad thing as the object of our desire when it is not – in any straightforward way – the actual object of our desire. Notice that this is another way to understand our earlier chalk and cheese example. When I pick up the cheese after saying "I need chalk," my desire is not for *apparent chalk*. In fact, when I have the cheese in hand, I shall likely say that I did not do what I wanted to do, despite the fact that the cheese was the object that I voluntarily grabbed. I desired *actual chalk* – it is simply the case that I treated a piece of *actual cheese* as the *actual chalk* that I desired.

## *GORGIAS*: WHY TYRANTS AND ORATORS HAVE THE LEAST POWER IN THE CITY[10]

At the end of the last section, I hypothesized that rather than saying that all desire is for apparent good, Socrates' argument in the *Meno* can be understood as saying that all desire is for actual good. Under such a theory, all apparent cases of desire for the bad would be understood along the following lines: the subject desires what is actually good, but – due to ignorance – treats something that is actually bad as the actually good thing that she desires. While it might be the case that the *Meno* doesn't offer enough detail to allow us to choose between these two interpretations, in the *Gorgias* we see Socrates embracing this alternative way of thinking about desire. In due course, Penner's Dominance theory of desire will help us to understand how this alternative works.

[9] In so doing I follow Penner 1991, Penner and Rowe 1994. Some of what I say here overlaps with what I have said in my 1991, 1995, and 1996.

[10] In this section I follow Penner 1991 and 1987.

At *Gorgias* 466b9–10, Socrates makes a surprising and seemingly paradoxical statement: he declares that orators and tyrants have the least power of anyone in the city. Polus, his interlocutor, cannot understand Socrates' claim. Polus believes that tyrants have power. After all, they can put anyone to death, deprive anyone of property, and expel anyone from the city at will. Socrates distinguishes the above-mentioned acts of orators and tyrants from their having great power. While he agrees that they can perform those acts, Socrates maintains that they have no power, "for they do nothing of what they want to do, so to speak, but do that which seems best to them" (466d8–e2). He goes on to assert that this is a statement with which Polus must agree since he already believes that "great power is a good to its possessor" (466e6–7).

Polus finds Socrates' statement that doing what one wants is not doing what seems best "shocking and fantastic" (467b). In having Polus respond this way, it seems Plato is acknowledging that the reader might also have some questions concerning the plausibility of what has been said. To add to the confusion, Socrates next introduces intelligence into the discussion:

> Then do you think it good if someone does the things that seem to him to be best without having intelligence? And do you call this great power? (466e9–11)

Why does Socrates think intelligence must be discussed before the matter can be settled? Also, why does he characterize orators and tyrants as merely doing what they think is best *without intelligence*? Is he assuming that all orators and tyrants are stupid? If so, why would he think that?

Socrates' next move (467a) is also puzzling. Socrates sets up two mutually exclusive possibilities between which to adjudicate: Either,

1 Orators have intelligence.
2 Rhetoric is an art.
3 Orators do what they want.
4 Orators have great power, which is a good and provides them with happiness.

Or,

1 Orators have no intelligence.
2 Rhetoric is a knack (not an art).
3 Orators do what they think best.
4 Orators have the least power, which is not good and does not provide them with happiness.

Why does Socrates treat all of these elements as if they are inseparable? Let's begin by dealing with what might seem to be the most peripheral issue. Why does Socrates assume that orators and tyrants are unintelligent?

## TYRANTS AND ORATORS AND THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE IRRELEVANCE OF TRUTH

The first clue as to why Socrates characterizes both orators and tyrants as unintelligent comes with his earlier (465a3) description of rhetoric as a "knack" (ἐμπειρία) rather than an "art" (τέχνη) or a "science" (ἐπιστήμη). This contrast, between a knack or a "flattery" (κολακεία) and an art or a science works as follows: a knack or flattery "guesses at what is pleasant with no consideration for what is best" (465a2) and also "has no account of the nature of whatever things it applies according to which it applies them, so that it is unable to state the cause of each thing" (465a3–5). Accordingly, Socrates considers rhetoric, cookery, cosmetology,[11] and sophistry each to be a knack or a flattery. He deems gymnastics, medicine, legislation, and justice to be crafts or sciences.[12]

Socrates' statement concerning why he calls the first group "knacks" shows us that he makes this division on the basis of what kind of knowledge each discipline would – in theory – recommend its practitioners possess. *In theory*, experts in the crafts and sciences become experts by accumulating knowledge about their particular subject. Horse trainers must know a great deal about what is actually beneficial and harmful to horses. Doctors must know how to benefit and harm the human body. Navigators must know how to read the stars and how to manage a ship in open seas. The extent to which an expert in these areas is successful will be the extent to which she knows her subject – the extent to which her beliefs about horses, bodies, ships, etc., correspond to the way these things actually are.

In contrast, in those disciplines that are classified as knacks and flatteries, the "knowledge" necessary in order to be an expert is quite different in nature. Practitioners of these disciplines pride themselves on being able to get their desired result while remaining completely ignorant of how things actually are with the object to which they apply their expertise. Cookery is the art of making food look and taste good without paying attention to

[11] I use this as a handy noun for translating κομμωτική which is perhaps more literally translated "embellishment." It is described as that which deceives men by allowing them to acquire an extraneous beauty through shapes, colors, polish, and dress (465b).

[12] Once we know his justification we will see why all those other things that he labels crafts and sciences throughout the early dialogues – navigation, horse training, shoemaking – fall under this label.

whether or not it actually is good (nutritious). Cosmetologists are able to make people look healthy and beautiful regardless of whether they are either healthy or beautiful. Rhetoric enables a person to persuade another to regard something as true independently of whether it is actually true. Thus, as far as any of these practitioners is concerned, the kind of knowledge that would connect them to the truth about the way things actually stand in the world is irrelevant. So, when Socrates says that orators act without intelligence, he is saying that the rhetorician is – at least *theoretically* – committed to the irrelevance of knowledge and truth. This is what intelligence is in this case: knowledge of the truth about the way the natural world works, since this is the sort of knowledge that people need in order for their projects to come out as they intend, so that each person *actually* benefits from his or her project.

It is the orator's commitment to the complete independence of knowledge and persuasion that results in Socrates' formulation of the above dilemma: either orators are unintelligent and rhetoric is a knack, or orators are intelligent and rhetoric is a science. From this alignment of their practice of a knack with their view that intelligence is unnecessary, it will follow that, if power is good for its possessor, then orators have the least power in the city. For, if the orator does not understand the world, and if he sees no reason to understand the world, then no amount of power can be truly beneficial to him.

What of tyranny (which Socrates seems to treat in parallel with rhetoric throughout this passage)? Is there any justification for saying that tyrants are also theoretically committed to the irrelevance of truth and knowledge? Presumably, Socrates has in mind the sort of tyrant who is actually discussed in the *Gorgias* – Archelaus (471a–c).[13] Archelaus is the classic tyrant who usurps the throne in order to use it for the achievement of his own goals. This sort of tyrant sees power *and not intelligence* as the source of his success. In *Republic* 1, Plato has Thrasymachus represent the tyrant as holding a "might makes right" theory of correct behavior. That is, the tyrant need only appeal to his own inclinations in order to figure out what he and others should do. The tyrant has power and does not see why anyone should need truth in addition to power. He sees his own inclinations, based on what *appears* best to him, as the sole determinant of what others should do: they should act according to his decree. There is nothing further to which anyone might appeal. ("Have some strong men come take down that beam in the palace

[13] See Penner (1991: 165–8) for an explanation of how Plato can allow Socrates to berate tyrants as knack-practitioners in the *Gorgias* and still put forth a "science" of ruling in the *Republic*.

roof. It looks ugly." "But, Your Majesty, if we do so, the roof might collapse in the next big storm." "Don't talk back to me! Do as I say. Do you dare to question my judgment? I am the King.") So the tyrant is theoretically committed to the irrelevance of any truth that is independent of his own decree.

This claim is not a claim about stupid or ignorant people generally. Socrates is not saying that stupid people don't value knowledge. People who lack knowledge, but recognize that understanding how the natural world works is the key to success in their endeavors, are not being chastised here. The tyrant and the orator are committed to ignoring the relationship between their capacity to understand elements of the world that are not under their control and the success of their pursuits. They are committed to the irrelevance of the truth to their endeavors. That is why Socrates deems them unintelligent.

## DOING WHAT YOU WANT IS NOT DOING WHAT SEEMS BEST TO YOU

Now that we understand what Socrates is asserting about the relationship between knowledge and knacks, let's see how he concludes that orators and tyrants have the least power of anyone in the city. In the process, we will see how his distinction between doing what one wants and doing what seems best is part of a theory of desire that is not consistent with the supposition that the object of desire is always an apparent object.

Socrates' defense of his assertion that orators and tyrants do not do what they want is premised on a further idea about the structure of desire: people do not want the act that they perform, they want the goal for which their act is performed. Those who take medicine want to be healthy. Those who are seafarers want great wealth:

> But then, is it not this way in all cases? If someone should do something for the sake of some other things, the person does not desire this action, but the things for the sake of which that person acts? (467d6–e1)

Next, as he does in several dialogues, Socrates divides everything into the exhaustive categories of good, bad, and neither-good-nor-bad (NGNB). The things categorized as good in this case are wisdom, health, and wealth.[14] Socrates says that the opposites of those categorized as good are to be categorized as bad. The NGNBs are activities (sitting, walking, running,

[14] But this is not always the case as we will see in the first third of the *Euthydemus* (Chapter 5).

sailing) and objects (sticks, stones). Socrates gives only a finite list. However, because his list is arbitrary, it seems he believes that all actions and objects are NGNB:

SOC. Those things which are neither good nor bad you say are such that they sometimes partake of the good and sometimes of the bad and sometimes neither? Things like sitting, walking, running, and making sea voyages and also those things like sticks and stones. Is that not what you say? Or are there other things that you call neither good nor bad?
POL. No it is these. (467e6–468a4)

People do, or use, the things in the NGNB category for the sake of the things in the good category. Thus, when a tyrant expels a man, deprives him of his property, or puts him to death, we should assume that he does these actions for some further end that is good. In other words, the tyrant chooses to perform the actions that he does, as opposed to others, because he thinks that those are the actions from which he will glean better results. The tyrant does not want the act of putting someone to death or expelling him *for itself*, he wants that act because of some further things that he believes can be gained by performing it. He performs this act because he thinks that something good will result from it. That is, he thinks that it will result in something beneficial to himself; if he considered the act harmful, he would not want to do it. In fact, should he perform an action that he believes is to his advantage, only to find that it brings him harm, he is likely to claim that, while he once believed that he wanted to perform such an act, he has come to realize that in actuality, this was not the act he wanted to perform:

We do not want to slaughter, exile, or expropriate *thus simply*, but if these actions are beneficial, we want to do them; when they are harmful, we don't want to do them. (468c2–5)[15]

Notice that this characterization is tantamount to the alternative characterization that we gave for desire in the *Meno* – any pursuit of an actual bad is explained by the fact that the agent mistook an action which appeared good (but was actually bad) for that which was actually good. This also fits with our alternative explanation of the chalk and cheese example: if I pick up the cheese after stating that I need chalk, when I have it in hand, I will find that I treated cheese (apparent chalk) as actual chalk.

Now let's return to *Gorgias* 467a8–b10 where Socrates makes the following surprising distinction:

[15] This is Penner's translation.

SOC. How can orators and tyrants have great power in the cities if Socrates is not refuted by Polus so that [he must admit that] they do what they want?
POL. This man . . .
SOC. I deny that they do what they want; so refute me.
POL. Did you not just now agree that they do what seems best to them?
SOC. So I say.
. . .
POL. What you say is shocking and fantastic, Socrates.

As I said earlier, Polus' description of Socrates' stated distinction as shocking and fantastic demonstrates Plato's recognition that the distinction may sound counterintuitive and may be, initially, hard to grasp. With some further reflection, however, we will see that Socrates is distinguishing between two different cases in which an NGNB act is chosen or designed for self-benefit. The distinction is based on the actual results of the act performed. He characterizes the case where, in actuality, the act chosen for benefit will bring self-harm, as one where agents do what "seems best to them" (αὐτοῖς δόξῃ βέλτιστον) and not what they "want" (βούλονται). By contrast, the other case, in which the act chosen for benefit actually delivers benefit, is characterized as a case where agents do what they want. In other words, since an agent never wants to do an act for its own sake, but only for the beneficial outcome which she supposes will result from it, the property of being "wanted by the agent" gets attached to the action only via that beneficial outcome. If the action is not actually connected to the outcome desired by the agent, then it does not have the property of having been wanted by the agent – it only seemed best to the agent.

On the one hand, this claim seems odd: if the action I apparently wanted to do turns out well for me, then I did indeed want to do it, while if it turns out badly for me, then I didn't. On the other hand, in what we said just now in our chalk and cheese example, it did seem an accurate description: once I have the cheese in hand (which I grabbed after saying "I need chalk"), I will probably not be satisfied that I did what I wanted to do. Still, in order to explain why this makes sense of the chalk and cheese example, we need to use a philosophy of language that is radically different from the sort of I/O theories that have generally been used to describe the object of desire in these sorts of cases. We will examine such a theory presently, and apply it to the distinction between doing what one wants and doing what seems best, as well.

Before moving on to a defense and an explanation in terms of a new philosophy of language, let's take a moment to see how such a theory of desire would enable Socrates to claim that tyrants and orators have the

least power of anyone in the city because they act without intelligence. The tyrant and orator practice their knacks in the absence of any concern about what is actually the case. This results in their doing what seems best to them far more often than they do what they want. Since they haven't used science to find out what is actually best for them, the chances that they will be able to figure out which actions will result in their benefit is small. So they have the least power to do that which actually benefits them; they have no power that anyone would envy.[16]

## MAKING FURTHER SENSE OF THE CLAIM THAT WE DON'T ALWAYS DO WHAT WE WANT

In order to understand Socrates' distinction between doing what you want and doing what seems best to you, we must understand Socrates to assume that all desire is for the *actual* – not the *apparent* – good. He distinguishes what we want from what seems best to us by understanding desire to operate within a certain framework. As we have seen at *Gorgias* 468c2–5, when Socrates explains behavior, he contextualizes it within a means/ends hierarchy. The example concerning the tyrant's decision to slaughter someone suggests that, when we cite an agent's beliefs and desires in order to explain behavior, we must assume that people approach every situation with the desire to achieve whatever end is the best possible end in their current situation.[17] By making this mechanism clear, we will be able to see how Socrates explains our behavioral pursuits of both the actual and the apparent good – even while maintaining that all desire is for the actual good. Clarifying this mechanism will force us to realize that no one operates upon a vague or general desire for the good. Only a specific desire for whatever is best in a particular situation can motivate an agent to perform a specific act.

Penner (2002b) proposes that we understand the means/ends hierarchy contained within desire as presented in the *Gorgias* passage as structured

[16] Penner defends Socrates against the objection that Socrates' use of the term "power" is special and narrower than ordinary usage (1991: 173–5). His defense turns on the recognition that, if we accept the earlier claim that "power is good for its possessor," we have already recognized that there is at least one kind of power that Socrates has shown tyrants to lack. After all, if it were believed that the tyrant's power were simply raw power – separated from any concern about the benefit that they derive from it – no one would envy the tyrants their power just as no one envies the lion or the elephant its raw power. In other words, power is the ability to do what one wants, where "wants" is understood in terms of the means/ends hierarchy that Socrates outlines in the *Gorgias*. I will discuss this further in Chapter 8.

[17] This is agreed upon by Irwin (1977, 1995), Penner (1991), Santas (1979: 224), Devereux (1995), and Anagnostoupoulos (2003).

according to a general formula that contains a substitution clause. This general formula is: I have the desire to do *whatever it is that will be of the most benefit to me in my present circumstances*. Our beliefs about the particulars of our current situation, and our further beliefs that take the form of predictions about what might happen as the result of the various possible actions that we could perform, dictate a very particularized reformulation of the substitution clause (which I have placed in italics above). This general formula for desire is not itself the sort of thing that can motivate behavior. We act only once we have substituted a *particular* action in the appropriate way. This substitution of a particular action – one that involves a specific object and takes place at a specific time ("I wish to pick up this piece of chalk, here in this tray, right now") – results in what Penner calls an "executive desire." An executive desire integrates our beliefs into our hierarchical motivational structure yielding the motivation to perform a particular action. When we offer an explanation for a piece of purposeful behavior, we must cite an executive desire.

Once we understand that Socrates is using this means/ends hierarchy (captured by the formula that results in the executive desire) as a framework, we can comprehend his distinction between doing what one wants and doing what seems best in the following way: we have a distinction between two different scenarios that might unfold when we try to do the action that is the best means to the best end in our particular, current situation. When we do what we want, we *desire* that which is *in fact* the best end available to us in the situation we are in, and we *do* the action that is *in fact* the best means to that best available end. In contrast, when we do what seems best to us, we *still* desire that which is *in fact* the best means to the best end available to us in the situation we are in, and we *think* that the action we perform is the best means available to that end. However, in this case, it turns out that the action we perform is not *in fact* the best means available to that best available end.

The identity of actions might become a cause for concern at this point. Many of us imagine that we can identify actions simply by taking a look at what a person does at a particular moment in time: each time the tyrant kills someone, he performs the same action; each time he banishes someone, he performs the same action; each time he confiscates property, he performs the same action. But clearly this is not what Socrates thinks, for it is possible that there are times when what *looks* to the tyrant (and to us) like the same action will be what seems best to him, while at another time it will actually be what he wishes. He might kill one son-in-law with the result that he puts down a vicious conspiracy, but in killing another son-in-law remove his only opportunity to have a legitimate heir to the throne. There is no such

generic action as "killing a son-in-law." There is only "killing son-in-law A and thereby putting down a conspiracy, etc." and "killing son-in-law B thereby removing the only opportunity for a legitimate heir to the throne, etc." Socrates' distinction between doing what one wishes and doing what seems best to one shows him identifying and differentiating actions, at least in part, according to their consequences. The role that consequences play also serves to underline the role that background circumstances play in the identity of an action: son-in-law A might commit suicide when he hears a knock at the door, but the identity of his action will be partly determined by who actually knocked, a piece of background information concerning which he might have been mistaken but which will have made the difference in determining whether or not he actually *wanted* to commit suicide.

This way of individuating and identifying actions has two results that might make us uncomfortable. First, if we rarely, if ever, perform the same action twice, we might wonder how we can learn from past experience. Second, we probably cannot ever know exactly which action we are performing.

With respect to the first problem, there is no reason why actions which are not the same cannot be similar. Socrates is once again warning us *not* to be misled by appearances into thinking that two behaviors that are superficially similar have the same consequences. We also might find that two actions that seem on the surface to be very different have similar consequences. Socrates is saying that we must take much more into account in learning from past experience than momentary episodes of behavior; we must take into account background conditions, and the interaction of those conditions with our behavior to produce consequences, as well.[18]

With regard to the second problem – that we probably don't know what action we are performing – it would be more absurd for Socrates to claim that we *do* know what action we are performing. Socrates is showing us why we will want to try to figure out what the consequences of our purposive behavior will be as best as we can. But we certainly don't *know*, when we perform an action, whether we are doing what we wish or what only seems

[18] It is this attitude toward the identity of actions that makes Socrates unwilling to prescribe the sort of "education" through habituation and conditioning that Plato and Aristotle do. As is widely recognized, Socrates thinks education necessarily involves a conversational exchange with an individual. Getting someone to automatically perform a particular motion on a certain cue is not a way to make it more likely that they will benefit as it is unlikely that the resulting action will be sufficiently similar in each case. Plato's incorporation of something like conditioning or habituation into a proper education in the *Republic* shows that Socrates' straightforward approach to the good, bad, and NGNB has been abandoned in the Group 2 dialogues. That this is the case will become more obvious as we unpack Socrates' view of the NGNB in Chapters 5 and 6.

best to us. We would never *knowingly* do what only seemed best to us rather than what we wished! Our confidence in our actions must come from how carefully we have tried to figure things out. The more careful we are and the more information we accumulate in making our decision, the more likely it will be that we are doing what we wish. In such a case we are acting out of something like knowledge.[19] But, there is never any guarantee. I believe that this is a realistic attitude for us to take toward our actions. If we are honest, we acknowledge that only time will tell whether any particular action we have performed was beneficial to us. Socrates is modest in his claim to know anything at all; when we embrace his theories, we are well advised to embrace that modesty as well.

Let's look more carefully at why we often end up doing what only seems best to us. Notice that the mistakes that result in our doing only what seems best to us can be located in at least two places in the substitution clause. We can mistake an end that is not actually the best in the situation at hand for the one that is *in fact* the best end; or, we can mistake an action that is not *in fact* the best means to the best available end for the action that is *in fact* the best means to that end. We could also make both mistakes. No matter which of these mistakes we commit, we must recognize that in order to use either one in our explanation, we must assume that the ultimate desire which is motivating the behavior to be explained is a desire for what is *actually* the best end available in the situation at hand – not a desire for what *appears* to be the best end. If all desire were for an *apparent* best end, there would be no basis for Socrates' distinction between what we want and what seems best to us. This is how Socrates' belief that all desire is for the good gets translated into the *Gorgias* passage: every desire for an action or an object is constructed by substituting a determinate action or object into the "whatever" component of the substitution clause.

Thus, in the *Gorgias*, the distinction between doing what one wants and doing what seems best is a form of the second suggestion that I gave for interpreting Socrates' argument in the *Meno*. It is widely assumed that the use of a verb like "want" or "desire" places the object of that verb into a context which forces us to look into the mind of the subject of the verb for the sense in which the object is to be understood. Such an assumption favors the first interpretation of the *Meno* argument. But there are both textual and philosophical reasons for thinking that the understanding that we have

[19] In later chapters, we will come to understand that Socrates thought that acting knowledgeably is acting virtuously.

gleaned from the *Gorgias* was what Socrates intended in the *Meno* as well.[20] We will need to abandon I/O theories as a method for understanding the *Gorgias* and, arguably, for understanding the *Meno* also.

## TEXTUAL EVIDENCE IN FAVOR OF UNDERSTANDING THE *MENO* TO BE CONSISTENT WITH THE *GORGIAS*

It might be hard to make the case that there is *decisive* textual evidence that forces us to interpret the *Meno* in the second way that I propose rather than the first.[21] But it is certainly possible to find some passages in the *Meno* that are not easily interpreted along the lines of the first. Let's look at what happens just after Socrates concludes:

> Then it is clear that those who do not know these things to be bad do not desire bad things. Rather, they desire the things they think good. But they are actually bad [the things they think good]. So that those who do not know these things [are bad] and believe they are good clearly desire good things. (77d7–e3)

He goes on to show why it makes no sense to think that anyone desires bad things, knowing them to be bad and believing they will be harmed by them.

SOC. What then, I suppose those who, as you say, desire bad things, knowing that bad things harm whoever gets them, know they will be harmed by them?
MEN. Necessarily.
SOC. But do they not believe that those who are harmed are miserable to the extent that they are harmed?
MEN. This must also be the case.
SOC. Are not the miserable unhappy?
MEN. It seems so to me.
SOC. Is there anyone who wishes to be miserable and unhappy?
MEN. It doesn't seem so to me, Socrates.
SOC. Then Meno, no one wishes for bad things if no one wishes to be [miserable] like that. For what is being miserable other than desiring bad things and attaining them? (77e5–78a8)

Now, if we understand all uses of "S desires *x*" to be identical to "S desires *apparent x*," then we are forced to read 78a8 as follows: "For what is

[20] Penner and Rowe also argue that editors have punctuated 77d7 incorrectly and say that the placement of a full stop (period) rather than a comma at 77e2 shows the passage to be consistent with the *Gorgias*. See 1994: 18–22.

[21] For someone who questions the evidence that I present by way of questioning what Penner and Rowe say in their 1994, see Anagnostopoulos 2003.

being miserable other than desiring [apparently] bad things and attaining them?"[22] In any ordinary case, it would seem implausible that the diagnosis for a person's misery is that she desired things that *appeared* bad to her and got them. How are we to understand her desire for, and pursuit of, that which she understood to be bad? Further, it is not clear why the fact that they *appeared* bad should be any explanation at all for her subsequent misery – for although these things *appeared* bad to her, they could in actuality have been good. The statement would make far more sense as a gloss on misery if we were to understand it as a reference to actual bad things that produce actual misery that one wants to avoid. To be miserable isn't to desire apparently bad things. It is to desire things that are actually good, but to mistake actually bad things for those actually good things that are the object of one's desire, and to succeed in getting those actually bad things.

Under an I/O theory, it might be thought that *every* use of the verb "desire" carries with it a suppressed "apparent," so that desire for good *just is* desire for apparent good. But this doesn't do justice to the passage. First, when Socrates talks about what misery is, we have a use of "desires bad" where it is clear he intends *actual* and not *apparent* bad. Second, Socrates seems to allow that we *either* desire good things *or* desire bad things *thinking that they are good*. With regards to the second disjunct, he goes on to say that, in this instance, we "clearly desire (actual) good things." In these two places, the text defies any effort to couple every use of "desire" with a suppressed "apparent." Socrates seems to find appearance necessary only to explain how a person can – in a very restricted way – treat something that is *in fact* bad as an object of desire.[23]

By the end of this chapter (or at least by the end of this book) we will be able to place Socrates' conclusion to the *Meno* argument in the more general context of Socratic ethics and psychology. Taking this broader view it will be natural to read 78b3–c1 as pointing out that Meno's particular account of virtue (that it is to desire good things and to be able to get them) is wrong because everyone is the same in desiring good things.

SOC. Surely you were just now saying that virtue is to desire good things and to be able to [acquire them].
MEN. That's what I said.

[22] Penner and Rowe point this out in their 1994.
[23] I take myself to be following Penner and Rowe (1994: 14) here. I will elaborate on how this sort of case must work in the next section.

SOC. However, the part of the statement about wanting is true [ὑπάρχει] of everyone and in this respect no one is better than anyone else?
MEN. Clearly.
SOC. But it is clear that he who is better than another would be better in his ability [to acquire good things]?
MEN. Absolutely.
SOC. Then it seems that, according to your account, virtue is the ability to get good things. (78b3–c1)

Still, Meno could have been correct in thinking that virtue is the ability to acquire good things. In fact, Socrates' equation of virtue with knowledge and his demonstration that it is knowledge that engenders happiness will show him to be in agreement with Meno on this point. But of course this will only make sense if the good that knowledge is able to obtain is the actual good.[24]

## PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF THE VIEW THAT ALL DESIRE IS FOR THE ACTUAL GOOD

A major and legitimate concern that any proponent of the view that all desire is for the actual and not the apparent good must address is how – on a belief and desire theory – we can explain actions that seem to aim at something not actually good. If I fire my accountant – mustn't I have had a desire to do so? But, if Socrates analyzes the occasion of my firing my accountant by saying that while it was what *seemed best* to me it was not what I *desired*, then doesn't he leave us with no explanation whatsoever – in terms of beliefs and desires – for why I fired my accountant?

I will give a detailed answer to this question over the course of this section and the next. Here, I begin by summarizing how such an answer proceeds. We *can* cite desires and beliefs in order to explain why an agent did what only seemed best to her. The desire that we cite will be the agent's desire for the actual good. But the desire for the actual good will have been processed through false beliefs that the agent has about the actual good to the point where, as a result of the agent's faulty reasoning, it – while persisting in being for what is actually good – takes on the guise of being for a particular (actually bad) action (or event, or object) that the agent has confused with that which is the best means to the agent's actual good. The agent wants

[24] See Penner and Rowe (1994: 17–18, n. 21).

what is actually good for her, and intends for the actual good to be the object of her desire. But her desire has more to it than these intentions toward the actual good, and her false beliefs and faulty reasoning have so distorted her thinking about the good that the desire comes to function as a desire for something not actually good. As a result, the desire has the discordant property of being both *for the actual good* and *aiming at an object or action that, while seeming good, is not actually good*. The desire is (so to speak) *psychologically* for the actual good (with whatever properties it has, whether they are known or not) because the actual good is a primary feature of any explanation for why the agent ever became oriented to this particular (not actually good) object, action, or event. The desire is *mechanically* for that which only seems good because its actualization orients the agent to the precise action that the agent does (with whatever properties it has, whether they are known or not). It is to this action that the agent commits herself even though, in the end, it can only be said that it seemed best to her. Thus, the desire for the actual good is the super-desire from which all of our subordinate desires toward things that either are actually good or are not actually good is derived. But, because we so often have misconceptions about the good, our desire for the good often has us interacting with the world via these derived, subordinated, and discordant, versions of itself, which end up being oriented toward what is not actually good. They result in an executive desire that makes us treat something that is not actually good as something that is actually good – a desire for the actual good which has "gone bad."

I am arguing that Socrates thought that our saying that we want – and our sometimes even pursuing – things that are actually bad is more plausibly understood as attributable to an incoherence in the desire that brings about our action than as evidence that we always (or ever) seek the *apparent* good. The incoherence results from mistaken beliefs about what is the best end for us in our current situation. In order to see why this is plausible, we must examine carefully the tacit assumption that drives the notion of intentional contexts.

The driving force is the supposition that each individual has incorrigible knowledge of what he or she desires. The contemporary theories of desire which make use of the notion of intentional contexts (I/O theories) are unwavering in their adherence to this supposition. Since Descartes, we are accustomed to the assumption that thinkers have unerring access to their own psychological states and that introspection is a reliable – indeed the only – means for figuring out what the objects of our psychological states are. A careful look at Socrates' theory of motivation will show that he

rejects this assumption for a very compelling reason: we are often willing to conclude, based upon the consequences of our actions, that our initial conception of what we wanted to do was incorrect.[25]

On Penner's analysis, I/O theories attempt to compensate for the fact that a person's executive desire sometimes harbors an incoherence that results from the disparity between the action she does (with all of its properties, known and unknown) and the one she intended to do (with all of its properties, known and unknown). Frege's purpose in distinguishing sense from reference was to render our executive desires coherent. But this cannot always be done, as sometimes the desire will be the product of inconsistent beliefs; Frege, therefore, stipulates his resolution at a price. As we will see, distinguishing sense from reference with respect to executive desires makes it impossible for a person to interact *psychologically* with the actual (as opposed to the apparent) world. That is, the action we actually do is often not the action we conceived of ourselves as performing. Frege wants to talk about the action that we conceive of ourselves as performing as the intended action. He wants to relate us to this action that only has the properties which we conceive of it as having. But often, the way the world is prevents the way we conceive of the action from being a real possibility. So we are stuck interacting with our conception of our action to the exclusion of interacting with any possible or soon to be actual action. Our desires don't put us in touch with the actions that we actually execute, or with the world in which they come about.

Socrates can plausibly reject the thesis that what we appear (to ourselves) to desire is what we actually desire because even if we accept that thesis, we find it insufficient for explaining behavior. Let us recall our chalk and cheese example. In this case, when we try to develop a hypothesis concerning what the teacher wanted, background information forces our hand. Our conclusion ends up being consistent with the theory that desires should be understood in intentional contexts. We favor the supposition that the teacher wanted chalk (which is what she *said*) over the supposition that she wanted the cheese (which she *grabbed*). I/O theories say that we do this because we assume that the teacher is the expert on what she wants. We assume that she *knows* she wanted chalk even if she accidentally grabbed the cheese. But our conclusion isn't necessarily a result of our reliance on what the teacher said about what she wanted. We have been told that she is a teacher and she is in a room with students. We assume that teachers

[25] In fact, I would argue that, once incorrigibility is abandoned, there is no reason to expect a person's beliefs concerning her own desires to be any less defeasible than those of an observer. The agent might have *more* information about her desire, but she doesn't necessarily have *better* information.

in rooms with students are more likely to want to write on a board than to eat, because they are probably there for the *overall purpose of teaching*. Teaching is more typically promoted by the act of writing on a board than by eating cheese. Writing on a board is done more successfully with chalk than with cheese. Thus, we do not understand the teacher's desire as a two-place relation between the teacher and an apparent object. We actually understand the teacher's desire to be a three-place relation between herself, her action in picking up the object that she picked up, and some further goal that she has for performing an action with what she has grabbed. It is on the basis of this three-place relation that we conclude that she wanted chalk and not cheese, it is not strictly on the basis of any linguistic theory that we have about how to understand her claim about what she desires. Had the subject in this case been another adult student who was just learning English, or a two-year-old, we would have needed recourse to far more than the two-place theory of intentional contexts before we were confident that we had correctly interpreted her desire from the evidence that she said she needed chalk, and subsequently grabbed a piece of cheese.[26]

If we agree that desire is actually the sort of three-place relation that has been described in the *Gorgias* (one where the word "desire" describes the relationship between a subject, an object, and *a further end that the subject hopes to achieve*), then we will probably find the supposition that subjects have incorrigible knowledge of what they actually desire problematic. For subjects will readily grant that they want the object upon which they have fixated *for the purpose* of bringing about their desired end. This seems to render their statement of desire sufficiently provisional so as to allow their discovery that a certain object does not bring about their desired end to override their claim that they did indeed desire it.

Many will concede the provisional nature of a first-person desire statement if the discovery that its object will not meet expectations is made prior to acting. There is no sound reason for treating the case where it becomes apparent that this condition has failed to be met antecedently any differently from the case where it is only subsequently discovered that this condition was not met. In other words, if I claim to desire to drink water for the purpose of relieving the burning feeling in my mouth, and I am told, in advance, that the water will only intensify that feeling, it will be

[26] As Penner points out (1991: 199–201), contemporary philosophers also think that if we are to know what the tyrant wants, we will need to have not only a true description of some action he wants to do, but also an account of *the description* (*or descriptions*) *under which* he wants to do the action in question.

readily granted that I can conclude that I do not, after all, desire a drink of water. Thus, there is no reason why I should not be able to justifiably conclude *after* drinking it (when I have had no such advance warning) that I was mistaken – I did not desire a drink of water. This is parallel to the case where I pick up the cheese and conclude that I did not get what I wanted (chalk).

As stated in my earlier remarks (39), it might be objected that there is a good reason to say that I desired to drink the water. If I didn't desire it, then how am I to explain the fact that I did it? Once we grant that we don't have incorrigible knowledge of what we desire, we will notice that we must attribute desires to ourselves in the same way that we would attribute desires to others in an experimental context: we must test our hypotheses concerning what we desired to see if we are correct. In experimental contexts, we always base our hypothesis about what an agent desires on behavioral and environmental factors. Given the way we use our beliefs about what is best for us to make substitutions and create particularized executive desires, it makes sense to think that the desire that motivated a behavior was the outcome of a provisional hypothesis that the agent made concerning what was her best end and what was the best means to it. This would be manifested through the plugging in of a particular action to the substitution clause to form a (perhaps incoherent) executive desire.

However, it also makes sense to understand every executive desire to have included the agent's desire that any mistakes in the way she has particularized her executive desire be overridden by the way the world actually is. This is where the incoherence comes in: she wanted whatever really was best for her even if she erred in specifying, identifying, and doing it. Despite this incoherence, it makes sense to think that, while agents often mistakenly believe that an object is a means toward a particular end, it is the end – construed in the most ultimate way – that we should take them to want in each case. Thus, a desire for what the agent actually wants can be the motivating factor in her pursuit of something that only appeared best to her, and can also be cited as a means for explaining her behavior in such a case. I will explain how this works when I discuss Penner's "Dominance" theory of desire, which he proposes as a replacement for I/O theories.

The view that we desire an action only if we can get from it what we ultimately want, and that we do not want it if it turns out not to get us what we want, becomes intuitive when we consider our use of the locution

"you don't want to do that."[27] Imagine yourself as an audience member at a stunning performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. Romeo is about to drink the vial of poison. As you sit on the edge of your seat, you can barely keep from shouting, "You don't want to do that!" How can you say that he doesn't want to do that? His actions are voluntary and he went to great pains to secure the vial of poison. The point of the advisory, "You don't want to do that!" is focused when we look at the identity of the act in question. Romeo's killing himself when Juliet is already dead is the act that he seeks to perform. Unfortunately, Romeo is performing a completely different act: he is killing himself when Juliet is still alive and Paris is dead, and there are indications that they might be able to marry and live together in peace and tranquility.[28] We in the audience seem to be better at figuring out what Romeo wants than he is – there is no incorrigibility here.

Still, Romeo *does* drink the poison; how do we explain his act of drinking it if he did not have the desire to do so – if it only *seemed best* to him? Romeo *did* have an executive desire where the substitution clause was inhabited by "drink this vial of poison, the one you hold in your hand, right here, right now." But that executive desire contained the incoherence we have been discussing. Romeo's desire was a desire to do what was best for him. But so many of Romeo's beliefs about Juliet and all kinds of other elements of his situation were wrong that the desire he ended up with can be analyzed as incoherent. That is, he desired both to do what was best and to drink the poison, where these two actions were mutually exclusive. This executive desire had the force of making him drink the poison. The incoherence in this executive desire produced the result that he did only what seemed best to him and not what he wanted. When we go on to discuss the Dominance theory of desire, we will see that there is another step to this analysis which further explains why Romeo did not desire to do what he actually did. That additional step is Romeo's intention: he always wants to do whatever action is best (with all of its elements, whatever they are, known and unknown) and he always intends that any discrepancy between the action that he actually wants to do (what is best for him) and the way he represents that action to himself (what *appears* best to him) be overridden in favor of what is actually best for him.

[27] Penner demonstrates this in his 1991 and also argues that it does not involve a special sense of "want" (1991: 191).

[28] Of course there is no guarantee that even *that* is the act that Romeo wants to perform. For all we know he and Juliet would have grown to realize that they were very ill-matched and would have spent the rest of their lives in misery.

If we grant that, as subjects, we are not incorrigible concerning our own psychological states, the difference between subject and observer reduces to the fact that the observer must make hypotheses concerning the object of desire based only on behavioral evidence, while the subject of the desire (and the behavior) has internal evidence as well. The subject reads the internal evidence – how she "feels" – and allows it to help her form her hypothesis about what she wants. On the basis of her feelings of, for example, hunger, thirst, or fear,[29] in concert with what she takes to be true of her environment, she hypothesizes about the best end for her in her situation, and about the best means to obtain it. An observer would have to formulate these hypotheses from the agent's linguistic or other behavior. Thus, the principles for a first-person hypothesis concerning what the object of desire is are no different from the principles for an observer's hypothesis. It is simply that the subject of the desire has more (and more varied) evidence. Also, it will now be equally true of both the observer and the subject that each one's skill in reading and interpreting the evidence will contribute to her success in determining the object of the desire under scrutiny. Thus, the way in which we make hypotheses concerning what we desire should be modeled on the way we would do so when observing another in experimental conditions. It is possible for us to be wrong about what our desire is for, just as an outside observer can be. We might even be more likely to be wrong than an observer is, if the observer possesses expertise relevant to our situation that we don't.[30] This is the thesis that Socrates' view supports. In fact, as we will see throughout this book, it makes sense to think that he would say that it is our having more *knowledge* that makes us more likely to be right about what we and others desire. Our position with respect to whether we are the agents of the desire under scrutiny or mere observers pales in significance when compared to our knowledge.

Using our standard I/O theories, agents construct *their* hypotheses by looking at the "inside" of the object of desire, and observers construct *their* hypotheses by looking at its outside. But the result is that each has been handed a way to render coherent her beliefs about the desire in question at the price of allowing it to explain any behavior at all. What we need is

[29] It is also arguable that she can misinterpret these. She might think that she feels tired, but finds that resting does not make the feeling go away whereas drinking water does. As a result, she might conclude that she mistook feeling dehydrated for feeling tired. For a more general argument against the incorrigibility of these sorts of internal states, see my 1996.

[30] Consider this analogy: we wouldn't necessarily assume that an untrained bystander who happened to be an eye-witness to an automobile accident would be any better at explaining what had actually happened than a forensic expert who was not an eye-witness would be – not even if the eye-witness and the expert had equal access to the accident's aftermath.

a theory that does not separate insides from outsides, even for intentional states.

In order to form a meaningful hypothesis for a subject's purposeful behavior, an observer will always have to provide a desire that is defined by an object that endures any substitution *salva veritate*. This is because we, as observers, have to take behavioral and other signs as evidence for the satisfaction of desire. Most frequently, this evidence will be the extinction of the behavior that we saw the desire as motivating.[31]

Let's go back to our chalk and cheese example. Our ordinary reading of this example tries to render the teacher's beliefs coherent, and so does not allow us to make substitutions in psychological contexts *salva veritate*. I/O theories would force us to say the following:

The teacher desired that which she grabbed.

She grabbed the cheese.

However, the teacher did not desire cheese.

In order to allow the teacher to have a coherent desire, we are encouraged to understand the verb "desire" in a way that makes it the case that the teacher can both:

(1) have wanted that which she grabbed without having wanted cheese, even though they are identical;
(2) have wanted both the object which she grabbed and chalk, even though they are mutually exclusive.

Notice that given (1) and (2) there is no actual, *physical* object that can be construed as what the teacher wanted. There is no possible action that can be the actual action she wished to perform. The solution, on the standard treatment, is to say that the teacher desired an apparent object:

The teacher desired the object that appeared to her to be chalk.[32]

But this object is either the cheese or something other than a physical object. Let's argue against the first alternative – that it is the cheese. I proposed earlier that it is completely intuitive to think that when the teacher grabbed the cheese she was not satisfied that she did what she wanted to do. Let's vindicate this by showing that it is what observers (who, according to the standard treatment, must evaluate her behavior from the outside) would conclude.

Observing the teacher, and seeing her pick up the cheese, we might make the following hypothesis about how to explain her behavior:

The teacher picked up the cheese because she wanted cheese.

[31] For a fuller explanation of this see my 1996: 155–60.
[32] Or, some will want to say, "cheese under the description chalk."

Having made our hypothesis, we now continue our observations to see if we can confirm our hypothesis. If we are right about the cheese being what the teacher wanted, her obtaining the cheese should make her stop seeking whatever it was that she wanted.[33] Upon picking up the cheese, the teacher was startled at having grabbed a slimy, cold object and fetched a further cylindrical, white object from the windowsill of the room.

Did the teacher want the cheese? The fact that she reacted negatively and then went right on grabbing things seems to count against that hypothesis. But, it also doesn't seem to make sense that in keeping with our (1) and (2) she wanted something other than a physical object. Yet, this is the awkward position in which the I/O theory leaves us; the object of the psychological verb is the sense and not the reference of the term used. She wanted an apparent object or her sense of the word "chalk." A theory which renders our desires coherent at the price of making us able to interact psychologically only with something like a Fregean sense is not a useful tool for explaining our behavior.

In order to make sense of what motivated the teacher's behavior, we must resort to a deeper explanation. We need to include the third part of the three-place relation to which we earlier referred. The teacher didn't want what she picked up for itself, she wanted to teach; to facilitate that, she wanted to write on the board. As observers trying to explain behavior, we must view the agent's behavior within the context of an ultimate goal that the agent desires to attain. It will not be useful to focus on the proximate goals that the agent pursues because he or she believes (however temporarily) that they are a means to that ultimate goal. This is why Socrates asserts that all desire is for the actual good – that actual good (which, as we will see in future chapters, Socrates identifies with happiness) is the ultimate goal for which all other subordinate goals are viewed, provisionally, as a means.

The clearest, and most complete, explanation we can give for why the teacher picked up the cheese is:

The teacher wanted the chalk.

Chalk = cylindrical object on windowsill.

The teacher believed: cylindrical object on desk (cheese) = chalk.

Therefore: the teacher wanted – and wanted to pick up – the object on the windowsill (chalk) even though she believed that she wanted – and wanted to pick up – the object in the tray (cheese), and that is the object that she grabbed (she treated the cheese as if it were the chalk). Many of her beliefs about the object in the tray were false and

[33] See my 1996 for a defense of this criterion.

this resulted in an incoherence in her desire. She wished to do what would facilitate writing on the board. This, combined with her false beliefs, allowed her to form an executive desire which was both for what would facilitate writing on the board (on the presupposition that that was actually best for her) and for something that could not write on the board. It oriented her to the latter with the result that she did not do what she wanted but did what only seemed best to her.

Notice that the teacher's desire for the good (i.e., the chalk) supplies both belief and motivation for explaining why she pursued the cheese. When we discuss the Dominance theory, we will see that it does this without our having to attribute a desire for an apparent object (or for the white, cylindrical object on the desk, or for the cheese *under the description* "chalk") to the teacher. To use Socratic vocabulary: the teacher wanted the chalk but, due to false beliefs and an incoherent executive desire, pursued what seemed best to her: the cheese.

In order to appreciate fully what the example shows, we must take it to the next level – the level at which Socrates is arguing at *Gorgias* 467c–468c. The contention seems to be that, in practical contexts, our activities have a provisionally, and somewhat artificially, specified goal. We say that it is the teacher's goal to write on the board, but even that is only the case if it is what is best for her at the present time – only if it contributes to some further goal and, ultimately, to her overall happiness. It is the nature of human endeavor that each *practical goal* that is achieved is describable as a means to some further end. No one ever wants to procure any object, or to bring about any event, other than his or her own happiness *simply for itself*. Every practical endeavor is done for the sake of some further goal and, ultimately, for the purpose of furthering happiness.[34]

It should be noted that Socrates is *not* saying that we don't desire the proximate actions and objects that we use as successful means to reach our overall goal. He says that we want both the means and the end, but only if the means is actually a means to our desired end:

> We do not want to slaughter, exile, or expropriate *thus simply*, but if these actions are beneficial, we want to do them; when they are harmful, we don't want to do them. (468c2–4)

This important point will bear further emphasis when we discuss the neither-good-nor-bad.

[34] What happiness is and how it might be furthered will be discussed in later chapters.

## DESIRING THE ACTUAL GOOD: THE DOMINANCE THEORY OF DESIRE

So, now we understand Socrates' distinction between what we want and what seems best to us. We have achieved this by understanding that all desires for actions and objects operate within the context of a hierarchy of desire, where there is an overall desire for the good that directs our desires for particular things. This context is our desire for the best end available to us in the situation we are in. Still, we must go on to defend Socrates' contention that this overall desire is for what is actually the best and not for what merely appears best.

Let us not forget that we have also started to notice the limitations of I/O theories. I/O theories say that our desire is for an apparent object in order to resolve the incoherence in our executive desire that results from our false beliefs about what is best for us. This leaves us unable to interact psychologically with the physical world. People want what is actually good. They simply judge things by their appearances because they have little other evidence. When I buy a stock, I buy an actual stock. In order to explain the fact that I bought an actual stock, I need to cite a desire that makes reference to some actual thing in the world. This can't happen if our theory translates propositions about desires into statements about people's psychological relationships to intermediary objects (like Fregean senses). Frege certainly didn't mean to say that we want to eat, or to marry, or to wear, or to drive in, or to do anything else with an apparent object. He understood that we want actual things, but the way he resolved the incoherence between the inside and the outside of the actions that we intend to perform – between our wanting both what is best and what is not best – forces all actual objects to drop out of the equation.

We desire the means to our happiness. The way that the Dominance theory will deal with this same incoherence is to acknowledge that our executive desires orient us toward real things that are out there in the world – things that have realities that are independent of any of the ways that we think about or represent them to ourselves. Rather than having the actual act (that is not aligned with our actual good) drop out of the equation, and rather than allowing our actual good to drop out of the equation, the Dominance theory relies on them to work together in a specific way in order to explain our action. The Dominance theory does this by noting that Socrates believes that we always intend to seek whatever is actually good – whatever is actually best for us in the situation at hand, and whatever is the actual best means to that best end. No one ever pursues

any object or does any action on the hypothesis that it is (only) *apparently* good. The Dominance theory will use this intention to allow the way the world really is, and what is actually good for us, to dominate our desire twice in the formation of our executive desire. One domination will fix the reference of the act, the other will establish the object of desire. The general hierarchical structure that includes the substitution clause integrates our desire for the good with our beliefs. Now our intentions in performing our actions will perform a double integration of the inside and the outside of the object of our desire allowing our desire for what is actually good (outside) to dominate by overriding misconceptions reflected in the insides of our object of desire. As a result of these two moments of overriding, our intentions will integrate the actually best action with the action that the agent has determined is actually best and has plugged into the substitution clause to form the relevant executive desire. This will be illustrated shortly (52–3).

Penner believes that Socrates' attitude toward the object of our desire for the good is analogous to the kind that Donnellan (1966) spoke of in elucidating a new way of thinking about Russell's notion of definite descriptions. While Donnellan discussed reference outside of psychological contexts, Penner thinks that what Socrates thought about reference within psychological contexts works with the intentions of the agent in the same way. Donnellan gave the example of a man who stands in a corner drinking water from a martini glass. He claimed that even if someone refers to this person as "the man in the corner drinking a martini" the reference will succeed. Penner and Rowe (1994) have reasoned that the success of this reference is due to the fact that a certain feature of the agent's psychological state underlies the act of referring. When we refer to an object, we do so with the intention that any details we get wrong in our description of the object to which we want to refer will be overridden by whatever is actually true about the object. As Penner and Rowe put it:

> It is Jones' intention to refer to the man *as he actually is* and even if how Jones would describe the man is other than how he actually is. Jones wants *how it is with the man in question* to override any errors in Jones' conception of him. (In general people are well aware that their conceptions and descriptions of the people they are referring to are inadequate.) "But he's only drinking water," we say to Jones. "Whatever!" he replies, "You fix it up. (And when you've fixed it up, that's the person I intend to refer to.)" (1994: 6)

Penner and Rowe point out that it is a feature of Jones's psychological state that he *intends* (looking at his manner of representing the object from

the "inside") that how it actually is with the man in question (looking at the object from the "outside") *dominate* his manner of referring to the man ("inside").[35] Jones intends for his reference to overcome any discrepancy between how he represents things to himself and how they are. Thus, the Dominance theory adds a sort of "escape clause" to the general formula that results in an executive desire: I want whatever means to whatever ends is best for me in my current situation *and* I want my reference to what is best for me to overcome any discrepancy between how I represent things to myself and how they are.

It makes sense to think that this sort of reference underlies our investigation of any hypothesis, scientific or otherwise. If a biblical historian wants to investigate the truth of the claim that Jonah was swallowed by a big fish, it can't be the case that the historian's reference to Jonah is mediated only by her belief that Jonah was swallowed by a big fish. That is, it can't be the case that the historian only succeeds in referring to Jonah if her belief that he was swallowed by a big fish is true (that her reference only succeeds under the description "man who was swallowed by a big fish"). If that were the case, then the historian would be asking whether or not "the person who was swallowed by a big fish was swallowed by a big fish" – a question that can't fail to be answered affirmatively.

This insight carries implications for how we should understand a desire for something that is wanted as a means to a further end. As we have already seen in our examination of the *Gorgias*, Socrates believes that every desire for anything other than happiness should be characterized as a desire for a means to a further end (33–7). In our chalk and cheese example, we hypothesized that the teacher wanted to write on the board. We hypothesized this on the basis that she picked up the cheese. But the teacher's grabbing of the cheese was premised on her belief that it would write on the board. That is, the teacher wanted (inside) however things actually were with respect to the object she grabbed (outside) to dominate over her representation of that action as the action that she wanted to do. She wanted to pick up the chalk *whichever action it was*, but she mistook grabbing the cheese for the action she actually wanted to perform. Now, the teacher's executive desire explains why she picked up the cheese without our having to attribute to her a desire for cheese nor for the white, cylindrical object on the desk. As in the Romeo example, the teacher's false beliefs have allowed her to formulate

[35] Penner and Rowe discuss this in their 1994 (n. 5 and 5–8). They point out that they are actually going beyond mere issues of opacity and transparency. My 1996 mistakenly indicates that transparency would be sufficient. What I say here shows my disagreement with the statements that I made in 1996.

an incoherent executive desire. It is a desire to do whatever is best – in this case, to grab the chalk – but it is also a desire to do the actual grabbing that she did (a grabbing of cheese). Further, these incoherent elements are integrated by her desire that any discrepancies between the action that is really best for her and the action that she does be overridden in favor of what is actually best for her.

The teacher's desire is still a desire for the actual good, even though it oriented her to the cheese, for two reasons: first, it is only by assuming that she desired to do the action that was the best means to the best end available to her that we can ever account for how the action that she actually did (picking up the cheese) was plugged into the substitution clause. Second, it is a second feature of her desire for the good – her intention that any discrepancy between the action actually best for her and the action that she actually did be overridden in favor of what was actually best for her – that allows us to understand her desire as one that referred to a real, physical, action – namely, the picking up of the cheese. So, the executive desire to do a particular best action is, at the same time, the executive desire that explains why she picked up the cheese.

Thus, the formulation of the executive desire in accordance with the Dominance theory of desire details how Socrates can have a theory according to which I explain why someone picked up cheese even when cheese was not the dominant object of her desire. Once we understand all of the features of her executive desire, we can understand why Socrates insists that her desire is for chalk, but is oriented in a way that explains her grabbing of the cheese. That is, the teacher has substituted "teach," and then "write on the board," and then "pick up this object in the tray," in sequence for the *whatever* clause, forming an executive desire. The full expression of the general structure of an executive desire is, "*I want whatever means to whatever end is the best for me in my current situation, and I also want my reference to what is best for me to overcome any discrepancy between how I represent things to myself and how they are*." It is this which has become particularized in each case where we purposefully perform an action.

To illustrate the two moments at which integration of outsides and insides is afforded by the Dominance theory, as promised earlier (50), let us return to the case of Romeo's act in drinking the vial of poison. It is our intention, as captured by the escape clause, that results in these two coordinated moments at which insides are dominated by outsides in the formation of each executive desire.[36] For one, the way an action will actually

[36] It is tempting to think of them as not only coordinated, but sequential: first the reference of the action needs to be fixed on the one which will actually be performed, and then the action which

turn out is allowed to dominate over the way we conceive of the action when we are about to perform it. In Romeo's case, his conception of his drinking the poison as a drinking of poison in the face of Juliet's having died would be overridden so that when he intends to perform the action, he is referring to the action he actually will perform. This is not to say that he knows which action he will perform – none of Romeo's misconceptions have been cleared away – it is just that now, when he refers to the action he has it in mind to execute, he refers to the action he is actually about to perform. It is important that he is referring to the actual action that he will carry out, as it is that action (whatever he is about to do with all of its properties, whatever they are, known and unknown) which needs to be involved in the second bit of overriding as governed by his intention to do what is actually good. The second bit of overriding involves one's intention to have one's possibly misconceived desire to do that actual action be overridden in favor of whatever action is actually best for one. This enables outsides to come to triumph over insides, when it comes to determining what one wishes. This overriding is desired and intended, in the event that the way the world is requires that the action that one will actually perform is not the best available means to the best available ends for one, in one's present circumstances. In Romeo's case, this would mean that his desire to perform the action of "killing himself while Juliet is still alive and will soon revive" would be overridden in such a way that it is not the case that he wishes to drink the vial of poison right here, right now (the actual drinking of the poison that he will do, with all of its properties, known and unknown). Instead, this action is not desired; it only seems best to him. For he desires to do the best action available to him (with all of its properties, known and unknown) and that is not what he will do. In summary, one bit of overriding fixes the reference of the action to the actual action to be performed in the interest of fixing desire on the good, the other bit fixes desire on the good.

Although the teacher doesn't have a full-blooded desire for cheese in our example (picking up cheese only "seems best" to her in Socrates' parlance), her desire for the good explains why she picked up the cheese. It explains why cheese is featured in her executive desire. The escape clause provided by the Dominance theory brings outsides to bear on the content of our intentional states. Contrary to what is dictated by I/O theories, it is not, here, the case that a desire for an end produces *ceteris paribus* a desire for

is actually good needs to dominate the action which is going to be performed. But, really the two work from the ends toward the middle, so to speak. We start out with a desire to have everything about our desire align itself with what is actually good and the work to get this alignment to happen proceeds – with varying degrees of success – from there.

the means *thought* necessary to bring it about. Rather, our desire for an end (our own good in the present circumstances) produces *ceteris paribus* a desire for the means *actually necessary* to bring it about. At the same time, it also invokes our beliefs, some of which may be false, in orienting us to a particular action toward a specific object at an exact time. This will also result in an executive desire that is – in an impure way – *for* an action that only seemed best to us. While I will often have false beliefs about what I desire and what is good for me, and while these beliefs might be cited in explanations for why I behave the way I do, the way an object appears to me cannot simply be cited in describing the object of my desire.[37]

## DESIRE

We have come to understand Socrates' desire for the good as a sort of super desire. This super desire is structured in a specific way, and is the basis for the formation of an executive desire:

(1) I want whatever means to whatever end is the best for me in my current situation and I also want my reference to what is best for me to overcome any discrepancy between how I represent things to myself and how they are.

An executive desire is the kind of desire that unites motivation with belief in order to cause, and therefore explain, an individual purposeful action. We have come to see that an analysis of Socratic desire affords us two ways to understand executive desires: it will either be the case that,

[37] I am now in the position to reply to a textual objection that Kamtekar makes to the individuation of actions according to their consequences (2006). The text (*Gorgias* 468d) treats the action that the tyrant actually does as the same action as the one that seemed best to him. But, how can they be the same if the action that seemed best to the tyrant seemed that way to him because – as he planned it – it had different consequences than the action that he actually did (certainly he didn't *intend* to perform an action that had bad consequences)? So, her objection goes, the intended action and the actual action can't *both* be the action that seemed best and any choice of one over the other will seem arbitrary. Kamtekar's objection, however, assumes that Socrates embraces an I/O theory and that there is such a thing as "the action that the tyrant intended to do" that is a completely internal phenomenon and has no relationship to the way the external world actually is. It is, in particular, divorced from those elements of the external world that make it the case that the intended action could never be actualized. In other words, the whole point of the distinction between doing what one wants and doing what seems best is that there is no such thing as the action that one intends to perform where those intentions don't also include the intention for how the world actually is to override the discrepancies between the intended action and the action that will inevitably be performed. Contrary to Kamtekar's assertion, there is only one action here: the one that is constituted by a proper combination of the action intended (inside) and the action performed (outside), for one of the intentions that characterizes the intended action is that any discrepancies between the action intended and the one performed be overridden in favor of the action performed. This is the first moment of overriding described above (52–3).

(a) the substitution succeeds in orienting the agent to what is actually good and there is no overriding to be done.

Or it will be an incoherent and discordant case where,

(b) the substitution orients the agent to something not actually good but even this substitution and consequent orientation are performed because the agent desires the good and the agent intends for what is best to overcome any discrepancy between the way she represents the action to herself and the way things actually are.

These are three of the four ways in which Socrates uses words that we might understand to mean "desire." In Chapter 4, it will become clear that there is yet another desire of a sort:

(2) A raw desire that is independent of our desire for the good, and cannot *directly* influence our behavior. It influences our behavior only when it is represented in our beliefs concerning the good, and it is, in turn, featured in the content which has been substituted into the generalized form to create the executive desire.[38]

I will prefer the terms "urge" or "drive" in referring to these raw desires.

I do not claim that these various ways of understanding "desire" map onto differences in Greek terminology, except that, in a very small section of the *Gorgias* (466a–468e), (a) is always βούλεσθαι and (b) is always δοκεῖν βέλτιστον. Also, to my knowledge, βούλεσθαι is never, and ἐπιθυμεῖν is often, used for (2). I do not, for example, think that Plato uses βούλεσθαι and ἐπιθυμεῖν in a systematic way that – by itself – shows Socrates to distinguish among the various understandings of desire specified above. They are the theoretical consequence of what Socrates says in the *Meno* and *Gorgias* about desire for the good.

## CONCLUSION

This understanding of Plato's early dialogues leaves us with a very different impression of human desire and motivation than the one with which I started this chapter. According to the view we have developed, everyone always desires the good. To focus on the assumptions which we listed under (A) at the beginning of the chapter: if bad or evil people are supposed to be people who desire bad, then there are no such people. Moreover, paying attention to whether people mean well, as opposed to how they behave, will get us nowhere in assessing whether or not they are good people. Everyone

[38] This raw desire will be a major player in Chapter 4 in the discussion of Socrates' denial of *akrasia*. It will also be mentioned in our discussion of altruism in Chapter 3.

means well – each person always tries to do that which is the best available action in his or her current situation. In the next two chapters, we will see that Socrates' theory concerning motivation also puts him at odds with the popular claims that we should be more concerned about others than about ourselves (Group B), and that even good and intelligent people often do wrong because, due to temptation, they go against their better judgment (Group C).

CHAPTER 3

# *Socratic egoism*

No matter how we interpret the conclusion to Socrates' *Meno* argument, it implies that desiring something bad is tantamount to desiring to be harmed, which is desiring to be miserable and unhappy. This carries two further implications: first, harm is always harm to the self and benefit is always benefit to the self. Second, bad is simply this harm to the self and good is just this benefit to the self.

Socrates seems to neglect a whole category of examples when he equates bad with harm and good with benefit. What of a person who benefits from performing a bad action, where "bad" is here understood as something like "morally wrong?" Socrates' controversial conclusion to the *Meno* argument and its entailments call our attention to many passages throughout the Socratic dialogues that make it apparent that Socrates is an egoist.

In the *Gorgias*, we saw Socrates base an entire argument about who has power on the assumption that power – if it is a worthwhile commodity – is good for its possessor (33n.16). Later in the *Gorgias*, Socrates argues that justice benefits the self (474c4–d2, 475b3–d6), and that it is to be prized because it is better for the agent than the alternative (470e4–11).

In Chapters 4 and 9, we will see that, in the *Protagoras*, Socrates describes all deliberation concerning voluntary action as a cost/benefit analysis concerning which alternative will bring about the most pleasure for the agent over the long run. There, Socrates is even so bold as to argue that agents *never* choose to do something other than what they think will bring them, personally, the most pleasure.

In the *Lysis*, Socrates argues that all things – even friends – are desired for their usefulness to the one desiring them (212c5–d4, 214e3–215c3). Further, he shows that all goods are loved for the sake of some ultimate good, which is arguably identified with the agent's happiness.[1]

[1] See my 1997 for one interpretation to this effect. Irwin (1977: 57) also shows this. It is my understanding that Penner and Rowe (2005) argue that the ultimate friend here is knowledge, but it is still the knowledge of the agent and so still conforms to egoism.

The *Apology* is peppered with passages that show Socrates making his own benefit a key criterion in his deliberations concerning his actions. He also assumes that a key component in his Athenian jury's decision will be their own advantage. At 22e, Socrates confesses that after asking himself whether he would prefer to have both the wisdom and the ignorance of the craftspeople instead of his own complete ignorance, he decides that "it is best (λυσιτελοῖ) for me to be as I am" (22e5–6).[2] Socrates defends his absence from political matters, telling the Athenians that if he had taken part in politics he would have "died long ago, benefiting neither you nor myself" (31d8–e1).

An important key to unlocking the ethical and psychological views that are presented by Socrates in the early dialogues is an understanding of Socratic egoism. In order to gain this understanding, we must think through how Socratic egoism would address some of the controversies that are taken to be part and parcel of egoism.

## HARM IS SELF-HARM; BENEFIT IS SELF-BENEFIT

In addressing the assumption that Socrates thinks that harm and benefit are always and only harm or benefit to the self, we might want to know whether Socrates is a psychological or an ethical egoist. Ethical egoism states that a person *should* do what is in her own self interest, but makes no observation concerning what people *actually* do. Psychological egoism states that a person inevitably aims to do what is in her own self interest, but takes no stand on what a person *should* do. As we have seen in the *Gorgias*, Socrates thinks that whenever an individual chooses to act, she chooses the particular, available, action that she thinks will bring her the most benefit. Socrates believes that it is not possible for anyone to choose to act in any other way. This is psychological egoism. Given this, we must address a further question: psychological egoism looks like a descriptive theory, not a normative or prescriptive one. How can I claim that Socrates is making claims about ethics, if he is not addressing the question of how people are required to behave? As I stated in Chapter 1, Socrates does not actually give us an ethical theory in the sense of a prescriptive or normative theory. He does, however, give us a theory that can be understood to have an ethical dimension.

Socrates determines that every time we act, we do that which we determine through reason to be the act that will lead to our own greatest possible

[2] In fact λυσιτελοῖ, has the somewhat mercenary – and not moral – connotation that something is better in the sense of being more profitable.

benefit, in our current situation. Of course, this forces reason to calculate how the way in which our actions affect others might, in turn, result in our own long-term benefit and harm. As a result, we view the benefit and harm of others as constitutive of our own. We also have to reason out the net effect of pursuing short-term benefits that have a long-term cost and, therefore, ultimately result in more harm than benefit. Thus, reason brings the relation between our short-term benefit and our long-term benefit into our calculations, when we set our goals. So, the fact that Socrates is a psychological egoist does not mean that he cannot offer us advice on how to behave.

Socrates is a psychological egoist who does not offer a normative or prescriptive theory. He does offer a theory of how people are motivated, in conjunction with one about what allows people to best succeed in bringing about their own happiness. He understands human beings to be motivated only by their own self-benefit. He understands virtue to be the only available means for increasing one's happiness. If he is right about these things, then anyone who is convinced by Socrates' description of what the world is like will be compelled to become as virtuous as possible. So, Socratic ethics is a descriptive theory, from which an appropriate strategy concerning how one should act in order to become happy can be derived as a hypothetical imperative. A person can come to conclusions about what she should do, because she will see both that she pursues her own good, and that proper pursuit of her own good will allow her to achieve her ultimate goal. This will be described more fully in Chapters 7 and 8.

In understanding Socratic egoism, we must forestall some common objections to egoism. These have to do with apparent evidence that people voluntarily harm themselves, and also with the concern that someone cannot be ethical if their goal is not – at least at times – to benefit others. Let us focus on harm to the self first, and deal with benefit and harm to others later (65–72). Socrates believes that the fact that people do bad things, and harm themselves, is not the result of a substandard motivational process. People do bad and harmful things to themselves because ignorance prevents them from choosing the action that is actually the one that is most beneficial to *them*. So, Socrates is convinced that no behavior is ever intentionally self-destructive. Also, if altruistic behavior is behavior that benefits another *at one's own expense*, then Socrates is equally convinced that no one's actions are ever purely altruistic. Now, it may seem that there is much evidence that contradicts both parts of this claim. Can't we find many examples of people who want to harm themselves, and choose to do so quite deliberately? Aren't there also many people who sacrifice their own well-being in order to help others?

The first concern, about self-destructive behavior, is relatively easy to address for a wide class of cases.[3] When people act, they act in a definite situation in which they, in fact, have a limited number of options. Sometimes, the option a person chooses is labeled "self-destructive" by an observer because it causes the agent to suffer physical or psychological harm, or even death. Still, an observer who wants to understand that action as purposive and not random must find some explanation for it. The strategy for explaining this type of behavior will always be to show that the consequences, which the agent understood would result from this action, were more consistent with her beliefs about what was best for her than were the consequences that she thought would result from another available action. Socrates appears to have acted in a self-defeating way throughout his trial, and once convicted, he was unwilling to consider escaping from prison in order to avoid death. While it might seem to us that he allowed himself to be ushered to an unfortunate and untimely death, Socrates seems to say that, once he is forbidden to practice philosophy, death is his most satisfactory available alternative (*Apology* 29a–30b).

The image of Achilles, which Socrates evokes at *Apology* 28c1–d3, gives further evidence that Socrates believed that death can be a noble and egoistic choice. Achilles chose to avenge Patroclus and die himself, rather than "remain here, a laughing stock by the curved ships, a burden upon the earth." Achilles seemed to prefer to forgo the unhappy (because it is useless) existence that he would have otherwise endured. A life in exile without philosophy would have rendered Socrates a "burden on the earth," as well. If all behavior is rational, then, sometimes, "self-destructive" behavior simply reflects an instance where an agent has chosen what she takes to be the lesser of two evils.[4] Of course, in this case, the behavior is not *actually* self-destructive; the agent is doing the most advantageous action available. Truly self-destructive behavior, on the other hand, results from ignorance concerning the most advantageous action.

Perhaps it is harder to understand how Socrates could have assumed that no acts are purely altruistic. As I write this, over 200 New York area firefighters are being mourned. They ran into the burning World Trade Center complex in order to try to save the lives of others. They knew that

[3] Cases that involve a supposed irrational impulse to self-destruction will be covered in our discussion of irrational desire (83–8).

[4] Socrates needn't insist that he or Achilles (or anyone else) is correct in his choice of the lesser of two evils. He need only insist that they have chosen what they have chosen because they believed it to be the lesser of two evils.

they could be killed in the line of duty. It is here that we see the importance of understanding that we are discussing *Socratic* egoism, rather than a more generic kind. Our calculation of benefit to ourselves takes in many complex and far-reaching factors. Socrates does not think that we ever, in reality, succeed in sorting our options into categories that show some to involve actions that are *exclusively* for our own benefit as opposed to *exclusively* for the benefit of others.

For some reason it is the gut reaction of many people to say that we devalue the things a person does for others, if we argue that they saw their actions to be in their own self-interest.[5] It is somehow thought to be a great affront to the heroic acts which the firefighters performed, if I claim that they performed these acts because – of all of the acts available to them – this was the act that best fit with their calculation of what was best for them in the big picture and in the long term. Why not think, as I believe that Socrates did, that a person's ability to see that her own interests dictate that she should perform such an act makes her virtuous and heroic?[6]

Socrates was not beginning from preconceived judgments concerning what is right and wrong, and then allowing them to dictate what *should* motivate and therefore *explain* human behavior. Socrates was reasoning from what actually *could* cause human behavior, to what such a theory would dictate constitutes *good* behavior. In doing so, Socrates reasoned that it is not plausible to claim there are desires and beliefs that motivate actual instances of physical behavior that are not, somehow, integrated with our desire to benefit ourselves.

The argument for altruism would have to be that agents have desires that are completely independent of any beliefs that agents have about the consequences of their actions *for themselves*. Yet, it is hard to see how such a desire could motivate physical behavior, if it cannot be integrated into a deeper and more primitive – or basic – motivational structure.[7] Our examination (33–7) of the *Meno* and the *Gorgias* passages demonstrates that Socrates held a certain view of the structure of desire. He believed that our desires have a hierarchical structure: all desires for anything other than our own good are subordinated to the desire for the good, and the objects of these desires are wanted only insofar as they are understood to be a means to our good. Now, a desire or belief that is not integrated into

[5] Perhaps this is so because the figure of Jesus and the writings of Kant have influenced our conception of exemplary behavior.

[6] See Penner 1973 and 1992b for more on Socrates and courage.

[7] See my 1990: 133–75 and 229–34.

this hierarchical structure would have to be, somehow, independent and free-floating. This sort of desire would have to have an object that is not commensurable with the objects of our other desires. It would have to be a belief or desire that has not been involved in the process of particularizing the general formula of desire to create an executive desire (for the executive desire – as we have seen [39–54] – orients all beliefs and desires around the goal of self-benefit). A desire that does not have this form is not an executive desire, and cannot explain behavior.

There are good reasons to think that Socrates was correct. In order to explain behavior, we need not only cite an agent's particular beliefs and desires, but we also need to account for how a particular subset of the hundreds of beliefs and desires that the agent has at any particular time came together to compel her to act. This is the role of the general structure of desire that Penner advocates in connection with the *Gorgias* passage (33–7): I desire to do *whatever* is the best means to the best end in my current situation. Beliefs and desires come together by filling in the substitution clause creating an executive desire. We cannot account for how a free-floating desire (that is irrelevant to the agent's well-being) can be harnessed for the purpose of motivating behavior. How will it come together with relevant beliefs, and when it does, how will it be integrated into the rest of our beliefs and desires?[8]

Let's look at this in more detail. We have a general desire of the form "I have the desire to do *whatever it is that will be of the most benefit to me in my present circumstances*." Our beliefs about the particulars of our current situation, and our further beliefs that take the form of predictions about what might happen as the result of various possible actions that we could perform, dictate reformulation of the substitution clause. Through this reformulation, we substitute a particular action for the "whatever" creating an executive desire. This is how beliefs become integrated with our desire for the good.

[8] An anonymous reader has objected that, for those who don't accept Socrates' theory of motivation, many of these desires are not free-floating, but are just aimed at something other than the agent's own good. It seems to me, however, that in the absence of the subordination of all desires to the desire for the good either (1) *all* desires are free-floating with nothing but chance to bring them together with beliefs in particular combinations (why does my desire for ice cream become related to my belief that there is ice cream in my freezer in the next room and not to my belief that there is ice cream in every convenience store in Nebraska?), or (2) some more compelling super-desire (other than the desire for the good) must be offered and all desire must be seen as subordinated to this. My comments about free-floating desires here do not rest on the assumption that all desire is for the good, but on the assumption that – in order to cause behavior and, in turn, to explain behavior – all desires must be for an object whose value is commensurable with the values of the objects of all of our other desires. Commensurability will be further discussed in Chapter 4 (76) and Chapter 9 (185–6).

It's not that I can't *have* a free-floating desire. It is that if I do have this sort of unruly and raw free-floating desire for something – a milk shake for example – it is not clear how this desire will cause me to produce specific physical behaviors, if it is not integrated with my desire for the good. In order to explain any particular instance of milk shake-getting behavior, we need to explain many details. Why do I order the small and not the large? Why do I get it at the store near campus rather than walking to my car and driving to another store across town? Why do I buy it at 1 p.m. even though I have been craving it since 10 a.m.? None of these explanations will be available, unless they are obtained under the assumption that I have somehow managed to structure and appreciate my beliefs, urges, cravings, etc., in a way that has allowed me to substitute "eat a small, chocolate milk shake from Cleary's for a late lunch" for the substitution clause in "I desire to *do whatever is best for me in the given circumstances*."[9]

Egoism is the only way that beliefs can harness the motivational and – in turn, the physical – apparatus that must be invoked in order to perform a *particular*, *physical* action.[10] In the *Apology* (30c–e), Socrates recognizes that his success in getting the Athenians to do what is best for him (being allowed to remain in Athens and continue philosophizing), is dependent on his ability to make them understand that it is best *for them* in *their* current situation.[11]

## BAD AND GOOD, HARM AND BENEFIT

Now we are ready to address the second controversial assumption that we associated with egoism at the beginning of this chapter. Is Socrates justified in equating good with benefit and bad with harm? Can't we want, and (more importantly) can't we do something, that is both beneficial to ourselves and bad (where bad is understood as "morally corrupt")? Rather than assuming that Socrates ignored an obvious case, I will assume that

[9] As always, it is not essential that this be a legitimate substitution for the clause. It is not important that it be what *actually* is best for me, and so what I *actually* desire. It is possible that I have *mistaken* this for that action to which the original escape clause actually refers.

[10] See Berman 2003 for fuller arguments to the conclusion that this is the most plausible explanation for human behavior.

[11] Even in the Jewish Yom Kippur liturgy, each person's final appeal to God for being written in the book of life is made on the basis that it is best for *God* to do so (*Katveinu b'sefer hachayim l'maancha eloheem chayim*). When push comes to shove, we all assume that this is what really motivates anything that has beliefs and desires.

he intends to cover all cases that he deems theoretically possible. In saying that Socrates ignored such cases, we are assuming that he would agree that there are either things[12] or actions that are bad but do not promote self-harm. Socrates is not ignoring these cases; he is denying the possibility that there is something that is bad but not harmful. What else would Socrates need to believe in order to arrive at this conclusion? He would need to believe that *all there is* to good is benefit, and that *all there is* to bad is harm. He would have to believe that there is *no such thing as* "moral" good or bad *in addition to* harm and benefit. In other words, Socrates would have to reject the notion that there are either acts or things that are bad regardless of their consequences for the person who does or possesses them.[13]

So is Socrates some sort of a consequentialist? If he is, he is not one in the common sense of the term. On the one hand, he thinks that the consequences of an action are *constitutive* of that action and, so, make it good or bad. On the other hand, he does not embrace the thesis that is central to the most common consequentialist views: he does not think that the ends *justify* the means. The use of the word "justify" harbors the assumption that a "good enough" end can make it okay to utilize a rather nasty means. In other words, it implies that the means in question has some value or other attached to it even before it is used – that a "bad" means can produce a "good" end. But, according to Socrates, the means do not have a value that is independent of the fact that they produce either good or harm.[14] Means to the good are themselves good, means to the bad are themselves bad. A major focus of this book is Socrates' rejection of the assumption that means can be evaluated independently of the end they produce.[15] This rejection will be addressed in detail in most of the

[12] "Things" in this case can be actions as well as objects. Generally in metaphysics we interpret "thing" in this very broad sense. Furthermore, at *Gorgias* 467–8, Socrates makes it clear that objects and actions get the same treatment in his theory of desire.

[13] Alternatively, we could say that Socrates believes that moral good and bad are determined solely by the consequences of the action in question.

[14] Of course, despite the intuitive way that we understand this common locution (which we associate with consequentialism), what I say here about the means not being able to be "bad" and therefore not needing "justification" must be assented to by the pure consequentialist. Note Anscombe's (2002 [1958]: 536) observation that the consequentialist (*qua* consequentialist) cannot imagine "borderline" cases.

[15] This thesis would be held by the pure consequentialist as well. Thus a true consequentialist might find Socrates' system of values (good, bad and NGNB) useful. But Socrates' views differ from those of utilitarians: Mill seems to think that the principle of utility results in some sort of moral duty (1957 [1861, 1863]: chapter 3). Socrates does not believe in moral duty and finds his thesis that all desire is for happiness to flow from other sources. Further, Mill requires that, while maximizing happiness for the greatest number, we remain neutral concerning our own happiness (1957 [1861,

subsequent chapters, but it should be obvious that this is the case: as we have already seen that Socrates holds that the consequences of an action partly constitute its identity. In the meantime, we must understand that Socrates maintains that it is impossible to find a counterexample to his claim that bad actions harm and good actions benefit. The appearance that a bad thing can lead to benefit or a good thing to harm is merely that – an appearance. This is the result of the less-than-completely comprehensive perspective from which the person contemplating an action evaluates the consequences of that action.[16]

Socrates would maintain that every time we think we can benefit by harming someone else, we are wrong. Either the act is, in the long run, harmful to us as well, or it is not the case that the act is, in the long run, harmful to someone else. Because Socrates insists that we take the broadest possible perspective when calculating the harm and benefit that might result from the performance of a certain action, the question of whether an action or object is good or bad (that is, whether it is harmful or beneficial) is not easily answered. Thus, any question of whether Socrates' view is counterintuitive is also not easily answered. Indeed, I believe that the more we examine the long-range consequences of our actions, the more we find ourselves making determinations that are Socratic, and that defy our initial impulse to say that a certain object or action is obviously wrong, no matter what its consequences. Socrates' insistence, therefore, that no one can benefit from harming another, allows his theory to match our deep considerations about what is good and bad at least as well as they are matched by any other theory.

## NO ONE CAN BENEFIT BY HARMING ANOTHER

Isn't it somewhat platitudinous for Socrates to assert that no one can benefit from harming another? Aren't we simply being naïve if we accept that assertion? Let's look carefully at the textual evidence for this view, and at the sorts of philosophical arguments that the text invites us to offer in its favor. At *Apology* 25c–26c, Socrates defends himself against the charge that he has corrupted the youth of Athens as follows:

1863]: chapter 2) while Socrates thinks that worrying about our own happiness is the way to make sure that we are doing right by others. This points up two major sources of disagreement between Socrates' ethics and other consequentialist views: Socrates thinks there is never any conflict between those benefits that accrue to me and those that accrue to others. He also believes that it is impossible to desire something that is bad for oneself.

[16] How this actually works will be explained when we deal with *akrasia* in the next chapter (75–88) and with the Unity of Knowledge in Chapters 8 and 9.

SOC. Do not the bad do bad deeds to those who are always closest to them, whereas the good do some good?
MEL. Certainly.
SOC. Is there a person who wants to be harmed by those around him rather than to be benefited?
MEL. Of course not.
SOC. Are you so much wiser at your age than I am at mine, [so] that you know that bad people always do some bad deeds to those particularly close to them, while those who are good do good; but I have indeed become so ignorant that I do not know this: that if I make one of those around me miserable, I run the risk of receiving some harm from that person so that I do such bad purposefully, as you say? (25c8–e5)

We see in this passage that Socrates believes that when we harm someone, we cause her to degenerate into a worse person. The worse a person is, the more likely she is to harm those around her. If the perpetrator of the original harm is nearby, she is likely to receive reciprocal harm. Even if the perpetrator of the original harm is not in the immediate vicinity, by harming those around her, the one who has been harmed creates more bad people who are also likely to harm those with whom they interact. This also increases the likelihood that the perpetrator of the original harm will receive reciprocal harm.

This sentiment about what happens to those who are harmed is also expressed in *Republic* I:

SOC. Is it then the part of a just man to harm anyone at all?
POL. Of course [he said] it is necessary for him to harm those who are both bad and his enemies.
SOC. When horses are harmed do they become better or worse?
POL. Worse.
SOC. In respect to the excellence of dogs or of horses?
POL. In that of horses.
SOC. And do not also dogs who are harmed become worse with respect to the excellence of dogs and not with respect to the excellence of horses?
POL. Necessarily.
SOC. Must we not also speak this way concerning men, my friend? Being harmed they become worse as far as human excellence is concerned?
POL. Definitely.
SOC. And is not justice the virtue of a man?
POL. This must also be the case.
SOC. Then, necessarily my friend, men who are harmed become less just. (335b2–c7)

Perhaps common sense would suggest that we have stated this claim too boldly. It is not that we *cannot* benefit through harming another, it is that we are *unlikely* to benefit – and indeed far more likely to be harmed than to benefit – when we do so. This is the claim that seems best supported by the textual evidence cited above. If we maintain it in this weakened state, it still fully supports the claim that harming another person is risky and ill-advised.[17]

In a moment we will see that there is textual evidence to support the stronger claim. But let us focus on the weaker, more probabilistic one, for a moment. This claim is elaborated further in *Republic* 1. Socrates does not state it as a probability, either. At 347e, Glaucon makes the claim that the life of the just person is more profitable.[18] Then, at 351c–d, even Thrasymachus (although he claims just to be playing along), agrees that cities can only triumph over one another through wisdom, which is justice. Additionally, they agree that no person or group can accomplish any project that requires the cooperation of others, unless those others are treated well. Treating people badly results in factions, hatred, and internal conflict, and so any group in which injustice arises loses its power and its function.

If what Socrates says is plausible, then we should be able to sympathize with it by finding evidence that resonates with it in our contemporary world. We might better recognize evidence for the claim that one is unlikely to benefit from harming another if we break it down a little. The claim relies on three more basic suppositions. First, those who are harmed are made worse to the extent that they have been harmed. Second, a worse person is more likely to harm another person than a better person is. Third, it is impossible to escape the harm caused by the victim of one's harm. The first and third claims seem to be empirical. Either the world and people are such that these claims turn out to be true, or they are such that these claims turn out to be false. Given what we said earlier about how circumspect a Socratic would need to be in asserting that an action is harmful or beneficial, no empirical evidence that I can offer will escape controversy.

The job of defending this element of egoism will be easiest if Socrates can make a philosophical argument for the second underlying premise. Such an argument would have to be made on the basis of what Socrates thought it was to be a good person, and what that dictates about what

[17] Socrates' use of κινδυνεύσω (I will run the risk) at *Apology* 25e4 might provide evidence for this, although the word is most often used in predictions of what will actually happen.

[18] Here again "more profitable" is a translation of λυσιτελέστερον, which does not have a moral connotation.

it is to become a worse person. Once we have uncovered his views on the relationship between virtue and knowledge (in Part III), we will see that Socrates does have a philosophical argument in favor of the second premise available to him.[19] For now, however, let's focus on whether or not we can find some empirical confirmation for the first and third premises.

I have heard many people speak as if the first premise is false. Surprisingly, it is common for people to assume that a person who is harmed is made *better* to the extent that she is harmed! In the second half of the twentieth century in the United States, it was common for people who viewed themselves as liberals to assume that those who suffer injustice develop a deeper understanding and empathy toward others.[20] While this might be the effect of *educating* an oppressed group of people, there is strong evidence that, at least if no intervention occurs, harm has the opposite effect. That is, it has the effect of which Socrates speaks.[21]

When a child is taunted or bullied on the playground, we do not assume she will be more considerate in her treatment of others as a result. We worry that she will become more callous toward her peers, that she will try to empower herself by showing that she is better than they are, or that she will seek revenge. Adults who have suffered abuse as children are more likely to abuse others than are adults who have not. The histories of those who have committed the most heinous crimes are often rife with chilling stories of the physical and emotional harm that they suffered. Members of minority groups that have been institutionally and socially oppressed in the United States are not now considered better people because of this history. They are not assumed to be more empathetic and less likely to harm and abuse others than those who did not suffer this oppression. This is equally, if not more, true in countries like South Africa, Israel, Ireland, and others. It is generally recognized that when we harm and abuse others, we make them more dangerous people with whom to associate. As a consequence, our own quality of life is degraded by our inability to have social and economic dealings with our neighbors in security and confidence. Socrates has a ready explanation for this: oppression and repression deprive their victims of knowledge, and knowledge is necessary for understanding the connection between one's own well-being and that of others. Of course,

[19] It results from the identification of virtue and knowledge. To be made worse is to be made more ignorant (174).

[20] Claudia Card does a compelling job of dispelling this assumption (1996).

[21] Of course, to the extent that conditions of poverty or other hardships help people to understand what is truly a source for real happiness, they are to be deemed benefits and not harms.

people can be ignorant for other reasons. It is not a foregone conclusion that all people who harm others are bad because others have harmed them.

Let's see if we can justify the third supposition that we identified above. Socrates must be assuming that it is impossible to escape the harm that is caused by those one has harmed. Is this true? Even if by harming others we do make others worse and more likely to cause harm, can't we – ourselves – escape the harm they cause, allowing it to befall others instead of ourselves? Socrates lived in a "small world," one in which individuals were almost entirely dependent upon one another for their survival. Socrates' reluctance to choose exile over death because he is worried that he will fare even worse among strangers than he has among his fellow citizens is evidence for this.[22] Today, there is increasing evidence that our world is also too small and interconnected for anyone to escape the harm that is perpetrated by those who have been made worse by oppression and repression.

We must remember that Socrates is not necessarily claiming that it will be impossible to amass great wealth or great political powers through harming others. He is claiming that it is either very unlikely or impossible that a person will become happier this way than he would have been otherwise. Even before Iraq was invaded in 2003, Saddam Hussein – while he had amassed great wealth and power – had seemingly backed himself into a corner when it came to happiness:

> The tyrant must steal sleep. He must vary the locations and times. He never sleeps in his palaces. He moves from secret bed to secret bed. Sleep and a fixed routine are among the few luxuries denied him. It is too dangerous to be predictable, and whenever he shuts his eyes, the nation drifts. His iron grip slackens. Plots congeal in the shadows. For those hours he must trust someone, and nothing is more dangerous to the tyrant than trust.
>
> Saddam Hussein, the Anointed One, Glorious Leader, Direct Descendant of the Prophet, President of Iraq, Chairman of its Revolutionary Command Council, field marshal of its armies, doctor of its laws, and Great Uncle to all its peoples, rises at about three in the morning. He sleeps only four or five hours a night. When he rises, he swims. All his palaces and homes have pools. Water is a symbol of wealth and power in a desert country like Iraq, and Saddam splashes it everywhere – fountains and pools, indoor streams and waterfalls. It is a theme in all his buildings. His pools are tended scrupulously and tested hourly, more to keep the temperature and the chlorine and pH levels comfortable than to detect some poison that might attack him through his pores, eyes, mouth, nose, ears, penis, or anus – although that worry is always there too.

[22] *Apology* 37de.

He has a bad back, a slipped disk, and swimming helps. It also keeps him trim and fit. This satisfies his vanity, which is epic, but fitness is critical for other reasons. He is now sixty-five, an old man, but because his power is grounded in fear, not affection, he cannot be seen to age. The tyrant cannot afford to become stooped, frail, and gray. Weakness invites challenge, coup d'état. One can imagine Saddam urging himself through a fixed number of laps each morning, pushing to exceed the number he swam the previous year, as if time could be undone by effort and will. Death is an enemy he cannot defeat – only, perhaps, delay. So he works. He also dissembles. He dyes his gray hair black and avoids using his reading glasses in public. When he is to give a speech, his aides print it out in huge letters, just a few lines per page. Because his back problem forces him to walk with a slight limp, he avoids being seen or filmed walking more than a few steps.[23]

In order to protect his power, Saddam Hussein ordered the executions of at least two of his own sons-in-law and many other people to whom we must assume he at one time felt close. And this says nothing of what his life must have been like when he went into hiding after the invasion. Even if he had never been deposed, we are hard-pressed to think that he was happier than a more democratic or more benevolent leader might have been.

Living underground in an isolated or separated community (as organized criminals often do) can have temporary advantages. But problems arise when people choose to isolate themselves in order to "protect" what they have gained through cooperating with some and harming others:[24] they minimize their options for future action, and so must select from a very limited palette when it comes to choosing the action that is best for them in their present situation. Maximizing our own happiness depends on our ability to select from the largest possible palette when deliberating about what our next move should be. Those who must interact with only a small subset of people and institutions in order to escape harm from those who have been harmed by them, reduce the potential amount of happiness that they can achieve over the course of their lives. This is especially true if we recognize, as Socrates argues in the *Euthydemus* (see Chapter 6), that power and wealth are valuable only as a means to happiness. They are valuable only if they allow us to expand our options for what we can do to

[23] Mark Bowden, "Tales of the Tyrant," *Atlantic Monthly*, May 2003.

[24] Socrates describes "honor among thieves" in the same breath as he notes that only a just city will triumph (351d–e). He seems to think that, if they have accomplished *anything*, even thieves have treated *somebody* well. But, taking this to its logical conclusion, it will only work in the long run if the world is set up in such a way that one never has to cooperate with anyone who has been affected by the harm that was caused. This is unrealistic.

increase our happiness. If they are acquired at the price of closing ourselves off from most of the kinds of activities that are associated with pleasure and human happiness, then they are acquired to the detriment of the one who acquires them.

It seems Socrates was on the mark in thinking that our well-being and happiness do not only depend upon our own survival and lack of suffering, but they are equally wrapped up in the welfare of those we love and those with whom we interact. When we look more closely at Socrates' views on the relationship between desire, knowledge, and happiness (in later chapters), we will gain even more of an appreciation for the fact that, whenever our activities are limited by a need to avoid certain people, places, or topics of conversation, we compromise our ability to make ourselves happy. The narrower our palette, the more likely it is that the best action available to us in our current situation will be sub-par.

We have now examined support for the thesis that no one is *likely* to benefit by harming another – the probabilistic thesis. However, many would argue that Socrates supports the claim that no one can benefit by harming another as an *absolute* thesis. If this were the case, then its support would come from Socrates' understanding of what the soul is and how it can be harmed.

Socrates speaks a great deal about care for the soul, though it is unclear exactly how he identified the soul. It is fair to say that he identified it with either the self or the most important part of the self.[25] He thought that good souls are those that guide people to perform activities that make them do well and be happy (*Rep*. 353d–354a). He makes it clear that the soul does this scientifically, through the possession of knowledge.[26]

In the *Apology*, the *Crito* (48a–d), and the *Gorgias* (472c–481b), Socrates argues that harming others results in harm to the soul of the perpetrator. I am more circumspect in discussing this justification for Socrates' contention that harm to others cannot result in benefit to the self, because the available texts underdetermine the mechanism by which Socrates understood the act of harming another to harm the soul.[27] It is hard to find a mechanism other than the one that results in the sort of retributive harm to the self that we discussed in defense of the weaker and more probabilistic version of the thesis, above.

[25] See Gerson 1997: 7.

[26] *Laches* 180c, *Charmides* 153d–154e.

[27] This is a subject upon which many commentators in this area agree. See Taylor 1998: 61–2; Penner 1992b: 134–7 and 146; Vlastos 1991: 198; Brickhouse and Smith 1994: 121–3.

Socrates often speaks of the soul by analogy to the body. His talk of the body makes use of a medical model.[28] The soul being harmed is like the body being diseased; it makes the soul unable to fulfill its function. The function of the soul is to help guide our actions so that we become happy; and the soul does this through virtue, which is knowledge.[29] Socrates must think that harming another increases the ignorance of the *agent*. This greater ignorance is a harm to the soul of the agent because it makes the soul less able to bring about happiness. Thus, harming others leads directly to a decrease in happiness. But the indirect route described in defense of the probabilistic thesis (above) is not the only mechanism through which the soul is harmed by harming others. The medical model would also dictate that appropriate punishment is like appropriate medicine – the appropriate punishment repairs the soul's ignorance.[30] That is why the person who harms another is better off if he endures the consequences.

Why does harming others increase ignorance? Since Socrates has shown us that it is unrealistic to think that we will benefit by harming others, harming another in the belief that we will benefit by doing so predisposes us to have many ill-conceived notions about how the world works.[31] In caring for our souls – which is what Socrates calls seeking knowledge – we have worked hard to disabuse ourselves of all that we have incorrectly assumed ourselves to know. This sort of knowledge seeking is a difficult and life-long endeavor. When we harm others in the hope of self-benefit, we entertain false beliefs that set us back considerably in this endeavor.[32]

## CONCLUSION

Socrates' egoism allows him to propose a theory of desire that enables us to explain human behavior and hands us a theory for figuring out what it is best for an individual person to do at a particular time. Only a theory that cites personal happiness as the motivation for each action can provide a plausible explanation for human endeavors.

[28] I find Santas (1979: 292–4) very helpful here.

[29] It is widely agreed that Socrates identified virtue with knowledge, but I will rehearse some arguments for it in Chapter 4.

[30] And so would look much more like education than the sort of punishment described by Polus at *Gorgias* 473c. See Santas (1979) on this point as well.

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

[32] Here I have been influenced by Gerson (1997).

Any other sort of explanation will involve a free-floating desire that cannot be integrated with beliefs, and thus cannot guide human endeavors. While the resulting egoism is a descriptive, psychological theory, since it shows happiness to guide human endeavors, it can also help us determine how it is best for us to behave.

Pursuit of actual happiness will further the happiness of the individual and of those in her community because each individual's well-being is inextricably tied to the well-being of her community. Unfortunately, it is often the case that, when people pursue the good, they mistake something that is only apparently good for what is actually good. When they achieve what is only apparently good, they make matters worse for themselves and also for others. This can take the form of actual physical harm or of depriving themselves and others of the physical means for gaining happiness. More importantly, they can be harmed by being deprived of access to knowledge and, therefore, of the ability to discern between that which is actually good and that which is only apparently good. Contrary to the part of the popular picture that we labeled (B) at the beginning of Chapter 2, the problems in the world don't come from people focusing too much on their own self interest. Rather, these problems stem from the fact that people are ignorant about what is actually in their own self-interest and of how their benefit is connected to that of others.

CHAPTER 4

# *Socratic intellectualism*

We now understand that Socrates believes that all desire is for the good. This understanding has been facilitated by the hierarchy of desire that is described in the *Gorgias*. Using this framework, we assume that people always endeavor to reach the best end available in their current situation. Such endeavors lead to subordinated desires for that which is the best means to that best end. As a result, agents *always* do that which they *believe* is the best means to the best end in their current situation. This suggests that Socrates must believe that all desire is rational. Indeed, Socrates confirms that this is true in the *Protagoras*, where he argues that no one errs willingly in the pursuit of happiness.[1] Does Socrates really believe that everyone approaches every crossroad in their lives by weighing the various alternatives strictly in light of what they judge to be true about the world?

The notion that all desire is for the good and therefore all purposive behavior is rational has come to be called "Socratic intellectualism." The name alone is offensive to the view with which I opened Chapter 2. By saying that our desire for the good works in concert only with beliefs to control our behavior, Socrates seems to be discounting any possible role for desires that are base or irrational. He seems to be discounting emotion altogether, as if people operated from a purely scientific basis. Certainly this claim flies in the face of robust evidence. Can't we find cases where people's behavior is motivated by base urges and by emotional reactions that have not been intellectualized?

Even though they are closely related, let us deal with these two objections separately. First, let's see what Socrates said about apparent instances of what we today call "weakness of will," which the Greeks called *akrasia*, or *lack of self-control*. These are cases where it at least seems that an agent is doing an action that she believes is contrary to her best interests. Then, we'll

[1] *Protagoras* 355e–357e, 358c–360a, 360cd, 361ab.

look at what role Socrates sees for emotions or unintellectualized urges and drives in rational behavior.

## THE DENIAL OF *AKRASIA*[2]

It is clear that Socrates rejects the possibility of *akrasia* in the *Protagoras*.[3] However, it is less clear exactly how Socrates explains away apparent examples of *akrasia*. If Socrates is successful at explaining away the phenomenon of *akratic* behavior, then the plausibility of his view over others will be relatively assured. Those views that assert that *akrasia* is possible usually[4] do so either by dividing the soul into parts,[5] or by hypothesizing the existence of a "will."[6] Thus, those views that embrace the possibility of *akrasia* often do so by introducing multiple sources of motivation that compete with one another, and where one source wins over the others due to its *strength*.

Now, before any account can offer multiple, competing, sources of motivation, it will have to describe how any individual sources of motivation can operate effectively. That is, each individual strand will have to unify a motivational (desire) and a cognitive (belief) component in order for any particular strand to have an orientation. In other words, an account of a unified, singular, motivational strand is a prerequisite for a more complex account that makes use of more than one motivational source.

The Dominance theory of desire, which Penner has discerned in the Socratic dialogues, does a satisfactory job of presenting the unified account. It can explain how *any* specific desires and *any* specific beliefs are able to work in concert in order to produce behavior. This alone gives Socrates a leg up on his opponents.

It is not sufficient to explain behavior by positing that Sally's desire for fruit and Sally's belief that fruit is in the cupboard make it the case that Sally moves to the cupboard – as is commonly done. Those who think that Sally has desires like desires for fruit, will have to admit that Sally has (at least) thousands of these sorts of desires at any given moment; they will also have to admit that she has (at least) thousands of beliefs. Any theory that is truly explanatory will have to tell us how this particular desire and belief happened to find one another. Why did Sally's desire

[2] I follow Penner 1990, 1996, and 1997 throughout this section.
[3] It is also widely accepted that this rejection is implied at *Gorgias* 467–8 and in the *Meno*, *Lysis*, and *Euthydemus* as they also show our desires to be unalterably oriented toward our own happiness.
[4] Wiggins (1980 [1979]) is a notable exception.
[5] As we see Plato do in *Republic* IV; this is arguably Freud's method as well.
[6] Augustine uses the will for this purpose, as have many others since.

for fruit connect with her belief that there is fruit in the cupboard rather than her belief that there is fruit in every fruit stand on King's Highway? The Dominance theory gives this sort of explanation. The structure of desire in the individual starts her out with the general formula described in Chapter 2 (52). The substitution clause in the general desire is then particularized according to the individual's beliefs about what is best for her in her particular circumstances and how one obtains that best thing given what the world is like. In comparing Socrates' theory to others which offer a different account of the phenomenon of *akratic* behavior, we should have an appropriately high standard for whether or not those other theories can explain even a single motivational strand, let alone show how a number of these single strands compete with one another. It is unlikely that they will be able to meet this standard. But even if one of them does, if Socrates can produce a unified account that explains that same apparent phenomenon, there is every reason to expect that his account will be superior: it will possess equal explanatory power with less complexity.[7]

In our defense of Socratic egoism, we have already reviewed a strong argument for the plausibility of Socrates' unified account over any account which introduces a desire that competes with the desire for the good. This competing desire would have to be *thought independent* – the kind of raw, free-floating desire that we discussed when we argued against altruism in the last chapter (62). This desire would have to be independent of any consequences that it harbors for our overall good. Again, while we *can* have this sort of unruly and free-floating, (raw) desire, we can't explain how a desire that is independent of the kinds of beliefs and desires that allow us to form the executive desire causes us to produce specific physical behaviors. In order to explain any particular behavior, we will need to be able to explain all of its details. Why do we pick the particular bag of potato chips that we pick, at the store at which we pick it, at the moment at which we grab it? These sorts of things won't be explained until we assume that we have responded to a desire to do *whatever is best for us in our given circumstances*.[8]

Interpreters who recognize Socrates' rejection of *akrasia* typically take him to be dismissing the possibility that people actually experience the *feelings* of conflict and tension that have come to be associated with weakness of will. If this were true, then no one could blame them for thinking that Socrates (and anyone who tries to defend him) is, at worst, dishonest or,

[7] See Penner 1990, 2002a and my 1990 for a more thorough discussion of these comparative plausibilities.

[8] See Chapter 3, n. 8 for an examination of the assumptions that lie behind this statement.

at best, put together rather differently from the vast majority of regular folk. My interpretation of Socrates' explanation for the phenomenon that appears to The Many to involve being overcome by pleasure, allows him to acknowledge the existence of such things as drives, urges, and those feelings that accompany them. However, my interpretation maintains that none of these can *trump* our desire for the good by *competing* with it.[9] As I will explain, these longings, drives, and urges can influence our behavior only by being, somehow, represented in our beliefs concerning what is best for us (thereby affecting the way in which our executive desire is particularized). We need recourse to our desire for good in order to explain even apparently *akratic* actions. In this way, I will defend Socrates' denial of *akrasia* and his alternate explanation for the phenomenon, without challenging the existence of any of the phenomena that are generally taken as evidence for *akrasia*.

Socrates' explanation of what The Many call "being overcome by pleasure" is found at *Protagoras* 351b3–357e8. This passage appears to be about the strength of knowledge (352c4–7). Socrates identifies a *pathos* called "being overcome by pleasure" (352d7–e9, 352e6–353a2, 353c2, 354e6, 355a3–e3, 357c7–d1, 357e2) and asserts that knowledge is strong and cannot succumb to this pathos (357c2–4). Instead of hypothesizing multiple motivational sources, Socrates accounts for apparent *akrasia* by appealing to two conflicting judgments of what is best in the circumstances. One of these two conflicting judgments is more comprehensive and more accurate in the weight that it assigns to its various components, and so is superior to the other, which is a *less* comprehensive (or more *mistaken* or *distorted*) assessment of the situation. It is important for us to note in what sense these two judgments *compete* with one another. The superior and the inferior judgment are never entertained at the same time in Socrates' explanation for how one very specific kind of *akrasia* can occur. They are different and competing conclusions about what it is best for us to do in our current situation.

Socrates establishes that good is pleasure (351b3–352b9), and moves on to what he considers to be a more central part of the theory: that knowledge is strong and cannot be overcome by pleasure (352c2–7). Socrates next volunteers to examine and explain away the phenomenon which The Many (mistakenly) call "being overcome by pleasure." When Protagoras questions the value of worrying about the opinion of The Many, Socrates makes it

[9] This will distinguish me from Devereux (1995) and Brickhouse and Smith (2002), who also wish to challenge this standard interpretation; I will discuss our differences shortly.

clear that he is interested in it because it might aid the two of them in their larger investigation of virtue (353b1–3).[10]

Following a subsequent discussion in which Socrates shows the many to be committed to the absurd conclusion that when a man is overcome by pleasure he "does what he knows to be bad because he is overcome by the good" (355d1–3), Socrates goes on to analyze the phenomenon of being overcome by pleasure as a case where an agent chooses an amount of present pleasure which she does not realize is outweighed by the amount of pain that it stores up for the future or, conversely, chooses an amount of present pain which is not outweighed by future pleasure (356a5–357c3).

At 357c1–4, Socrates reminds Protagoras of their agreement that nothing is stronger than knowledge, and knowledge will always prevail. Socrates then, in the voice of The Many, summarizes what has been laid out: men err in their choice of pleasures and pains (i.e., good and bad) from deficit of knowledge in the measuring art (the art that would allow them to measure present and future amounts of pleasure and pain against each other without the error that results from perspective). People, then, are overcome by pleasure due to ignorance (357d9–e2).

However, at this point, things get a bit odd. The next time Socrates states what, we assume, used to be the "knowledge is strong" thesis, he states it very differently. At 358c6–d2, Socrates says, "No man voluntarily pursues bad *or that which he believes is bad*." He goes on to say that "it is not in human nature to pursue what one *believes is bad* rather than what is good."

This apparent variation on Socrates' original theme is surprising as it results in "no one errs willingly," which is a significantly stronger thesis than his original "knowledge is strong and erring is a form of weakness." It is a stronger thesis because, rather than asserting that no one acts contrary to what she *knows* is the best course of action, it states that a person will never even act contrary to what she *merely believes* is the best course of action. So, while Socrates began with the assertion that "knowledge is strong," it appears he is now claiming that "belief is strong."

It has been common for commentators from Aristotle to Vlastos to understand Socrates' insertion of statements about belief after the discussion of the measuring art to be something of an extension of his original comment that knowledge is strong.[11] As these commentators read the dialogue, Socrates was always talking about belief (he was always concerned with the simple "no one errs willingly"); the comments about knowledge

[10] This larger investigation proceeds for most of the dialogue: 319a–334c, 348b–351b, 358d–360e.
[11] For a thorough discussion of the interpretation which I here summarize see Penner 1997: 117–22.

are not an aberration because whatever one knows one also believes. So, not erring in what you know is an obvious implication of the fact that one cannot err in what she believes.

However, it is also acknowledged that this is an odd way for Socrates to proceed.[12] After all, at 353b1–3, as we noted above, Socrates conceded that the only reason to discuss being overcome by pleasure at all was its potential to enlighten concerning virtue. It is natural to assume that what lies behind the original claim that knowledge is strong is Socrates' singular notion that virtue is knowledge. However, the claim that belief is strong (which would now have to be the thrust of the passage) is inconsistent with his claim that virtue is knowledge. The claim that virtue is knowledge certainly assumes that knowledge is not reducible to belief (even true belief).[13]

The resolution of this difficulty requires distinguishing between the claims that Socrates makes before the discussion of the measuring art and those that he makes after. Clearly, only those who do not have knowledge fall prey to the games that perspective can play on them as they judge present quantities of pleasure and pain against future ones. Socrates' explanation of the phenomenon that The Many call being overcome by pleasure as caused by ignorance concerning the measuring art, indicates that he believes that those who know the measuring art *never even appear to be overcome by pleasure*. What might be called "knowledge-*akrasia*" never occurs, even on a phenomenal level. However, through analyzing the way that changes in perspective can affect our beliefs concerning present *versus* future pleasure and pain, Socrates comes to make a finer and more subtle point about what might be called "belief-*akrasia*." It is those who are operating on the basis of belief, and not knowledge, who *can* at times – maybe even frequently – *appear* to be overcome by pleasure. But this can happen only if we understand what manifests that appearance in a very particular way.

In his 1990, Penner makes sense of Socrates' denial of *akrasia* by understanding him to have distinguished two genera of *akrasia*, one of which has two species. The first genus is *belief-akrasia*. This is simply acting contrary to what you believe is the best option open to you, and is divisible into *synchronic* belief-*akrasia* and *diachronic* belief-*akrasia*. Synchronic belief-*akrasia* is when an agent acts contrary to what she believes is the best option open to her *at the moment when the action takes place*. Diachronic belief-*akrasia* finds an agent acting contrary to what she believes is the best option open to her, both *before* performing the action (during the period

[12] See Penner 1997: 121 n. 10 and Vlastos 1969: 72 n. 9.
[13] Socrates' other dialogue about virtue, the *Meno*, also testifies to this; see 97a–98b.

when she is assessing which option is best) and *after* performing it (when she is either regretting, or approving of, what she has done). The second genus is *knowledge-akrasia*; if it existed, it would be when an agent acts contrary to what he or she *knows* is the best option open to her.

Synchronic belief-*akrasia* is the kind that Plato tried to account for with his parts of the soul doctrine: this is *akrasia* as it is most commonly understood. Penner points out that when Socrates makes the claim that "no one errs willingly,"[14] he flatly denies the possibility of synchronic belief-*akrasia*. This is because synchronic belief-*akrasia* describes a situation in which someone acts contrary to what she believes to be best at the moment when she acts. However, Penner also thinks that Socrates' position in the *Protagoras* is subtler than the claim that "no one errs willingly." In the *Protagoras*, Socrates claims that knowledge is strong and erring is a form of weakness. If Socrates' claim were reducible to the claim that no one errs willingly, then he would be holding a claim that is stronger than the claim that *knowledge* is strong. He would be saying that something weaker than knowledge – namely belief – is strong. The claim "no one errs willingly" is tantamount to the claim "*belief* is strong," because to say that no one errs willingly is to say that no one acts contrary to what she *believes* is best for her.[15]

Thus, when Socrates speaks of knowledge as strong at the same time that he says that no one errs willingly, he is discounting the possibility of *knowledge-akrasia*, and of *synchronic belief-akrasia*, while leaving open the possibility of *diachronic belief-akrasia*. In fact, Socrates can explain all cases labeled "*akrasia*" as cases of *diachronic belief-akrasia*. Let's look at how those explanations work.

In diachronic belief-*akrasia*, an agent makes different assessments of what it is best to do in the situation at hand at each of three different (crucial) times. First, before acting, the agent calculates that it would be best *not* to do a particular action. Then, at the moment when the agent is actually engaging in the sub-optimal behavior, the agent experiences a temporary lapse in judgment: for a brief period of time, she sees the situation and the choice to be made from a different, inferior perspective. Once the action is performed, the agent returns to view the situation in the original, more perspicuous way and regrets having performed that action.

Let's look more closely at how this works. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates compares the judgments that we make about amounts of pleasure and pain to the judgments that we make about size. The same object will look

[14] 358b6–c1, c6–d4, 358e2–359a1, 360a4–6. [15] Penner 1990: 46.

larger when we are close to it and smaller when we are farther away. So, for example, we might misjudge someone's height, if we are far away from him. We might be especially poor at judging that a person in the distance is taller than a person who is near at hand. Socrates thinks that this same principle applies to measuring anticipated pleasures and pains. We might judge a pleasure that is near at hand to outweigh the pain that that source of pleasure lays up for the future – especially if it is for the distant future. Thus, the judgments that we make when we assess the value of performing a certain future action are often reconsidered when the future opportunity presents itself.

Now, recalling that there are three judgments made in diachronic belief-*akrasia* (before performing the action, at the moment when we perform it, and after it has been performed),[16] let us extract these from an actual situation: assume that I need to walk a long way to go to a meeting at the end of a very hot day. I know that along the way there is a store at which I can purchase a large, delicious milk shake.

(1) Before I begin my walk, I judge that even though I could buy a milk shake, I shouldn't, and therefore I won't. I believe that I should reduce the amount of fat in my diet: the milk shake is full of fat. It could easily contain as many as 800 calories, which is about half the number I should eat in a full day. So, I will likely gain weight if I drink it and I'm trying to cut back. Furthermore, this store has the audacity to charge $3.50 and I'm on a tight budget.

However, as I approach the store, I begin to think a little differently.[17]

(2) I judge that it is even hotter and sunnier than I thought it would be. So a milk shake would be very cool and refreshing right now. I will probably arrive at my meeting in better condition for working if I have had something to eat. Besides, it's only bad to have all that fat and all of those calories if you have them every day. I haven't had a milk shake in several weeks. Also, I probably won't have much time to eat supper tonight. Yes, $3.50 is a lot of money, but I've been doing well with my budget – better to allow myself this little splurge now, rather than a bigger one later.

This is my reasoning as I enter the store and buy the milk shake. Back on the street, I really enjoy it – it's cold and delicious. However, as I enter

[16] Of course this third judgment isn't necessary. We could die as a result of performing the less beneficial action or from some other cause before we get to this third phase – the action will still have been a case of diachronic belief-*akrasia*. The third phase is simply when we appreciate the case as an instance of this sort of *akrasia*.

[17] While it is possible for there to be some internal change in me that skews my perspective, no internal change is necessary – as will be discussed shortly.

the building where the meeting is, I glance at the remaining third of my milk shake and I begin to regret my action.

(3) I judge that I feel pretty full and my pants feel uncomfortably tight for sitting in a meeting. The milk shake doesn't taste quite as good now that it is a little warmer – it tastes kind of sticky and overly sweet. It makes me feel somewhat sleepy – what if I fall asleep in the meeting? Also, as I walk into the meeting, I see that there are some pretty good cookies. It will be boring to just sit there and not eat them. I no longer feel that this milk shake was worth the fat and calories. But I can't just throw it away – it cost me $3.50!

My distance from the possibility of having a milk shake changes my judgment of whether or not it is beneficial. Socrates seems to have been aware of the phenomenon that we all recognize each time we choose not to keep ice cream in our house, or to hide the cookies in the back of the cupboard. When short-term pleasures are at hand, we have a harder time comparing their immediate versus their long-term benefits. The short-term rewards of any action loom larger when they are near at hand, but when they are farther away, it is easier to see that they lose the battle against the long-term benefits that they exclude.

In diachronic belief-*akrasia*, a person still never acts contrary to what she believes to be best *at the moment when the action occurs*. This is because the action is always – however temporarily – *rationalized* at the moment when it is actually performed.[18] Socrates interprets all apparent cases of *akrasia* as cases of diachronic belief-*akrasia*. Thus, he manages to explain as many behaviors as do those who employ multiple, competing, sources of motivation, but he does so with a single, unified account.

Using diachronic belief-*akrasia*, Socrates theorized that mere belief can defeat itself – beliefs can shift, thereby distorting judgments. Our discussions of Socratic knowledge in later chapters will illustrate why Socrates thinks that knowledge is strong and immune to these shifts in judgment due to perspective. When one has knowledge, everything is accounted for and an accurate perspective is maintained throughout any action. Socrates likens possession of this knowledge to possession of the "measuring art" with respect to size. If I am able to measure and account for changes in perspective when I measure, then my distance from an object won't affect my assessment of its size.

[18] As Devereux points out, the word πάθημα, which Plato has Socrates use to describe the experience (357c1–d1) is evidence that he thought of it as a temporary and passing condition (1995: 391–2).

One might think that a view that embraces diachronic belief-*akrasia* can't be completely intellectualist, because intellectualism cannot account for the shift in perspective from an accurate judgment to an inferior one.[19] This objection may be understood in two ways: first, it could be an objection that the shift in perspective *must* be instigated by some unintellectualized urge or drive – it must be the fact that I have become further dehydrated, or have lower blood sugar, that allows me to start distorting my former beliefs about how a milk shake would fit into my life. Second, it could be an objection that this shift in perspective *can* be instigated by some unintellectualized urge or drive. While it might be the case that a shift in perspective could occur without the introduction of any new urge or drive, there are many times when a shift *does* occur due to the introduction of this sort of urge. For example, I refuse my host's first offer of orange juice because I hate the taste, I accept the second offer because I have become so thirsty that I decide that a little sip would be enjoyable, despite the taste.

Let me begin by arguing that this second understanding of the objection describes what is, in fact, true. New urges or drives can – *but don't have to* – be implicated in the shift from a more to a less accurate perspective. A shift in perspective can occur simply because the agent is physically (in space or in time) *closer* to or *farther* from an object or event than she was before. Being in a different space and time, the agent is having sense experience that differs from her earlier sense experience. Different sense experience can lead an agent to form different beliefs from the ones she had formed earlier. Some of these new beliefs might be inconsistent with those she held earlier, and so she might give up some of the earlier beliefs (at least temporarily) in favor of the new ones. Of course, a different set of beliefs can easily lead her to make different judgments in conclusion. Thus, shifts in perspective can cause shifts in judgment without the introduction of any additional urge or desire. These shifts happen for exactly the same reasons as changes in assessment of size.[20]

[19] I have heard many people voice this concern. Perhaps it is what Devereux has in mind on 1995: 395, n. 26 (which I quote in n. 20, below). In fact, in my 1990, I also assume that the shift in perspective has to be triggered by some sort of drive. I have since been persuaded that this is not the case.

[20] Devereux voices concern over how a purely intellectual error can get us to have a distorted conception of what is good (1995: 395, n. 26). He says,

> In the case of perceptual distortion, we can appeal to the fact that when an object is very near it takes up a large proportion of the visual field, and this can sometimes lead to an overestimation of its size. But there does not seem to be an analogous factor, separate from desire, that might account for us "overestimating" pleasures and pains that are near in time.
>
> Perhaps there is no one perceptual factor that would cause inaccuracy in our judgment in all cases, but it seems easy to come up with analogous perceptual factors: for any pleasure, its nearness will

Still, Socrates doesn't have to deny that shifts in perspective *can* occur due to new drives and urges. As I argued earlier (45), Socrates thinks that we read and interpret internal factors, and make judgments about those, in much the same way that we observe, interpret, and produce judgments about external factors that we appreciate through our senses. My newly acquired thirst *can* be something that I observe, represent to myself in my beliefs, and then take into account in my reasoning – thereby concluding with different judgments than I made earlier. My subsequent dehydration can make me dizzy and feeble-minded, so that my calculation of the number of calories in a milk shake is less accurate than it was earlier. Intellectualism need only claim that these non-intellectualized factors never cause behavior in an unmediated fashion: they cause it by affecting our beliefs. These changed beliefs influence our deliberations concerning which action is the best means to the best end available to us in our situation, so we come to different conclusions about which action is most beneficial.

We have now also begun to form the answer to the second general objection to Socratic intellectualism that we noted at the beginning of this section. We might think that Socrates is assuming that emotions, feelings, and physiological urges can't figure in our explanations of behavior.[21] It is true that Socrates does not think that emotions and base urges influence our behavior by *competing* with and *winning out over* our desire for the good. Still, he does not need to deny that we feel these urges in order to deny that they can be unmediated causes of our behavior.

Socratic intellectualism is the claim that emotions and base urges only influence behavior by influencing beliefs. We observe, represent, and take our emotions and base urges into account, in making decisions about what

cause us to reassess the ease with which it can be procured. This would instigate a recalculation of whatever pains originally appeared to be tied to its acquisition. Furthermore, our calculations of many pleasures seem to be related to our ability to perceive vividly their sources or causes. When I am closer to chocolate, I can smell it and see its consistency. The smell leads me to judgments about how it tastes. I might be a bad judge of how much pleasure chocolate provides in proportion to these sensory cues. I might then think that I had not properly appreciated the pleasure to be gained in my earlier calculation. Also, as I will discuss shortly, there is no reason to renounce the possibility that sensory stimulation gives rise to unintellectualized drives and urges that then come to play a role in our rational assessment of the good. However, I will argue that they do this in a way that is different from the way that Devereux assumes they must.

[21] Devereux provides textual evidence that Socrates indeed acknowledges the existence of such feelings, emotions, etc. He finds passages at *Laches* 191d6–e1, *Gorgias* 507b4–8 and *Protagoras* 352b3–c7 (1995: 388–9). Indeed, in the *Protagoras*, Socrates notes the particular experience that The Many have in mind (352e5–353a6). I think it unnecessary to emphasize this sort of evidence. It is not that I deny that Socrates acknowledges the existence of these emotions, it just seems absurd to assume that Socrates only needs the kind of defense that Devereux and I attempt to offer if he makes overt reference to these psychic phenomena. It is as if in the absence of overt evidence we would be justified in assuming – as the orthodox view does – that Socrates simply denied that people have feelings.

actions will make us happy. I take time away from writing my book in order to call home to see that my son has returned safely home from school. I believe that there is little chance that he has come to harm. Still, the reassurance that he is okay so enhances my peace of mind that it is worth the inconvenience of taking time to check on him. The rational response to my irrational worry is to call him.

Our emotions and base urges also influence the effectiveness of our reasoning. When I am panicked, I try to solve problems quickly, and so might not take the time to consider important information. When I am hungry or tired, I have trouble forming coherent thoughts, and am less likely to notice inconsistencies in my beliefs.[22]

Any emotion, urge, or desire other than the desire for the good will be subordinated to the desire for the good. While other drives and urges might exist, Socratic intellectualism dictates that they cannot trump or triumph over the desire for the good.

Devereux has also tried to challenge the orthodox[23] view that Socrates does not recognize drives, urges, and desires that are distinct from the desire for the good. In giving his own re-description of the explanation for apparent *akrasia* that Socrates provides in the *Protagoras*, Devereux gives an example that is indistinguishable from my own (1995: 393). Yet, Devereux's explanation of the mechanism whereby this takes place does not agree with mine:

> [W]hen we perceive something pleasant near at hand, our desire is aroused and begins to undermine our better judgment; desire only "gets in the way" by first getting us to judge that the immediate pleasure is what we ought to choose. The desire thus explains the fact that the pleasure appears greater than it is, and not the other way around. (1995: 395)

Thus, Devereux holds that irrational desires can interfere with beliefs more actively, and at a more basic level, than they can on the view I have presented. Devereux believes that my appetite for chocolate can actively work to distort my beliefs concerning a candy, *causing* me to *see the candy as a means to my happiness*. Thus, Devereux suggests that, at times, irrational appetites are instrumentally equal to the desire for the good, in the production

[22] Notice that in this case it is very important for us to talk about belief. As we will see later, Socrates seems to think that a person who has knowledge will not produce poor reasoning due to emotional factors. Still, a person who has knowledge will certainly *have* emotions and base urges and will be very effective in considering these factors while pursuing her happiness.

[23] This is Devereux's term (1995: 385). For examples of the more standard view see Walsh 1963: 8 and 30; Irwin 1977: 78, 1995: 83–4; and especially Vlastos 1971a: 15–16, where he says that, according to Socrates, Aunt Rosie can't both have a fear of mice and realize that a mouse can do her no harm.

of a behavior. Here the irrational appetite must be cited as providing a motivational force that is other than the desire for the good.

This is not how I have presented the role of unintellectualized drives and urges. In my view, an appetite never plays a role that is more instrumental than any other piece of information that the intellect has used in order to determine what it is best to do as motivated by the desire for the good. I hold that appetites are like sense impressions: they are phenomena that help us form our judgments, but they do not interact with judgments that have already been formed. Our desire for the good registers our appetites in forming judgments and beliefs. The fact that I now crave chocolate will be taken into account as I judge what is best for me in the circumstances. This current and intense craving might then be cited as a factor in my judging that a nearby candy is a means to what is best for me, whereas I did not earlier judge that same candy to be so. I can also be caught in a "struggle." I can *feel* my desire for the good propel me repeatedly toward alternate actions as I go back and forth in calculating the net good that will result from satisfying my craving, as compared to the good that I suspect would be the result of not indulging. I can bounce back and forth between my superior and inferior[24] judgments. All that is required is that, at the moment when I act, I am entertaining only one of them – I act on only one assessment of what is best for me in my present circumstances.

Devereux appears to be addressing just the sort of view that I present when he says:

> But how, we may wonder, does the proximity of pleasure or pain bring about the temporary displacement of correct belief? One possibility is that the erroneous judgment should be explained as a purely intellectual error. Just as the nearness or distance of an object of visual perception may make it appear larger or smaller than it really is, so the proximity or remoteness in time can bring about similar distortions in the "appearance" of pleasures and pains. According to this view, our desires do not influence our judgments; rather they follow upon and reflect our judgment of the relative amounts or values of different pleasures and pains. A change in the appearance of pleasure or pain causes a change in the agent's judgment, and this in turn causes a change in his or her desires. (1995: 394)

But Devereux then concludes with the following criticism:

> This account of how erroneous judgment occurs goes hand in hand with the view that Socrates rejects non-rational or good-independent desires: our desires do not influence, but rather reflect, our rational assessment of the relative value of different courses of action.

[24] "Inferior" and "superior" are to be taken objectively here. The one that I choose will have to have appeared superior to me.

This statement makes me think that Devereux either has not referred to the sort of view that I endorse, or has misinterpreted it. I hold that urges and drives *do influence* our rational assessment of different courses of action. It is our *desire for the good* that *reflects* that influence, by being actualized in the form of one particular executive desire as opposed to another. My craving for chocolate makes my calculation of the good, and my consequent actions based on my desire for the good, come out differently than they would, had I not been craving chocolate. For now that I have the craving, the satisfaction of it is a potential source of pleasure that must be factored into my appreciation of the net pleasure afforded to me by each of my present opportunities, when I go to decide among them. I might, after at one time judging that I should not eat chocolate, go on to misjudge the good to be gained by eating it. I might do this because my craving is strong. It might influence my judgment of the pleasure to be gained from eating the chocolate. My momentary craving could influence me to misjudge the pleasure that I will receive from eating it. If this is the case, my craving can be cited as something that led to the shift in judgment and the formation of a particular executive desire. Thus, it will also have led to my submission to diachronic belief-*akrasia*.

There is a similarity between Devereux's views and mine: while others have held that Socrates' denial of *akrasia* means that he denied that we experience non-rational urges and drives, Devereux and I find that Socrates acknowledges that there are such urges and drives and that these are taken into account – though sometimes mistakenly – in our assessment of what is best for us when we act. However, Devereux's explanation for how these are taken into account is different from mine.[25]

Presumably, Devereux would argue that his view is more plausible than mine because it accounts for the fact that we experience the phenomenon of an inner conflict or struggle when we engage in apparently *akratic* behavior (1995: 395–6). However, as I have indicated above, I believe that my account does provide for the feeling of engaging in inner struggle. We feel the desire for the good careen back and forth between the two courses of action because we find it hard to maintain a stable belief concerning how short-term and long-term goods measure up to one another. I would argue that the way the struggle *feels* is not the factor that decides whether it is a motivational or an intellectual struggle. There is no reason to assume that we are well tutored in diagnosing the difference between intellectual

[25] The same can be said about the relationship between my view and that of Brickhouse and Smith (2002), who follow Devereux on this issue.

and motivational conflict within ourselves. It is also reasonable to assume that our observations are – from the outset – infected by the explanatory theory that we hold.[26] As Socrates indicates, The Many seem to hold the motivational conflict theory. Devereux is concerned with vindicating the phenomenon *as a motivational struggle*, rather than finding an alternative theory that explains the same phenomenon.[27]

As a theory that must fit into an overall explanation of human motivation, I believe that the view that I present is the more plausible one.[28] Recall that in defense of Socratic egoism, we noted that any desire that competes with the desire for the good will have to be *thought independent*. That is, it will have to be desired independent of any consequences that its fulfillment harbors for our overall good. We also noted that it is unclear how any particular desires and beliefs could come together in a non-random way in order to produce behavior if there is not some mechanism, like the general formula given by the hierarchical structure of our desire for the good, that integrates them. Devereux cites a desire that is not integrated into our desire for the good as instrumental to the production of physical behavior. But it is not clear how he thinks this can happen. The sort of irrational desire that he cites cannot replace the substitution clause in "I desire to do *whatever is best for me in the given circumstances*."[29]

[26] Thus, those who make this claim with respect to plausibility must embrace the observational/theoretical distinction. For a discussion of the history of this distinction and its problems, see Hempel 1950.

[27] The actual wording that Socrates uses is that we "shift back and forth regarding the same things" (this is Devereux's translation of μεταλαμβάνειν ταὐτα at 356d6 [1995: 392]). I would argue that this fits better with an intellectual struggle than with a motivational one. It indicates that we careen back and forth between two judgments, which we entertain one after another and which don't come into direct conflict. I imagine that the motivational struggle would feel more like being pulled in two directions at the same time – like an internal tug-of-war.

[28] Devereux in essence concedes (1995: 393 n. 24) a further point of plausibility for my interpretation over his own. He acknowledges that the orthodox view can explain why Socrates believes those who have knowledge as opposed to belief cannot succumb to even diachronic belief-*akrasia* while his does not. While conceding this, he offers that it is more important to be able to admit the phenomenon of non-rational desires (which he can do and the orthodox interpretation can't) than to accommodate this distinction on Socrates' part (which the orthodox interpretation can do and he can't), so his package is the superior one. The interpretation which I have advanced herein accommodates both of these theses.

[29] Note that, granting Devereux his explanation, we can point up the following (familiar) difficulty: Imagine that Sally is trying to do what is best for her but she has a very strong desire for chocolate (and we will stipulate that chocolate is detrimental to her). Her desire is so strong that it "makes her judge that chocolate is good for her" (this is Devereux's way of putting it). This all takes place while Sally is at a banquet where she has a choice between chocolate mousse and chocolate cake for dessert. Sally chooses the chocolate cake. How is Devereux going to explain this? Her desire for chocolate cannot explain her choice between the two as both are consistent with it. The solution would be to connect her selection to her desire for the good. This would have to result in a picture in which her

## SUMMARY

The theory of desire that we have attributed to the Socrates of the early dialogues shows knowledge to be the most important factor in the attainment of happiness. Lack of knowledge is what stands in the way of our discerning what is actually good. Knowledge not only allows us to identify the actual good, it also guarantees that once it is properly identified, our perspective will not distort our appreciation for what is actually good. As we will see, this is why Socrates identified knowledge with virtue. Contrary to what we placed in group (c) in our original picture of good and bad, at the beginning of Chapter 2, we now must reject the notion that there are bad, but knowledgeable, people. The understanding of knowledge and bad afforded by Socrates shows us that those who act badly (those who harm themselves) can't have possessed the sort of stable, intellectual take on the world that deserves to be called knowledge.

A virtuous person is a good person. Human good is happiness. Knowledge is what makes people happy. Once we appreciate the fact that knowledge is virtue and is the thing that allows us to make ourselves happy, we will be able to understand how virtue (knowledge) operates in the production of happiness. Knowledge is what enables virtuous people to take that which is neither-good-nor-bad and make it good.

## AN ANTICIPATORY DIAGNOSTIC INTERLUDE

Having set out an entire theory of Socratic desire, upon which the rest of what I say will be founded, I now pause to anticipate what about it will distress its audience, and to say what I can to analyze – and maybe even ameliorate – that discomfort. There are two major aspects of my understanding of Socrates that are often found objectionable:

First, Socrates, while recognizing how things seem to The Many, seldom saves the phenomenon. It *seems* to us that we want things that he says only seem best to us, but aren't desired. It *seems* to us that we don't always act with our own best interests in mind. It *seems* to us that we engage in a motivational, internal struggle that results in at least synchronic belief-*akrasia*, if not knowledge-*akrasia*. Doesn't the way things seem to us count for anything?

desire for chocolate cake was – in the end – subordinated to her desire for the good. But, this runs counter to Devereux's strategy for explaining *akratic* behavior. I thank Jim Butler for this suggestion.

Socrates develops his theory by looking at what *has* to be the case, if we are going to be able to give a coherent explanation of human behavior. His priority is to eliminate that which is mystical, unfathomable, and immune from rational comprehension, from his analyses of purposive behavior. If this cannot be done, then he at least removes those elements to the most remote level of his descriptions.

Socrates understood that our internal introspection is not immune from theoretical constructions. The way things seem to us is not, somehow, pure and pre-theoretical: it is easily the result of thinking that has been put together uncritically and – equally uncritically – adopted by The Many. If we are to get anywhere, we must be prepared to give up even those things that we thought would be our toe-hold. We must embrace *aporia*. Our realization that we know nothing is the first step to moving in a positive direction.

This is clear from Socrates' equation of virtue with knowledge, coupled with his embrace of virtue as something of supreme value. It should not surprise us that Socrates leaves virtuous – that is, knowledgeable – people with a better understanding of what they want, more able to make themselves happy, and less prone to *akrasia*, than those who aren't virtuous. If we could just go with how things seem to us, then everyone would be equally endowed with respect to these things, and self-knowledge, happiness, and self-control would be democratically distributed. It seemed to Socrates that that is not the case, and he thought it reasonable to give that intuition a place of importance, where it is favored over those earlier mentioned, less self-reflective, seemings with which it conflicts.

It is interesting to me that so many of the same people who reject these Socratic ideas on the basis of a perception that they are too much at odds with introspected psychological phenomena, do not, when approaching Plato's theory of Forms, simply reject it saying, "but that is not how things seem to me." Yes, they might ultimately reject the Forms, but they do so on the basis of judgments concerning internal consistency, explanatory power, capacity for resolving stubborn difficulties, and a myriad of other theoretical considerations.

This underlines a notable feature of Socratic thought. Socrates treated the internal, psychological world and the external, physical and metaphysical worlds with an equal amount of respect concerning their limited accessibility to human comprehension. Socrates – a very modest person when it comes to claims concerning knowledge – was equally reserved in his confidence concerning our ability to know either one.

And this is the second thing that people don't like about Socrates' theory of motivation: most of us end up knowing very little, if anything. We are not likely to know what action we are performing at the moment when we perform it. We are not likely to know whether we are doing what we want to do, or doing what only seems best to us, either when we act or later, when we reflect back upon our action. As I show in subsequent chapters, we spend our whole lives pursuing happiness, while having little idea of what that is. Even those of us who take the time to look carefully at these Socratic texts will find that Socrates provides us with little information concerning the nature of happiness. Socrates doesn't give us clues or shortcuts; any incremental progress we make is going to have to be the result of a lot of difficult, investigative work. Still, I am inclined to agree with Socrates that this seems to accurately reflect our capacities as human beings for understanding ourselves, others, and the larger environment in which we make, and live out the consequences of, our decisions.

PART II

# *Socratic value*

CHAPTER 5

# *The good, the bad, and the neither-good-nor-bad*

While we need to understand Socrates' theory of desire in order to comprehend the view put forth in the Socratic dialogues, this is not sufficient in order to understand Socrates' claims concerning happiness, virtue, and knowledge. We also need to understand Socrates' theory of the good, the bad, and the neither-good-nor-bad. To put it simply, Socrates believed that the only good thing was happiness, the only bad thing was misery, and everything else was neither-good-nor-bad (NGNB). While this threefold classification falls out of the text in a relatively straightforward manner, it is difficult to figure out how virtue fits into it – nor is it immediately obvious how vice should be classified. We will take a careful look at how these elements fit into his schema in the next chapter.

In this chapter, through an analysis of what Socrates says about the good, the bad, and the NGNB, we will see that he provides no metric for evaluating any action or object other than its *actual* capacity to render its possessor either more or less happy. There is no principle, no "moral" notion of good, to which we must look, in order to decide what is the best action for us to perform in our current situation.

It is widely agreed that Socrates holds virtue to be identical to knowledge.[1] Ferejohn (1984: 107) summarizes the textual support for this as follows:

1 The only thing which always benefits us is wisdom, *Euthydemus* 281e2–5, *Meno* 87d4–8, 88c6–d1.
2 Virtue always benefits us, *Meno* 87e3.
3 Therefore virtue is wisdom, *Meno* 88c4–d3.

As I mentioned above, virtue appears to fall outside of the threefold classification of good, bad, and NGNB. Virtue is not NGNB; it is good. However,

[1] Although not all treat it as a strict identity (some think there are some parts of virtue that are not knowledge, others that there are some kinds of knowledge that are not virtue). Still, it is not uncommon to treat them as strictly identical. See Annas 1999: 68; Irwin 1995: 45; Santas 1979: 125; Brickhouse and Smith 1994: 70; Reeve 1998: 141; Rudebusch 1999: 91; Kahn 1996: 73, 225–6; Benson 2000: 22, n. 20 and Vlastos 1991: 231 for the full spectrum of variations on the claim that virtue is knowledge.

in Chapter 6, I will argue that it is not the same kind of good as happiness. Virtue is *unconditionally good* because it always furthers happiness. But virtue is not a *self-generated good*, as happiness is. A *self-generated good* derives its value strictly from its inherent properties, rather than from its relationship to something else. I will argue that while virtue is always good (and is, therefore, *unconditionally good*), it still derives its value from happiness. Socrates' discussion of vice (ignorance) is indirect. I will argue that it makes sense to think that ignorance and misery have a parallel relationship to virtue (knowledge) and happiness. Ignorance is unconditionally bad because it always furthers misery, but it is not a *self-generated bad* as misery is. Thus, for our present purposes, we need only remember that, when Socrates speaks of the NGNB, he speaks of everything other than ignorance, virtue, misery, and happiness. This theory of valuation is strikingly unusual to us today, and may have been thought unusual in Socrates' time, as well.[2]

Socrates divides those things desired by humans into the good, the bad, and the neither-good-nor-bad at least three separate times in the Group 1 dialogues (see 11). At other times he says things that support this same theory without making reference to the NGNB. Let us look at the three texts that mention the NGNB, the *Gorgias*, the *Euthydemus*, and the *Lysis*, in order to uncover this radical view concerning valuation. We will also take a brief look at part of the *Meno*, in order to see our theses concerning this view of evaluation confirmed. For at *Meno* 87e–88a, Socrates assumes precisely the theory of the NGNB that we will uncover in the other three dialogues.

### GORGIAS

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates makes this tripartite division in order to elucidate a hierarchy among objects of desire. At *Gorgias* 467e–468d, the division and hierarchy are elucidated clearly. Socrates must proceed carefully: he has already baffled Polus with his distinction between doing what one wishes and what seems best (which we have discussed at length at 30–7) and has elicited Polus' assessment that his proposal is "shocking and fantastic." Thus, he now brings Polus along slowly, using concrete examples with which he believes Polus will agree. He begins by

[2] Certainly Socrates seems very concerned to persuade his audience that they can avoid much misery by being careful not to mistake NGNB things for good things. This seems to include the tacit accusation that many people have made such a mistake. It is evident that it was as true in his time, as it is in ours, that people pursue such things as money and power as if they were goods in their own right.

observing that when people do something, they don't want their present action, but the thing for the sake of which they act. He gives the example of the sick person who takes medicine. Polus agrees that the sick person does not take medicine because he wants the act of taking the medicine, but because he wants to be healthy – the thing for the sake of which he takes the medicine (467c). Likewise, he agrees that a person will go on a voyage not because he wants the dangers and troubles that it necessitates, but because he wants wealth. Socrates then summarizes his thought:

> Isn't it this way in all cases: if a person does something for the sake of another thing, he does not wish the thing he does, but that other thing for the sake of which he does it? (467d6–e1)

We will soon see that this is an intermediate step toward understanding the value of NGNB things. Socrates amends this step at 468c2, after which he proceeds to bring up the notion of the NGNB. In keeping with the examples that he has already set before Polus, Socrates gets him to admit that he would say that "wisdom, health, and wealth and the like" (467e4–5) are good, and their opposites are bad. It is important to note that, in characterizing wisdom, health, and wealth as good, Socrates need not be stating his own opinion. Health and wealth are on the list because Polus has consented to the two examples that Socrates used to illustrate his point (about the reason one takes medicine [467c] or goes on a sea voyage [467d]). Socrates designed his list in order to gain a point of access to Polus' opinions, by tailoring that list to the specific examples that conform to Polus' outlook. He hopes to draw out from Polus (who has shown resistance to Socrates' earlier distinctions [467a8–b10]) the acknowledgment that – even according to Polus – there *are* things that are NGNB. As I will show later, it makes sense to think that Socrates himself would characterize only wisdom as good, not health or wealth.[3] In Chapter 6, I will argue that Socrates would say that not even wisdom is good *without qualification*, since the goodness of wisdom derives from happiness.

Socrates gets Polus to admit that by the NGNB he (Polus) means:

> [T]hings which sometimes partake of what's good, sometimes of what's bad, and sometimes of neither, such as sitting or walking, running or making sea voyages, or stones or sticks and the like (καὶ τἆλλα τὰ τοιαῦτα). (467e6–468a4)

[3] Socrates removes health and wealth from the list of absolute goods at *Euthydemus* 281a–b and *Meno* 87e5–88a5. We will return to discuss these two pieces of text in more detail.

As I said above (31), the fact that Socrates here puts together a relatively random list of actions and objects would seem to indicate that his "and the like" implies all actions and objects.[4]

So far, we have been able to understand the distinction as described in the *Gorgias* in the following way: bad things are desirable neither in themselves nor as a means for obtaining something beyond them. NGNB things can go either way – they are good if used as a means for obtaining the good, bad if used as a means for obtaining the bad. Only good things are good by nature; only they can be desired for themselves as an end, rather than as a means.

The textual evidence is clear on an important point that bears emphasis: NGNB things are not *terminally* NGNB; they are only NGNB when considered independently of a particular context in which they are to be used. As the text quoted above specifies, when used for benefit, NGNB things *partake* (μετεχεί) of the good. When used for detriment, they *partake* of the bad. Socrates reiterates this point when he discusses the theory of desire that is underwritten by this tripartite distinction. At 468c2–5 he says:

> We do not wish to [do these NGNB actions like] kill, banish from the city, or confiscate property *as such*; but *if they are beneficial* we wish to do them, *if harmful*, we do not [wish to do them]. (My emphasis[5])

Just as they partake of the good if they lead to happiness, and of the bad if to unhappiness, NGNBs are also – themselves – *desired* or *not desired*, respectively, in these cases. Thus, particular NGNBs that promote happiness in their specific context are *actually* good and are *actually* desired, while particular NGNBs that promote misery in their specific context are *actually* bad and are not desired.

### *EUTHYDEMUS*

At *Euthydemus* 281d–e, Socrates expressed much the same view of the good, the bad, and the NGNB that we have seen in the *Gorgias*. The *Euthydemus* reads as an argument to the conclusion that happiness is achieved through knowledge, and that is why we should pursue virtue. Socrates was asked to explain why the young man Cleinias should endeavor to become knowledgeable (275a). In making his reply, Socrates began by securing Cleinias' agreement that all human beings wish to do well, and that we do well by

[4] If he meant to indicate that only some actions and objects were NGNB, he would have provided a list of things that more obviously had a specific commonality so that we would see what principle distinguishes the NGNB.

[5] Following Penner 1991: 178.

having good things. Socrates then prompted Cleinias to compile a list of good things. The list included wealth, health, beauty, good birth, talents, and wisdom.[6]

Socrates next casts a critical eye on this list by pointing out that these things, which people tend to believe will make them happy, do nothing to promote happiness unless they are used correctly – virtuously (with knowledge). At 280b, Socrates notes that our possessions would not make us happy if they gave us no benefit. For example, they would not benefit us if we merely had them but did not use them (280b–d). On this basis, Socrates and Cleinias agree that benefit does not come from possession of those things earlier mentioned, but from having them *and using them*.

Next, however, Socrates points out that just using these supposed goods wouldn't be enough to secure benefit from them, either. Cleinias agrees with Socrates that these goods are far more likely to benefit their possessor when used correctly than when used incorrectly:

> For I think it is more harmful if someone uses something incorrectly than if he leaves it alone; in the first case it is bad, in the second case it is neither good nor bad. (280e5–6)

In essence, Socrates is making the argument that the material objects and actions that people generally take to be good are actually NGNB. In fact, when these supposed goods are used incorrectly, they are likely to do more harm than their so-called opposites – even though it is those supposed opposites that are conventionally assumed to be bad and deleterious to happiness. Yet, when used correctly (with knowledge), these actions and objects *really do* promote happiness – they are not irrelevant to it.

> In summary then Cleinias, I said, it is likely that with respect to all of those things which we at first said were good, the discussion must not concern whether they are good in themselves, i.e., are good by nature, but rather, I think it stands as follows: if ignorance guides them they *are greater evils* (μείζω κακὰ εἶναι) than their opposites[7] . . . Whereas, if guided by wisdom and understanding they *are greater goods* (μείζω ἀγαθά).[8] But, taken by themselves, neither sort is of any worth. (281d2–e1)

[6] Also good luck, which Socrates – very strangely – equates with wisdom. I will deal with this in detail in Chapter 7.

[7] Annas (2002) finds Socrates' willingness to refer to some of the so-called goods as the "opposites" of the so-called bads problematic. If they are opposites then they must have some absolute (opposing) values. I would counter that, while Socrates is choosing logical opposites, he is not committed to them having opposing values. With respect to valuation it makes sense to think that Socrates is speaking in the vernacular here – that he is speaking of *so-called opposites*.

[8] There is no εἶναι in the text here, but it makes sense to read it in parallel with the phrasing concerning "greater bads" above.

It is important to read Socrates' conclusion about the worth of conventional goods carefully. He is making the same point that I emphasized at the end of our discussion of the *Gorgias*, above. He says that when conventional goods are "taken by themselves" (αὐτά δὲ καθ' αὐτά), they have no worth. This is a way of reflecting back on whether or not they are good "in themselves" (ὅπως αὐτά) – "by nature." When we try to figure out what their worth is when they are "by themselves," or what their "natural" worth is, we find that they have none – their goodness is not *self-generated*.[9] When considered apart from how they are to be used, these so-called goods are NGNB.

Socrates is telling us that no conventional good is good by nature or by itself; all of these resources are NGNB. The upshot of this statement is twofold, because Socrates is telling us that the value of an NGNB object or action is to be determined in two ways. First, the value of a thing comes from its being used correctly, and second, it is used correctly only if it is used under appropriate conditions. When we think about any object or skill in the abstract, we notice that it is equally capable of yielding good or bad. What it yields depends partly upon the conditions under which it is used. Also, even if used under appropriate conditions, the action or object must be used skillfully, with knowledge, in order to yield a good result.

This is a bold thesis, but it is both textually justifiable and plausible. Let's look at the two implications above separately. First, a thing is beneficial only if used under appropriate conditions. None of the things under consideration has any value when separated from the conditions of its use. This is implied by the text when Socrates begins the discussion of the value of conventional goods by making it clear that, whatever value they have, they do not have it by nature. In fact, just a few lines later, Socrates comes to the further conclusion that, even though he joined Cleinias in listing many things as goods near the beginning of the dialogue (279a), the intervening discussion has shown that only one of those things is actually good, and that is wisdom.[10] If Socrates is willing to say that none of these things is good by nature, and that, in fact, none of them – other than wisdom – is

[9] The term "self-generated" is partly chosen for its fit with Socrates' test concerning whether or not goods are good αὐτὰ δὲ καθ' αὐτά and πέφυκεν.

[10] Thus, he contradicts the list that he puts into Polus' mouth at *Gorgias* 467e by removing health and wealth. The removal of wealth is also very clear at *Euthydemus* 281c. As I said (97), this gives us the distinct impression that when Socrates produces the list of "goods" in the *Gorgias*, he is coming up with a list designed to obtain Polus' agreement to the fact that there *are* NGNB things. This list of good things is not one that Socrates takes seriously.

good,[11] then he is assuming that no action or object can be called "good" unambiguously. Nor can these so-called goods be ranked according to their value.

This seems terribly wrong on the face of it. Can it really be that health and a paper clip are equally NGNB? If we take Socrates' view seriously, this claim is defensible. If my current situation demands that I must defuse a hand grenade in order maintain and further my own happiness, my good health (apart from my being neither in a coma nor completely paralyzed), hardly seems relevant to my ability to master my circumstances. By contrast, the fact that I happen to have a paper clip in my pocket might turn out to be the key ingredient in my mastery of those same circumstances. It generally *seems* to us that health is inherently more valuable than a paper clip, but that is because we are more often *in circumstances in which* health is more beneficial than a paper clip.[12]

Under specific (albeit unusual) circumstances, a person might actually be able to *increase* her well-being more successfully when she is diseased than when healthy. A friend of mine was not drafted into the Vietnam War because he had lost the index finger of his right hand (his "trigger finger") in a farming accident. A close relative met his future wife – an army librarian – while hospitalized for shrapnel wounds he received while on military duty. Furthermore, an ignorant person in good health can disrupt her life and harm herself in ways that would have been prevented had she been less able-bodied.

Circumstances can be specified for any two items that show them to play equally profound roles in bringing about good or bad consequences. No conventional good will always turn out to be good – or bad. No object or action[13] will always turn out better than any other object or action. All actions and objects are equally NGNB.

The reason that it seems to us that not all NGNB objects are equally capable of yielding bad and good is because NGNB objects *do* have distinct and unique determinate features and characteristics. Given the general geographical and modal parameters in which we live our everyday lives,

[11] As will be discussed in Chapter 6; at 281e3, he says, "of all of the other things not one is either good or bad."

[12] Health is the state in which our bodies are best able to exercise their particular and distinctive capacities. Yet the body is itself NGNB (*Lysis* 217a–b), so neither it nor its state of health are unconditionally beneficial to us. I will discuss this further below (109–14).

[13] I am referring to objects and actions as they would be described generally outside of a context. "Murder" is what we call an action that we have already judged within a context (we have, for example, chosen to call it "murder" rather than "mercy killing"). Outside of a context, we would refer to it more generically as "killing." Socrates is committed to saying that killing is NGNB.

we find ourselves in circumstances that allow us to exploit only certain subgroups of these characteristics a large percentage of the time. Thus, we attribute "stereotypical" characteristics and uses to most objects. For example, it would probably never occur to a pre-Columbian native of North Carolina to classify ice as a building material.

Socrates says nothing to dispute the notion that objects have determinate features – nor need he. These determinate features and characteristics render an object either capable or incapable of producing significant effects, when utilized in a specific context. For example, many things can be used to cut, but whipped cream is not well suited to this purpose. These determinate features make it the case that a person's knowledge, combined with the situation in which she finds herself, render a NGNB thing good or bad (or better or worse than the other NGNB things that are available). Of course, those who do not have the knowledge necessary for taking advantage of them, cannot harness these characteristics and use them to their benefit. Neither will anyone be able to take advantage of an object, if the determinate product that it produces cannot further happiness, in the conditions under which it is available. When considered apart from the conditions of their use, these determinate features and characteristics are *themselves* NGNB – "useful" NGNBs can be used by the less than virtuous person in a manner that actually makes that person less happy. Socrates often mentions money as a prime example of an NGNB object that has NGNB power.

Our discussion of the determinate nature of individual NGNBs has already served to illustrate the second implication mentioned above: even if used under appropriate conditions, an action or object must be used skillfully – virtuously, or with knowledge – in order to yield a good result. If I have a leak in the pipes under my sink, and I possess the finest plumbing tools available, I am still likely to do more harm than good, if I try to fix the pipes myself. This is because I do not possess the appropriate skills and knowledge. Thus, NGNBs only become good when used under appropriate conditions, and with knowledge. Any generic action or object has the potential to be good if used under the right conditions – actions and objects are *conditionally* good.

To put my earlier point in a slightly different way: the fact that NGNB objects are *conditionally good* implies that they are not *terminally* NGNB. Knowledge allows us to exploit distinct features of these NGNBs so that, under the appropriate conditions, they can *actually* be good, and can benefit us. Ignorance, on the other hand, produces a lack of control over these resources. This renders them actually bad, because they contribute to our lack of well-being. So, Socrates' thesis that all actions and objects are NGNB

carries the implication that, under appropriate conditions, these resources, by themselves and by virtue of their own inherent, determinate properties, *do* contribute to either happiness or misery.[14] Virtue allows us to become happy by allowing us to *make* that which is NGNB become *good*.

## *LYSIS*

Careful examination of the *Lysis* shows that Socrates thinks that people experience friendship (φιλία) as a relationship between themselves and the good.[15] Where that relationship is mediated by another person, we find the relationship of human friendship. At 212a8–222d8, we see the structure of the relationship between human beings and the good that Socrates proposes. We also see that a human being's relationship to the good can be mediated by a human friend. Here, it is assumed that a friend must be a friend for the sake of some further thing. It is also assumed that the further thing that attracts friend to friend must be a bad thing (an "enemy").

Socrates uses "friendship" (*philia*) very generally, as a synonym for desire or attraction. He also uses verbs to express species of attraction broadly rather than narrowly. For example, he juxtaposes "is like friend to like?" (214b) with "opposites desire one another" (215e), thereby treating being a friend to something and desiring something as equivalent. Socrates also uses "to desire" and "to be a friend of" interchangeably at 215e3–5:

> [F]or the things most opposite to one another are especially friendly since each thing desires its opposite and not its like.

The same juxtaposition also suggests that the "friend" in the first clause need not represent human friends any more than the "opposites" in the second clause need represent human opposites. This suggestion is confirmed when we look at Socrates' examples of opposites that might attract (hot/cold, sharp/blunt): these examples indicate that he is not concentrating on the human-centered examples of attraction that would constitute human friendship. Rather, Socrates is specifying general terms that would cover all cases of attraction (not just friendship) between all kinds of attractants (not just humans).

[14] Annas (2002) believes that the conditional nature of NGNBs allows us to associate what I take to be the terminally neutral, Stoic notion of "material" or "indifferents" with Socrates' claim that the things on his original list of goods are NGNB. As we see in 281d–e (quoted above) this is not borne out by the text. Socrates says that when guided by ignorance, NGNBs *are* greater evils, and when guided by wisdom they *are* greater goods. In his discussion of the NGNB at *Gorgias* 467c7–468e7, Socrates also says that they partake of the good when used in a way that furthers happiness.

[15] Here I follow my 1997.

The generality of Socrates' discussion suggests that he takes its subject to be one which does not obey categorical distinctions between the natures of the various entities which make up the metaphysical environment. Whatever is being attracted (humans, physical objects, plants, cosmic entities), Socrates uses the same theory of attraction to describe why one object is drawn to another. Thus, the same principles which govern gravitational force also govern human friendship.

Socrates' discussion of reciprocity provides another clue that his use of *philia* is general, and applies to a broad spectrum of relationships. Although reciprocity is a criterion for friendship between human beings at 212e–213d, there are many places in Socrates' discussion of *philia* where he ignores that criterion. If Socrates were simply analyzing human friendship, we could expect reciprocity to be a central and necessary criterion as it is for Aristotle.[16] Thus, Socrates' account of *philia* will seem wrong to us, if we assume that he speaks narrowly of human friendship. Also, our more general ideas concerning desire and attraction do not require that the relationship be reciprocated. Given all of these factors, Socrates' account is arguably more about desire and attraction than about human friendship *per se*.

With this grasp of his notion of *philia*, we can understand his debate concerning whether "like is friend to like" (214b2–4) or whether "opposites attract" (216a4–5). It is agreed that like cannot be friend to like, first because bad cannot be friend to bad:

> For it seems, to us at least, that the nearer a bad person approaches to, and the more that person consorts with, a bad person, the more hateful that person becomes; for he is unjust and there is no possible way for the unjust and the unjustly treated to be friends. (214b8–c3)

And then for more general reasons:

> SOC. [W]hen anything whatever is like anything else, what benefit does it hold or what harm might it be able to do the one like it that it cannot do to itself? Or what could it endure that it could not inflict upon itself? Indeed how can such things be cherished by one another when they hold no service to one another? Is it possible?
> LYS. No. (214e5–215a3)

Here, Socrates is saying that things will not be friends to one another if they have no need of each other – if they are not *attracted* to one another

[16] Aristotle regards reciprocity as a necessary criterion for friendship (*EN* VIII.2).

through one being the source of something that the other lacks. This notion, that friends need each other, conjures up the general notion of attraction or desire because we conceive of these as unidirectional forces. Plants are attracted to light and animals are attracted to water because one has something that the other lacks. Again, Socrates seems to be speaking of a relationship based on need without reciprocity. We are best off returning to our contemporary notions of need and desire in order to make sense of what he is saying. Attraction and desire are plausibly unidirectional, and based on need.

Socrates has concluded that like cannot be friend to like. Next, Socrates tries a different approach to the hypothesis that good is friend to good:

> [G]ranting that like is not friend to like, might the good still be friend to the good insofar as he is good, not as he is like? (215a3–5)

This is quickly rejected:

SOC. But what of this? Will not the good person, insofar as he is good, be accordingly sufficient for himself?
LYS. Yes.
SOC. And the sufficient one, at least, is in need of nothing due to this sufficiency?
LYS. For how not?
SOC. And not being in need of anything this person will cherish nothing?
LYS. Presumably not.
SOC. And the one who does not cherish does not love.
LYS. No indeed.
SOC. And since not loving, is not a friend.
LYS. Evidently.
SOC. Therefore, how can we say the good are friends to the good to begin with? They neither long for one another when apart (for each is sufficient for itself even being separate) nor do they have any need for one another when present. For what reason do people like this have to hold each other in high esteem?
LYS. None, I say.
SOC. But if they do not at least set a high value on one another then they are not friends.
LYS. True. (215a6–c1)

Having rejected all possibilities of like being friend to like, Socrates goes on to consider the possibility that everything desires its opposite. He finds this idea so implausible that he does not give it much consideration: while it is intuitive that dry desires wet, cold desires hot, bitter desires sweet, sharp desires blunt, and empty desires fullness (215e5–7), it is counterintuitive to

suppose that a hating thing could be friendly to a friendly thing, or just to unjust, temperate to intemperate, or good to bad (216b2–5).[17]

Socrates eventually places this discussion in the same context as his discussions of desire throughout the rest of the early dialogues – the hierarchical relationship between the good and the NGNB that we have also seen in the *Gorgias* and the *Euthydemus*. This becomes most evident at 216d5–7. Here Socrates asserts that there are three different kinds: the good, the bad, and the NGNB. He goes on to elaborate the same hierarchy that we have seen before, but this time with respect to this power he calls friendship.

The good and the bad are friendly neither to each other nor to themselves, and nothing is friendly to the bad.[18] The two remaining alternatives are that what is NGNB is friendly either to itself or to the good. But the NGNB can't be friendly to itself because that would be a case of like being friend to like.[19] So the only alternative that has not been ruled out is for the NGNB to be friendly to the good. Now both horns of the dilemma in the original hypothesis are destroyed: ". . . neither is like friend to like, nor opposite friend to opposite" (216b8–b9).

Socrates has placed this discussion in the same context as his discussions of desire throughout the rest of the dialogues – the hierarchical relationship between the good and the NGNB that we have also seen in the *Gorgias* and *Euthydemus*. Now he goes on to elaborate the same hierarchy with respect to this power that he calls "friendship."

Ultimately, Socrates illustrates this possibility with the following example: the sick man is a friend to the doctor because of his disease and for the sake of health. Thus, the body (which is NGNB) is a friend to medicine (good) because of disease (bad) (217a4–b6). Socrates then summarizes all of this more generally:

> The [NGNB] friend is a friend of its friend (the good) for the sake of its friend (the good) and because of its foe (the bad). (219b2–3)

Have we now exposed the same views concerning the NGNB that we did in the *Euthydemus* and the *Gorgias*? It is too early to be certain. What we do have is the good and the bad giving direction to the NGNB. The NGNB

[17] This appears to be a counterexample to my thesis that Socrates is taking a general theory of attraction and applying it, specifically, to human friendship. However, the end of the dialogue gives us resources for explaining this anomaly. The physical examples are intuitive not *qua* opposites which desire one another, but *qua* deficits which find fulfillment in one another. By contrast, the examples concerning hating/friendly, temperate/intemperate are simply the negations of one another. Socrates reconsiders this premise at 221d1–5.

[18] The arguments against these possibilities are found at 214b–216b, and are discussed in my 1997: 4–7.

[19] The possibility for which was ruled out at 214b2–4.

engages in no self-motivated (*self-generated*) activity. It does what it does because of the good and the bad – it pursues something good (like medicine) in an effort to avoid something bad (like disease). Still, the example given allows us to call doctors and health "good" when we have been exhorted by the *Euthydemus* and the *Gorgias* to consider them NGNB.

Socrates doesn't leave it at this, however. He continues by making it clear that neither health nor medicine have self-generated value. He admits that he has illustrated the hierarchy in an artificially attenuated manner. He makes this clear when he states:

> All exertion such as this is not exerted toward these things – toward the things that we procure for the sake of something else – but toward the one thing for the sake of which we procure all things. (219e7–220a1)

And he goes on to say some things that are very familiar from the *Gorgias*:

> Of course we often talk as if we set great value upon gold and silver. But that is not the way it is and to speak in this way gets us no closer to the truth. The truth is that we value that one thing – whatever it is – for the sake of which all other provisions and gold are provided. (220a1–5)

Here, in the *Lysis*, Socrates identifies that one thing as the "ultimate friend" (πρῶτον φίλον [219d7]). The ultimate friend is that thing for the sake of which we befriend all other friends – happiness, which is human good.[20] So now it seems that we do have the same notion of NGNB once again. All of the actions and objects that we desire are NGNB, and are desired insofar as they are a means to the ultimate good, which is our happiness. In fact, Socrates goes on to make a distinction between that which is truly a friend and that which is "a friend for the sake of a friend" (a conditional friend):

> When we speak of anything that is our friend for the sake of another friend, it is clear that we merely say the word ["friend"]. For the real friend is likely to be that one thing in which all of the other things we call friends terminate. (220a7–b3)

What *makes* an action or object – a friend for the sake of a friend – describable as a "friend" at all is its relationship to the ultimate friend. The value of this provisional sort of friend is conditional upon its ability to actually further its human friend's happiness in the particular case in question. Thus, no action or object is always a friend to any person: actions and objects become conditional friends to a person when they are the actual means to that person's happiness.

[20] See my 1997 for arguments in favor of this treatment of the πρῶτον φίλον.

While Socrates certainly uses the tripartite distinction of the good, the bad, and the NGNB in the *Lysis*, it might be most accurate to say that he is not developing or explaining the theory here. We are seeing him apply the views of the good, the bad, and the NGNB – which he has developed elsewhere – in his treatment of friendship here in the *Lysis*.

### *MENO*

A good example of a case where Socrates simply assumes his doctrine of the good, the bad, and the NGNB is at *Meno* 87e–88a. Here, he neither explains it nor employs his ordinary terminology. Socrates uses the distinction between conditional and unconditional goods in his strategy for figuring out what is a virtue and what is not. First, he points out that health, strength, beauty, and wealth are conditional goods:

SOC. Indeed let us see – taking up each in turn – what are the kinds of things that benefit us. We say health and strength and beauty and wealth. We call these things and other things like them (καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα[21]) beneficial, don't we?

MENO Yes.

SOC. Still we say that these very same things also harm us at times? Would you claim otherwise?

MENO No, I agree. (87e5–88a3)

Next, Socrates points out that it is correct use that allows health, wealth, and other things of the same kind to be beneficial, rather than harmful. He points out that anything that is a virtue (and is, therefore – for reasons we have explained at the beginning of this chapter – knowledge), will not be harmful, under any conditions. It always will be *unconditionally* good, rather than only conditionally good. NGNB things are conditionally good:

SOC. Consider then, what is that which guides each of these so that it is sometimes beneficial to us and sometimes harmful? Is it not the case that whenever they are used correctly they benefit and whenever not, they harm?

MENO Certainly.

SOC. Now let us examine the [apparently beneficial] things that come from the soul. You call them temperance, justice, courage, intelligence, memory, and munificence and there are more things like that?

[21] Socrates does not take his list of presumed goods that turn out to be NGNB as exhaustive. As in the *Gorgias*, he seems to assume it can be expanded. Again we would have to grant that, when pushed to its logical conclusion, it includes all actions and objects.

MENO Yes.
SOC. Now consider, those of these things that do not seem to you to be knowledge, do they not sometimes harm and sometimes benefit? . . .
MENO Yes.
SOC. Thus, to put it briefly, all of the things that the soul undertakes and endures when guided by knowledge end in happiness and when guided by ignorance, the opposite.
MENO So it seems. (88a3–88c4)

Here, in the *Meno*, we see Socrates operate within the dictates of the theory of valuation – the good, the bad, and the NGNB – that he has used in the other dialogues, without mentioning the NGNB. This is further evidence that this theory of valuation is Socrates' touchstone – his one strategy for assigning value to those things, other than virtue, knowledge, ignorance, happiness, and misery. These five (or four, given the identity of knowledge with virtue) elements are the only things to which Socrates ever assigns a designation of good or bad that is not conditional upon the circumstances in which they appear and are used.

## FURTHER ELABORATION OF THE NEITHER-GOOD-NOR-BAD: THE *LYSIS*

At *Lysis* 216d5–7, when Socrates makes the familiar tripartite division, he discusses these elements in relation to one another in a way that appears to turn the conclusion of our former analysis on its head. Socrates illustrates the inter-relationships between the good, the bad, and the NGNB by making an analogy. He says that a body – which is NGNB – when afflicted by disease – which is bad – will be drawn to medicine – which is good. Now, this can be confusing,[22] unless we separate instances where we discuss an agent seeking the good from those where we are discussing the commodities (like health and the body) that an agent uses in order to seek the good. Socrates has said that only the NGNB which is tainted by bad can seek the good. Thus, agents – human beings themselves – must be NGNB things tainted by bad, and using friends (actions and objects – some of which might be other human beings) to seek the good.

Notice, however, that human agents are not identical to their bodies. While it might be straightforward that a sick body is an NGNB tainted by

[22] Both Taylor (1926: 70) and Guthrie (1975: 147) stretch to find a way to understand the body example that I will discuss in this section. Guthrie is particularly perplexed at having to apply the example of the doctor and the ill body to friendship (the topic purported to be the subject of the dialogue as a whole). Neither is satisfied, and both conclude that the dialogue is a failure.

bad (illness) which requires the good *particular to it in this case* (medicine) in order to be in its best state, this doesn't mean that the NGNB agent who *has* a body and is ill will always require either medicine or health in order to reach the state in which the agent is no longer NGNB, but good (happy).

### THE TEXT

The example under examination follows Socrates' speculation at 216e2–217a that:

SOC. If anything is a friend to anything, the NGNB is a friend either to the good or to the same kind of thing as itself. For, I suppose, nothing could become a friend to the bad.
MEN. True.
SOC. Moreover, nor could like be a friend to like as we just said.
MEN. Yes.
SOC. So it is not possible for the NGNB to be a friend to the same sort of thing as itself.
MEN. Apparently not.
SOC. Then the NGNB alone is shown to be a friend to the good.

Thus, the example of the body is intended to demonstrate that something that is NGNB is drawn to the good. First, Socrates argues that if the body is already in health, it is not drawn to anything:

[The body in health] is well enough so that no one who is healthy is a friend to the doctor on account of his health. (217a5–6)

Second, Socrates says that a body that is not in health, but is diseased, is drawn to the doctor's medicine:

SOC. But the sick person is, I imagine, a friend to the doctor on account of disease.
MEN. Naturally.
SOC. Indeed, disease is a bad thing, while medicine is beneficial and good.
MEN. Yes.
SOC. And, I suppose, a body, taken as a body, is NGNB. But a body is compelled by disease to embrace and love medicine.
MEN. I think so.
SOC. Thus, what is NGNB becomes a friend to the good because of the presence of bad. (217a7–b6)

Next, Socrates distinguishes between something that has been so harmed as to have been *made* bad, and that which is only temporarily afflicted with bad.

SOC. So the NGNB is sometimes, when bad is present, not yet bad, but other times it has already become such.

MEN. Certainly.

SOC. Therefore, whenever it is not yet bad, but bad is present, this presence makes it desire the good. But [if it is present for a long time] the presence [of bad] makes it bad and at the same time robs it of its desire and its love for the good. For it is no longer NGNB, but bad. And [we found] bad was not a friend to good. (217e4–218a2)

That which has been afflicted long enough to have been made bad can no longer benefit from the good but is, so to speak, terminally bad. However, that which is only temporarily afflicted by the bad is attracted to the good. The implication is that the NGNB that is temporarily afflicted by the bad is attracted to the good so that it can be in its own ideal state. For an NGNB *agent* afflicted by ignorance, the good will be virtue (which brings about happiness). For an NGNB *body* afflicted by illness, that good will be medicine which brings about health. Health is to the NGNB body as happiness is to the NGNB human being.

Socrates illustrates his statements concerning the restoration of that which is temporarily afflicted by bad by discussing the philosopher:

And due to this we can say that those who are already wise no longer love wisdom, whether they are gods or men, neither can those who are so ignorant that they are bad love wisdom. For the bad and stupid person does not love wisdom. Indeed, there remain those possessing this bad thing – ignorance – but have not yet been made ignorant and stupid by it, because they are still aware of not knowing what they do not know. (218a2–b1)

Socrates seems to be saying that the philosopher is someone who is NGNB, but has been afflicted by the bad and, thereby, stimulated to pursue the good. In his next sentence, Socrates confirms this:

It follows then that those who are *as yet* (πω ὄντες) NGNB are philosophers, while all who are bad and all who are good are not. (218b1–3)

The philosophers are *as yet* neither good nor bad. This seems to imply that being a person who is tainted by bad (ignorance), and so being pushed to pursue the good is what it is to be a philosopher. It would be a contradiction in terms to speak of a philosopher who has *already become* good. The philosopher's pursuit of the good makes her NGNB. While it is the goal of the philosopher to be good, the NGNB is the philosopher's natural state. The philosopher who is to remain a philosopher must remain NGNB.

Once she becomes good, she will no longer seek the good and will be a "sage"[23] and not a philosopher.

The subjects under discussion in the examples in the *Lysis* – the body and the philosopher – are more abstract and complex than those we have seen in the *Gorgias* and the *Euthydemus*. In the latter two dialogues, Socrates is simply discussing whether or not people desire each NGNB thing, and why they do or don't (the reason for which will stem from whether or not each is actually beneficial). In contrast, in the case of the body analogy in the *Lysis*, Socrates is discussing how human bodies, disease, and medicine *in themselves* are related to one another by nature. We can learn a lot about the good, the bad, and the NGNB by understanding that the body (or any NGNB for that matter) can have a dual role. It can be an NGNB subject that, having been tainted by bad, is now seeking its own good. It can also be an NGNB that a human NGNB agent uses when she has been tainted by the bad in order to make herself good. In the first case, what establishes the NGNBness vs. the goodness of an object that could be either an NGNB-subject/agent or an NGNB-means for another subject/agent (something like the body) will be very different from what establishes this second case.

In the example at 217a–218a, the body is discussed as a personified subject of desire. The discussion of the body as "welcoming and loving" (ἀσπάζεσθαι καὶ φιλεῖν, 217b4) toward something treats the body as a subject: as something that subsists in a state that can be good or bad for it, itself.

Socrates refers to the body using the term "NGNB" in order to specify the sort of thing he is talking about. He is talking about a body "taken as a body" (σῶμα δέ γέ που κατὰ τὸ σῶμα, 217b2) – namely, the sort of thing that is NGNB from the perspective of human desire. He does not here intend to speak of the relationship between human beings and their bodies. Rather, he speaks of the way in which things (like the body) that are NGNB for humans are drawn toward those things that are good or bad for the NGNB things considered in themselves.

Socrates personifies the human body in order to treat it as a thing that has a best state that it can inhabit with respect to itself. The body *qua* body should be understood as analogous to the human being. Just as Socrates regards happiness (*eudaimonia*) as the best state for a human being to be in, so he regards health as the best state for a human body to be in. *Eudaimonia* is the best state for a human being because it is the state in

[23] "Sage" is not being used to translate a Greek word here. It is the term I have heard George Rudebusch use (following the Stoics) to refer to the person who was a philosopher but has now found knowledge in the *Lysis*.

which a person can best exercise her particularly human capacities; health is the best state for a body because it is the state in which a body can best exercise its particular capacities. The body is here being labeled "NGNB" because Socrates is classifying it as an object with respect to the human subject/agent.

Since it is an object like any other object, the body is NGNB for the human who possesses it. But apart from that label, Socrates' personification of the body allows us to see it as a subject. Subjects of desire have to be NGNBs that pursue the good on account of the bad, according to Socrates' account from 214b2–217b2.[24]

If we do not note that the body is viewed as a subject of desire, we are likely to be confused about whether or not it coheres with the treatment of all actions and objects as NGNB, in the *Gorgias* and *Euthydemus*. There, Socrates argued that both bodies and medicine are NGNB when viewed as commodities that have some hope of being used by people as a means toward increasing their well-being. Bodies have the same status as any other NGNB thing that a human might use as a means toward achieving the good (*eudaimonia*).

According to Socrates, my body is a tool (or a resource) that I can put to use for good or for ill. In this way, Socrates thinks of this thing that I have – my body – no differently than the way we think of other things at my disposal – like pliers. A pair of pliers is a tool that I can put to use for good or for ill. While I might find that I am able to use my pliers to my benefit in a manner for which they were not intended, my pliers, taken by themselves, have a specific function that exploits their specific capacities. My pliers are considered to be good pliers when they are in the condition that best enables them to perform the function for which they have been designed. Anything that inhibits my pliers from being in the condition which best allows them to fulfill their function (heat, for example) is bad for them. Likewise, anything that restores my pliers to a condition where they can best fulfill their function (like oiling them) is good for them. We can assert consistently that, when the best pliers are in good functioning condition, they are in their own best state. However, while this makes them good pliers, they are still NGNB when considered as a tool that will be a means for helping a human being to become *eudaimonic*. Whether or not good pliers are good for a human being is determined by whether or not

[24] My own lack of a clear understanding concerning this led to an analysis that was unnecessarily complicated in my 2000. I thank Christopher Rowe for a subtle but illuminating set of comments on this material.

the human being uses them with knowledge in order to further her own well-being.

If what I have just said about pliers is Socratic, then everything that Socrates says about the body in the *Lysis* is consistent with the doctrine of the good, the bad, and the NGNB that is set out in the *Gorgias* and *Euthydemus*. A body has a best state that it can be in with respect to itself. Just as human beings strive for happiness as their naturally good state, the body strives for health as its naturally good state. Health is the best state for my body to be in because when it is healthy, I am best able to exploit its natural capacities, and use it as a resource or a means for my happiness. It is easiest to locomote, to find food, to eat food, to enjoy pleasurable activities, and to exercise intellect, when the body is healthy.

Every determinate object has some state that is the best state that it can be in with respect to itself. It has some state in which it can best exercise the capacities that are specific to it. In the case of a body, that state is health. Still, even in its healthiest and therefore best state, the body remains NGNB for the person who uses it. The only thing that can make a body be beneficial to a person is that person's knowledgeable use of it as a means for the successful achievement of *eudaimonia*. In fact, at *Euthydemus* 281c2–e2, Socrates says that the things on his list of "goods" at 279e – which include health – are *actually* NGNB. Also, at *Meno* 87e, health is described as NGNB.

Everything at a person's disposal is neutral from the perspective of that person's particularly human quest for *eudaimonia*. Nothing is naturally beneficial to human beings. However, given that NGNB objects are determinate and various, so that each has particular capacities that can be exploited for its most effective use, every NGNB object is most effective as a resource for a human being when it is in its *own* best state. Socrates seems to be saying that, for the body, this best state is one where it is healthy – where it is not afflicted by what is bad for it. Thus, there is a sense in which, when the body is in the best state with respect to itself, it is in its most NGNB state (most able to be used *qua* itself either for good or for ill)[25] with respect to an agent who employs it. If an NGNB object is afflicted by bad, then it needs to employ something that is *good for that object under those circumstances*, something that restores it to its own best state, which is the state in which it is neutral for human use. Thus, an NGNB object is *benefited* by that which restores it to a neutral state, whereas something

[25] That is, when it is healthy, the human body is best able to be used *as a human body* for good or for ill. If one tries to use it as a paperweight or a doorstop one must take other things into account.

that has the potential to be good – like a human being – is benefited by something (an NGNB) that (under the appropriate circumstances) enables it to become good.

## SOME FINAL POINTS ON THE NGNB

Before going on to discuss Socrates' unique designation for the values of virtue and ignorance, there are three points that will help to clarify and accentuate the impact of the claims about the good, the bad, and the NGNB that I have presented.

### *A fourfold distinction*

As will be noted in the next chapter, Socrates' views on the relationship between happiness and virtue cannot be properly understood unless we make a fourfold distinction, using two different sets of evaluative opposites. I have already used both sets of opposites in distinguishing NGNBs from both virtue and happiness. It is only after we understand Socrates' discussion at *Euthydemus* 279a–281e that we will fully appreciate the need to use both sets of opposites in clarifying what Socrates says about three different kinds of things: NGNB; knowledge/ignorance; happiness/misery. Still, as I have already mentioned all four opposites, it might be helpful to look at this fourfold distinction.

The following table describes how everything that has been mentioned fits into these sets of distinctions:

| | **Self-generated value** | **Other-generated value** |
|---|---|---|
| **Conditional value** | (*uninstantiated)* | NGNBs |
| **Unconditional value** | happiness, misery | virtue, ignorance |

The first set of opposites, "self-generated value" and "other-generated value," distinguishes those things that get their value from their own inherent properties from those that get their value from the relationship that they have to other objects. Objects that have other-generated value ultimately get their value because of a relationship that they have to an object with self-generated value. The second set of opposites, "unconditional value" and "conditional value," distinguishes those things that have the same value under all conditions from those things whose value is dependent upon their conditions. It should already be clear from what I have said in this chapter that the value of NGNB things is both other-generated and conditional. In

the next chapter, I will argue that Socrates distinguishes happiness and misery as the only things whose value is both unconditional and self-generated. We will see that virtue (knowledge) and vice (ignorance) are unique in that their value is unconditional despite the fact that it is other-generated.

### *"Self-generated good"* vs. *"intrinsic good"*

Why use the terms "self-generated" and "other-generated," rather than the more common "intrinsic" and "extrinsic," in order to describe the kind of good possessed by happiness?[26] As I have emphasized several times, Socrates contends that NGNBs *become* good and *are* desired when they are able to increase actual happiness, while they *become* bad and *are not* desired in the cases where they decrease happiness and increase misery; although their value is conditional and other-generated, NGNBs *always have some actual value or other*. Furthermore, an NGNB's value is *always consistent with the value of the thing from which it derives its value*.

The terms "intrinsic" and "instrumental" are often used to connote something different from what I have just stated. To say that something is "instrumentally" or "extrinsically" valuable is often to say that it is "bad *but* can be used to get something good." In the same manner, to say that something is "intrinsically" good is often to say that it is "good *no matter what bad means* are used to obtain it." Socrates' discussion of the value of conditional and other-generated goods and bads cannot be understood along those same lines. The goodness of the means to an end and the value of that end are interconnected and cannot be considered separately. We cannot evaluate any NGNBs except insofar as they are a means to the good or bad.

Here is another way of understanding this: the actual, determinate properties of the NGNB actions and objects *themselves become* happiness-producing in the cases where they serve to increase the well-being of the agent who uses them. When I drink water under the circumstances where the act and the water actually make me better off than anything else could at that moment, the water and my act of drinking it contain the goodness that enhances my well-being. In this case, being a person who has drunk water is (partially) constitutive of my being a person who is as happy as she

[26] I used the more common intrinsic and extrinsic or "instrumental" in my 2001. I have since been convinced by Terry Penner that the use of such terminology is misleading for the reasons that I am about to mention. I have no conviction whatsoever, however, that Penner would agree that the language that I do use is any improvement. Nor am I at all sure that he would agree that Socrates makes the distinction that I make between virtue and happiness.

is right now. Does it make sense to say that I desired the act of drinking and the *properties* of the water in some categorically different way from the way I desired the *results* of having drunk the water that had those properties? What can it mean to say that I desired *drinking water* only instrumentally, but *having drunk water* intrinsically? Likewise, the goodness which other-generated goods derive from happiness under appropriate conditions is the *self-same goodness that happiness has*. So, why should I not place *exactly the same* value upon them as I place on happiness? It makes no sense to say that I value *drinking water* in some categorically different way from the way I value *having drunk water*. Thus, any meaningful distinction between intrinsic and instrumental desire or value has broken down. In the context of Socrates' theory of the good, the bad, and the NGNB, a distinction between intrinsic vs. instrumental value constitutes a false dichotomy.

### *An important implication of Socrates' theory of value for his theory of ethics*

The fact that there are no intrinsic, nor any merely instrumental or extrinsic, goods in Socrates' theory of value has dramatic implications for his ethical theory. Socrates holds that there is no metric to use in evaluating any action or object other than its *actual* capacity to render its possessor or agent either more or less happy. There is no independent consideration, no moral truth or principle, to which we need look in addition to this one – albeit complex – calculation. This leads to two unique and fascinating results. One is that scientific, and so-called "moral," investigations consider exactly the same data. The practice of morality is simply the practice of rigorous and honest science (as I will argue in Chapter 8). The second is that knowledge is the key to happiness because happiness cannot be pursued directly, so to speak. It can only be pursued through knowledge. As a result, the human quest for happiness is purposefully pursued through the pursuit of knowledge (I will address this in Chapter 7).

CHAPTER 6

# *Virtue and happiness: Two different kinds of goods*

What is the relationship between virtue and happiness in Plato's early dialogues? How does Socrates think that virtue and happiness are each to be evaluated with respect to human good? These two questions have fueled many discussions of Socratic ethics and psychology.

Some authors have argued that the relationship between virtue and happiness is one of identity.[1] They claim that Socrates must think that virtue and happiness are simply two different names for the same thing. This is known as the *identity thesis*.

Others have argued that while virtue and happiness are not identical, virtue is sufficient for happiness.[2] That is, they think that Socrates held the view that whoever is virtuous is happy. This is known as the *sufficiency thesis*.

Many of the authors who adhere to one of these two positions have used phrases like "intrinsically good" and "good in themselves" in order to characterize happiness as the ultimate human good.[3] Those who subscribe to the identity thesis call virtue "intrinsically good" or "good in itself" as well.

A number of authors have said that, according to Socrates, virtue is the only good.[4] One way to make sense of this is to attribute the identity thesis to Socrates.[5] For no one would deny that Socrates held happiness to be that ultimate human good toward which all desire is directed. And, it would be inconsistent for Socrates to assert that virtue is the only good, while asserting that happiness is the ultimate human good.

There is a rival view that Socrates held only happiness to be the ultimate human good and saw virtue as an instrument for achieving happiness.[6] On

[1] Kraut 1984: 211, n. 41; Rudebusch 1999: 123–8; Annas 2002.
[2] Vlastos 1991: 224–31; Irwin 1995: 58–60; Reeve 1989: 137.
[3] Kraut 1984: 211, n. 41; Vlastos 1991: 229; Brickhouse and Smith 2000a: 77.
[4] Annas 1993: 54, 2002; Alcinous, *Handbook on Platonism*, Ch. 27; Kraut 1984: 211, n. 41; Irwin 1986: 202, 204; Rudebusch 1999: 5; Reeve 1989: 137; Brickhouse and Smith 1994: 111; Santas 1993: 43; Benson 2000: 150, n. 31; Vlastos 1991: 209–14; Kahn 1996: 226.
[5] This appears to be the strategy employed by Annas, Alcinous, Rudebusch, Vlastos, and Kraut.
[6] Irwin 1995: 67–8.

such a view, only happiness is said to be "intrinsically good," while virtue is good only in a lesser or subordinate sense (it's only good because it's a means to happiness).

In this chapter, I show that Socrates described a relationship between virtue and happiness that is different from all of those described above. It is similar to the last view mentioned, which sees happiness as the ultimate human good and the only thing that is intrinsically good, and sees virtue as a means to happiness. However, I do not claim that virtue is a *mere instrument*, and is, therefore, not really a good as happiness is. Instead, I attend to statements that Socrates makes that show virtue to be a unique kind of good that, nevertheless, owes its goodness to happiness – which is the only self-generated good. Virtue and happiness are each unique and distinct, when it comes to their value. Also, for the reasons given above (116–17), I do not claim that the intrinsic vs. instrumental distinction captures the relationship between happiness and virtue.

As a consequence of my reading of the *Euthydemus*, virtue and happiness are related in a contingent and nomological way, rather than in a logical one. Knowledge is not simply defined as whatever produces happiness. Nor is happiness simply analyzed as whatever comes about as the result of virtuous activity. Virtue and happiness have distinct references whose stable alliance comes about through the fact that the outcome of human behavior with respect to the fulfillment of desire is dependent upon circumstances in the actual world.

For Socrates, virtue and happiness are each good in a way that distinguishes them from all other candidates for the good, and also from one another. I demonstrate that, according to Socrates, virtue is the only other-generated good that is unconditionally good, while happiness is unique in being a self-generated good.[7]

Something is an other-generated good if it gets its good value *through being the means* to some other thing that is either an other-generated or a

[7] Vlastos calls virtue a "sovereign good" (1991: 211). He speaks of what we do when faced with exclusive and exhaustive alternatives that we have come to perceive as, respectively, "virtuous and vicious." Because virtue is a sovereign good, Vlastos says that we need not deliberate beyond that determination. I agree with Vlastos that Socrates holds that the realization that one action is more virtuous than another is all that should be taken into account in our decision to perform that action rather than an alternative action. Throughout this chapter, I am speaking about what goes into making that initial determination. Here there are deep differences between Vlastos and me. I argue that, for Socrates, the only thing to consider in deciding what is virtuous is what will actually make one happy. An action is more virtuous than another action only because it brings the agent closer to happiness than that alternative action. Vlastos believes that some things are relevant to our happiness but not to our virtue. See Chapters 7 (especially n. 24) and 8 to better understand my disagreement with Vlastos on this issue.

self-generated good. An other-generated good must be a means to something further, that is other than it. Something is a self-generated good if its goodness comes from its own inherent properties, and it, therefore, gets its value from itself. A self-generated good can be a means to itself as long as it is also an end in itself.[8] In order for anything to be an other-generated good, there must be at least one thing that is a self-generated good. An other-generated good will have the further feature of being conditionally good if it can derive its goodness only under some conditions. An other-generated good is unconditionally good if it is an other-generated good under all conditions.[9]

It is important to note that it is only through being a means that an other-generated good becomes good. In using self-generated/other-generated rather than the extrinsic/intrinsic distinction, I do not intend to give up the notion that other-generated goods are means to ends, while self-generated goods are ends in themselves. I simply show that a thing with an other-generated value always has the same value as the things for which it is the actual means. I also emphasize that it, itself, *does* have a value. This is because it derives its value from being the actual means to that further thing. This is foreign to ordinary instrumentalism.[10] Objectors to traditional instrumentalist views protest that, if the instrument is a mere means, then it makes no difference how one arrives at one's good, and there is no justification for favoring one means (knowledge) over any other. There is no way to understand the statement, "it makes no difference how one arrives at one's good," on the view that I advance. Nor would it make any sense to say that we *care* about the ends but not the means. On my view, the instrumental/non-instrumental view is an "untenable dualism."[11] Of course, everything that I have just said about other-generated goods and self-generated goods, and how they are distinguished from conditional and

[8] For example, when I use my recreational time to climb a mountain, I don't climb the mountain in order to get to the peak. I climb the mountain in order to climb the mountain. It is both a self-generated good and a means to its own achievement. Other similar examples can be found in Ackrill's discussion outlining the distinction between preliminaries and constituents (1980: 19).

[9] It seems that there is room for there to be self-generated, but conditional, goods in this fourfold distinction. But Socrates doesn't treat any goods as both conditional and self generated (see the table on 115). So, in the Socratic scheme, all self-generated goods are also unconditionally good. In developing this fourfold distinction, I rely heavily upon Rudebusch's fourfold distinction concerning Socratic desiring (1999: 28–9). However, Rudebusch does attribute the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction to Socrates (as I did in my 2001), and I do not.

[10] "Instrumentalism" in this context refers to the thesis that Socrates held knowledge to be an *instrument* for the achievement of happiness rather than something worth having for its own sake. This interpretation of Socrates is generally ascribed to Irwin in his 1977.

[11] See Penner 2005: 1, n. 2. I will discuss this further below (153–5).

unconditional goods, works in exactly the same way for other-generated, self-generated, conditional, and unconditional bads.

It might seem that at *Euthydemus* 281e2–5, Socrates makes the claim that virtue is the only good:

> What can we conclude from what we have said? Is it anything other than that, of all of the other things not one is either good or bad, but of these two, wisdom is good and ignorance bad?

It might also seem that, if this claim were to be made consistent with everything that he says about happiness, it would entail the identity claim. In contrast, I argue that, in the *Euthydemus*, Socrates is actually emphasizing virtue's unique status as an unconditional, other-generated, good. Socrates does this by contrasting virtue's skill-like, and therefore instrumental, qualities (which are described in the skill analogy at 280b7–281e1) with its unconditional goodness (281e3–5). This makes virtue unique, because none of the rest of the other-generated goods shows this lack of dependence upon conditions. A lack of sensitivity to this contrast has, I believe, allowed some authors to see these two aspects of the dialogue – the skill analogy and the description of virtue as an unconditional good – as inconsistent with one another. These same authors have responded to this inconsistency with puzzlement,[12] by embracing the identity and sufficiency theses,[13] and by rejecting the skill analogy so that they can attribute to Socrates the thesis that virtue is the only good.[14] A lack of sensitivity to this contrast is also responsible for the promotion of a simplistic notion of what it is to be an unconditional instrument. In Chapter 7, I argue that the assertion that something is an instrument allows for more latitude than has previously been recognized (153–5).

## THE SKILL ANALOGY IN THE *EUTHYDEMUS*

I have already discussed the skill analogy extensively (280b7–282e1) (98–103). Socrates uses the skill analogy to demonstrate that all of the things that people believe will make them happy do nothing to promote happiness unless they are used correctly – virtuously (with knowledge). He points out that, when these supposed goods are used incorrectly, they are likely to do

[12] Santas 1993: 44. It's a wonder that Irwin isn't more puzzled by it since he argues both that virtue is purely instrumental and that virtue is the only good (1995: 57). He does, however, take a dim view of the entire first protreptic of the *Euthydemus* (1986: 214–15).

[13] See nn. 1 and 2, above.

[14] Annas (2002) openly rejects the skill analogy for just this reason. See n. 4 above, for those who read the text as saying that virtue is the only good.

more harm than their so-called opposites – even though it is those supposed opposites that are conventionally assumed to be bad, and deleterious to happiness.

Based on the skill analogy, Socrates concludes that conventional goods are worth nothing, when they are taken by themselves. When considered apart from how they are to be used, these so-called goods are NGNB. The value of a thing comes first from its being used, and that use must be under appropriate conditions. Second, even if so used, the action or object must be used skillfully, or with knowledge, in order to yield a good result.

Circumstances can be specified for any two items that show them to play equally profound roles in bringing about good and bad consequences. No conventional good is unambiguously good or bad. No object or action is unequivocally better than any other object or action. All actions and objects are equally NGNB.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VIRTUE AND HAPPINESS

Happiness (εὐδαιμονία) has played a strong – albeit behind the scenes – supporting role both in the skill analogy and throughout the entire discussion in Chapter 5 of how NGNBs come to have value imparted to them. It might seem that it is virtue (knowledge) and the appropriate external conditions, which confer a value upon that which has heretofore been NGNB. That certainly is one way of describing what has been said: NGNBs become good through virtuous use, and NGNBs are, therefore, dependent upon virtue for any value that they come to have. But such a description leaves out the fact that whether or not a NGNB becomes good is entirely determined by whether or not it is beneficial; whether or not something is beneficial is based solely upon whether or not it engenders happiness.

The discussion between Socrates and Cleinias is premised on the assumption (278e3–6) that everyone wishes to do well (εὖ πράττειν). At 280b5–8, the discussion revolves around the assumption that goods benefit us when they make us happy:

> For we agreed, I said, that if many goods were present to us we would be happy and do well (εὐδαιμονεῖν ἂν καὶ εὖ πράττειν).
> He agreed.
> Then would we be happy due to our present goods if they did not benefit us or if they did?
> If they did benefit us, he said.

Throughout the passage, Socrates continues to use the question of whether or not we will become happy as the litmus test for whether or not we have benefited from our possessions. At 280d3–4, Socrates and Cleinias agree that a man who has all goods but makes no use of them would not be "happy due to his possession of these goods" (εὐδαιμονοῖ διὰ τὴν τούτων κτῆσιν τῶν ἀγαθῶν, 280d3–4). For each thing that is examined – possession, use, virtuous use – the ultimate question concerning benefit is always answered by looking at whether or not it leads to happiness (280d6, 280e1, 282a2).

In fact, the foregoing discussion has presupposed that it is *happiness* that is our ultimate goal, hence, that happiness is the ultimate good.[15] The worth of an NGNB commodity was assessed by looking at whether or not it could help the person who possesses it become happy. While circumstances are important, virtue is required. Even under the best conditions, virtue is the only thing that permits resources to be used in a way that can lead to happiness. This is the only reason that the skill analogy allows us to give for the importance of virtue.

Why is virtue important? Virtue makes NGNB things good. How does virtue make NGNB things good? By allowing them to further happiness. It is *happiness* that confers value upon virtue; virtue is said to make NGNB things good only because it allows them to contribute to happiness. Nothing at 280b7–281e1 underwrites the contention that virtue has a value that is independent of its utility in bringing about happiness.

Properly understood, 280b7–281e1 is inconsistent with the identity thesis. This is because the skill analogy demonstrates that it is only because our knowledge allows us to use NGNBs in order to become happy, that our knowledge (which *is* virtue) is a good thing. If virtue were identical to happiness, the virtuous person would always be happy, without putting to use any NGNBs whatsoever. Thus, virtue and happiness are distinct. The virtuous person can be virtuous before she uses her wisdom to exploit and benefit from NGNB things. While the identity thesis implies that NGNBs are irrelevant to the virtuous person's happiness, Socrates' claim, via the skill analogy, that NGNBs become good through virtuous use, indicates that Socrates thought that NGNBs were, at least frequently, necessary to the achievement of happiness. If this were not the case, Socrates would have allowed NGNBs to remain terminally NGNB.[16] Additionally, if it were

[15] As I have discussed at length in (22–4), Socrates establishes that all desire is for the good at *Meno* 77b–78c.

[16] One might think that Vlastos' special brand of sufficiency is still plausible (1991: 215–17). On Vlastos' view, the already virtuous (and therefore happy) person can make use of NGNBs in order to become happi*er*. However, this notion of the relationship between virtue and happiness is also inconsistent

not the case that NGNBs were frequently necessary for the achievement of happiness, Socrates would not have used their beneficial interaction with knowledge as a reason for Cleinias to try to become as knowledgeable as possible.

In summary, Socrates reasons that the value of NGNBs is dependent upon virtue because, without virtue, these so-called goods cannot contribute to happiness. Virtue enables these NGNB things to become tools for the acquisition of happiness, and it is the fact that they become *a means to* happiness that appears to confer value upon them. This actually indicates that it is happiness, *not* virtue, which makes them valuable. But this does not mean that happiness is the only good, and that virtue is not also a good. Nor does it mean that virtue is a mere instrument that could be replaced by some other instrument, and about which we should care no more than we care about any other instrument. Rather, the text shows that virtue and happiness are unique examples of distinct goods.

## THE SPECIAL STATUS OF VIRTUE

At *Euthydemus* 281e2–5 Socrates arrives at the following conclusion:

> What can we conclude from what we have said? Is it anything other than that, of all of the other things not one is either good or bad, but of these two, wisdom is good and ignorance bad?

This conclusion – that wisdom (therefore virtue) is the only thing that is good – might seem to contradict what has just been said about the relationship between happiness and virtue, and their own hierarchy with respect to human good. In fact, some have read it as stating that virtue is the only good.[17] Such a reading could confuse one about the coherency of this part of the dialogue.[18] However, we avoid this confusion when we distinguish between two different and unique ways of being good – as I believe Socrates did.

with what is said about the NGNB. Since NGNBs have no value by nature, they are of equal rank: no single NGNB is intrinsically more valuable than any other, all become valuable only if used with virtue to achieve happiness. Vlastos' idea that some NGNBs are relevant to happiness only before one is either virtuous or happy while others are relevant only after one is virtuous and minimally happy, introduces a moralistic distinction among NGNBs that the text seems determined to avoid. For Socrates, all NGNBs are created equal; it's the context and manner of their use that distinguishes them from one another (as we have already discussed, 63–5).

[17] I assume that those who read the text as making this claim (see n. 4, above) would cite this as their textual evidence.

[18] Annas (1993, 2002), Santas (1993), and Reeve (1989: 137–9) express this concern.

Virtue has been shown to be distinct from all the other commodities that we employ in order to become happy. Still, we must not confuse virtue's way of being the only means that always furthers happiness (no matter what the conditions) with happiness' way of being the only self-generated good toward which those means can be exercised. We dispel this confusion when we distinguish between two different sets of evaluative opposites, as we have above. In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates maintains that happiness is the only thing that is a *self-generated* good. Virtue, on the other hand, is unique among those things that are other-generated goods because it is an *unconditional*, *other-generated*, good. All other "goods" are *conditional*, *other-generated*, goods.

Virtue is not a mere NGNB that, under the right circumstances, gets to be good by being a subject's means to happiness in situation *y*. Virtue is the thing that enables other things to be a means for happiness. Virtue is unalterably aimed at happiness. At 280b7–282e1, NGNB things were called good when actually able to contribute to happiness. Virtue never fails to contribute to happiness, so it is always good. But this does not make virtue the only good thing without qualification. It makes virtue the only instrument for achieving happiness that always – under any conditions – makes us more likely to become happy. Virtue is the only instrument that furthers happiness under all conditions, rather than only under some conditions (while backfiring – and furthering misery – in others).

It would not be correct to say that virtue is an independent good.[19] Its goodness is dependent upon – derived from – happiness, and happiness is a human good. Virtue derives its goodness from happiness by being a means to happiness. This is how NGNB things derive their goodness, as well. Still, while NGNB things can fail to be connected to happiness, virtue cannot. But the connection between virtue and happiness is not a logical, analytic one: it is a contingent one. "Promoter of happiness" is not part of the definition of knowledge. Socrates finds that knowledge is the one thing that connects our beliefs to the way the world is. He also realizes that understanding how the world works is the only hope we have for controlling at least some elements of how we are situated in it. Since we are motivated to pursue happiness, we translate this control into doing anything we can to control and increase our happiness. Socrates' recognition of the connection between our wisdom and our ability to exert at least some

[19] I believe that Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 111) make a poor choice of words when they call virtue an "independent good." They certainly do not wish to assert that virtue's goodness is independent of happiness (1994: 103).

control over whether or not we realize our own good (our own happiness) inspired him to label wisdom *arete* (excellence).

Let's look at 281e2–5 carefully in order to better interpret Socrates' statement that only wisdom is good. Socrates reflects on the original list at 279a. That list includes wealth, health, good looks, bodily endowments, good birth, talents, honors, and wisdom – but not happiness. The discussion between 279a and 281e forces us to reconsider whether or not the items on the original list are, in fact, good. That discussion is about how each of these things may or may not be used in order to achieve happiness. He concludes that *of all of the things on the original list*, all of those other than wisdom are not infallible contributors to happiness and are, therefore, NGNB. Thus, *of the things on the original list*, wisdom alone is good; by contrast, ignorance must be bad. *In this context* (that of the original list), one might say that virtue (i.e. wisdom) is the only good. But, *in this context*, this does not amount to saying that virtue is an independent, or self-generated, good. The sense in which it might be true to say that virtue is the only good is the one which I indicated before: of all of those commodities that one might use to pursue happiness, virtue is the only one that is unconditionally necessary, and that cannot be misused.[20] This very same passage and reasoning imply that happiness is other than virtue, and that happiness is good in an unqualified sense. It is the only thing that is good in itself – the only self-generated good. Happiness achieves this status by being the thing according to which we judge the worth of virtue and conventional goods – they are good *if and only if* they are in a position to contribute to happiness.

What does it mean to say that virtue is unalterably aimed at happiness, and cannot be misused? In the next chapter, I argue that nothing in the *Euthydemus* makes it clear whether Socrates believed that the possession of virtue guaranteed happiness. It is guaranteed that the virtuous person will never fail to use those resources at her disposal to improve her situation. In the next chapter, I also argue that the sufficiency thesis – even if true – would add nothing useful to this thesis, and is therefore irrelevant.

[20] Ferejohn finds that wisdom is genuinely good because it is both *value independent* and *invariably beneficent*. Invariably beneficent means that wisdom is always beneficial (there are no circumstances under which it is detrimental). To say that wisdom is value independent is to say that there is no particular object *y* such that wisdom brings benefit only if *y* is present (1984: 114–15). I clearly agree with Ferejohn about invariable beneficence. I also agree with him on value independence *as stated*. That is, I agree that there is no particular object which virtue requires *in every situation*. I can also agree with him that virtue requires no particular *y* in any particular situation (where that *y* might change from situation to situation), provided that "knowledge" is understood to have very severe requirements. Still, all of this is consistent with virtue needing some NGNBs or other to produce happiness; hence, virtue is not the same kind of good as happiness is. Happiness is the only completely independent good.

### IGNORANCE, MISERY, AND THE BAD

We now understand that *Euthydemus* 281e2–5 dictates that wisdom (therefore virtue) is an unconditional, but other-generated, good. Clearly, this passage mentions ignorance in the same breath as wisdom, and must intend to say that ignorance is analogous to wisdom. Ignorance (which must be the same as "vice," although Socrates does not regularly call it that) is an unconditional and other-generated bad. If ignorance is used, it will make NGNB actions and objects bad. It will do so by using them in a way that diminishes the happiness of the ignorant agent. Unhappiness, or misery, is the only self-generated bad. It is clear that Socrates thinks this is the case at *Meno* 78a, where he takes it as self-evident that no one desires to be miserable and unhappy.

This is presented straightforwardly in the skill analogy, when Socrates says that if those things that are considered good are used with ignorance, then they can produce more harm than their so-called opposites (281d–e). It is also clear from Socrates' claim that the person who is ignorant is better off with fewer possessions, as he will then be in less danger of getting himself into trouble (280e–281a, 281b–c).

In the *Meno*, Socrates also presents the relationship between knowledge, happiness, and good as completely parallel to that between ignorance, unhappiness, and bad.

SOC. Consider then, what is it that guides each of these so that it is sometimes beneficial to us and sometimes harmful? Is it not the case that whenever they are used correctly they benefit and whenever not, they harm?

MENO Certainly.

SOC. Now let us examine the [apparently beneficial] things that come from the soul. You call them temperance, justice, courage, intelligence, memory, and munificence, and there are more things like that?

MEN. Yes.

SOC. Now consider, those of these things that do not seem to you to be knowledge but seem different from it, do they not sometimes harm and sometimes benefit? . . .

MEN. Yes.

SOC. Thus, to put it briefly, do all of the things that the soul undertakes and endures when guided by knowledge end in happiness and when guided by ignorance, the opposite?

MEN. So it seems. (*Meno* 88a3–88c4)

Also at *Gorgias* 467c7–468e7, Socrates says that the NGNB things, when used as a means to happiness, partake in the good, and when used as a means to unhappiness, partake in the bad. Furthermore, as we noticed

earlier (28–30), Socrates asserts that tyrants and orators do not have the power to make themselves happy, because they don't see any point in trying to figure out how the world works in order to make themselves happy. They think that they can make themselves happy through blindly getting people to do whatever they tell them to do – through sheer might, unguided by knowledge. In the *Gorgias*, knowledge – the possession of science – is tied directly to a person's ability to become happy, and ignorance is inexorably linked to a person's inability to make herself happy.

## CONCLUSION

We can now understand Socrates' evaluation of virtue in the *Euthydemus*. Virtue is unique because it is unconditionally good – it is always aimed at happiness. Virtue is not a self-generated good. It is an unfailing means for increasing one's happiness. Happiness is the only self-generated good, and virtue's unique position as our only unfailing and necessary means to happiness makes virtue an unconditional good. Perhaps Plato had Socrates juxtapose these two ways of talking about virtue within three pages of text just so we might understand how virtue is special despite its subordination to happiness.

Furthermore, understood in this way, the *Euthydemus* is fatal to the identity thesis. Conventional goods are found not to be actually good. They are only good when used with wisdom in order to further happiness, and this necessitates the claim that conventional goods can be *put to use* by the virtuous person *in order to obtain* happiness. This cannot be the case, if it is assumed that the virtuous person is happy by definition.

## ADDENDUM ON VIRTUE AS ITS OWN REWARD

Some will object to my interpretation of Socrates' appraisal of virtue as a unique kind of good but not a self-generated good. This is because they see in Socrates' statement at *Euthydemus* 281e2–5 a glimmer of something that they think Socrates *should* want to say about virtue. The issue can be characterized as follows:[21] on the one hand, in the *Euthydemus*, Socrates tells us that we want virtue because it enables happiness; on the other hand, isn't he also (at 281e2–5) telling us that we want virtue for its own sake? Granted, there is some tension between these two statements. But (according to this objection) why shouldn't we try to resolve the tension, rather than

[21] I take myself to be paraphrasing Reeve 1989: 137.

eliminating the claim that we want virtue for its own sake? Can't we want virtue for its own sake *in addition to* wanting it because it brings happiness? In other words, must virtue be *either* a means to happiness *or* an end in itself? And won't Socrates' view resonate more with our own intuitions about virtue if it turns out that he thinks that virtue is something that is desired for its own sake? I have two replies to this objection.

First, I believe that this objection imports a moral sensibility that is foreign to, and unnecessary for, Socratic ethics. If we analyzed why we instinctively feel that virtue – if it is to be virtue – must be desired for its own sake, I believe that we would realize that our reasons would not hold equally for Socrates. If we have such intuitions about virtue, it is not because they are, somehow, natural and inborn. We are post-Kantians and post-Christians and our intuitions have been shaped by these legacies. Socrates was an egoist (see 63–5) – he believed that human behavior could not be motivated by anything other than personal self interest. He took this self interest to be the desire for personal happiness. This sort of human psychology strikes many of us as pessimistic. How can we hope to live in moral communities, if people are motivated to pursue only their own personal happiness?

To the extent that there is a popular view that takes people to be motivated by their own self interest, our popular views of morality try to offer us reasons for being so concerned about the well-being of others that we cannot be happy at their expense. Socrates also had reasons to think that we could not benefit at the expense of others. However, Socrates' reasons are significantly different from those that contemporary philosophers embrace. Some religious doctrines extend our concern to others by connecting it to the way that we will be treated in the afterlife. While we might benefit in our mortal lives even without having been virtuous, our afterlives will be so burdensome as to outweigh any mortal enjoyment that we have experienced.

Some of us might even subscribe to a view that is similar to Socrates' in appearance, but is a developmental or emotional account of why our concern for ourselves should extend to others. This account relies on our cultivating emotional ties with others. We might contend that we have a feeling of attachment toward all others. Perhaps this feeling is gained by extending outward the native feelings that we have toward our offspring and family. It is assumed that these ties can exist despite the actual (lack of) importance of (most of) these others to our daily lives. However, it might be feared that other emotions that we have (emotions that push us to pursue ends that conflict with the happiness of others) could override

these (perhaps tenuous) emotional ties, at times. The possibility of conflicts between our concern for others and our desire to benefit at their expense, has led many philosophers to focus on the importance of *moral behavior*, rather than happiness, as the goal of the virtuous person. By focusing on moral behavior, we feel that we might escape the danger of allowing those with less emotional control to focus on their own happiness to the exclusion of others.

In contrast with these various lines of reasoning, Socrates offers a metaphysical and *intellectual* reason for us to be concerned about the welfare of others. Human nature, and the interdependency of human beings, simply make it the case that, if we harm others, we decrease our own chances for happiness. Harm makes people worse. Bad people are likely to harm those around them. Those around bad people are likely to be those for whom we care (including our own selves). If we try to isolate ourselves from the greater community in order not to reap the negative repercussions of what we sow, we radically limit our choices and, as a result, limit the innovation that we can use in order to make ourselves happy. Thus, it is imprudent to harm another. As Socrates' reason for resisting the exploitation of others is an intellectual one, it cannot be overridden by the perceived benefit of harming another. Virtuous people are knowledgeable, and so cannot (even temporarily) mistakenly believe that they are likely to benefit through the harm of another. Socrates' intellectualism renders it *impossible* to focus exclusively on one's own happiness (as discussed, 61–3).

Another contrast between the popular notion of virtue (even at Socrates' time) and Socratic virtue is the belief that one's motivation to do what is right is separable from one's desire to be happy. This popular way of thinking holds that our desire to be happy can *compete* with our desire to do the right thing (be virtuous). In other words, the popular notions of virtue and happiness hold out the hope of some shortcut that, if taken, will allow us to become happy without going through the arduous task of engaging in virtuous behavior. Given such possibilities, if virtue is not desired for its own sake, and even held out to be a more important goal than personal happiness, then there is the risk that no one will see any point whatsoever in virtue's pursuit. In contrast, as we will see in Chapter 7, Socrates believed that the pursuit of virtue is a *central component* of the pursuit of happiness – it might not guarantee happiness, but happiness cannot be purposefully pursued without it. As a result, the desires for happiness and for doing the right thing cannot compete with one another – they are one and the same. Thus, there was no reason for it even to occur to Socrates that virtue

"should" be desired for itself, or that it is, somehow, base to think that virtue's unique goodness comes from its special role as a means to happiness. On Socrates' view, there is only one reason for anyone to desire anything: everything is desired for the sake of happiness. Further, one is missing the point or importing extraneous and mystifyingly irrational concerns, if one does not respect this motivation as a lofty one – it is the only one that is possible.

These are some popular reasons for thinking that our self-concern includes only a contingent and weak concern for others, and that we need to take steps to allow our desire to do the right thing to win out over our desire to become happy. These reasons might make it seem appropriate to encourage people to focus on becoming virtuous over and above – or, at least, in addition to – becoming happy.[22] However, Socrates' explanation for the connection between self-concern and other-concern, and the strong, nomological connection that he saw between virtue and happiness, make any focus on virtue for its own sake a piece of perhaps cumbersome, and certainly unnecessary, "moralistic" baggage.

My second response to this objection is that it is not a problem for my interpretation. It is consistent with what I have said to think that virtuous activity is contingently what composes happiness at the same time as it provides for more happiness in the future. But, even if Socrates does think that happiness consists in virtuous activity, he also thinks that, had happiness consisted in something else, virtue would still have been the only way to pursue happiness. That happiness can but needn't consist in virtuous activity will be further discussed when we examine the relationship between happiness and pleasure, in Chapter 9.

We can now reiterate what we said earlier about the instrumental/intrinsic distinction in (116–7), using some new vocabulary. Since knowledge is an unconditional, *other*-generated, good, it gets its goodness from happiness. It has the same goodness that happiness has. The knowledge that I use in order to become happy can be distinguished from the happiness that it produces, to the extent that *knowledge* and *happiness* are two different kinds of goods (one other-generated, one self-generated). However, the *goodness* of knowledge, and the goodness of happiness, cannot be so distinguished. I can prize the goodness of virtue no more and no less than

[22] I characterize both of these views as "popular," but of course they have had their sophisticated philosophical supporters as well in the persons of Aristotle, Luther, Kant, and many others. Rudebusch's "impure heart" objection to Socratic Egoism in his 2003 is an example of the importation of these foreign philosophical concerns into Socratic ethics.

the goodness of happiness, despite the fact that knowledge is the means that I use in order to become happy. Once again, to distinguish my desire for the value which I place upon virtue from that which is associated with happiness using the instrumental/intrinsic distinction, would be to embrace an incoherent dichotomy. I will discuss instrumentalism still further at the end of the next chapter.

PART III

# *Virtue and its relationship to happiness*

CHAPTER 7

# *Does virtue make us happy?*

In recent Socratic scholarship, much debate has centered on two questions: first, did Socrates find virtue to be sufficient for happiness? And second, regardless of whether virtue is sufficient for happiness, is it necessary for happiness? In this chapter I will show that these questions are irrelevant to Socrates' mission. I will also connect the question of the necessity of virtue for happiness to the debate over whether virtue is a *mere instrument* for the procurement of happiness (which I discussed above, 116–17 and 128–32).

Debates over necessity and sufficiency are fueled by the assumption that we must attribute to Socrates a theory that post-Kantians would recognize as a *moral* one. The volatility of these debates is a symptom of the fact that it is difficult to find a post-Kantian notion of morality in Socrates' statements concerning virtue and happiness. The project of finding a moral view in the Socratic dialogues is complicated by the fact that Socrates evidently *reduces* the (now – intuitively – moral) notion of virtue to craft or scientific knowledge, and also by the fact that he sees the goal of human life as the maximization of individual happiness. Furthermore, as if this didn't make the project of uncovering some sort of moral underpinnings for Socratic ethics difficult enough, Socrates – at critical moments – even reduces happiness to pleasure!

The motivation for finding virtue to be necessary and/or sufficient for happiness seems to be the hope that a mechanism can be provided for knitting virtue and happiness together in such a way that the banal (from a moral point of view) goal of personal happiness can be infused with moral fiber through its logical relationship to the necessarily moral commodity of virtue. But, of course, such a project is doomed to failure if, as I have argued, Socratic virtue possesses no moral fiber to begin with.

If virtue is not necessary for happiness, then there is the further concern that people might not be motivated to become virtuous. Why not simply become happy through some other means? I hope that it is already clear that Socrates finds the pursuit of virtue to be a precondition for the

intentional pursuit of happiness. If this is already clear, then it should render such concerns moot. But in case it is not clear, I will explain why the necessity of virtue for happiness is not essential to the motivation of virtue's pursuit.

The defeat of instrumentalism is seized upon as a way to show that virtue really is, for Socrates, a *moral* category, and not mere craft or science. In other words, it is designed to show that virtue has some independent, intrinsic value and so wears the halo of some otherworldly, or transcendental, goodness. I maintain that virtue is not so endowed. However, I also point out that virtuous activity can still be a contingent constituent of human happiness.

## SUFFICIENCY IS BOTH IRRELEVANT AND UNDERDETERMINED BY THE TEXT

Scholars justify taking the view that virtue is either necessary or sufficient for happiness[1] by analyzing the many instances where Socrates describes a causal or co-referential connection between virtue (sometimes under one of its other names, "wisdom," "knowledge," "intelligence"), and happiness (sometimes under one of its other names, "doing well," "living well"). I have already argued that virtue and happiness are logically distinct, and distinct kinds of goods (122–6). When we take the doctrine of the NGNB, together with the skill analogy of the *Euthydemus*, we see that the relationship between knowledge and happiness is one of neither identity nor of logical implication. My main object in this chapter is to show that Socrates had no reason to be concerned with the necessity and sufficiency theses, as their truth or falsity would add nothing to the connection that he outlines between virtue and happiness. Further, belief in the necessary or sufficient connection between virtue and happiness would do nothing to increase a person's motivation to pursue virtue, beyond the motivation that results from a more contingent or even probabilistic connection. In order to substantiate this, we will further explore the text of the *Euthydemus*.

Socrates wanted to help people hone the craft that enabled them to flourish. His theorizing was intended to help individuals develop the best

[1] Many scholars endorse both necessity and sufficiency. See Irwin 1995, Rudebusch 1999, Annas 1993, 1999, 2002, Reeve 1989, Kraut 1984, Vlastos 1991 and Taylor 1998. Brickhouse and Smith (1994) are the exception here, but a minor one as they find virtuous *behavior* to be sufficient for happiness. Fine (1999: 12) seems to think this allows us to group them with those who grant the sufficiency thesis. It does, in any case, show them to connect virtue and happiness in a stronger manner than the contingent one that I will argue is consistent with the text.

strategy for achieving that which they were inevitably destined to pursue – their own happiness. Since, as Socrates demonstrates, the only way that a person can control her happiness is through the exercise of virtue, it is also the case that the only way that a person can endeavor to increase her happiness is by increasing her virtue. Thus, the only way to seek to increase one's happiness is by seeking to increase one's virtue. Socrates demonstrates that *the intentional pursuit of virtue just happens to be a precondition for the intentional pursuit of happiness*. Thus, it can be concluded that happiness can only be pursued through the pursuit of virtue. Hence, the pursuit of happiness simply *is* the pursuit of virtue.

Still, the contingent identification of these two pursuits says nothing about either the necessity, or the sufficiency, of virtue for happiness. Further, anyone who wonders if virtue is also necessary and sufficient for happiness, in addition to being the only way to purposefully pursue happiness, would be engaged in a purely mental exercise. Given what has already been laid out, the answer to the questions concerning necessity and sufficiency can have no practical or motivating effect on a person who already understands that the only way to endeavor to increase one's happiness is to increase one's virtue – one's knowledge. In other words, a major goal of this chapter is to underline the power of Socratic desire: if happiness is the only thing that you want, and if virtue is the only hope that you have for being able to exert even *some* control over whether or not you get happiness, then you *are going* to pursue virtue.

This can be made clearer with an example: imagine that I am teaching a course in which students will do several small, graded assignments and a graded final exam, before receiving a course grade. Imagine that I also make the following assertion about how I will distribute course grades: *I **intend** to give an A in the course only to students who get an A on the final exam*. Notice that the rules I have described do not have enough specificity to tell us whether getting an A on the final exam is necessary or sufficient for receiving an A in the course. They allow me to refrain from giving an A in the course to students who did get an A on the final exam. Also, it is not clear that my *intending* to give something other than an A in the course to those who did not get an A on the final exam is sufficient for that to take place. The rules described are compatible with a large number of scenarios, but here are three importantly representative ones:

1 I will give an A in the course to everyone who gets an A on the final exam and will not give an A in the course to anyone who does not get an A on the final exam. [An A on the final exam is necessary and sufficient for an A in the course.]

2 Once I grade the final exams, I will give all but one of those students who received an A on the final exam an A in the course. The one who doesn't get an A in the course will be chosen at random. [An A on the final exam is necessary but *not* sufficient for an A in the course.]
3 I will record an A for the course in my grade book for each student who receives an A on the final exam. However, grades become a matter of record only when I click on an appropriate grade on a certain computer screen. Although I do my best to click on the appropriate grade, I have been known to get it wrong (the icons are so close together), and the software is so poorly designed that it provides no means for correcting a grade once I have clicked on the wrong one. [An A on the final exam is *neither* necessary *nor* sufficient for an A in the course.]

While it might not be clear to any of my students which of the many possible scenarios is the case, it is clear that students who want to know which one is the case simply have curious philosophical minds and like to exercise them. For there is no way that knowing which is true can have any practical effect on what a student who wants an A in the course endeavors to do. No additional information will alter the strategy of a student who really cares about getting an A in the course. Anyone who cares about getting an A in the course will try to get an A on the final exam. In fact, pursuit of an A on the final exam *is* both necessary and sufficient for pursuit of an A in the course, because pursuit of an A on the final exam is the same activity as pursuit of an A in the course.

I believe that Socratic ethics entails that concern over necessity and sufficiency is this same kind of purely mental exercise, with no practical effect. Anyone who really cares about becoming happy (which, according to the Socratic theory of motivation, is everyone) will try to become as virtuous as possible. This is because whether or not virtue guarantees happiness, and whether or not it is the sole means for achieving happiness, it is the only way that a person can exert any control whatsoever over whether or not she becomes happy. Socrates has already shown that all of our purposeful behavior is conducted in the service of becoming as happy as possible.

I see no reason to think that either Plato or Socrates put much thought into exactly how strong the nomological connection between virtue and happiness was. Socrates wanted to educate people to pursue the course of action that would most likely result in their maximal happiness. He only needed to get them to understand that increasing their virtue is the only way to increase their control over whether they achieve their goal. And increasing their control is, in turn, the only way for them to increase

their happiness. Once he accomplished that, no further information about what, exactly, the nomological connection was, could possibly alter their strategy.

While I assume that Socrates thought that being virtuous *was* highly correlated with increasing one's happiness, and the grading example, above, is designed to model that, in actuality – given the power of Socratic Desire – virtue need not even be highly correlated with happiness, in order for us to be motivated to pursue it. As long as virtue is the *only* way we might control our happiness, we will try to get it. Imagine, by analogy, that a child is struck with a horrible illness for which there is only one treatment. Imagine further that, when left untreated, the illness is terminal in 98 percent of all cases while, when treated, it is terminal in 60 percent of all cases. Here, not only is the treatment neither necessary nor sufficient for the child's recovery, it actually has a low success rate. Still, it is easy to imagine the parents of the child doing everything within their power to ensure that she receives this treatment. Virtue doesn't need to be necessary or sufficient for happiness in order to be pursued. It simply needs to be the only game in town. In fact, it doesn't even need to be the only game in town – it only needs to be the only game in town that is based on skill rather than chance. As we will soon see, this is the presupposition upon which Socrates bases his argument: no one is willing to trust their happiness to random luck, when they have some hope of seizing some amount of control over it.

To put it simply, there are at least four possible views that Socrates might have held (two of them might be understood to make knowledge sufficient for happiness):

(SS) *Strong Sufficiency:* Whosoever has knowledge is guaranteed happiness in some absolute sense, where they are "perfectly" or "completely" happy. It's not the case that there are *other circumstances* in which they would be better off.[2]

(WS) *Weak Sufficiency:* Whosoever has knowledge is guaranteed to be as happy as that person could be in their particular circumstances. Knowledge is sufficient for maximal happiness, where maximal happiness is understood as the most happiness possible, given one's own particular circumstances up to this point in one's life.

(KAB) *Knowledge Always Benefits:* Knowledge will always benefit, and will never harm, a person in their quest for happiness. However, it might not benefit them to the extent that they become as well-off as it is possible for them to be in their particular circumstances.

[2] Here, the virtuous person is as happy on the rack as in any other situation – completely happy.

(KNH) *Knowledge Never Harms:* Knowledge will never harm a person in that person's quest to become happy. Knowledge is connected nomologically to that person's benefit, but it is possible for its effect to be neutralized by circumstances over which the person has no control. The result is that the agent is neither better nor worse off than she was without it.

In what follows, I will argue that the text clearly does not justify the attribution of (SS) to Socrates, that there is evidence against (KNH), and that it lacks the detail to decide between (WS) and (KAB). However, my main point – and the one that I have stated above – is that whichever of (WS) and (KAB) – if either – Socrates actually had in mind when he spoke, or Plato actually had in mind when he wrote, is irrelevant to the question of whether Socratic theory provides sufficient motivation for every individual to try to become as wise as possible.

## IS IT POSSIBLE TO HAVE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE FOR SUFFICIENCY?

It is actually convenient for us (as readers and interpreters) that, when it comes to our motivation to become virtuous, there is no practical distinction to be made among the variety of nomological connections that could exist between virtue and happiness, if we assume that the pursuit of virtue is a precondition for intentionally pursuing happiness. This is because it is easy to argue that the text underdetermines Socrates' commitment to a nomological connection as strong as necessity or sufficiency.

Presumably, Plato and Socrates were cognizant of our contemporary, logical notions of necessity and sufficiency. Many scholars find that Socrates made analytic-type arguments in which he supported a conclusion by finding necessary and sufficient criteria for it. Furthermore, in many of the dialogues, sophists like Gorgias, Polus, Euthydemus, and Dionysodorus use these necessary and sufficient criteria to support their conclusions. However, it seems reasonable to question whether Socrates would have seen fit to apply these technical and logical concepts to descriptions of, and recommendations for, human behavior in the physical world.

Further, whatever technical and logical concepts Socrates possessed, neither he nor Plato were part of a long philosophical tradition that provided textbook examples for how individual bits of logical reasoning should be verbalized, and how specific verbal locutions should be interpreted logically. Plato scholars are, today, part of a community in which there is general agreement that the verbal locutions "X causes Y" and "X makes

Y happen" are equivalent to the logical claim that "X is sufficient for Y." It would be unwise for a philosopher today to make statements like "X causes Y" or "X makes Y happen" if she did not wish to be interpreted in this way. However, there are rigorous thinkers who are neither part of our community nor steeped in our tradition, and who do not adhere to this practice.

People in the medical profession are comfortable saying "Smoking causes lung cancer," "Aspirin reduces fevers," "Calcium increases bone density" and many other such statements, even though they readily admit that these causes are neither necessary nor sufficient for their effects. Philosophers of science conclude that causes need not be necessary and sufficient for their effects.[3] The educated public does not feel that a lack of specificity with respect to such matters restricts the possibility of serious discourse. It seems entirely possible that Plato's Socrates was inclined toward just this type of discourse. By saying that virtue causes happiness, he could easily have meant to indicate that he thought that there was an overwhelmingly strong causal connection between the two, without imagining that he might be interpreted as saying that virtue is sufficient for happiness.

In the event that Socrates did have in mind a strong, but probabilistic, connection between virtue and happiness, it can also be argued that he could not have distinguished coherently between concerns over necessity and concerns over sufficiency. Brian Skyrms,[4] in his book *Choice and Chance*, argues convincingly that, when it comes to probabilistic causes, a cause that has a strong tendency to be necessary for its effect cannot be distinguished from a cause that has a strong tendency to be sufficient for its effect.[5]

[3] See Salmon 1998: 145; Sober 1994: 198.

[4] I thank David Sherry for calling my attention to Skyrms's argument.

[5] As an example, take the statement that smoking causes lung cancer. This is not used to communicate that smoking is either necessary or sufficient for lung cancer. Rather, it is meant to express the thesis that smoking increases one's chances of getting lung cancer. But does smoking necessarily increase one's chances? Is it sufficient to increase one's chances? Skyrms explains as follows:

> We might say that smoking has a tendency in the direction of sufficientness if Pr(cancer given smoking) is greater than Pr(cancer given ~smoking) – that is, if smoking is *positively statistically relevant* to cancer. We might say that smoking has a tendency in the direction of necessaryness for lung cancer if Pr(having smoked given cancer) is greater than Pr(having smoked given no cancer) – that is, if cancer is positively statistically relevant to smoking. But we can show from the probability calculus that for any two statements, *P*, *Q*, P is positively statistically relevant to *Q* if and only if *Q* is positively statistically relevant to *P*. By Bayes theorem:

$$\Pr(Q \text{ given } P) = \frac{\Pr(P \text{ given } Q)\ \Pr(Q)}{\Pr(P)}$$

So:

$$\frac{\Pr(Q \text{ given } P)}{\Pr(Q)} = \frac{\Pr(P \text{ given } Q)}{\Pr(P)}$$

In summary: I argue that Socrates' locutions in the text of the *Euthydemus*, and elsewhere, underdetermine the answer to the question of whether Socrates found there to be a strict nomological, or a probabilistic, connection between virtue and happiness. If Socrates held a probabilistic account, he could not have distinguished between necessity and sufficiency – he could not have embraced one and rejected the other. Most importantly, the question of which (if any) of these above views Socrates held is irrelevant: once it is established that virtue is required for any possible control over happiness, none of the views discussed could have any additional effect on the shape of voluntary human behavior.

## WHAT THE TEXT DOES SAY

So, with this in mind, what happens when we look at some of the texts that are purported to give evidence for sufficiency? One text to examine[6] in this connection is *Euthydemus* 279d6, where Socrates identifies wisdom with good luck. We will see that it actually endorses only the claim that the intentional pursuit of virtue (here discussed via *sophia* [knowledge or wisdom]) happens to be a precondition for the intentional pursuit of happiness. We will also see that this piece of text, most plausibly, takes virtue (i.e. wisdom) to be only nomologically connected to happiness, and does not guarantee complete happiness to those who possess it.

Good luck (εὐτυχία) is introduced in the *Euthydemus* (279a) as a supposedly good thing to be added to the list of other supposedly good things. The list includes wealth, health, good looks, bodily endowments, good birth, honor, talents, courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom. Everything on this list, with the exception of wisdom, is later (280b) found to be NGNB.

Socrates treats *eutuchia* somewhat differently from any of those other NGNB things. I argue that he brings it into the conversation in order to make two points: first, there is no such thing as unconditionally good circumstances for living a good life; second, there is no such thing as good that comes about as a result of something other than one's knowledge – "random" luck is always NGNB.

*P* is positively relevant to *Q* just in case the left-hand side of the equation is greater than one; *Q* is relevant to *P* just in case the right-hand side of the equation is greater than one. So the probabilistic notions of being a tendency toward a sufficient condition, and having a tendency toward being a necessary condition come to the same thing! (1999: 134)

[6] At least since Irwin made it the focus of his analysis in his 1986.

After adding *eutuchia* to the list, Socrates next makes the shocking statement that *eutuchia* duplicates something else that is already on the list; he says that good luck *is* wisdom.

"Wisdom is good luck, I suppose, even a child could know that" (279d6). Cleinias expresses wonder or surprise at this statement. And so do we, as readers. This is because it strikes us as completely implausible. There are two ways to understand the Greek use of *eutuchia* that are not unlike two ways in which we understand "good luck" in English.[7] First, "luck" refers to elements of our situation that are beyond our control. "Good luck," then, refers to having the elements of our situation that are beyond our control work out well for us.[8] We say that a jackpot winner enjoyed "good luck" in this first sense. I will call this "superimposed good luck."[9] It comes about through no effort of one's own.[10] Second, both *eutuchia* and "good luck" have a slightly less precise usage, where they are something of a nickname, that indicates some degree of success that doesn't take into account how the success was caused. When we wish a surgeon "good luck" before the performance of a complicated procedure, we are most likely using the term in the second sense. We do not think that the success of the operation is to be attributed either exclusively or predominantly to the fact that elements of the circumstances that were beyond the surgeon's control turned out well. We assume that the surgeon will apply skill and knowledge in order to meet any challenges that arise for her during the course of the operation. I call this "success good luck."[11]

After 279d6, Cleinias' surprise is emphasized. This might indicate that Plato intended Socrates to say something that is, at face value, not merely cryptic, but absurd.[12] For this reason, I claim that Plato intends us (and Socrates intends Cleinias) to understand *eutuchia* at this particular point

[7] It might be the case that the more common one in English is the less common one in Greek.

[8] Plato and Socrates might have conceived of τύχη as the things which the gods give us or make happen to us and εὐτυχία as the things which the gods give us or make happen to us that work out well for us (τύχη often, but not always, carries the connotation of something good). This amounts to the same thing that I have just said about luck and good luck.

[9] For other instances of this use of *eutuchia* in Plato see *Meno* 72a6 and *Laws* 1 632a4.

[10] In English we would call it "random luck," but the Greeks may have thought it not random but distributed by the gods.

[11] For another instance of this use of *eutuchia* in Plato see *Phaedrus* 245b7.

[12] This attention-getting technique is used elsewhere by Plato. At *Gorgias* 467b1–10, Socrates asserts that tyrants do not get what they want when they do what seems best to them. Polus responds by saying this is "shocking and fantastic," thereby directing the reader to realize that Socrates has said something that Plato acknowledges is, on the face of things, absurd. Also at *Republic* v 475e, Socrates attributes the view that the beautiful is distinct from the ugly to Glaucon with a certain amount of fanfare – as if this is controversial and not many people will agree with it. He does this so that he can, later, make apparent to the reader the absurdity of the position taken by those who believe only in the physical world (the "lovers of sights and sounds") – they can't agree that the beautiful is

in the text as superimposed good luck, conceived as I have stated above. For to say that wisdom is success would require some interpretation, but would not be all *that* surprising.

No interpreter of the text can be blamed for not taking this identity literally.[13] Can one reasonably think that wisdom *is one and the same thing as* either superimposed or success good luck? But we get a hint as to how to interpret this from what Socrates says at 280b1–3:

> Somehow, in the end, I don't know how, we came to an agreement that in summary it is like this, when wisdom is present, he for whom it is present has no need for good luck at all [in addition].

If Socrates meant the identity of wisdom and good luck literally at 279d6, then how can he now be saying that whoever has wisdom has no need for good luck? For, if they are the same thing, then he is saying that whoever has *P* has no need for *P*.[14] I argue that this can be understood by noticing that, according to the theory of the NGNB, the only way to understand *luck* to be *good* luck is to understand that good luck is wisdom as applied to one's contingent and NGNB happenstance. *Good* luck assumes that some wisdom is already at play. Superimposed "luck" merely changes the circumstantial framework in which the recipient of that luck must operate.

Let us look at these lines of text again. At 279d, *eutuchia* is added to the list, and Socrates says that the same thing has been listed twice, once as *eutuchia*, once as *sophia*. Then Socrates says that *sophia* is *eutuchia*. Certainly this is to be read as a putative identity, but one that is surprising. It is stated in order to get our attention. We are supposed to wonder what Socrates is going to make of this. It is an identity that will be clarified; it will make more sense than first appearances suggest.

Next (279e–280a), Socrates teases out the second way in which *eutuchia* is generally used. He gives examples of people who, through the exercise of knowledge, enjoy more success than unskilled people do when engaged in the same activity. The flutist has more success in making flute music, and hence must have the best luck (εὐτυχέστατοι) when it comes to flute-music making. Grammarians are in the same situation in comparison to

distinct from the ugly. In each of these other cases, as with the present case, the supposed absurdity is later vindicated.

[13] In fact, it is more of a wonder that Kraut does (1984: 211, n. 41).

[14] Many scholars handle this by assuming that *eutuchia* here is just another way of saying happiness or one of its equivalents like "doing well" or "living well." That is why the passage is so often cited as evidence for sufficiency (or even identity). See Irwin 1986 for an example of this that has influenced the scholarship in this area. It's worth noting that Irwin is himself uncomfortable with where this leaves Socrates, see 1986: 203–4, 212 n. 29 and 214–15.

people who have no such training, when it comes to the writing of letters. The same holds for navigators and physicians. Socrates concludes with the statement that wisdom – since it never errs – causes men to be lucky (εὐτυχεῖν).

Thus, in 279d6–280a, it's plausible to think that Socrates distinguishes two popular – but distinct – uses of the term *eutuchia*. First, in catching our attention with the surprising identity at 297d6, he relies on our notion that "good luck" is a force that leads people – with no effort on their part – to have a good result. Second, with his examples of people who exercise a skill, he points out that "good luck" is also used to indicate success.

The discussion of flutists, grammarians, navigators, physicians, etc., is Socrates' means for eliminating the first use – that good luck is a force that leads us to a good outcome through no fault of our own (superimposed good luck) – as a legitimate reference for *eutuchia*. Expert knowledge is the only thing that can be said to allow one person to have a better outcome than another in the *same* situation.[15]

Socrates next asserts that he for whom wisdom is present has no need for good luck at all [in addition] (280b1–3). Here, Socrates qualifies this second use of *eutuchia* – success good luck – in order to make it more equivalent to *sophia*. He says that whoever has wisdom does not need *eutuchia* in addition.[16] The whole point of Socrates' discussion with Cleinias is to convince the young man that the pursuit of knowledge is worthwhile because it engenders happiness. If we look closely at how Socrates speaks about the kind of success that is to be identified with *sophia* in his discussion of flute players and grammarians, we see that it is a qualified kind of success.

In order to understand the qualifications offered, let's review an important point about absolute and relative terms, made by Peter Unger, in his article "A Defense of Skepticism" (1971).[17] It is straightforwardly true that absolute terms express a property in an unqualified sense. There is no difference between saying that something is flat and saying that it is *perfectly* or *absolutely* flat. An absolute term is juxtaposed with a relative term, which admits of degrees. "Bumpy" is just such a relative term. Absolute and

[15] We should take note that (*pace* Irwin) Socrates cannot possibly be using *eutuchia* to indicate "happiness" here. He's certainly not trying to argue that flutists, navigators, etc., are happier than people without these skills.

[16] He certainly cannot be saying that the person who has *sophia* does not need success, i.e. happiness, which is what Irwin would seem to be committed to saying.

[17] I would argue that Unger is not here defining or stipulating how absolute terms work. Rather he is uncovering something that is already present in the way we understand certain terms and so something to which Plato could have adhered even before it was isolated and described by Unger. Irwin makes the very same argument about Socrates' use of some other comparatives in his 1995: 58.

relative terms like "flat" and "bumpy" go together in a certain way. When we say that a surface is flat, we imply that it has no bumpiness at all. When we say that it's bumpy, we state that it's not flat.

The absolute term "unmarried," however, does not have this kind of connection to a relative term. Unlike the term "unmarried," "flat" and "bumpy" can both be modified: we say that a surface is *very* flat or *very* bumpy; we do not say that our neighbor is *very* unmarried. Now this makes it seem as though both "flat" and "bumpy" admit of degrees – so why not say that they are both relative terms and see them as juxtaposed to "unmarried?"

Unger points out that there is a difference in the way that absolute and relative terms respond to modification. When we modify a relative term, we give the modifier in question a meaning opposite to the one that we establish when we modify an absolute term with the same modifier. When we say that a surface is "very bumpy" we *augment* its bumpiness. When we say that a surface is "very flat" we *diminish* its flatness. To say that a surface is "very flat" or "pretty flat" is to imply that it is *not flat*. If we say that surface A is flatter than surface B, we imply that neither is flat – to imply that one is flat, we would say that A is flat and B is not flat.

"Success" is also an absolute term. When we say someone is "very successful," we do not imply that she is completely successful. In fact, we imply that she could have been even more successful than she actually is. When we say that Tom was more successful than Harry, we imply that neither was completely successful. To imply that one was completely successful, we would say that Tom was successful, and Harry was not.

As Socrates moves away from the superimposed-good-luck understanding of *eutuchia* and toward the success-good-luck understanding (279e–280a), we must look carefully at exactly how he uses the adjective *eutuches*. Socrates uses the superlative (εὐτυχέστατοι) and comparative (εὐτυχεστέρους). He says that flute players have the most success in playing flute music. He does not say that flute players succeed and others don't. He implies that flute players could be even more successful than they are. When he talks about navigators, he adds even more qualification. Navigators are more successful in dealing with the dangers of the sea, *generally speaking* (ὡς ἐπὶ πᾶν εἰπεῖν). This additional qualification in the case of the navigators seems to follow easily from Socrates' perception of them as being the experts among those mentioned who are most challenged by circumstances outside of their control (the dangers of the sea). Socrates also says that we choose a wise doctor because we will fare more successfully (εὐτυχέστερον) in his hands. Thus, when Socrates sums up using *eutuchein*, the infinitive form of the verb, and not the comparative degree

of the adjective, it is possible to see it as already having been qualified to operate within a certain domain, so that it is absolute only in that domain.

> Thus knowledge everywhere makes men succeed (εὐτυχεῖν), for I suppose she could never miss the mark, but she is necessarily right in action and in outcome (τυγχάνειν) or she would no longer be knowledge. (280a6–8)

*Sophia* masters that over which it has control. In this domain, it brings about unqualified success. Socrates could be thinking that in every practical context, each of which includes elements over which an individual does not have control, *sophia* only allows for as much success as can be gained by the mastery of that which is controllable (KAB). Socrates could be thinking that *sophia* renders its possessor as successful as circumstances allow – but does not guarantee absolute success (WS). It does not seem likely that Socrates is saying that whosoever really has wisdom will be completely successful and become completely happy – as (SS) would have it.

In any case, Socrates has eliminated superimposed good luck as a candidate for equivalency with *sophia*. It cannot be a force or a process that produces happiness or other good results independently of a person's knowledge. This is because a person with knowledge will, in all likelihood, fare better under the same circumstances than a person without knowledge. There is no such thing as superimposed *good* luck; there is just superimposed luck. The latter is an NGNB that knowledgeable people must try to make good as they try to succeed. Knowledgeable people are the most successful. They are more successful than those who are not knowledgeable.

This is compatible with saying that knowledgeable people are not completely successful, if to be successful is to become happy in some absolute sense. Thus, it is compatible with the rejection of (SS), so the attribution of (SS) to Socrates is not justified.[18] It is consistent with saying that they become as happy as wisdom can make them given what the circumstances allow – even if we view this as a strict nomological and not a probabilistic connection (WS). Saying that knowledgeable people are the most successful is also consistent with saying only that anyone who becomes wise will be better off than they would have been had they not become wise (KAB).

[18] I can't help but note that (SS) seems implausible to me and to many others. First, as Brickhouse and Smith point out (1994: 119, n. 31) in their argument against Reeve (1989: 129–44), even if one were omniscient that would not entail that one is omnipotent. Secondly, I can't help but agree with Aristotle, Penner, and (by implication from the fact that he finds the view he attributes to Socrates in his 1986 implausible) Irwin, that it seems ridiculous to think that even the truly wise person is happy on the rack (although of course the wise person can handle it better than anyone else, i.e. "make the best of it"). There is also textual evidence that counts against (SS): *Crito* 47d7–e5, *Gorgias* 505a and 512a2–b2, *Apology* 30a7–b4.

But it seems slightly stronger than (KNH), as it shows those who are wise are more successful than those who are not.

We are left with the statement that those who are wise are more successful than those who are not. This does not allow us to choose between (WS) and (KAB) with precision. While this statement is consistent with (WS), it has only enough detail to underwrite the more modest (KAB). Despite this modesty, it is satisfactory with respect to motivating its audience. Socrates has pointed out that the only reliable factor that we can control, when it comes to the project of making ourselves happy, is knowledge. No one who wants to be successful (and that's everyone – for everyone wants to become happy), will do anything other than become as wise as possible as a result.

I contend that, when Socrates says "wisdom is good luck," he is thinking in this way: good luck is having those elements of one's situation that are beyond one's control work out well for one. But since all actions and objects are NGNB, all situations are NGNB. There is no situation that is good, if the person who has to make the choice of what to do in that situation is ignorant; there is no situation which the wise person cannot make better. Thus, there is no such thing as having it "just happen" that the elements of one's situation that are beyond one's control turn out well for one. Only the exercise of wisdom can make the elements of one's situation that are beyond one's control turn out well, because only the wise person can make the right choices, once those elements have happened to turn out in any one particular way.

The wise person can use any circumstances to greater advantage than can the ignorant one. The ignorant person is likely to do himself more harm than good, no matter how he finds himself situated. Thus, luck by itself can't be *good*. You are extremely unlikely to make the best choices – the ones that make you increase your happiness – without wisdom, no matter what resources happen to be available. On the other hand, if you have wisdom, you already have what you need to do your best with what you're given. Wisdom, operating alone, can utilize whatever you are given to produce a better outcome. In the absence of wisdom, all antecedent circumstances are NGNB.

### OTHER TEXTS FROM WITHIN THE *EUTHYDEMUS*

Other passages from within the *Euthydemus* are commonly cited as textual evidence for sufficiency:

At the end of his elucidation of the analogy between wisdom and a skill, Socrates concludes:

[(E1)] Since we all desire to be happy, and since we appeared to become happy by using things and using them correctly, and since it was knowledge which supplied correctness and good luck, then it seems that every man should prepare himself in every way so that he will be as wise as possible. (282a1–7)

At the end of the first protreptic Socrates concludes:

[(E2)] Now then, since you think that [wisdom] is teachable and that it is the only thing of all things that are that makes a person happy and lucky, would you say anything but that it is necessary to love wisdom? (282c8–d1)

In his discussion of the kingly art in the second protreptic of the dialogue, Socrates says that it would be the political art only if politicians

[(E3)] made [citizens] wise and gave them knowledge, if indeed knowledge would be the thing to benefit them and make them happy. (292b7–c1)

The only thesis that we can be sure that these are underwriting is the supposition that Socrates held the view that the only way to purposefully pursue happiness is through wisdom.

In (E1), Socrates says that we "become" happy by using things correctly, but nothing in the passage compels us to think that such use inevitably makes us happy. The same goes for Socrates' contention that knowledge "supplies" correctness and good luck. Knowledge *is* the only thing that supplies correctness and good luck. However, the fact that knowledge is the only thing that can produce correctness (making the best choices), does not imply that knowledge is sufficient for happiness. Indeed, it might underwrite no more than (KNH). This weaker alternative – that Socrates thinks that knowledge and knowledgeable use are *the only way to purposefully endeavor to increase one's own happiness* – is reinforced by the last part of this passage: "Then it seems that every man should prepare himself in every way so that he will be as wise as possible."

If we understand Socrates to say that wisdom is the only pursuable means to happiness, then we can also understand his comment in (E2). The only thing that would lead a person to think that this alludes to sufficiency rather than necessity is Socrates' use of the word "makes" (ποιεῖν) in the second clause. As I have already indicated above, there is no reason to read this as anything other than a strong causal claim. In fact, one might imagine the following scenario with a parallel causal claim that, although unlikely, illustrates this point:

A healthy individual comes to a doctor and somehow convinces the physician that it is of the utmost importance that she develop lung cancer. Not possessing any technological means for administering lung cancer to patients, the doctor exhorts

the patient to begin smoking cigarettes – unfiltered ones, with high tar content, and as many as possible. The patient might ask the doctor if this guarantees that she will develop lung cancer, and whether there is any other, more palatable, means for achieving her goal. The doctor's answer would be something like, "I cannot guarantee that you will acquire lung cancer through this method, and there is a small chance that you will develop lung cancer without it. I am telling you to smoke because frequent cigarette smoking is the most controllable factor that makes a person have lung cancer."

The doctor's reasoning in this case would be the same as Socrates' in (E3). Again, we have nothing stronger than (KNH).

Socrates' use of the verb "makes" (ποιεῖν) in (E3), as in (E2), serves as the only ground for reading anything stronger than (KNH) into this passage.[19] I believe that the same sorts of arguments can be made for other evidence external to the *Euthydemus*, as well.[20] Still, since everything stated in these passages is consistent with (KAB), and since that was the weakest thesis that was not ruled out by 279d6–280a above, it seems that (KAB) is the most reasonable thesis to attribute to the Socrates of the *Euthydemus*. However, as I have argued throughout, it is not important to make this determination, in order to credit Socrates with supplying his audience with the motivation to become virtuous.

## WHY NECESSITY IS UNNECESSARY

Moralists have a much harder time abandoning the idea that virtue is necessary for happiness than abandoning the claim that it is sufficient for happiness.[21] Those who want to make the pursuit of virtue mandatory for the "good"[22] person will worry that if there is any possibility that a person could become happy without knowledge, then people might reason

[19] All of the pieces of textual evidence that Irwin lists (1986: 216, n. 5) are also chosen on the basis that they claim that either wisdom or the kingly art *makes*, *provides*, or *produces* happiness. Thus they are also equally explained by the alternative thesis that the pursuit of virtue and the pursuit of happiness are identical.

[20] Consider *Ap*. 30c9–d4 and 48c8–d2, *Crito* 48b8–9, *Chrm*. 174b11–c3 and 175e6–176a1, *Grg*. 470e4–471a3 and 507b8–c5 and *Meno* 88c1–4 in light of my proposal that all that need be underwritten is that the intentional pursuit of virtue happens to be a precondition for the intentional pursuit of happiness. Also, note that *Crito* 47d7–e5, *Grg*. 505a and 512a2–b2, and *Ap*. 30a7–b4 seem to mitigate against (SS) and (WS) but not against the thesis I have attributed to Socrates.

[21] Although given Skyrms's point above (n. 5), I'm not convinced that they can coherently allow knowledge to tend only in the direction of being sufficient for happiness while claiming that the necessity of knowledge to happiness is not probabilistic.

[22] I put *good* in quotation marks here because in order for the concern to make sense we must understand the good person to be something other than simply the happy person or the one who lives or does well as I have argued. In this context, "good," once again, seems to wear some sort of moral halo.

as follows: "Why should I bother with all of this craft knowledge, if it is possible to become happy without it?" Wouldn't a lack of necessity show that virtue is an optional component of the "good life?"

It should be clear from what I have already said that, in practical terms, the answer to this question is simple: the pursuit of virtue is not optional for one who wishes to increase the likelihood that she will become happy. For, recalling my example concerning how I am distributing As to my class in the beginning of this chapter (137–8), this is the same sort of reasoning that one of my students would be using were she to ask herself, "If the teacher might accidentally click on 'A' for my course grade even if I didn't get an A on the final exam, why should I bother trying to get an A on the final exam?" Someone who is motivated to get an A in the course would never leave the question of whether they were going to get one up to my accidentally misrecording it.

Likewise, a person who is driven to become happy would never leave her happiness up to a mere chance for which there is a low probability.[23] Furthermore, given Socrates' theory of motivation, it is impossible to construct a clear account of the behavior of someone who has decided not to pursue knowledge and to simply leave her happiness up to chance. What would such a person do with her life? How would she decide between available alternatives? Certainly, there would be no way for us to explain any single act of deliberation which she performs.[24] All decisions would *have* to be made randomly. If motivation is governed by the substitution clause as described earlier (33–4), such a person could never be understood to produce *any voluntary behavior whatsoever*.

Someone might still object that all of this is beside the point, if Socrates is endorsing the necessity thesis in the text.[25] I maintain that those who argue that Socrates frequently and forcefully endorses the necessity thesis do not distinguish the claim that virtue is necessary for happiness from the

[23] Penner argues that it is a probability too low for Socrates to have even considered it (1991: 164, n. 18) and Rudebusch follows him as a way of *endorsing* necessity (1999: 143, n. 17). It seems to me that it only has to be lower than would be probable were they to act in a scientific, rather than a random, way in order to guarantee that the rational person will pursue virtue. For, as I will soon point out, given the way Socratic motivation has been laid out, someone who is not endeavoring to control her happiness must act only at random.

[24] This point is, in essence, acknowledged by those who make the mistake of thinking that Socratic virtue can cover only "moral" choices; they are stuck with the view that the theory provides no mechanism for dealing rationally with non-moral choices (see Vlastos' discussion about choosing a bed to sleep in, 1991: 215–16).

[25] An anonymous reader has suggested (and no doubt many will agree) that, "It's hard to find any thesis in Socratic ethics that is asserted more frequently and forcefully than that virtue is necessary for happiness."

claim that I say *is* endorsed. The claim that virtue is necessary for happiness assumes some sort of analytic connection between the concept of virtue and that of the ultimate good. The one that I say is endorsed in these passages is that the purposeful pursuit of virtue is the primary, and most central, component of the purposeful pursuit of happiness. In this second case, the relationship between virtue and happiness can be a contingent one that is nomological and that is the result of the way people and the world which they inhabit are constructed.[26] As I have said, nothing precludes the possibility that the nomological connection is strong enough that virtue turns out to be necessary for happiness. However, even if this is the case, this necessity is inert. It plays no active role in promoting the pursuit of virtue among the theory's adherents.

Let us look at two representative passages. First, consider *Gorgias* 470e:

POL. It is evident that you, Socrates, would claim not to know if even the Great King is happy.
SOC. And I would speak the truth for I do not know how he stands with respect to education and justice.
POL. Why? Is happiness entirely dependent on that?[27]
SOC. So I say Polus, for I say that a just and good man or woman is happy and the unjust are wretched and miserable. (470e4–11)

Here, Socrates can't tell whether or not the Great King is happy by looking or through hearsay (or simply by knowing that he is the King). Socrates' best chance of correctly appraising his happiness is to determine how he stands with respect to education and justice.[28] This is because happiness is dependent upon how one stands with respect to education and justice, for the just[29] man or woman is happy. I see no need to inject this reading with some notion that the just or educated person is *by definition* happy, as opposed to being happy through his (or her)[30] ability to manipulate

[26] Again, this is the sort of relationship that exists between receiving an A on the final exam and an A in the course in the grading example at 137–8.

[27] The Greek here (Τί δέ; ἐν τούτῳ ἡ πᾶσα εὐδαιμονία ἐστίν;) does not specify exactly what the relationship is. This leaves translators to translate according to their favorite theory: Zeyl (1987) translates causally ("Really? Is happiness determined entirely by that?"). Lamb (1925) goes for the constitutive view ("Why, does happiness consist entirely in that?"). W. Hamilton (1960) leaves it as a general and vague dependency relation ("What? Does happiness depend entirely on that?") as I have.

[28] Justice is a virtue and, on the account of virtue which I endorse (see Penner 1973) can be identified with knowledge here just as *arete* would be.

[29] Dodds (1959: 242) makes a convincing case for the notion that καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα καὶ γυναῖκα (a fine and good man and woman) is here (470e9) used non-standardly to indicate a *just* man or woman as it is juxtaposed to ἄδικον καὶ πονηρὸν (unjust and wretched).

[30] Dodds also points out (1959: 243) that this is the only place where Socrates applies *kalos kai agathos* to women.

his environment in a way that affords what he is able to recognize as true happiness.

*Gorgias* 507b reads as follows:

> [I]t follows as a strict necessity, Callicles, that, according to our demonstration, the temperate man, being also just, brave, and pious is the completely good man. And the good man does well and rightly in whatever he does. And he who does well is blessed and happy . . . (507b8–c5)

Here we see that one who possesses all of virtue is a completely good man. The completely good man does well in everything he does, and whoever does well is happy. Here, especially, it seems that being good is connected to happiness through *doing well*. Happiness depends upon doing well. But here it is even less clear that happiness depends on doing well, because it is somehow the *definition* of doing well, rather than the *result* of doing well.[31]

My point, once again, is not to claim that Socrates doesn't consider virtue to be necessary for happiness. Rather, if Socrates does indeed think that knowledge (under the designation *arete*) is necessary for happiness, it is not because it is, somehow, part of the logical analysis of knowledge that it leads to happiness, so that virtue is analytically rather than nomologically "whatever leads to happiness." Nor is it because he thought that being virtuous (knowledgeable) makes a person morally exemplary, and that it is analytically the case that there is nothing to happiness other than being morally exemplary. Socrates was saying that people can manipulate the NGNB (so that it aids them in achieving their goal) by understanding how the world works. In the case of human beings, that goal is happiness.

## INSTRUMENTALISM

Moralistic concerns about instrumentalism, and moralistic concerns about necessity, are closely related. For if virtue is a mere instrument, *and* is not even necessary for happiness, then it is even less likely that I will bother with it.[32] I have already shown why necessity is not an issue for my view. Even if Socrates does believe in necessity, it is inert, and can have no further implications for human behavior other than those that come from virtue's necessity for endeavoring to control one's future.

[31] The scope of "it follows as a strict necessity" is only that the temperate man is the completely good man.

[32] See Taber (2003) for an argument to the effect that a necessary, instrumental means does not present the same intuitive problems as one that is both unnecessary and instrumental.

If necessity is no longer a problem, lingering concerns over instrumentalism betray even deeper moralistic concerns. For now, despite the fact that it is an instrument, it is no longer one about which we do not care and which can be traded in for some other means to our goal. As has already been stated above (116–17 and 128–32), when we claim that something that is *unconditionally* good is a *mere* instrument simply because it is also an *other-generated* good, we render the instrumental/non-instrumental distinction untenable. Virtue is extremely and uniquely valuable, when it comes to furthering our happiness. It has no value in the absence of that quest.

If it is counterintuitive that virtue would not be valued were it not for the fact that happiness is valued, this is because our intuitions have been shaped by post-Kantian moralistic concerns that are foreign to Socratic ethics. Given the culture and philosophical epoch in which our intuitions have been formed, it might not be possible to render Socrates' position intuitive. If the only thing that will allow the view to match these sorts of intuitions is some sort of analytic connection between virtue and happiness – some way of finding virtue to be *the* ultimate in human good – then there is not much more that can be said on this issue.[33] Such opposition will have to be faced on other grounds, and the debates will have to concern the larger issues: can a plausible theory of motivation underwrite this notion of morality? How can we account for this otherworldly notion of morality in our metaphysics?

What Vlastos found unacceptable in the view that, for Socrates, virtue was only instrumental in producing happiness, was the claim that, for Socrates, virtue and happiness are entirely distinct.[34] Vlastos seemed to think that this made it impossible for virtuous activity to constitute happiness, either in whole or in part.[35] Certainly, Vlastos is right that, if virtue and happiness are entirely distinct, then virtue cannot *necessarily – by definition –* be the stuff of which happiness is made. On the view of Socratic ethics which I advance – and within which virtue and happiness are distinct – it is not the case that happiness is necessarily constituted by virtuous activity. It could, however, turn out to be the case that this is the contingent

[33] Although it is hard for me to imagine why this should satisfy the moralist's intuitions. It seems to me that the major point of this sort of moralistic notion of virtue is to *divorce in every way* the question of whether or not a person is good from the question of whether or not she is happy. No one can construe any version of Socratic ethics as intuitive if that is what our intuitions demand! The view will either have to simply understand *eudaimonia* to *mean* virtue (emptying happiness of any intuitively satisfying content – this is the absurdity of the claim that a virtuous person is happy even on the rack), or it will have to deny all of the textual explanations for what motivates a person to become virtuous.

[34] Vlastos 1991, 7. See also Irwin 1977: 300, n 53.

[35] See his 1991: 203–9.

relationship that virtue and happiness have.[36] That is, given the nature of human activity, the way the world is put together, and the nature of happiness, it could turn out that either part or all of human happiness consists in being engaged in virtuous activity.[37] But this is not something to be discovered by analyzing our concepts of virtue and happiness. If it is true, it will be discovered through our efforts to become happy.

## CONCLUSION

Two major theses lie at the heart of Socrates' ethical views: (1) virtue is knowledge; and (2) happiness is the ultimate human good. It is hard to construct a theory that meets the post-Kantian moralist's intuitions from these basic materials. Emphasis on some sort of logical or analytic relationship between virtue and happiness, via the assertion that Socrates considered virtue to be necessary and sufficient for happiness, is the vehicle that scholars use in order to impose post-Kantian intuitions upon Socrates' words.

While it is an open question how strong the nomological connection between virtue and happiness was, according to Socrates, it is not a question that we need to answer. According to the Socratic theory of motivation, the only way to understand the behavior of a person who is not trying to increase his virtue, is as random behavior. Further, Socrates has shown that the pursuit of virtue is not optional for those who wish to attempt to shape their futures. Those who want to become happy do want to shape their futures, and everyone wants to become happy. For those who understand Socrates, a contingent and nomological connection between virtue and happiness is more than sufficient to compel the pursuit of virtue.

[36] As I have pointed out, nothing in the doctrine of the NGNB prevents something from having both self-generated and other-generated value (see 128–32).

[37] I discuss this possibility further in Chapters 8 and 9.

CHAPTER 8

# *Virtue as a science*

In looking at the *Euthydemus*, *Gorgias*, *Lysis*, and *Meno* I have stated that Socrates' theory of the good, the bad, and the NGNB serves as the centerpiece for all his pronouncements on ethics. I now turn to the *Charmides*, for further evidence. Here, we see how this theory concerning the assignment of good and bad values operates as a touchstone for Socratic ethics, even in a dialogue that doesn't develop these ideas explicitly. We also see the profound ramifications that Socrates' commitment to this theory of valuation has for his views on ethics: it eliminates any distinction between virtue and scientific knowledge, as well as any distinction between science and morality.

In the *Charmides*, Socrates discusses the nature of *sophrosune*. This Greek term is most often translated as "temperance" in English, although it is also commonly agreed that "temperance" does not really capture the connotations that this word held in ancient Greek. Some other possible translations are "self-control," "sobriety," "discretion," and "moderation." However, all these indicate a mastery of bodily desires. In his discussions of *sophrosune*, Socrates seems to intend a reference that includes, but also goes beyond, such mastery. He speaks of a well-thought-out approach to all of life's decisions. Thus, "equanimity" might be the best English equivalent of this Greek word. Still, I will use the popular term "temperance" in my discussion.

As is common in the early dialogues, Socrates is less than forthright in stating his own views concerning the nature of temperance. However, we can still discern some important features of his understanding of temperance by reading the *Charmides*. In this chapter, I examine Socrates' views concerning temperance by focusing on those that he conveys more straightforwardly in the *Charmides*, and in other dialogues.

I begin by arguing that, in the *Charmides*, we find evidence for two overarching Socratic themes: Socrates' notion of the good, the bad, and the NGNB; and a Socratic thesis that I will call the "unity of knowledge" (UK). We see these two themes at work in the background in the *Charmides*,

shaping Socrates' thoughts on the nature of temperance. If we pay attention to these two themes, which are central to the early dialogues and to Socrates' own particular views on ethics, we will better understand what Socrates says about temperance in this dialogue. An understanding of NGNB and UK will allow us to see how they guide Socrates' discussion at *Charmides* 170c–175a, and this will allow these themes to aid our own understanding of Socrates' arguments.

I also show that, when Socrates' argument at 170c–175a is understood in light of NGNB and UK, we can draw two further conclusions. First, Socrates did not think that knowledge of the good and the bad was distinct in kind from any other knowledge. He did not distinguish between "moral knowledge" and "scientific knowledge." Rather, Socrates thought that all there is to doing what is *right* or *good* is acting according to the conclusions that one draws from one's scientific knowledge concerning what will be beneficial to one, and help one become happy. In short, he did not distinguish between morality and prudence.[1] Second, Socrates believed that the virtuous person is the person who never errs at producing her own happiness. As a result, he believed that such a person, if she existed, would be the individual who knew everything.

After eliciting Socrates' less-stated conclusions concerning the nature of temperance, we will see that these conclusions underlie his contention at *Protagoras* (329c6–d1) that "virtue is one." My interpretation of the *Charmides* also endorses the view that, when Socrates says "Virtue is one," we should take him literally. All of the virtues name one and the same "state of soul."[2] This is the Unity of Virtue (UV) thesis. Finally, the *Charmides* also resonates with another very widely accepted Socratic theme: virtue – that singular state of soul – is knowledge.

## BACKGROUND THEMES

We are already familiar with one of these background themes: the good, the bad, and the neither-good-nor-bad (Chapter 5). To diagnose how NGNB

[1] Often scholars do not recognize the lack of such a distinction in the Socratic dialogues. Instead, they assume it and read it into the *Charmides* anachronistically. For an example see Tsouna 1997.

[2] See Penner 1973. Penner of course recognizes that this is true of the *Charmides* (1973: 176–7). It seems to me that the modified view that virtues are all caused by a single state of soul but have different *erga* and vary in scope (so the names of the various virtues are not necessarily co-extensive, see Brickhouse and Smith 1994: 68–71), would also compel the view that virtue is the unity of knowledge based on the considerations that I outline in this chapter. Indeed, I believe that even Vlastos' (1972) understanding of the unity of the virtues upon which the virtues are taken to be equivalent rather than identical would be most plausibly defended through the unity of knowledge.

and UK serve as background assumptions in Socrates' discussion of temperance in the *Charmides*, let us familiarize ourselves with UK as well.

### *The unity of knowledge*

One way to characterize the unity of knowledge is to say that, for Socrates, there was only one thing to know – everything. What there is to know is so interconnected that, in order to know any of it, we have to know all of it.

Socrates identified knowledge with virtue. One attraction of treating virtue as omniscience is that it allows us to justify Socrates' alleged belief that virtue is sufficient for happiness.[3] This is not my reason for attributing the view that virtue is UK to Socrates. As I argued in Chapter 7, both sufficiency and necessity are irrelevant to the relationship which Socrates finds between virtue and happiness.

Socrates does, however, claim that virtue is the only thing that allows us to pursue happiness, because it alone allows us to make the best choice available to us in any situation. The doctrine of the NGNB makes it evident that, in this pursuit, no action or object can be anticipated to be more important than any other. Thus, in order to be infallible in making the best available choices, we must be prepared for any situation – we must possess the UK. Possession of it will enable us always to make a better choice: one that yields a better outcome (KAB). Virtue might even allow us to achieve a maximal approximation of happiness. It might allow us to achieve the most happiness available to us in our particular circumstances (WS).[4]

Why might Socrates claim that virtue is the only thing that allows us to pursue happiness, at the same time that he argues that virtue is the UK, or the knowledge of everything? Omniscience is not a possible human achievement. Socrates can't be saying that virtue is the only way to pursue happiness, but since no one can be virtuous, pursuing happiness is not an option. This would make Socratic ethics useless; I would be attributing a view to Socrates that is both uncharitable and implausible. However, this is not the view that I am advancing. I believe that Socrates holds that to be truly virtuous is to be omniscient. I also think that he did not expect any human being to become omniscient. However, I believe that Socrates believed that we should aspire to omniscience. The more knowledge a person has, the more that individual will resemble a virtuous person. People with more

[3] It appears that Reeve endorses omniscience for this reason (1989: 136).

[4] Although it could be the case that, for some people in some situations, maximal happiness is just minimal misery. This will become clear in Chapter 9.

knowledge are better able to purposefully pursue the maximal amount of happiness available to them over a complete lifetime, and so are better able to attain maximal happiness. Thus, the more knowledgeable we are, the less we fall short of being both virtuous and happy. In exhorting those around him to become virtuous, Socrates was encouraging them to become as knowledgeable as possible, in order that they might become as happy as possible. For, even though knowledge doesn't guarantee happiness, it is the only means by which we have *any* control over how happy we become.

As we will soon see, some of the critical evidence for UK lies at *Charmides* 171d. Still, several other early dialogues also contain evidence for it. Anyone who endorses the "Unity of Virtue" (advanced by Penner 1973 and 1992a) in the *Protagoras* and the *Laches* would be committed to the UK. The claim at *Euthydemus* 280a that wisdom never errs seems to require this treatment. Also, at *Meno* 97a–98a, where Socrates distinguishes knowledge from true belief, he describes knowledge as something that is perfectly stable, while true belief is tremendously unstable. True belief can disappear, just as Daedalus' untethered statues. Knowledge, on the other hand, is tethered by a "causal calculation" (αἰτίας λογισμῷ, 98a3–4). But to what is knowledge tethered on the other end?[5] It had better be tethered to something which is itself stable. Thus, it will not be secure if the fastening is to further true beliefs or propositions. It seems that the idea in the passage is something like this: once you have all of the true beliefs in place, these individual pieces gel into a unified whole – a qualitative transition has taken place. Socrates is thinking of knowledge as an interconnected whole. In contrast, mere true beliefs will forever remain scattered bits and pieces.[6]

On a hypothetical note, one might wonder why, if the virtuous person possesses all knowledge, we do not seek out the virtuous person to handle all of our problems from medical to mechanical ones. In a world where there were actual people who possessed the UK, and who were, therefore, virtuous, we would do well to consult the virtuous person for any problem. However, the world in which we live is one where people can get a grasp

[5] The answer is not stated in the text. Neither have I ever seen it puzzled over in the literature on this passage. Most informal discussion seems to confuse the tether itself with that to which it is tethered. People speak as if Socrates is saying that knowledge is *tethered to* the causal calculation, rather than acknowledging that it is the causal calculation which is *itself* the tether.

[6] Thus it seems reasonable to conclude that, as no one will ever be omniscient, no one will ever actually be virtuous. Still, omniscience and virtue are our goal as we strive to have the largest, most interconnected and accurate web of beliefs possible. Although virtue itself would seem to be an absolute for Socrates, our discussions of the virtue of actual people will be rehearsed in the language of "more" and "less." Those who are closer to being omniscient (virtuous) are more able to control their destiny with respect to happiness than are those who have a smaller, less interconnected and less accurate system of beliefs.

of some parts of knowledge and then strive to expand what they have. So, we have doctors who have devoted their time to getting a handle on one part of the web of interconnected truths that make up the world, and we have mechanics with similar achievements. Both are more accomplished in their particular areas than we are, so we consult them on matters relevant to their expertise.[7] But no matter how skillful they are, even the best doctors and mechanics get in over their heads. They might attempt to apply their knowledge to an object in circumstances that require an understanding of the intersection between their own area of expertise and another that is beyond them.[8] Navigators would do well to be experts in meteorology. Doctors in *MASH* units should probably know something about hand grenades and land mines. These experts will err while practicing their own craft in many situations.[9] They are worth consulting, but they are not infallible. Since they are not infallible, what they possess does not rise to meet Socrates' criterion for wisdom.[10]

Yet there are others – like Socrates – who have a certain piece of critical self-knowledge. Socrates knows only that he knows nothing. This most important realization is the feature of Socrates' grasp of the truths that make up the world that makes him worth consulting on every matter. He will tell you, "Have the mechanic look at your car, but be careful."

## A WALK THROUGH THE PASSAGE (*CHARMIDES* 170A–175A)

Familiarity with NGNB and UK will aid our understanding of *Charmides* 170a–175a. The NGNB is *developed* in other dialogues, but it is *applied* in the *Charmides*. Also, a major piece of evidence for Socrates' endorsement of UK is found at *Charmides* 170a–171d.

[7] I believe that this is the way we should understand the "knowledge" that Socrates attributes to the craftspeople at *Apology* 28d. See n. 16, below, for further explanation of this.

[8] And of course their appeal to other experts for assistance on these problems makes them subject to error for an additional reason: they can't recognize experts in a field in which they are not themselves experts. We will discuss and look at the evidence for this very soon when we examine Socrates' argument for "it takes one to know one." (TOKO) (162) at *Charmides* 170d5–171c9.

[9] Someone might object that, when Socrates says that wisdom doesn't err, he is saying that someone who is an expert in *x* never makes a mistake *qua* expert in *x*. At *Republic* 1 342c4–6, Socrates appears to agree with Thrasymachus' suggestion (340d7–341a2) that the ruler, insofar as he is ruler, never makes errors. He responds by saying that the expert *qua* expert does not seek his own good, but the good of the object of expertise. However, Socrates doesn't maintain this. In order to figure out why the just person would ever agree to rule, Socrates has to appeal to the notion that the ruler rules for his own sake (347c–d). In summary, Socrates doesn't see how there can be an expertise called "benefiting the self" that does not include other expertise as well. So the expert in self-advantage must be an expert in everything, even if she is to be an expert only in the precise sense implied by Thrasymachus.

[10] Wisdom never makes a mistake (*Euthydemus* 280a). The virtuous person never errs (*Charmides* 172a).

This passage (170a–175a) can be divided into two arguments that surround a group of interim assertions. The first argument extends from 170a–171d, and contains an important sub-argument. Socrates relies on the conclusion to this sub-argument for the remainder of the dialogue. The interim assertions, which also loom large in Socrates' later arguments, are found at 171d. The second argument extends from 172a–175a.

### *A science of science: 170a–171d*

The first argument explores the supposition that there is a science of science, which is to be identified with temperance. We enter the dialogue at 170a at a moment of transition. Socrates is confused by Critias' assertion that the person who knows himself will know what he knows and does not know (170a2–4). This leads Socrates to abandon the line of questioning concerning self-knowledge, and to turn to an exploration of what exactly is entailed by the supposition that there is a science of science.

Socrates and Critias next agree that a science of science can do no more than determine which things are sciences and which are not (170a6–9). A science of science would not be able to determine what was or was not health, nor what was or was not justice. Only the science of medicine would do the former, and only that of politics would do the latter. The science of science is neither the science of medicine nor the science of politics; it is just knowledge, pure and simple (170a10–b2). This leads them to conclude that the person who has only this knowledge of knowledge (which does not entail knowledge of any particular science, like medicine or politics) will only be able to know *that* he knows or doesn't know something, and *that* others do or do not know something (170b6–10). That is, this person will know *that* he or others know or do not know, but he will not know *what* he or others do and do not know. So if temperance is a science of science, then the temperate person will not know *what* is known or not known but only *that* something is or isn't known (171d1–4).[11]

As Socrates goes on to examine this conclusion further, he and his interlocutors move from a discussion of whether or not there is a science of science to one of whether or not such a science could be of any benefit. Through a sub-argument, they come to realize that such a science cannot deliver anything worthwhile, and so they reduce it to absurdity. So begins a part of the argument that will be critical to both Socrates' and

[11] I assume that, in contrasting knowing *that* and knowing *what*, Socrates is saying that the person who knows *that* another knows something, but not *what* that person knows, is able to identify the area of expertise possessed by that individual, but does not know the content of that area of expertise.

my later discussion. It is instrumental both to the thesis that virtue (which we will see later is also called temperance) consists in the unity of knowledge and to the thesis that knowledge of which actions are good is not distinct from any other scientific knowledge. Here is how the argument goes:

Socrates and Critias agree that, since this so-called temperate person would not be able to establish whether or not others know what they claim to know, he will not be able to distinguish between the true and the false professor of knowledge. A temperate man would not know the true doctor unless he were himself a physician. The same will be true with any other artist or craftsperson; he will only be recognized by the person who possesses his craft or trade, and by no one else (170d5–171e10).

This is a straightforward argument to a conclusion that will guide Socrates' thought concerning the nature of temperance. Let's call this conclusion "it takes one to know one" (TOKO). It can be summarized as:

(TOKO) only a person who possesses a particular science will be able to distinguish a true practitioner of that particular science from a false one.

With this sub-argument, Socrates ends the first argument in the passage.

### *Interim assertions*

The conclusion TOKO leads into a larger vein of Socratic assertions that are made at this point in the dialogue. What follows is an interlude that suggests and confirms many other assumptions. It is during this interlude that Socrates makes what I have called his interim assertions.

At 171d2–172a3 we find the first set of assertions:

If indeed, as we supposed in the beginning, the wise man knew what he knew and what he did not know and that he knew the first and did not know the second, and if he were able to discern this same capacity in another, then we would declare that being temperate is enormously helpful. For we would go through life leading without error both those of us who were temperate, and the rest, who were led by us. We would not try to do that which we didn't know but would seek out those who know and hand matters over to them. Neither would we allow those under our guidance to do anything but that in which they were likely to do well – and they would be likely to do well in what they knew. And in this way indeed the house administered by temperance would be likely to be guided beautifully and also the city that was ruled this way and everything else which temperance ruled. For with error eliminated, guided by correctness, those so disposed would necessarily do beautifully and well in all they did. And those doing well are happy.

If the temperate person could (1) distinguish *what* he knew and didn't know, (2) *that* he knew the one and didn't know the other, and (3) recognize when others had reached the same level, then being temperate would be a great advantage. It would be a great advantage in this case because (1) he would not attempt to do what he did not know how to do, and (2) he would find those who did know, and delegate to them responsibility for what needed to be done. Then, with truth guiding and error eliminated, he would do well and be happy.

The assertions in this interlude again show us a great deal about what is guiding Socrates' thoughts as he ponders the nature of temperance. We see that he believes that

(EE) the elimination of error is required for happiness.

We also see that Socrates believes that error is eliminated by having a person who has knowledge of a science deal with any situation where decisions must be made on the basis of information that can be gleaned from that science. Thus he believes that

(SP) science is that which has the power to enable to us to eliminate error and, so, make ourselves happy.

The interim assertions conclude with Socrates admitting that temperance must be more than knowledge *that* one and others know and do not know. For while such "knowledge *that*" might enable a person to learn more easily (172b1–8), it does not allow a person to live free from error.

### *The science of science vs. the science of good and bad*

But now Socrates is sobered. In his interim assertions, he thought he had convinced himself that, if temperance is a science of science, allowing the temperate person to know *what* he knows and does not know, then the temperate person will be inerrant and do well. Now he is not so sure (172c4–173a1). Charmides asks Socrates to disclose his confusion (173a2). Socrates describes his new insight as a dream that must be examined for veracity (173a7). Thus, we understand Socrates as disclosing his own thoughts and ideas.

Socrates imagines a world in which every act is done according to the sciences, so that the human race is living according to knowledge. In particular, he adds to his long list of sciences the science of prophecy – of knowing all that is to come (173c3–7). He says that even in a world like that, it cannot be shown that happiness will follow (173d3–5).

At this point, Critias jumps in. He states that it is difficult to do well when one is not ruled by knowledge (173d6–7). By having this next observation interjected by the interlocutor and accepted by Socrates without incident, Plato presents another assumption that we can accept straightforwardly and take to be guiding the discussion. Socrates takes the content of Critias' interjection to be obvious. In other words, even though Socrates is here worrying that the completely scientific life might not lead to happiness, it remains clear that he thinks that being unscientific is never beneficial. I will examine this thesis, i.e., the unscientific life is bad, below (166–9).

Socrates does not disagree with Critias that the unscientific life is bad. He does, however, want to focus on a different subject. Socrates wants to know what particular knowledge provides benefit. He enumerates sciences such as shoemaking and brass working, none of which are accepted by Critias (173d7–e5). Socrates asks Critias if he thinks that the happy man lives according to a particular kind of knowledge (περί τινων ἐπιστημόνως) that is beneficial – namely, the knowledge of the future to which he, Socrates, referred in bringing up the prophet at 173c3–7. Critias concurs.

However, the assent is qualified. Critias wants to specify another person who has the knowledge that it takes to live happily. Socrates guesses that this additional person must be the one who knows everything past, present, and future, and *is ignorant of nothing* (καὶ μηδὲν ἀγνοοῖ) (174a6). Critias agrees that such a person would have the particular science that will assure happiness.

At 174a6, Socrates and Critias *postulate* the existence of such a person – a person than whom no one alive is more scientific. They agree that not all of the sciences play an equal role in making this person happy. What allows this person to be happy is knowing the past, present, and future good and bad[12] (174b10). Let us remember what we have already learned about good and bad in the *Gorgias*, *Euthydemus*, and *Lysis*. Good is happiness and bad is misery. The science of past, present, and future good and bad is the science of happiness.

But now Socrates is dismayed. They proceeded on the assumption that temperance was the science of all sciences. Now they see that living scientifically – even if one has mastered all of the sciences put together – is not what allows a person to do well. Rather, it is life according to this one particular science – the science of good and bad – that affords benefit (174c4).

[12] In addition to everything else. Since the subject of the discussion is the person postulated at the end of 173e–174a, we should interpret Socrates as saying that what makes this person happy is knowing the past, present, and future good and bad, which is a part of his knowledge of everything past, present, and future.

Socrates supports this realization through the following reasoning: if you take away the science of good and bad, all of the other sciences will continue to produce their characteristic products, but not in a way that is beneficial to us (174c3–d1). It is important to note that Socrates discusses the inability of the other sciences to benefit us if the science of good and bad is taken away. However, Socrates never entertains the possibility that a person could practice the science of good and bad in the absence of the other sciences. This is evidence that Socrates is still assuming that the subject of inquiry is the postulated person who possesses all of the sciences including the science of good and bad. This will be important to our later discussion (169–71).

Socrates ends this part of his discussion in a puzzling way. He says that the science of good and bad cannot be temperance, because it was hypothesized that temperance is the science *of science and lack of science*, which is not the science *of good and bad* (174d3–174d7). Critias responds by asking if the science of good and bad might indeed be temperance: it is the science of good and bad, but it presides over and governs the other sciences (174d8–e2). Socrates says that the science of temperance was supposed to be beneficial, and the science under discussion produces no benefit; as beneficial products such as health are produced by a particular science such as medicine (174e3–175a8).

I believe that this argument was designed by Plato for the reader to see something that he has Socrates miss, but that is made obvious through the interactions between Socrates and Critias. Temperance is the only science that is properly regarded as beneficial. It must be the science of good and bad (happiness and misery). In order to understand this, however, we must see the science of good and bad as that which harnesses the NGNB products of the other sciences (like health in the case of medicine), in order to make them good through their contribution to happiness. This becomes clear when we solve a series of puzzles that come up in this last argument, in light of the background provided by NGNB and UK.

### *A series of puzzles*

First, at 173d3–7, Socrates and Critias agree that, while the unscientific life is bad and cannot lead to happiness, the completely scientific life is not necessarily good. In other words, Socrates is assuming that even if a person conducts her life in a completely scientific manner, there is no reason to expect her to become happy. This appears strange at first. If the unscientific life is bad, then shouldn't we expect the completely

scientific life to be good? In order to understand Socrates' initial assumption that the completely scientific life is only NGNB, we must recognize that Socrates equivocates on what it is for a life to be completely scientific. At this point in the dialogue, Socrates has not realized that knowledge of what happiness is (knowledge of good and bad, past, present, and future) is scientific knowledge that would be a part of the completely scientific life. In order to understand why the *almost* completely scientific life (the one that lacks the science of happiness) is only NGNB, we must recall Socrates' argument against the tyrants and orators in the *Gorgias*.

Socrates equivocates on what it is for a life to be "completely scientific" in this way: first, Socrates says that the completely scientific life is NGNB; then – once he asserts that the completely scientific life would include the science of good and bad – Socrates gains confidence that it could be good and beneficial. I will argue that Plato portrays this development in Socrates' own thinking regarding the scientific life to help the reader sort out exactly what relationship the science of good and bad holds to all of the other sciences.

A further puzzle must be examined in order to explicate this relationship. What is it that allows a person to do well and be happy? At first, Socrates seems to say that it is possession of all the sciences. However, then Socrates appears to say that it is knowledge of good and bad alone that allows for happiness. I will argue that, while Socrates does say that happiness cannot be attained if the science of good and bad is lacking, he never retracts the position that only the person who possesses all knowledge, and is ignorant of nothing, can make himself or herself happy.

The resolutions to all of these puzzles taken together will allow us to see that Socrates does not distinguish between "moral knowledge" and "scientific knowledge," and that Socrates holds that temperance is identical to all of the other virtues (and consists in the Unity of Knowledge). The life that truly is completely scientific – the one that includes the science of happiness – is good.

### *The initial assumption: the completely scientific life is NGNB*

Socrates rejects the notion that the person who never errs at procuring what any science produces is necessarily able to make herself happy (172e–173a). In order to understand Socrates' rejection of this hypothesis, and how he refines it, we must understand how it interacts with both his views on the

NGNB and his views concerning the relationship between knowledge and happiness.

Socrates uses the NGNB to make a specific point in his argument at *Gorgias* 466a–468e. As we have already seen (26–30), the argument leads to the conclusion that orators and tyrants have the least power in the city. Polus' contention is that, since orators and tyrants can manipulate anyone to do anything, they can always set things up so that they are in control of what others do. Orators do this by persuading people. Now, orators are equally good at any persuasive effort. An orator needn't be concerned with the truth of his or her thesis because success is guaranteed regardless of the truth. Tyrants also manipulate others, but they do it because they have power over them. Tyrants are politically able to force their subordinates to do whatever the tyrants choose. As a result, orators and tyrants can make people do their bidding. Polus concludes that, since orators and tyrants can make people do whatever the orators and tyrants choose, they have the most power. They are to be envied as they can do whatever they want.

Socrates disagrees. He grants that orators and tyrants may be the most able to manipulate others. Still, this does not result in their doing as they *want* (βουλέσθαι); they are only able to do what *seems best to them* (δοκεῖ βελτίστον, 466d8–e2). Doing what *seems best* is not necessarily *beneficial*, for what *seems best* could easily not be what *is* best. We have all been misled by appearances to do that which seemed best at the time, but which we later came to regret. Thus, unless we can be sure that the orator and tyrant are going to make use of their raw power in order to make themselves happy, there is no reason to consider them powerful in any enviable sense. Elephants are very strong, but that does not necessarily recommend their lives to us – it is what one does with one's strength (or raw power) that makes one's life enviable.

This point in the *Gorgias*, and that discussed in the present section of the *Charmides*, are the same. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates treats raw power the same way he treats being completely scientific in the *Charmides*; both are NGNB. The ability to procure any result one might choose is not beneficial unless one is able to use this ability to complement one's desire to procure happiness for oneself, and one's knowledge of what would constitute that happiness. Thus, the ability to procure any result that one chooses through the manipulation of others does not in itself make the tyrant or the orator happy. Hence, it does not make either one of them powerful in the relevant and enviable sense that Polus intends. Likewise, the ability to produce any result because one is an infallible practitioner of the appropriate science

will not alone enable one to become happy. One must, in addition, choose to produce results that are beneficial. Beneficial results are consistent with one's desire for happiness. For the person who does not take advantage of her scientific knowledge in order to complement her desire for happiness and her knowledge of what constitutes happiness, the completely scientific life is NGNB. This is how Socrates conceives of the completely scientific life initially: he starts out thinking that it is NGNB.

Now let's look at why the unscientific life is bad. As we observed earlier (26–8), all we have from the *Gorgias* so far is the reason why orators and tyrants are not the most powerful in the city. Socrates has countered Polus' assertion with the contention that they are the least powerful. Why should this be the case? Socrates seems to harbor the prejudice that orators and tyrants are worse at figuring out what will make them happy than other people are. Can we justify his belief that they are less intelligent in this way? The justification comes from the fact that he regards both orators and tyrants as unscientific.

The way in which orators and tyrants are unscientific helps us to understand why Socrates is comfortable agreeing with Critias that unscientific behavior is always bad, even though being completely scientific is only NGNB. As argued in Chapter 2 (28–30), orators and tyrants are unscientific because they think that knowledge of how things actually are is irrelevant to the question of whether or not they have the power to do what benefits them. Throughout the early dialogues, Plato portrays orators as those who can persuade anyone of any statement, then turn around and persuade the same person to believe the opposite. Whatever sort of practice oratory is,[13] it is one that treats the truth as irrelevant.

Tyrants also treat the truth as irrelevant. Socrates is discussing a "might makes right" tyrant, someone who thinks that he has the power to determine – by decree – what is right and wrong. This is also a practice that treats the truth as irrelevant: the tyrant is not committed to trying to figure out what is right or wrong because the tyrant believes that he *makes* something right by proclaiming that it is so.[14]

The tyrant and the orator don't ever attempt to discover a truth. Therefore, they never try to figure out what will *actually* make them happy, and they never consider the possibility that their attempts to make themselves happy could fail miserably. This reduces – practically to zero – the

[13] As we said in Chapter 2 (28), Socrates considers it a flattery (κολακεία), not a science.

[14] As is a familiar theme from the *Euthyphro*, Socrates thinks that it is nonsense to think that even the gods can make something right by proclaiming that it is so.

probability that they will do what will *actually* make them happy.[15] Thus, to live a life in which one does not even pursue the truth – to be unscientific – is most assuredly bad, as such a practice makes one's own happiness an unreachable goal. While being completely scientific is only NGNB, according to Socrates, being completely unscientific is most assuredly bad.

### *The completely scientific life includes the science of happiness*

At first, when Socrates discusses the completely scientific life, he regards it as one that would not necessarily render the completely scientific person able to make herself happy (173d3–5). Later on, after Socrates and Critias postulate the existence of the man who knows everything (past, present, and future) and is ignorant of nothing, they assume that this person has the knowledge of good and bad, and that it is this knowledge which will enable its possessor to do well (174c4). Is Socrates proposing that there is some difference between the completely scientific person and the postulated man? Is Socrates proposing that something must be added to the scientific life, in order for it to be beneficial?

Many contemporary philosophers would likely assume that what is missing from Socrates' initial understanding of the completely scientific life is something that has "moral" content. After all, science will only offer us the "facts." In the face of scientific "solutions," neo-Humean ethicists are taught to cry out: "Where are the *values*?"

Before saying why I think this is not the appropriate way to interpret this apparent transition in Socrates' thinking, let us clarify exactly what Socrates asserts about the person who can make herself happy. What does she *possess*, and what does she *use*, in her pursuit of happiness? Thus, we will resolve the last puzzle that I mentioned before completing our discussion of whether what is missing from Socrates' initial conception of the completely scientific life is categorically different from what is already there.

On the one hand, at 173e–174a, Socrates says that it is not living according to knowledge that makes a person happy – it is living according to knowledge of certain things (περί τινων ἐπιστημόνως). On the other hand, he says that the science that must be possessed in order to ensure happiness is

[15] See Penner (1991: 164, n. 18) where he argues that the possibility that an unscientific person will luck out and succeed in accomplishing a complicated task (like building a suspension bridge) is too small to be worth Socrates' consideration.

the science of seeing the future (τὸν εἰδότα τὰ μέλλοντα ἔσεσθαι πάντα). Critias does not protest or question Socrates' assertion, nor does Socrates protest when Critias adds to it. Together, they conclude by agreeing that the person who knows everything (past, present, and future), and *is ignorant of nothing* (καὶ μηδὲν ἀγνοοῖ), has the particular science that will assure happiness.

At 174a6–12, Socrates and Critias *postulate* the existence of such a person, calling him "a person than whom no one living is more scientific" (οὐ γάρ, οἶμαι, τούτου γε ἔτι ἂν εἴποις οὐδένα ἐπιστημονέστερον ζῶντα εἶναι). Thus, they seem to equate him with the completely scientific man. But now they bring out the idea that each of the sciences does not play an equal role in making this person happy. What *most* allows this person to be happy is knowing the past, present, and future good and bad. It is important to note that what Socrates and Critias say here is consistent with the notion that all the sciences *do* play a role in making the postulated person happy. It is just that they do not play an *equal* role (οὐδαμῶς ὁμοίως). The postulated person relies on knowledge of past, present, and future good and bad the most (μάλιστα). Thus, Socrates develops and refines his original hypothesis that the completely scientific life is NGNB. Also, as I mentioned earlier (163–5), Socrates discusses the inability of the other sciences to benefit us, if the science of good and bad is omitted. Yet Socrates never entertains the possibility that a person could practice the science of good and bad in the absence of the other sciences. So, he still maintains that in order for a person to do well, she must *possess* all of the sciences, but this is complicated by the fact that she must use those sciences *in accordance with* the science of good and bad.[16]

[16] An anonymous reader questioned my emphasis on craft knowledge, saying that Socrates takes a dim view of the craftspeople in the *Apology*. But, it is worth taking careful note of the precise criticism – and praise – that Socrates has for the craftspeople in the *Apology*. When Socrates questions the politician, he is completely unimpressed. He does not make any qualifying or redeeming remarks about the politician and simply concludes that the politican, while knowing nothing, thinks that he is wise. He next goes to the poets and finds that, rather than wisdom, they have only "a natural gift and divine inspiration" (*Ap*. 22c). When Socrates moves on to the craftspeople he is still disappointed, however, he concedes that here he has found people who have some sense and even some knowledge:

> Those with the best reputation seemed to me to be almost the most lacking . . . and others with lower reputations seemed to be superior men with respect to having sense (φρονίμος ἔχειν). (*Ap*. 22a)
> . . . In the end then, I went to the handworkers. For I understood myself to know nothing to speak of, but I knew that I would find that they knew many fine things. And about this I was not deceived, they knew (ἠπίσταντο) what I did not, and in this way they were wiser (σοφώτεροι) than I. (22c9–d6)

Socrates concludes by saying that the downfall of the craftspeople was that their knowledge of their craft made them unjustifiably confident in areas that did not fall within its domain.

Whether or not Socrates has offered us a specific understanding of temperance, his underlying message seems to be that temperance is the possession of all of the sciences, including the possession of the science of good and bad. Possessing all the other sciences gives the postulated most scientific person access to any NGNB resource he needs, in order to do what the science of good and bad tells him will make him happy in the particular situation in which he finds himself.

It might look as if Socrates is doing exactly what I predicted that neo-Humean ethicists would recommend. He may seem to be taking a purely "factual" body of knowledge and adding some value-laden terms to it in order to give it a morally prescriptive edge. However, I argue that Socrates is doing just the opposite. For Socrates, the science of good and bad is simply the science of what condition is naturally, objectively, and actually the ideal condition for a human being.

## THE SCIENTIFIC OBJECTIVITY OF GOOD AND BAD

According to Socrates, there is one goal that serves as the motivation for all human behavior. Humans are naturally oriented toward the goal of making themselves happy. All human activity is performed in the pursuit of this one singular activity that is engaged in for no reason beyond itself (as we discussed in Chapter 2, 22–4 and 25–6).[17] Socrates does not hold that humans strive to become happy because it has been decreed that they "should" or even because they believe that this pursuit will make them so. They strive to become happy because it is simply impossible for them to do anything else. It might not be obvious to each person that her own happiness is the motivation that structures all her sub-motivations, but she is so motivated nonetheless. The science of good and bad in the *Charmides* is simply that of making oneself happy.

Socrates also believes that questions concerning whether any particular individual is happy are best answered by someone who is an expert on the subject of happiness. He does not think that, as the subjects of our own happiness, we are in a special position with respect to our awareness of it. The fact that someone believes that she is happy does not necessarily constitute evidence for her happiness, as far as Socrates is concerned. Socrates thinks that we establish the fact that a person is happy through the same sort of evidential criteria that we would use to justify

[17] *Meno* 77b–78c, *Euthydemus* 278e. This is also illustrated at *Symposium* 205a (while not generally taken to be Socratic, *Symposium* is a Group 1 dialogue).

our belief that she is intoxicated, or a victim of cancer. As a result, while the expert on happiness might recognize her own happiness through either introspection or from external criteria, the one who is not an expert on happiness might have to defer to the opinion of an expert, in order to figure out what her own status with respect to happiness is.[18] The dialogues are full of examples of people who take themselves to be happy, while Socrates surreptitiously gets the reader to agree that they are not: the politicians in the *Apology*, Polus and the Great King in the *Gorgias*, the possessors of the ring of Gyges in *Republic* 1. Thus, while what enables a person to be happy might differ from person to person, for Socrates, happiness is an objective goal toward which human beings inevitably strive.[19]

As a result, we can see that Socrates thinks that what we today call "values" are dictated by what we today call "facts." He does not think that "facts" and "values" are two categorically different things, where we need at least one from column "B" to combine with our ones from column "A," in order to establish the proper moral prescription in a given situation. Any individual who has an understanding of what will actually make her happy, and has access to all of the NGNB things that the world offers her as resources, will be guided inexorably to do what she needs to do to in order to become as happy as she can be.[20] As Socrates sees it, this is the sole reference for any notion of what she *ought* to do.

A "should" or an "ought" can always be established from an objective situation, if there is an objective goal provided. If I set for myself the goal of baking a chocolate cake, I am suddenly confronted with many mandates that arise naturally from the way in which my goal meshes with the laws of physics and chemistry. I should use flour, chocolate, shortening, and some sort of leavening agent. I should avail myself of a pan, an oven, and the proper utensils. Once the goal is set, prescriptive elements fall out of the state of my environment. Socrates argues that happiness is an objective state, and he combines this with the contention that human beings are naturally and inevitably motivated to pursue their own happiness. He concludes that the person who possesses all the sciences, and knows what her happiness consists in, needs no further "moral" as opposed to "prudential"

[18] I have already discussed Socrates' rejection of the claim that individuals are incorrigible with respect to their own psychological states (39–48).

[19] Gerson makes a nice argument for the objective nature of Socratic happiness (1997: 5).

[20] Of course (as we discussed in Chapter 7) there will still be circumstances beyond her control. As a result, Socrates assumed that knowledge was only sufficient to allow a person to be better off than she would have been without it.

suppositions, in order to establish what she should do to become happy. Another way to say this is that the science of human happiness is not value-laden. Or, one could say that the science of human happiness is no more value-laden than the science of human health, or the science of chocolate-cake-baking.

Those with neo-Humean ethical sensibilities might wish to object that Socrates did need one particular "ought" in order to get his view off the ground: each person ought to pursue her own happiness. This approach anachronistically interjects the current fact/value distinction into Socrates' view. It presumes that Socrates' supposition that all human action is motivated by a desire for the good, which is happiness, must be a *normative fact*, rather than simply a *fact*. This is the point where the above analogy breaks down: we can *choose* to bake a chocolate cake, we can wonder whether or not we *should* bake a chocolate cake. In contrast, Socrates does not think that our pursuit of happiness is something with respect to which it is possible for us to deliberate. He sees it as a fact that the maximization of personal happiness is the goal that governs the purposeful behavior of every human being. It makes no more sense to ask if it is good for human beings to pursue their own happiness than it does to ask if it is good that unsupported objects fall toward the center of the earth. We might find it reassuring, however, to recognize that, for Socrates, the benevolence of human relations is promoted by the further fact that it is impossible for a person to achieve her own happiness at the expense of another's.[21]

Socrates' conviction that all actions and objects are NGNB, dictates the absence of any distinction between fact and value, or between the moral and the prudential. No raw object or action has any independent prudential or moral value – all actions and objects are created equal.

Thus, in positing the postulated man, Socrates is not introducing a new and categorically different kind of knowledge into the completely scientific person's repertoire. Instead, Socrates is realizing that a person who knows everything would also know that she always conducts herself with the goal of becoming happy. Socrates sees that such a person would understand what that goal consisted in, hence would be able to harness the products of all the other sciences in the pursuit of that goal. This is the full answer to the question of what it is to live completely scientifically. Thus it is also the resolution to the second puzzle.

[21] I have already discussed this in Chapter 3.

### A WORSE PERSON MAKES THINGS WORSE

Now we can tie up a loose end from our discussion of egoism (67–8). There we noticed that our defense of Socratic egoism would be more successful if we could give a philosophical defense of the claim that a worse person is more likely to harm another than a better person. This was because the claim that no one benefits from harming another breaks down into this and two other components. Taking the two others [(1) those who are harmed are made worse to the extent that they are harmed, and (2) it is impossible to escape the harm caused by the victim of one's harm] to be empirical, I offered empirical evidence for them. At the same time, I promised to bolster the entire package by showing that Socrates' understanding of virtue would make plain his endorsement of the present claim. We can now appreciate that, since virtue is knowledge, all there is to being a better or a worse person is being a more knowledgeable or a more ignorant person. The more ignorant a person is, the more likely she is to remain unaware of the fact that those who are harmed are made worse and that it is difficult to escape the harm caused by one's victims. As a result, she, in her ignorance, is more likely to harm another than a more knowledgeable (better) person would be.

### CONCLUSION

Once the doctrines of the NGNB and UK are stated and understood, they allow us to access two striking and central theses of the *Charmides*. First, morality is nothing more than science exercised meticulously so that it produces happiness. Second, the virtuous, temperate, and therefore happy, person is the person who has a complete command of every science, which of course includes the science of human advantage. The science of human advantage is simply the science of how to use that which is yielded by all of the other sciences in order to produce happiness, by understanding (1) that happiness is the goal of a human life, and (2) what happiness is.

In support of the first thesis, Socrates shows that our natural and inevitable quest for our own happiness, combined with our grasp of science (which includes an awareness that we cannot benefit at the expense of another), propels us toward what is commonly considered "moral" conduct. Yet Socrates' description entails no supposition that there is a separate and categorically distinct moral realm, inhabited by such things as "values."

In support of the second thesis, Socrates discusses the relationship between knowledge of the sciences and our ability to produce good in

the future. The person who is adept at all of the sciences, apart from the science of human advantage, is adept at producing any outcome whatsoever. However, without the science of human advantage, this person does not know what outcome is desired. Still, the science of human advantage would be useless on its own, since someone with expertise in only this area (or only a limited number of areas) would not be able to develop and utilize the resources necessary for happiness.

Once these two theses are evident, we can determine some of what Socrates would say about temperance. The touchstone of Socrates' discussion of temperance is that it is a great thing, in that the person who has it is able to do well and be happy. Every hypothesis concerning the nature of temperance has been judged and either maintained or discarded in accordance with its ability to fulfill this requirement (159b1–161b2, 167b3–4, 171d1–172a5, 172d2, 174d3–e7, 175a3–4).[22] The exception has been the proposal that temperance is a science of science – a science that allows us to know *that* something either is or is not a science. This proposal was short lived, because nothing could be found that fulfilled that description. While not proposing it as an overt definition of temperance, Socrates has also shown us that the requirement that temperance be beneficial *is* fulfilled by all of the sciences taken together, once it is understood that this would include the science of good and bad.

Most importantly, Plato – purposefully it would seem – creates a certain tension at the end of the dialogue. He gets Socrates to all but state that the solution is to understand that temperance *is* this unity of knowledge that includes the science of good and bad. He does so, however, with dramatic irony: he has Socrates and Critias fail to realize that this is the obvious solution to their own riddles, as they throw up their hands and call it a day.

At 174d–e, Socrates suddenly reverts to the hypothesis that temperance is the science of science. This was already discounted at 172a – because they could not come up with any plausible description of a science of science – but Socrates granted it hypothetically (169d2–5, 172c6–d5). Critias wonders why temperance should not be beneficial even if it is the science of science, as it would then preside over the science of good and bad and would, therefore, be beneficial. Socrates then protests that the science of science cannot be beneficial, since it produces no product. Critias agrees that temperance, *as*

[22] The doctrine of NGNB helps us see that these passages are evidence that Socrates thinks temperance must be beneficial. Several candidates for temperance are suggested, and each is discounted because it is NGNB (can be used for benefit or for ill) – thus Socrates must harbor the assumption that temperance (like knowledge) is always beneficial. See Ferejohn (1984: 114–15), on knowledge as "invariably beneficent."

*a science of science*, cannot be beneficial, since it is craftsman of no beneficial thing. We can almost hear Socrates sigh as he says:

> Do you see then, Critias, that my earlier fears were reasonable and that I was justified in blaming myself for a useless investigation of temperance? Because I don't suppose that the thing we have agreed to be the finest of all would have turned out to be of no benefit if I had been of any use in making a good search. (175a9–b2)

Socrates then recounts all of their earlier reasons for deciding that there is no such thing as a science of science.

Socrates does not consider whether temperance might bear a close resemblance to the science of good and bad combined with all the other sciences. The science of good and bad can direct the person who has all the other sciences to use those sciences and their products to his or her benefit – but it is not a science *of* the other sciences. Plato leaves the reader frustrated that Socrates and Critias fail to pursue this obvious possibility. We want to pose the question loudly to Socrates' retreating back. We mumble to ourselves that, if only we, ourselves, had been Socrates' interlocutors, the whole discussion might have turned out differently. It is easy to think that this tension was designed by Plato just in order to produce this level of philosophical engagement.

Thus, Plato leaves us with the impression that we are to suppose that, if temperance is beneficial, then it is the unity of knowledge. It must be all of the sciences taken together, and we must not forget that this will include the science of good and bad without which no other science can be counted upon to benefit us. Since virtue is knowledge, it seems that we should not regard temperance as a kind of or a part of virtue, but as identical with it. Virtue is *complete* science – the Unity of Knowledge.

CHAPTER 9

# *Happiness, virtue, and pleasure*

We now come to know Socrates' thoughts on the NGNB rather well. We have analyzed Socrates' description of it in the *Gorgias* and *Euthydemus*, we have seen how it informs his discussion of friendship in the *Lysis*, and we have noted its operation as a background assumption in the *Charmides*. We have also seen that it allows us to discern an appropriate Socratic connection between virtue and happiness. In this chapter, we will look at yet another dialogue in which Socrates' views on the NGNB loom large, despite the fact that there is no direct mention of it. We will see that Socrates' assertions in the *Protagoras*, that pleasure is what is good and pain is what is bad, also get their stark and elegant structure from his thesis concerning the good, the bad, and the NGNB. Once we recognize that Socrates' discussion of pain and pleasure in the *Protagoras* contains both the structure and the substance of his views on the NGNB, we will begin to at least approach an answer to the question of what Socrates thought happiness was.

## PAIN AND PLEASURE IN THE *PROTAGORAS*

We have already discussed *Protagoras* 351b–358e as our source for Socrates' rejection of *synchronic belief akrasia* and *knowledge akrasia* (77–81). Now, without repeating that argument, I will look at this text once more, to note the fact that his assertions concerning pain and pleasure echo, and are dependent upon, the rubric of the good, the bad, and the NGNB (which is set up elsewhere).

At 353c–354e, Socrates establishes that while people in general believe that they can be overcome by pleasure because pleasure is at times bad, this is not because they think that the pleasure in question is itself bad. The only reason that anyone has for believing that pleasure is bad, is that it brings on bad consequences – by storing up disease and poverty for the future. Protagoras agrees with Socrates' conclusion that people in general would say that "bad pleasures"

are not bad on account of the pleasure of the moment [which they give], but on account of their after-effects in the form of diseases and the like. (353d7–e1)

After establishing this, Socrates secures Protagoras' assent to the claim that only when diseases and poverty cause pain – pain which eclipses the pleasures that were provided earlier – are they thought to be bad (353e5–354a1).

Socrates next establishes the parallel claim for "good pain." Protagoras allows that it would generally be agreed that when goods are spoken of as "painful," they are actual pains that are considered good in a remedial or therapeutic sense. Exercise, military service, and medical treatments are actually painful. These pains are merely called "good" because they store up more pleasure for the future than they provide pain in the present (354a–c). In fact, at the end of this passage Socrates says:

Are these things [therapeutic pains] good for any other reason than because they culminate in pleasure and eliminate and ward off pain? Are you looking to any other end apart from pleasure and pain when you call them good? Wouldn't they [people in general] acknowledge that they are not? (354b5–c2)

Protagoras agrees that they are not.

We see that two familiar things are true of the way in which pains and pleasures – especially those that are a means to some further good – are being evaluated. First, they are being evaluated *strictly on the basis of that towards which they are a means*. These pleasures and pains thus viewed are only *conditionally* good or bad. Now if pleasures and pains were to have *self-generated* value, presumably pleasure would be a self-generated good and pain a self-generated bad (we will discuss the implications of this shortly). In the dialogues that we have examined up to this point, Socrates attempts to evaluate everything other than happiness and misery by reference to happiness and misery. In the *Protagoras*, we seem again to have two opposites with self-generated value – pain and pleasure – from which everything other than them derives its value. Pleasure and pain in the *Protagoras* are analogous to happiness and misery elsewhere. Also, as we will soon see, in the *Protagoras*, knowledge (here called "the measuring art") will turn out to be an unconditional, other-generated, good, while ignorance will turn out to be an unconditional, other-generated, bad. Knowledge gets its good value from the fact that it always – and in all circumstances – increases pleasure (or, at least, decreases pain), while ignorance is bad because it always increases pain.

The second familiar point contained in this description of conditionally good pains and pleasures is the fact that they are to be evaluated by looking

at self-generated pain and pleasure *alone*. There is no further consideration – like an imported "moral" one – that must be entertained in addition to a scientific examination (using the "measuring art") of which actions will lead to more pleasure and less pain over a complete lifetime. This is what we have just seen in the *Charmides*, as well (Chapter 8). In fact, in his translation of 354b7 (quoted above), Jowett translates τέλος as "standard" rather than "end," presumably because he believes that the surrounding context makes this point so clearly.[1]

While this is compelling, it raises a question, the apparent answer to which has often disturbed interpreters of this text. What is the relationship between pleasure and happiness? If Socrates speaks of pleasure as the only self-generated good here, and speaks of happiness as the only self-generated good elsewhere, must we assume that he is equating the two? Is Socrates a hedonist?

## HAPPINESS AND PLEASURE

What is Socratic happiness or *eudaimonia*? Some of what Socrates says in the Group 1 dialogues seems to point toward hedonism. However, the statements that he makes about the relationship between pleasure and the good also seem inconsistent from dialogue to dialogue. At *Gorgias* 500d, Socrates refutes Callicles' claim (*Gorgias* 495a–d) that "pleasure and good are the same." But at *Protagoras* 351e5–6, he asserts that goodness *is* pleasure. How should this contradiction be resolved? Some have proposed that it be resolved in favor of the claim that goodness is not pleasure. They say that virtue has also been identified with the good, and it does not seem plausible that Socrates should have considered virtue to be pleasure.

## MODAL PLEASURE

Rudebusch (1994, 1999) has argued that we can resolve the contradiction in favor of the view that goodness is pleasure, if we are careful to discern the Socratic reference of "pleasure." In other words, there are different hedonisms. The *Gorgias* is an attack on one particular kind, which Rudebusch calls *ethical Protagoreanism*, while the *Protagoras* is a defense of another kind, which Rudebusch calls *modal* or *Socratic hedonism*. According to Rudebusch, the inconsistency surfaces only if we assume that Plato

[1] Jowett's translation (in Ostwald 1956) reads, "Are you looking to any other standard than pleasure and pain when you call them good?"

uses "pleasure" to indicate "sensate pleasure" in both the *Gorgias* and the *Protagoras* passages. Rudebusch argues that, in the *Protagoras*, it is likely that Socrates was referring to something that might be called "modal pleasure." While the account of hedonism defended by Callicles in the *Gorgias* takes pleasure to be a sensation, the pleasure that is identified with the good in the *Protagoras* is modal, not sensate, pleasure (1999: 19–63).

Rudebusch describes a modal pleasure as an activity that fulfills a natural human capacity. Borrowing from Aristotle and Ryle, Rudebusch describes modal pleasure as follows:

> Modal pleasures are things done in a certain way: they are done effortlessly or without boredom, or are approached in a certain way, or have a particular value to a person. By contrast, sensate pleasures are the feelings that result from what is done. (1999: 68)

> [Modal pleasures] are absorbing. One approaches their activity with anticipation and is unwilling to break away from it. They have some value to one's life. (1994: 167)

In contrast with my own view (Chapters 6–7), Rudebusch's view is that Socrates identified both virtue and modal pleasure with the chief good:[2]

> Socratic argument entails that, for a human being, living well, living pleasantly, and living virtuously are one and the same. (1994: 170)

Rudebusch argues for this identification because a modal account of pleasure allows Socrates to identify pleasure with a skillful activity and, in turn, with a virtuous one (1999: 125).

Rudebusch begins by citing *Republic* I (349b–354a), where Socrates argues that true pleasure for a human being is virtuous activity (1999: 126). He then concludes that Socrates believed that the greatest good for a human being is to perform skillful, virtuous, activity, and that this is a modal pleasure for any person, as it fulfills a natural human capacity. In fact, it fulfills our natural human capacity *qua* human beings. Rudebusch concludes that Socratic *eudaimonia* – which is the greatest human good – consists in modal pleasure.

While I agree that modal pleasure *can* be identified with some instances of skilled activity, I don't see that it must be. Furthermore, it is not clear to me that just any skilled activity will turn out to be virtuous. Thus, it is not clear that all modal pleasure is good. The theory of NGNB dictates that

[2] As I argued in Chapter 6, it would be a mistake to think that Socrates considered virtue the chief good. Virtue is the only unconditional, other-generated good. Happiness is the chief good: it is a self-generated good and virtue derives its value from happiness.

skilled activities are NGNB unless they lead to happiness, in which case they are good; when they lead to unhappiness, they are bad. Socrates' discussion of pain and pleasure in the *Protagoras* dictates that modal pleasures are not identifiable with happiness, if modal pains outweigh them. Thus, just as there is no strict identity between skilled and virtuous activity, neither is there one between modal pleasure and happiness.

While I believe that Rudebusch is correct in resolving the tension between the *Gorgias* and the *Protagoras* by interpreting Socrates' claims about pleasure in the *Protagoras* as claims about modal pleasure, I find Rudebusch's further assertion – the identification of modal pleasure and *eudaimonia* – to be overstated. I find it troubling for another reason, as well. The identification would eliminate causal direction from the relationship between virtue and modal pleasure. As we have seen in the *Euthydemus* and the *Apology* (Chapter 6), it is the fact that a person is virtuous that allows her to construct her activities in a way that affords modal pleasure in her experiencing them. So, there should be a distinct causal direction to the relationship between virtue and modal pleasure. Virtuous activity gives rise to modal pleasure; the experience of modal pleasure does not make a person virtuous.

Rudebusch tries to deal with this concern by saying that only *some* modal pleasures should be identified with virtuous activity and *eudaimonia* (1999: 109–12). Human beings have natural capacities for taking pleasure in the suffering of others. While witnessing others' misfortunes, many people react in ways that fulfill all the criteria mentioned in Rudebusch's description. Clearly, if *eudaimonia* is to be identified with modal pleasure, it must be identified only with those modal pleasures that fulfill capacities that we possess *qua* human beings (not *qua* doxaphilists or sensationalists or whatever deviant proclivities we have). However, it's not clear to me that this can be found in the text. As we have just seen, there is no indication in the *Protagoras* that Socrates intends us to use the measuring art to do cost/benefit analysis on some pleasures and not others. In fact, the major point that I have made above is that he seems to think that we should pursue a life in which there is more pleasure than pain *period*. Socrates does not think that we need to bring any further considerations – including so-called moral ones – into our evaluation of net pleasures as good and net pains as bad.

Does Rudebush think that we can simply assume that, according to Socrates, only modal pleasures that are also activities in accordance with human virtue will win out in the final analysis? If so, then we won't have to assume that Socrates is simply advocating that we pursue modal pleasures

that do not store up inordinate amounts of pain for the future, without any concern for whether or not they actualize our capacity for virtue. However, if we say that Socrates was confident that any modal pleasure that did not store up pains that overrode it in the future would necessarily be the one that employed a virtuous activity and actualized our human *qua* human capacities, then we run into a second problem. It begins to look as if *eudaimonia* is tremendously accessible according to Socrates. Looking at a beautiful view of the mountains could easily constitute a modal pleasure for which one did not have to pay a dear price in subsequent pain. Is it therefore virtuous? Do people who engage in these activities experience a fleeting moment of actual *eudaimonia*, in all of its glory? It has long been claimed that Socrates thought that knowledge, virtue, and happiness were out of human reach.[3] It is true that this view has recently been challenged.[4] However, even those who maintain that Socrates did consider *eudaimonia* a possible human activity, seem to think he held that it was very rare – more rare than it would be if it were simply identified with modal pleasures that are not outweighed by future pains.

I believe that there is still a further problem with Rudebusch's solution. As I have argued in Chapter 6, I do not believe that Socrates holds that virtue is to be identified with *eudaimonia*. Virtue is an unconditional, but not a self-generated, good, while *eudaimonia* is a self-generated good. Nor, as I have already argued in Chapter 7, do I believe that Socrates holds that virtue is sufficient for happiness.

Despite the problems with Rudebusch's view, I do think that he is right to point to modal pleasure as the dimension of pleasure that Socrates has in mind in the *Protagoras*. I agree that, by embracing modal pleasure as a possible referent of "pleasure," we can see that Socrates is condoning a certain kind of hedonism in the *Protagoras*. Also, Rudebusch is right that Socrates can call pleasure good in the *Protagoras* without contradicting his denial of the claim in the *Gorgias* that (sensate) pleasure and good are the same.

In fact, if we allow that the *Protagoras* is building upon what has been said about good and bad in the *Gorgias*, *Euthydemus*, and elsewhere, we find yet another textual argument for the claim that Socrates thinks that happiness, the only self-generated good, is some kind of pleasure. If Socrates thought that the pleasure discussed at 353c–354e were a NGNB that becomes

[3] It is generally accepted that Socrates believed virtue is necessary for happiness (see Brickhouse and Smith 1994: 104, n. 3 for a list of scholars who agree to this thesis). Since virtue is knowledge and knowledge is unattainable, happiness is also out of reach.

[4] Brickhouse and Smith argue that Socrates considered himself happy (1994: 124, 130).

good when it contributes to happiness, he would not have concluded his argument by saying:

> Then you think that pain is bad and pleasure is good. You even deem pleasure bad when it robs you of greater pleasure than it gives or causes pains greater than pleasures. If, however, you call pleasure "bad" because of any other end or standard beyond that which I've just mentioned, you would be able to show us that standard, but you have none to show. (354c5–354d3)

This is different from what Socrates said about actions and objects in the *Gorgias*. He is not appealing to happiness or "doing well" (εὖ πράττειν) in order to assign a good or bad value to any pleasure or pain. He is treating pleasure as a *self-generated* good, and pain as a *self-generated* bad. From all that we have seen so far, happiness is the only self-generated good, misery the only self-generated bad. If that is the case, then it seems that he is equating pleasure with happiness, and pain with its opposite. Socrates appears to have emerged as a hedonist – but not as a *sensate-pleasurist*.

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF PLEASURE AND PAIN TO MAXIMAL HAPPINESS

Rudebusch describes modal pleasures with help from Ryle, who argues that when we look carefully at the way we talk about pleasures, we see that

> pleasure is not a sensation at all, and therefore not a sensation on one scale with an ache or a twinge. (1954: 58)

> Pleasure cannot be thought of as something that can, in itself, be quantified by duration. (ibid. 59)

Sensations occur some*where* and at some*time*; pleasure does not. To be clearer about the non-identity between pleasure and sensation, Ryle often prefers to substitute the word *enjoyment* for pleasure.

As both Ryle and Rudebusch observe, this understanding of pleasure is sympathetic with Aristotle, who says that "pleasure should be defined as an activity in accordance with one's nature," rather than as a "phenomenal event" (*E.N.* VII.12.1153a13–15).

Now Ryle, correctly, warns against an understanding of pleasure and enjoyment that would make it an agitation that transports one in a way that impedes rationality (1949: 108–9). Just as there is modal pleasure, we might want to think of this sort of agitating experience as a "modal pain." If something is a pleasure or an enjoyment, it should be one because it enhances our rationality by making us immune to distractions. This is why

Aristotle finds *eudaimonia* to be most compatible with *theoria*, which is a state of rationality that is enhanced by a disregard for purely practical matters.

Ryle also notes another significant feature of modal pleasure and pain. It is possible to experience a modal pleasure while experiencing sensate pain. As he demonstrates,

> [E]ven though what a person has felt is properly described as a thrill of pleasure or, more specifically, as a tickle of amusement, it is still a proper question whether he not only enjoyed the joke but also enjoyed the tickled feeling that it gave him. Nor should we be much surprised to hear him reply that he was so much delighted by the joke that the "tickled" feeling was quite uncomfortable. (1949: 109)

It is also the case that we can experience sensate pleasure during episodes of modal pain. One could imagine a person confessing to feelings of self-loathing and disgust, upon using someone for whom she does not especially care as a vehicle for sexual pleasure.

Sensate pain can also be good in a representational sense. It can warn of danger, present and impending injury, or disease. Sensate pain can also indicate something good. Pain can indicate that a muscle is being stretched or that a nerve is intact, both of which can occasion a modal feeling of joy and satisfaction. Even modal pain can be a useful indication that something is amiss. If I find my job boring or my best friend's conversation tedious, I do well to pay attention to, and rectify, these situations in some way. Making constructive use of these signs might well increase my modal pleasure.[5]

Socrates' description, in the *Protagoras*, of the use of the measuring art to conduct cost/benefit analyses of pain and pleasure shows us that he saw both sensate and modal pleasures and pains as the conditional goods that allow us to achieve the maximum amount of happiness that we can have over our lifetimes. I believe that, when we try to achieve this, we are trying to maximize something similar to what Rudebusch calls modal pleasure. Thus, our lives are made up of individual episodes that contain sensate pains, sensate pleasures, modal pains, and modal pleasures. Our goal is for our life to have as much of its duration as possible caught up in episodes that afford modal pleasure. Our experience of maximal happiness seems to consist in

[5] Apart from one exception, which I mention in n. 9, I think that all of this is consistent with Rudebusch's highly instructive representational account of sensory pain and pleasure (1999: 81–96). However, I disagree that sensate pleasures and pains are only valuable as representations. I also would argue (as I just have) that modal pleasures and pains can have representational value.

these experiences of modal pleasure. Still, it is not clear to me that Socrates wants to say our experience of an episode of modal pleasure *is* an experience of happiness. Rather, I would argue that he thought modal pleasure brought us closer to happiness.[6] When we experience the greatest possible amount of net pleasure over the course of our lives, we are experiencing maximal happiness.[7]

## COMMENSURABILITY

Of course, the foregoing discussion assumes that all of these pleasures and pains are commensurable with one another. This is not surprising. In fact, the entire Socratic theory of desire, discussed in Chapter 2, is dependent upon commensurability:

> For Socrates, Aristotle and the modern decision theorist, there is only one such substitution device.[8] . . . On the other hand, some modern philosophers have (in effect) asserted not only that there is a plurality of such substitution devices – prudential good, moral good, pleasure, honor, and so forth – but also that there is no *one* substitution device by means of which all the different *desiderata* can be assessed against each other. At this level of generality, one must, as the existentialists say, just *choose*. Our ultimate values are *incommensurable*. (Penner, 1990: 61, n. 23, italics in original)

Furthermore, as Rudebusch (1999: 21–3) argues, Socrates' denial of *akrasia* is also dependent upon the claim that all pleasures are commensurable. Is there any reason to resist this claim?

An incommensurabilist might argue that, while such things as the size of an object or the loudness of a noise can be quantified, thus measured and compared on an interval scale, it is not clear that magnitudes of pleasures and pains – particularly modal pleasures and pains – can be. However, as Rudebusch argues in response, in order to be commensurable, pains and

[6] This parallels what I say about virtue in Chapter 8, n. 6. I suspect that Socrates thought that both virtue and happiness were absolutes that human beings could not reach. Still, just as those who have a larger, more interconnected, sophisticated and accurate system of beliefs will be more like virtuous people, those who experience greater modal pleasure over the course of their lives are experiencing something more like happiness.

[7] I would argue (*pace* Rudebusch) that sensate pleasures count as well. If we are choosing between two lives that contain the same amount of net modal pleasure, we do well to choose the one with more net sensate pleasure.

[8] Of the sort that we referred to in Chapter 2 (33–4).

pleasures need only be comparable on an ordinal scale.[9] He points out that even an incommensurabilist like Taylor agrees that this is possible:

> We are quite happy to say that we enjoyed something more than we normally do or less than someone else did. (Taylor 1991: 198).

In fact, I would argue that commensurability is more plausible than its opposite. If incommensurability is true, then how can we explain why a person takes one of two incompatible courses of action, where each course has been individually deemed "best," from the point of view of a criterion or standard that is relevant to it, and not to the course of action against which it is being compared? Once we assume that the criteria relevant to each course of action are incommensurable, there is no way to understand either the motive or the choice as rational. Incommensurability leaves us with a theory according to which a very large percentage of human behaviors are immune from rational explanation. A theory that assumes commensurability possesses far more explanatory power.[10]

## VIRTUE AND THE MEASURING ART

So we find ourselves, once again, with a Socratic thesis that specifies exactly one thing that is a self-generated good, and exactly one that is a self-generated bad. These are pleasure and pain, respectively. Pleasure, in this case, turns out to be happiness, and pain turns out to be misery. We also find that all things that are not pain or pleasure get their value from their relationship to pain and pleasure. Now, we must figure out how the modal and sensate pleasures and pains that are a means to our overall maximal happiness get their value.

We will remember from our original discussion of the *Protagoras* (79–81), that Socrates hypothesizes that the phenomenon of "being overcome by pleasure" (which we called *diachronic belief-akrasia*) is partly a function of the fact that our ability to correctly measure the amount of pleasure and pain that will be afforded by an object or activity changes, with our distance

[9] Rudebusch 1999: 88. He finds commensurability obvious as he argues that the intrinsic value of sensate pleasures comes only from their modal aspect (1999: 95–6). I, on the other hand, recognize the possibility that – even if it is only rarely experienced – modal pleasure can be the direct result of sensate pleasures that are not eclipsed by sensate pain (see n. 7). Thus, in order to make judgments about whether an anticipated experience will be a modal pleasure, we will need to assign value to sensate pleasures as well. Thus, commensurability will need to extend over both modal and sensory experience.

[10] For further argument along these lines see Berman 2003.

from that pain or pleasure. Socrates makes it clear that he thinks that this error is due to the fact that pains and pleasures appear to deliver different things, from different perspectives. Socrates compares this phenomenon to the fact that it is more difficult to judge the relative sizes of two objects, or the relative loudness of two noises, if one stands at different distances from each.

With respect to how this phenomenon works for pleasures and pains, he goes on to say:

> Now suppose doing well consists in doing or choosing the greater, and in not doing or in avoiding the less. What would save us in life? Would it be the art of measuring or the power of using one's senses? Isn't the latter that deceiving art that makes us wander up and down and take at one time the things of which we later repent, both when it comes to our actions and in our choice of large and small things? But the art of measurement would invalidate the powers of the senses and would show the truth, and by giving us peace of mind in showing us this truth, would it save our lives? (*Prt.* 356c8–356e2)

Socrates continues by saying that, if this is the case, then the principle that makes for the salvation of our lives would be knowledge (357a). He concludes by saying that since (1) the salvation of human life has been found to consist in the right choice of pleasures and pains, and (2) this means choosing pleasures and pains with respect to more vs. fewer, greater vs. less, and nearer vs. farther, then (3) this measuring must be a consideration of their excess, defect, and quality, in relation to one another. As a result, the measuring art is a science, and is therefore knowledge (357b–c).

How does what we have just seen Socrates say about science and knowledge resonate with what we have encountered elsewhere in the early dialogues that discuss virtue and the NGNB? For one thing, in the *Charmides* (169–71), we saw Socrates investigate the claim that the person who could make herself happy would be the one who knew past, present, and future goods and bads. This sounds as though it refers to the person who possesses what has now been called the "measuring art," in the *Protagoras*.[11] In the *Charmides*, we also found Socrates arguing that only scientific considerations need to be taken into account, in making ourselves happy. This is what Socrates has just said in the *Protagoras*, as well. All we need to look at is what will ensure more pleasure and less pain, where objective criteria determine what counts as pain and what counts as pleasure. In the *Charmides*, it looked as if we would need all knowledge, or the "unity of knowledge,"

[11] Rudebusch agrees that Socrates means to identify these two sciences (1999: 90).

to ensure that we would make ourselves as happy as possible. It seems the measuring art can evaluate every instance of pleasure and pain in such a way that its predictions concerning what will outweigh what remain stable, no matter what our perspective in time. Thus, the measuring art appears to amount to the same comprehensive knowledge as that described in the *Charmides*.

We have agreed that virtue is knowledge, as far as Socrates is concerned. Just as was evident in the *Euthydemus*, we seem now, also, to see knowledge, here called "the measuring art," to be an unconditional good. Possession of this art will make one able to choose actions and objects in a manner that promotes happiness – rather than impeding it – every time. Still, why is the measuring art a good thing to have? Not because it is a self-generated good – measuring pain and pleasure isn't good because of its own inherent properties as an activity. It is good because it is the unique strategy through which a person makes no mistakes in furthering her happiness. The measuring art does not have a self-generated value. Its value comes from its very solid connection to happiness. Nothing I have said (and nothing said in the text) prohibits an episode of measuring from being an episode of modal pleasure (cf. 131). Still, nothing that is said in the text *requires* that practice of the measuring art be accompanied by modal pleasure. Rudebusch seems to think that there is a necessary relationship between the practice of the measuring art and modal pleasure. He speaks as if modal pleasure is always an epiphenomenon of the practice of the measuring art (and of any other skilled activity). This is why he identifies modal pleasure with virtue and happiness. The *Protagoras* says nothing to promote this as a necessary connection, and the *Euthydemus* militates against it.

## CONCLUSION

The measuring art is Socratic virtue. It is also that which allows us to make actions and objects good. It does this by allowing whoever possesses it to choose actions and objects that it then makes good. The virtuous person makes these actions and objects good by using them, in accordance with this knowledge, in activities that give rise to sensate and modal pleasures and pains. She chooses her activities, with the result that she endures more modal pleasure or happiness over the course of her life.

CHAPTER 10

# *Reflections on Socratic ethics and the demystification of morality*

Upon being asked what is pious, the character Euthyphro in Plato's *Euthyphro* eventually responds with "what is loved by the gods" (10d–11c). Socrates does not dispute this, but neither does he find it satisfying. Socrates questions Euthyphro further: is a thing pious because the gods love it, or do the gods love it because it is pious? Even today, this is appreciated as a compelling argument against the notion of divine decree. It can't be the case that what is good or morally right is so *only* because God has decided that it is so. For, how did God choose and decide which actions to love and condone? Did God choose arbitrarily? Did it just so happen that murder ended up on the list of things that are morally wrong, when it could have, by God's whim, been condoned as right? Even if we choose our actions because we think that God approves of them, the argument in the *Euthyphro* suggests that God's love does not make these actions right – God came to love them because they were, somehow, *already*, morally correct. If this is the case, then there is a moral truth that is independent of God. This conclusion has often (I think, incorrectly) led philosophers to suggest that there are abstract and universally applicable moral truths or principles that antedated human existence, and that should govern our conduct – if we can only figure out what they are.

This same argument – written small – has been used against moral relativism. To say that what is morally correct (in a given society or culture) is to be determined solely by the practices and beliefs of the individuals in that culture brings up a necessary query: how did the individuals in any culture come to make the decisions that they did, concerning what would be their practices and their beliefs? To what did they look? It cannot be that cultural values originate by examining what the cultural values already happen to be. Again, there is the hint that the development of cultural practices arose from the application of more abstract beliefs about what was true about the world in some objective sense. While we might use relativism to *justify* cultural beliefs and practices, it is baffling to imagine that

theoretical relativism was itself at work in the formation of any particular society's beliefs and cultural practices. Once again, many believe that this argument against relativism points toward a commitment to some notion of abstract, universally applicable, moral principles.

Hume (1888, 469–70) is known for having taken this reasoning one step further. The mere observation of facts about the world can never be the sole determinant of moral behavior. To know what we *ought* to do on any given occasion, we must bring down one of these moral principles and apply it to the facts at hand, in order to determine what behavior is to be condoned as moral in our particular situation. An *ought* cannot be derived from a bunch of *is*'s; if there is to be an "ought" in the conclusion, there must be at least one "ought" in the premises, as well.

Insights that suggest that the moral worth of actions and objects is dictated by these universal moral principles contrast with what I have, herein, shown Socrates to have thought. This is a welcome turn of events, because the notion of an otherworldly moral truth – to which we must adhere through the force of reason alone – has left moral theory burdened by a significant amount of mystery. How did the universal moral truths come to be? Why are there these particular moral truths and not others? What exactly do we investigate in order to discover these universal moral principles? Are such principles even a possible object of human investigation? More importantly, why are we supposed to be invested in these moral principles? If we do follow them because we are somehow *supposed* to – rather than because we *want* to – how do we explain our own adherence to them and our entreating of others to do the same?

In exposing his own theory of the good, the bad, and the neither-good-nor-bad as the centerpiece of ethics, Socrates has removed this framework and demystified any abstract notion of good and bad objects and right and wrong action. Rather than citing universal moral principles from which we derive the prescription for action, Socrates has proposed that all human beings have a natural and objective goal toward which they are inevitably driven – their own happiness. Scientific appreciation of what it would mean to actualize this goal (including the acknowledgment that it is unlikely to be attained at the expense of another person's realization of the same goal) allows us to deliberate about our actions strictly on the basis of whether or not they will further us on this mission. This is the sole criterion that determines which actions and objects are either good or bad. I grant that such scientific investigations are difficult to carry out, and far from foolproof, but there is no mystery. There are no unanswered questions that are reserved for some higher level of discourse. There is no point at which we throw

up our hands at something that demands a leap of faith. We mere humans might be incapable of discerning exactly which actions are good and why. But we are not incapable of understanding what theoretically renders an action good or bad, and why we are driven to do that which is good, and avoid that which is bad.

This suggests that the gods love what is pious because it is good. But what is good is good because it furthers an individual human's happiness. The gods don't make NGNB things good by loving them. The gods are in a position to understand the laws of nature and to see where the various concrete possibilities lead. The gods have objective criteria for loving some actions over others, not because they have access to a set of moral principles that are above and beyond them, but because they are not limited in their ability to evaluate what will lead to what for human beings in this world.

Human beings are confined by space and time. This limits the extent of our knowledge. How the world is put together, and how we might work with the way that the world is, in order to bring about our ultimate goal, is the objective truth that we must discover. We are virtuous if we are experts in this. Virtue does not consist in knowledge of some amorphous moral "facts" of inexplicable origin. Virtuous people take advantage of their resources by means of their knowledge of laws of nature and how those laws of nature can be applied to situations in which they find themselves. Their virtue allows them to use their knowledge, skills, and everything else available to them, to the best possible end for them. Virtue is good because it is what *we* use in order to make the NGNB good.

The Plato of the *Republic*, Aristotle, and Kant (among others), each in his own way, worried that desire and emotion could cloud our perception and interpretation of these moral principles. Kant, in particular, thought that the pollution of reason by desire and emotion makes our realization of these truths very unlikely. Thus, isolating reason from desire was, for Kant, essential to the contemplation of right and wrong action: unless we perform an action strictly because reason shows that we should, and guard against desire's contribution of a motive, we cannot be certain that we are indeed performing a moral action. In contrast, Socrates argues that there is no reason to fear desire and emotion, when they are guided by knowledge, and that nothing other than knowledge can guide them.

Having cleared away many of the ethical assumptions that were foisted upon us by those who came after Socrates and Plato, we now see in the Socratic dialogues an understanding of ethics that is elegant, sophisticated, and plausible. At the same time, this new rendition avoids many of the pitfalls, and clarifies many of the puzzles, that have plagued other

interpretations of Socratic ethics. I believe that the interpretation of Plato's Socratic dialogues, and the discernment of a plausible Socratic ethics, are inseparable tasks. I also believe that the diagnosis of Plato's intentions from his text is a fascinating undertaking. I believe that I have given credible evidence to the thesis that Plato intentionally attributed to Socrates the view of ethics that I have described in these ten chapters. Still, the most profound effect of the study of Plato comes from its ability to focus our attention upon potentially independent theories that merit investigation and development. The question of whether or not the theory I have elucidated is the one that Plato had in mind, *can* be separated from the question of whether or not this is a theory that will help us in our endeavors, as we attempt to answer the many timeless and provocative philosophical questions that beg for our attention.

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