VIRTUE, KNOWLEDGE, AND WISDOM: BYPASSING SELF-CONTROL

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I

SOCRATES' CLAIM THAT VIRTUE IS KNOWLEDGE implies that if we behave in an unvirtuous way we must be ignorant of what goodness really is. No allowance is made for the possibility that we may know what is good but act otherwise because we are too weak to resist temptation or fear—in other words that we may lack self-mastery. In a famous passage Aristotle rejects the Socratic model:

> It is problematic how someone with correct understanding can lack self-mastery (ἀκρατεύεται). Some say this is not possible for someone who has knowledge; for it would be strange, as Socrates thought, if when someone possessed knowledge something else should master it and "drag it around like a slave." Socrates in fact used to attack the account altogether, on the grounds that there is no such thing as lack of self-mastery; for no one understands himself to act against what is best, but they do so only through ignorance. Now this account clearly goes against the evidence.[1]

The evidence that Aristotle has in mind is the experience we have all had of sometimes going against our better judgment because of the pressures of the moment. Most people agree with Aristotle and it is hard to see how Socrates could have believed that we never go against our better judgment.[2] The view that emerges from Plato's treatment

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[1]Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Ingram Bywater (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), 7.2.1145b21–9. Unless otherwise stated, all references to the *Nicomachean Ethics* will be to this edition, and translations my own.

[2]For recent investigations into *akrasia* or weakness see John McKie, who cites five studies as showing that "sincerely expressed moral beliefs are often not reflected in action"; "Linguistic Competence and Moral Development: Some Parallels," *Philosophical Inquiry* 16 (1994): 27.

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of the subject is ambiguous, and disentangling that ambiguity will help us to understand why Socrates may have described virtue as he did.

Aristotle's reference to "dragging knowledge around like a slave" is from the *Protagoras*,[3] and in other early dialogues as well Plato seems committed to moral intellectualism, the view that whether we are virtuous depends solely on our intellect and has nothing to do with the strength or weakness of a will that is distinct from the intellect. However, Plato's subsequent formulation of the concept of a tripartite soul seems to be an accommodation to precisely the kind of criticism that Aristotle later made. In the *Republic* Socrates says:

> Self-control[4] is surely some kind of order, the self-mastery (ἐγκράτεια) of certain pleasures and appetites, as they say, using the phrase "master of oneself" (κρείττω αὑτοῦ)—I don't know how—and other such phrases that are like traces that it has left behind. . . . Yet isn't the expression "master of oneself" ridiculous? He who is master of himself would also be subject to himself, and he who is subject master. The same person is referred to in all these statements. . . . But the saying seems to me to want to say that in the same person there is something in the soul that is better and something that is worse, and when the part that is better by nature is master of the worse, this is what is meant by speaking of being master of oneself. . . . But when, on the other hand, because of bad upbringing or bad company the better part which is smaller is mastered by the multitude of the larger, we blame this as something shameful, and call it being subject to oneself and licentious.[5]

Here it sounds as though there really is something that can overpower knowledge and "drag it around like a slave," and that not only

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[3] Plato, *Protagoras* 352c, in *Platonis Opera*, ed. John Burnet, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900). Unless otherwise stated, all references to Plato's dialogues will be to this edition, and translations my own.

[4] σωφροσύνη is often translated as "temperance" or "moderation" but for the present purpose I prefer a translation that captures something of the connotation of σωφροσύνη as a subject that holds firm against corrosive influences. σωφροσύνη comes from σῶς, "safe and sound" and φρήν, "mind," and thus points to a subject, the mind, which is "safe and sound" rather than eroded by irrational elements. Analogously if not quite accurately, Aristotle derives it from σώζω and φρόνησις: "preserving wisdom"; *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.5.1140b11–12. Although the elements of the term "self-control" do not parallel those of σωφροσύνη, it nevertheless conveys in its own way the sense of a subject that has preserved itself from the influence of irrational elements. "Moderation," on the other hand, comes from *modus*, "measure"; and "temperance" from *temper*, "to mix in proper measure," so they are closer to Greek words like μέτριος ("moderate") that come from the word for measure.

[5] *Republic* 4.430e–431b.

knowledge is responsible for virtue, but also our upbringing and the company we keep. Later in the discussion internal obstacles are added to the external examples of bad upbringing and bad company, and we learn that vice occurs when either the spirited part of us, or the part of us that seeks pleasure and avoids pain and fear, dominates the knowledge-loving part. The language implies that Plato is putting forward the very view that Aristotle argues for in opposition to the view of Socrates in the *Protagoras*.[6] This suggests several possibilities. (1) Socrates was an intellectualist but Plato was not: Aristotle's criticism of "Socrates" may not be meant as a criticism of Plato and may only apply to the early dialogues, which are usually considered more Socratic in doctrine than the later ones. Aristotle himself suggests as much in the *Magna Moralia*.[7] (2) Plato as well as Socrates was an intellectualist but only at first: Plato may have subscribed to the Socratic position in his early dialogues but changed his mind and is no longer an intellectualist by the time of the *Republic*. (3) Neither Plato nor Socrates were really intellectualists: Since the earlier dialogues are aporetic, their denials of a *Republic*-like doctrine may be only dialectical rather than dogmatic, and may be meant to be superseded by a more sophisticated view that is implicit in the reasons why the dialogues end in failure. (4) Both Plato and Socrates remained intellectualists: Plato may only *appear* to have revised the position of the early dialogues, and may still be an intellectualist in some sense even in the *Republic*, despite appearances to the contrary.

Aristotle attributes intellectualism to Socrates rather than to Plato, so the first two of the above possibilities seem safest; but on the other hand Aristotle goes on to say that Plato still failed to distinguish adequately questions of virtue from questions of truth,[8] so perhaps Plato is still an intellectualist in some sense. There are several reasons for being cautious about taking the *Republic* to be a repudiation of the *Protagoras* on this issue. First, in the *Protagoras* passage that

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[6] Lloyd Gerson and Glenn Lesses both take Plato to be talking about *akrasia* there; W. K. C. Guthrie on the other hand thinks that throughout the *Republic* "the Socratic 'Virtue is knowledge' was still [Plato's] guide." See Lloyd Gerson, "Platonic Dualism," *Monist* 69 (1986): 359; Glenn Lesses, "Weakness, Reason, and the Divided Soul in Plato's *Republic*," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 4 (1987): 148; and W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 2:435–6.

[7] Aristotle, *Magna Moralia* (hereafter *MM*), ed. Immanuel Bekker (1831; reprint, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1960), 1.1.1182a15–25.

[8] Aristotle, *MM* 1.1.1182a24–30.

Aristotle cites, Socrates actually anticipates the kind of account given in *Republic* 4, and rejects it:

> The many think something like this about knowledge, that it is not strong nor guiding nor ruling; . . . but that although knowledge often exists in a person, the person's knowledge is not what rules, but something else does—sometimes spiritedness, sometimes pleasure, sometimes pain, at times *eros*, often fear. They think about knowledge absolutely the same thing that they think about a slave, that it is dragged around by everything else.[9]

Socrates suggests instead that "whoever learns what is good and what is bad will never be swayed by anything to act otherwise than as knowledge bids."[10] The *Republic*, on the other hand, describes its position in precisely the terms that were taken as a reductio ad absurdum by the *Protagoras*. In book 9 Socrates says that in the soul of the person most lacking in self-control—the tyrant—"the most reasonable (ἐπιεικέστατον) part of it is dishonorably and wretchedly enslaved."[11] Plato may have changed his mind after the *Protagoras* and decided to embrace the very view that he dismissed there as that of *hoi polloi*, but puzzling passages at the beginning, middle, and end of the discussion in the *Republic* make this at least questionable. (1) The first passage is where book 4 resolves the problem in terms of the concept of self-control.[12] Just before he introduces the concept of self-control Socrates says, "Two things still remain to be discerned in our city, self-control and . . . justice. How then might we find justice without having to bother any more about self-control?"[13] Although Glaucon replies that he wants Socrates to talk about self-control in any case, Socrates seems to be suggesting that there is a preferable way to talk about justice that does not require reference to self-control; that sounds like the claim of the *Protagoras*. (2) The middle passage is where, just prior to extending the discussion of self-control from the city to the individual, Socrates warns Glaucon (a warning that will be recalled at 504b) that the present analysis is flawed:

> But you should know, Glaucon, that in my opinion, we will never get an accurate answer using our present methods of argument—although there is another longer and fuller road that does lead to such an answer.

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[9] *Protagoras* 352b–c.
[10] Ibid., 352c.
[11] *Republic* 9.577c.
[12] Ibid., 4.430e–431b, 4.443c–444a.
[13] Ibid., 4.430d.

> But perhaps we can get an answer that's up to the standard of our previous statements and inquiries.
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> Isn't that satisfactory? It would be enough for me at present.
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> In that case, it will be fully enough for me too.[14]

(3) Finally, when Socrates sums up their conclusions he does so with a caution commensurate with those earlier warnings: "Well then, if we said that we discovered the just person, and the courageous one, and the city, and what justice happens to be in them, I think we would in some way not completely seem to be lying."[15]

In view of Socrates' invitation to seek an account of justice that does not "bother about self-control," and his subsequent warnings of the inadequacy of the approach they took instead, it is conceivable that although the doctrine of the *Republic* is an improvement over the earlier account in terms of clarity and ease of comprehension, those advantages may have been achieved at the price of adequacy to the nature of virtue in some more fundamental sense. In that case the *Republic's* discussion of virtue in terms of self-control may function as a *deuteros plous*, a provisional method to be resorted to when the preferred one proves too difficult to attain immediately.[16] It may be that the kind of knowledge that virtue is, is so difficult to attain that in its absence we must resort to something less adequate but more accessible. In that instance, as Socrates says, "there is another longer and fuller road that does lead to [an adequate] answer."

It is usually assumed that the reference to a longer road is an anticipation of the metaphysical digression of books 5, 6, and 7. On that view, by the time we finish book 7 we will have traversed the longer road, and therefore will have learned the truth about justice, and we can be reasonably sure that the soul really is tripartite since

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[14] *Republic* 4.435c–d.

[15] *Republic* 4.444a.

[16] See Plato, *Phaedo* 99c. *Deuteros plous*, literally "second sailing," refers to the use of oars in the absence of wind. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty gives a different reason for believing that we cannot take the *Republic's* rejection of intellectualism at face value: "To defend the virtues of Socrates, Plato had to undermine his doctrines and to portray the limitations of ethical intellectualism" in the hope of "convincing readers that the outrages of an Alcibiades were due to his character flaws rather than to Socrates"; Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, "The Limits of Socratic Intellectualism: Did Socrates Teach Arete?" in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. John Cleary (Latham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 2: 328, 329.

tripartition is not repudiated there and reason continues to be set in opposition to appetite and spiritedness (for example 469d–e). Yet at the end of book 10, Socrates announces that we have not in fact achieved those results: we have still not seen the true nature of justice, or the truth about whether the soul has distinct parts:

> We must see it as it is in truth, not maimed by communion with the body and other evils, as we now see it, but discern it adequately with reason when it has become pure. And then one will find it much more beautiful and will more clearly distinguish justice and injustice and everything that we have now gone through. Now, however, we told the truth about the soul as it appears at present. . . . But we must, Glaucon, look elsewhere, . . . [namely] to its love of wisdom (φιλοσοφίαν), and we must understand what it touches upon, and what kind of things it yearns to associate with, as being akin to the divine, and to the immortal, and to what always is. . . . And then one might see whether in its true nature it has many forms or one form, or in what way it is and how.[17]

If we do not yet know the soul's true nature or whether it consists of multiple parts, then books 5–7 cannot be the longer road after all (although they may hold the answer to what the longer road is). It may seem that because Socrates is speaking of the soul in its immortal nature, this passage is not relevant to the earlier discussion of virtue which refers to embodied behavior, for he says that "we told the truth about the soul as it appears at present." However, he also says that in the previous discussion we did not clearly enough "distinguish justice and injustice and everything that we have now gone through," so his comments here about the unfinished nature of their discussion apply to virtue explicitly, and throw into question the doctrine of the tripartite soul and therefore the need for self-control in addition to knowledge.

In what follows I want to consider two questions, each of which helps to illuminate the other: (1) Can the definition of virtue as knowledge be defended against the objection that it ignores *akrasia*, moral weakness or lack of self-control? (2) Does the *Republic* repudiate that definition or does it only supplement it with a less paradoxical but oversimplified one, while pointing to a different kind of account that bypasses the concept of self-control, as Socrates seemed to suggest at 430d?

Despite its paradoxical appearance, the Socratic view has always had its proponents, so the question we are dealing with is important not only for historical reasons. Accounts of how the intellect can de-

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[17] *Republic* 10.611c–612a.

fend itself from passion have been put forward by philosophers as diverse as Marcus Aurelius,[18] Spinoza,[19] Locke,[20] and Leibniz.[21] Even in

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[18] "There are three counsels worth keeping in mind. The first concerns actions: these should never be undertaken at random, nor in ways unsanctioned by justice. You must remember that all outward events are the result of either chance or providence; and you cannot reprimand chance or impeach providence. In the second place, think well what everything is, from earliest seed to birth of soul and from soul's birth to its ultimate surrender; what the thing is compounded of, and what it will dissolve into. Thirdly, imagine yourself suddenly carried up into the clouds and looking down on the whole panorama of human activities: how the scene would excite your contempt, now that you could discern the multitude of aerial and heavenly beings who throng around them. Furthermore, reflect that no matter how often upborne in this way, you would still behold the same sights, in all their monotony and transience. Yet these are the things of which we make such a boast!"; Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, bk. 12, sec. 24, trans. Maxwell Staniforth (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1964), 184–5; see also ibid., bk. 3, secs. 10–11; bk. 4, sec. 3; bk. 4, sec. 24; bk. 8, sec. 29; bk. 9, sec. 1; bk. 11, sec. 18. In general, Marcus Aurelius had no hesitation in continuing to defend the claim that virtue is knowledge. See ibid., bk. 2, sec. 1; bk. 6, sec. 27; bk. 7, sec. 26; bk. 8, sec. 14; bk. 11, sec.1; bk. 185, sec. 26.

[19] "Through the ability to arrange and associate rightly the affections of the body we can bring it about that we are not easily affected by bad emotions. . . . Therefore the best course we can adopt, as long as we do not have perfect knowledge of our emotions, is to conceive a right method of living, or fixed rules of life, and to commit them to memory and continually apply them to particular situations that are frequently encountered in life, so that our casual thinking is thoroughly permeated by them and they are always ready to hand"; Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics* 5, prop. 10, Scholium, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), 207–8.

[20] "[T]he first thing to be done in order to happiness,—absent good, though thought on, confessed, and appearing to be good, not making any part of this unhappiness in its absence, is justled out, to make way for the removal of those uneasinesses we feel; till due and repeated contemplation has brought it nearer to our mind, given some relish of it, and raised in us some desire: which then . . . comes in turn to determine the will." John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, bk. 2, ch. 21, sec. 46, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (1894; reprint New York: Dover, 1959), 344.

[21] "[W]hen one is occupied with a very strong passion . . . [i]t is then necessary for the mind to be prepared in advance, and to find itself already in process of going from thought to thought, in order not to hesitate too much at a slippery and dangerous step . . . And for this purpose it is well from time to time to accustom ourselves to collect our thoughts and to raise ourselves above the present tumult of impressions, to go forth, so to speak, from the place where we are, to say to ourselves: 'Why are we here? consider the end, where are we then? or let us come to the purpose, let us come to the point. . . .' Now being once in a condition to stop the effect of our desires and passions, *that is*, to suspend (their) action, we can find means to combat them, whether by contrary desires or inclinations or by diversions, *that is*, by occupations of another nature. It is by these methods and artifices that we become as it were masters of ourselves"; Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding* 2.21, sec. 47, trans. Alfred Gideon Langley, 2d ed. (1896; La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1949), 202–3.

contemporary psychology there is support for this view that our irrational emotions can be effectively combatted by our cognitions. Cognitive therapy is founded on the principle that by being fully conscious of our thoughts we can control our unhealthy appetites and behavior.[22] There is a reciprocal relation between our brain state and our thoughts: an imbalance in our brain chemistry results in irrational thoughts; but the cognitive taming of our irrational thoughts also produces measurable improvements in our brain chemistry.[23] The fact that not everyone can be helped by cognitive therapy need not be taken to mean that knowledge cannot always overcome irrational factors, for it may be that in certain psychological states we become incapable of knowledge in the required sense at all. We shall return to this possibility below.

II

According to Aristotle, some people defended intellectualism by claiming that although our knowledge always translates into behavior, the same is not true of our opinions, so we may act against our beliefs about goodness but not against our knowledge of goodness:

> [T]here are some who agree in one sense but not in another; for they agree that nothing is stronger than knowledge, but they do not agree that no one acts against his *opinion* about what is best; and because of this they say that someone who lacks self-mastery does not have knowledge that is overpowered by pleasures, but only has opinion.[24]

This explanation appears at first to be counter-intuitive. People may know that alcohol or tobacco is killing them, and not want to die, and yet be unable to break their addiction. It seems question-begging to deny that these people really know that their addiction is killing them, and to insist that their acceptance of that fact is only an opinion. Nevertheless there is a sense in which the people whom Aristotle cites are

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[22] See Aaron T. Beck, *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders* (New York: International Universities Press, 1976).

[23] See Paul Gilbert, "Emotional Disorders, Brain State and Psychosocial Evolution" 41–70; also C. N. Carmin and E. T. Dowd, "Paradigms in Cognitive Therapy" 10–11; and R. L. Wessler, "Affect and Nonconscious Processes in Cognitive Psychotherapy" 23–5; all in *Developments in Cognitive Psychotherapy*, ed. Windy Dryden and Peter Trower (London: Sage Publications, 1988).

[24] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.2.1145b31–5.

right to claim that knowledge can be overcome only when it is not knowledge in the fullest sense, and that some things that we normally call knowledge may indeed be more accurately described as only opinions.[25] We can see this by looking at the dialogues in which Socrates makes his claim that knowledge is virtue.

In the *Protagoras* when Socrates disputes the view that knowledge is overcome by pleasure and the like, he does so by analyzing these emotions as instances of mistaken opinion. When we are overcome by pleasure, pleasure means something that is good in a certain way,[26] so we are overcome by a good. However, it makes no sense to say that we fail to do what is good because we are overcome by what is good.[27] Rather, it must mean that we mistakenly perceive a lesser

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[25] Gerasimos Santas has disputed that any distinction between knowledge and opinion can help us explicate the Virtue is Knowledge equation: "[I]t cannot be taken for granted that Plato means to exclude the view that true *belief* (as distinct from knowledge) is sufficient for acting justly. Though he uses *sofia*, *epistēmē*, *mathēsis* (all usually translated "knowledge"), which he distinguishes from *pistis* or *doxa* (belief, opinion), in stating the moral paradox, he nevertheless contrasts these with ignorance or false belief (never with true belief) when he argues for the moral paradox [*Prot.* 360b–c, 360d1–2]. It is reasonable to suppose that he would accept the view that true belief . . . if it is a firm conviction, would be sufficient for acting justly"; Gerasimos Santas, "The Socratic Paradoxes," *Philosophical Review* 73 (1964): 147–64; reprinted in Alexander Sesonske and Noel Fleming, eds., *Plato's Meno: Text and Criticism* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1965), 62. Throughout this argument Santas speaks not of "being just" but of "acting justly." However the *Republic*, at least, never defines justice in terms of particular kinds of actions, but rather in terms of the inward state of the soul (443c–444a). In that case Santas's conclusion does not follow unless he can show that Plato believes that when we have a firmly held true opinion the state of our soul is not significantly different from when we have knowledge, and that would be a difficult position to defend. In fact the *Phaedo* shows that even certain kinds of *false* beliefs are sufficient for *acting* justly, but the resulting actions are not instances of justice, but only of what the many *call* justice (68d–e, 82a–b). Moreover Santas's own solution is problematic. He argues that Plato's position is that since we all desire what is good for us, then "knowledge of virtue and vice *and knowledge that it is always to one's greater advantage to behave virtuously* is sufficient for such behavior"; Santas, "Socratic Paradoxes," 63 (emphasis added). The clause emphasized is what Santas takes to be the implied premise that makes the equation valid (although not cogent since Santas thinks the added premise is false; see ibid., 64). The problem for Santas's solution is that the same question must arise for the new premise as for the original one: Why would knowing something rationally (including knowledge of what is to our advantage) be enough to prevent reason from being overruled by those urges within us that are not lovers of truth but only of pleasure or honor?

[26] *Protagoras* 354b.

[27] Ibid., 355c.

good to be better than a greater good.[28] This can happen because immediate gratification exerts a more powerful pull than long-term gratification, just as what is near to us always looks larger than what is farther away.[29] So what is needed is an art of measurement that enables us to weigh and compare competing goods independently of their proximity to us.[30] Since this is a kind of knowledge, it is clear that virtue depends on knowledge alone,[31] and being overcome by pleasure means nothing other than being ignorant.[32] When Socrates first began his attack on the notion that anything could be stronger than knowledge, Protagoras agreed, saying that "wisdom (σοφίαν) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμην) are . . . the strongest of all human things."[33] At the end of the argument the concept of wisdom returns: "being overcome is nothing other than ignorance (ἀμαθία), and self-mastery nothing other than wisdom (σοφία)."[34] Why is the concept of wisdom added to knowledge at the beginning and end of the argument? Are the terms synonymous or is wisdom something different from knowledge? Socrates concludes with a provocative double paradox that challenges us to look for some kind of distinction among the things we call knowledge. He points out that he, who began by saying that virtue cannot be taught, has ended up arguing that it is a kind of knowledge, in which case "it will be surprising if it is not teachable"; whereas to Protagoras, who at first claimed that virtue is teachable, "it now seems . . . to be almost anything rather than knowledge, and thus it would be what is least teachable."[35] We can avoid these paradoxes if virtue turns out to be a distinctive kind of knowledge that is not teachable, and this may be the nature of wisdom.

This slipping back and forth between the concepts of knowledge and wisdom occurs also in other passages of the early dialogues where virtue is defined in terms of knowledge, notably the *Laches* and *Charmides*. In the *Laches*, Nicias proposes that virtue follows from being wise (σοφός) and Socrates agrees.[36] Therefore the species of virtue that they are trying to define, courage, must also be a particular

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[28] *Protagoras*, 355e.
[29] Ibid., 536a–c.
[30] Ibid., 356d.
[31] Ibid., 356e–357c.
[32] Ibid., 357e.
[33] Ibid., 352d.
[34] Ibid., 358c.
[35] Ibid., 361a–c.
[36] Plato, *Laches* 194d.

kind of wisdom. "What kind of wisdom (σοφίαν), Socrates?" Laches asks. Socrates restates the question as "What is this knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) or what is it of?"[37] and the discussion ends in an impasse.

The *Meno* raises the question of whether virtue can be taught, and approaches it by hypothesizing that if (and only if) it is a kind of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) can it be taught.[38] Yet the actual proof is not a demonstration that virtue is a kind of knowledge, but that it is a kind of wisdom (φρόνησις[39]). The shift occurs at 88b and remains in effect until 89c, when "knowledge" returns again for awhile, to be replaced again by "wisdom" in Socrates' later recapitulation: "Didn't virtue seem to us to be teachable if it was wisdom . . . and if it was teachable it would be wisdom?"[40] However, in a passage reminiscent of the paradoxes at the end of the *Protagoras*, Socrates argues that since knowledge and teachability are equivalent, the fact that there are no teachers of virtue implies that virtue is not a kind of knowledge after all.[41] This passage, like that of the *Protagoras*, suggests that the difference between knowledge and wisdom in these early dialogues is that wisdom is a species of knowledge that cannot be taught, at least not in the straightforward way that other kinds of knowledge can be taught.[42] It is not information or technique. Knowledge is virtue only insofar as the kind of knowledge meant is wisdom. However, wisdom here

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[37] Ibid., 194e.

[38] Plato, *Meno* 87c.

[39] σοφία is used at ibid., 91a and at 99b where it is used interchangeably with ἐπιστήμη.

[40] Ibid., 98d.

[41] Ibid., 89d–96e.

[42] Commentators often take the crafts (*technai*) as paradigmatic both of Socrates' conception of moral knowledge and of knowledge that is teachable in a straightforward way. But this answer is more problematic than it may seem at first. Alexander Nehamas, for example, has pointed out that "Socrates, himself a statuary and a statuary's son (D.L. V.I. 18), knew perfectly well that in ancient Athens the crafts were most often transmitted along with their 'secrets within the family from generation to generation'. The overwhelming evidence is that fathers trained their sons and even that 'training probably began at an earlier age than in modern times'. Habituation no less than 'rational method' is essential for the practice if not also for the appreciation of a craft." Consequently, "If *aretē* was a craft, then Socrates must have known that, like any craft, it could be learned only through an early beginning and after long training. Such training does not only impart knowledge; it also trains one's habits and dispositions"; Alexander Nehamas, "Socratic Intellectualism," in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. John Cleary (Latham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 2:299, 309.

cannot mean "knowledge *together with* self-control," as in the *Republic*,[43] for the view that self-control is a necessary condition of virtue was expressly rejected by the *Protagoras*, and even the *Republic's* endorsement of that addition was not unqualified.

Yet there is strong evidence in favor of the view that Socrates so ambiguously advances in the *Republic*, for the claim that self-control is different from knowledge follows from the doctrine of the tripartite soul, and the argument for the tripartite soul is an impressive one,[44] based on the ontological equivalent of the principle of contradiction: "It is obvious that the same thing will not be willing to do or undergo opposites in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time. So, if we ever find this happening in the soul, we'll know that we aren't dealing with one thing but with many."[45] When one thing stands in an apparently conflicting relation to something else, therefore, in order to avoid admitting a contradiction, we will have to make a distinction either in the thing itself (as in a spinning top the axis is standing still but the circumference is moving), or the object that it is related to (the top is standing still in relation to the ground but moving in relation to the air surrounding it), or the time when it happens (now it is spinning but earlier it was lying still). Socrates proceeds to show that there are times when we are in a state of conflict in relation to the same object, and at the same time, so there must be some internal distinction within ourselves to account for this apparent contradiction. Sometimes we are ambivalent about drinking, for example, in which case reason and appetite are opposed—the pleasure-loving part of us wants one thing, while the knowledge-loving part of us insists that the opposite is good for us—so reason and appetite must be different. Again, sometimes we are angry at ourselves for having an appetite for certain things, so the spirited and appetitive part must be different as well. Finally, sometimes reason tells us to control our anger, so reason and spiritedness must also be dis-

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[43] *Republic* 4.442c.

[44] John Cooper points out that Aristotle appears to accept it despite the dualistic psychology that appears in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "Aristotle does in fact preserve the distinctions that led Plato to regard the human soul as having three parts. He regularly divides ὄρεχις (desire) into three subkinds, βούλησις, θυμός and ἐπιστήμη (see *de An.* 2.3.414b2, 3.9.432b3–7; *de Motu* 6, 700b22; *EE* 2.7.1223a26–7, 10, 1225b25–6; *MM* 1.12.1187b36–7), and he assigns the first to reason itself (*de An.* 432b5, 433a23–5; *Top.* 4.5. 126a13)"; John Cooper, "Plato's Theory of Human Motivation," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1 (1984): 17, n. 2.

[45] *Republic* 4.436b.

tinct.[46] The argument is a powerful one, and we wonder why Socrates was so modest about the accuracy of his methods, especially since in the sequel to the *Republic*, the *Timaeus*, Plato goes on to hypothesize a physiological basis for the tripartite soul by assigning its three parts to different seats in the body.[47] As it turns out, Plato was right in principle even though mistaken in the details, for the three parts of the soul do indeed occupy different parts of our body—or of our brain, to be precise. The psychological distinctions that Plato imputed to them are corroborated by physiological distinctions among three relevant parts of our brain, which evolved at different times and are thought to operate quasi-independently of each other. The diencephalon at the top of the brain stem which evolved four hundred million years ago is the seat of appetite; the limbic system or "reptile brain" which is the seat of aggressive behavior (spiritedness), evolved as a quasi-separate organ added onto the top of the brain stem three hundred million years ago; and two million years ago the "rational" part of the brain, the cerebral cortex, evolved as another organ grafted on top of the rest of the human brain.[48] Since these features are not fully integrated, it is not surprising that we would perceive their influence within us as distinguishable and at times antithetical.

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[46] Terry Penner argues that Plato's arguments justify only a bipartition of the soul: "The fact that *thumos always* takes reason's part when there is a conflict with appetite suggests that Plato doesn't really have an argument for *thumos* and reason being different parts . . . Plato's arguments for the existence of *thumos* as a third part of the soul are singularly few and weak"; Terry Penner, "Thought and Desire in Plato," in *Plato*, ed. Gregory Vlastos (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1971), 2:111–13. It is true that at *Republic* 440b Socrates anticipates that Glaucon has never seen spiritedness side with appetite against reason, but rather than taking this to mean that it never does so, Socrates only concludes that spiritedness sides with reason much more (πολὺ μᾶλλον) than with appetite (440e), but that it may side with appetite as a result of bad upbringing (441a). He proceeds to illustrate the independence of spiritedness from reason in terms of Odysseus' conflict between his reason and his anger. I am not sure why Penner regards this as a singularly weak illustration, but a more familiar instance is the conflict that Plato occasionally points to between our love of truth and our love of winning arguments. Plato is clearly concerned that the spiritedness of our love of victory may conflict with reason's pursuit of truth—see for example *Phaedo* 91a. Penner does, however, show that it would not be easy to subdivide the soul any further than Plato has.

[47] Reason to the brain (*Timaeus*, 44d), the spirited element between the neck and the midriff, and appetite to the lower thorax between the midriff and the navel (*Timaeus*, 70a).

[48] See Robert Jastrow, *The Enchanted Loom: Mind in the Universe* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1981), 127–137.

Since Plato anticipated that the three parts of the soul were physiologically distinct, why did he intersperse the discussion of the tripartite soul with warnings about the inadequacy of the analysis? Why is he at all tentative about abandoning the definition of virtue as knowledge, and about affirming in no uncertain terms that virtue requires not only knowledge but the mastery of reason over the other drives? The answer may be implicit in the vehemence with which Socrates denied in the *Protagoras* that knowledge could be overmastered by its inferiors, appetite and spiritedness. If reason is the natural ruler of the soul, as Plato so often maintains, how could it be dragged around unwillingly by its inferiors? There may be something of the kind implicit in the *Republic* account as well, for although in one way the three parts of the soul are treated as entirely distinct, in another way they constitute a progression that culminates in reason.[49] If that is the case, and in some sense the lower parts are "for the sake of" reason, then we would expect reason to be the natural ruler of the three. A lack of complete independence among the three is apparent from the fact that reason already seems to be implicit in appetite and spiritedness when Socrates speaks of them as "sharing the belief" (ὁμοδοξῶσι) that reason should rule the soul, and conversely Socrates later ascribes appetites (ἐπιθυμίαι) to reason and spiritedness.[50]

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[49] Glaucon sharply differentiates them, saying that children "are full of spirit as soon as they are born, while in the case of rationality some seem to me never to partake of it, while the majority do so very late"; Plato, *Republic* 4.441a–b. But this is rationality only in its most refined sense; in a more ordinary sense children make use of reasoning all the time. Penner rightly calls Glaucon's remark a "gross equivocation"; Penner, "Thought and Desire," 104, n. 6.

[50] The first passage is at *Republic* 4.442d. See also Penner, "Thought and Desire," 101–3; R. C. Cross and A. D. Woozley, *Plato's* Republic: *A Philosophical Commentary* (London: Macmillan, 1964), 124; Nicholas P. White, *A Companion to Plato's* Republic (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979), 129; Leon Craig, *The War Lover: A Study of Plato's* Republic (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 101. Terence Irwin points out that for Plato appetite must at least be capable of something very much like reasoning "since he takes the desire for wealth to be an appetitive desire" although it is only a means to an end; Terence Irwin, *Plato's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 219. The second passage is at 580d–583a. See Richard Lewis Nettleship: "In every desire there is an element of rational activity, and in the most reasonable direction of our activities there is an element of desire. So we may say that the real conflict is . . . between different kinds of desires, and accordingly in Book IX we find that each of the three forms of soul has its own special ἐπιθυμία"; Richard Lewis Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1964), 158. See also Guthrie, "A History," 2:475–6. For a careful discussion of this issue see Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's* Republic (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 139–51.

Here, in the context of the virtues, Socrates speaks of appetite and spiritedness as if they are capable of reasoning, but when he first distinguished those two "irrational" elements from reason he portrayed them as utterly excluding reason. Appetite was nothing but the desire to drink for example, a simple response to corporeal stimuli, which did not even reason far enough to care whether the drink is good or not.[51] Although the difference between these two descriptions has been taken to be an incoherence in Socrates' account, we can also see it as implying a distinction that resolves a further problem. In the city each of the three classes of people have tripartite souls (they all can reason, get angry, and have appetites), but since the individual soul is treated throughout the *Republic* as being perfectly parallel to the city, each of the three parts of the soul ought to have a tripartite structure as well. So it looks as though either the analogy between city and soul breaks down, or there will be an infinite regress in which each part of the soul has all three parts *ad infinitum*.[52] At the end of Socrates' discussion of justice in the city he said,

> What has come to light for us there let us apply to the individual, and if there is agreement that will be fine. But if something different manifests itself in the individual we will return again to the city to test it, and perhaps by examining them alongside each other and rubbing them together like fire sticks we may make justice blaze forth, and when it has come to light confirm it for ourselves.[53]

If Plato was foreshadowing the present difficulty, he seems to expect that it will ultimately further our inquiry rather than overturning it.

What enables us to pass between the horns of the dilemma is precisely the distinction we just looked at, where the three parts of the soul absolutely excluded one another when Socrates was distinguishing them, but partially included one another when he began to speak of how they function in the context of virtue. In their essential nature the three parts of the soul are mutually exclusive, but in their activity they are interdependent: we saw above that they each have appetites and each make use of reason, and they must each have spiritedness as well since they compete against one another. So we can say that *abstractly* the three parts are mutually exclusive, but *concretely* they make use of each other as part of their essential activity. In the city the individual classes are distinguished not by what parts their soul has, since each has all three, but by the relative strengths of those

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[51] *Republic* 4.437c–438a, 4.439a–b.
[52] See Annas "Introduction," 149–51.
[53] *Republic* 4.434e–435a.

parts: appetite predominates in the commercial classes, spiritedness in the auxiliaries, and reason in the guardians. The same now turns out to be true of the parts of the soul themselves, for each of the three concrete parts must involve all three abstract parts but in different proportions—one in which appetite predominates, another in which spiritedness predominates, and a third in which reason predominates. There is a regress, to be sure, since the concrete elements of the soul are composed of primitive abstract elements, but not an infinite regress since the abstract elements themselves are no longer complex. Socrates does not make this distinction explicit, but he does speak of the elements in both ways, and it is entailed by the parallel between the city and the soul.

The progression from the pure abstract type of appetite as a simple response to corporeal stimuli, to the mixed concrete type that includes reasoning processes, is so gradual that if it is inadvertent it is a remarkably well organized inadvertence. The first example of appetite was to distinguish it from reason, namely the desire to drink even when reason disapproves.[54] We would expect Socrates now to differentiate appetite from spiritedness by extending the same example—we get angry at ourselves for drinking when we know that we should not—but he introduces instead the new, bizarre example of someone who gets angry at himself for indulging in his appetite for looking at corpses.[55] Whatever else we may say of this example, it is no longer a corporeal response to corporeal stimuli, but now involves a cognitive component, however pathological. The cognitive component is not yet at a level we would normally call reasoning, but we saw that when appetite is considered again, in the context of virtue, some kind of reasoning is now involved that enables appetite to "share the belief" of reason.[56] This progression in which appetite becomes increasingly rational reaches its culmination in book 8, where appetite—as distinct from reason and spiritedness—can even have philosophy as its object.[57]

There is thus a continuity among the three parts of the soul in their concrete forms, despite the discontinuity of their abstract forms, and that is presumably what Socrates alludes to when he speaks of

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[54] *Republic* 4.439c–d.

[55] Ibid., 4.439e–440a.

[56] Ibid., 4.442c.

[57] ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ διατρίβων; *Republic* 8.561c–d. See Cooper, "Plato's Theory," 9.

the three parts together with "any others there may happen to be between them."[58] The progressive development of the three elements out of one another was prefigured in book 1 when Polemarchus' "spirited" definition of justice (the warrior's code[59] of helping friends and harming enemies) developed out of a defense of Cephalus' "appetitive" definition of justice (the money-maker's code of honesty and paying debts) and developed into a tribute to the importance of reason.[60] The clearest evidence of that progressive development is in the discussion of the "soul writ large," the city. The transition from the appetitive city to the spirited one never involves anything but appetite. It begins when Glaucon complains that Socrates has not made the lives of the inhabitants more pleasant by giving them comfortable couches, delicacies to eat, and so forth,[61] and it is complete a page later when Socrates says that war will break out among neighboring cities because they have "surrendered themselves to the unlimited acquisition of wealth."[62] There is no talk of a separate spirited element that intrudes into the city, but rather spiritedness is somehow latent within the unlimitedness inherent in appetite itself. (It is at this transitional moment that hunters are introduced into the city—hunters embody an appetite that has developed a spirited dimension to satisfy itself.) Next, as Socrates proceeds to discuss the nature of the guardians, the rulers of the spirited city, he and Glaucon agree that the "guardians also need, in addition to their spiritedness, love of wisdom (*philosophos*) in their nature."[63] So reason is not a new quality to be found in a different group of people, but it is already to be found within the spirited ruling class, as previously the spirited element was found in the appetitive. The transition from the spirited city to the philosophical one is so seamless that it is impossible to say precisely where one begins and the other ends, except that at 414b it is clear that such a change has already occurred: Socrates says that it would "be most truly proper to call these people guardians . . . and to call the youths, who we just now called guardians, auxiliaries and helpers for

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[58] *Republic* 4.443e.

[59] "In what action and for what function is [the just man] most able to help friends and harm enemies?" "In waging war and in alliances"; ibid., 1.332e.

[60] See ibid., 1.331b–332e, and 1.334b–335e.

[61] Ibid., 2.372d.

[62] Ibid., 2.373d.

[63] Ibid., 2.375e.

the guardians' beliefs." Instead of comparing the guardians to dogs as he did at 375a–376a, he now compares the auxiliaries to dogs and the true guardians to shepherds.[64] What started out as a guardian class of soldiers[65] has by imperceptible degrees turned into a guardian class of philosophers whose decisions are enforced by soldiers. The rational is shown to be implicit within the spirited just as the spirited was implicit in the appetitive. Distinct though they may be in their abstract definitions, the later arise progressively out of the earlier in such a way that reason seems to be the completion of the first two. In that case even on the adversarial psychology of the *Republic* there are grounds for supposing that knowledge by nature ought to rule the soul, and that an extrinsic self-mastery may seem necessary only because we have not yet grasped what is meant by knowledge.

III

One way that the equation of knowledge with virtue has been defended is to construe "knowledge" not as the ability to formulate a definition, but as a kind of skill or craft.[66] We always aim at what we perceive to be good, so if we have mastered a craft that enables us to know (1) what really is good in life, and also (2) what actions to perform in order to bring about that good, then how can our knowledge not eventuate in virtue? Aristotle's objection holds against this interpretation as well, however, for to have a skill is not necessarily to use it. What is to prevent me from leaving my skill at justice in abeyance when I prefer to use my skills at making money or at achieving power? Why should we—or Plato—believe that reason's skilful knowledge of what is good, will always and necessarily be stronger than the skilful desires of appetite and spiritedness? I can know (1)

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[64] *Republic* 3.416a.

[65] *Republic* 2.374a–e.

[66] See for example Irwin, "Recollection and Plato's Moral Theory," *Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1974): 755; Rosamond Kent Sprague, who takes justice to be equivalent to the craft of ruling in *Plato's Philosopher-King* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), 66 and 74; Richard Parry, "The Craft of Justice," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Supplementary Vol. 9 (1983): 19–38; and *Plato's Craft of Justice* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996); Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 298; John McKie "Linguistic Competence" 20, 26; Julia Annas, "Virtue as a Skill," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 3 (1995): 227–43.

that I *ought* to return a wallet that I find, and also (2) *how* to do so in the present case; and yet be too weak to resist when my appetite and spiritedness yearn after the pleasures and power that the money can bring. Advocates of this view sometimes reply that we need only take the identification of virtuous knowledge with skill one step further, and say that the skill also includes knowing how to put the dictates of reason into effect despite the pressures of appetite and spiritedness. Thus the knowledge that is virtue would be (1) knowing what really is good, (2) knowing what actions to perform to bring it about, and now (3) knowing how to prevent ourselves from being subverted by temptation. However, this would beg the question, because the whole point of Aristotle's criticism is that knowledge alone cannot prevent itself from being overwhelmed by passion and pleasure. If we are to find a genuine way out of this contention, we cannot do so simply by building self-control into our definition of knowledge.[67]

The view that virtue is a kind of skill seems to be just what Socrates' exchanges with Cephalus and Polemarchus aim to refute. Cephalus and Polemarchus identify justice with particular skills, rules that can be put into practice, such as "Tell the truth and pay what you owe," or "Help your friends and harm your enemies." Yet Socrates shows that such rules are not capable of being applied with universality, as they ought to be if justice were a skill or craft. He suggests the

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[67] This problem is not addressed by Richard Parry when he tries to assimilate even self-control to knowledge, by making justice, conceived in terms of self-control, into a craft. Parry argues that in Socrates' description of justice as the application of self-control to the wise and courageous individual soul at 443c–444a, "Justice . . . is compared to a craft. . . . The words for 'disposing,' 'ordering,' and 'harmonizing' are the same—or derivatives of the—craft words used at *Gorgias* 503e5–504a4: *kosmeō*, *harmozō*, *tithēmi* [order, harmonize, dispose]. . . . Finally, just and fine action (*praxis*) is any action which preserves and helps finish (*sunapergazetai*) the order . . . and *sunapergazetai* is clearly a craft word"; Parry, "The Craft of Justice," 26. But if the self-control element of justice is a craft, then, since a craft need not be put into practice, we get the absurd result that we can have self-control without actually being in control of ourselves. Laurence Houlgate formulates the difficulty succinctly: "To say that A has an ability to do X does not imply that A will do X when the circumstances and the opportunity arise. . . . [A] man may fail to do what is virtuous even where he has knowledge of virtue, and this is true regardless of whether we conceive 'knowledge of virtue' as like knowledge of a definition or as analogous to possession of a skill or technique"; Laurence Houlgate, "Virtue is Knowledge," *Monist* 54 (1970): 148. We still need something like will power. However much Socrates may attribute some aspects of crafts to justice and self-control, he never attributes to them the teachable rules of crafts.

reason for this in the second refutation of Polemarchus: if justice can be reduced to rules it is a kind of craft,[68] but any craft can be used for good or ill, so the most just person would also be the best thief,[69] and justice a craft of stealing as well as holding in trust.[70] The reductio shows that justice cannot be a craft,[71] and this prepares us for the analysis in book 4 that defines justice not in terms of rules but in terms of character. Nevertheless, many scholars believe that Plato continues to regard justice as a craft in the *Republic*.[72]

The general lack of agreement on this point is due to the ambiguity of the word *technē* "craft" or "skill." If we take it in a weak sense, to mean "knowing how to do something," then those who know how to bring order to their souls can be said to practice a craft. However if we take it in a strong sense to mean "a determinate set of teachable rules for doing something"—in accordance with Aristotle's claim that craft entails a knowledge of the universal causes within its field that we can impart by instruction[73]—then there is good reason for denying that justice is a craft. For it may be true that in the weak sense justice is the craft of setting one's soul in order by letting reason rule, but it is not the kind of craft that can supply precise rules for doing so, as a carpenter can provide rules for making a bed. We can tell people to

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[68] *Republic* 1.332c–d.

[69] Ibid., 1.333e–334a.

[70] Ibid., 1.334b.

[71] See Cross and Woozley, *Plato's* Republic, 13–16; Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), 72; Annas "Introduction," 24–8; C. D. C. Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato's* Republic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 8. On the other hand, in his debate with Thrasymachus Socrates argues that craft is always unselfish (*Republic* 1.341c–342e and 1.346c–347a), which undermines the claim that if justice were a craft it could also be the craft of stealing. But then he reverses himself again by calling money-making a craft despite its being avowedly selfish (*Republic* 1.346c). It is a puzzling move since money-making is no more a craft than justice (we make money *in exchange* for crafts), and calling it a craft needlessly subverts the premise that all crafts are unselfish. The move salvages his earlier argument against Polemarchus but at the expense of his present argument against Thrasymachus. By calling both justice and money-making crafts, while at the same time showing that they cannot be crafts, Socrates creates a certain parallel between them which, if nothing else, prefigures their future complementarity as the poles (reason and appetite) between which the dialogue will eventually play itself out.

[72] See Sprague, *Philosopher King*, 63–6; Parry, *Plato's Craft*, 88, 96; and Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, 69, 171 n. 14.

[73] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.1.981a10–b10, ed. Werner Jaeger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957).

rule themselves by reason, but we cannot tell them *precisely* how to go about doing so. Exhortations like "Pull yourself together!" (that is, "Rule yourself by reason") are not very effective. At best, then, virtue is a craft in the weak sense of the word, but the weak sense does not really add anything to what was already implied by calling virtue knowledge in the first place.[74] We would only be replacing one imprecise term with another.

A different line of approach is succinctly formulated in a doctrine of the unity of knowledge and action, by the last of the great Neo-Confucianist philosophers, Wang Yang-ming (1472–1529). Wang's paradoxical doctrine that knowledge and action are inseparable entails the Socratic paradox that virtue is knowledge, so Wang's arguments support Socrates' doctrine as well. Like Socrates, Wang claims that to know the good is to do the good. How then does he reply to the problem we have been considering: how to account for people who know and do not doubt that a certain action is wrong but cannot resist when temptation presents itself, because what their knowledge tells them is overpowered by what their appetite tells them? Wang's disciple Hsü Ai raises a similar objection: "There are people who know that parents should be served with filial piety and elder brothers with respect but cannot put these things into practice. This shows that knowledge and action are clearly two different things." Furthermore, in that case neither would knowledge be virtue. Wang replies:

> Those who are supposed to know but do not act simply do not yet know. . . . Therefore the *Great Learning* points to true knowledge and action for people to see, saying, they are "like loving beautiful colors and hating bad odors."[75]

> Seeing beautiful colors appertains to knowledge, while loving beautiful colors appertains to action. However, as soon as one sees that beautiful color, he has already loved it. It is not that he sees it first and then makes up his mind to love it.[76]

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[74] Especially since the weak sense of *technē* is more or less synonymous with *epistēmē*. Aristotle uses them virtually interchangeably in the passage cited above and Plato often does so as well (at least in the early dialogues: see Parry, *Plato's Craft*, 15).

[75] "What is meant by 'making the will sincere' is allowing no self-deception, as when we hate a bad smell or love a beautiful color"; *The Great Learning*, commentary, sec. 6; in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 89.

[76] Wang Yang-ming, *Instructions for Practical Living*, sec. 5, in *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming*, ed. Wing-tsit Chan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 10. See also sec. 125, p. 82.

When Wang says that "those who are supposed to know but do not act simply do not yet know," he is not merely begging the question, and there are people today who take a similar line.[77] The example of colors and odors is an effective one. If someone says, "The colors of a sunset are very beautiful but I don't particularly care for them," or "Raw sewage has a bad smell but that doesn't mean I don't like it," we would feel that the consequent failed to cohere with the antecedent, and even violated the normal meaning of the antecedent. It seems more reasonable to believe that people who do not dislike an odor that they say is bad, or do not like colors that they say are beautiful, are using words imprecisely and do not really think that the odor is bad and the colors beautiful, but only recognize that other people think so. By extension, people who say that they know that stealing is bad, but do not hate it enough to be able to resist temptation, are speaking imprecisely and do not really know, in the full sense of the word, that stealing is bad.

Wang's argument supplies the middle term in the transition from knowledge to virtue: to fully know that something is good is to love it. Love motivates us to act. Therefore to fully know what is good is to be virtuous. However, once again Aristotle taps us on the shoulder. Can we not love virtue with our intellect, but love stealing even more strongly with our appetite, in which case knowledge still would not be

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[77] Amélie Oksenberg Rorty writes: "Full knowledge might require a set of conditions that go beyond having, and properly defending true beliefs: it might, for instance require the active disposition to apply those beliefs appropriately, in any contexts where their import might be relevant . . . [The knower] must also hold those beliefs in such a way that functionally permeates his psychology, his beliefs, attitudes and actions"; Rorty, "The Limits," 318, 320. See also Irwin: "Plato may believe that we cannot achieve knowledge, as distinct from right belief, unless we have acquired the appropriate noncognitive states as well. If we have knowledge, we must have a fixed and self-conscious awareness of the grounds for our correct beliefs, and we must be able to reject specious but misleading counterarguments. Plato suggests that to reject these, we must have the right affective training . . . [Knowledge] cannot be present in someone who has erratic nonrational desires . . . Aristotle recognizes this influence of nonrational motives on rational convictions; that is why he argues that temperance is necessary to preserve wisdom (*EN* 1140b11–20)"; *Plato's Ethics*, 237; Horace Fries, citing Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, makes a related observation: "The objection is that many people perform acts which they freely acknowledge as evil before they do them. But to acknowledge freely is not necessarily to know. It may well be the expression of a mere opinion or habit held in conformity with the mores of one's time." Horace Fries, "Virtue is Knowledge," *Philosophy of Science* 8 (1940): 91 and n. 5. Other examples are cited below.

a sufficient condition for virtue? Here, I think, we can more fully appreciate the *Protagoras* passage that Aristotle cited:

> They think about knowledge absolutely the same thing that they think about a slave, that it is dragged around by everything else. Now then, is this the way the matter seems to you as well, or rather that knowledge is noble and capable of ruling a person, and if someone knows what is good and what is bad, that person will not be overpowered by anything so as to do anything other than what knowledge demands—but rather wisdom is a sufficient support for a person? [78]

It is now clear that Socrates must mean knowledge in Wang Yang-ming's sense, complete knowledge that includes the full appreciation of the thing's value.[79] *This* knowledge, Socrates is saying, will be strong enough to resist the temptations of pleasure and power—appetite and spiritedness. Is it possible to distinguish this kind of knowledge from the defeasible kind in a nonquestion-begging way, or will it all turn on a circular definition: virtue means having knowledge, and having knowledge means that one acts virtuously?

Wang Yang-ming says, "No one really learns anything without carrying it into action. . . . Can merely talking about it in a vacuum be considered as learning?"[80] "Suppose we say that so-and-so knows

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[78] *Republic* 1.352c.

[79] See Emile de Stryker: "the Socratic insight [*phronēsis*], which is virtue, is not the conclusion of a merely intellectual demonstration, it is not some knowledge which may be separated from the ends for which we strive, it is a caring for some definite things more than for others. In other words, it is a choice, by which we concretely and effectively put that which is objectively more valuable *above* other things which might also attract us . . . Insight into the good and love for the good are one, and it is precisely in this unity that the typical fullness of the human person, that virtue (*aretē*) consists"; Emile de Stryker, "The Unity of Knowledge and Love in Socrates' Conception of Virtue," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 6 (1966): 440–1. In support of this de Stryker refers to *Republic* 10.617e, where Socrates says (in de Stryker's translation), "As man does *value* virtue more or less, he will possess more or less of it"; ibid., 444. Similarly, Samuel Scolnicov writes, "Moral excellence is knowledge and no one does evil willingly, because the soul is essentially one and it is impossible to separate between its cognition and its volition. True knowledge is, in itself, a motive power"; Samuel Scolnicov, "Reason and Passion in the Platonic Soul," *Dionysus* 2 (1978): 45. See also his *Plato's Metaphysics of Education* (London: Routledge, 1988), 102, 112. Julia Annas makes a similar point in connection with knowledge of the forms: "Plato always connects Forms with recognizing and valuing what is good, not just with having the capacity to follow an argument. . . . It is thus a change of heart more than a mere sharpening of the wits that is needed to make one realize that there are Forms"; Annas, "Introduction," 237.

[80] Wang, *Instructions*, sec. 136, p. 100.

filial piety and so-and-so knows brotherly respect. They must have actually practiced filial piety and brotherly respect before they can be said to know them. . . . Or take one's knowledge of pain. Only after one has experienced pain can one know pain."[81] Thus only by performing virtuous activities can we really know virtue. This is a claim that Plato maintains as well. Socrates points out that the appetitive lover of profit, the spirited lover of honors, and the philosophical lover of truth would each say his own life is best, and he asks,

> Of the three men, who is most experienced in all the pleasures we mentioned? Does a lover of profit learn what truth itself is, and seem to you to be more experienced in the pleasure of knowledge than a philosopher is in that of making a profit?
>
> They differ greatly [Glaucon answers]. The one has necessarily tasted the pleasures of the other two since the beginning of childhood, but it is not necessary for the lover of profit to taste or experience the nature of learning, how sweet the pleasure of it is. Moreover even if he is eager for it it will not be easy for him.
>
> Then a philosopher differs greatly from a lover of profit in his experience of both pleasures. . . . How does he differ from a lover of honor? Is he more inexperienced in the pleasure of honor than the other is in the pleasure of thinking?
>
> No, for if they accomplish their respective aims honor follows upon all of them . . . but the pleasure of contemplating what is cannot be tasted by anyone except a philosopher. [82]

For Socrates, as for Wang, we know something only to the extent that we have experienced it and have been able to taste its pleasure.[83] Knowledge is virtue, then, not when it is only abstract and conceptual, or even when it is the know-how of a skill, but only when it is complete knowledge by acquaintance, the full experiencing of a certain condition.[84] To say that virtue is knowledge would then mean that once we know from experience what it is like to be virtuous, our convictions will become too firmly established to be dragged around slavishly by our appetites and passions. Such an interpretation would re-

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[81] Ibid., sec. 5, p. 10.

[82] *Republic*, 9.582a–c.

[83] Compare John Stuart Mill: "Of two pleasures, if . . . one of the two is, *by those who are competently acquainted* with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, . . . we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority . . ."; John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979), 8 (emphasis added).

solve the other paradox in the *Meno*, that virtue is knowledge but there are no teachers of it. Experience is not only the best teacher of virtue, it is the only one.

If this resolves the problems of *akrasia* and definitional circularity, it may seem to do so at the price of introducing a practical circularity in which we can become virtuous only by acquiring full knowledge of what it is to be virtuous, and we can acquire full knowledge of what it is to be virtuous only by being virtuous. However, that way of putting it is misleading. We have been looking for a way to explain how knowledge can be virtue even in the absence of a supplementary self-control that protects knowledge from temptation. That means that we are looking for a kind of knowledge that is a sufficient condition for being virtuous. It does not need to be a *necessary* condition, however, and in that case our formulation is not circular. Yet if it is not a necessary condition for virtue, what else besides knowledge can make us virtuous? The actual sequence of events is analogous to what happens to Meno's slave during the geometrical demonstration that is intended to prove that knowledge is recollection. The proof is in response to "Meno's Paradox." Meno challenges Socrates' effort to discover the nature of virtue:

> And in what way will you look, Socrates, for a thing of whose nature you know nothing at all? What sort of thing, of the things you don't know, will you propose to search for? Or even if, at the most, you chance upon it, how will you know this is the thing you did not know?[85]

What Socrates needs to show is that it is possible to search for and arrive at virtue or anything else because we already have an implicit knowledge of these things. Our own investigation here of the nature of virtue could not have been carried out unless we were guided by our intuitions, however imprecisely they make themselves known to us. The geometrical demonstration in the *Meno* is meant to offer mathematical learning as a paradigm of this, for in the case of mathematics we do not accept claims on the authority of others—as we do

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[84] John Kelly makes a related point: "the goods of the soul, as they are usually referred to, can only be achieved through the soul's standing in the proper relationship to a reality external to itself as a result of living a certain kind of life. Thus, the virtuous life is required to engender the virtuous soul, while the soul seeks its fulfilment and perfection through living such a life." John Kelly, "Virtue and Inwardness in Plato's *Republic*," *Ancient Philosophy* 9 (1989): 203.

[85] *Meno* 80d.

with historical knowledge for example—since we can test them against some kind of internal intuition. We may not have been able to formulate the principle that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points but we can verify it from our own internal perceptions. In a similar manner, by a carefully chosen series of questions Socrates leads the slave to see that we can produce a square that is double the area of a given square by using the diagonal of the original square as the side of the new one. Socrates concludes that

> [i]n someone who does not know certain things, whatever they may be, can't there be true opinions about the things he does not know? . . . And now those opinions have just been stirred up in him, like a dream; but if someone asked him the same things many times and in many ways, you know that he will finally have knowledge of them that is no less exact than anyone's.
>
> So it seems.
>
> Without anyone having taught him, and only through having had questions put to him, he will have knowledge, recovering the knowledge out of himself by himself?
>
> Yes.
>
> Is not this recovery of knowledge, by himself and in himself, recollection?[86]

The steps involved are (1) the right answers are suggested to the slave; (2) the slave somehow recognizes by his own intuitive resources that the answers are correct, but this is only a true opinion since he has not mastered them sufficiently to reproduce the proof himself; (3) "if someone asked him the same things many times and in many ways . . . he will finally have knowledge of them that is no less exact than anyone's."

This model of mathematical learning, devised to resolve Meno's Paradox by distinguishing between intuitive and fully realized knowledge, was introduced by Socrates ultimately in order to understand the nature of virtue. It does, in fact, provide us with a way to explain how we can achieve the knowledge that is virtue, without having had that knowledge ahead of time. As with Meno's slave, we begin not with knowledge, but with opinions that are legitimated by intuition;[87] true opinion paves the way for full knowledge. Corresponding to the above sequence in the slave's learning of geometry—opinion, intu-

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[86] *Meno* 85c–d.

ition, knowledge through repeated experience—the following sequence applies to our learning of virtue: (1) ideas about virtue are communicated to us throughout our lives; (2) we recognize intuitively that certain of them are correct, but this is only an opinion at first; (3) if we repeatedly put our true opinions about virtue into practice, in the end we will have full knowledge of their truth. In that way we can say that virtue is knowledge. According to the *Meno*, the way to convert true opinion into knowledge is by discovering the reasons why it must be so. True opinions

> as long as they stay with us are a fine possession, and effect all that is good; but they do not care to stay for long, and run away out of the human soul, and thus are of no great value until one makes them fast by reasoning to their cause. And this, Meno my companion, is recollection, as we have previously agreed. But once they are fastened . . . they turn into knowledge.[88]

When the kind of opinions under consideration are those of virtue, the cause whereby they are true cannot be apprehended abstractly in the same way as the causes of geometrical relationships. It can only be grasped and recollected when we put the true opinions into practice and discover the inner experience that directly confirms their truth. Such experience is the only way we can discover a *reason* to be virtuous that is firm enough to withstand the challenges of appetite and passion.

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[87] Thus Irwin argues that Plato's conception of virtue requires the doctrine of recollection; Irwin, "Recollection," 760, 768, 771. However, whereas we have taken this to be an elucidation of Plato's previous equation of virtue with knowledge, Irwin takes it to be a rejection of that doctrine. He rightly notes that recollection is different from the empirical knowledge characteristic of crafts, but he also claims that the identification of virtue with knowledge requires that virtue "will be a craft; several of Socrates' arguments require us to take this claim seriously, as more than a loose analogy"; ibid., 755. Although it is true that more than a loose analogy is involved, it is also true that the dialogues which make this claim end in perplexity. A standard way of explaining that perplexity has been to suppose that it is Plato's way of provoking us to see that the craft analogy is an inadequate model of knowledge. See for example de Stryker: "Thus the dialogue [*Hippias Minor*, one of the dialogues cited by Irwin] ends in an *aporia*; but this *aporia* possesses a clear meaning: Plato wishes to show that we were wrong when we identified the knowledge which is basic for virtue with the technical knowledge of the expert"; de Stryker, "The Unity of Knowledge," 432. De Stryker refers to previous defences of this view by Hirshberger, Kuhn, and Goldschmidt (ibid., n. 14).

[88] *Meno* 98a.

Practicing the right behavior does not make us virtuous if we do not have the appropriate inner intuition, however, any more than true opinion alone makes us knowledgeable. In the *Phaedo* Socrates says of those who do not devote themselves to philosophy and do not receive the rewards that philosophers do, that "happiest of those, and going to the best place, are those who have pursued, by habit and practice, without philosophy or reason, the social and political virtue that they call (καλοῦσι) self-control and justice."[89] Even though they practice the right behavior, they do so out of habit without grasping the reason for it. In fact they generally do it for the wrong reasons, prudential rather than moral ones. They are called (ὀνομαζομένη) courageous, for example, for behavior that arises not from moral conviction but from fear of the consequences of behaving otherwise; and those whom the many call (ὀνομάζουσι) self-controlled only resist one kind of pleasure because it deprives them of another.[90] Thus we cannot even term their practices "virtues" in the proper sense of the word, but only "so-called (καλοῦσι, ὀνομάζουσι) virtues."[91] It is safe to assume that this was Plato's view in the *Meno*, *Protagoras*, and *Republic* as well.

Like fully actualized knowledge, true opinions together with inner intuition are sufficient conditions rather than necessary ones. Normally the inculcation of true opinions is a gradual one, nurtured "by habit and practice," but sometimes the kind of fully actualized knowledge that results in virtue materializes suddenly. In the second half of the eighteenth century John Newton, the captain of a slave-trade boat, suddenly saw with such clarity the evil in which he was participating that it was no longer possible for him to continue in it. It was not that he developed greater self-control, but that the clarity of his sudden knowledge was sufficient to produce virtue by itself. The

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[89] *Meno* 82a–b.

[90] *Phaedo*, 68d–e.

[91] I have some sympathy with Frederick Rosen's line of argument when he suggests that "Plato needs to condemn popular virtue in such strong terms in order that the soul will turn away from everything, *even virtue*, that is connected with ordinary life. Contemplation, for Plato . . . bids one to turn away from morality as well as sin to reach the eternal;" but not when Rosen concludes, "Nevertheless, though ordinary virtue is condemned, it must be emphasised that it is still virtue"; Frederick Rosen, "Contemplation and Virtue in Plato," *Religious Studies* 16 (1980): 93. If virtue is a condition of the soul, then the soul that is oriented toward the temporal rather than the eternal will not be virtuous, even if it performs actions that are considered virtuous.

hymn that he wrote to commemorate that event, *Amazing Grace*, contains the words, "I once . . . was blind but now I see." The kind of knowledge that is sufficient for virtue is not the kind that can have teachers, because it is not like information or like craft but like the difference between sight and blindness. If we see clearly how virtue consummates our lives, and how trivial are the rewards of the activities that are counterproductive of virtue, then the latter lose their hold over us. This is what Socrates means in the *Protagoras*, when he says that the philosophical art of measurement will be able to weigh the true value of things, free from the distortion caused by the different proximities of the competing gratifications.[92] Normally the gratifications of appetite and spiritedness seem larger because they are closer, their gratification is more immediate; "but the art of measurement would deprive this appearance of authority, and by showing us the truth would have brought our soul into the restfulness of remaining with truth and would have saved our life."[93] We need the constraint of self-control to hold us back only when we are subject to the illusion that the gratification of appetite and spiritedness is greater than it really is, because it is more immediate than the gratification of knowledge.

The sudden enlightenment and falling away from blindness that Newton spoke of is sometimes called a conversion experience, and the themes of blindness and conversion are prominent in the *Republic's* Allegory of the Cave. When we turn from the darkness of corporeality to the light of pure goodness, everything that we found most visible before, now seems dim and unreal, and the rewards of the old life no longer have any power over us. Looking at those who are still in thrall to such gratifications, we feel that we would "go through any sufferings, rather than share their opinions and live as they do."[94] Thus,

> our present argument shows that this power [of insight] is present in the soul of everyone, and that the instrument by which everyone understands is like an eye that cannot be turned to light from darkness except together with the whole body. Thus that instrument must be turned from the realm of becoming together with the whole soul until it becomes able to contemplate that which is, and what is brightest of that which is; and we say that this is the good, is that right?—Yes.—Now

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[92] Plato, *Protagoras* 356c–357c.
[93] Ibid., 356d–e.
[94] *Republic* 7.516d.

> there would be a skill of this very thing, this "conversion" (περιαγωῆς, turning around).[95]
>
> This would be . . . a "conversion" of the soul from a day that is like night to the true day—the ascent to what fully is, which we say is true philosophy.[96]

The skill referred to is education,[97] but it can never show us the light directly; at best it develops in us habits of thinking that maximize our chances of seeing the light. The *Seventh Letter* gives a famous description of this: "It cannot be expressed in speech like other kinds of knowledge, but after a long attendance upon the matter itself, and communion with it, then suddenly—as a blaze is kindled from a leaping spark—it is born in the soul and at once becomes self-nourishing."[98] The *Second Letter* also illustrates the underdetermined nature of this kind of education, as well as the perspective-shifting nature of the conversion itself:

> There are people, many of them, who have listened to these things—people who are capable of learning and capable of remembering and passing judgement on them by all sorts of tests—who are already old and have been listening to them for no less than thirty years; who only now say that the things that used to seem most unconvincing to them now appear most convincing and evident, while the things that used to appear most convincing are now the opposite.[99]

The turning of the whole soul means not just an intellectual knowing, but a reorientation of our way of seeing the world. Whatever else they may be besides, all of Plato's dialogues are efforts to effect a conversion of this kind. Partly this is done in a negative way, such as by the Socratic technique of provoking aporia, an impasse of thought that shows us the darkness of what previously seemed to us to be most visible.[100] Partly it is done in a positive way, by providing us with doctrines that we can accept as true opinions which, if put into practice, can lead to an experience of knowledge that converts us to virtue. The more we can strengthen our correct moral convictions, so that our intellect holds them as unshakably as possible, the greater the chance that this will happen, that believing will be converted into

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[95] *Republic*, 7.518c–d.
[96] Ibid., 7.521c.
[97] Ibid., 7.518b.
[98] Plato, *The Seventh Letter* 341c–342a.
[99] Plato, *The Second Letter* 314a–c.
[100] See *Meno* 80a–b.

seeing. That is why moralists always give us maxims with which to fight against our passions, like the examples we saw from Marcus Aurelius, Spinoza, Locke, and Leibniz.

It turns out then that virtue really is knowledge, but it is a knowledge which requires that reason "be turned from the realm of becoming together with the whole soul"; in other words, it is a change of perspective in which appetite and spiritedness must participate as well as reason. In that case the oppositions among them disappear, and the soul is no longer tripartite in the earlier sense in which it can be divided against itself. This is the "longer and fuller road" that enables us to "find justice without having to bother any more about self-control."[101]

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[101] I would like to thank Brian Calvert for his helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay.