

Plato's *Republic*

An Introduction

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Sean McAleer, *Plato's Republic: An Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0229>

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ISBN Paperback: 9781800640535

ISBN Hardback: 9781800640542

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800640559

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 9781800640566

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 9781800640573

ISBN XML: 9781800640580

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0229

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13. The *Republic*'s Second Question Answered

Three and a Half Arguments that the Just Life is Happier

Book IX

At long last, in Book IX Socrates is ready to address the *Republic*'s second question, *Is a just life happier than an unjust life?* There is a lot at stake here, as 'the argument concerns no ordinary topic but the way we ought to live' (1.352d). It is important to bear in mind that the 'ought' here is not necessarily a moral ought. Indeed, it seems trivially true that one morally ought to live a morally good life. Socrates is asking a question that does not presuppose a moral answer.¹ He is asking what is the best sort of life for a human being: is it a life of acting justly, or am I personally better off acting unjustly when it pays to do so, all things considered? If I cannot be happy without being just, then I have a good, self-regarding reason to live justly. Socrates initially thought that he had answered this question with Book I's Function Argument, but he quickly realized that he jumped the gun in concluding that the just life is happier before determining what justice itself *is*. But now, having determined what

1 This is a point driven home forcefully in the opening chapter ('Socrates' Question') of Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), esp. pp. 5–6.

justice is to the satisfaction of Glaucon and Adeimantus and the rest, Socrates is ready to deliver.

Argument #1: Comparing Characters (9.576b–580c)

'It is clear to everyone', Socrates says, 'that there is no city more wretched than one ruled by a tyrant and none more happy than one ruled by kings' (9.576e). So much for political happiness. As for personal happiness, settling the question requires us to compare the just and unjust lives—the lives of the aristocratic philosopher and the tyrant, respectively. Actually, it does not require *us* to do this; it requires someone 'who is competent to judge' (9.577a) to do so. Their verdict will decide the case. So, 'who is fit to judge'? (9.576e) The person, Socrates answers, who 'in thought can go down into a person's character and examine it thoroughly, someone who does not judge from outside' (9.577a). After my making so much of the enlightened philosopher's *going down* into the Cave, readers might be deflated at learning that a different verb, ἐνδύειν [*enduein*] is being translated 'go down'. Its primary meaning is 'to try on', as clothes; it can also mean 'to go into'. Though it lacks literary razzle-dazzle, the crucial point is that this is something that the fit judge can do *in thought*: they need not actually (i.e., in body) become a drug addict to assess the addict's life, for example; they can understand this life without having lived it because a philosopher grasps the relevant Form and its relation to the Form of the good. This squares with Socrates' earlier observation that a good judge is aware of injustice 'not as something at home in his own soul, but as something present in others [... he] recognize[s] injustice as bad by nature, not from his own experience of it, but through knowledge' (3.409b).

Another crucial point, related to the first, is that the fit judge does not judge from the outside; they are not 'dazzled by the façade that tyrants adopt [...] but [are] able to see through that sort of thing' (9.577a). This echoes and indeed answers Adeimantus' earlier complaint that the way justice is praised in Athenian culture leads young people to cynically conclude that they 'should create a façade of illusory virtue around [them] to deceive those who come near' (2.365c). The Greek being translated 'a façade of illusory virtue' (σκιαγραφίαν ἀρετῆς [*skiagraphian arêtes*]) should remind us of the shadow-filled world of the Cave, as

it literally means 'a shadow-painting of virtue.' What the competent judge finds is that the tyrannical soul is 'full of disorder and regret' and indeed is 'least likely to do what it wants' (9.577e). The tyrannical soul lacks self-control (9.579c) and its desires are not merely unsustainable but are unfulfillable: the tyrannical addict always wants more.

One especially striking feature is the tyrant's friendlessness: 'someone with a tyrannical nature lives his whole life without being friends with anyone, always a master to one man or a slave to another and never getting a taste of either freedom or true friendship' (9.576a). For most readers, friendship is an important component of a happy life, and Plato would agree. His student Aristotle regarded friendship as one of life's greatest goods, one we cannot lack and still flourish. It seems a general—but not exceptionless—truth that friendship is necessary for happiness. It is not too difficult to see why the tyrant is incapable of friendship. First, friendship is typically a relationship between equals, which the contemporary philosopher Laurence Thomas takes to mean that neither party is under the authority of the other or entitled to the deference of the other.² One friend might be wiser and the other might frequently heed their advice, but the other friend is not obligated to do so: a friend can make suggestions but not issue commands. This is one reason that workplace friendships can be problematic: there may come a time when my friend has to switch roles, from friend to boss, which puts us in a relationship of inequality—and to that extent, at that moment, our friendship recedes into the background. 'I thought you were my friend', I pout. 'I am', she replies. But I am also your supervisor, and you need to clean up that spill in aisle six *right now* or we're going to have a real problem'. The tyrannical soul is bent on outdoing everyone; life is a constant competition in which one dominates or is dominated, and that does not leave much room for friendship, as the tyrant cannot abide anyone being their equal, let alone their superior.

A second reason that friendship is unavailable to the tyrant is that friendship requires—and indeed is a kind of—love. Even if we think Plato's conception of love is overly cognitive and insufficiently affective, we can agree with him that love involves a commitment to the other's

2 Laurence Thomas, 'Friendship and Other Loves', *Synthese*, 72.2 (1987), 217–36 (pp. 217, 221–23).

wellbeing, for the other's own sake. This seems like an impossibility for the tyrant, who always seeks to further their own interests and sees others merely as a means to their own ends. The tyrant might cultivate what *seem* to be friendships, but insofar as they seek their own and not their would-be friend's wellbeing, they are cultivating an ally, not a friend. So when it is in the tyrant's interest to turn on the ally—or the ally's interest to turn on the tyrant—they will do just that. It is no accident that *The Godfather, Part Two* ends with Michael Corleone alone and brooding, isolated and friendless.

Argument #2: The Soul's Distinct Pleasures (9.580d–583a)

The second argument subtly shifts the terms of the argument from *happiness* to *pleasure*. Despite Socrates' earlier rejection of hedonism, there is nothing problematic about the shift to talk of pleasure here. Indeed, it makes perfect sense for Socrates to do so, given that he is trying to show that everyone has good reasons to live justly rather than unjustly. Thus it makes sense to focus on happiness in terms of pleasure, since how pleasant or enjoyable a life is takes up the individual's own perspective, as the argument requires.

Each of the soul's three parts has its own distinctive pleasure, so the question becomes which part's pleasures are most pleasant—the pleasures of the rational part or the spirited part or the appetitive part? In other words, is the just life, in which reason governs, more first-personally pleasant than the life in which appetite rules? There is a wrinkle in Socrates' approach here: he insists that 'there are three primary kinds of people: philosophic, victory-loving, and profit-loving' (9.581c). Offering three possibilities may be an improvement upon thinking that 'there are two kinds of people in this world', but even here readers may rightly object that this division is far from exhaustive, as it omits people who are peace-loving or family-loving. Indeed, Socrates himself earlier suggested another option toward the end of Book V: lovers of beautiful things. Such people (and many others) do not seem to fit any of Socrates' three types, so we might rightly resist Socrates' attempt at shoehorning here. But the wrinkle becomes difficult to iron out if we recall that Socrates has just finished a detailed account of *five*

kinds of people. His distinction between three kinds of people accounts for the aristocratic, timocratic, and oligarchic souls, but what about the democratic and tyrannical? It is puzzling, especially since he is supposed to show that the really just but apparently unjust person is happier than the really unjust but apparently just person, which requires that he compare the aristocrat and the tyrant. Socrates might respond that the third, appetitive kind of life includes the democrat and tyrant as well as the oligarch, but given the way the oligarch's desire for wealth tempered their other desires and bestowed order in their soul, this seems less than satisfactory. This might be a significant problem if this were the only argument given by Socrates that the just life is happier, but as the argument that will follow is 'the greatest and most decisive' (9.583b), all is not lost. Still, though, this is another place where the reader might wish Glaucon or Adeimantus or someone might notice the issue and speak up.

Now, if we ask each representative of the kinds of life which is the happiest, each will insist that their own is. We have no reason to doubt the sincerity of their testimony: each believes their life is more pleasant than the others. It is crucial here to appreciate Socrates' caveat: the dispute is 'not about which way of living is finer or more shameful or better or worse, but about which is more pleasant and less painful' (9.581e). That is, the dispute is not a moral or normative one: the philosopher is *not* arguing that while the money-lover's life is more pleasant the philosopher's own pleasures are better, higher quality pleasures (as John Stuart Mill suggests in *Utilitarianism*); the philosopher asserts the descriptive, quantitative claim that the pleasures of reason are *more* pleasant than those of spirit or appetite.

A relativist or subjectivist will suggest that the dispute cannot be settled, shrugging and rhetorically asking, 'Who's to say?' Socrates, though, does not think that the relativist's question is rhetorical and offers an answer: the competent judge is to say. While it is true that each of the three offers testimony that their life is most pleasant, only the philosopher offers *expert* testimony, so to speak, since only the philosopher is really competent to judge the issue. Judging competently and indeed judging well is a matter of 'experience, reason, and argument' (9.582a), Socrates tells us. The philosopher clearly has the advantage as regards reason, since reason governs their

soul. And they clearly have the edge as regards argument: argument is the instrument by which we judge, and 'argument is a philosopher's instrument most of all' (9.582d). As for experience, Socrates argues that the philosopher alone has experienced all three kinds of pleasure: the philosopher has enjoyed the pleasures that come with having one's desires and appetites satisfied and with being honored, but neither the honor-lover nor the appetitive money-lover has any experience of the pleasure of knowing the Forms. Thus, Socrates argues, since the philosopher alone is a competent judge, we should accept their verdict: the philosophical, aristocratic life, which is the just life, is the happiest of the three.

Many readers will be less confident about this than Socrates seems to be. First, some will doubt that grasping the Forms exhausts the possibilities for intellectual pleasure. It is not as though investment bankers and plumbers do not find their work intellectually challenging and rewarding. While they no doubt enjoy being well compensated, many also enjoy the challenges of putting together complex financial instruments and solving construction problems. Although one would hope that intellectual snobbery is not at work here, one might well fear that it is, leading Plato to downgrade not only the manual arts but also intellectual arts not aimed at abstract knowing.

A second concern focuses on that claim that the philosopher has experienced the pleasure of being honored and thus is a better judge than the honor-lover. This is difficult to square with the attitudes towards philosophy that Socrates dealt with in Book VI, where he conceded that people who think that philosophers are vicious or useless 'seem [...] to speak the truth' (6.487d). It turned out, of course, that the public mistakenly takes sophists to be philosophers and thus that the 'slander [against] philosophy is unjust' (6.497a). But even so, in the very act of defending philosophy against this slander Socrates gives evidence that slander is afoot and thus that philosophers know very little of being honored. Remember that Glaucon imagined the idea of philosopher-kings would be met not with relief but with people 'snatch[ing] any available weapon, and mak[ing] a determined rush at you, ready to do terrible things' (5.474a), so it is not difficult to doubt Socrates' claim that philosophers are well acquainted with being honored. Nor does his claim that 'honor comes to each of them, provided that he accomplishes his

aim' (9.582c) encourage confidence. In the last chapter we discussed the difference between the external good of being honored and the internal good of being honorable or worthy of honor. Indeed, in defending philosophy against slander, Socrates argues that philosophers—the genuine philosophers he tries to distinguish from the frauds in Books V, VI, and VII—are honorable, but he does not (and seemingly cannot) show that they have in fact been honored. He needs to establish the latter, descriptive claim that philosophers are actually regarded, not the former, normative claim about what sort of treatment they deserve or are entitled to.

So there is reason to doubt the cogency of the second argument. As usual, we might agree with its conclusion—that the just life is happier and preferable—but regard this argument as failing to justify it. That is the bad news. The good news is that, as noted above, Socrates regards the next argument as 'the greatest and most decisive' (9.583b) of the three. Let us see what it has to offer.

Argument #3: The Metaphysics of Pleasure (9.583b–588a)

The third argument, which I call 'the Metaphysics of Pleasure Argument', is the philosophically most interesting of the three, arguing that the pleasures of reason are more pleasant than the pleasures of spirit or appetite because they are more real; the latter seem the result of 'shadow-painting (ἐσκιαγραφημένη [*eskiagraphêmenê*])' (9.583b) by comparison, the sorts of things we expect to encounter on the wall of the Cave. It is also the philosophically most precarious, since it presumes the reality of the Platonic Forms. I will go a little out of order in presenting the argument and make the existential sense of the verb 'to be' more apparent. Here is the heart of the argument, as Socrates makes it (with a little help from Glaucon):

And isn't that which is more [real], and is filled with things that are more [real], really more filled than that which is less [real], and is filled with things that are less [real]?

Of course.

Therefore, if being filled with what is appropriate to our nature is pleasure, that which is more filled with things that are more [real] enjoys more really and truly a more true pleasure, while that which partakes of things that are less [real] is less truly and surely filled and partakes of a less trustworthy and less true pleasure.

That is absolutely inevitable. (9.585d-e)

At the heart of the argument is an understanding of pleasure as the result of being appropriately filled. Think of the pleasure a good, simple meal affords when you are hungry, or the pleasure of enjoying—i.e., being filled with—good music. Too much filling, be it too much food or music that is too loud, does not yield pleasure, since pleasure requires *appropriate* filling. Since what is more real is more filling and what is more filling is more pleasant, it follows that what is more real is more pleasant. But since the Forms are more real than any particulars, they are more filling, and thus the pleasure of knowing the Forms—which is the distinctive pleasure of the reason-governed, just person—is greater than the pleasures of being honored or having one's appetites satisfied. Stated in premise-conclusion form, the argument looks like this:

- P1 What is more real is more filling.
- P2 What is more filling is more pleasant.
- P3 The objects of the rational pleasures are more real than the objects of the spirited pleasures and the appetitive pleasures.
- C1 Therefore, rational pleasures are more filling than spirited and appetitive pleasures. (From P1, P3)
- C2 Therefore, rational pleasures are more pleasant than spirited and appetitive pleasures. (From P2, C1)
- P4 Each kind of life has a distinctive pleasure, determined by which part of the soul rules: the just person's pleasures are rational pleasures; the unjust person's pleasures are appetitive pleasures.
- C3 Therefore, the just life is more pleasant than the unjust life. (From C2, P4)
- C4 Therefore, the just life is happier than the unjust life. (From C3)

As with the previous argument, it is important to bear in mind Socrates' caveat that the argument concerns quantity, not quality: it is not an argument 'about which way of living is finer [...] or better [...] but about which is more pleasant' (9.581e). The argument concerns which life contains the most pleasure, not a ranking of the pleasures in terms of quality, where, for example, intellectual pleasures are superior to appetitive pleasures. It would not be unreasonable for Socrates to insist that the just person's pleasures, being pleasures of the best part of the soul, are better, higher quality pleasures, but to concede that rational pleasures are not as pleasant as appetitive pleasures. But Socrates does *not* make this argument. Instead, he argues that rational pleasures are more pleasant than appetitive pleasures. So the Metaphysics of Pleasure Argument implies that the pleasures of doing philosophy or solving a calculus problem are more pleasant than the pleasure of sex. And that is going to strike many readers as preposterous.

I think Plato is fully aware of how preposterous this seems, and he has a response ready. This response actually comes *before* the argument as I have stated it, hence the 'going out of order' I mentioned above. Plato's response is that while it *seems* that appetitive pleasures are more pleasant than rational pleasures, this is an illusion and not how things really are.

Contrary versus Contradictory Opposites

This is the point, I think, of the analogy he draws between pleasure and space. There is an up, a down, and a middle in space (Plato seems to be thinking of *space* as *place*, as a large container or room). If I am down and start ascending, I might mistakenly think I am at *up* when in fact I am merely at *middle*. Someone who is at *up* and then descends might think they are at *down* when they are at *middle*. If we meet, we might disagree about where we are, neither of us realizing that we are at *middle*. Just as there is an up, a down, and a middle in space, Socrates suggests that there is pleasure, pain, and a neutral state of calm. And we regularly, wrongly take up/down and pleasure/pain to be contradictory opposites when in fact they are contrary opposites. A pair of opposites is contradictory when at least and at most one of them must be true or apply in a given situation; a pair is contrary when

at most one must be true, but it might be that neither is true or applies. Consider *hot* and *cold*. They are clearly opposites, but they are contrary opposites: while at most one of them applies to a given object, it may be that neither does. The place where you are reading this book might be hot or it might be cold, but it might be neither: it might be cool, warm, tepid, chilly, balmy—even room temperature. (Here we should remember the Opposition Principle from Book IV: if both of a pair of opposites applies, this suggests that the thing they apply to has parts. If I am both hot and cold, part of me is hot and part is cold, or I am hot now and then cold in an instant, etc.) While hot and cold are contrary opposites, cold and not-cold are contradictory opposites: everything is either cold or not-cold. Tucson in July? Not cold. Eau Claire in January? Cold. The number twelve? Not cold: numbers have no temperature, so they go in the not-cold column. On a well-written true-false question, 'true' and 'false' are contradictory opposites: at least and at most one of them is correct. But, other things being equal, 'true' and 'false' are contrary opposites: many things are neither true nor false. Questions are neither true nor false (although the answers to them might be true or false); exclamations ('dang!') are neither true nor false; and of course non-linguistic items—picnic tables, peanut butter, pencils, etc.—are neither true nor false, since they make no assertions (though of course they can be what assertions are about).

Many of us make mistakes when it comes to opposites. We think that 'helping' and 'harming' are contradictory opposites when in fact they are contrary: action can make a thing better off (helping) or worse off (harming) or leave it neutral. The good-hearted but dim-witted Ricky Bobby of *Talladega Nights* lives his life mistakenly thinking that *first* and *last* are contradictory opposites: 'If you ain't first, you're last!' he insists.³ With the help of his father (his confusion's source), Ricky later comes to see the folly of this "wisdom". Plato's suggestion, I think, is that most of us take pleasure and pain to be contradictory opposites when in fact they are contraries. After a week in bed with the flu, the first day of feeling normal again *seems* pleasant, but it is really only not painful: I am mistaking the neutral state of calm for pleasure. After an exhilarating, inspiring vacation a return to normal is a real downer, but

3 *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*, dir. by Adam McKay (Sony Pictures, 2006).

I am probably just mistaking the neutral state of calm for pain, having been experiencing so much pleasure.

Optical and Hedonic Illusions

A person who is 'inexperienced in what is really and truly up, down, and in the middle' (9.584e) will regularly make mistakes about where they are since they will mistake up and down to be contradictory opposites. And similarly, 'those who are inexperienced in the truth [and] have unsound opinions' (9.584e) will regularly make mistakes about what they are experiencing. Here's the catch: becoming experienced in the truth and having sound opinions will not ensure that we are no longer subject to illusions about where we are or what we are feeling: it still feels like I am at up when I am only at middle, and this still feels like pleasure when in fact it is only non-pain. But being experienced in the truth and having sound opinions I can now know that things are not as they appear to me. Consider the famous Müller-Lyer illusion, below in Fig. 4:

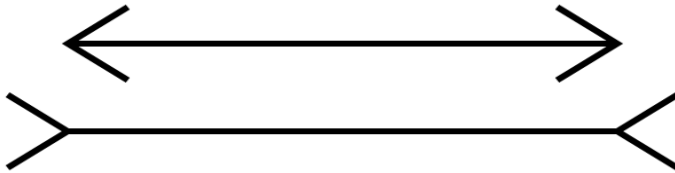


Fig. 4. Müller-Lyer illusion. Photograph by Fibonacci (2007),
Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1792612>)

It seems to be psychologically impossible to see the line segments as the same length: try as we might, the lower one just looks longer. If we measure the lines, as in Fig. 5, we can see that they are the same length:



Fig. 5. Müller-Lyer illusion. Photograph by Fibonacci (2007),
Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1792612>

Even so, when I look back at Fig. 4, I cannot see them as being the same length—I assume readers have the same experience. Our senses deceive us: what *seems* to be the case is not what *is* the case: This deception is persistent and not correctable by reasoning and measurement in that we see the lines as having different lengths even when we know that they are the same length. That is what makes it an optical illusion.

The philosopher Jessica Moss argues that Plato is suggesting that just as we are prone to optical illusions, we are also prey to *hedonic* illusions: illusions about pleasure.⁴ Of course sexual pleasure *seems* more pleasant than rational pleasure, just as the bottom line *seems* longer than the top line: there is no way to perceive the comparative lengths of the lines accurately, just as there is no way to perceive the comparative amounts of the pleasures accurately. Measuring the lines tells us that our visual perception tricks us, just as rational argument tells us that our hedonic perception tricks us. 'Calculating, measuring, and weighting are the work of the rational part of the soul' (10.602d), Socrates will tell us in Book X. And of course, 'argument is a philosopher's instrument most of all' (9.582d), since it is the rational instrument *par excellence*. Reason cannot alter our visual experience of the lines, making us see them as having the same length—but it can remind us that our perception is faulty and that they are in fact the same length. And similarly, reason cannot make us experience rational pleasures as more pleasant than appetitive pleasures, it can tell us that they are. Reason cannot make us experientially immune to optical or hedonic illusions: we will continue to experience them. But it can render us rationally immune to them:

4 Jessica Moss, 'Pleasure and Illusion in Plato', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 72 (2006), 503–35, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2006.tb00582.x>

we can know that they are systematically misleading and that the way things *appear* is not the way things really *are*.

The upshot of all this is that, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, the just person's life is happier than the unjust person's—in fact, it is 729 times happier, if Socrates' geometric 'proof' is to be believed. The tyrant, he reasons, is, counting himself, 'three times removed' from the oligarch: tyrant–democrat–oligarch. And the oligarch is three times removed from the aristocrat. Three times three is nine, which cubed—that is, three-dimensionalized—makes the aristocrat 729 times happier than the tyrant. As with the 'perfect number' at the start of Book VIII, I am not sure that Plato intends this to be taken seriously; I am inclined to take it as a joke, and, like most philosophical jokes it is not especially funny. I suggest that we think of it as Plato's way of suggesting that the contest between the just and unjust lives is not even close: the just life is *way* happier than the unjust life.

The Metaphysical Elevator and the Metaphysics of Pleasure

As many readers will expect, there is a major worry about the Metaphysics of Pleasure Argument. It is not a *logical* worry, since the Metaphysics of Pleasure Argument is valid: its conclusion must be true if its premises are true. But its soundness—that is, the question of whether its premises are actually true, given that it is valid—is another matter. P3, that the objects of the rational pleasures—the Forms—are more real than the objects of the spirited pleasures and the appetitive pleasures—concrete particulars—is not obviously true, and indeed for many readers it is obviously not true. P3 is true only if Plato's Metaphysical Elevator goes all the way to Level Four, where the Forms are not only mind-independently real but are *more real* than the many particular things that are instances of them. Even going to Level Three, where the Forms are mind-independently real, is not enough to make P3 true, and many readers will balk at going even to this level. More readers, I suspect, will get off the Elevator at the second floor, insisting that the Forms are human constructs and that the concrete particular things are more real than the Forms so conceived, since the Forms so

conceived are mind-dependent entities while the particulars are not. For these readers, P3 should be replaced with:

- P3* The objects of the appetitive pleasures are more real than the objects of the spirited pleasures and the rational pleasures.

This yields these conclusions:

- C1* Therefore, appetitive pleasures are more filling than spirited and rational pleasures. (From P1, P3*)
- C2* Therefore, appetitive pleasures are more pleasant than spirited and rational pleasures. (From P2, C1*)

This better fits with the commonsensical views that eating a donut is more pleasurable, because more filling, than grasping the Form of the donut and thus understanding the essence of donut-ness, and that sexual pleasure is more pleasant than philosophical pleasure. Perhaps Socrates was wrong to focus on quantity rather than quality. Many readers might concede that while appetitive pleasures are *more pleasant* than rational pleasures, rational pleasures are *better, higher quality* pleasures than appetitive pleasures, as they appeal to our higher nature as rational creatures. But this is expressly *not* what Socrates is arguing.

Even readers inclined to think that Plato's theory of the Forms is right and thus to take the Metaphysical Elevator all the way to the fourth floor should concede that, at least in the *Republic*, Plato has not provided good reasons to believe in the Forms. The argument that supports his two-worlds metaphysics, the Powers Argument, is logically invalid, and even if this invalidity can be fixed, we have good reason to doubt that knowledge and belief have different objects. This casts a long, dark shadow across the *Republic*.

Socrates regards the Metaphysics of Pleasure Argument as 'the greatest and most decisive' (9.583b) in answering the *Republic's* second question, but it depends for its soundness on the problematic Powers Argument. So even if we agree with Socrates that the just life is happier—perhaps even 729 times happier—than the unjust life, we will have to concede that he has not really given Glaucon and Adeimantus what they asked of him, a justification for this belief.

Argument #3½: 'an image of the soul in words' (9.588b–590e)

Given the dependence of the Metaphysics of Pleasure Argument on the Powers Argument, things look bleak for Socrates' view that the just life is happier than the unjust life. But Plato follows up the philosophically abstract Metaphysics of Pleasure Argument with an intuitive metaphor that he does not officially count as an argument—hence the '½'—but which seems more powerful than the supposedly 'decisive' argument he just gave, and not merely because it does not depend in any way on the contentious metaphysics of the Forms. To argue against the view that the unjust but seemingly just life is happier, Socrates offers 'an image of the soul in words' (9.588b). Perhaps this is Plato's way of indicating that he understands that the Metaphysics of Pleasure Argument will not persuade skeptics unconvinced of the reality of the Forms. Or perhaps it is a subtle way of reminding us that we are in the Cave, where images and shadows are the cognitive coin of the realm.

Imagine first a 'multicolored beast' (9.588c) with many heads, some the heads of gentle animals, others more savage. 'Multicolored' translates ποικίλος [*poikilos*], a nod to the multicolored garment that is worn by the defective democratic *polis* in Book VIII. Then imagine a lion, smaller than the beast, and last a human being, smallest of the three. Then join these three so that they 'grow together naturally' (9.588d): the resulting creature is not mere artifice, a jumble of separate parts having nothing to do with each other, but something that functions as an integrated organism. Finally, cloak them in a human exterior, so anyone aware only of the exterior will think the creature a human being.

The analogy is fairly straightforward: the multiform beast represents the appetites, the lion represents the spirited part of the soul, and the inner human being represents reason. Now, Socrates argues, when someone who maintains that injustice is more profitable, better for you than justice, what they are telling you, is that you are better off feeding the beast, starving the human, and getting the lion to do the beast's bidding. But no one would think that is prudent. To claim that the unjust life is happier implies something false—namely, that you are better off feeding the voracious, multiform beast and starving reason—so it follows that the unjust life is *not* happier than the just life.

It is perhaps surprising that Socrates argues that one should not starve the beast, but earlier he indicated that the philosopher 'neither starves nor feasts his appetites' (9.571e) in his nighttime ritual to keep his dreams free of lawless, unnecessary appetites. Nor should we let the beast's different parts attack and kill each other. Though Plato would likely agree with Immanuel Kant's view that 'it must be [...] the universal wish of every rational being to be altogether free of them'⁵ our appetites are not going anywhere, at least not as long as we inhabit a body. The beast is part of us. So we should bring our parts into harmony with each other, as much as possible, 'accustoming them to each other and making them friendly' (9.589a). In living a just life we tend the beast as a farmer cares for their animals, domesticating some and separating and containing the feral ones.

It is a compelling picture in many ways, but Socrates takes it even further. Someone who lives unjustly is enslaving the best part of himself, reason, to feed the worst, appetite. When the financial rewards are great enough, that might seem a bargain worth striking. But no one, Socrates argues, would enslave his children to 'savage and evil men' (9.589d); there is no amount of money that would make *that* a good deal: 'it would not profit him, no matter how much gold he got' (9.589e). Why, then, are we willing to treat ourselves so poorly, in ways we cannot imagine treating those we love? It is a fascinating insight. What philosophers sometimes call 'self-other asymmetry' usually involves our problematically treating ourselves *better* than we treat others. Virtues and moral reasons are often correctives to this egoistic tendency to think our interests count for more than the interests of others. While some advocate altruism, the view that our interests count for *less* than the interests of others, correcting egoism requires only the egalitarian view that everyone's interests have the same weight—that self and other are symmetric. What is so interesting about Plato's point here is the suggestion that the self-other asymmetry at work when we are trying 'to determine which whole way of life would make living most worthwhile for each of us' (1.344e) is one in which we give our interests, at least our true interests, *less* weight than we should.

I suspect that this will resonate with many readers. If I have promised a friend to meet for an early morning bike ride, it is extremely unlikely

5 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 40 [Ak. 4:428].

that I will roll over and go back to sleep when the alarm wakes me. But if it is a promise I have made only to myself, well, if it is a cold and dark morning there is a decent chance that I will turn the alarm off and stay in bed. If I would never casually blow off a commitment made to a friend, why would I do so when it is one I have made to myself? If reason fully governed my soul, my appetites for sloth and comfort would have been tamed by reason and its ally, spirit. Readers tempted to judge themselves harshly on this issue should take some comfort from the fact that Marcus Aurelius, the great Stoic and indeed the Emperor of Rome, often wanted to stay in bed, too, and tried to have arguments at the ready to rouse himself (*Meditations* 5.1).

One great advantage of Socrates' analogy is that it does not presuppose the problematic theory of the Forms. It is simple and intuitive, as the best analogies are. It is not without objection, however. As mentioned much earlier, the great eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume thought that philosophers regularly overstated the claims of reason; Hume thought that reason was but the slave of the passions, so he would be skeptical of the ideal person Plato has sketched here. So too would Epicurus, whose taxonomy of desire we explored in the last chapter. Neither of these philosophers advocated egoism and injustice, but neither had the lofty view of reason that one finds in Plato in particular and in the Western philosophical tradition in general. It is worth noting that much contemporary psychology sides with Hume and Epicurus against Plato and most of the Western philosophical tradition. Reason, the eminent social psychologist Jonathan Haidt argues, is like someone riding an elephant; only a fool could think they are in charge of the elephant. But they can learn the elephant's ways, learn that there is wisdom in the emotions, and use their rationality to guide the elephant toward the goals it naturally has.

So even if we are skeptical of the role Plato assigns to reason, we might find a modified version of this analogical argument plausible, one in which the inner human being is constituted not by pure reason but by emotions such as compassion, care, and love. And we might well wonder, too, if what Hume called a sensible knave—someone who generally acts justly but cheats when they can do so without detection—would be persuaded, and indeed if *we* should be persuaded, that the just person's life is more pleasant than the sensible knave's. Socrates' argument seems

plausible against the tyrant but perhaps this is only because a reason-governed philosopher-king will always fare better than the manic basket of addictions, neuroses, and psychoses that is the tyrant. But how a philosopher-king would fare against someone who is decent but cuts corners (perhaps when the harm he does is not significant and the gain to him vastly outweighs it) is another matter. Socrates insists that the unjust person's injustice can remain undiscovered only for so long, and while we can think of examples confirming this claim—off the top of my head, I offer Lance Armstrong, Bernie Madoff, and any number of politicians who are brought down by scandals—it is worth noting that this is spurious evidence for Socrates' claim. That we can list unjust people whose injustice has been discovered does not provide reasons for thinking that there cannot be unjust people whose injustice remains undiscovered. It may well be that the just person and the sensible knave have incompatible conceptions of happiness.

Paternalism (9.590d)

So the just life, which for Plato is the life in which reason governs the soul, is significantly happier than the unjust life. It may not always be the happiest possible life, since, as we have seen, living in an unjust or a non-just *polis* precludes full happiness. So justice, while necessary for happiness, is not by itself sufficient for it (something Stoicism, which began around 300 BCE and which is currently enjoying a renaissance in our troubled age, disagrees with, taking virtue to be sufficient for happiness).

We have noted on several occasions Plato's insistence that 'the majority cannot be philosophic' (6.494a). Most of us are not capable of grasping the Form of the good, Plato thinks, so most of us are not capable of acquiring the personal virtue of wisdom. We may have true beliefs about what is best for our souls, but by our natures we lack the capacity for *knowledge* in this area. But if that is the case, how can the non-philosophers among us be happy? It seems that most of us are doomed to live unhappy lives. Is there any way to escape this pessimistic conclusion?

There is, Plato thinks—though his solution is unlikely to be attractive to most readers. Since most of us cannot be ruled by our own power

of reason, it is best that we be ruled by the philosopher-king's (and -queen's) reason:

Therefore, to insure that someone like that is ruled by something similar to what rules the best person, we say that he ought to be the slave of that best person who has a divine ruler within himself. It is not to harm the slave that we say he must be ruled [...] but because it is better for everyone to be ruled by divine reason, preferably within himself and his own, otherwise imposed from without, so that as far as possible all will be alike and friends, governed by the same thing. (9.590c–d)

Even if Plato means 'slave' (δοῦλος [*doulos*]) only metaphorically, many if not most readers will reject this out of hand. Most readers, I suspect, are liberals—not in the contemporary American political sense of voting Democratic instead of Republican, but in the philosophical sense of valuing liberty over wellbeing. Paternalists prioritize wellbeing over liberty where the two conflict, holding that interfering with another person's liberty or autonomy is justified if the interference benefits the person being interfered with. Philosophical liberals, by contrast, typically hold that the only justification for interfering with someone's liberty is to prevent harm to another person; if my conduct harms only me or is harmless but regarded as immoral, the liberal argues, neither the state nor another person is justified in interfering. Of course, if I am not in my right mind or if I am lacking vital information, most liberals will countenance temporary interference. If I do not know that the bridge ahead is out, the liberal might try to stop me from bicycling across it—but only to make sure that I am aware of this materially relevant fact or that my judgment is not impaired. If I know that the bridge is out—for me, the whole point is to try to jump across the missing span—the liberal will not think interfering is justified.

It is not surprising that Plato endorses paternalism. But most Americans, I think, take liberalism (in the philosophical sense) for granted, at least to a significant degree. Most of us, I suspect, share John Stuart Mill's view that 'the only purpose for which power can rightfully be exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others'.⁶ One of Mill's arguments

6 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. by Elizabeth Rappaport (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978), p. 9.

for this view is that paternalism does not work: given the centrality of autonomy and spontaneity to the conception of happiness many of us share, outside interference for our own good will likely backfire, since the resentment we feel at being interfered with will outweigh the good that the interference does. We can probably think of cases where Mill is mistaken, especially where the benefit done is significant and the interference is minimal, as in seatbelt laws. Many readers will think Mill's argument is beside the point, holding that interfering with a competent adult for that adult's benefit is wrong in itself, regardless of any beneficial consequences, since paternalism manifests a failure of respect. We interfere with our and even others' children when doing so is required to protect the children from themselves. But adults are another matter entirely.

We will not adjudicate this dispute between liberalism and paternalism here; I raise it largely to give readers a framework and vocabulary with which to agree or disagree with Plato. To justify the belief that, fundamentally, liberty trumps wellbeing, may prove more difficult than even die-hard liberals imagine. And it may be that our shared ideology shapes our views on questions like this in a non-rational way. Many readers are familiar with Patrick Henry's saying 'Give me liberty or give me death!', and many of us know that New Hampshire's license plate reads 'Live Free or Die' (which, admittedly, makes Wisconsin's motto, 'America's Dairyland', sound pretty tame). But, like Glaucon and Adeimantus, our task as rational creatures is to think through these core values and to try to find good reasons to justify what we already believe. Of course, we may fail, or we may change our minds, perhaps thinking that the liberal, individualistic conception of happiness that grounds our objections to Plato's paternalism is, if not 'a silly, adolescent idea of happiness' (5.466b), one we no longer fully endorse after reflection.

Plato's paternalism is fueled by, among other things, his anti-egalitarian belief that most people are incapable of wisdom as well as his highly demanding conception of what counts as knowledge. Some readers will be skeptical that we can ever *know* what is best, in Plato's sense, insisting that the best we can do is to have justified beliefs about how to live, and that views very much at odds with each other might be justified. Such readers may insist that the intellectual virtues of humility and open-mindedness are crucial to thinking about how to

live well, and that while Plato has challenged them to think through some of their fundamental values and presuppositions, he has not succeeded in convincing them that those values are mistaken and those presuppositions are false.

At best, Plato's arguments seem to provide a reason for those who already find themselves in agreement with their conclusion—but that does not render wrestling with the *Republic* a worthless, circular enterprise. Even if one's reasons for living justly will not convince the Thrasymachuses of the world, it is valuable to ensure that our beliefs form as consistent a set as possible. Most of us, I suspect, are more like Glaucon and Adeimantus than we are like Thrasymachus (though we probably all have a bit of him in us), who want Socrates to show them that their belief that the just life is happier is justified or at the very least not foolish, wishful thinking. It would be nice if egoists found these reasons persuasive, but that may be asking too much of philosophy. Plato and Socrates thought philosophy could do this, but we have seen over and over that their arguments fall well short of the mark and that only people who share their fundamental assumptions (e.g., about the Forms) will find their arguments persuasive.

Even so, those of us who do not share those fundamental assumptions can find their arguments intriguing and worthy of the time and attention of reflective people who take seriously the question of how to live their lives.

Some Suggestions for Further Reading

Readers interested in exploring the philosophy of friendship will find no better place to start than with Books 8 and 9 of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which they will find, along with other excellent readings, in *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship*, ed. by Michael Pakaluk (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1991). Readers will find Laurence Thomas' excellent essay, 'Friendship and Other Loves' and others in *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. by Neera Badhwar (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

Readers interested in Mill's distinction between higher and lower pleasures will find it discussed in Chapter Two of John Stuart Mill,

Utilitarianism, 2nd ed., ed. by George Sher (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002), pp. 8–11.

Matthew Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010) is an excellent discussion of, among other things, the role reason plays in the 'manual arts', offering a powerful antidote to Plato's views from a Ph.D. philosopher who repairs vintage motorcycles for a living.

Readers interested in a leading psychologist's take on the role reason plays in a happy life should start with Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

Readers interested in philosophical or legal liberalism would do well to start with John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. by Elizabeth Rappaport (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978). For an interesting collection of essays on paternalism, readers might have a look at *Paternalism*, ed. by Rolf Sartorius (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

Readers interested in a brief musical exploration of the multicolored beast who dwells within should listen to Nick Lowe, 'The Beast in Me', on *Quiet Please... The New Best of Nick Lowe* (Yep Roc Records, 2009).

