

GOOD CHARACTER AND PHILOSOPHY IN
PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

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Abstract

In this thesis, I argue that the ethical theory Plato develops in the *Republic* assigns critical importance to the role of one's moral dispositions in their ability to make progress in philosophy. On this view, cultivating a good character, although not sufficient for pursuing philosophy, is necessary for success in philosophic endeavor. Conversely, having a vicious character precludes one from being able to acquire wisdom, which is the goal of philosophy. This is in contrast to Socratic intellectualism, which Plato is commonly seen to have adhered to in his earlier writings. The intellectualist view holds that knowledge is sufficient for virtue, and so one naturally becomes virtuous through the acquisition of wisdom. In other words, rather than virtuous character being necessary for philosophy, it is merely an effect of becoming wise. I argue that Plato moderates this kind of intellectualism in *Republic* in a way that makes the relationship between moral virtue and wisdom bidirectional. I demonstrate the plausibility of this thesis by examining an array of themes in the *Republic*, starting with the nature of philosophy and what it means to be a philosopher, and concluding with a look at the theory of education Plato advances throughout the dialogue.

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Chapter One: The Nature of Philosophy..... | 9 |
| 1.1 Introduction..... | 9 |
| 1.2 Philosophic Activity..... | 10 |
| 1.3 The Good of Philosophy | 19 |
| 1.3.1 The good as difficult to apprehend | 22 |
| 1.4 The Character of the Philosopher | 29 |
| 1.5 Conclusion | 40 |
| Chapter Two: Education and Character Formation | 42 |
| 2.1 Introduction..... | 42 |
| 2.2 Degenerate Souls | 43 |
| 2.2.1 Introduction..... | 43 |
| 2.2.2 The timocratic man | 45 |
| 2.2.3 The oligarchic man | 49 |
| 2.2.4 The democratic man..... | 52 |
| 2.2.5 The tyrant | 56 |
| 2.2.6 Conclusions on degenerate character | 57 |
| 2.3. The Aims of Education | 59 |
| 2.3.1 Introduction..... | 59 |
| 2.3.2 Beginning well | 61 |
| 2.3.3 Character formation | 64 |
| 2.4 The Cave and Degrees of Virtue..... | 67 |
| 2.5 <i>Mousikē</i> and Its Effects | 73 |
| 2.7 Conclusion | 78 |
| Conclusion | 82 |
| Bibliography | 89 |

Introduction

In this thesis, I argue that, in the *Republic*, Plato develops the notion that our moral character is essential to our ability to succeed in philosophy.¹ Consequently, whether someone has a virtuous or vicious character will either enable, or inhibit, their ability to make philosophical progress. It is fairly uncontroversial to claim that, for Plato, certain qualities of the intellect are necessary to succeed in philosophy, since philosophy aims at a kind of knowledge, namely, wisdom. And indeed, Socrates lists these qualities in the *Republic* as being necessary for the philosopher, such as having good memory and being quick to learn (487a).² This is easy enough to understand, since the philosopher must not only be able to acquire knowledge, but be able to retain it as well. What is more controversial, however, is the idea that in order to successfully pursue philosophy, one must have a prerequisite moral character; and yet, cultivating a virtuous character is so central to the conception of philosophy advanced in the *Republic* that philosophical inquiry would not be possible without doing so.

¹ While one could potentially survey Plato's corpus in a more thematic way to gather support for the claim of this thesis, in order to keep the project manageable I have chosen to focus on the *Republic* because it contains a particularly detailed discussion of the nature and importance of education, as well as a detailed image of what philosophy and the philosopher is. However, at times I appeal to passages from certain other dialogues, such as *Phaedo*, and *Theaetetus*, because they provide additional support for my claims, and enhance our understanding of key themes in *Republic*.

² Except in the case of *Theaetetus*, where I use the translation of Harold N. Fowler, when referencing Plato I am using the translations from *Plato: Complete Works*, edited by John M. Cooper. When referencing Aristotle, I am using the translations from *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, edited by Jonathan Barnes.

When talking about good moral character, I mean the sum of one's good dispositions. These include the virtues which Plato lists as necessary for the philosopher at 487a, such as courage, moderation, and justice, as well as related qualities such as high-mindedness, which is opposed to pettiness, and determination, which is opposed to irresoluteness. These dispositions are ethical states, and are different from qualities of the intellect like good memory, which are not moral in nature, i.e., pertaining to right and wrong action. Socrates refers to this distinction by differentiating between reason and "the other so-called virtues of the soul" (518e), which he says are acquired by habit, like the virtues of the body. This distinction is elaborated upon by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he differentiates between the kinds of virtue:

Excellence too is distinguished into kinds in accordance with this difference; for we say that some excellences are intellectual and others moral... For in speaking about a man's character we do not say that he is wise or has understanding but that he is good-tempered or temperate... (1103a4-8).

The virtues of the non-rational parts of the soul are referred to as virtues "so-called", because in order for them to be fully actualized in someone, these virtues must be overseen by knowledge and wisdom (443e; cf. 619c). In the early stages of development, and prior to becoming a philosopher, these virtues of character are therefore imperfectly possessed. The central aim of this thesis is not to deny that wisdom contributes to the perfection of virtue, rather it is to show that

Plato believes one's moral character is also essential to their ability to become a philosopher. These moral dispositions well-dispose someone towards the good insofar as they safeguard the power of reason, preventing its activities from going awry by focusing on false goods, and enabling it to focus on true goods, and ultimately the good itself.

Although in the *Republic* we are never presented with a clear exposition of what the good itself is, one cannot be mistaken that our conception of it in some way determines the kind of lives we will lead.³ Socrates says "every soul pursues the good and does its utmost for its sake" (505e), but that there are many controversies over what people believe to be good. The majority, for example, believe that pleasure is highest good, and therefore organize their lives around this principle. People, however, are not content with pursuing the good on the basis of mere belief, but want "things that *really* are good" (505d). It is on account of this that Socrates establishes the need for the guardians of the city to have knowledge just and fine things, not just correct beliefs, but knowledge of why things are good. Plato's representation of human action, however, does not reduce to a strict rationalism, whereby we need only to perfect our reason in order to be virtuous. Such an account would reduce moral virtue to simply being a concomitant effect of wisdom.

³ Socrates says he is afraid he cannot define the good itself and would look foolish doing so. He also suggests that his interlocutors, Glaucon and Adeimantus, are not capable of understanding it (506d-507a).

This intellectualism is motivated elsewhere in Plato's works, such as in the *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*, in which we are presented with the image of a philosopher as an abstract thinker who is seemingly detached from the affairs of the corporeal world. In *Theaetetus* there is a famous depiction of the philosopher as 'otherworldly', someone who is "so eager to know the things in the sky that he could not see what was there before him at his very feet" (174a), "does not know how to pack up his bedding" (175e), and tries to escape from this world as quickly as he can (176a).

One could be forgiven for drawing the conclusion that philosophy, being a pursuit concerned with apprehending the Forms, or "the ascent to what is" (521c), needs only the power of reason. And yet, according to Plato, this is not the case. When Socrates advances his conception of philosophy in the *Republic*, it is intimately tied to notions of moral virtue. This, as it turns out, is a prominent theme which runs through the *Republic*: the kind of moral character we have determines our ability to be philosophers.

This interpretation stands in contrast to another view of Plato's moral theory, which may have contributed to marginalizing his significance in contemporary educational theory. This other interpretation of Plato's moral psychology is called 'Socratic intellectualism' and comes from a fairly uncontroversial reading of what are thought to be earlier dialogues which precede the *Republic*, e.g., *Euthydemus*, *Laches*, *Meno*, and *Protagoras*. In these dialogues, the view that is explicitly advanced by Socrates is that a) wisdom is sufficient for

virtue, and b) all virtues can be explained as intellectual states. In other words, starting with the premise that we all desire the good, if the activities of reason are calculative or evaluative, and reason is the governing principle of the human being, all that is required to do good is to have the correct understanding of the good.

However, in the *Republic* there is notable shift away from the “Socratic” view to one which more closely resembles that which we find in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, where intellectual and moral virtues are mutually reinforcing and reciprocal in each other’s development. This nuance has, in part, led to the continued relevance of Aristotle’s view, for example, in virtue epistemology and educational theory. It is interesting that Aristotle himself attributes to Plato a view which stresses the importance of habituation in early moral development, which would seem to be problematic for the intellectualist view:

For moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and be pained by the things that we ought; for this is the right education.

(*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104b9-13)⁴

⁴ Aristotle could have a number of Plato’s works in mind here, such as the *Philebus* and the *Republic*, where Socrates distinguishes between true and false pleasures.

There has been a resurgence in the study of virtue in some philosophical circles, both in ethics and in epistemology,⁵ which makes understanding the moral psychology that underlies Plato's *Republic* of particular relevance. The study of phenomena such as wilful ignorance and the suppression of counter-evidence, which has long been dominated by cognitive psychology, is starting to be brought under the light of an examination of character and the role of moral integrity.

For example, W. Jay Wood explains that seeing certain information as evidence, and the importance one assigns to it, requires that we interpret information in accordance with a set of background beliefs. These beliefs, he says, are influenced by our moral character, which can be traced back to childhood: "we sometimes fail to excel intellectually because we fail to display moral virtues that coordinate with and support our intellectual endeavors."⁶ In other words, if children are not properly habituated towards the good through moral development, they will have poor dispositional beliefs. Their deficient affective natures consequently impair their ability to reason well; e.g., they are unable to properly internalize the virtue of justice, which demands a minimal level of empathy, and therefore cannot discern the form of justice.

To speculate for a moment on why the intellectualism in Plato's early dialogues would diminish the lasting relevance of his moral theory, the

⁵ In the second half of the 20th century virtue ethics was reignited by philosophers such as Elizabeth Anscombe and Alisdair MacIntyre, while virtue epistemology was introduced by figures such as Ernest Sosa and Linda Zagzebski. Both groups have been concerned with the relationship between the activities of reason and moral character.

⁶ Wood, 28.

intellectualist view argues that knowledge is sufficient to motivate people to do well. However, this does not accord with everyday experience, in which one is well-acquainted with the notion of *akrasia*, or weakness of will, whereby a person knowingly does what is less good. To reduce akratic action simply to a lack of knowledge does not seem to fully capture the psychological complexity of the human being. It is not sufficient just to know what is good, but one must also have the proper feelings towards the good if one is going to be sufficiently moved to act towards it. In the *Republic*, however, Plato advances a fuller, more complex, conception of the soul, which accounts for different independent sources of motivation that compete with each other. The victor in this competition determines the direction of reason's activities, i.e., whether one will use their intellect towards real or false goods. Consequently, for philosophical progress to be made, the goal of which is knowledge of the good itself, one must not only understand the good, but be well-disposed towards it.

That is not to say that wisdom does not perfect moral virtue through understanding. Full virtue requires knowing not only *that*, but also *why* something is right or wrong. However, acquiring knowledge also requires a minimum amount of moral virtue to pursue learning and develop the intellect in the first place. These virtues, moral and intellectual, are not developed individually, but together. In other words, they are dependent on each other. My goal is to show how it is plausible to interpret the *Republic* as advancing this view by focusing on the relationship between moral virtue and philosophy, and in particular on how moral virtue is

necessary for succeeding in philosophy. This shift in Plato's thought has not gone unnoticed; however, those who have observed it tend to focus only on singular aspects which moderate the intellectualism of the earlier dialogues. My intent in this thesis is to better understand the nature of Plato's shift away from Socratic intellectualism by looking at an array of ideas and themes throughout the *Republic*.⁷

We see that the causal relationship between moral and intellectual virtue is bidirectional through various aspects of the *Republic*. For example, in chapter 1 I look at what Plato says about the philosopher and the nature of philosophy. Here, we see that philosophy begins with an emotion called "wonder" and is a difficult activity. We are also given a picture of who the philosopher is. From this, I infer that for Plato virtues of character are necessary for pursuing philosophy. In chapter 2, I turn to the theory of education that is advanced throughout the *Republic*, focusing in particular on the first stage of education, which all prospective philosophers must go through. Before doing so, I first look at the psychological transitions between degenerate characters in order to show both how vicious character misdirects reason, and also that each degradation of character is ultimately due to poor education and upbringing. I then analyse the aims of education as good beginnings in the character of the knower, before showing how the first model of education is primarily concerned with this through the effects of *mousikē*.

⁷ For example, Kamtekar (1998) and Cormack (2006) focus on early education to argue that in Plato's virtue theory one's character is shaped through training and habit (as opposed to only knowledge and learning); Appealing to Plato's narration of characters, Rist (1997) argues that Plato moves in the direction that behind every metaphysical mistake is a moral fault.

Chapter One: The Nature of Philosophy

1.1 Introduction

Although the necessity for moral virtue in philosophical endeavor underlies much of the *Republic*, Plato does not give a systematic account of the causal relationship between moral virtue and the successful pursuit of philosophy. We can take as our starting point the explicit claims that the philosopher needs to have a certain character. In particular, we are repeatedly reminded throughout the *Republic* that the philosopher needs to possess virtues which today we would classify as ‘moral’. We are not told that these virtues are merely an effect of becoming a philosopher, but, rather, that they are necessary for anyone who wishes to practice philosophy to begin with. Unfortunately, this only tells us *that* moral virtue is necessary for wisdom, but does not tell us specifically *why* it is required to do philosophy. Plato only alludes to there being some causal and temporal relationship between the early development of good character and the later pursuit of philosophy. The *Republic* does, however, give us the tools to piece together a plausible answer to this question, albeit through some interpretive work.

From what we are told about the various virtues, as well as the nature of philosophy itself, we can begin to see why the successful pursuit of philosophy would necessitate one possessing moral virtue. We should first look at the conception of philosophy that is advanced in the *Republic*, as this will help us to understand why the successful pursuit of philosophy requires a certain moral

character. Then we can turn more specifically to what Plato says about moral virtue and see what can be inferred about its relationship to philosophy.

1.2 Philosophic Activity

One of the difficulties of trying to understand the theories and ideas expressed in the *Republic* is that seldom does Plato present everything on a given topic in a single place. Where one might expect or desire to find all of his thoughts on a subject – for example, poetry, or justice – neatly presented in one section of the text, the reader instead finds him or herself having to piece those thoughts together from many conversations and statements made at various points in the dialogue. The books of the *Republic* are presented as a single conversation on a particular afternoon, and as such the conversation weaves in and out of topics, straying into parenthetical asides and related questions. Often the participants will make an effort to return to the original matter some time later, which requires that they recall how they arrived at the current point in their conversation.⁸ Socrates and his interlocutors acknowledge that they are limited by the scope of their endeavor, saying that the matter of who philosophers and non-philosophers are would have been “better illuminated if we had only it to discuss and not all the other things that remain to be treated...” (484a). This is perhaps a shortcoming of writing in dialogue

⁸ This is recognized by Glaucon and Adeimantus throughout the dialogue. For example, at 471c Glaucon has to urge Socrates not to stray too far into other topics, lest the original one be forgotten altogether: “But I think, Socrates, that if we let you go on speaking about this subject, you’ll never remember the one you set aside in order to say all this...”

form; what it gains in some respects, it tends to lack in the depth or rigor with which questions can be satisfactorily answered.⁹

The meandering nature of the dialogue does not mean that certain books do not have themes, or that parts of these books cannot be subdivided according to the topics that are discussed. For example, the middle books of the dialogue (Books 5-7) are often considered the ‘philosophical’ books, not because Socrates and his companions have not been engaging in philosophical discourse up to this point, but because these books contain the most densely metaphysical conversations. They are also where we get some of the most fundamental insights into what philosophy itself is.

The philosopher can be defined in a number of ways. For example, ostensibly, Socrates is a philosopher.¹⁰ The philosopher can also be defined by the qualities they possess, e.g., they are courageous, moderate, just, etc. More substantially, the philosopher can be defined in relation to what philosophy itself is. In the middle books of the *Republic*, the philosopher is defined in the latter two ways: by the qualities he possesses, and through a description of the nature of

⁹ The Thomist philosopher Josef Pieper contended that the dialogical nature of philosophy is perhaps why it can never be resolved in a fully satisfying way, since arguments and counter-arguments can perpetually be raised. (Pieper, 12).

¹⁰ I merely use this as an example, since, given the *Republic*’s account of philosophy, and Socrates’ claims of ignorance, this is not as straightforward a claim as it might seem. Nevertheless, at 496c Socrates includes himself in the few who have “tasted how sweet and blessed a possession of philosophy is”, which seems to indicate that he is a philosopher. This, however, is complicated by the fact that he also claims not to have knowledge of the good, which is the ultimate goal of philosophy.

philosophic activity. Although philosophy is defined as early as Book 2,¹¹ and some qualities of the philosopher are subsequently listed, this is only to set up other discussions, for example, of the philosopher's education. It is not until the "third wave" in Book 5, wherein Socrates defends his famous pronouncement that in the ideal city, if it is to "be born to the fullest extent possible", philosophers must be kings (473c-e), that we get an extended treatment on the nature of philosophy itself.

Towards the end of Book 5, Socrates makes the pronouncement that, until philosophers are made kings, or kings turn to philosophy, cities "will have no rest from evils" (473d). In order to defend this claim, the need is established to define who philosophers are, and this discussion carries on through the middle books of the *Republic*. Socrates begins by reminding his companions that if one is to love something, he must love not just a part of it, but the whole of that thing.¹² This principle was anticipated earlier in their conversation, where Socrates posited the simplicity of desire, stating that desires are not for particular things, but for things themselves; e.g., thirst is not a desire for this or that drink, but drink itself (438a-b).

At first glance, this discussion in the *Republic* seems to support the intellectualist view as evidence that virtue comes strictly as a consequence of the intellect properly discerning the good.¹³ However, as we will see, this comes at the

¹¹ "But surely the love of learning is the same thing as philosophy or the love of wisdom?" (376b)

¹² "Do you need to be reminded or do you remember that, if it's rightly said that someone loves something, then he mustn't love one part of it and not another, but he must love all of it?" (474c).

¹³In his paper "Plato's Theory of Desire", Charles Kahn explains that in the earlier dialogues Plato construed desire as desire for something judged to be good or beneficial. But Plato breaks from this intellectualism in the *Republic* in order to present reason and appetite as distinct sources of motivation in the soul which can sometimes conflict with each other. This does not mean that there

expense of overlooking key passages that make it clear that reason does not operate completely independently of spirit and appetite, and, as a result, its activities can be misdirected towards false goods. Kahn raises the question “How can a faculty of cognition and judgement prevail over intense thirst?”¹⁴ The development of different sources of desire as they relate to divisions in the soul ultimately lays the foundation for Plato to introduce good predispositions to his virtue theory, since, although reason still judges the goodness of an act, its judgments can be influenced by the other parts of the soul, causing reason to err. In order that the governance of reason not be left up to chance, it therefore becomes necessary to instill virtuous habits in the youth. This highlights the need for virtues of character to moderate the non-rational desires such as appetite in order to safeguard the calculative activities of reason.¹⁵

Returning to this principle, Socrates says “do you remember that, if it’s rightly said that someone loves something, then he mustn’t love one part of it and not another, but he must love all of it?” (474c). The philosopher, too, desires

is no cognition involved in the desires of the non-rational part of the soul, minimally an object of appetitive desire must be apprehended as such, e.g., as drinkable, in order to be desired. The idea of appetite taking control of a person implies that it minimally shares in the rational part of the soul. This is a weaker rule of reason, where reason aims at goals according to conceptions of the good but in an uninformed way. When reason rules weakly, it is in a very qualified way, since the direction of its activities, i.e., the ends pursued, are being determined by the non-rational part of the soul (pp. 85-86). We see this enslavement of reason by non-rational desires in the various kinds of degenerate character described in Books 8-9, which I discuss in chapter 2. In contrast, the strongest sense in which reason rules is when it has acquired wisdom, i.e., knowledge of the good, and uses this to inform action, both means and ends, in a calculated manner.

¹⁴ Kahn, 89.

¹⁵ I agree with Kahn when he says, “In order for appetite and anger to listen to reason, they must be properly trained; hence the need for the scheme of pre-philosophical education in Books 2-3.” (p. 90). However, Kahn does not elaborate this point.

something, and therefore desires the whole of it, and that desire is for wisdom (376b; cf. 611e).¹⁶ The philosopher does not, as Socrates says, love one part of it and hate the other; rather, he desires to possess wisdom in its entirety. This definition of philosophy tells us that philosophy starts with a disposition towards something. There are many kinds of desire, as distinguished by their objects – for example, the desire for food, drink, or beautiful things – but philosophy, as distinguished by its object, is the love of wisdom. Many people delight in experiencing many particular things, e.g., to hear music, taste food, or enjoy crafts, but the philosopher’s love of learning is differentiated as a love of truth itself. This disposition is associated with learning, but not of just anything; the philosopher does not, for instance, desire knowledge of particular things, e.g., the beauty of this or that object. Rather, the philosopher desires knowledge of beauty itself (476b-d). Knowledge is a power that enables us to understand things, and knowledge of universal things, or forms, is necessary for the philosopher to know the things which participate in them, i.e., particulars. For example, knowing the form of a dog – what it is to be a dog, what makes a dog to be a thing of its kind – enables one to identify particular dogs.¹⁷ Consequently, lovers of knowledge *per se* study things in

¹⁶ This is the etymology of the word “philosophy”, which comes from the Greek ‘*philo*’, referring to something loved and ‘*sophia*’, meaning wisdom, and taken together to mean “love of wisdom”.

¹⁷ This could be taken to mean that ordinary people, and not just philosophers, have knowledge of the forms. The Theory of Recollection, which is found in other dialogues such as *Meno* and *Phaedo*, seems to support the idea that all people are in touch with the forms, however vaguely. This theory argues that we all have inborn knowledge because our soul existed before our corporeal existence. During this time before our present life, our souls had access to the forms, and although this knowledge remains dormant in us, it can be elicited through our experiences. The problem with this is that the Theory of Recollection is not advanced in the *Republic*, and so it is questionable whether or not the ordinary person has any knowledge of the forms, particularly given that access to this kind of knowledge seems to be restricted to those who pursue philosophy. In the *Republic*, knowledge of

themselves, and these, we are told, are things which are always the same in every respect; so, while beautiful things may change, what it means to be beautiful remains constant.

Through this discussion, Plato is giving us a summary of his epistemological and metaphysical theories, as Socrates explains what philosophy is to his companions, after being asked to justify why philosophers are best equipped to be rulers. He contrasts philosophers with other kinds of person, in particular “lovers of sights and sounds”, explaining the foundational disposition of philosophy as a love of wisdom and knowledge (480a). Wisdom is a kind of knowledge, namely knowledge of the forms, which is accessed through learning. Socrates explains that this is distinguished from other kinds of learning, i.e., of particular things, in the way that knowledge, opinion, and ignorance are distinguished by their objects. Knowledge, furthermore, is of things that exist in a complete sense: they are in no way transient or mutable. For example, the form of beauty, that thing thanks to which we call all other things beautiful, is fixed and permanent, whereas the beauty of a particular object is neither permanent, nor does it fully encapsulate what it

forms, or “accounts of the substance of each thing” (534b) is the result of an advanced stage of the philosopher’s education called “dialectic”. However, Naomi Reshotko argues in “Plato on the Ordinary Person and the Forms” that two passages in the *Republic* – on the lovers of sights and sounds at 476–480, and the “finger exercise” at 523d – Plato believes ordinary people *are* in touch with the forms, albeit in an incoherent way. With respect to the first passage, she argues that because an ordinary person mistakes forms for perceptible things, such as a beautiful object for beauty itself, this demonstrates “that he is thinking about something other than perceptible objects.” (282). In the “finger” passage, Socrates demonstrates how some perceptible things do not provoke intellection, whereas others do. Using the example of a finger, he demonstrates that a finger itself does not inspire people to contemplate ‘finger-ness’, but using fingers to judge size naturally provokes a reflection on bigness and smallness. According to Reshotko, this kind of experience compels ordinary people to “think about things that we cannot experience empirically” (286), thus provoking them to reach out to access the forms.

means to be beautiful. It might be beautiful in some way, but not in other ways, and certainly not in every way that beauty can be said to exist. Opinion, on the other hand, is of things that do not exist completely, but are in some way, and are not in other ways, much like the beautiful object. Lastly, things that are not, or have no reality to them, are the objects of ignorance.

C.D.C. Reeve explains that cognitive powers differ in their ability to comprehend reality because “their objects have a different share in truth”¹⁸. These powers, as differentiated by the kind of knowledge, or lack thereof, which they produce, must be able to both provide an account of something, as well as determine when something in particular fits that account.¹⁹ Perceptual-thought, he explains, is unable to distinguish visible properties from things themselves, and so people whose psychological powers are characterized by this kind of thinking are able “to opine but not to know”.²⁰ What makes opinion more reliable than ignorance is that its objects minimally resemble things themselves, and although the subject cognizing them is unable to draw on these distinctions, he is nevertheless able to formulate thoughts on things which have some basis in reality. As we progress upwards through the kind of cognitive powers and their corresponding objects, the things enumerated in the Divided Line resemble things in themselves to increasing

¹⁸ Reeve, 55.

¹⁹ Ibid., 59.

²⁰ Ibid., 62. Interestingly, in apparent contrast to the view of Naomi Reshotko, Reeve argues that people whose psychological power is limited to perceptual-thought “have no cognitive access to the forms” (p.61).

degrees, and the cognitive power used to grasp them increases in its ability to discern between what something itself is and what merely resembles it.

The power of the philosopher is what Reeve labels dialectical-thought, which “attempts to establish systematically with regards to all things what each of them is in itself.” (553b). While someone can be more or less wise according to the level of their ascent towards the good, we are given the impression that philosophy does not just seek the sum of its parts, as science does. Rather, as Reeve argues, totality, for philosophy, is the ordered structure of the world, i.e., hierarchy of being, which culminates in knowledge of the good itself.²¹ The good is not just the final part to being – as Socrates says, it is “beyond being” – it is the principle of all reality; it is the source from which all things derive their being. Starting with things known, the dialectician reasons his way towards increasingly higher things until finally arriving at knowledge of the good. However, Socrates says that “nobody will have adequate knowledge” (506a) before they acquire knowledge of the good, and so, having reached this hypothetical first principle, we have to go back down through the forms, to perfect our knowledge of them (511b).

Wisdom, then, is comprised of knowledge, which is of the forms. There are many unchanging forms, and the highest one which subsumes the rest is the form of the good. Wisdom in the fullest sense would be the knowledge of the good itself,

²¹ Ibid., 76.

rather than the knowledge of one or some of the forms.²² There seem therefore to be degrees of wisdom insofar as a perfectly wise person would be one who has acquired knowledge of the forms in the highest way possible, and in this sense, they would be the true philosopher. On the other hand, those who are on the path of becoming fully-fledged philosophers have knowledge only partially. Such people would be called philosophers, not in the sense of perfectly possessing wisdom, but insofar as they love and pursue it. This view of philosophy calls to mind Plato's *Symposium*, in which love is defined as a lack, and so the philosopher, although he yearns for wisdom, does not fully possess it. Only the gods can rightly be called wise, and as such, they do not practice philosophy, since they have no need for it.²³ Likewise in the *Phaedo*, the realization of philosophy seems to be something attained in the afterlife, and the practice of philosophy is a kind of life which adequately prepares one for this.

²² In, "The Form of the Good in Plato's *Republic*", Gerasimos Santas very carefully fleshes out a number of key points that Plato makes about the good, including: (i) It is by virtue of participating in the Form of the Good that all the other Forms have their ideal attributes (p. 7); (ii) The ideal attributes of all the Forms other than the Form of the Good are proper attributes of the Form of the Good (p. 7); (iii) it is by virtue of participating in the Form of the Good that all the other Forms are the best objects of their kind and the best objects of their kind to know (p. 8). Santas concludes from this that "the forms have something in common, namely, their being the best objects of their kind; so it is natural that there should be a Form in virtue of which they have this in common, and in view of what this common feature is, it is natural that the Form would be the Good." (p. 8). He points out that Plato's conception of the good conflates reality and goodness, which reflects his metaphysical theory that there are degrees of reality, i.e., some things are more real than others, and accordingly, some things have a share in the good than others (p. 9). I believe that this makes the good both one of many forms in one respect, as well as above the forms in another respect. It is one of many forms insofar as, like them, it is a principle of ideality, but it is also higher than the other forms insofar as it subsumes the ideality of all things. Santas puts it well where he says "The Form of the Good is not a superlatively 'good something-or-other'... it is, presumably, superlatively good, period." (p. 20), arguing that the good is good in virtue of itself.

²³ In the *Symposium*, philosophy is described as a middle ground between wisdom and ignorance. "None of the gods loves wisdom or wants to become wise—for they are wise—and no one else who is wise already loves wisdom." (204a).

Although these themes from *Symposium* and *Phaedo* do not specifically carry over into the *Republic*, there does appear to be in the *Republic* the distinction between complete and incomplete wisdom, as distinguished by philosophy in the sense of the love and pursuit of wisdom, and philosophers in the sense of possessing it. When defining philosophy in the *Republic*, Plato has the tendency to describe it in terms which suggest an active pursuit, for example, “the love of learning” (376b). By contrast, Plato describes the mature philosopher as someone who has a “complete grasp of that which is” (486e).

Book 5 ends with us having a fair, but incomplete – since we do not yet know what the good is – outline of who the philosopher is: not his character, as this will be picked up in Book 6, so much as what philosophic activity is. In other words, through understanding the activity of philosophy in particular, as contrasted to other intellectual pursuits, we get a picture of who the philosopher is, as a lover of wisdom.

1.3 The Good of Philosophy

The idea of the good plays a central role in Plato’s thought, and yet it is the cause of much scholarship due to how difficult it is to understand. And indeed, this is the case for Socrates and his companions, too. The obscurity of this concept is problematic if our goal is to understand the comprehensive theory advanced in the *Republic*, but it is not my intention to give a formal analysis of the coherence of

Plato's conception of the good. Nevertheless, it would be appropriate to give a brief overview, before moving on to the relevance of the good to this thesis.²⁴

According to Socrates, the good is the final cause of everything we do. In Book 6, he says that "every soul pursues the good and does its utmost for its sake. It divines that the good is something but is perplexed and cannot adequately grasp what it is" (505e). This is very similar to what Aristotle says at the outset of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, namely, that the good is that at which all things aim (1094a3). Aristotle, too, observes that despite having a natural inclination towards the good, human beings do not naturally discern it correctly. The great difficulty of ascertaining what the good is consequently results in misunderstandings that give rise to all manner of ignoble pursuits. Although Socrates says that "the power to

²⁴ In his paper "The Good in Plato's *Republic*", David Hitchcock argues that the good is essentially unity. He points out that, according to Socrates, the good is different from knowledge in general, and is different from knowledge of the good in particular (68). Although the good is the source of knowledge and truth, it is not the same as those things. Forms, Socrates tells us, are unchanging and inalterable – they are always one, always the same. On the basis of this, Hitchcock asks: "What single concept can cover both the Form's invariability over time, and invariability over aspects?" (73). The answer, he argues, is that the form of the good is unity. From this, he infers that if the good is unity, then the ultimate goal of the soul is to be one, or uniform, like the one. This unity of a soul consists in the consistency between thought and desire, so that the soul does not contain any inner conflict (75-76). This means that when there is a "rebellion against a part of the soul against the whole" (444b) in the unjust man's soul, the soul is in a state of disunity. Appealing to examples of degenerate soul in Books 8-9 of the *Republic*, Hitchcock takes this to mean that one's wretched or wicked state is a conflict between their reason and desire, insofar as reason apprehends as good something opposite of desire, but has become enslaved to desire. In other words, passion masters reason "against its will" (77). If I understand this correctly, for there to be disunity in the soul reason must maintain its beliefs about the good while being overpowered by non-rational desires (otherwise reason would be in conformity with the misdirection of non-rational desire). Inferior character, then, would seem to be a state of *akrasia*, or weakness of will. According to the contention of my thesis, the cultivation of good moral habits would prevent such a decayed state of character. However, particularly in chapter 2, I argue something slightly different (or perhaps additional) about the relationship between desire and reason, in which desire can also *shape* reason's conception of the good. In such people the conflict is less of a disunity in the sense that Hitchcock presents, but a disorder where the wrong part of the soul is ruling (and the others are subservient). Overall, despite these potential points of disagreement, I am open to the idea that Plato conceived of the good as unity and take my main claims in this thesis to be compatible with that view.

learn is present in everyone's soul" (518c), we see throughout the *Republic* that people direct their attention to inferior things, and this leads to a variety of degenerate psychological states.

The good is not just the final cause of all things, but the source of the knowability and being of all things. This revelation comes after Socrates' companions ask him to explain more precisely what the good is. At this point, Socrates professes not to have knowledge of the good, and is hesitant to talk about it for fear of misleading his companions (506d-507a). Instead, he proposes to speak of it by way of analogy, much as he proposed to use the city as an analogy for the soul. And so, at 507b, he begins to give an image of the good that is known as the 'analogy of the sun'. From this, we are told that the good makes things intelligible, and is the cause of being, while it itself is superior to being. In other words, the good is a kind of transcendent primary cause of reality: "not only do the objects of knowledge owe their being known to the good, but their being is also due to it, although the good is not being, but superior to it in rank and power" (509b). Just as the Sun provides light to make objects visible to the eyes, so too the good makes things intelligible to the mind. Although the good is something that is beyond being, it is also something potentially knowable to us: "So that what gives truth to the things known and the power to know to the knower is the form of the good. And though it is the cause of knowledge and truth, it is also an object of knowledge." (508d-e). The ascent to the form of the good is what Socrates calls "true philosophy" (521c).

1.3.1 The good as difficult to apprehend

In the *Republic*, the good is associated with the beautiful, and described as something brilliant like the sun, in other words, as something that inspires awe. The Greek word for wonder, θαυμάζω (*thaumázō*), means to admire, or be awestruck at something.²⁵ Wonder causes us to delight in the unknown, or, in other words, to be in amazement at something that bewilders us. The love of wisdom is closely connected to this feeling, because it is on account of the fact that we desire to know that things which confound our understanding cause us to be in wonder. This wonderment, consequently, further motivates our desire to intellectually grasp the unknown.

It is for these reasons that wonder is the experience from which philosophy gets its start. Those who are well disposed towards the truth will be motivated by wonder to ascertain it, while those who are not will not have the same motivation. However, not every desire to know something can be considered philosophical wonder. The feeling that gives philosophy its start is different from other sorts of wondering in the colloquial sense, i.e., “curiosity”. Although these other kinds of wondering loosely share the desire to know, philosophical wonder is differentiated in the way that the philosopher’s knowledge is differentiated from other kinds of learning, as outlined above. Philosophical wonder is wonder at the universal causes of things, which, for Plato, are the Forms. Whereas a historian might wonder what

²⁵ <https://lsj.gr/wiki/θαυμάζω>

it was like to live in the past, and this drives his pursuit of learning, the philosopher's wonder is about the fundamental causes of things.

Wonder does not explicitly play a central role in the conception of philosophy that is advanced in the *Republic*. In fact, the closest connection to philosophical wonder, where the related noun “*thaumatopoiia*” is used,²⁶ is in an analogous sense, related to magical powers and conjuring, and carries with it a negative connotation (602d). Magical activities are the cause of wonder insofar as they bewilder people's senses and deceive with illusions. Nevertheless, this use of the word retains the connection to instilling awe, something magicians inspire.

Although we don't see wonder playing an explicit role in the exposition of philosophy in the *Republic*, it does appear elsewhere in Plato's corpus, suggesting that Plato was interested in the phenomenon called wonder. For example, in *Theaetetus*, Socrates declares wonder to be the only beginning of philosophy:

Theaetetus: By the gods, Socrates, I am lost in wonder (θαυμάζω) when I think of all these things, and sometimes when I regard them it really makes my head swim.

Socrates: Theodorus seems to be a pretty good guesser about your nature. For this feeling of wonder (θαυμάζειν) shows that you are a philosopher, since wonder (θαύμαντος) is the only beginning of philosophy, and he who said that Iris was the child of Thaumias made a good genealogy. (155c-d)

²⁶ The usage of θαυμάζω in the *Republic* tends to be for “admire” in the common sense, e.g., to be impressed by something someone said or did.

Accordingly, it seems plausible that the *Republic* is consistent on this point with the account given in *Theaetetus*, even though wonder is not explicitly addressed. The good is the cause of wonder because it confounds reason. It is reached with great difficulty, and even Socrates professes not to have direct knowledge of it. We do not wonder at things which are easily known, or epistemically trivial, and if it were easy to know the truth, the desire to know and the aversion to mistakes would be sufficient to acquire knowledge. But since truth is often difficult to know, and error hard to avoid, the wonder of the philosopher must include or have with it the hope of overcoming the difficulties in acquiring wisdom, for if one despairs in this endeavor, he will give up the pursuit of truth.

Since the object of philosophy is such a difficult good to acquire, there is also an aspect of fearing to philosophical wonder, which pulls in the opposite direction to hope. Fear is an emotion that is either overcome by confidence or gives in to despair. There is a well-known interlude on this in the *Phaedo*, wherein Socrates warns his companions against the danger of despairing of their ability to know the truth (89a-91c). After a series of unexpected objections dishearten his companions, Socrates counsels them against blaming the process of argumentation rather than their own lack of skill when facing difficulties in coming to knowledge of the truth, and thus becoming misologists:

When we heard what they said we were all depressed, as we told each other afterwards. We had been quite convinced by the previous argument, and they seemed to confuse us again, and to drive us to doubt... (88b)

This then, is the first thing we should guard against, he said. We should not allow into our minds the conviction that argumentation has nothing sound about it, much rather we should believe that it is we who are not yet sound and that we must take courage and be eager to attain soundness... (90e)

This discussion highlights how despair is a significant impediment to philosophy, and subsequently highlights the need for one to have a certain resoluteness in order to remedy despair.²⁷ In other words, philosophical endeavor requires more than just intelligence. Because the process of inquiry can be so overwhelming, and the effect of this can be demoralizing to someone pursuing philosophy, it is necessary that one has a certain character which includes the virtue of courage through which one can persevere through difficult problems and frustrating objections.

That knowledge of the good is difficult to achieve is explicitly stated by Socrates after the cave analogy: “In the knowable realm, the form of the good is the last thing to be seen, and it is reached only with difficulty” (517b). We see this also comes up in the *Seventh Letter*, where Plato describes testing the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse, to see if he truly possessed a philosophical spirit, or was full of “half-understood doctrines”, as the case turned out to be. If genuine, the *Seventh Letter*

²⁷ George, 208.

also supports the idea that Plato thought a kind of courage is required to do philosophy.²⁸ Plato writes,

You must picture to such men the extent of the undertaking, describing what sort of inquiry it (philosophy) is, with how many difficulties it is beset, and how much labor it involves. For anyone who hears this, who is a true lover of wisdom, with the divine quality that makes him akin to it and worthy of pursuing it, thinks that he has heard a marvelous quest that he must at once enter upon with all earnestness, or life is not worth living... This is the state of mind in which such a man lives; whatever his occupation may be, above everything and always he holds fast to philosophy and to the daily discipline that best makes him apt... Those who are really not philosophers but have only a coating of opinions... when they see how much learning is required, and how great the labor, and how orderly their daily lives must be to suit the subject they are pursuing, conclude that the task is too difficult for their powers. (340c-341a)

As we just saw in the *Phaedo*, in the *Seventh Letter* Plato stresses the resoluteness required to do philosophy on account of how difficult the subject matter is. Moreover, we see here that philosophy requires a high level of discipline and orderliness in one's life. If the *Seventh Letter* was written by Plato – or even if it merely documents a Platonic conception of philosophy – it supports the idea that

²⁸ The authenticity of the *Seventh Letter* is disputed. For an extended argument on this, see *The Pseudo-Platonic Seventh Letter* (2015) by Michael Frede and Myles Burnyeat.

the successful pursuit of philosophy requires not only intelligence but also discipline and self-control.

Similarly, the Cave analogy in the *Republic* illustrates that the good is reached with great difficulty, and that the journey of the philosopher in his endeavoring towards wisdom is an arduous one. The prisoner in the cave is “pained and dazzled” (515c) at being released from his shackles, and he has to be compelled to leave the illusory world of sensible images. His eyes hurt when he is further compelled to “look at the light itself” (515c), or in other words, when one has the focus of their intellectual gaze reoriented to look upon the truth. The prisoner is then dragged by force up the rough, steep path into the sunlight and towards the realm of the forms. These stages of ascent out of the cave parallel the cave reorientation or turning of soul which is the basic education of the guardians. The prisoner is gradually habituated to be disposed towards looking upon the final object of his journey – the sun, or in other words the form of the good. Once the prisoner is out of the cave, he needs time to get adjusted before his eyes can see the world around him (516a), which gradually allows him to see increasingly real things, and we are reminded throughout this journey that the prisoner has to be compelled, undergoes pain, and initially cannot identify the truth. One of the cautions of the cave analogy is that people can become accustomed to the darkness and evils of the visible realm. This habituation is related to the darkening of their mind, which not only prevents them from being able to see the truth, but also from *wanting* to see it.

The last thing the freed prisoner is able to look at is the sun, which represents the good, and so the final object of philosophy – the form of the good – is reached with great difficulty. However, the ascent from the cave does not represent the philosopher merely increasing in his intelligence; rather, the focus of his gaze is being redirected towards higher and higher things. While the prisoner physically leaves the cave, this is merely a metaphor for the turning around of the soul which Socrates describes, and which is characteristic of the view of education that is advanced at 518b, wherein Socrates rejects the orthodox view of education as “putting knowledge into souls that lack it”. Men of different characters can have equally shrewd intellects, and so the philosopher’s education must be more than this, if their pursuit is to be different in kind. Reeve concludes from this that the early stages of education are aimed “primarily not at the transmission of information or at the inculcation of intellectual skills, but rather at the removal or moderation of as many of a person’s unnecessary desires as his nature permits.”²⁹ This is not to say necessarily that the process of “turning around the soul” or of ascending from the cave is exhausted by the elimination of certain kinds of desires through education, since the philosopher must also study geometry, mathematics, and ultimately dialectic. It is especially the case with dialectic that we see the philosopher continued to be brought closer to the good through acquiring knowledge of forms.

²⁹ Reeve, 50.

Nevertheless, what these passages help us to understand is that since the object of philosophy, namely knowledge of the good itself, is such a difficult good to acquire, certain virtues of character such as discipline and fortitude are necessary for a person if they are going to be successful in philosophy.

1.4 The Character of the Philosopher

Philosophy is named from one of the key dispositions which gives it its start, namely the love of wisdom. Because its object is a difficult good to acquire, a certain character is required of the philosopher. We should therefore pay special attention to what it means to begin philosophy well, as far as the traits that are conducive to it are concerned. Since a philosopher acquires knowledge by the use of reason, it is important to have good beginnings in the dispositions of the knower, because it is possible to misuse reason.³⁰ In Book VII of the *Republic*, Socrates observes how sometimes even the shrewdest intellects belong to corrupt characters:

Or have you never noticed this about people who are said to be vicious but clever, how keen the vision of their little souls is and how sharply it distinguishes the things it is turned towards? This shows that its sight isn't

³⁰ Beginning, in this sense, does not simply mean a point in time at which something starts, but that from which something ensues and what also sustains it. For example, according to the teachings of many religions, e.g., Christianity, the world has a beginning, and in this sense God created it, but he did not just trigger an effect and walk away, but maintains its very existence. So too is it that love and wonder are at the beginning of philosophy: they start it, and sustain it. Those things which are important for starting philosophy do not go away once philosophy has started, rather they continue to play a role in its practice.

inferior but rather is forced to serve evil ends, so that the sharper it sees,
the more evil it accomplishes. (519a)

When someone is of poor moral character, they close themselves off to the truth. At the basis of philosophy, then, as indicated by the Greek words from which we get the term, is the question of what it is that a person loves. One must love truth for its own sake in order to be a true philosopher, and so we see that this kind of love is a foundational moral disposition that is necessary for philosophy. In other words, there is a connection between one's character and the activities of reason – the way we think depends on the kind of character we have. Perhaps the clearest depiction of this relationship is found in the analysis of the kinds of degenerate souls, and their corresponding characters, taken up in Books 8-9. Those who are ruled by lower parts of the soul, such as spirit and appetite, have the direction of reason's activities oriented away from the love of truth. However, we will look at this in greater detail in the next chapter.

The class of people with a "philosophic nature" that is described in Book 6, and from which the future rulers will be selected, is described as consisting of people who "strive for every kind of truth from childhood on" (485d). Here, Socrates identifies the various qualities which are either compatible or incompatible with philosophy, and from this it seems that the good dispositions of the prospective philosopher arise from their love of learning. This is not incompatible with the claims of this thesis in general, since it shows that a good moral character is both prior to the acquisition of wisdom and necessary for it. Nor is it incompatible with

what I argue more specifically in chapter 2 about the role and importance of early moral education. Children with a philosophic nature still need a good upbringing, since, as we see in Book 8, it is possible for those with good natures to be corrupted by bad influences. For example, the timocrat was raised with the nature of his aristocratic father who “nourishes the rational part of his soul” (550b), but is pulled away from this by seeing how other more vicious people live. So while those with a philosophic nature might naturally have better dispositions than other types of people, their character still needs to be safeguarded in a way that corresponds to what Socrates proposes in the first model of education for the future guardians, which, as I go on to argue, the prospective philosophers still receive. This would include a curriculum in *mousikē* that is highly censored, and which aims at character formation, so that the youth are exposed to only good models in music and poetry. Socrates also states that those who are “vicious but clever” can be reoriented from the world of becoming, that is to say, have their bonds to greed and pleasure broken, and soul turned towards philosophy if their nature is “hammered at from childhood” (519a) by habit and practice. Due to the intellectual qualities that those with a philosophic nature have, they are good candidates to become the vicious and clever type that Socrates describes in Book 7, should they not be raised well. There seem to be, therefore, more requirements to successfully pursue philosophy than having an inborn nature which is conducive to learning.

In the *Phaedo*, it is an important theme that the virtue of temperance (moderation) plays an important role in the life of a philosopher. Man does not

become virtuous by indulging in the inclinations of the body, but by resisting them, and the appetites of the body are, in many ways, an impediment to philosophy. For example, they can distract us from real goods and cause us to value false ones. The *Phaedo*, which is a dialogue about the immortality of the soul and the fate of the soul in the afterlife, both contains a prominent discussion on the virtue of temperance and depicts the philosopher as one who possesses it. Socrates famously depicts the philosopher as someone who is “training for dying” (67e), which is to say, preparing for their soul to part from the body upon death. He likens our embodied existence to a prison (62b), and claims that philosophers do not fear, but welcome, death as a sort of liberation from the confines of the body (and the corporeal world). It is on account of not fearing death that philosophers are said to truly have a courageous disposition (68b). Because of the pessimistic view the philosopher is described as having towards the body, temperance is not just colloquially defined as “not getting swept off one’s feet by one’s passions” (68c), but also as approaching one’s passions with “disdain and orderliness” (68d). It is in this way that the “majority”, or the common person, is said to lack temperance, because they “fear to be deprived of pleasures which they desire” (68e) and are consequently ruled by these passions. Like the oligarchs in the *Republic*, if people like this appear moderate, it is only because they avoid certain pleasures for the sake of others; however, this “exchange” is incompatible with wisdom.³¹ The

³¹ It is perhaps important to note that in this discussion Socrates emphasizes how wisdom perfects virtue, and in fact says without wisdom, such virtue is only the “illusory appearance of virtue” (69b). However, the point of this chapter is not to reconcile this difference with the *Republic*, but only to point to the recurring theme of virtues of character being essential to philosophic life. As I will argue

consequence of not cultivating a virtuous character is that the soul becomes “polluted”, “impure”, and “bewitched” (81b) by physical pleasures, which ultimately drag the soul down to a shadow world in the afterlife, in which it continues to be imprisoned in a body (81c-e). It is paramount, therefore, that philosophers “keep away from all bodily passions, master them and do not surrender themselves to them.” (82c)

Similarly, in the *Republic*, Plato depicts philosophy as necessitating a certain kind of life. In both of these dialogues, the practice of philosophy is ultimately related to one’s success in the afterlife, for which the well-ordering of the soul in this life is paramount. In neither account is philosophy presented as being only the activities of the speculative intellect. Rather, both dialogues emphasize the importance of moral virtue if the power of reason is to function properly.

As we see in the *Republic*, the philosopher is a lover of learning, but not just any learning; he loves truth for its own sake (475d). Socrates says that philosophy cannot be at all slavish, which means not only that it is not subordinated to any other ends in the way crafts or technical knowledge are subordinated to practical ones, but also that it does not serve the desires of the body. He seems to have this in mind when he says this, since he both differentiates philosophy from other pursuits that are like it (475e) and also emphasizes the orderliness in the soul that

in chapter 2, there seems to be a more nuanced conception of degrees of virtue in the *Republic*, which softens the strong remarks made in the *Phaedo* that virtue is either possessed perfectly or not at all.

is necessary for philosophy (486b). The objects of pleasure are things that are in themselves less real, and, because of their effect on the body, they can inhibit philosophy. Accordingly, we are told that philosophers will abandon “those pleasures that come through the body” (485e), and, as such, will regard a life oriented towards things other than wisdom as “petty” and unworthy of pursuing for its own sake.

As previously mentioned, in Book 6 Socrates enumerates the various character traits necessary for a successful pursuit of wisdom in order “to have an adequate and complete grasp of that which is.” (486e). This means that moral virtue is not just a consequence of one having become wise, but necessary for anyone who wishes to acquire wisdom. In other words, one has to have a certain kind of character to achieve philosophical progress, namely by being well-ordered. Those who chase after lesser things, and consequently who do not have any knowledge, do not have a model in their souls according to which they can judge things properly. Someone who loves sensible particulars and desires mutable things – things which both are and are not – therefore does not come into the possession of truth. Socrates explains that the young student can recognize the good because of its kinship with himself (401d-402a), and that a naturally virtuous person can acquire knowledge of virtue and become wise (409d). However, a vicious person cannot know himself nor who is a virtuous person (409d). Just as success in philosophy is made possible through virtues of character, it is likewise obstructed through a vicious character. In other words, one of the main failures to grasp the

good is due to a defective character, since vicious people are directed by their character toward inferior things. As we will see more clearly in the next chapter, this enslavement of reason to spirit or appetite is often the result of bad upbringing and education. It is in this way that we are told the philosopher tries to imitate the things he studies (500c), he studies ordered and divine things and in so doing becomes as ordered and divine as he can.

The list of qualities which are required to do philosophy are presented by Socrates in the following summary:

Is there any objection you can find, then, to a pursuit that no one can adequately follow unless he's by nature good at remembering, quick to learn, high-minded, graceful and a relative friend of truth, justice, courage, and moderation? ... When such people have reached maturity in age and education, wouldn't you entrust the city to them and to them alone? (487a)

The wording here already implies what is being suggested by this thesis, stating that "when such people have reached maturity", i.e., that this character precedes achieving the end of philosophy. However, Socrates removes any ambiguity as to what this means by saying these qualities are "essential to *becoming* a complete philosopher" (491a). It is clear from this that these personal qualities are not just mere consequences of becoming wise, but necessary for the practice of philosophy, meaning that one could not acquire wisdom without them.

Among the virtues of the philosopher is “high-mindedness.” We are told that the philosopher is not petty or slavish, but is instead “high-minded” (μεγαλοπρεπής) (486a). This resembles what Aristotle would go on to call μεγαλοψυχία, or greatness of soul, in Book 3 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which involves the belief that one’s life is something important, and consequently that one is deserving of great things.³² Aristotle says that the magnanimous man believes himself deserving of the greatest things, and that this must correspond to an object. As we see in the *Republic*, philosophy is the most excellent pursuit because it studies the greatest object, namely the good, and so accordingly the philosopher must necessarily be “high-minded enough to study all time and all being” (486a), which causes him to want to pursue this, as opposed to, for instance, simply indulging in bodily pleasures.

Magnanimity came to be classified as a potential part of courage by Thomas Aquinas.³³ This is consistent with “high-mindedness” in the *Republic*, insofar as high-mindedness is concerned with noble pursuits and contrasted with pettiness (486a). Noble pursuits motivate the spirited part of the soul, whose principal virtue is courage, and courage is needed to endure difficult things. It is defined as an endurance of the soul in *Laches*,³⁴ and in the *Republic* as the power to preserve the

³² In the context of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle also seems to juxtapose greatness of soul to pettiness, and identifies it with noble pride: “Now a person is thought to be great-souled if he claims much and deserves much; he who claims much without deserving it is foolish, but no one of moral excellence is foolish or senseless.” (1123b1-3).

³³ *ST II-II* q.139.

³⁴ This discussion begins at 192b. Although endurance in itself is inadequate to fully capture the essence of courage, it remains an aspect of what courage is, and this carries over into the *Republic*.

declarations of reason about what should or should not be feared (442b-c). Philosophy is a long and difficult undertaking, and one's spirit can easily grow weary due to its difficulty and give up before one reaches the truth, or fall into despair due to the challenge of confronting many different and contrary opinions, as we saw in the *Phaedo*. Magnanimity overcomes despair and encourages one to seek great things.

Along with being high-minded and courageous, we are told that the philosopher must also be just. Justice is defined multiple times throughout the *Republic*, both socially and individually. Socially, it is described as “doing one's own” (433b), and individually it is characterized in a like manner as the proper ordering of the soul, where every part plays its appropriate role, e.g., it is the job of the rational part to rule (441d-e). Without justice, it is impossible to maintain interaction with others. A conventional definition is advanced in Book 1 as a disposition thanks to which we give others what is due to them. Although, like the definitions of courage in *Laches*, this disposition seems to be insufficient for fully encapsulating the nature of justice, it nevertheless persists through the dialogue as a part of this virtue, since injustice continues to be associated with doing wrong to someone (440c). The unjust person is hard to associate with, which calls to mind the behaviour of Thrasymachus in Book 1, which impedes his ability to make philosophical progress. Thrasymachus' brazenness manifests itself in his impatience with debate, as well as in his overconfidence in his own opinion; he is both impetuous and rash. He often believes he has settled a matter before it is over,

which at one point culminates with his intent to leave before allowing Socrates to respond (344d). This is the second major episode where Thrasymachus has to be restrained by those around him. The first was to prevent him from belligerently throwing himself into the conversation, the second, now that he has entered it, is to prevent him from hastily leaving it before it is over. Moreover, throughout their conversation, Thrasymachus reacts to Socrates' insistence that he further develop his arguments with irritation – "What more can I do? Am I to take my argument and pour it into your very soul?" (345b) – showing that he lacks the proper patience and gentleness towards others that philosophy necessitates.

Philosophy, being a cooperative endeavor, demands the virtue of justice: giving both people and ideas their due. One must not just give others their due by engaging in respectful dialogue in good faith, but also give ideas their due by accepting or rejecting them based on their truth, however unpleasant this may personally be to them. It is also necessary for a person to have a properly ordered soul if they wish to successfully pursue philosophy. For a soul to be properly ordered, that is to say, for each part to do its own work, we are told that reason should rule; however, we are also told that reason is not strong in the young.³⁵ In such cases, they are made to be well-disposed towards the good, i.e., habituated to delight in fine things, and to behave in a manner that accords with reason.

³⁵ Socrates says that (at least at a very young age) the youth are "unable to grasp the reason" (402a), i.e., the underlying causes of why some things are shameful; but if raised well, will welcome the reason when it comes.

Lastly, temperance is required of the philosopher in order to not be distracted by pleasures and false goods. The other virtues pay attention to more than just the self, e.g., justice pertains to how we treat others, and courage is resoluteness and willingness to endure hardship. Temperance, on the other hand, concerns the individual's self-control with respect to their appetitive desires. This is required of the philosopher so that more important things, like knowledge and the good, are not subordinated to less important things, in particular, pleasures of the body. It is in this way that temperance preserves the order and direction of reason in the philosopher's life. Although in the philosopher reason must rule, saying this does not mean that everything else has to be eliminated. Following the city-soul analogy, one would not say that just because the king rules, everyone else must be killed. We need temperance on account of the fact that we have appetitive desires; however, these are not the highest principle of our nature. Thus, we have to order and direct our desires so that we do not pursue bad ones (or the right ones in a bad way). When first establishing the city-soul analogy in Book 2, Socrates describes how the excess of desires gives rise to conflict and warring in the city, which subsequently establishes the need for the virtues corresponding to the classes of citizens, or divisions in the soul. Socrates goes on to classify our appetitive desires in Book 8, distinguishing between necessary and unnecessary ones, saying that desires which go beyond what is necessary and beneficial to well-being must be restrained in children when they are young, since they are "harmful both to the body and to the reason and moderation of the soul" (559b).

1.5 Conclusion

Although strictly speaking knowledge is a property of the intellect, throughout the discussion of the good in Books 6 and 7 Socrates describes the ascent to knowledge as one which requires turning the whole soul.³⁶ He says that although the instrument with which one learns is present in everyone, it cannot be turned from evil to the good without turning the whole of the soul, just like an eye cannot be turned from darkness to light without a turning of the whole body (518c). This implies that the philosopher's ascent to the good is not *merely* an intellectual activity, but one that requires a certain moral character, since the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul must also be "turned" in a person, namely through the inculcation of virtue in order for the intellect to apprehend the good. Since the soul as conceived in the *Republic* is complex, i.e., has multiple parts, turning the whole soul must necessarily involve each of its respective parts. And if undertaking philosophy requires this, then we must conclude that philosophy is not simply an intellectual endeavor, but one which requires the cultivation of virtues in other parts of the soul as well. I have argued for this by outlining the nature of philosophy as it is presented in the *Republic* – how it is defined, the disposition from which it starts, and that it is difficult – to show that a certain prerequisite moral character is necessary for the philosopher to be successful. I then sketched out the character of the philosopher, showed which virtues are required for the successful pursuit of

³⁶ 518c; cf. 521c.

wisdom, and gave an explanation of why they are necessary. Next, I will consider how these virtues of character are acquired by turning to the account of education that is advanced in the *Republic*, which will give support to the claim that they are necessary prerequisites to the successful acquisition of wisdom.

Chapter Two: Education and Character Formation

2.1 Introduction

The contention of this thesis is that, in the *Republic*, Plato believes that in order to become a philosopher, one needs to have a prerequisite moral character. So far we have seen that philosophy starts with an experience called “wonder”, at the center of which is the love of truth. Related to wonder, it was shown that the object of philosophy is a difficult good to acquire, and on account of this it was argued that those with a philosophic nature must possess certain virtues of character in order to pursue wisdom and learning. There is, therefore, a necessary beginning to philosophic endeavor which is not intellectual in nature, but, rather, concerns the moral dispositions, or character, of the knower. The *Republic* consequently marks a departure in Plato’s thought from Socratic virtue theory of the early dialogues to something closer to Aristotle’s theory, in which the virtues – moral and intellectual – are mutually reinforcing, and in which early moral habituation is crucially important.

In this chapter, we will see how this interpretation of Plato’s virtue theory manifests itself in the educational program that is developed in the *Republic*. First, we will take a broad survey of what the dialogue says about education and upbringing. Then, we will specifically look at the first stage of education that Socrates advances in Books 2 and 3, which all guardians must go through. In so doing, we will see that the main aims of this stage of education are not the

advancement of knowledge, but the formation of character, which involves cultivating moral virtues that well-dispose the youth towards the good. This is most evident in the effects of *mousikē* and its role in character development. However, before we look at this, it will be beneficial to examine the different types of degenerate character that Socrates describes in the *Republic*, as this will help us to understand the importance of good upbringing and education in character formation.

2.2 Degenerate Souls

2.2.1 Introduction

Towards the end of a lengthy discussion on the different kinds of character, Socrates states the commonplace that “there are three primary kinds of people: philosophic, victory-loving, and profit-loving” (581c). These different types of people are distinguished according to desire, as well as by which part of their soul is most dominant. Philosophic, or wisdom-loving people are ruled by the rational part of the soul; victory, or honour-loving people are ruled by the spirited part of the soul; and money, or pleasure-loving people are ruled by the appetitive part of the soul. However, while describing these characters, and in particular, the degeneration of the soul from one character to the other, Socrates identifies five unique character-types, adding to the aforementioned list both democratic and tyrannical characters. Following the principle of differentiating the constitutions of people according to the divisions of the soul, it would seem that this list would require two further distinctions in the soul to account for the democratic and

tyrannical character types. However, as we will see, these two types of people are not primary in the sense of requiring any new distinctions of soul, but, rather, are complications of the already existing soul-types. For example, in the democratic man, there is no fundamentally new desire from which his character originates; rather, there is a transient quality to his desires, whereby the rule of his soul shifts between passions, so that sometimes he is ruled by appetitive desires, and other times he indulges in the desires of the rational and spirited parts of the soul.³⁷ The tyrannical man, on the other hand, represents the appetitive nature run completely amok, which again does not introduce any new distinction in the soul, but is instead an extreme degeneration of an already existing nature. And indeed, the tyrannical man is described as having been raised with a democratic nature, but as someone in whom the lawlessness of “freedom” has become overwhelming (572d).

The purpose of this section will be twofold. By describing the different types of character that Socrates says are inferior to the philosophic nature, we will see how the activities of reason are directed by desire.³⁸ This will reinforce the idea

³⁷ In his paper “Plato’s Critique of the Democratic Character” Dominic Scott presents an interesting view about the nature of the democratic man’s desires, which I am sympathetic to. He argues that the democratic man is not fundamentally appetitive, but indulges in the pleasures of all three parts of the soul. In his view, this distinct disorderliness is the reason for the democratic man being ranked as more degenerate than the timocrat and oligarch.

³⁸ I agree with the “reorientation” view proposed by Mark Johnstone in his recent paper “Plato on the Enslavement of Reason”, in which he says reason remains a source of motivation in the souls of degenerate characters. He argues that when reason is enslaved, it “no longer draws on its own resources to figure out what really is good. Rather, it is forced to regard and pursue as good an object characteristically desired by the soul’s ruling part” (p. 6). This is particularly supported by the text vis-à-vis the prominent passage at 519a, where Socrates proclaims that the “sight” in those who are “vicious but clever” isn’t inferior, but is forced to serve evil ends. This shows that reason is still viewed by Plato to be quite active when it is supplanted as ruler by a lower part of the soul, and that it is being compelled by something other than it, i.e., the lower parts of the soul.

that our moral dispositions are paramount in our ability to make philosophical progress, since the pursuit of philosophy depends on the kind of character that is cultivated in a person. Second, by outlining the hierarchy of character types and showing how each nobler constitution degenerates into an inferior one, we will see how in each case a poor upbringing, or lack of education, is ultimately responsible for this corruption. Both of these observations – the relationship between desire and reason, and the importance of good upbringing – will help us to better understand the theory of education that Socrates presents in the *Republic*, which we will subsequently focus on.

2.2.2 The timocratic man

After having described the ideal constitution which is “good and just” (544e), namely, aristocracy, and the virtues of character in the person who embodies it, Socrates and his companions turn their attention to the “inferior” kinds of constitution and their corresponding characters. Socrates begins by quoting the Muses, who proclaim that “everything that comes into being must decay” (546a), saying this is true even of the city which they have been constructing throughout the *Republic*. The first inferior character that Socrates describes is that of the timocrat, who is ruled by “the love of victory and the love of honor” (548c). This person’s character, which is dominated by the spirited part of the soul, is said to be a midway point between the rational and appetitive parts. Although the people who embody it have the ambition to rule, over time this desire is pulled by its lower nature towards the pursuit of money-making. This movement towards money-

loving is said to evolve gradually, and in particular it develops in older age. The timocrat's ambition to rule is not driven by proper virtue, and he believes that one's qualification to govern is military prowess. He values "tricks and stratagems of war" (547e) rather than reason and philosophy, and, consequently, "doesn't base his claim to rule on his ability as a speaker" (549a), and in fact is afraid to appoint wise people as leaders.

There are two things that are of particular relevance to us in Socrates' depiction of the timocratic character. The first is how the disorder in his soul misdirects the activities of reason towards things other than knowledge and wisdom. The dominance of the spirited part of the soul causes the timocrat to organize his life around the things he desires, namely military victory and the pursuit of honour. Although the timocrat is a lover of music and poetry, he is less well-trained in it, and instead dedicates himself to physical training and things which advance his capabilities in warfare and "warlike activities". Not only does the spirited part of the soul distract the timocrat from pursuing more noble activities, but it also lacks the necessary virtue to preserve itself, so that eventually the timocratic character further degenerates into that of the money-lover.

The second thing of importance for us is how the timocrat comes to be in the first place. Interestingly, Socrates describes the origin of the timocratic city and of the timocratic man in two distinct and seemingly unrelated ways.³⁹ The former

³⁹ This is unique in his portrayal of the types of cities and their corresponding soul-types. Generally, there is a closer parallel between the origins of the two.

comes to be as a result of a breakdown in selective breeding, whereas the latter is due to poor education and upbringing. One likely reason for positing such different accounts for the degeneration of each of the two analogues – the city and the soul – is that, in the case of the timocrat, how he arises out of the corresponding city is different from the other types of character. This is because, unlike the other corrupt cities, the timocracy arises out of the ideal noble city, whereas the others all arise out of other forms of degenerate constitution. In other words, in order for the timocrat to come into being from a poor upbringing, the city must first be corrupted for the first time. It seems unlikely that the foundation of disorder in the city as a whole would be poor education, since education is carefully constructed and overseen by the philosopher-kings. However, the harmony of the city rests on a highly structured class system, which is preserved by an extremely selective breeding program. It stands to reason, then, that if the classes were to become mixed, there would arise a disharmony in the city analogous to that which takes place in the soul of the timocrat, in whom the desires of reason and appetite are warring. And indeed, Socrates describes the transformation from aristocracy to timocracy as the result of an inability of the rulers to maintain a proper breeding program. As a result, there is an “intermixing” between the classes of people, which begets children “when they ought not to do so” (546b), and this subsequently causes strife in the city.

What is more relevant to us, however, is how the timocratic man comes to be by being brought up in a city which is no longer well-governed (549c). When

the city and its inhabitants have become corrupt, the timocrat's nobler father stays out of public affairs in order to avoid trouble. This, however, leads to widespread scorn, beginning with the father's wife – the timocrat's mother – who tells her son that his father is “unmanly” (549d). This then extends to the servants of the household, who also belittle the father to his son in private. At the same time, the son sees how “those who meddle in other people's affairs are honored and praised” (550a), and this impresses itself upon him in his youth. The result is that he adopts a “middle” nature between the rational nature of his father and the appetitive nature of the people in the city. The good nature that he inherited from his father is thereby corrupted by the influences of society, which cause disharmony between the intellectual and appetitive parts of his soul. This strife resolves itself temporarily in the cultivation of a spirited nature, which is said to share in both parts, rational and appetitive.

Besides being acquainted with the corrupting influences of bad company, the boy's education is described as inadequate, and this is directly connected to his poor behaviour. As a result, instead of being gentle with people of lower class, he is harsh and looks down upon them (549a). He is not as well-educated in music and poetry as his father presumably was, and, as we will see, these things play a critical role in character formation. Moreover, Socrates says that reason, mixed with music and poetry, is the best guardian, since it is “the lifelong preserver” of one's virtue. The corruption of the timocrat is therefore characterized as a shift away from a life

oriented towards reason and philosophy, which is evidenced by his neglect of these activities.

2.2.3 The oligarchic man

Next, Socrates and his companions turn their attention to “another man ordered like another city” (550c), namely the oligarch. The oligarchic nature is described as being governed by the appetitive part of the soul, as well as having the character of a money-lover. In this man, the rational and the spirited parts of the soul “sit at the ground beneath his appetite” (553c), or in other words, are subordinated to the desires of the appetitive part of the soul. The appetitive part of the soul (*epithumêtikon*) is named by Socrates and Glaucon after the intensity of its desires (*epithumôn*) for “food, drink, sex, and all of the things associated with them” (580e). Socrates associates this with a money-loving character on account of the fact that money is the most efficient means through which to acquire these goods, and thereby to satisfy the underlying desires.⁴⁰ Although the oligarch is ruled by appetite, his love of money, and consequently his aversion to parting with it, cause him to indulge in only the necessary desires of his appetite (554a). This frugality gives him the appearance of possessing moderation, and he is praised on account of it. However, his moderation is not real virtue, only the appearance of it. The appetite of the oligarch is not held back by reason and arguments, but by “compulsion and fear” (544d) of losing his possessions. In other words, his frugality

⁴⁰ “Hence we called it the appetitive part, because of the intensity of its appetites for food, drink, sex, and all things associated with them, but we also call it the money-loving part, because such appetites are most easily satisfied by means of money.” (580d–581a)

is motivated by his inordinate love of wealth, which is itself a form of immoderation.

Socrates' depiction of the oligarchic nature makes it much more explicit how the desires of the non-rational parts of the soul misdirect the activities of reason. At 550e, we are told that there is a negative correlation between wealth and virtue: the more one is valued, the less the other is valued. The love of money therefore necessarily comes at the expense of a regard for virtue. The oligarch is a slave to his appetite, and, as a consequence, only values wealth. Intellect and spirit become subordinate to this desire, and the oligarch "won't allow the first to reason about or examine anything except how little money can be made into great wealth." (553d). It seems, therefore, that it is not merely the result of an error of reason that he strives in this manner for money. If that were the case, it would imply that reason was still in control of desire, but, on the contrary, Socrates describes the other parts of the soul as being enslaved to appetite in the oligarchic man.⁴¹

Like the timocrat, the oligarch is corrupted by his upbringing. Although he first tries to emulate his honour-loving father, the boy's character changes when he

⁴¹ This is in contrast to the view proposed by Terence Irwin in *Plato's Ethics*, which argues that each of the psychological transitions in Books 8-9 of the *Republic* is the result of rational choices, i.e., the deliberations of reason. As Mark Johnstone ("Tripartition and the Rule of the Soul in Plato's *Republic*," p. 113) points out, the textual evidence for this view is "worryingly thin". Irwin's view seems to hinge on the language used in one particular passage, where Socrates describes the oligarchic man as "handing over" or surrendering himself to the spirited part of the soul (Irwin, pp. 285-288). In his aforementioned paper, Dominic Scott also responds to Irwin and rejects the view that the transition between characters in Books 8-9 is the result of "autonomous" reason. Among other things, he points out how, for Plato, reason is not strong in the youth, nor does it spontaneously develop; rather it requires careful nurturing. Thus, if not safe-guarded through proper upbringing and education, reason can become enslaved to appetite (Scott, p. 36).

witnesses his father being ruined and subsequently executed or exiled by false accusers in the city. As a result, the son is dispossessed of his inheritance and “humbled by poverty” (553b). After suffering the injustice of his family’s estate being seized, driven by fear, the boy “turns greedily to making money” (553c). As we saw, the spirited part of the soul which previously ruled in the timocrat is fundamentally unable to resist the degradation of character into the life of a money-maker. Having been reduced to nothing, the boy does not fear living without honour, for if this were the case, his spirit would lead him to carry on as a timocrat, striving to re-establish his reputation through military victory. Rather, the non-rational motivations of the appetitive part of the soul, along with suffering misfortune, cause a transformation in the boy’s values, leading him to become oligarchic in nature.

The oligarchic city is full of evildoers who have been reduced to poverty by the ruling class (the wealthy), and “almost everyone except the rulers is a beggar there” (552d). The oligarchs allow what Socrates calls “the greatest of all evils”, namely, permitting men to sell all of their possessions so that they can live in the city while not providing any service to it (552a). This is how the oligarchs amass their wealth. Socrates attributes this behaviour of the citizens – prodigality followed by criminality – to their lack of education, as well as to their poor upbringing, which is the result of the bad constitution of the city.⁴² This would explain why so much

⁴² At 552e, Socrates says that the presence of such people in the city “is the result of a lack of education, bad rearing, and a bad constitutional arrangement”.

of the *Republic* is spent emphasizing the importance of good education and upbringing. The oligarch himself is also accused of both having a bad education and not paying proper attention to his education;⁴³ however, this connection between character and education is most explicit with the next kind of degenerate soul, the democratic man.

2.2.4 The democratic man

Democracy is the first constitution whose corresponding state of character does not align simply with one of the tripartitions of the soul. Although the democratic man is fundamentally appetitive in nature, the objects of desire which he pursues are multiform. Whereas the other types of men correspond one-to-one with the part of the soul which is dominant in them, e.g., the timocrat with spirit, and the oligarch with appetite, there is a transient nature to the life of a democratic man such that his life looks like a “supermarket” of desires.

Although both are governed by the appetitive part of the soul, the oligarch and democrat differ in the desires they pursue. The oligarch pursued only necessary desires, which are urges that we are “by nature compelled to satisfy” (558d), for example, eating only insofar as it is conducive to health. The democrat, on the other hand, indulges in unnecessary desires, which go beyond that which is for the sake of health, and not only do not lead to any good, but can harm a person.⁴⁴

⁴³ “I don’t suppose that such a man pays any attention to education.” 554b

⁴⁴ Socrates introduces this distinction at 558d-559d.

The youth of the democratic man is described as a frenzied state as his various passions compete for his attention. In such a state, he calls “anarchy freedom, extravagance magnificence, and shamelessness courage” (560d-e). If he is lucky, however, this chaotic state will subside, and an equality of pleasures will establish themselves. Nevertheless, he remains irresolute, satisfying whatever urge captivates him at a given time. If he takes pleasure from certain virtuous activities, he will temporarily take up them up in order to satisfy those desires, and likewise all intemperate activities too. For example, he sometimes practices an instrument, sometimes takes up what he believes to be philosophy, sometimes exercises, whereas at other times he is idle and neglects everything; he floats through life with a certain irresoluteness, pursuing whatever whim captivates him in a moment. This is the spirit of equality in the soul of the democrat, which produces “a complex man, full of all sorts of characters” (561e).

As we have seen with the other kinds of character, the types of desire that govern the soul determine the manner of the intellect’s activities. The democratic man’s intellect is drawn towards an array of objects on account of his whimsical desires. There is, therefore, less discipline in the democrat, and this is marked by his being the first type of man we have come across to pursue unnecessary desires, which makes his character type more degenerate than the others.⁴⁵ In this respect, the misdirection of the democrat’s intellect by desire is unique, insofar as it is

⁴⁵ The timocrat and the oligarch, although possessing degenerate natures, were able to maintain a semblance of discipline and order in their soul, on account of how fixed they were on acquiring their uniform desires, namely, honour and money.

especially pronounced, and the equality of his desires won't allow him to "admit any word of truth into the guardhouse" (561b) of his soul.

Socrates' depiction of the democrat also draws a particularly clear connection between the democrat's early education and upbringing and the corruption of his soul. The oligarch has a virtue of moderation that his son does not have: he is able to differentiate between necessary and unnecessary desires. The oligarch does not do this because of his affinity to virtue, but based on which activities are conducive to money-making, and he avoids those which are not (558d). Upon drawing this distinction, Socrates emphasizes that an unnecessary desire can be gotten rid of in a person's life "if it's restrained and educated while they're young" (559b). Here, he is explicitly referring to the importance of properly educating the youth to be able to rightly distinguish necessary and unnecessary desires.⁴⁶

The democratic man comes to be when his oligarchic father, who is too miserly to part with his money, does not provide an adequate education for his son. As a result, the son is raised in "the uneducated manner we described" (559d), namely in such a way as to be unable to properly discern the good. He subsequently pursues all manner of things, and this leads to a transformation in his soul. His initial exposure to a variety of pleasures is the beginning of the change in his inner

⁴⁶ As we will see in the following two sections, this involves habituating the youth to be properly disposed towards desire, so that they delight in the things which they ought to delight in and are repulsed by the things they ought to be repulsed by.

constitution; it serves as a sort of genesis, or the planting of a seed in him, so to speak (559d-e). He has no education, or training, or habit, through which to resist this degradation of character, and these desires breed and multiply in him. In the acropolis of the young man's soul, being devoid of study and habit, "false and boastful words and beliefs rush up and occupy" (560c) him. These new vicious guardians of his soul then shut out any opposition, such as advice from elders, and banish the virtue of moderation from him. In such a soul, vices of all sorts abound.

The origin of the democratic man parallels that of the timocrat and oligarch inasmuch as their character is corrupted by a countervailing desire which is allowed to rule the soul on account of poor upbringing and education. While the timocrat's spirit allowed him to focus on victory and pursuing honours, this virtue-adjacent quality is corrupted by the desire for wealth. The money-loving nature of the oligarch was also a cause of certain restraints, but only incidentally, i.e., not because moderation was desired for its own sake, but only for the sake of preserving wealth. The essence of each nature is what ultimately destroys it, and just as it was the lust for money run amok which caused the oligarch to degenerate into a democrat, it is the zeal for freedom that causes the democrat to degenerate into a tyrant. The democratic man, valuing freedom above all other things, becomes opposed to any notion of an imposed order or hierarchy. Seeing these things as oppressive, he lashes out at any suggestion that some desires are better than others, and as a result there are as many kinds of person as there are pleasures in the democratic city (557c). This gives people the impression that democracy is the fairest, because of

the license it gives to its citizens to live as they please (557c-e). This new and anarchic spirit which has sprung forth in the democratic man ultimately gives rise to another, and final, degeneration of city and soul: the tyrant.

2.2.5 The tyrant

In Book 9, Socrates and his companions spend a considerable amount of time discussing the tyrannical man. Despite this, much of the conversation is devoted simply to describing the many injustices that the tyrant commits, and less time is spent tying the corruption of his character to his upbringing, so it will be less interesting to us for our purposes. Nevertheless, the tyrant is the most corrupt kind of character, and pursues unnecessary desires in a lawless manner (571b). While these desires exist in everyone, in most people they are restrained, and the point was made in Book 8 that the training of this habit is one of the goals of education. However, there is a kind of man in whom these desires build until they overcome any apparent moderation in him. His desires then become frenzied, and he turns to every source of wealth in order to fulfill them, for example, betraying parents, stealing from neighbors, looting temples, etc. (574c-d). His upbringing is like that of the democrat, where he is captivated by lawlessness and calls it “freedom” (572d). A key difference between the upbringings of the two, however, seems to be that the democrat was raised by his oligarchic father who had self-restraint, whereas, being raised by democrats, all of the influences in the tyrant’s life come to the aid of fulfilling his desires. Eventually he is overcome by these desires and is filled with madness. As a result, all shame and good beliefs are purged

from his soul, and he aims at acquiring power insofar as this will enable him to pursue his insatiable desire. The tyrant thus represents the furthest breakdown in the city's ability to properly raise children, and his intellect, which is employed towards the most evil ends, is therefore the most corrupted.

2.2.6 Conclusions on degenerate character

In a recent paper in which he focuses on the relationship between reason and desire in degenerate souls, Mark Johnstone responds to a number of opposing interpretations of Plato (as well as the views of Hume more broadly) with regards to what I have just described.⁴⁷ The first is the “homuncular” view (e.g., Bobonich, 2002), which attributes all of the reasoning activities of a degenerate soul to its ruling part. Under such a view, the appetitive part of the soul in the oligarchic man would be responsible for its own deliberations about means and ends pursued. The second is the “deflationary” view (e.g. Thyssen, 1998), which sees the talk about changing rulers in the soul as metaphorical. This view argues that there are not distinct “parts” of the soul, only different desires within it. By contrast, Johnstone argues that reason's desires (for the good) remain active, however “instead of determining for itself what is good, reason is forced to desire and pursue as good a goal determined by the soul's ruler.” (2020, p. 383). One of the benefits of this interpretation is that it avoids the need to further subdivide the parts of the soul when there is apparent conflict within them. For example, we have seen that there

⁴⁷ Johnstone, “Plato on the Enslavement of Reason”.

is an opposition between desires in the oligarch for things such as food, drink, and sex, insofar as they conflict with his desire for money. Johnstone argues that this does not necessitate a further subdivision in the soul, on the basis that Socrates says the oligarch restrains his “dronish” appetites by means of “some decent part of himself” (554c-d). This decent part is most likely corrupted reason.⁴⁸ Moreover, the “reorientation” view proposed by Johnstone eliminates the problematic need for the individual parts of the soul to be cognizant in themselves, that is to say, self-reflective, as suggested by the “homuncular” view. Instead, reason remains active in the degenerate soul, and the manner in which it operates – the things which it deliberates over and views as good – is determined by the desires of an inferior part of the soul. Johnstone summarizes this relationship as follows:

In every soul, reason generates desires to do what the person reflectively considers best. In some souls, it is free to draw on its own resources to determine and pursue what really is good. In others, however, it is enslaved and, as a result of its enslavement, is forced to regard and pursue as good a goal imposed on it from without. (p. 390)

This view, however, would seem to be confusing, if not problematic, when it comes to the democratic character, on account of how multiform and transient his desires are. In the other kinds of degenerate character there is a unitary goal towards which reason can be fixed, such as victory, money, or in the case of the tyrant,

⁴⁸ Johnstone 2020, p. 388.

power (which he relentlessly pursues in order to satisfy his frenzied desires). The democrat's desires, on the other hand, are so varied and fleeting it is difficult to imagine what role enslaved reason would play in his life. However, as Johnstone points out, the democratic man clearly has views about the good, however "mercurial". But perhaps most of all, the democratic man is presented as having wide array of individual desires, and "no one thinks individual pleasures and desires have such views [on the good]. Pleasures and desires can, however, reorient and shape one's views about the good" (2020, p. 391).

Thus, through Socrates' description of the types of degenerate character in Books 8-9, we see two things: The first is that reason can be turned away from the (true) good by the desires of the non-rational parts of the soul. This highlights the importance of virtues of character to safeguard reason's activities from going awry. Second, we see that such a character must be cultivated before the acquisition of wisdom. In fact, without such virtues safeguarding the soul, it is unlikely, if not impossible, that an individual will become wise, no matter how sharp their intellect is. Although reason is called the "best part" in a person, it nevertheless can "serve" spirit and appetite in a morally weak person (590c).

2.3. The Aims of Education

2.3.1 Introduction

Plato provides us with two accounts of education in the *Republic*: the first in Books 2-3, and the second in Book 7. The first account is a curriculum of *mousikē*

and *gumnastikê* for guardians who will go on to play a role in managing the city, either as warriors who will protect the city from threats, or philosophers who will rule the city. Much of the discussion in these books is devoted to what sort of *mousikê* the youth should be exposed to in order to raise them with a virtuous character. That this model of education is in reference to not only auxiliaries but the future philosophers is made clear by how the form of this education is framed immediately preceding their discussion of it. Here, Socrates says that the guardians, “besides being spirited, must also be philosophical in nature” (375e), upon which we are given the first definition of philosophy as the love of wisdom (376b). Having just done this, Socrates and his companions then seek to understand how someone with such a character (including the other qualities they mentioned) should be raised.

In Book 7 the need is established to provide additional training of an intellectual nature. This includes mathematics, which it seems the auxiliaries also learn, since it is deemed necessary for warriors (525b). However, those who excel in their education and demonstrate the qualities to potentially become philosophers are selected to study more advanced subjects as adults (537d). This will enable those with a philosophic nature to not only intuit and opine about the good, but also begin inquiring into things themselves and reach the level of true understanding. I do not view these two accounts of education as incompatible, but rather as complementary and overlapping, since, presumably, the prospective philosophers will also be exposed to *mousikê*, in which case the principles of the first model of

education would apply to them. In Book 7 Socrates gives no indication that the principles of the first model of education no longer apply, or that prospective philosophers do not receive it in addition to the new subjects that are introduced. Rather, it is only determined that education in *mousikē* and *gumnastikē* do not by themselves lead to knowledge of the good, hence the need to find further subjects which will lead prospective philosophers to “ascend to what is” (521c). However, the philosopher of Book 7 remains someone who must undergo a period of physical training (537b), and it is maintained that education in music and poetry are the counterpart of physical training (522a). It therefore seems plausible to say that the early education as conceived in Books 2-3 still applies to the future rulers in Book 7.

Nevertheless, Plato stresses the importance of virtues of character necessary for anyone who wishes to become a philosopher. If, as I argue, it is true that these virtues are in some way a prerequisite to wisdom, it seems that the philosopher’s education would involve moral upbringing in a way that corresponds to the model of education advanced in Books 2-3. The second model of education, therefore, seems to supplement the love of wisdom of those with a philosophic nature, rather than supplant the early moral habituation of the first model.

2.3.2 Beginning well

One of the major advances in the *Republic*, which marks a departure from the Socratic intellectualism of Plato’s earlier dialogues, is the introduction of the importance of cultivating virtue in the soul through training and habit. As we will

see, in the two models of education that are proposed, the first stage is principally concerned with character formation, which is not done through theoretical knowledge of the forms, but through habituation. It is in developing his ideas about this stage of education that Plato launches his first extended attack against the corrupting influences of the poets, which he returns to in the final book of the *Republic*. The purpose of his aggressive and controversial censorship of the poets is to ensure that the guardians “are not brought up on images of evil”, because in their youth they will begin to imitate these things, and, over time, “unwittingly accumulate a large evil in their souls” (401c). They must, therefore, only be exposed to examples of good behaviour.

What this tells us about Plato’s virtue theory, and subsequently its implications for philosophic endeavor, is that, because we learn first by imitation, education begins with habituation, and we must have good examples after which to model ourselves. This will not only make it possible for people to live healthy lives in “harmony with the beauty of reason” (401d), but the moral character instilled in the youth will also serve as precondition to go on to understand *why* things are shameful, since “having been educated in this way, he will welcome the reason when it comes and recognize it easily because of its kinship with himself.” (402a).

The importance of beginnings is a recurrent theme in the works of Plato. For example, in *Laws* he writes,

As the proverb says, ‘getting started is half the battle’, and a *good* beginning we all applaud. But in my view a good start is more than ‘half’, and no one has yet given it the due praise it deserves. (753e-754a)

Although the Athenian speaking here is talking about the founding of a colony, not about early education, we can see in a general way how this claim could apply to the importance of early education as well. Plato is saying that common wisdom, although assigning great importance to the beginnings of endeavors, still does not give beginnings enough credit, and that they are not owed just half of the praise, but the majority of it. This sentiment is echoed in the *Republic*, where he says:

You know, don’t you, that the beginning of any process is the most important, especially for anything young and tender? It’s at that time that it is most malleable and takes on any pattern one wishes to impress on it. (377a-b)

This passage from the *Republic* helps to reinforce what is being advanced by this thesis overall, namely, that philosophers must have good beginnings in their character if they are going to be successful. It also helps to reinforce what is being argued in this chapter, namely, that this idea manifests itself in the theory of education that is advanced in the *Republic*. In this quote, it is the young and tender themselves who are being molded in a specific way by their upbringing, so as to have good characters.

2.3.3 Character formation

As we have just seen, Plato pays special attention to the beginnings of things. In each example of a degenerate soul, Socrates and his interlocutors first investigated how each came to be from poor upbringing. These poor upbringings subsequently corrupted the more noble natures of the children raised under them. This should not come as a surprise to us as readers, since earlier, in Book 6, there is an explicit discussion about this. At 491e, Socrates and his companions discuss how “those with the best nature become outstandingly bad when they receive a bad upbringing”, and how this can destroy the philosophic nature:

Now, I think that the philosophic nature as we defined it will inevitably grow to possess every virtue if it happens to receive appropriate instruction, but if it is sown, planted, and grown in an inappropriate environment it will develop in quite the opposite way, unless some god happens to come to its rescue. (491e-492a)

Socrates goes on to explain that the sophists are able to shape people into precisely the kind of men they want them to be through the social pressures of the mob, and that once corrupted, no man can come to virtue on his own except through divine dispensation (592e). The kind of education that the sophists are expert in is nothing other than a knack of appeasing crowds. The sophist is described as a sort of animal trainer, who, through experience with people, has learned what will “soothe or anger” audiences, and applies the terms “good or bad, just or unjust” to

what people like or dislike. Consequently, their “wisdom,” falsely so-called, is nothing other than “understanding the moods and pleasures of a majority” (493a).

Those with the best inborn traits are described as philosophic in nature, and even these rare kinds of people are not immune to the corruptive forces of a bad upbringing. In fact, Socrates says that these men, once corrupted, “do the greatest evils” (495b) to both cities and people. We might wonder why someone with a philosophic nature would become the most unjust kind of person if not properly reared. The answer is found a short while later, where the discussion on the aims of education continues in Book 7.

In Book 7, we are told that education isn’t a matter of “putting knowledge into souls” (518b), but rather is principally concerned with turning or redirecting the soul, so that it looks “where it ought to look” (518d). Previously, we were told that a vicious person cannot possess self-knowledge, nor properly identify virtue, but that a naturally virtuous person, when educated, can go on to acquire knowledge of virtue and become wise (409d). This is not, however, merely an intellectual endeavor. Rather, a pattern of the good must be impressed upon their soul thanks to which they are able to begin to know the good. This sort of nature is philosophic and must be “hammered at from childhood” (519a) to ensure that the prospective philosopher is freed from his attachments to the corporeal world. That these traits, which education aims at refining, and which are required for one to go on and pursue philosophy, include virtues of character is made manifestly clear in Book 6, 485b-487a. Here, Socrates and his companions attempt to enumerate the various

qualities that the prospective philosopher must have. When Socrates says “it is necessary to understand first the nature of the ones who are going to come to have both sorts” (485a), he is referring back to 474b-c, where they recognized the need to determine the character of those who are fit both to engage in philosophy and to rule the city. After enumerating the various qualities that this person must have, Socrates concludes with a quick summary, producing the list: “by nature good at remembering, quick to learn, high-minded, graceful, and a friend and relative of truth, justice, courage, and moderation” (487a). It is important to note that he says “friend and relative” to the last virtues, since we have to be careful about the distinction between perfect and imperfect virtue. Nevertheless, there is a character that one must have if one is to successfully pursue philosophy, and certain traits are listed which include moral virtues.

If those with a philosophic nature are properly educated, they have the potential to become the most excellent and virtuous citizens, worthy of ruling the city. However, because people of this type must necessarily possess a very keen intellect, if their nature is allowed to become corrupted through poor upbringing, they are also potentially the worst kind of citizen. I have already quoted this passage above, but it is worth looking at in full again:

Or have you never noticed this about people who are said to be vicious but clever, how keen the vision of their little souls is and how sharply it distinguishes the things it is turned towards? This shows that its sight isn't

inferior, but rather is forced to serve evil ends, so that the sharper it sees,
the more evil it accomplishes. (519a)

As seen with the degeneration of souls, there is a danger in not properly educating people in their youth to be well-disposed towards the good. Although everyone's soul pursues the good, not every soul is able to adequately grasp it (505e). One of the main causes of failure to grasp the good is a defective character, and vicious people are directed by their character toward bad things, irrespective of how sharp their intellect is. This explains why character formation is the primary goal of the first stage of education. In a moment we will examine some details of the curriculum, to see more specifically how it revolves around character formation, vis-à-vis *mousikē*. But first, we should clarify the difference between perfect and imperfect virtue.

2.4 The Cave and Degrees of Virtue

In the previous chapter, I showed how the Cave analogy was used to illustrate that philosophy is a difficult endeavor. I now add that the analogy is also a metaphor for the educational process. Having completed the analogies of the Line and Sun in Book 6, Socrates begins Book 7 by saying “compare the effect of education and the lack of it on our nature to an experience like this” (514a), after which he proceeds to give the allegory of the Cave. In it, he describes the condition of ordinary adult non-philosophers as being like that of prisoners bound in a cave, unable to look at anything other than shadows being cast on the wall by puppets in

front of a fire which is behind them. In this state, they are devoid of knowledge and full of falsehoods, believing that the images being cast on the wall are real things. This state is a representation of our soul being attached to the things of the visible world, and consequently of our intellect being deceived by the transient and mutable things therein. This level of thought is characteristic of people who are unaware that the things they take to be real, and the goods they pursue, are “shadows” of true reality. An example of such people are pleasure-seekers who are consumed with unnecessary desires. Following this metaphor, it seems that the first model of education would correspond to the unshackling of these prisoners and turning them to the light; and indeed, as we have seen, immediately following the Cave analogy Socrates describes education as a turning around of the whole soul.⁴⁹ After being unshackled, the prisoner is compelled to climb further and further out of the cave, until finally he is outside in the light of day. Through this process, Socrates describes incremental stages through which the prisoner’s vision is improved, and he is able to see increasingly real things, first shadows, then darkened objects, then objects themselves, until finally he is able to see the Sun. As Socrates remarked at the beginning, these steps correspond to the stages of

⁴⁹ One complication here is that the prisoners in the Cave are adults when the journey starts. This does not change the fact that education aims at turning around the soul; however, it raises the question as to how this “turning” might differ for an adult who has been badly raised in the *kallipolis* in comparison to a child who is brought up well. This is an interesting consideration, however my initial thought is not to read too literally into the allegory. For one, Socrates states how it is unlikely that adults, if poorly raised, will be able to have their character re-oriented towards the good. Moreover, I see no reason why we cannot take the Cave allegory as such, namely as allegorical, and see the ascent of the adult prisoner as also corresponding to the model of education of children, which is to release them from the bonds of images and sensations and direct them upwards through education towards the good.

education. Once outside the cave, there is a transition from the first stage of education to the second, since the objects seen by the prisoner begin to correspond to the forms of real things, which are one of the objects of study in second model of the education program.

Michael Cormack believes that the epistemological theory that Plato develops here implies that there are corresponding levels of virtue.⁵⁰ He points out that in the Divided Line there is the one-to-one relationship between the structure of reality and levels of comprehension, and that there is clearly a relationship between these and the stages of ascent from the Cave. What is interesting about his observations, however, is his claim that “the measure of one’s virtue is relative to their epistemic condition”⁵¹. By this, he does not mean that virtue is knowledge, although he does concede that those who go on to the second stage of education have their virtue perfected by knowledge. Rather, according to Cormack, what Plato seems to be implying by tying these heavily metaphysical analogies to his educational theory is that it is possible to possess virtue without knowledge.⁵² This, Cormack argues, is most clearly evident in the virtue of the auxiliaries, who he claims do not participate in the second model of education with the guardians.⁵³ The auxiliaries’ virtue is acquired through habit, whereas the philosophers’ virtue is perfected through knowledge, which is the result of their additional education in

⁵⁰ Cormack, 112.

⁵¹ Ibid., 95.

⁵² Ibid., 88.

⁵³ Ibid., 89.

theoretical subjects. The first model of education habituates one to be good, and therefore gives the auxiliaries the capacity to recognize particular manifestations of what is good; i.e., they are able to act, in the here and now, according to the habit-based beliefs that have been instilled in them. The second model of education perfects virtue through knowledge, i.e., not only recognizing *that* something is good, but understanding *why* it is good. One with this kind of knowledge doesn't just have a true opinion about particular just actions, but knows what justice itself is.⁵⁴

The first model of education is necessary because it provides stable, fixed opinions on the good, as well as the fortitude to preserve them. The courage possessed by those who complete this stage therefore represents virtue imperfectly possessed, but virtue nonetheless, in the same manner that, depending on their level expertise, a craftsman can be more or less skilled at their trade. And indeed, Cormack notes the similarity between the acquisition of virtue and the acquisition of craft knowledge, noting how crafts are passed down first by example and emulation, and that knowledge follows only later.⁵⁵

I believe Cormack is right that Plato recognized degrees of virtue and believed lower degrees of virtue do not require knowledge. Further textual evidence

⁵⁴ While I agree in general with Cormack on the basic differences between the two models of education that are proposed in the *Republic*, I am hesitant to say, as he does, that these models are neatly divided between auxiliaries and future rulers. For my purposes, I simply take the stance that the future philosopher-rulers still receive the education in *mousikê* described in books 2-3, and that this habituation plays a role in their character formation, which subsequently lends critical support to their pursuit of wisdom.

⁵⁵ Cormack, 83.

of degrees of virtue is given in Book 4, where Socrates defines courage as “the power to preserve through everything the correct and law-inculcated belief about what is to be feared and what isn’t” (430b). He immediately goes on to qualify this definition as “civic” courage, refusing to call this a formal definition. What stands out in this definition is that this kind of virtue is a power to preserve belief about what is to be feared, rather than knowledge. Moreover, it is inculcated by law, i.e., instilled in people by habit, for example through education. This “civic” virtue is presumably being contrasted to the virtue of the philosopher, which is perfected by knowledge, and no longer just a habituated disposition which has become ingrained in someone as a belief.

Rachana Kamtekar argues that at 505e we are given reason to believe that there is a more relaxed restriction than genuine knowledge for one to be motivated to do well.⁵⁶ She says, “To pursue the good, and to do everything for its sake is to value the good for its own sake, and it seems, at least from this passage, that valuing the good for its own sake does not require already having a correct conception of it; “guessing what it is” suffices.”⁵⁷ If Kamtekar is right about this, it opens the door to non-philosophers being able to behave in a virtuous manner if they have been raised well, despite not having knowledge. Like Cormack, Kamtekar focuses on the example of those ruled by the spirited part of the soul to show that they will do what the city has raised them to believe is noble. If, therefore, they have been brought up

⁵⁶ “Every soul pursues the good and does its utmost for its sake.” (505e)

⁵⁷ Kamtekar, 13.

in the ideal city which has inculcated virtue in them, they will follow this model which they have been trained to emulate.

One concern with this view is that people behaving according to habit are not really exercising a virtue, but responding to their conditioning, in which case no real moral progress is evident in them. Responding to this concern, Kamtekar looks to the first stage of education, arguing that internalization is an effect that is evident in it. Internalization, according to her, implies that judgements of worth and self-reflection are being made, so that action is not simply reflexive; rather, one is evaluating themselves according to some standard or model of what they believe is good. She argues that, “When an honor-lover internalizes a norm, he does something more than learn that behaving in accordance with this norm will earn him a good reputation, praise, and so on.”⁵⁸ She finds evidence for this in the musical education of the auxiliaries, whereby they are presented strictly with content which is conducive to virtue after which to model themselves. This allows the honour-lovers, who will not go on to acquire real knowledge, to judge themselves according to these examples. As we have already seen in the *Republic*, cultivating a model of the good in the soul gives one the means to recognize it, both in themselves and others. Thus, the honour-lovers, through internalizing their education, are able to come to “a genuine and stable commitment to virtue”⁵⁹. The fact remains that this virtue is not perfected by the kind of knowledge that gives

⁵⁸ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 29.

philosophers an understanding of why virtue is good, but Socrates nevertheless still calls this virtue, albeit in a modified sense. It seems plausible, then, to call this kind of virtue, which is the product of the first stage of education, “imperfect” virtue. We will now see more clearly how this degree of virtue is cultivated in the first stage of education.

2.5 *Mousikē* and Its Effects

Having for the first time identified the traits necessary for any potential guardian who is going to rule the city, and defining this person as having a philosophical spirit (376b), in Books 2 and 3 of the *Republic*, Socrates turns to the manner in which such a person should be brought up and educated, if they are to possess such qualities.⁶⁰ In so doing, he ends up describing what will be the first stage of education that will be common to both auxiliaries and philosophers, and which is composed of training in *mousikē*,⁶¹ as well as gymnastics. The goal of this education is ultimately to instill a good character in the youth, so that they are well-disposed towards the good. This training will give them the necessary prerequisite character in order to protect the city, as well as govern it.

Socrates begins by stating what is taken as obvious by him and his companions, namely that education should be lengthy and involve “physical

⁶⁰ This discussion spans 376c-412a.

⁶¹ Although the word “music” derives from *mousikē*, our appropriation of the term has a different, narrower, meaning. For the ancient Greeks, *mousikē* was not music in the modern sense of vocal and instrumental songs, but the arts of the Muses, which involved combinations of song, dance, poetry, and theatrical performance.

training for bodies and music and poetry for the soul” (376e). However, music and poetry must come before physical education, since the priority is to impress a “pattern” on the soul while the character of the youth is most malleable.

It is on account of the impressionability of the youth and the importance of good beginnings that Socrates then turns to things which the youth should and should not be exposed to. He says that the young should not be exposed to stories which portray conduct that is contrary to the beliefs which they should hold as adults, and so if the city is to properly safeguard the shaping of the souls of its youth, the storytellers must be supervised, and only fine and beautiful stories will be permitted to be told (377b-c).

This is the beginning of their discussion on censorship, where stories that are not “fit to be told” are either not allowed to be recited in the city, or else limited to as small an audience as possible. The fear of rearing children on stories that set bad moral standards, for example, “gods warring, fighting, or plotting against one another” and “hating their families or friends” (378c), is that, besides being false, they will cause a young man to think that if he does these wicked things “he’s doing nothing out of the ordinary” (378b). Unable to properly distinguish between what is real and what is allegorical, the youth will emulate and internalize the vicious behaviours they see in myth. As they advance in age, they will be “apt to become unalterable” (378d) in the beliefs that have adopted from an early age.

Socrates thus proceeds to enumerate the laws that should regulate the content of stories, beginning with the depiction of the gods. The first is that the gods, being good, must not be portrayed as the cause of any evil, so that if someone's condition is depicted as wretched, it must be because of some wickedness they themselves are guilty of, and that they are benefited by being punished by the gods (380b). The second law is that the gods must be depicted in a constant and stable manner. The reason for this is that "the best things are least liable to alteration or change" (380e), and so if something is in good condition, it is not likely to be disturbed or corrupted. Portraying the gods as shape-shifters implies that they are deficient in their virtue, or they would not otherwise have the need to alter themselves. Moreover, portraying the gods using magic or illusion in effect turns them into propagators of falsehood, since they are deceiving us, which, Socrates says, is a representation of a bad "affection in the soul" (382b). The gods must therefore be free from all falsehood.

Having sufficiently dealt with censorship pertaining to the depiction of the gods, Socrates and his companions then turn to the kind of virtues that should be inculcated in the youth through their education in *mousikē*. Beginning with courage, they agree that the kind of stories children should be told should be ones that "will make them least afraid of death" (386b). The immediate concern seems to be that portraying the afterlife as something terrible and horrifying will make poor warriors out of those who will go on to be auxiliaries responsible for defending the city. They will consequently turn into cowards on the battlefield, preferring defeat and

slavery over death. Socrates then proceeds to give a number of examples of lines which must be “expunged” from Homer’s *Iliad*, and *Odyssey*, because they are not conducive to the model of courage that children should emulate. It is also for this reason that lamentations are censored from the city, since they cause men to despair in the face of death and inordinately mourn their loved ones. If death is not to be feared, then this sort of affectation cannot be tolerated, since young people, seeing this behaviour glorified in song and story, will no longer feel “shame nor restraint but groan and lament at even insignificant misfortunes” (388d).

After a few further considerations about laughter and falsehood, the companions turn their attention to the virtue of moderation, whose most important aspects for most people they describe as obeying the rulers and ruling “the pleasures of food, drink, and sex” (389d). Appealing again to examples from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, they agree that verses which exalt or dignify these desires will cause the young to be overcome by their appetites and hence to become intemperate of character.⁶²

Until now, Socrates has been dealing with “*what* must be said in stories” (394c), in other words, what their content should be, but now he turns his attention to “*how*” stories must be said. Since poems and stories were dramatically performed by poets and storytellers through narration, song, and imitation, it is important that

⁶² “For that reason, we must put a stop to such stories, lest they produce in the youth a strong inclination to do bad things.” 391e-392a.

these people imitate characters well. At this point it becomes abundantly clear that at this stage of education virtue is developed in the youth through imitation:

...they must imitate from childhood what is appropriate for them, namely, people who are courageous, self-controlled, pious, and free, and their actions. They mustn't be clever at doing or imitating slavish or shameful actions, lest from enjoying the imitation, they come to enjoy the reality. Or haven't you noticed that imitations practiced from youth become part of nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice, and thought? (395c-d)

It is for this reason that both storytellers and young men are not permitted to imitate ignoble characters or behaviours. In fact, Socrates goes so far as to say they should not imitate animals, nor people of a lower class, i.e., the producers, such as craftsmen (396a-b).

Music, songs, and odes must also correspond to the kind of character that must be cultivated in the youth of the city. Socrates outlines what must and must not be permitted in these arts in a similar way as he did with poetry. For fear of becoming repetitive, it will suffice to say that the content of songs must follow the same rules as those of stories.⁶³ Neither must the modes of songs, that is, their tones and rhythms, stir up passions in men through too much variety of sound, which

⁶³ The discussion on music, song, and ode spans 397b-400e, and closely parallels the previous discussion on poetry and stories, that is to say, the same principles are being applied. Concerning our present inquiry, it would be redundant to repeat the same arguments as they are applied to these arts.

allows for a wide range of fluctuating moods to be affected in the audience. Subsequently, multi-stringed instruments are banned from the city.

The main discussion of *mousikē* concludes with a brief consideration of crafts. All craftsmen must produce works in ways that imitate virtues of character, and they must not portray “images of evil” in their works. The souls of the youth must be protected from corrupting influences in every aspect of society, and only healthy, virtuous images must be presented for them to look at. Socrates reminds us here that the nature of vice is very insidious, creeping up on people unwittingly until it has accumulated in their souls (401c).

2.7 Conclusion

The purpose of the curriculum in *mousikē* which Socrates calls “most important”, and the laws governing it, is that the students raised by it will develop a good character. This will enable them to “acutely” sense the flaws in things, have the “right distastes” (401e), and receive fine things into their souls. All those who complete the primary education will therefore have a noble character, which is to say that they will have a degree of virtue which allows them both to act well and to recognize fine and beautiful things. This relationship between one’s character and their ability to acquire knowledge is reflected the pronouncement that the youth, “having been educated in this way, he will welcome the reason when it comes and recognize it easily because of its kinship with himself.” (402a)

In the first model of education, and in contrast to the second, there is a striking absence of intellectual training, e.g., in mathematics, dialectic, or anything theoretical in nature. It would therefore be tenuous to claim that in the aforementioned passages Socrates is saying that we need to have knowledge of the forms in order to be able to draw distinctions that would allow us to recognize their instances in the world. Specifically, Socrates says that young people are “unable to grasp the reason” (402a), but, having been raised with the right tastes and distastes (dispositions), they are able to later recognize and welcome the reason why some things are shameful. It is possible that Socrates only means that the *very* young are unable to grasp the reasons as to why some things are shameful and others good. However, whether or not welcoming the reason “when it comes” happens without the advanced stage of education is unclear. This would depend on whether Socrates means *genuine* knowledge of the form of virtue, in which case this kind of understanding would require the advanced education of the philosopher, or if he simply means true belief, in which case those who only partake in the earlier stages of education would conceivably reach this level of discernment.

Nevertheless, this indicates that a character is first formed in the youth which is not primarily intellectual in nature – one which is in harmony with the good, or as Socrates says, in a state of grace and pleased by beautiful things. On account of having this character a person is readily disposed to understand why, for instance, some things are shameful and others good, even though he or she does not yet possess this knowledge. This helps us to see how early moral habituation, which

is the focus of the first model of education, would complement the additional intellectual training introduced in Book 7.

It is clear then that according to Plato the first stage of education is primarily ethical in nature, that is to say, geared towards the moral character of the youth. If one's inborn nature and reason were sufficient for them to become virtuous of character, then this entire curriculum would be redundant, especially for those with an innate philosophical nature. On the contrary, as we have seen, both here and throughout the *Republic*, Plato repeatedly stresses the importance of good beginnings in the character of philosophers, not just what is inborn, but that which is instilled by habit. He also warns us that even the best natures can be corrupted by poor upbringing. In other words, the point of a good education and upbringing is not just to *prepare* one to have a virtuous character. Rather, Plato says that virtue itself comes as a result of practice and habit. This was seen insofar as the first stage of education is about imitation and habituation, and the things being imitated and qualities being habituated were virtues. Later in the *Republic* it is stated outright: "Now it looks as though the other so-called virtues of the soul are akin to those of the body, for they really aren't there beforehand but are added later by habit and practice." (518d-e). Although Socrates seems to be denigrating the virtues other than wisdom in this sentence, throughout the *Republic* we have seen that he has repeatedly stressed their importance. It is possible that Socrates calls the virtues of the non-rational part of the soul "so-called" because ultimately wisdom subsumes the other virtues by informing their action, thus perfecting them; or it could merely

be because of what is explicitly stated in the context of this passage, namely, that unlike spirit and appetite, reason does not diminish, so its virtue must be more powerful relative to them. Nevertheless, here Plato explicitly says that the other virtues (so-called) are a result of habit, and they appear to be an important precondition to the proper use of reason.

Plato thus advances an educational program based around the principle that *mousikē* is able to shape one's character to be virtuous or vicious. Since the youth learn by imitation, in order for them to become courageous and moderate they must be exposed to *mousikē*, which, from the content of poems to the rhythms of song, reflect these virtues. As we have seen, having a good moral character is also necessary for one to have success in philosophical endeavor, since "a cowardly and slavish nature will take no part in true philosophy" (486b). In other words, one cannot acquire knowledge of the good without first possessing a good character. In some respect, then, virtue is not merely an *effect* of attaining wisdom, but rather is a necessary precondition for anyone who wishes to become wise.

Conclusion

The *Republic* marks a development in Plato's virtue theory in which he departs from the strict intellectualism found in his earlier dialogues such as *Meno*. These early dialogues often begin with a practical consideration about a given topic, for example, "Is this action pious?", "Can virtue be taught?", or "Is X Y?" so to speak. It is characteristic of the interlocutors to then turn to the question "What is X?", assuming that this question is both prior to, and will in some way help to answer, the first question. In other words, if I want to know if a particular action is courageous, just, or moderate, I first need to know what courage or justice is; or, if I want to know if courage and justice are virtues, I first need to know what virtue is.

In these dialogues, e.g., *Meno* and *Protagoras*, Socrates advances through these considerations the notion that all virtue is knowledge. This adds an extra imperative to the project in each dialogue insofar as the participants stand to directly benefit in a non-trivial way from satisfactorily answering them. If, for instance, they are able to come to an understanding of what courage is, then presumably they will be transformed into courageous men. Socrates argues that because all people desire the good, nobody knowingly does what is bad (*Meno* 73a-b). From this it follows that if one is to do good, it is necessary to have the correct understanding of the good. However, such a view apparently reduces moral action to a strictly intellectual endeavor – it assumes that one's moral state does not affect their ability to comprehend the good.

By contrast to this uncontroversial interpretation of Plato's early moral theory, in this paper I have argued that in the *Republic*, and according to Plato, a person needs to have a prerequisite moral character if they are going to come to knowledge of the good. While maintaining the notion that knowledge and virtue are related to each other, I have highlighted a development in the *Republic* that adds complexity to the relationship between knowledge and virtue, making their interaction bi-directional rather than unidirectional. This advance in the ideas of Plato assigns critical importance to the role of habit in his virtue theory, since it is through habit that the virtues, moral and intellectual, become mutually reinforcing. In particular, we see in the *Republic* the introduction of the idea that our moral character is essential for our ability to make philosophical progress. For this reason, I focused on demonstrating this side of the relationship between the virtues, namely, that virtues of character contribute to our ability to acquire knowledge of the good.

In particular, I argued that virtue is neither identical to knowledge nor merely an effect of becoming wise. Rather, virtue of character (at least imperfect virtue) is a precondition to the successful pursuit of philosophy, and helps people to acquire wisdom. First, I pieced together what Plato says about the nature of philosophy itself in order to see why it necessitates virtues of character (chapter 1). Next, I demonstrated how the educational theory in the *Republic* assigns vital importance to early moral habituation (chapter 2).

One of the limitations of an undertaking like this is that, due to the scope of the paper, breadth can come at the expense of depth. And yet, without broader

reflections on topics such as this, there is the risk of losing the forest for the trees, so to speak. That is to say, by focusing on singular issues, or parts of a given text, the theme at hand, insofar as it reflects the text as a whole, can become difficult to see. In fact, it can become all but lost due to seemingly endless quarrels over many technical debates. I do not mean to minimize the value of such detail-oriented analytical scholarship. Rather, my goal has been to establish that the idea that moral virtue is necessary for successfully pursuing wisdom pervades the *Republic*. This broad conclusion is meant to leave the door open to more thorough research on any number of topics contained herein.

Accordingly, I began by looking at what Plato has to say in the *Republic* about the nature of philosophy and about what it means to be a philosopher, under the assumption that this would give us some clues as to why philosophy requires a certain character in those who pursue it. From this, we learned that philosophy is an intellectual pursuit which aims at a kind of knowledge about the “good”, which is the ultimate principle of reality from which everything else derives its being and intelligibility. I then showed that the object of philosophy is both the cause of wonderment, as well as difficult to apprehend, and used this to infer that acquiring knowledge of the good would therefore require certain virtues of character in those who pursue it. These virtues included courage – in order to avoid falling into despair – temperance – in order to not be distracted by false goods – and “high-mindedness”, which is related to courage, in order that one sees themselves worthy of such a noble pursuit, and does not fall into pettiness (pursuing lesser things).

After this, I turned to the theory of education that is advanced in the *Republic*. This is one of Plato's central concerns throughout the dialogue, and so I had to draw from a wide range of considerations. First, I looked at how Socrates characterizes the nature and origin of the various kinds of degenerate soul in Books 8-9. The purpose of this was twofold: 1) to support the claim that our moral dispositions determine the direction of our intellect's activities; and 2) to provide an initial background to the point furthered in this chapter, and in this thesis as a whole, namely that a prerequisite moral character is necessary to succeed in philosophy. This second point was demonstrated insofar as each degenerate character owed its decline to a poor education and upbringing that cultivated a vicious character in the youth, and which prevented them from properly discerning the good. This gave credence to another point which was advanced in this chapter, which concerned the importance of good beginnings: a recurrent theme in the works of Plato. Because this thesis argues that Plato rejected the so-called "intellectualism" that is commonly understood to be central to *Plato's* early virtue theory, it was necessary to respond to the question whether virtue is either perfect or non-existent. Here, I argued that there are degrees of virtue, and that this is manifest in the *Republic*, both throughout the educational program and in the Cave analogy in Book 7. Just as someone can be a more or less skilled craftsman, or better or worse in any respect of their lives, so too can someone be more or less virtuous: this is the difference between what I (following others) have called "imperfect" and "perfect" virtue. I then showed how in the first stage of education

the effects of *mousikē* are ethical in nature: *mousikē* aims at developing a certain moral character in the souls of the youth, whereby they can recognize and act according to a model of the good which is instilled in them, despite not having direct knowledge of it.

One other kind of research through which the central claim of this thesis could also be further advanced is a literary analysis of Plato's dramatic depiction of characters. Plato, as an author, is able to depict the characters of the *Republic* in a way that reflects the relationship between character and wisdom. Interestingly, Aristotle mentions how this relationship can be portrayed through narration in his work *Rhetoric*, where he states:

The narration should depict the character; to which end you must know what makes it do so. One such thing is the indication of choice; the quality of purpose indicated determines the quality of character depicted and is itself determined by the end pursued. Thus it is that mathematical discourses depict no character; they have nothing to do with choice, for they represent nobody pursuing any end. On the other hand, Socratic dialogues do depict character. This end will also be gained by describing the manifestations of various types of character, e.g., 'he kept walking along as he talked', which shows the man's recklessness and rough manners. (1417a16-24)

Similarly, David O'Connor argues that Plato's dialogues are not just a series of propositions that need to be extracted from the text, but that the literary form

Plato chose allows him to convey a relationship between the ethical dimension of a character and the kinds of arguments each character makes: “It is not just a question of what arguments are made, but of what sort of man would make a particular argument, or accept it, or long for it...”⁶⁴ Accordingly, Plato is able to express, through the seriousness, or lack thereof, of a given argument, the personal dispositions of the character who advances them, and “individuals, governed by their own passions...make mistakes which reveal their own natures.”⁶⁵ It is through this dramatic portrayal of characters that Plato can help us understand the relationship between virtuous character and philosophy.

Nevertheless, while such a study might lend credibility to the claim of this thesis, my arguments do not depend on Plato’s depiction of characters. I have argued that, through Plato’s depiction of philosophy, and the educational program that is presented in the *Republic*, we see that reason alone, although necessary, is not sufficient for one to become a philosopher. Rather, there is also a character that a person must have that is ultimately a moral one, and on account of which the instrument of reason can be turned towards “the brightest thing that is” (518c-d), namely, the good. Without this moral character, which frees the soul from the bonds of the body that “pull its vision downwards” (519a-b), the divine virtue of reason is made harmful. And so, Plato presents us with a virtue theory through which one’s

⁶⁴ O’Connor, “Rewriting the Poets in Plato’s Characters”, 55.

⁶⁵ John Rist, “On the Aims and Effects of Platonic Dialogues”, 38-39.

character—their virtues and corresponding vices—determine their success, or lack thereof, in becoming philosophers.

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