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SOCRATES AND PLATO ON *SOPHIA*, *EUDAIMONIA*, AND THEIR FACSIMILES

Naomi Reshotko

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout Plato's dialogues, there is evidence to suggest that he believed that human beings are distinct from gods because they are limited by space and time. These limitations distinguish us from gods at least partly because our mortality and physicality inhibit us both epistemologically and experientially. In the group I dialogues, Socrates sees human beings as naturally motivated to seek the good.¹ On this account, human beings never perpetrate evil; they merely *err*. They always aim at the actual good but often miss the mark. Missing the mark is never evidence that a person is evil or has a sinister motivation for acting.² Even though humans do miss the mark often, every case of a human being's missing the mark is due to ignorance. Ignorance is a chronic state among even the best of human beings, as Socrates discovers in his efforts to prove the oracle wrong in the *Apology*. Throughout the dialogues, when humans are not shown to be completely ignorant, they are still shown to have specific, severe limitations on their ability to acquire knowledge. These two theses, that human beings are limited in their ability to have knowledge and that they err in making themselves happy because they lack knowledge, stem from the same Platonic conviction: human knowledge and psychic experience are compromised by the limitations of space and time. For Plato and his Socrates, humans are gods who have been crammed into four dimensions.

This paper examines the evidence that Plato treats human beings as divinities who are forced to live in space and time.³ The method for doing so will be to explore two parallel theses that result from his treatment of humans as such. The first is that, despite the fact that in the group I or "Socratic" dialogues, Socrates holds knowledge to be unattainable, he believes that what might be called a *facsimile* of knowledge can be attained. This is the reason he exhorts himself and those around him

to pursue knowledge even while believing that humans are necessarily and terminally ignorant. On the present interpretation, Socrates thinks of this facsimile as “human-knowledge” or “craft-knowledge.” He treats it as something that brings benefits to its possessor and is well worth having despite its inferiority to actual knowledge. This thesis gains support from the fact that when Plato does claim that we have knowledge via the theory of recollection, he holds that this endowment came at a time when we were not in human form.

The second and parallel thesis is Plato’s reflection upon the actual benefits that result from the possession of this approximation of knowledge. While true and absolute human good—which Socrates calls *eudaimonia*—is divine and, therefore, out of reach for those who live in space and time, it is worth our while to strive for something that is like *eudaimonia* as well. We work toward an activity that is consistent with our “doing well” (*eu prattein*) and consists in a distinct kind of activity. However, in order to understand Socrates’ claim that this particular activity is the humanly accessible approximation of *eudaimonia*, we must be very careful in our identification of that to which this activity refers. Some will call it *pleasure* or *enjoyment*. It might be acceptable to do this, but only after much circumspection.

The thesis that Socrates believed that humans had much to gain from trying to become happy and knowledgeable—because they could become “happier” (understood as more *like* happy beings) and “more knowledgeable” (understood as more *like* knowledgeable beings)—has important implications. Socrates believed that both actual *eudaimonia* and actual *sophia* were out of human reach. He did not think that humans could actually become *eudaimonic* or wise, but he did think that something could be gained with respect to the quality of one’s own mortal life via the pursuit of *eudaimonia*⁴ and wisdom. His view that true *eudaimonia* and knowledge were out of human reach did not keep Socrates from encouraging his fellow citizens in their pursuit of these qualities. He believed that their pursuit would enable his peers to become better (more virtuous, knowledgeable and, hence, more *eudaimonic*) people.

2. A GLOSS ON *FACSIMILE*

The word *facsimile* is not a translation of any word in the Greek text. Rather, it is appropriate to think of the approximations of divine experience in the human world as facsimiles in that they are made (*facere*) similar. *Made* is not here used in the sense of “made up,” “invented,” or “artificial,” but in the sense in which something having been made now *is*, whereas before it *was not*. That is, these facsimiles are approxima-

tions of nonspatiotemporal things that somehow come to be *in* human experience—in space and time.

3. KNOWLEDGE AND ITS FACSIMILE

3.1. The Apology

Throughout the *Apology*, Socrates makes comparisons between human-knowledge and that of the gods. At 20d7–8, he says his reputation has been caused by “a certain kind of wisdom,” namely, “human wisdom.” He goes on to say that, if there are people wiser than he, they would have to possess “wisdom greater than human.” At 23a5–8, he contrasts the statement that “human wisdom has little or no value” with the assertion that “god is really wise.” At the end of the *Apology*, he says that no one “except the god” knows whether Socrates (in going to die) or his Athenian audience (in continuing to live) is going to a better place (42a3–5).

In making these comparisons, Socrates asserts that humans cannot actually be said to have knowledge without qualification. There is something *similar but inferior to* divine (unqualified) knowledge that human beings can possess (and Socrates and the craftspeople seem to possess in important ways) that Socrates calls “human-knowledge.”

One difference between knowledge and human-knowledge lies in the area of fallibility. Humans are always theoretically fallible; they can always benefit from further exploration of that upon which they must make a judgment. For this reason, the most important element in any person’s epistemological repertoire is that he or she “*knows* nothing.” It is because he realizes that he knows nothing that Socrates has a “certain kind” of “human-knowledge.” That is, he has something like knowledge in that it enables him to make fewer errors; he has a *facsimile* of knowledge. Divine knowledge deserves to be called “knowledge” without qualification because it cannot err.

3.2 Craft-Knowledge as a Facsimile of Divine Knowledge

Much has been made of the fact that, while Socrates claims only to know that he knows nothing, in several group I dialogues he actually makes knowledge claims and attributes knowledge to others. For several scholars, this has seemed problematic, and they have tried to show that Socrates actually recognizes two different kinds of knowledge: one that he knows he does not have and one that he relies upon in order to make epistemological attributions.⁵ The present view differs from these: Socrates believes in only one kind of knowledge, which is the divine one possessed by the gods. Socrates believes that humans are capable of possessing only a *facsimile* of knowledge. Some people possess a better facsimile of knowledge than others and so are closer to having

knowledge than are those others.⁶ Socrates' status as the wisest man in Athens stems from his possession of the most foundational facsimile of knowledge. He is distinguished from his fellow citizens because he possesses an awareness of his limitations.

4. AN ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNT

It is evident in the group I dialogues that Socrates considers *craft-knowledge*—the *techné* of the expert craftsperson—to be the paradigm facsimile. In the *Apology*, he describes his encounters with three different groups of people. When he questions the politician, he is completely unimpressed. He does not make any qualifying or redeeming remarks about this person and simply concludes that the politician, while knowing nothing, thinks that he is wise. He next goes to the poets and finds that, rather than wisdom, they have only “a natural gift and divine inspiration” (22c1–2). When he encounters the craftspeople, he is still disappointed. However, he concedes that he has found people who have some sense, even some knowledge:

Those with the best reputation seemed to me to be almost the most lacking . . . and others with lower reputations seemed to be superior men with respect to having sense [φρονίμος ἔχειν]. [22a6] . . . In the end then, I went to the handworkers. For I understood myself to know nothing to speak of, but I knew that I would find that they knew many fine things. And about this I was not deceived. They knew [ἠπίσταντο] what I did not, and in this way they were wiser [σοφώτεροι] than I. (22c9–d4)⁷

Thus, throughout the group I dialogues, all moral expertise is compared to the *techné* of expert craftspeople. Crafts aim at producing a product, and the more expertise a craftsperson possesses, the less likely he or she is to err in producing that product. Socrates believes that every person is naturally engaged in crafting a *eudaimonic* existence. The expert in such a craft would never err in pursuing *eudaimonia*. All other crafts are subordinate to the *eudaimonic* craft. In order to become better versed in the *eudaimonic* craft, one must come closer to having knowledge.⁸

5. RECOLLECTION: HUMAN FORM LIMITS EPISTEMOLOGICAL ACCESS

When it comes to making claims concerning human epistemological access, Plato's theory of recollection displays some profoundly different sentiments concerning knowledge than those found in many other group I dialogues. While, in many of them, Socrates is skeptical concerning the possibility that humans know anything, the theory of recollection enables a more optimistic outlook on these matters. However, a constant thesis underlies these fluctuations. Plato is convinced that our bodies limit our

ability to commune with the Forms during our mortal lives. The permutations in his thought concerning what determines our epistemological access to the Forms are the result of his varying assessments of the plausibility of recollection. Recollection is the way that he theorizes we might get around our physical, human limitations. Plato believes that it is possible for human beings to have actual knowledge—rather than a mere facsimile—only if recollection is possible.

5.1. *Meno*

In the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, Plato has Socrates puzzle over the problem of how we are to gain (or succeed in gaining) knowledge concerning things that are not objects of sense experience when our only access to an external world is through sense experience. In the *Meno*, Socrates concludes that the slave boy must have recollected the proportion between the side of the triangle and the hypotenuse because the information supplied by the senses was insufficient to allow him to perceive this. Socrates hypothesizes that the slave boy did not learn these things in this life—but he does not conclude that the boy must have learned them in an earlier life. Socrates emphasizes that he must have learned these things *when he was not a human being*. (ὅτ' οὐκ ἦν ἄνθρωπος, 86a3–4) When we are in human form, we are required to access the world using only sense experience, and our senses are only able to give us access to the world of appearances. The slave-boy argument is a demonstration that certain ideas, which are not accessible through sense experience, must accompany the slave boy's geometrical realizations. The knowledge that enables us to make sense of the world of appearances cannot be gained through sense experience because its object is not a physical object. Thus, being in human form inhibits our ability to attain this requisite knowledge. In the *Meno*, the fact that our souls are trapped in bodies is an impediment to knowledge; it is what inhibits us from gaining any knowledge during our mortal lives.

While discussing recollection in the *Meno*, Socrates is relatively circumspect in his use of the word *knowledge*. He begins by asking the slave boy “You know [γινώσκεις] that a square is a figure like this?” (82b9). Later, when he has brought the boy into *aporia*—midway through the argument—he describes the progress made in negative knowledge terms:

At first he did not know [ἤδεν] what the basic line of the eight-foot square was; even now he does not yet know [οἶδεν] but then he thought he knew [εἰδέναι], and answered confidently as if he did know [εἰδώς], and he did not think himself at a loss, but now he does think himself at a loss, as he does not know [οἶδεν], neither does he think he knows [εἰδέναι]. (Grube, 84a4–b1)⁹

Socrates continues, pointing out how beneficial the slave boy's perplexity is to his finding out how things stand: before, when he thought he knew, the boy would not have tried to find out. Now that he realizes he does not know, he will be motivated to investigate. So, falling into perplexity—realizing that one does not know what the square, equal, beautiful, or good is, is the first step to recollecting. Notice, however, that it is a first step in that it *motivates* inquiry—he who does not fall into *aporia* might never realize that he is ignorant and might never inquire. That is the only sense in which *aporia* is a first step. It is not a first step in the sense of making it possible for a person to recollect. Presumably, whatever allows a person to recollect is the same both before and after *aporia*; it is only the motivation to try to recollect that is different.

When the demonstration concerning the diagonal has been completed, Socrates turns to Meno. He points out that the slave boy has only expressed his own opinions and that—despite not knowing (οὐκ ᾔδει), as they both agreed earlier (85c2)—the opinions expressed (at least near the end of the demonstration) turned out to be true. Socrates takes this to show that “the man who does not know [οὐκ εἰδότης] has within himself true opinions [ἀληθεῖς δόξαι] about the things which he does not know [οὐκ οἶδε]” (85c6–7). The process of recollecting has begun, yet Socrates is careful to say that what the slave boy has dug up from within himself is *true opinion*.¹⁰ This is better than the false opinions that he entertained prior to his aporetic episode, but it is not knowledge. Socrates goes on to say: “These opinions have now been stirred up like a dream, but if he were repeatedly asked the same questions in various ways, you know [οἶσθ] that in the end his knowledge [ἐπιστήσεται] about these things would be *as accurate as anyone's* [οὐδενὸς ἤττον ἀκριβῶς]” (Grube, *Meno* 85c9–d1, italics added). That the slave boy needs to repeat the exercise many times in order to come to know it as well as anyone else (as well as possible) is consistent with the theme we find in the *Phaedo*. The slave boy will never fully come to know what has been demonstrated. He will come as close as humanly possible to knowing it. It is only at this point that Socrates goes on to call *knowledge* what the slave boy has the potential to achieve through recollection (in the future):¹¹ “And he will know [ἐπιστήσεται] it without having been taught but only questioned, and find the knowledge [τὴν ἐπιστήμην] within himself? . . . And is not finding knowledge [ἐπιστήμην] within oneself recollection?” (Grube, *Meno* 85d3–7).

It cannot be denied that, in the *Meno*, Socrates thinks that recollection furnishes us with true beliefs about the square, the triangle, and the diagonal, for he speaks of the slave boy as having true beliefs in him after he has completed the demonstration and says that he acquired them at a time when he was not human and has had them in his soul

since that time. Presumably, they were dormant from the time that he was born until the time that he began to recollect. In the *Meno*, the initial moment of recollection is signaled by *aporia*. Still, in the *Meno*, while Plato makes it clear that we have knowledge prior to birth, he does not imply that we fully recover that knowledge through the process of recollection during our mortal lives. Recollection is a long and arduous process, and it seems to result in our *knowing as well as anyone*. That is, it results in our knowing as well as any other human being. If it results in knowledge at all, it results in human-knowledge.

5.2 *Phaedo*

Plato sees the attainment of knowledge—which he calls *recollection* rather than *learning*—as a process that begins with perceptual experience. We may be tempted to call the moment *recollection* when a person begins to believe things about objects that are not available to perception as a result of perception. But Plato is careful to note that this moment of going beyond sense experience is not all there is to obtaining knowledge of that which is beyond sense experience, so it is only the first step in the *process* of recollecting. Recollection is ongoing and, as is indicated in the *Phaedo*, cannot be completed by mortal human beings.¹²

In an early passage in the *Phaedo* (63e–66e), before recollection is mentioned, Socrates explains to his comrades why a true philosopher will face death cheerfully. He begins by asserting that the body is an impediment to and a distraction from reason. It is a distraction from reason because the pleasures of the body interfere with reason, and it is an impediment to reason because the senses through which the body must apprehend things are deceptive. Philosophy is as close as we come to freeing the soul from the body while we are alive. But since death separates the soul from the body, it alone will allow us to gain real knowledge if anything does. Socrates' conclusion at 66e5–6 is that either we can never attain knowledge or we can do so only after death.

Perception impedes knowledge to the point that knowledge cannot be gained through perception (which is the only vehicle embodied souls have for accessing anything). When we dissociate the soul from the body by practicing philosophy, we come closest to knowledge (ἐγγυτάτω ἐσόμεθα τοῦ εἰδέναι, 67a2–3)—but that is as far as we get. Plato has Socrates state that it is impossible to come to know anything during our mortal lives. Philosophy helps, but it just gets us close.

In the *Phaedo*, we get a thorough explanation of the proposition that knowledge is inaccessible to human beings because they are limited and distracted by their bodies. Socrates dwells on this in most of what he says in 63b–67b. He asserts, “But indeed [the soul] reasons best whenever none of these things bothers it, neither hearing nor sight nor pain nor pleasure,

but it is as much as possible alone by itself and takes leave of the body and, as much as it is able, avoiding all interaction and contact with the body, it reaches out toward reality” (65c5–8). And he concludes:

And then, as it seems, the argument shows that, after we are dead, we are likely to possess that which we desire and claim to be enamored of—wisdom [φρονήσεως]—but not while we live. For if pure wisdom [καθαρῶς γινῶναι] is not possible when we are with the body, one of two things follow: either we can never acquire knowledge or we can do so only after death. (66d8–67e6)

In a section too long to quote (82e–83e), Socrates gives a vivid description of the body as a cage (εἰργμός) which imprisons the soul, forcing it to “wallow in every kind of ignorance.” This ignorance comes about because investigation through the senses is “full of deceit.”¹³ In summary, our bodies force us to interpret reality through the senses; as a result, the physical world looms large in our assessment of what is the case. We cannot completely correct this imbalance while housed in our bodies. Throughout the dialogues, Plato sees that our human form restricts our ability to become knowledgeable. In certain dialogues, this is overcome through recollection, but in the purely “Socratic” group I dialogues, it is not overcome.¹⁴ Socrates treats knowledge as a divine state that is inaccessible to us. The only way to understand it is by analogy to craft-knowledge and then to think of the science in which we wish to acquire expertise as the science of past, present, and future goods and bads (*Charmides* 171c–174d, *Laches* 199a–c).¹⁵ We are able to contemplate knowledge via its facsimile and are also able to become more like knowledgeable people by acquiring that facsimile.

6. *EUDAIMONIA* AND ITS FACSIMILE

What is *eudaimonia* according to Plato? Some of what Socrates says in the group I dialogues seem to point toward hedonism. However, the statements that Socrates makes about the relationship between pleasure and the good seem inconsistent from dialogue to dialogue. At *Gorgias* 500d, Socrates refutes Callicles’ claim (*Gorgias* 495a–d) that “pleasure and good are the same.” But at *Protagoras* 351e5–6, he asserts that goodness *is* pleasure. Some have proposed that this contradiction be reconciled in favor of the claim that goodness is not pleasure.¹⁶ They say that virtue has also been identified with the good, and it does not seem plausible that Socrates should have considered virtue to be pleasure.

6.1 Rudebusch and Modal Pleasure

George Rudebusch has argued that we can resolve the contradiction in favor of the view that goodness is pleasure if we are careful to discern

the Socratic reference of “pleasure.” According to Rudebusch, the implausibility surfaces only if we assume that Socrates uses *pleasure* to indicate “sensate pleasure” in both passages. Rudebusch argues that, in the *Protagoras*, it is likely that Socrates was referring to something we might call *modal pleasure*.¹⁷ A modal pleasure is an activity that fulfills a natural human capacity. Borrowing from Aristotle and Gilbert Ryle, Rudebusch describes modal pleasure as follows:

Modal pleasures are things done in a certain way: they are done effortlessly or without boredom, or are approached in a certain way, or have a particular value to a person. By contrast, sensate pleasures are the feelings that result from what is done.¹⁸

[Modal pleasures] are absorbing. One approaches their activity with anticipation and is unwilling to break away from it. They have some value to one’s life.¹⁹

Rudebusch uses the *Apology* to ground the notion that Socrates does not always associate pleasure with a sensation; Socrates calls a dreamless sleep—one during which we experience no sensation—a “surpassing pleasure” (40d6).²⁰ Thus, according to Socrates, what makes an activity pleasurable is not the sensation associated with it but some other value that it has for us as human beings. Rudebusch contends that Socrates identified both virtue *and* modal pleasure with the chief good: “Socratic argument entails that, for a human being, living well, living pleasantly, and living virtuously are one and the same.”²¹ Rudebusch argues for this identification because a modal account of pleasure allows Socrates to identify pleasure with a skillful activity²² and, in turn, with a virtuous one.²³ He cites *Republic* I (349b–354a), where Socrates argues that the chief good for a human being is virtuous activity.²⁴ He then concludes that Socrates believed that the greatest good for a human being is to perform skillful, virtuous activity and that this is a modal pleasure for any human, as it fulfills a natural human capacity. In fact, it fulfills our natural human capacity *qua* human beings. Rudebusch concludes that Socratic *eudaimonia*—which is the greatest human good—consists in modal pleasure.

Rudebusch is correct that modal pleasure *can* be identified with skilled activity. But he is wrong that it is always so identified. Furthermore, it is not clear that just any skilled activity will turn out to be virtuous. Thus, it is not clear that all modal pleasure is good. Rather, it seems that, for Socrates, skilled activities are neither good nor bad unless they lead to *eudaimonia*, in which case they are good—or lead to unhappiness, in which case they are bad.²⁵ Socrates’ discussion of pain and pleasure in the *Protagoras* dictates that modal pleasures are not identifiable with *eudaimonia* if modal pains outweigh them. There

is no strict identity between skilled and virtuous activity. The claim that there is one between modal pleasure and *eudaimonia* overstates their coextension.

Thus, while Rudebusch is correct to resolve the tension between the *Gorgias* and the *Protagoras* by interpreting Socrates' claims about pleasure in the *Protagoras* as claims about modal pleasure, his further assertion—the identification of modal pleasure and *eudaimonia*—is too strong.²⁶ While problems might arise for Rudebusch's view due to this identification, his claim that modal pleasure is the dimension of pleasure that Socrates has in mind in the *Protagoras* is eminently defensible. By embracing this as a possible referent of "pleasure," we can see that Socrates is condoning a very specific kind of hedonism in the *Protagoras*. Also, Rudebusch is right that Socrates can call pleasure good in the *Protagoras* without contradicting the *Gorgias*' denial that pleasure and good are the same. Further, an awareness of the existence of modal pleasure will allow us to appreciate that Socrates thinks that this sort of pleasure is the humanly accessible facsimile for *eudaimonia*.

6.2 Modal Pleasure and *Eudaimonia*

Socrates hypothesized *eudaimonia* as a divine and ideal activity toward which humans strive. Humans who are closer to engaging in such an activity will be more *eudaimonic* than those farther from it. On such a view, Plato might have advocated the pursuit of modal pleasures as a means of getting closer to the ultimate activity of *eudaimonia*. The consequence would be that Plato viewed modal pleasures as facsimiles of *eudaimonia* that get us closer to that activity by creating the illusion that we have escaped from the human prison of space and time. Furthermore, just as knowledge and virtue are closely related to *eudaimonia*, it is also the case that it is inaccessible for the same reasons that knowledge and virtue are—the human constrictions of space and time are implicated in our inability to possess knowledge and virtue. Socrates treated modal pleasure as the facsimile for *eudaimonia* and craft/human-knowledge as the facsimile for knowledge—thus, also as a facsimile for virtue.

Socrates never *identified* *eudaimonia* with any kind of modal pleasure that human beings can experience. If *eudaimonia* is identical to some pleasure, then it is identical to one that is experienced by beings (gods, perhaps) that are both knowledgeable and virtuous. Since no human can have knowledge or virtue (humans can only have the facsimile obtained through craft-knowledge), people cannot experience a pleasure that is *eudaimonia*. So it is best to understand "modal pleasure" as referring only to the range of possible (perhaps nonsensate)²⁷ human pleasures.

Socrates thought that modal pleasures were phenomenologically similar to *eudaimonia*. They give us the illusion that we are not bound by space and time and allow us to have an experience analogous to that of those who are not so bound—analogue to divine experience. This analogous status makes modal pleasure a useful tool for thinking about *eudaimonia* in practical terms. It also makes it the case that modal pleasures can enhance our mortal lives by allowing us to spend them in a state that is as close to the unqualifiedly good state of *eudaimonia* as physical beings can possibly get. Thus, modal pleasures are not identical with virtue or the good, but—due to their similarity to *eudaimonia*—they are as close to being virtuous and good as any human psychological activity can be.

6.3 The Illusion Created by Modal Pleasures

Rudebusch describes modal pleasures with help from Ryle. Ryle argues that when we look carefully at the way we talk about pleasures, we see that “. . . pleasure is not a sensation at all, and therefore not a sensation on one scale with an ache or a twinge.”²⁸ “Pleasure cannot be thought of as something that can, in itself, be quantified by duration.”²⁹ Sensations arise *somewhere* and at *sometime*; pleasure does not. In order to be clearer about the nonidentity between pleasure and sensation, Ryle often prefers to use the word *enjoyment* rather than pleasure.

Let us focus on a further criterion for pleasure or enjoyment that is implied by Ryle, Rudebusch, and Aristotle. Pleasures are absorbing and hard to break away from because they result in a suspension of reality. They result in our being unaware of our physicality in the sense in which we ordinarily experience it—inside space and time.

Rudebusch says that modal pleasures are “. . . done effortlessly and without boredom.”³⁰ “They are absorbing. . . . One approaches their activity with anticipation or is unwilling to break off from them.”³¹ Rudebusch’s criteria speak to the suspension of reality. To be absorbed in an activity that is not boring and from which one would be loath to break away is to be transported from certain practical concerns. An awareness of how our activity fits into the world in which we live our lives forces us to confront those practical concerns. When one is bored, one is overly aware of the passage of time and of the physical discomforts that attend the activity that is being performed. Furthermore, if one is absorbed in reading, it is annoying to have the phone ring. If one is captivated by a performance, it is irritating to hear the theater door open to noise in the lobby. These things disturb us not because they distract us from the task at hand but because they break the suspension of reality. They cause us to come crashing back into our present physical reality. We are not in eighteenth-century England—we are at home on the couch.

We are not dancing with angels—we are seated in the theater. As both Ryle and Rudebusch observe, this understanding of pleasure is in accord with Aristotle, who says that “pleasure should be defined as an activity in accordance with ones nature” rather than as a “phenomenal event” (*E.N.* vii.12.1153a13–15).

Now, Ryle correctly warns against an understanding of pleasure and enjoyment that would make them agitations that transport us in a way that impedes rationality.³² Neither is this implied by the present view. In fact, pleasure and enjoyment enhance our rationality by making us immune to the distractions that our spatiotemporal existence is wont to impose upon us. This is the reason Aristotle finds *eudaimonia* to be most compatible with *theoria*, which is a state of rationality that is enhanced by a disregard of purely practical matters.

In J. L. Ackrill’s discussion of *eudaimonia* and *theoria*, he underscores the fact that these are superrational states and that they transport humans into an eternal realm where they are not limited by time and can exercise their god-like qualities:

A life of *theoria* would certainly be the best of all lives—and such indeed is the life Aristotle attributes to his god. But, as he himself allows, *theoria* by itself does not constitute the best possible life for a man. A man is a sort of compound (*syntheton*), an animal who lives and moves in time but has the ability to engage in an activity that somehow escapes time and touches the eternal.³³

In his own words, Aristotle asserts that the purpose of *theoria* is “to make ourselves immortal as far as we can.” (*E.N.* 1177b33)³⁴

Aristotle, Ryle, Ackrill, and Rudebusch all speak of *eudaimonic* activities as those that are accompanied by a suspension of reality. They also indicate that this brings the person who participates in it closer to a divine state. It does so by making her disengage from practical concerns, causing her to focus on an activity that is done for itself in an undistracted way. This allows her to be more rational than she would otherwise be.

That these sentiments resonate with Plato’s conception of optimal human experience is corroborated by the same *Phaedo* passage mentioned earlier (63e–66e), where Socrates explains to his comrades why a true philosopher will face death cheerfully. The body is a distraction from and interferes with reason; only death, which separates the soul from the body, allows us to attain real knowledge. Philosophy comes as close possible to freeing the soul from the body while we are alive. Since knowledge cannot be gained through perception, only the partial dissociation of the soul from the body afforded by philosophy allows us to move closer to having knowledge, but it does not get us all the way there.

Clearly, Plato sees this epistemological state that philosophers are in when the soul is disassociated from the body as highly enjoyable, the next best thing to what is experienced when the soul is separated from the body upon death. There are other moments in the group I dialogues where Socrates also calls activities *enjoyable* or *pleasurable* because they allow us to experience what seems like a disassociation—no matter how temporary—from the spatiotemporal world.

6.4 *Apology*: A Dreamless Sleep

As Rudebusch has already noted, at *Ap.* 40c4–e4, Socrates declares that the most pleasurable experiences involve a suspension of sense perception. We see this in his declaration that “[i]f [death] is a complete lack of perception, like a dreamless sleep, then death should be a great advantage.” What bears emphasis, however, is that, in summarizing why death, conceived of as such a sleep, is a hard-to-surpass pleasure, Socrates focuses on the suspension of awareness of *time* in particular:

For I think that if anyone were compelled to pick out that night in which he slept without dreaming and, comparing it with all the nights and days of his life in order to say how many days and nights of his life surpassed it in goodness and pleasure, not only a private person—but the great king himself—would find them few in number when compared with other days and nights. Therefore, if death is like that, I say it is an advantage, for, in this way, all time would seem no longer than a single night.

Thus, we have evidence that Socrates considered the creation of the illusion that we are free of the spatiotemporal world to be a chief criterion for judging the quality of a pleasurable activity.

6.5 *Gorgias*: Full Jars

At *Gorgias* 492d–e, Socrates objects to Callicles’ implication that the best person is the one who does not restrain his appetites but lets them become as large as possible. Socrates seems to think that those who have no need of anything are more correctly thought to be happy. When Callicles objects, saying that on such a theory “stones and corpses would be happiest,” Socrates replies, “Perhaps in reality we are dead. Once I even heard one of the wise men say that we are now dead and our bodies are our tombs” (493a1–3). Here, Socrates seems to imply that it is when we are in our bodies that we are “most” dead—most inhibited from being truly good. If that is the case, then it is when we are freed from our bodies that we are most excellent—divine even. Socrates goes on to say that, when we are in our bodies, “. . . that part of our souls in which our appetites reside is open to persuasion to shift back and forth” (493a3–5). When we are in our bodies, we are driven to pursue sensate

pleasure, and those who are most foolish have, when in their bodies, a part of their soul that is like a leaky jar that cannot be filled—insatiable appetites for pleasure.

At this point, Socrates makes a comparison between two men, one who has a jar that is leaky and must continuously be refilled and the other who has a jar that, once it is filled, stays full. Clearly, the man with the leaky jar has more opportunity to experience sensate pleasure. However, Socrates makes it clear that he believes that the man with the full jar is in the most desirable position: “Now the one man, having filled up his jars, doesn’t pour anything more into them and gives them no further thought. *He can remain at ease over them* [ἡσυχίαν ἔχου]” (493e4–6).

Let us put the notion that corpses and stones might indeed be experiencing something more excellent than humans who are trapped in bodies together with the notion that the most desirable state is that in which one is able to be at ease over full jars. This seems to communicate something similar to Socrates’ contentions in the *Apology* concerning the dreamless sleep. The activity toward which we strive is one where we are not subject to the distraction of a physical existence, and the closer that we can come to such a state while still bound by physical reality, the better.³⁵

7. FLOW

In our own time, we also see enjoyment and modal pleasure as a means for defying the boundaries of space and time. Our adage “time flies when you’re having fun” is an acknowledgement of a deeper phenomenon. Activities that we truly enjoy occur as if in a moment, not because they feel as if they break rapidly but because they release us from the distractions and concerns of the practical world. We perform these activities *for themselves*—for the pleasure that they constitute. They are moments of pure being.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is known for the research that he has done on *eudaimonia*. Csikszentmihalyi agrees with Aristotle that *eudaimonia* is an autotelic experience (an experience that provides its own *telos*). He calls this optimal experience *flow*. Through qualitative research that crosses numerous cultural and international boundaries, Csikszentmihalyi finds certain features of optimal experience to be universal. It occurs at moments when psychic dissonance is decreased due to the fact that attention has been narrowly focused permitting psychic control and organization. However, such focus leads to flow only when it engages the person in an activity that increases her own psychic complexity. Like the view that Rudebusch attributes to Aristotle and Plato, Csikszentmihalyi’s thesis is that *eudaimonia* is a skilled activity. Most interesting to this project, he finds that flow has several phenomenologi-

cal effects that are in sympathy with the Socratic notion that pleasure or enjoyment allow us to fathom what it would feel like to escape from the confines of our human condition. For example, when one escapes from the everyday concerns of the practical world, “one acts with deep but effortless involvement that removes from awareness the worries and frustrations of everyday life.” In this state, we are not subject to the tyranny of time: “[T]he sense of duration of time is altered; hours pass by in minutes, and minutes can stretch out to seem like hours.”³⁶ We are able to transcend our human condition—to be more godlike:

So loss of self-consciousness does not involve a loss of self, and certainly not a loss of consciousness, but rather, only a loss of consciousness of the self. What slips below the threshold of awareness is the *concept* of the self, the information that we use to represent to ourselves who we are. And being able to forget temporarily who we are seems to be very enjoyable. When not preoccupied with ourselves, we actually have the chance to expand the concept of who we are. Loss of self-consciousness can lead to self-transcendence, to feeling that the boundaries of our being have been pushed forward.³⁷

The research upon which Csikszentmihalyi bases his views on flow has covered diverse cultures around the globe. He believes he has found that the criteria for optimal experience are universal (even though the experiences that fulfill those criteria vary from culture to culture). There is no guarantee that Csikszentmihalyi is correct. But, if he is, perhaps it would not be foolish for us to assume that optimal human experience was similar in Plato’s day as well. Thus, we might conclude that Plato thought that experience that engenders an escape from the concerns of the practical world and our perceptions of our human limitations, at the same time as it allows us to grow into better, more complex human beings, gives us a glimpse of divine experience. Modal pleasure is divine experience translated into a human phenomenological vocabulary.

CONCLUSION

Socrates does not identify virtue with *eudaimonia*. However, he does think that the two qualities are closely related. He holds that the pursuit of knowledge, which is virtue, is the only controllable factor that can enhance the pursuit of *eudaimonia*. He also believes that knowledge always benefits its possessor, always makes that person “happier” than she would have been without it.

Both knowledge and *eudaimonia* have correspondent states—human/craft-knowledge and modal pleasure, respectively—that are their facsimiles. While, for Socrates, knowledge always results in virtuous activity and virtuous activity always brings one closer to *eudaimonia*, it is not

the case that craft-knowledge always furthers one's *eudaimonia* or even modal pleasure, for that matter. It is also not the case that modal pleasure only results from the exercise of virtuous activity (although it might—as Rudebusch and Csikszentmihalyi would argue—come only from the exercise of skilled activity). These pieces, falling together so beautifully in the ideal, divine situation, do not automatically gel in the human and physical world, where we must get along with imitations that approach, but are not identical to, these ideal capacities.³⁸

Still, there is a positive relationship that exists between craft-knowledge and modal pleasure. Although they are neither identical to nor sufficient for one another, they are mutually enhancing. Possession of one puts a person in a better position to experience the other by making that other both more likely to occur and more appreciated. As stated earlier, modal pleasure heightens our rationality by allowing us to rise above distractions that might lure us away from the essence of the matter at hand. Craft-knowledge produces a skilled way of dealing with the world so that we can mold, craft, and control our circumstances with a mind toward creating opportunities for enjoyment. In fact, when actualized, the intellectual challenge and awareness of a controlled experience during this creative process *itself* gives rise to modal pleasure.³⁹

Socrates believed that knowledge, virtue, and *eudaimonia* constitute the good life. However, he also believed that humans are incapable of actually experiencing any of these. He did not, however, conclude that life was futile and of no value. Rather, he viewed these three modes of experience as divine ideals toward which humans must strive. The degree to which we approximate these states through their facsimiles is the degree to which we are good people leading good lives.

We can appreciate this through an analogy to the “limit” in statistics. We understand that the results of an experiment will be more veridical if the sample size is larger because we understand that larger samples bring us *closer* to this *infinitely distant* thing called “the limit.” We understand this despite the fact that no sample size will ever actually reach the limit. Large samples are facsimiles of the limit. The limit, then, is an ideal that allows us to evaluate those things that fall short of it.

The greater our craft-like knowledge of the science of human advantage, the more likely we are to enjoy lasting pleasures (which are generally modal pleasures). As these two experiences build and resonate with one another, what we attain becomes more like divine experience allowing us to live the best life that a human being is able to live—which, according to Plato and his Socrates, is one well worth living.

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NOTES

1. For the division of the dialogues into three groups, their subsequent interpretation, and the possible identification of the group I dialogues with the historical Socrates, see Naomi Reshotko, *Socratic Virtue: Making the Best of the Neither-Good-Nor-Bad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9–14.

2. For evidence that this is Socrates' view, see T. Penner and C. Rowe, "Is the *Meno* Inconsistent with the *Gorgias*?" *Phronesis* 39, no.1 (1994): 1–25; T. Brickhouse and N. Smith, *Plato's Socrates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 85–92; and Reshotko, *Socratic Virtue*, 21–56.

3. I limit myself to discussing dialogues from group I. The group II and III dialogues have received the most attention in this area. I show that there is a way to understand the notion of humans "becoming like gods" in the group I dialogues.

4. Throughout this paper, I use *eudaimonia* rather than an English translation that might limit our understanding of *eudaimonia*. I use the English word *knowledge* rather than *sophia* or *episteme* or any of the other nouns or verbs that Plato uses. Plato did not distinguish between *sophia* and *episteme*. I use the English word *knowledge* in the hope of referring equally to all Greek translations of that word.

5. Vlastos distinguishes between infallible or certain knowledge and elenctic knowledge (G. Vlastos, *Socratic Studies* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 56). Brickhouse and Smith (*Plato's Socrates*, 39–40) distinguish between knowing that something is the case and knowing why something is the case and claim that Socrates has the former kind of knowledge but not the latter.

6. Socrates does use nouns and verbs that mean "knowledge" and "know" to describe human states. I suggest that Plato instinctively used the term loosely as we do with many verbs in English. A two-year-old child is said to have spent the afternoon "swimming" even if she has done nothing that actually counts as swimming during the period of time under consideration. She has been "swimming-for-her." The qualification *human-knowledge* communicates that, while it is not knowledge in any strict sense, it is what plays the role of "knowledge-for-humans."

7. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

8. For supporting arguments, see Reshotko, *Socratic Virtue*, 156–76.

9. Plato, *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981).

10. I find Dancy helpful here (R. Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of the Forms* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004]): "[I]t cannot be that [these true beliefs] were in him [all along] as things that he believed. They come from him only in the sense that, once he considers the questions they answer, he has no need of anyone else's help: he can see by himself the truth of the matter" (231).

However, Dancy is too willing to grant the boy knowledge at some future time when he has been asked the same question in different ways (231–32); he does not pay sufficient attention to Socrates' qualification that the slave boy will know them "as well as anybody."

11. In fact, at 85e7, Socrates goes back to calling what the slave boy now has *opinion* (τὰς δόξας).

12. Robert Hackforth ("Hedonism in Plato's *Protagoras*," *Classical Quarterly* 75, no. 22 [1928]: 39–42) agrees that recollection is a long and gradual process. Norman Gulley (*Plato's Theory of Knowledge* [London: Methuen, 1962], 13) has three explicit stages of knowledge acquisition, only the first of which is associated with recollection. David Bostock (*Plato's Phaedo* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986], 77) distinguishes between "humdrum" knowledge, which consists in knowing what words mean and enables us to speak, and the sort of philosophical knowledge that philosophers strive for but never attain. W. D. Geddes (*The Phaedo of Plato* [London: MacMillan and Company, 1885], 62) thinks that we gain practical knowledge through recollection, but not knowledge in a Socratic sense. Dancy (*Plato's Introduction*) thinks that there is a "Standard Interpretation" (254, n2) upon which, in the *Phaedo* "we recollect as soon as we see" (276). This seems wrong, given the views just rehearsed. Dancy thinks we do come to know equality in our mortal lives as well as we knew it antenatally (276).

13. This is further textual evidence that Plato distinguishes between sensate and other pleasures. The soul of the philosopher knows to stay away from pleasures and pains as they make him believe that the physical world is veridical, but 114e refers to pleasures of learning in which the philosopher is wise to engage.

14. I count as purely Socratic at the least *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Euthyphro*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, and *Protagoras*.

15. See Reshotko, *Socratic Virtue*, 156–76, for an explanation of how this works in the *Charmides*.

16. Hackforth, "Hedonism in Plato's *Protagoras*," 42; G. Vlastos, "Socrates on *Acrasia*," *Phoenix* 23 (1969): 71–88; reprinted in *Studies in Greek Philosophy*, vol. 2, *Socrates, Plato, and Their Tradition*, ed. D. Graham and G. Vlastos (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 47–50; Daniel Russell, *Plato on Pleasure and the Good Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 248; D. J. Zeyl, "Socrates and Hedonism: *Protagoras* 351b–358d," in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy III: Plato*, ed. J. P. Anton and A. Preus (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 5–26.

17. Callicles introduces pleasure in the *Gorgias*, so it is Callicles' notion of pleasure (sensate) that Socrates does not identify with goodness.

18. G. Rudebusch, *Socrates, Pleasure, and Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 68.

19. G. Rudebusch, "How Socrates Can Make Both Virtue and Pleasure the Chief Good," *Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* 3, no.1 (1994): 167.

20. Rudebusch, *Socrates, Pleasure, and Value*, 5, 65.
21. Rudebusch, "How Socrates . . . the Chief Good," 170.
22. Rudebusch, *Socrates, Pleasure, and Value*, 25.
23. Rudebusch, "How Socrates . . . the Chief Good," 169.
24. Rudebusch, *Socrates, Pleasure, and Value*, 126.
25. See Reshotko, *Socratic Virtue*, 177–88, for a discussion of the evaluation of both modal and sensate pain and pleasure.
26. For problems inherent in Rudebusch's view due to this identification and apart from it see Reshotko, *ibid.*
27. Sensate pleasures can also, at times, be part of a facsimile of true *eudaimonia*. See Reshotko, *ibid.*
28. G. Ryle, *Dilemmas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 58.
29. *Ibid.*, 59.
30. Rudebusch, "How Socrates . . . the Chief Good," 165.
31. *Ibid.*, 167.
32. G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1949), 108–9.
33. J. L. Ackrill, "Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 60 (1974): 339–59; reprinted in A. O. Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 31.
34. Resemblance of divine activity is a way of temporarily, phenomenologically, resembling God's immortality. God's immortality is God's being "outside" of the spatiotemporal world. When human activity resembles divine activity, the spatiotemporal world does not distract. Cf. David Sedley, "The Ideal of Godlikeness," in *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999), 309–28.
35. The jar analogy also provides textual evidence that Plato distinguishes sensate pleasure from the superior state of being "at ease" or "relaxed" ("modal" pleasures). Filling the jar is sensate pleasure; once the jar is full, one is free from sensory distraction and can experience something beyond sensate pleasure.
36. M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 49.
37. *Ibid.*, 64.
38. Socrates did not hold that virtue is sufficient for human beings in the spatiotemporal world to experience *eudaimonia* (Reshotko, *Socratic Virtue*, 135–55). However, for divinities, virtue could be sufficient for *eudaimonia*.
39. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, particularly chapters 7 and 9, is full of such examples.