PLATO'S METAPHYSICS OF MORALS

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Because craft ($\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\nu\eta$) constituted the paradigm of knowledge when Plato began to develop his philosophy, he used it—critically—as a model. He uncovered epistemological flaws in the crafts and described, in outline at least, a craft-like science that avoided them. This science, which has the Good itself as its unhypothetical—because dialectically defensible—first principle, is the superordinate craft that occupies the pinnacle of an allegedly unique craft hierarchy. It is philosophy as Plato conceives of it. Its deep similarities to Aristotle's science of first principles—metaphysics or primary philosophy—should be evident, though there are, it goes without saying, deep differences as well.

The *craft paradigm*, as we may call it, is at the heart of Plato's conception of philosophy, then, determining its structure and underwriting many of its central doctrines. In the present paper I want to provide some justification for these stark claims by examining Plato's critique of the specifically mathematical crafts and its surprising consequences for his metaphysics of morals.[1] The *Republic* and *Philebus* are my chief textual focus, but the *Euthydemus*, *Cratylus*, and *Symposium* also come into the picture.

[1] Calculation and geometry are crafts at *Chrm*. 165 E 5–6, arithmetic at *Theaet*. 198 A 5. I have discussed Plato's criticisms of the handicrafts in 'The Role of $T\acute{\epsilon}\chi\nu\eta$ in Plato's Conception of Philosophy', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 16 (2000), 207–22.

1. What's wrong with mathematics?

In the following text from *Republic* 6, Plato explains why mathematics is epistemologically unsatisfactory:

[1] [a] I think you know that students of geometry, calculation, and the like hypothesize the odd and the even, the various figures, the three kinds of angles, and other things akin to these in each of their investigations, as if they knew them. [b] They make these their hypotheses and don't think it necessary to give any argument [λόγον] concerning them, either to themselves or to others, as if they were clear [φανερῶν] to everyone. And going from these first principles through the remaining steps, they arrive in full agreement at a conclusion about what they set out to investigate. (510 c 2–d 3)

Focus first on (1b). λόγος here is usually translated as 'account'. But that can't be right, since Greek mathematicians did provide accounts of their first principles. A glance at Euclid, *Elem.* 1, defs. 8–22, for example, where the various types of angles and rectilinear figures are defined, testifies to this. The *Elements* (*c*.300 BC) post-dates the *Republic*, of course, but is a compilation of work in a range of literary and mathematical styles from earlier mathematicians, some of whom—such as Leon, Theudius, Theaetetus, and Eudoxus—were associated with the Academy. Thus, 'if we could read the mathematics available at the time Plato wrote the *Republic*, a good deal of it would look like an earlier draft of Euclid's *Elements*'.[2]

Moreover, 'account' can't be right for another reason. Giving an account of something—defining it—is not at all incompatible with treating it as a hypothesis. A hypothesis is something whose *truth* is taken for granted. Something left without an account or definition, by contrast, is something whose *intelligibility* is taken for granted. λόγος must mean 'argument' or 'proof', then, and φανερός must mean, not 'intelligible', but 'clearly true'. Notice that at 511 a 5–6 what mathematics cannot do is '*reach beyond* its hypotheses'. But accounts—as identities or necessary equivalences—exactly capture what they're accounts of, and so do not go beyond them. What

² M. F. Burnyeat, 'Plato on Why Mathematics is Good for the Soul', in T. J. Smiley (ed.), *Mathematics and Necessity: Essays in the History of Philosophy* (Oxford, 2000), 1–81 at 24.

the mathematicians fail to do, therefore, is not to define their first principles, but to prove them.

None the less, it is also true, as we discover in *Republic* 7, that the accounts mathematicians give of their first principles are defective. The topic under discussion is the proper education of the philosopher-kings, and the question is whether or not geometry should be one of their studies. Glaucon thinks it should. His reasons, however, are entirely practical (526 D 1–6). But practicality is not at all what Socrates has in mind: 'if geometry compels the soul to study being [οὐσίαν]', he says, 'it's appropriate', since 'it tends to make it easier to see the Form of the Good', but 'if it compels it to study becoming [γένεσιν], it's inappropriate' (526 D 7–E 7). The trouble with the mathematicians, it turns out, is that mathematical objects, as they characterize them, fail this Socratic test. For the accounts they give of the nature of these objects imply that they are mutable things belonging to the changing world of becoming:

[2] No one with even a little experience of geometry will dispute that this science is entirely the opposite of what is said about it in the accounts of its practitioners . . . They give ridiculous accounts of it, though they can't help it. For they speak like practical men and all their accounts refer to doing things. They talk of 'squaring', 'applying', 'adding', and the like, whereas the entire subject is pursued for the sake of knowledge . . . And mustn't we also agree on a further point? . . . That their accounts are for the sake of knowing what always is, not what comes into being and passes away . . . It draws the soul towards truth, then, and produces philosophic thought [διανοίας] by directing upwards what we now wrongly direct downwards. (527 A 1–B 11)

What mathematicians do, therefore, is speak of the abstract Triangle itself, for example, as if it were the sort of thing that can be moved or changed. (Witness the standard Euclidean formula: apply the triangle ABC to the triangle DEF.) They treat it, in other words, as if it were a perceptible triangle, like the triangles they draw in their diagrams—part of becoming, not of being. As a result, the accounts they provide are inconsistent with the epistemological claims of the mathematical crafts themselves to provide 'knowledge of what always is'.

Mathematics, then, is defective in two different—though no doubt related—ways. First, it gives accounts of its first principles that are incompatible with its own epistemological status. Second, it

gives no proofs of the truth of these principles. In Section 3, we shall see how Plato proposes to safeguard philosophy from such defects.

2. The Good itself

Plato's alternative to leaving first principles unproved is described in the continuation of (1):

[3] Then also understand that by the other subsection of the intelligible I mean that which reason itself grasps by the power of dialectic. [a] It does not consider these hypotheses as first principles but as stepping stones and links in a chain enabling it to reach the unhypothetical first principle of everything. [b] Having grasped this principle, it reverses itself and, keeping hold of what follows from it, comes down to a conclusion without making use of anything visible at all but only of Forms themselves, moving on from Forms to Forms, and ending in Forms. (511 B 3–C 2)

Here we shall do no more than register the major problems that (3) poses to understanding. First, there really is only one candidate 'unhypothetical first principle of everything' in the *Republic*—the Good itself—which, as 'the final goal of the intelligible', is the pinnacle of dialectic's upward path (535 A 5–B 2). But how can the Good itself be reached from the first principles of mathematics? Second, once the Good itself is reached, how are the first principles of mathematics to be rendered unhypothetical by it? How can the Good itself possibly be a first principle of mathematics?[3] Third, why can't Plato's objection that mathematics takes the truth of its first principles for granted also be raised against dialectic? Why isn't the Good itself simply a hypothesis, since it cannot be proved from something yet more primitive?

To see how Plato proposes to solve these problems, we naturally turn for assistance to the allegory of the Sun, since it provides our best clue to the nature of the Good itself. We may begin with the part that characterizes the role of the Good itself in knowledge:

[4] [a] 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 [b] an object of knowledge. [c] Both knowledge

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[3] See Arist. *Metaph.* 996ᵃ29–32: 'And that is why in mathematics nothing is proved by means of this kind of [final] cause, nor is there any demonstration [taking the form] "because it is better (or worse)"—indeed, no one ever mentions anything of this sort.'

and truth are beautiful things, but the Good is other and more beautiful than they. In the visible realm, [d] light and sight are rightly considered sunlike, but it is wrong to think that they are the sun, so here it is right to think of knowledge and truth as goodlike, but wrong to think that either of them is the Good—for the Good is yet more prized. (508 E 1–509 A 4)

The Good, then, is (4d) something like a self-illuminating object that can shed the intelligible analogue of light on other objects of knowledge in such a way as to render them intelligible: it is an intelligible object that is somehow a condition of the intelligibility of other things. This suggests that the 'light' the Good itself gives off is something like rational order or logical structure, and that it itself is a paradigm of such order or structure.[4]

   To make all this a little less metaphorical, suppose that we have a true definition or account of a Form, F, that tells us what F is, and is a first principle of some craft, T. Because this account is true, and other principles of T follow from it, it must exhibit whatever level of rational order or logical structure is required to guarantee that it has these two features—at a minimum, it must be consistent. Because such an account is made true by a Form, the Form must, at a minimum, possess the level of rational order that is an ontological correlate of consistency. As the Form or paradigm of rational order, the Good itself is (4b) an object of knowledge like any other Form. But since there would be no truth, and so no knowledge, without it, it is (4a) the cause of truth and knowledge, and so is 'other than they'. Furthermore, as the very paradigm of rational order, it is 'the brightest of the beings' (*Rep.* 7, 518 C 9–D 1), and so (4c) the best or most beautiful of them.

   In addition to this epistemological side, the allegory of the Sun has a more opaque metaphysical side, which attempts to capture the role of the Good itself not just in the truth or intelligibility of knowable objects, but in their very being or substance:

[5]   You'll be willing to say, I think, that the sun not only provides visible
      things with the power to be seen but also with coming to be, growth,
      and nourishment,[5] although it is not itself coming to be . . . Therefore,
      you should also say that the objects of knowledge not only owe their

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[4] As John Cooper persuasively argues in 'The Psychology of Justice in Plato', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 14 (1977), 151–7.

[5] At *Rep.* 7, 516 B 9–C 2, the latter debt is explained as follows: 'the sun provides the seasons and years, governs everything in the visible world, and is in some way the cause of all the things that he [the one ascending from the Cave] used to see'.

being known to the Good, but their being or substance is also due to
it, although the Good is not substance, but superior to it in rank and
power. (509 B 2–10)

Visible things—including the sun—are components of the visible
realm. The sun, however, has a very special role therein: without it
there would be no such realm. The same holds of the Good consi-
dered as a paradigm of rational order. Like other Forms, it is a com-
ponent of the intelligible realm. But, unlike them, it is a condition of
the existence of the realm itself, since if there were no rational order,
nothing could be intelligible. That explains why the Good is char-
acterized as 'not substance, but superior to it in rank and power'.

3. Philosophy/dialectic

As Plato understands the crafts, they are all 'by nature set over' the
various kinds of things, such as human bodies (medicine) or sailors
(piloting), 'to seek and provide what is to their advantage' (341 D
7–8). *Good-relatedness*, as we may call it, is thus a defining feature
of the craft paradigm. So, too, is *hierarchicalization*—the idea of
one craft, T_n, producing the raw materials for another, T_{n+1}, as the
miller produces flour for the baker. T_{n+1}, as a user of the prod-
ucts of T_n, will then have a role to play in T_n, specifying the kinds
of products it needs as raw materials in order to produce good or
high-quality products of its own:

[6] For each thing there are these three crafts, one that uses it, one that
makes it, and one that imitates it. . . . Then aren't the virtue or ex-
cellence, the beauty and correctness of each manufactured item, living
creature, and action related to nothing but the use for which each is
made or naturally adapted? . . . Therefore, a maker—through asso-
ciating with and having to listen to the one who knows—has correct
opinion about whether something he makes is fine or bad, but the one
who knows is the user. (601 D 1–602 A 1)

Furthermore, T_n may also stand to T_{n+1} in this sort of relation-
ship, since a single craft may draw its raw materials from a variety
of others. The idea of a master or superordinate craft that uses
the products of all other subordinate crafts is naturally suggested.
But uses them to do what? That question is answered by good-
relatedness: since all crafts aim at some good, the superordinate

craft must aim at some sort of superordinate good. On the admittedly controversial assumption that there is a single such hierarchy of crafts, and a single superordinate craft, we may speak of *the* craft hierarchy.[6]

We see these ideas in operation throughout Plato's works, but their employment in the *Euthydemus* is particularly illuminating. Happiness or doing well, which is what all people want (278 E 3–6), consists in the possession and correct use of good things (279 A 2– 282 A 4). Hence there is no 'benefit to be gained from any of the . . . sciences—moneymaking, medicine, or whatever—unless it knows how to use what it makes' (289 A 4–7). In other words, only the superordinate craft—the one that does not need to draw on another higher-level craft in order to know how to use its own products correctly—really produces a benefit, really makes us happy. Could this craft be 'the craft of making speeches'? Is *it* the craft 'whose possession is bound to make us happy' (289 C 6–8)? No. For even though it is 'superhuman and sublime' (289 E 3–4), it does not know how to use the speeches it knows how to compose. Is, then, 'generalship . . . the craft whose possession would bring happiness'? (290 B 1–2). No. For 'after [generals] have finished hunting a city or an army, they make way for statesmen, because they themselves do not know how to use their quarry' (290 D 1–3). Statesmanship emerges, then, as a candidate superordinate craft.

On the way to that candidate, however, another, different hierarchy of crafts emerges:

Geometers, astronomers, and calculators . . . are [like generals] also hunters, for each of them is engaged not in making diagrams, but in discovering the things that are [τὰ ὄντα ἀνευρίσκουσιν],[7] and inasmuch as they do not know how to use them, but only how to hunt them down, they—at least, however many of them are not entirely without understanding—hand them over to dialecticians to use them to the full [καταχρῆσθαι]. (290 B 10–C 6)

Socrates attributes the introduction of both hierarchies to Cleinias.

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[6] A further consequence of good-relatedness and hierarchicalization, which I shall not explore here, is that teleological explanation, as the kind internal to craft, becomes the naturally privileged sort.

[7] Most translators badly botch this clause: 'they are not mere makers of diagrams, but they try to find out the real meanings' (Rouse); 'for none of these make their diagrams; they simply discover those that already exist' (Sprague); 'they don't create their respective diagrams ex nihilo; they merely show up what's already there' (Waterfield). Thomas Chance, *Plato's* Euthydemus (Berkeley, 1992), gets it right: 'they are not engaged in producing figures, but in discovering realities'.

But Crito, to whom he is reporting the conversation, is incredulous: 'What are you saying, Socrates? Did that young man really assert all that?' (290 E 1–2). It's a challenge to Socrates' reliability that is, I think, unique in Plato. In response, Socrates acknowledges the uncertainty of his memory, and tries a different answer: 'Perhaps it was Ctesippus who said it' (E 7–8). But that suggestion too is dismissed with incredulity. 'Do you think', he asks in the end, 'that some superior being [τις τῶν κρειττόνων] was there to assert it?' (291 A 3–4). Though the phrase usually seems to refer to gods (*Soph.* 216 B 4; *Laws* 718 A 5), here it seems to be a joking reference to Plato himself (or Socrates as his representative), since—as we are about to see—the views expressed are his very own.

The mathematicians are not diagram-makers, but hunters of the ὄντα their diagrams represent. While they know how to hunt these ὄντα down, however, they do not know how 'to use them to the full'. That is why, if they are wise, they hand them over to dialecticians, who do know how to use them. The ὄντα in question are, of course, Forms. Consequently, the only way to hand them over is in an account. Effectively, then, it is the accounts of these Forms the dialectician knows how to use. Witness the following text from the *Cratylus*:

[7] Who or what provides us with the names we use? . . . Don't you think that the law provides us with them? . . . So when an instructor uses [χρῆται] a name, he's using the product of a lawgiver . . . It isn't every man who can give names . . . but only a name-maker, and he, it seems, is the lawgiver, the kind of craftsman most rarely [σπανιώτατος] found among human beings . . . [389 A 3] . . . [390 C 2] And who can best supervise the work of a lawgiver, whether here or abroad, and judge its products? Isn't it whoever will use [χρήσεται] them? . . . And isn't that the person who knows how to ask questions? . . . And he also knows how to answer them? . . . And what would you call someone who knows how to ask and answer questions? Wouldn't you call him a dialectician? . . . But it's the work of a lawmaker, it seems, to make a name. And if names are to be given well, a dialectician must supervise him. (388 D 9–390 D 5)

Notice that this passage also suggests a way to integrate the two hierarchies of crafts that emerged in the *Euthydemus*. The lawgiver is a statesman, but he must be supervised by the dialectician if he is to do his work well. Consequently, the wise mathematicians and the general in the end hand over their captives to the same man. In the

Republic, he will be identified as the philosopher-king.[8] But that identification is already hinted at in the *Euthydemus* itself, when the wisdom that ensures the correct use of good things is called φιλοσοφία (282 C 5–D 3).

In the *Euthydemus*, correct use is connected to happiness: using a good thing correctly or to the full is using it to promote happiness in the most effective way. In the *Cratylus*, use is—in one significant case, at least—a matter of being able to ask and answer questions correctly. But the one significant case has general repercussions. For even a craft like weaving will not be correctly practised unless it is practised as the superordinate craft of statesmanship, and so of dialectic, requires. Even the correct use of so mundane an implement as a shuttle depends, therefore, on the correct use of words, on dialectic. But that, of course, is too schematic an answer to be fully satisfying. To see in greater detail how the pursuit of happiness is related to the ability to ask and answer questions, we must turn, first, to the ascent passage in the *Symposium*, and then to the account of dialectic given in the *Republic*.

The ascent of the philosopher to the Beautiful itself described in the *Symposium* (210 A 4–212 A 7) has five stages. *Stage 1*: the philosopher must first 'love one body and beget beautiful accounts there' (210 A 7–8). *Stage 2*: then he must 'realize that the beauty of all bodies is one and the same . . . and must become a lover of all beautiful bodies, and slacken his intense love of the one' (210 B 3–5). *Stage 3*: then he must 'think that the beauty in souls is more valuable than the beauty in bodies', so that he comes to seek 'to give birth to such accounts as will make young men better' and so is forced 'to study the beauty in ways of life and laws and see that all this is akin to itself' (210 B 6–C 5). *Stage 4*: then 'he must be led to the sciences, so that he may also see the beauty of sciences, and be looking mainly not at beauty in a single example . . . but be turned to the great sea of beauty', so that 'gazing upon this, he gives birth to many gloriously beautiful accounts and theories, in unstinting philosophy', until he 'catches sight of a certain science which is single and concerns such beauty' (210 C 6–E 1). *Stage 5*: 'from these lessons he arrives in the end at this lesson, which is learning of this very beauty, so that in

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[8] I note, without wanting to make a song and dance about it, that the adjective σπάνιος, which is used to characterize the lawgivers at *Crat.* 389 A 2, and which is itself quite rare in the Platonic corpus, is used twice in the *Republic* (476 B 11, 503 D 11), both times to refer to the philosopher-kings.

the end he comes to know the Beautiful itself' (211 c 6–d 1). Having reached this stage, the philosopher no longer thinks of 'measuring beauty by gold or clothing or beautiful boys and youths', and so is at last able 'to give birth not to likenesses of virtue, since what he's got hold of [ἐφαπτομένῳ] is no likeness' (211 d 3–212 a 5).

What drives the philosopher to make this ascent is not the desire for knowledge as such, but rather the desire, common to all human beings, to be happy by possessing good things for ever (204 d 5– 206 a 12), and the consequent desire to have an account that can serve as a reliable standard or measure of such things. At each stage in his pursuit of this account, however, he becomes aware of the ever larger arena in which it must function. It must provide him with a standard that can reliably measure the beauty of anything, whether a single body, bodies in general, ways of life and laws, or sciences. At each stage, too, he produces accounts of the standard, as he sees it then. Not until he reaches the Beautiful itself, however, has he found an account of beauty that both applies quite generally and that captures not a mere likeness of beauty, but Beauty itself.

Once he has this account, the philosopher gives birth to true virtue by giving birth to beautiful accounts that deal with 'the proper ordering of cities and households' (209 a 6–7), and that will, as a result, 'make young men better'. In other words, as we discover in the *Republic*, he gives birth to a constitution for a city and its households that will make everyone, including himself and his beloved boy, as virtuous, and so as happy, as possible.

In the *Symposium*, whose topic is love, the pinnacle of the ascent is—appropriately—characterized as the Beautiful, which (in its manifestations) is the 'most clearly visible and most loved' of intelligible things (*Phdr*. 250 d 7–e 1). Even in that pre-*Republic* work, however, it is the Good and nothing else that everyone really loves (*Sym*. 205 e 7–206 a 1). So when the philosopher reaches the single science whose first principle is the Beautiful (210 c 6–e 1), he may well have another—but unadvertised—step to take. This would be the one, presumably, in which he would recognize that beauty is only one type of goodness, and the science of it only one type of the science of goodness. In *Republic* 7, this latter science is identified as dialectic:

[8] Whenever someone tries through argument and apart from all sense
    perceptions to find the Being itself of each thing, and doesn't give up

until he grasps the Good itself with understanding itself, he reaches the end of the intelligible . . . And what about this journey? Don't you call it dialectic? . . . Then . . . [a] all this business of the crafts we've mentioned has the power to awaken the best part of the soul and lead it upward to the study of the best among the things that are? . . . And mustn't we also insist that the power of dialectic could reveal it only to someone experienced in the subjects we've described, and that it cannot reveal it in any other way? . . . For all the other crafts are concerned with human opinions and desires, with growing or construction, or with the care of growing or constructed things. And [b] as for the rest, I mean geometry and the subjects that follow it, we described them as to some extent grasping what is. For we saw that while they do dream about what is, they are unable to command a waking view of it as long as they make use of hypotheses that they leave untouched and for which they cannot give any argument. For what mechanism could possibly turn any agreement into knowledge when it begins with something unknown and puts together the conclusion and the steps in between from what is unknown? . . . Therefore, [c] dialectic is the only enquiry that travels this road, doing away with hypotheses, and proceeding to the First Principle itself so as to be secure. (532 A 5–533 D 1)

Dialectic, though it must, as it were, pass through (8b) mathematics on its way to the Good, is not restricted in its origins to mathematics. The philosopher must also pass through (8a) the various handicrafts as well. There is no question, therefore, of his reaching the Good itself from mathematics alone. Moreover, because the Good itself is reached from these various origins, it must be of quite general application. It must serve as a measure of good proofs, to be sure, but it must also serve as a measure of good laws, good political institutions, and good people. If one asks what sort of good this could be, however, one is bound to be led towards syncategorematic notions such as unity, harmony, or—to use the notion we introduced in Section 2—rational order.

That Plato is led in precisely this direction is clear. In the *Philebus* (a dialogue to which we shall shortly return), the Good itself is said to be found 'somewhere in the area of measure [μέτρον]' (66 A 6–7). In the *Timaeus*, the god 'desiring that all things should be good . . . took over all that is visible . . . and brought it from disorder into order [τάξιν], since he judged that order was in every way the better' (30 A 2–6). In the *Gorgias*, Callicles' immoral advocacy of 'advantage-taking [πλεονεξίαν]' is diagnosed as a consequence of his having neglected geometry. For it would have shown him that it

is 'geometrical [or proportionate] equality', not advantage-taking, that makes 'this universe a world-*order* [κόσμον] . . . and not a world-*dis*order [ἀκοσμίαν]' (507 E 6–508 A 8).

In essence, this is the answer to the first problem we raised in Section 2 about how the Good itself, as a standard or measure of goodness in general, could be reached from the first principles of mathematics. For we can now see that it is not reached solely from this narrow basis, but from the much broader one that the *Symposium* would lead us to expect.

The Good itself, as the first principle of a science—dialectic—immune to the epistemological weakness diagnosed in the mathematical crafts, must be unhypothetical. The problem—which is the third we raised in Section 2—is to see how it can possibly have this status, since it seems that a genuine first principle cannot itself have a proof. In *Republic* 4, Plato offers us the vital clue to its solution. There he implies that the alternative to treating something as a hypothesis is to refute all the objections that can be raised against it: 'in order to avoid going through all these objections one by one and taking a long time to prove them all untrue', he writes, 'let us hypothesize that this is correct and carry on' (437 A 4–7). Moreover, being able to defend the Good itself in this way is precisely what is required of the philosopher:

[9] Unless someone can distinguish in an account the Form of the Good from everything else, can survive all refutation as if in a battle, striving to judge things not in accordance with opinion but in accordance with being, and can come through all this with his account still intact, you'll say that he doesn't know the Good itself or any other good. But if he somehow gets hold of [ἐφάπτεται] some image of it,[9] it's through opinion, not through knowledge, that he's got hold of it. (534 B 8–C 6)

Presumably, then, what makes a first principle unhypothetical is a dialectical defence of it against all objections. Provided we are willing to allow that such a defence of the Good can amount to the sort of 'demonstration by refutation' Aristotle countenances for the principle of non-contradiction in *Metaphysics B* 4, we can acknowledge it as a sort of proof—an analogue, at least, of what the mathematician provides for his theorems, though not for his first principles.

By implication, then, what causes the philosopher in the *Sym-*

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[9] Cf. *Sym.* 212 A 5.

posium to climb ever higher on the ladder of love is his failure to encounter dialectically defensible accounts of the Beautiful at lower levels. It is this that explains more fully why the Euthydemean philosophical task of using good things to promote happiness is the same as the Cratylean one of being able to ask and answer questions correctly: one cannot know which things are good, or how to use them to promote the Good, unless one knows how to ask and answer questions about the Good.

We are now ready to discuss the problem—the second one we raised in Section 2—of how the Good itself can possibly be a first principle of the mathematical crafts. The geometer knows how to produce geometrical demonstrations reliably from hypothetical first principles. The problem is that the accounts he provides of his first principles are inconsistent with the claim of geometry to provide knowledge of being, of what always is. One task of the philosopher, therefore, is to replace these inadequate accounts with 'good' ones—with accounts that have the greater level of rational order signalled by consistency with the truth-claim of the craft to which they belong.

Geometry is not an isolated craft, however: it is part of the craft hierarchy. As a result, successful accounts of its first principles must enable it to be consistently integrated therein. The very mark of a dialectician, indeed, is an ability to take such an holistic view of things:

[10]   The subjects they learnt in no particular order as children, they must
       now bring together to form a unified vision [σύνοψιν] of their kinship
       both with one another and with the nature of being . . . This is also
       the greatest test of who is naturally dialectical and who isn't. For one
       who has a unified vision [συνοπτικός] is a dialectician, but if he hasn't,
       he isn't. (537 C 1–7)

Dialectically defending an account of a geometrical first principle, therefore, is not just a matter of showing it to be consonant with the epistemic pretensions of *geometry*, but of showing it to be consonant with all the first principles of the crafts in the craft hierarchy. And this must include, of course, 'the first principle of everything', the Good itself.

We might think, then, of rational order as consisting in something like the following. The dialectician recasts the entire craft hierarchy as a formal system, in which all accounts of first principles

are assigned such logical forms (or patterns of rational order) as are determined by the rules of inference for the system. The Good itself, as the paradigm of this logical form, will also exhibit it. It will, therefore, be consonant with all the subordinate goods that are the first principles of the subordinate crafts in the hierarchy. More particularly, they will all share in the very Form that makes the Good itself a categorical first principle, and so they will themselves become categorical principles, worthy sources not just of opinion, but of knowledge.

4. Desire

Because the Good is an object of desire, however, and not just of theoretical cognition, it cannot be shown to be a categorical first principle, unless it can also be shown to be a categorical object of desire—something desirable for its own sake and not merely for the sake of something else. Now if the Good itself is simply specified as the paradigm of goodness, this problem can readily be solved. A familiar Platonic topos explains how:

[11] Do all men wish to do well? Or is this question one of the ridiculous ones I was afraid of just now? I suppose it is stupid even to raise such a question, since there could hardly be a man who would not wish to do well . . . Well then, I said, the next question is, since we wish to do well, how are we to do so? Would it be through having many good things? Or is this question still more simple-minded than the other, since this must obviously be the case too? (*Euthd*. 278 E 3–279 A 4)[10]

Thus the analytic or conceptual connection holding between the possession of good things and being happy—a connection it would be stupid or simple-minded to deny—ensures that the Good itself, as both the best thing and a cognitively reliable standard of the goodness of everything else, must be a categorical object of desire. What this connection does not do, however, is admit of trivial extension to an actual candidate Good itself specified in other terms. For example, it does not trivially extend to rational order. Consequently, if those who were in the best position to judge found that the most rationally ordered life was *less pleasant* (say) than a less ordered one, that would seem to pose a serious challenge to the

[10] See also *Sym*. 204 E 2–205 A 4; *Rep*. 6, 505 D 5–E 4.

claim that the Good just is rational order. For how could we accept something as the good life *for us* that we experienced as less than good *from the inside*?

Plato shows himself well aware of the need to deal with this sort of challenge when, in *Republic* 9, he undertakes to prove that the philosopher's characteristic pleasure—the pleasure of knowing the truth, and so of knowing the Good itself, which is the first principle of all knowledge—is most pleasant of all. His argument has both a subjective side, based on experience, and an objective one, based in a theory of pleasure. The subjective side acknowledges that people disagree about what sort of life is most pleasant. Money-lovers, whose souls are ruled by their appetitive desires, think that a life focused on food, drink, sex, and the money needed to get them is 'more pleasant and free from pain', whereas honour-lovers, whose souls are ruled by aspiration, and philosophers, whose souls are ruled by reason, think that lives devoted to victories and honours, or to learning and knowing the truth, have this status (580 D 7–582 A 2). The resulting 'dispute' seems impossible to settle, because it seems to hinge wholly on subjective claims.

Not so, Plato argues. Judgements about pleasure are no different from judgements about other things: the only 'criterion' to use in making them is 'experience, wisdom, and argument' (582 A 5–6). Hence the philosopher's judgement should be trusted. For he is wise, a master of dialectical argument, and has experienced appetitive and spirited pleasures since childhood, whereas 'the pleasure of having theoretical knowledge of [θέας] the things that are cannot be tasted by anyone except a philosopher' (582 C 7–9). The problems with this argument are twofold. First, the philosopher cannot claim to know what appetitive or spirited pleasures feel like to their true devotees, who spend their lives exploring them. And this weakens his authority. Moreover, the crucial claim that an appetitive or spirited person *cannot* know the philosopher's pleasure seems suspect—at 582 B 5–6, indeed, Socrates says only that the former, 'even if he were eager to taste it, couldn't *easily* do so'.

This point is worth developing. An appetitive person—Philebus, as we may call him (see *Phileb*. 65 E 9–66 A 3)—can be just as intelligent as a philosopher (*Rep*. 519 A 1–B 5). If he lives in a city which gives the highest monetary rewards to the best dialecticians, he will have a powerful incentive to acquire an education of the sort provided to philosophers in the *kallipolis*, since it will be the best means

to the money that is itself the best means to satisfying his appetites (580 E 5–581 A 1). If he does acquire such an education, he can surely come to know the ideal of rational order the philosopher calls the Good. (If not, why not?) Suppose he does. What is to ensure that he will not still continue to think his appetitive life to be more pleasant than the philosophic one? What is to ensure that he will not refuse to identify the ideal of rational order he has come to know with the Good? If the answer is 'Nothing', Plato's claim that the philosopher alone is equipped to judge pleasures will be undercut. For Philebus will have the same credentials as the philosopher, but will disagree with him about what the Good is, and about which life is most pleasant. To avoid this criticism, therefore, it is necessary to show that one cannot know the ideal of rational order without finding the study of it intrinsically pleasant—intrinsically more pleasant, indeed, than anything else.[11] Plato's account of pleasure, advertised as constituting 'the greatest and most decisive overthrow' (583 B 6–7) of someone like Philebus, is intended to show precisely this.

Desires, it claims, are 'kinds of states of emptiness' of either the body or the soul (585 A 8–B 4), and pleasure is having those emptinesses appropriately filled: 'being filled with things appropriate to our nature is pleasure' (585 D 11). Hence one pleasure is supposedly more pleasant than another, or a truer pleasure, if it is a case of 'being more filled with things that are more' (585 D 12–E 1). Thus having the emptiness that is one's rational desire to know the Good filled with the Good is allegedly more pleasant than having the emptiness that is one's appetitive desire for food filled with food, because the food will, by being digested, soon cease to be food, and so will cease to fill that emptiness, whereas the Good itself, since it is eternally and perfectly good, will always perfectly fill its correlative emptiness. Granted this view of pleasure, then, Philebus *cannot* both know the Good itself and continue to find appetitive pleasures more pleasant than philosophic ones. The very nature of pleasure rules that out.

Even if we leave aside any intrinsic deficiencies in its account of pleasure and desire, this Platonic argument remains open to challenge.[12] For what if Philebus responds that just as 'a white thing is no whiter if it lasts a long time than if it lasts a day' (Arist.

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[11] See my *Philosopher-Kings* (Princeton, 1988), 95–100.

[12] Some of these are discussed in J. C. B. Gosling and C. C. W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure* (Oxford, 1982), ch. 6.

NE 1096ᵇ4–5), so he continues to find fleeting appetitive pleasures sweeter and more intense than long-lived philosophic ones? How, given his credentials, is the Platonic philosopher then to refute him? Aren't we in one of those areas in which, everything else being equal, experience simply trumps theory?[13]

It is a measure of the depth of this problem, and of the pressure it rightly exerts on Plato, that in the *Philebus*, one of his latest works, he takes it up again in greater detail. The task he sets himself there is the Euthydemean one of showing 'some possession or state of the soul to be the one that can render life happy for all human beings' (11 D 4–6). This possession or state will then be 'the good . . . in man' (64 A 1). The contenders are: first, 'pleasure, amusement, enjoyment, and whatever else is of that kind' (19 C 7–8); second, 'understanding, knowledge, intelligence, craft, and everything that is akin to them' (19 D 4–5); and third 'a mixture of pleasure with understanding and wisdom' (22 A 1–3). Pleasure alone cannot be the good in man, however, because without right opinion, 'you would not be of the opinion that you are enjoying yourself even when you are', and without the ability to calculate rationally, 'you would not be able to figure out any future pleasures for yourself' (21 C 4–6). Similarly, knowledge alone cannot be that good, since no one 'would choose to live in possession of every kind of 'wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and memory of all things, while having no part, whether large or small, of pleasure or pain' (21 D 9–E 1). Hence neither the appetitive hedonism advocated by Philebus nor the intellectualism defended by Socrates yields correct accounts of the good in man (22 C 1–4). The mixture of pleasure and knowledge, however, has a strong claim to be that good.

The good in man is not the Good itself, however, but only something which may help us 'to get some vision of the nature of the Good itself' (64 A 1–3). For the Good itself is the *cause* of the mixture's goodness (22 C 8–D 4), the element whose 'goodness makes the mixture itself a good one' (65 A 4–5), the 'ingredient in the mixture that we ought to regard as most valuable and at the same time as the factor that makes it precious to all mankind' (64 C 5–7). The following text argues that what this ingredient is is measure or proportion:

[12] Any kind of mixture that does not in some way or other possess

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[13] See Arist. *NE* 1172ᵃ34–ᵇ7, 1179ᵃ17–22, ᵇ23–8, and my *Practices of Reason: Aristotle's* Nicomachean Ethics (Oxford, 1992), 31–66.

> measure or the nature of proportion [μέτρου καὶ τῆς συμμέτρου φύσεως]
> will necessarily corrupt its ingredients and most of all itself. For there
> would be no blending at all in such cases but really an unconnected
> medley, the ruin of whatever happens to be contained in it. (64 D 9–E 3)

Hence the Good itself, the Good of 'the first rank', is 'what is somehow connected with measure, the measured, the timely, and whatever else is to be considered similar' (66 A 6–8). In other words, it is the sort of paradigm of rational order familiar from our discussion of the *Republic*.

This reinstates intellectualism, Socrates argues, as *closer to the truth* about the Good itself and about the good in man than hedonism. For it was conceded at the beginning of the dialogue that if neither pleasure nor knowledge was the Good, then whichever of them was closer or more akin to it would be the victor in the dispute between them (11 D 11–12 A 5). But now that the Good has been identified with measure (rational order), we can see that knowledge is more akin to this than pleasure. For (simplifying Plato's argument somewhat) nothing 'is more unmeasured [ἀμετρώτερον] in nature than pleasure and excessive joy, while nothing more measured [ἐμμετρώτερον] than reason and knowledge could ever be found' (65 D 8–10).

The key weakness in this resourceful argument is revealed by the following criticism. If rational order alone is responsible for the value of the mixture of knowledge and pleasure that is the good in man, why does it need to be mixed with pleasure in particular in order to be preferable to us (see 21 D 9–E 1, quoted above)? Surely, it must be because the rational order that makes the mixture valuable is not enough to make it preferable to us, so that value and preference have come apart. But if they have, why think that what preference has come apart from is value at all? Why not think instead that rational order is simply an instrumental means to stable acquisition of pleasure in the long term? Why not, in other words, adopt hedonistic egoism or hedonistic utilitarianism instead of intellectualism as one's theory of the good?

When all the chips are on the table, it is once again adherence to the craft paradigm that leads Plato to choose intellectualism. For central to craft, especially to handicraft, is the notion of giving shape or form (μορφή) to, or introducing order into, raw or shapeless materials or matter (ὕλη). Thus craft is, as we might say,

incipiently hylomorphic—it encourages thought to move towards the sort of full-blown hylomorphism that Aristotle, largely under its influence, ultimately develops. Use of the craft paradigm has a built-in tendency, in other words, to lead to the general conception of matter as a formless stuff into which form is introduced from the outside. Given good-relatedness, which we saw to be a feature of the paradigm in Section 3, the association of value with form alone is scarcely a step away. (The same goes for the association of badness or evil with matter. But that fateful association is not our concern here.) The net result, therefore, is that once Plato has identified the good in man as a mixture of a matter-like element (pleasure) and a form-like element (measure), the latter is automatically identified as the one that contributes the value, since this is what the craft paradigm requires.

Once the Good has been divorced from pleasure and associated with rational order, however, virtue, as itself a good, is bound to move in the same direction (see *Phileb*. 64 E 6–7). Any hope of establishing an intrinsic connection between it and a happiness to which pleasure is essential (and any credible conception of happiness is bound to be of this sort) is thereby threatened. To be sure, it may yet be possible to get pleasure from one's virtue, but the *justification* of virtue will now lie in reason or rational order and not in the pleasure it promotes. The craft paradigm which performs such yeoman service in Plato's philosophy threatens, in the end, to undermine one of its central projects. For it pretty much forces Plato away from eudaemonism towards a metaphysics of morals much more like Kant's.

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