VIRTUE AS THE SOLE INTRINSIC GOOD IN PLATO'S EARLY DIALOGUES

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ALL acknowledge that in Plato's *Apology* and *Crito* Socrates makes remarkably bold claims about the power of virtue. These appear prima facie to express views dissonant not only with common sense but with opinions Socrates seems to express elsewhere in Plato's early dialogues.[1] This latter dissonance is a hurdle to be overcome not just by scholars who believe Socrates has no settled view about virtue's nature, let alone its exact powers, but also by those who accept the widespread interpretation according to which virtue for Socrates is practical wisdom or some such facility for acting correctly. This interpretative problem and its solution are the focus of the present paper.

When Socrates speaks of virtue, he is commonly—now almost universally—interpreted as having in mind a sort of practical wisdom, or some other power or disposition to act correctly. This assumption has led most commentators in recent decades to conclude that for Socrates virtue is simply a highly reliable, if not necessary and sufficient, instrumental means to happiness. The conclusion is expressed most succinctly by Terry Penner: for Socrates 'the

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[1] 'Early dialogues' here means at least *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Crito*, *Euthydemus*, *Euthyphro*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Protagoras*. I accept a traditional division between 'early' and 'middle' dialogues. The *Gorgias* and *Meno* are usually considered 'transitional' between early and middle; I do not rely on them for evidence about Socratic views of the early dialogues, though many scholars do. The *Euthydemus* is also sometimes considered 'transitional', but I use only its 'protreptic' passages, usually deemed representative of views and arguments of the 'earliest' dialogues.

goodness of a good human being is goodness *at* something, namely, getting happiness'.[2] (I call this conclusion the Traditional Interpretation.[3]) This in turn has led most commentators to conclude either that Socrates had no particular view about what *constitutes* happiness or that he simply fails to express (or to express adequately) such a view.[4]

It is on this last point that Gregory Vlastos famously parted ways with most scholars, arguing forcefully that for Socrates virtue has 'supreme' *intrinsic* value, being therefore the major *constituent* of happiness.[5] None the less, Vlastos evidently disagreed so little with the Traditional Interpretation that he had very little to say about the *nature* of virtue. Apparently, we are to think that Vlastos assigned supreme intrinsic value to the very thing most Traditionalists believe has an intrinsic value that is either zero or unknown. Like the Traditionalist, Vlastos appears to limit virtue to a practical knowledge (calling it 'moral knowledge'),[6] to the conduct recognized as best by such knowledge, or to both.[7]

[2] 'Socrates and the Early Dialogues' ['Socrates'], in R. Kraut (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge, 1992), 121–169 at 135.

[3] Some of its most prominent exponents are W. K. C. Guthrie, *Socrates* (Cambridge, 1971); T. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory* [*PMT*] (Oxford, 1977) and *Plato's Ethics* (Oxford, 1995); T. Brickhouse and N. Smith, *Socrates on Trial* [*Trial*] (Princeton, 1989) and *Plato's Socrates* (Oxford, 1994); C. D. C. Reeve, *Socrates in the* Apology (Indianapolis, 1989); J. Annas, 'Plato', in S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (eds.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edn. (Oxford, 1996), 1190–3; J. Cooper, 'Socrates', in *The Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London, 2000), 847–8; N. Reshotko, 'Virtue as the Only Unconditional—But Not Intrinsic—Good: Plato's *Euthydemus* 278e3–281e5' ['Plato's *Euthd*. 278e3–281e5'], *Ancient Philosophy*, 21 (2001), 325–34. Irwin lists some who apparently would have rejected the interpretation (*PMT*, 303 n. 69).

[4] G. Klosko, 'Socrates on Goods and Happiness', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 4 (1987), 251–64; Penner, 'Socrates', 146; Brickhouse and Smith, *Plato's Socrates*, 104 n. 2 (despite their interpretation at 130); C. C. W. Taylor, *Socrates* (Oxford, 1998), 68–9. Even Irwin, who famously attributes a form of hedonism to Socrates, believes that the *Protagoras* is the only early dialogue in which Socrates commits himself to that view of what happiness is (*PMT*, 114; *Plato's Ethics*, 91).

[5] *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* [*Socrates*] (Cambridge, 1991).

[6] Sc. knowledge of how to choose 'morally' correct acts (Vlastos, *Socratic Studies* (Cambridge, 1994), 113, 115–16; *Socrates*, 229). Vlastos indeed distinguishes 'moral' knowledge—which he sometimes identifies as virtue (see next note)—from 'technical' knowledge (*Socratic Studies*, 109–26), whereas many Traditionalists (e.g. Penner) would say that virtue is a technical (as well as moral) knowledge. But clearly Vlastos's distinction marks a difference in objects rather than a 'functional' difference.

[7] As far as I can tell, Vlastos never makes it clear precisely what virtue is for Socrates. Sometimes he appears to treat it as a condition of soul (*Socrates*, 220,

The Traditional Interpretation notoriously has difficulty making literal sense of some of Socrates' most important and famous claims,[8] particularly in the *Apology* and the *Crito*, where he suggests that the person with virtue is self-sufficiently happy and invulnerable to all injury. The Traditionalist's difficulty is not adequately overcome even by taking Vlastos's further step. After considering the problematic texts and some of the best attempts to solve the problem, I shall argue that the virtue Socrates speaks of in these passages must not be identified with practical wisdom or a facility for acting correctly and is not valued by Socrates simply or primarily as a means to—or even as the major part of—happiness. The virtue Socrates makes so much of is the sole intrinsic good, the sole constituent of happiness.

1. Why attend to virtue?

There are certainly a number of passages in the *Apology* in which the good condition of soul is characterized as the greatest good. Consider Socrates' habitual exhortation to everyone 'to attend to neither bodies nor money before—or as vehemently as—[you attend to] the soul in order that it will be best' (30 A–B;[9] cf. 29 D 9–E 2, 36 C, 39 D). He also uses the word 'virtue' to describe that which he exhorts everyone to attend to (31 B, 41 E; cf. 29 E 5, 30 B 3). Socrates' final exhortation in the *Apology* (41 E) makes it clear that he thinks there is *nothing* that one must attend to before attending to virtue.

None of this, however, proves that for Socrates virtue is the sole ultimate end; for it could be argued that the 'virtue' Socrates exhorts people to pursue before anything else is knowledge of good and bad.[10] According to this interpretation, when Socrates seems

226–31; *Socratic Studies*, 61, 109–26), but sometimes he appears to treat it as a kind of conduct (*Socrates*, 204, 210–16; *Socratic Studies*, 112). Indeed, Vlastos seems to think that neither Socrates nor any ancient Greek before Aristotle had the linguistic means to distinguish the two (*Socrates*, 232 n. 103; cf. Vlastos, *Platonic Studies*, 2nd edn. (Princeton, 1981), 231 n. 25, 436).

[8] See Irwin, *PMT*, 100–1, and *Plato's Ethics*, 59–60, 73–4; Vlastos, 'The Virtuous and the Happy', *Times Literary Supplement* (24 Feb. 1978), 230–1; Klosko, 'Socrates on Goods and Happiness'; G. Santas, 'Socratic Goods and Socratic Happiness', *Apeiron*, 26 (1993), 37–52 at 38; J. Annas, 'Virtue as the Use of Other Goods', *Apeiron*, 26 (1993), 53–66 at 65.

[9] Translations are my own, based on the Oxford Classical Text.

[10] See Penner, 'Socrates', 134–5. Others who accept that for Socrates virtue is

to treat virtue as the greatest good, he has in mind its unique instrumental value, and when he asserts that nothing must be attended to before it, the 'before' is temporal rather than axiological.

The exhortation at 30 B in particular seems to support this interpretation: 'Virtue does not come to be from money; rather, from virtue, money and all the other things [come to be] good for humans both in private and in public.'[11] Accordingly, when Socrates characterizes his practice of philosophizing—including examining others and himself and making speeches about virtue—as the greatest good (38 A), it might be argued that philosophizing, being the pursuit of knowledge of good and bad, is Socrates' own attention to virtue. According to this interpretation, philosophizing is necessary for knowledge of good and bad; so it is only instrumentally the 'greatest good'. Finally, this interpretation can explain the uncompromising imperative (*Ap.* 28 B, 28 D, 32 D; *Crito* 48 C–D) to act virtuously. This is, for Socrates, simply to act in accordance with knowledge of good and bad: action is an instrument used by the knower of good and bad to achieve happiness.

2. Consolation for the virtuous: their invulnerability

Most scholars who accept that kind of interpretation recognize that there are passages in the *Apology* which at least appear to conflict with their idea that Socrates considers virtue to be only instrumentally good in the way suggested. There are two main passages of this sort. In the first, Socrates claims that his accusers are incapable of injuring him 'in any way'—evidently on the grounds that in general a person cannot in any way injure one who is better (30 C–D). In the other, he says, 'There is for a good man nothing bad—neither when he's living nor even when he's come to an end' (41 D).[12] In both passages, Socrates pretty clearly implies that he considers himself a

knowledge of good and bad are Guthrie, *Socrates*, 133–4; Irwin, *PMT*, 89; Irwin, 'Socrates the Epicurean', in H. Benson (ed.), *Essays on the Philosophy of Socrates* (Oxford, 1992), 198–219 at 210; Brickhouse and Smith, *Plato's Socrates*, 71, 108; J. Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca, NY, 1999), 97; Cooper, 'Socrates'.

[11] I have translated this according to J. Burnet's suggestion (*Plato's* Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, *and* Crito (Oxford, 1924), ad loc.), defended recently by M. Burnyeat, '*Apology* 30B2–4: Socrates, Money, and the Grammar of *γίγνεσθαι*' ['*Apology* 30B2–4'], *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 123 (2003), 1–25.

[12] Cf. *Gorg.* 527 D 1–2 with C 5–6. *Gorg.* 522 C 4–D 2 should be read in the same way.

good man;[13] and this, we may assume, implies that he thinks he has virtue:[14] he evidently thinks he has attended to his own soul and has seen to it that its condition is good. In the first passage, he appears to be trying to get his judges to think he is defending himself not on his own behalf, since (he says) they cannot harm him. In the second passage, he is trying to assure his listeners that dying (among other things) will not cause anything bad for him or any of us if we are good; though those who voted for his death are *trying* to injure him (41 D 8), they have (inevitably) failed. It seems reasonable to conclude that, according to Socrates, some have a happiness[15] that cannot be taken away even if all they possess is virtue.

We may dismiss immediately the idea that in such passages Socrates has in mind the mere 'human wisdom' that consists in awareness of the limits of one's knowledge. Not only is it incredible in itself to propose that such 'wisdom' has the power in question, but Socrates himself elsewhere explicitly rejects the proposition, and in the same breath he *appears* to suggest which knowledge does have the power in question: 'For it is not knowledge of knowledges and of lack of knowledges [whose peculiar product [*ἔργον*] is our benefit]; rather, [it is knowledge] of good and bad' (*Chrm.* 174 D).

Despite appearances, the power attributed to virtue at *Apology* 30 C–D and 41 D goes well beyond the instrumental power Socrates himself attributes to knowledge of good and bad. The *Euthydemus*'s first 'protreptic' passage presents Socrates' most in-depth treatment of the value of knowledge of good and bad. Though it is not so called, there is ample reason to identify the *Euthydemus*'s

[13] Those who doubt this should see also 28 A 6–B 2.

[14] Socrates always assumes that a person's being good is the person's *soul's* being good (*H.Min.* 376 B; *La.* 185 E–186 A with 186 C; *Chrm.* 154 E; *Gorg.* 503 A 7–8 with 503 C 8). This is a natural corollary to the equally common assumption that one's self and one's soul are identical (for example, compare 'soul' at *Ap.* 29 E 1–2 and 30 B 2 with 'self' at 36 C 6–7 and 39 D 7–8; see also *Prot.* 313 B; *La.* 186 A–B). Since, then, goodness of soul in the *Apology* is described as 'virtue', we may be sufficiently confident that when Socrates calls someone 'good', he simply means that they have virtue, sc. a soul that is in good condition. Though this is implicit in many passages in the early dialogues, it is made quite explicit in at least the following: *Prot.* 319 E–320 B; *Gorg.* 506 D, 512 D, 519 C–D; *Meno* 73 A–C, 87 D–E, 93 A 5–7; *Rep.* I, 335 D, 349 E.

[15] To the typical ancient Greek speaker, good and bad, benefit and harm, are thought of in terms of the 'happiness' (*εὐδαιμονία*) of the agent in question (*Euthd.* 278 E ff. with 280 B; *Meno* 78 A; *Sym.* 204 E–205 A; *Phileb.* 11 D with 14 B; cf. Arist. *NE* $1095^{a}14$ ff.; *Rhet.* $1360^{b}4$–13). Though Socrates does not in the *Apology* passages cited use the term 'happiness', there is good reason to understand him as having this in mind.

wisdom with the knowledge of good and bad that is the topic of other dialogues more explicitly.[16] The precise conclusion of *Euthd*. 278 E–282 A remains controversial; but I believe Naomi Reshotko has defended the best interpretation:[17] although wisdom always gives its possessor the power to make the best possible use of the things usable in her or his circumstances (I shall call this 'inherent helpfulness'), it cannot by itself provide the materials whose correct use results in a good life, nor can it by itself completely safeguard its possessor against misfortunes that either take away materials necessary for correct use or somehow foil the process of using them.

Socrates never goes further than this in characterizing the instrumental power of knowledge of good and bad; wherever he discusses the value of knowledge of good and bad, he takes considerable pains to avoid claiming that it is instrumentally sufficient for happiness.[18] In fact, in the *Euthydemus*, assuming that wisdom there is knowledge of good and bad, there is some positive indication that Socrates acknowledges its impotence in the absence of additional materials. First, he acknowledges that generally for any craft there are equipment and/or materials necessary for achieving its end-product; so a craft by itself is ineffectual (280 C). Then, his discussion of the kingly or political art suggests that its com-

[16] In stark contrast to the philosophical impasse with which the second protreptic passage of the *Euthydemus* ends, Socrates in the *Charmides* does claim to have discovered the knowledge whose peculiar product (*ἔργον*) is our benefit (174 D): it is knowledge of the good and the bad (174 B). It is reasonable to conclude that the *Charmides*'s knowledge of the good and bad is the very knowledge that Socrates and his interlocutors sought in the second protreptic of the *Euthydemus*, since the latter was precisely characterized as the knowledge whose peculiar product is our benefit (288 E, 292 A).

[17] In 'Plato's *Euthd*. 278e3–281e5'.

[18] I have not the space here to defend this interpretation completely, but one example is telling. At *Chrm*. 174 A Socrates asks, 'Which of the knowledges makes him happy?' The referent of 'him' is 'the happy man' of 173 E 10, so Socrates' question is really: 'Which of the happy man's knowledges makes him happy?' Socrates seeks not a knowledge that makes all of its possessors happy, but a knowledge that explains why the happy person is happy. This is the context in which we must read the conclusion: 'It is not living knowledgeably that produces the doing well and the being happy, nor [is producing these] even [characteristic] of all the other knowledges together, but rather of that one alone that is about the good and bad' (174 B–C). Socrates carefully avoids saying that knowledge of good and bad always produces happiness; he says rather that producing it is 'characteristic of' it, i.e. peculiar to it. If anything can ever be said to produce happiness, it is knowledge of good and bad that can. That such knowledge is necessary for happiness seems to be Socrates' only conclusion (see 174 C 9–D 1); he goes no further.

pletion requires the handing over of other crafts' end-products (291 C).[19] Now, not only did Socrates and Cleinias initially presume that the political art was the unique, inherently helpful art they sought, but the political art is elsewhere in the early dialogues practically if not explicitly identified with knowledge of good and bad.[20] So understood, Socrates can hardly have thought it instrumentally sufficient for happiness. So his claim about the invulnerability of the virtuous at *Apology* 30 C–D and 41 D cannot come from his thinking of the instrumental value of the knowledge of good and bad.

3. The virtuous risk and do not risk 'injuries'

Our interpretative problem deepens: given the assertions in 30 C–D and 41 D, it is somewhat surprising to find Socrates elsewhere in his speech allowing that he does risk receiving bad things from base men (25 E)—that he can even be *injured* by them (25 D 1). He even provides examples of things he seems to think would be bad for him: imprisonment, exile, being silenced (37 B–38 B). More surprising still, one of these—exile—was mentioned at 30 D specifically as one of those things that his accusers might bring about, but that Socrates did not in that passage even count as an injury:

[19] Socrates often reminds listeners that certain crafts are naturally subordinate to others because only the latter involve knowledge of how best to use the products of the former. Given the specific examples Socrates uses, it is also obvious that the superordinate craftsmen, though more knowledgeable in this sense, cannot produce their peculiar works without a certain supply of products from the subordinate craftsmen: the cook (of *Euthd*. 290 B–C) cannot produce meals without the hunter's quarry; the trainer or doctor (of *Gorg*. 517 D–518 A) cannot produce bodies in good condition without the food, drink, and clothing supplied by other crafts; the general (of *La*. 198 E) cannot capture the victory-spoils without accurate predictions about the future, supplied by the diviner. Since statecraft is repeatedly understood by analogy with the other crafts, it would be strange if we were not supposed to think of it in a similar way: viz. that statesmen cannot produce their peculiar works (sc. the correct use of the various products of craft knowledge, including warcraft) without the products supplied by various craftsmen (*Euthd*. 290 D, 291 C).

[20] *Prot*. 319 A–B with 360 D–361 B; *Gorg*. 464 B–D with 500 B and 517 B–C; see also *Euthph*. 2 D–3 A and *Ap*. 31 C–32 A. The philosophical impasse of the *Euthydemus*'s second protreptic actually turns on Socrates' (intentional?) misinterpretation of the first protreptic's conclusion: Socrates reminds Cleinias that they found wisdom to be the 'only' good (292 B), but now evidently interprets this to mean not simply that wisdom was the sole bearer of inherent *helpfulness*, but that it was the only thing good *as an end* (292 B 7–C 1).

he claimed his accusers are incapable of injuring him in *any* way (30 C 8).[21]

Based on 30 C–D, therefore, Socrates would appear willing to assent to

(SNI) Socrates does not risk being injured in any way by his inferiors.

Based on 41 D, he would appear similarly willing to assent to

(SNB) Socrates does not risk receiving anything bad from his inferiors.

But given 37 B–38 B (and 25 D–E), Socrates appears *not* to be prepared to assent to SNI or SNB.

In order for an interpretation to provide a satisfactory account of all the relevant passages, it must not simply make them consistent, but also make sense of Socrates' attempt (particularly at 41 D) to provide the virtuous with meaningful consolation; further, it must not require that he assign to the knowledge of good and bad a greater power than he really thinks it has. The *best* interpretation would not only achieve those results, but would also preserve the literalness of Socrates' words: ideally, we would like Socrates to mean what he says; otherwise, his boasts and promises are misleading or empty. As Plato makes Socrates himself say, 'It is surely likely that a wise man would not trifle with words; let us, therefore, follow him closely' (*Theaet*. 152 B).

4. Do the virtuous risk living unlivable lives?

Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith settle for a less than literal interpretation of Socrates' words at 30 C–D and 41 D.[22] Socrates, they say, means not that for a good person there is nothing bad at all, but only that for a good person nothing bad can happen *to his soul*:

Since we maintain that he is claiming that no absolute harm comes to the good soul, Socrates must concede that although neither Meletus nor

[21] It will soon be clear why I reject Vlastos's suggestion that the negation here is merely a 'de-intensifying' one (*Socrates*, 218–21).

[22] *Plato's Socrates*, 121–3.

anyone else could ever harm his soul, unjust treatment could, nevertheless, harm him relatively, indeed, to such a degree as to make his life no longer worth living. (*Plato's Socrates*, 122; cf. 135–6)

So on their interpretation, Socrates does not really mean what he *says* at all; for he realizes that his accusers can injure him in ways both many and *great*; and for the virtuous person not only are there bad things many and great, but they are so great that virtue is not even sufficient for a good life. Socrates' boasts and promises are empty: if virtue provides no protection against a bad life, it is no consolation to say that it cannot be taken away.

5. May the virtuous be made unhappy 'by accident'?

Penner interprets Socrates' claim at *Apology* 30 C–D to mean that Socrates' inferiors cannot *artfully* injure him because they lack knowledge of good and bad. 'Of course what they do might *by accident* damage Socrates—make him a worse person'[23] Penner does not explain how such a thing might happen even by accident. But if his interpretation were correct, it would be strange that Socrates does not appear to acknowledge the possibility Penner mentions. Socrates would certainly say that the many lack knowledge of good and bad and, for that reason alone, could not achieve even what they *suppose* is good for them, viz. injuring people they think are enemies. But that does not seem to be the only or even the primary point of *Ap*. 30 C 8–D 1, and certainly not the primary point of 41 D.

The main problem with Penner's interpretation is that if Socrates were to allow that the virtuous are ever harmed accidentally, then what looked like boasts and consolations would be significantly deflated once they are understood. 'Meletus can't injure me at all' would become 'Meletus can't injure me at all, unless he's lucky'. 'There is nothing bad' would become 'There is nothing bad, except bad luck'. How are the virtuous, including Socrates himself, supposed to be so confident if there is a possibility that their virtue may be taken away even if it is just as a result of their enemies' 'good luck'?

[23] 'Two Notes on the *Crito*: The Impotence of the Many, and "Persuade or Obey"', *Classical Quarterly*, NS 47 (1997), 153–66 at 154 (emphasis original).

6. Do the virtuous risk losing minor intrinsic goods?

Vlastos offers a somewhat more appealing non-literal interpretation of Socrates' words: he suggests that when Socrates speaks of 'no injury' (30 C–D) and 'nothing bad' (41 D), he is speaking hyperbolically: what Socrates really means is no *non-trivial* injury, no *great* evil.[24] On this interpretation, Socrates' words, if true, should provide the virtuous with significant consolation: virtue, according to Vlastos's interpretation, is a very great intrinsic good, being the major (though not sole) component of happiness.

The main disadvantage of Vlastos's interpretation is in its excessive watering down of Socrates' statements. Given Socrates' actual words and their context, he appears to be making a remarkably bold claim about virtue's value and power: he does not talk as if he were making *any* sacrifices in his pursuit of virtue. Vlastos suggests that we interpret Socrates' words not literally, but as hyperbole. We can understand that, if a person is expressing views very dear to him, and especially in a situation where he feels obliged to defend those views, he may be inclined to state them in an exaggerated form. But then such statements do not faithfully represent his actual views. My aim, however, is to find an interpretation on which Socrates' statements come out consistent *and* accurately representative of his views. If every time a person expresses the basic principles of his view we are driven to say that he is speaking hyperbolically,[25] we might question whether we really understand his view.

Vlastos attempts not only to make Socrates' statements consistent, but also to make them sound more amenable to common sense. Undoubtedly most of us find it incredible to suppose that, if it makes no difference to one's virtue, there is no difference in value between one's being an inmate in a concentration camp and one's being an 'inmate' of a college campus.[26] Vlastos insists that for Socrates too there would be a difference (though very slight, since 'non-moral' goods make only a relatively small contribution to happiness). But Socrates in the *Apology*[27] never actually endorses such

[24] Vlastos, *Socrates*, 219, 221.

[25] In addition to the *Apology* passages, Vlastos admits that he must interpret *Crito* 48 B and *Gorg.* 470 E non-literally as well. We should find it a little strange that Socrates never states in literal terms the view that Vlastos thinks he holds.

[26] Vlastos, *Socrates*, 215–16.

[27] And arguably in the other early dialogues. There is good reason to suppose that

a position; given what is said there, it is plausible to think Socrates would say—however untrue it may appear—that if it really makes no difference to one's virtue, there is no difference in value between those alternatives.

7. If only instrumentally good, is virtue sufficient for happiness?

Terence Irwin proposes a clever way round the problem of reconciling Socrates' apparently conflicting claims.[28] He thinks Socrates held that virtue, though a purely instrumental means to happiness—being knowledge of good and bad[29]—is a means sufficient for happiness because it ensures the satisfaction of the *virtuous person's* desires. Irwin suggests that according to Socrates only a virtuous person has the ability to limit his desires to the objects that are possible to have, given his circumstances, no matter what those circumstances are. So, in spite of subjection to the gravest injustices or the direst misfortunes, the virtuous person can have satisfied desires and consequently be happy. Irwin acknowledges that in the extreme case the virtuous person will be forced to limit his desires to no more than the desire to be virtuous.[30] But, Irwin maintains, Socrates rejects the idea that that amounts to a failure on the part of virtue to ensure happiness; for even in the extreme case, all of the virtuous person's desires (just *one* in that case) are satisfied. Irwin thinks Socrates' view of moral psychology commits him to the possibility of successfully limiting one's desire to desire simply for virtue in cases where virtue offers no hope of providing anything else:

> [H]e believes that everyone's desires are all concentrated on his own happiness and the means to it; as soon as we see that an action does not promote our happiness we will lose the desire to do it. (Irwin, 'Socrates the Epicurean', 206)[31]

whenever Socrates appears to attribute intrinsic goodness to possessions other than virtue, he does so only on behalf of his interlocutors. Vlastos's main evidence, *Gorg.* 467 E (*Socrates*, 226, 305), is no exception (see my note 45; also E. R. Dodds, *Plato:* Gorgias (Oxford, 1959), on 451 E 2 and 467 E 4; Brickhouse and Smith, *Plato's Socrates*, 111; Burnyeat, '*Apology* 30B2–4', 3–4).

[28] 'Socrates the Epicurean', 206; *Plato's Ethics*, 74–5.

[29] Irwin, 'Socrates the Epicurean', 210.

[30] *Plato's Ethics*, 74–5.

[31] Irwin says that, though he believes Socrates is ultimately committed to the view that a virtuous person's ability to control his desires makes his happiness

The problem with Irwin's solution is that it does not deal well with the extreme case just mentioned; and this it must deal with if it is to account adequately for Socrates' claims at *Apology* 30 C–D and 41 D, for there Socrates appears to be envisaging just this sort of case. Irwin makes a great deal of the point that Socrates regards virtue as a purely instrumental good; he thinks that Socrates allots it no intrinsic value. But in the extreme case, he imagines that Socrates would desire nothing more than virtue. The inevitable consequence of this, on Irwin's interpretation, is that Socrates will in that case be satisfied with possessing just this purely instrumental good and with possessing *no intrinsic goods*: in the extreme case, a purely instrumental *means* will become the sole ultimate *end*. Irwin may be right that Socrates holds some desire-satisfactionist conception of happiness. He may even be right that according to Socrates we need to set limits on our desires in order to be happy. But to be at all charitable to Socrates, we must on his behalf reject either the possibility of eliminating one's desires for ends and of limiting oneself to desires for mere means, or the idea that one may be happy if only one's desires for mere means are satisfied when there is no satisfaction of desires for ends. Irwin has Socrates accept both of these. We can certainly hope for a more appealing solution to our difficulty.

8. The virtuous risk losing extrinsic but not intrinsic goods

Before I offer my solution to the problematic texts, let me distinguish two ways in which something bad or injurious might be brought about for someone:

X *damages* P =df. X causes P to lose some intrinsic good that P already possessed, or X causes P to gain some intrinsic bad that P did not already have.
X *obstructs* P =df. X decreases P's ability to gain intrinsic good (or decreases P's ability to be rid of intrinsic bad).

If one is not yet happy, obstruction either slows or (by total obstruction) stops progress toward happiness; if one already has some

invulnerable, Socrates' claims about bodily health at *Crito* 47 D–E and *Gorg.* 505 A provide some evidence for thinking that he did not 'stick consistently' to that view (ibid. 213). I deal with these passages on pp. 19–20.

happiness, it slows or stops the accumulation of more. Damage is either an actual reduction in happiness or otherwise a regression away from happiness.

It would obviously not be very impressive to claim that the virtuous have complete immunity against obstructive injuries, while fully allowing that they are susceptible to damaging injuries. Nor can Socrates be allowing that the virtuous are susceptible to great damage. But it cannot be that he is ruling out only the possibility of some kinds of damage (say, small ones); as I have already argued, such an interpretation would hardly square with Socrates' claim that there is *nothing* bad for the virtuous and that they cannot be injured *at all*.

Alternative interpretations remain. Socrates seems to be ruling out all possibility of damage, suggesting that the virtuous are guaranteed happiness. If so, he cannot be thinking simply of the inherent helpfulness of the knowledge of good and bad; for that does not guarantee happiness. So he must be thinking not of virtue's helpfulness, but of its *intrinsic* value: he believes that virtuous people—owing simply to their virtue—possess an amount of intrinsic good sufficient for happiness and that that happiness cannot be taken away.

It is possible, on this interpretation, that Socrates thinks there are intrinsic goods other than virtue. But they would have to be such that they cannot be taken away from the virtuous; for if a virtuous person were to possess, in addition to virtue, some intrinsic good that could be taken away, then it would be possible for a virtuous person to be damaged. Let me set aside for now the question of whether Socrates thinks there are intrinsic goods other than virtue, and return to the propositions about his invulnerability to injury, SNI and SNB.

The injury and the bad therein appear to be only of the damaging kind: Socrates thinks he cannot be damaged. On the other hand, when he does allow that he may suffer injury (*Ap.* 25 D 1) or something bad (25 E, 37 B–38 B), he must (if he is not contradicting himself) be thinking only of the obstructive kind of injury. This fits very well with 37 B–38 B; for clearly being silenced is bad only obstructively: it takes away his ability to discuss and examine (37 E–38 A), the value of which (it is natural to suppose) is instrumental. It is plausible that Socrates would similarly explain the badness of imprisonment and exile: they would take away his freedom to

philosophize[32] with whomever he wants, especially those reputed to be wise. Likewise, being fed in the Prytaneion is 'good' because it will help him continue to examine people (36 D). In the whole passage (surrounding and including 37 B–38 B), therefore, it seems that he is discussing things that are bad only obstructively and good only instrumentally. Only these do the Athenians have the power to bring about. We need not think that Socrates has in mind any other kind of injury at 25 D–E.

What protection does virtue, then, provide according to my interpretation? Intrinsically neutral things like imprisonment are bad inasmuch as they can prevent one who has not acquired anything intrinsically good from acquiring any, and inasmuch as they can prevent one who has already obtained some from acquiring more. So, according to Socrates, though we have some reason (since we want *maximum* happiness) to avoid such things whether or not we have a positive quantity of intrinsic goodness, we have no reason to fear that they will ruin what happiness we may already have: they cannot cause one to *lose* intrinsic goods. So virtue is supposed to provide bona fide consolation to those who have it to some degree. Socrates' view is that, though there are things that can prevent a good person from becoming *better*, there is nothing that can make a good person *worse*,[33] and being as good as possible is all that ultimately matters.

9. Why the virtuous do not fear the many: virtue cannot be taken away

Passages from the *Crito* not only corroborate the interpretation I have offered of *Apology* 30 C–D and 41 D, but also provide good reason for thinking that Socrates considered virtue to be the only intrinsic good there is.

In the *Crito* Socrates makes a claim that sounds similar to the

[32] Cf. R. Kraut, *Socrates and the State* [*The State*] (Princeton, 1984), 38–9 n. 21; Brickhouse and Smith, *Trial*, 116–17; Reeve, *Socrates in the* Apology, 143.

[33] The claim at *Ap.* 30 C–D leaves open the possibility that a person *better* (i.e. more virtuous) than Socrates *could* damage him. Socrates would evidently respond to this worry by saying that the virtuous never *wish* to harm others' souls (even though in some sense they may have the capacity to do so). At *Ap.* 25 C–E he seems to present a reason for this. But his most serious argument for it is in the *Crito*: harming others is unjust (49 C), and it is never virtuous to do injustice (47 D, 49 B).

claim at *Apology* 30 C–D. Crito is concerned that Socrates is not taking seriously the Athenians' power to cause him great harm: 'The things now present, of themselves, make it clear that the many can produce not the smallest of the bad things but almost the greatest, if anyone is slandered before them' (44 D). But Socrates is not convinced that he ought to give *any* consideration to what the many think or do:

> It would be a benefit, Crito, if only it *were* possible that the many produce the greatest bad things, so that it would also be possible that they produce the greatest goods, and then things would stand admirably. But as it now is, it's not possible that they produce either. For they are capable neither of making one wise [*φρόνιμος*] nor of making one unwise [*ἄφρων*] . . . (44 D)

Not only does he characterize being unwise as the greatest bad, but he likens the things the many are capable of producing—imprisonment, death, seizure of assets—to mere bogeys[34] that scare only children (46 C). If Socrates thought that the many were a threat to even the smallest intrinsic goods in his possession, it would be strange of him to characterize the threat with this particular metaphor. Bogeys are not just *little*, or otherwise insignificant, sources of fear; they are *imaginary* sources of fear, not worthy of *any* fear. Accordingly, I suggest that this metaphor marks a difference in kind, not degree; for Socrates there is a sense of 'bad' according to which it makes sense to say that imprisonment etc. are not *really* bad: they are neither intrinsically bad nor even *damaging* (though they may be *obstructively* 'bad' or 'fearsome' by preventing further intrinsic good). It is the same point he made in the *Apology*; the difference is that at *Crito* 44 D not only does Socrates express the view that having a good condition of the soul provides protection against evil, but he also indicates in more explicit terms why this condition protects: it is, he explains, the 'greatest' of goods. I suggest this means it is the only *intrinsic* good.

Might wisdom (*φρόνησις*) here not refer instead simply to knowledge of good and bad, with Socrates thinking of its instrumental value? That interpretation would ruin his attempt to console Crito; for what he says at 44 D would then simply not be true (even on his own account of knowledge of good and bad) and should then not console Crito at all. At 44 D Socrates implies that (i) he need not fear the many, because (ii) the many cannot make him unwise—(iii) lack

[34] Cf. *Gorg.* 473 C–D; *Phaedo* 77 E.

of wisdom being the worst bad thing there is. But if wisdom here were just knowledge of good and bad in its instrumental capacity and if Socrates were not suggesting that wisdom is the sole intrinsic good,[35] then there would be no clear sense of 'fear' on which (ii) could support (i). The reason for this would simply be that there is no clear sense of 'bad' on which (iii) would be true; for, assuming that Socrates is not here taking a stance on what is intrinsically good, he should easily imagine that the many—without taking away knowledge of good and bad—could still take away happiness by removing all its other necessary conditions. Though Socrates certainly regards knowledge of good and bad as useful in a way nothing else is, he realizes that without certain materials it is powerless to produce the correct use of materials that is necessary for happiness. In at least this sense, it appears that being deprived of the knowledge of good and bad is no *worse* than being deprived of all those other materials. Since it would thus be easy to imagine the many's taking away bodily well-being, all one's wealth and possessions, one's family and friends, and any other materials that may be necessary for correct use,[36] what consolation would one find in the fact they cannot take away or diminish one's knowledge of good and bad? It is not plausible that at *Crito* 44 D Socrates is considering only or primarily the instrumental value of wisdom and lack of wisdom; for there *would* then be something worse than lack of wisdom, viz. whatever it is for which wisdom is supposed to be instrumentally useful in avoiding.

10. Goodness of soul as the sole ultimate end

If wisdom in 44 D were not supposed to be the sole intrinsic good in the way I propose, we could not explain Socrates' reaction to Crito's appeals to Socrates' supposed self- and other-regarding interests. After reviewing some conclusions of past conversations, Socrates tells Crito, we must (as always) consider only which act is just, 'whereas the considerations you speak of concerning money,

[35] As he does in the *Phaedo*. There wisdom (*φρόνησις*) is the soul's apprehending philosophical truth (79 D, 66 B–C), considered as the sole ultimate end (66 B, E). And it is philosophical truth not even particularly about good and bad, but in general about all 'the things that are' (66 A, 90 D).

[36] Compare how easy it is for Polus (*Gorg.* 473 E) and Glaucon (*Rep.* 2, 361 E–362 A) to imagine this.

reputation, and nurture of children—truly those, Crito, are things considered [only] by . . . the many' (48 C). I suggest that the Socratic imperative to consider 'nothing other than' what is just (48 C–D) is founded ultimately and wholly upon concern for the soul's condition, rather than upon the expectation that focusing on 'justice' will ensure satisfaction of financial, reputational, familial, and such concerns. This interpretation is supported by Socrates' self-confessed inattention to familial and conventionally personal matters, which comes from relentless soul-care (*Ap.* 23 B–C, 31 B, 36 B 6–C 1, 36 C 5–7). It is likewise supported by Socrates' review in the *Crito* of past conversations.

Crito and Socrates have often agreed that one should always act only according to the opinion of the expert about the just, the admirable, and the good (47 C–D), just as one whose sole concern is exercise (i.e., ultimately, the body's condition) should act only according to the expert about the healthy (the doctor and/or trainer) (47 A–B). It is important to keep in mind that 'the healthy' is introduced here not as a *part* of the just, the admirable, and the good, but strictly as an *analogue* to the latter.[37] Indeed, the expert about the just, the admirable, and the good is *identified* with the expert whose purview is specifically the good of the soul (47 C–D),[38] rather than of the body or of anything else; just as, analogously, the health expert's purview is the good of the body (47 B–C). So, just as the exerciser *qua* exerciser *identifies* his real ultimate interest with what concerns the expert about health, Socrates wants us similarly to *identify* our real ultimate interest with that which concerns the expert about the just, the admirable, and the good.[39]

Such a conclusion is in any case *independently* suggested by the sole reason Socrates gives for doing the just and avoiding the unjust.

[37] The person in the example—the *γυμναζόμενος ἀνήρ*—is clearly one of those who 'live [only] for the body, moulding it into shape' (*Phaedo* 82 D 3; *Tim.* 88 C 3). No one else would think to act 'in that way alone' which the trainer considers best (*Crito* 47 B 9). Socrates certainly never suggests that 'we' should so act. An ox-meat diet is best for Polydamas the pancratiast—best 'with respect to his body' (*Rep.* 1, 338 C 8)—but presumably not best for us *even if* it is best for our bodies.

[38] We may find it odd that in the *Crito* Socrates avoids using the term 'soul' to name 'that which becomes better by the just and is ruined by the unjust' (47 D; cf. 47 E 6–7, 47 E 8–48 A). But I think, with most scholars, that the assumption that he just means *the soul* is natural and unproblematic. The discussion, after all, is supposed to be mere review; ellipsis is understandable.

[39] Similarly, in the *Laches*, to identify which pursuits are good and bad for a person (186 C–D) is the peculiar business of the expert about the soul (185 D–E).

The reason the person whose concerns are bodily should obey the trainer—i.e. do the healthy and avoid the unhealthy—is that otherwise he will ruin his body (47 C). The reason we should always obey the expert about the just, the admirable, and the good is that otherwise we will ruin our soul (47 D, 47 E 6–48 A 7). *This* is the basis for the Socratic imperative never to consider anything other than what is just. Just as the healthy act is what is instrumentally good for the body and so considered as best by the knower of the body's good, so the just act[40] is what is 'helpful' (47 E 7, i.e. instrumentally good) for the soul and so considered as best by the knower of the soul's good.[41] The good of our soul is always that for the sake of which we should act.

'Justice' here might suggest to some that Socrates has in mind concerns ultimately for things other than the agent's soul. But we are actually told that the just and unjust 'pertain/belong to [*περί*]' the soul (47 E 8–48 A 1), even as the healthy and the unhealthy pertain to the body (47 C). And there is good reason to suppose that 'just' is understood as having the same extension as 'good' and 'admirable' do: at *Crito* 48 C–D Socrates asserts there is *nothing* that one must consider other than whether one does justice or injustice, despite acknowledging at 47 C–D and 48 A that we must consider the good and the admirable as well as the just. Indeed, at 48 B 8 we are told that living well and living admirably and living justly are 'the same' (cf. 49 A 5–6, 49 B 4–5). Evidently, then, the concern for 'justice' is none other than the concern for 'the good', as I have already argued.

In the passage I have been considering, where Socrates uses the exerciser/trainer analogy, he is apparently offering an account of what ultimately makes a bad act bad. If certain acts were bad because they took away non-psychic goods or introduced non-psychic bads, then in explaining what is ultimately bad about them, it would be irrelevant to point out that they adversely affected the soul (*even if* we were to assume that that happened to be among such acts' consequences). In justifying the imperative always to act justly, Socrates speaks only of soul's well-being, giving us every reason to

[40] 'The just' and 'the unjust' at 47 D 4–5 and 47 E 7 refer to actions (cf. *Rep.* 4, 444 C–E, and Irwin, *PMT*, 296 n. 24).

[41] Damage to soul is not only a necessary condition of failing to do what is just, but is also presumably sufficient for it: just as any act that ruins the body will be considered unhealthy by the bodily expert, so presumably any act that ruins the soul will be considered unjust by the psychic expert.

suppose that he considers it not only an ultimate end, but the sole ultimate end, of action. We cannot suppose with Vlastos[42] that the imperative is a mere rule of thumb that ensures maximum happiness by focusing our attention on happiness's major constituent.

The passage indicates, moreover, that knowledge of the good is valuable (at least instrumentally) *for the sake of* a condition of the soul. This condition must be distinct from knowledge of the good; for Socrates allows that everyone—even the virtuous—is subject at least to obstructive injuries (*Ap.* 25 C 7–9; cf. 37 B–38 B), which seems to imply that, even for a knower of the good, there is more intrinsic good to be achieved. I believe the condition he has in mind is philosophical knowledge, including but not limited to knowledge of the good, though now is not the time to defend this specific interpretation.

11. Can bodily deterioration make the virtuous unhappy?

Socrates may seem to endorse the idea that life with a 'defective and deteriorated' body is not worth living (*Crito* 47 D–E; cf. *Gorg.* 505 A, 512 A). This proposition is often taken to imply that if bodily affliction is severe enough, it will make even the *virtuous* person's life not worth living.[43] Socrates, however, never says that. In fact, such an interpretation would conflict with *Apology* 30 C–D and 41 D;[44] for what kind of consolation does Socrates think he is offering the virtuous in those passages, and how can he himself be so confident, if a virtuous person may be made unhappy by someone's simply applying enough corporeal deterioration either to remove psychic virtue or to keep it from producing happiness?

There is independent reason for concluding that Socrates does not contradict himself. First, we must keep *Crito* 47 D–E in context: at this point in the discussion, the exerciser/trainer analogy has already been in play. I have argued that this was introduced *strictly*

[42] *Socrates*, 210–11.

[43] Kraut, *The State*, 38 n. 21; Irwin, 'Socrates the Epicurean', 213; Vlastos, *Socrates*, 218 n. 69; Brickhouse and Smith, *Plato's Socrates*, 111, 115.

[44] Not to mention *Gorg.* 522 C 4–D 2 and 527 D 1–2 + C 5–6. Recall that in the *Gorgias* Socrates explicitly maintains, in spite of the comments about health at 505 A and 512 A, that one's '*entire* happiness is in' (470 E 8, my emphasis) 'how [one] is disposed [ἔχει] concerning [one's] education and justness' (470 E 6–7). This is a roundabout, but typically Greek, way of saying that one's happiness is entirely determined by how virtuous one is, i.e. (for Socrates) how well 'educated' one is.

as an analogy and therefore does not imply that health is understood as a part of our real interests. Second, we must note that Socrates does not *assert* that life with a deteriorated body is not worth living; it is a *question* Socrates asks Crito (47 D 7–E 1, E 3–4), who readily answers yes. Socrates evidently thinks this answer helps people like Crito grasp the analogous point he is trying to make about psychic health at 47 E–48 A. We need not suppose that Socrates himself requires such help. I suspect that *he* would say (as the Socrates of *Rep*. 10, 610 A–B, suggests) that no bodily affliction can take virtue away from those who already have it, even though it may prevent someone from getting it in the first place or from getting more of it once one already had some.[45]

I conclude, then, that for Socrates virtue has a value over and above its practical application. Virtue makes the soul good not just *at* something, but *intrinsically* good. In fact, as I have shown, there is according to Socrates a certain condition of one's soul that is the only thing intrinsically valuable for one. It is for the sake of this and this alone that Socrates values virtuous activity—i.e. activity in accordance with knowledge of good and bad. Only this understanding of virtue makes adequate sense of and does full justice to Socrates' bold claims about the invulnerability of the virtuous.

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[45] In the *Gorgias* Socrates does say, 'I don't suppose it is profitable for a human to live with a defective body; for it's a necessity that he must thus live defectively too' (505 A). Assuming the *Gorgias* is 'transitional', the assertion may be a Platonic embellishment. Even if it is not, it is made in the context of an analogy established much earlier. At 478 B–C, for example, just being healed is similarly characterized as 'beneficial' and 'profitable' because it is release from a 'great evil'. This example is telling because here it is quite clear that 'great evil' is understood as *great evil with respect to body* (477 B 3–5), and one who is never sick is 'happiest' but only happiest *concerning the body* (478 C 3). The 'benefit' or 'profit', therefore, in being healed is benefit or profit with respect specifically to body. I suggest that the claim at 505 A be so understood. The point is never made independently of the analogy. Similarly, when in *Republic* bk. 1 Socrates talks as though medicine brings about a 'benefit' (e.g. 332 D, 346 A, 346 D), he is not implying that this is necessarily in fact beneficial for the person's life except in so far as it brings about the *supposed* goal of bodily health. The only 'advantage' the doctor *qua* doctor looks to is health, never considering whether health is really advantageous for the person's life. 'What is advantageous' for a thing is simply, for the sake of argument, identified (1, 341 E–352 A; cf. 10, 608 E–609 A) with the 'virtue' the thing needs in order not to be 'base/faulty', i.e. bad at producing its ἔργον (1, 352 E–353 C). So health is said to be 'advantageous' *for the body* (341 E) independently of its advantageousness for the person's life in general.

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