

Happiness

Reading 10 – Plato & Socrates

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"He who lives well is blessed and happy." —Socrates

"Long is the path that leads to happiness through words alone. But the path that leads to happiness through the practice of daily deeds is short." —Crates of Thebes

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Plato & Socrates

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This reading comes from the Cave's
Happiness—What the Ancient Greeks Thought and Said about Happiness.

As the title indicates, this reading, after a brief introduction, presents what Plato (and Socrates) thought and said about happiness.

"If Phoebus Apollo had not sent Plato to the Greeks, then how would they have been healed by learning? But he did send him. And just as Apollo's son Asclepius is a healer of the body, so Plato is a healer of the immortal soul."

—Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*

PLATO (c. 428/7-347¹ BC) WAS A DREAMER. That stated, we must acknowledge that he was not only a man with his thoughts in the sky—in the realm of Being itself, of the Ideas, of absolute things like Beauty itself or the Good. No, he was also a man of action.

In fact, beginning when he was about forty years old, Plato ventured three times across the sea from

Athens in Attica to Syracuse in Sicily in order to spread the benefits of philosophy and try to implement a good—if not ideal—form of government. The goal was a regime of laws in place of the whims of men, one that aimed at true liberty. The problem? To realize his plan, he had to work with a series of tyrants—with Dionysus I of Syracuse; his brother-in-

law, Dion; and Dionysus' out-of-control son, Dionysus II.

Here are the highlights of Plato's effort according to one version of the story that has come down to us. When Plato criticized tyranny as a form of government, declaring that "the self-interest of the ruler alone is not the most important thing," Dionysus angrily told Plato that he was going on "like a foolish old man." In response, Plato suggested that Dionysus himself was going on "like a tyrant." This according to the ancient biographer Diogenes Laertius. Unsurprisingly, the tyrant was not at all pleased. Instead, furious with the philosopher, he threatened him with death, and when he was finally talked down from murdering Plato, he sold him into slavery.²

Whether the story is true or not, a few facts remain. One, dealing with tyrants is a dangerous business. Two, Plato nevertheless believed it was his obligation to help when and where possible. This was true not only for the politics of governing a city but also for the business of living well and happily.

We observe the latter in Plato's seventh letter, where he boldly announces that he is not a fan of the typical Syracusan way of life, the so-called "happy life," one dedicated to the pursuit of pleasure, characterized by daily feasts and nightly sexual romps.³ In the *Republic*, Plato designates this lifestyle the life of the majority, one in which they "graze and copulate" like cattle.⁴ It is a way of life, he asserts, that will inevitably lead to an unending succession of bad forms of government and to a similar succession of unhealthy kinds of soul. The last will end with a tyrannical soul, one in which the ever-shifting whims of desire oppress the ruled—that is, oneself.

Instead of letting matters get out of hand in this way, Plato recommends a monarchical soul, one in which reason rules through practical wisdom, the desires justly obey, and, consequently, the whole of life is contentedly harmonious since it is ordered toward what is good. This kind of soul, says Plato, is happy.

As he expresses the point in his seventh letter, no "man can ever become happy unless he spends his life allied with practical wisdom and justice."⁵

It's hard to know if Plato himself was happy. An Athenian by birth who was born when the Peloponnesian War between Sparta and Athens was raging in the latter third of the fifth century BC, and related by his mother to the great Athenian law reformer and statesman Solon, Plato's first choice in life had been to engage in politics, that most Athenian of sports. In the end, however, he pursued the life of philosophy because *post bellum* Athenian politics left him feeling dizzy, madly shifting one way and then another with revolutionary change and violence. Moreover, he witnessed the men of Athens put Socrates to death in 399 BC, the man he considered "the most just of men then alive."⁶

Fortunately, Plato didn't let Socrates die. Rather, he took the man who taught him how to ask questions and pursue a line of thought to its very end, and he wrote him in to most of his dialogues as the main character. Therein, we encounter Socrates fully alive again, with the "power to charm the souls of men."⁷ Therein, he's conversing with a whole cast of other well-drawn characters, and, indeed, he's dialoguing with us, as we read along and participate in the discussion.

The fact that Plato included Socrates as the main character in most of his dialogues raises the so-called "Socratic problem." When Socrates speaks, it is hard to know whether Plato is giving Socrates' position or his own. It's a question that scholars have long debated and perhaps one that is too complex for a short introduction. Presently, let's just note the problem and agree to return to it when we meet up with Xenophon's presentation of Socrates in the next chapter. For now, we'll let "Plato" stand for both Plato and Socrates, fully acknowledging the fact that we really don't know who thought and said what.⁸

A final point before we get to Plato himself. Unless otherwise noted, all of the following selections come from Plato.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

We'll begin with Plato's basic formula for happiness, that happiness equals living and doing well and nobly.⁹

Socrates: He who lives well is blessed and happy. It's the opposite for the man who does not.¹⁰

Socrates: In whatever he does, the good man does well and nobly. And he who does well is blessed and happy.¹¹

But what does it mean to live and do well and nobly? It is to be good, to be virtuous. Happiness, then, comes about by means of virtue, which is the same as being good and thus living and doing well.

Aristotle (praising Plato) He was the first among mortals to visibly show by his own personal life and the investigations of his dialogues how the good man is also a happy man.¹²

Diogenes Laertius Plato held that the goal of life is to become god-like, and that virtue is sufficient in itself for happiness.¹³

The Athenian: One kind of life is sweeter than the other . . . In short, in comparison with a vicious life, the virtuous life in body and soul is not only more pleasant, but it also rises above the other in terms of beauty, correctness, excellence, and good reputation. Consequently, if a man lives with virtue, he will live with complete happiness.¹⁴

Socrates: Will the soul be able to perform its own function well if it is lacking its own virtue? Or will it be unable?

Thrasymachus: Unable.

Socrates: Necessarily, then, a bad soul rules and manages things badly, and a good soul does everything well?

Thrasymachus: Necessarily. . . .

Socrates: But he who lives well is blessed and happy.¹⁵

*If happiness comes about by means of virtue, then what is virtue?*¹⁶

Socrates: In the first place, virtue signifies ease of

motion, and secondly, that the flow of the good soul is always unimpeded.¹⁷

Socrates: It appears, then, that virtue is a kind of health and beauty and good condition of the soul.¹⁸

Socrates: Virtue is the means by which a thing performs its function well.¹⁹

If, among other descriptives ("ease of motion," "unimpeded . . . flow of the good soul," "health and beauty and good condition") virtue is "the means by which a thing performs its function well," then what is a thing's function or work? With the first statement that follows, Socrates offers a simple definition of "the function of a thing." The second selection explains "function" with several examples, ending with the prior simple definition.

Socrates: The function of a thing is that which it alone can do, or what it does better, than anything else.²⁰

Socrates: Would you say that a horse has a specific function or work?

Thrasymachus: Sure.

Socrates: Would you be willing to define the function or work of a horse—or of anything else for that matter—to be that which one can do only with it or best with it?

Thrasymachus: I don't understand.

Socrates: Well, let me express it this way. Apart from the eyes, is there anything else by which you can see?

Thrasymachus: Of course not.

Socrates: Again, can you hear with anything other than the ears?

Thrasymachus: There's no other way.

Socrates: Isn't it right, then, to say that seeing is the function of the eyes and hearing the function of the ears?

Thrasymachus: Yes, by all means.

Socrates: Once more, you could use a dagger, a sword, a butcher knife, and many other instruments to trim vine branches. . . . But I imagine that nothing will work or perform as well in comparison with a pruning knife.

Thrasymachus: True.

Socrates: Must we not assume, then, that pruning is the function of a pruning knife?

Thrasymachus: We must.

Socrates: I imagine you will now better understand that the function of a thing is that which it alone can do, or what it does better, than anything else.²¹

Since for Plato happiness corresponds to virtue, and virtue corresponds to a thing's function as "the means by which a thing performs its function well," and because a thing's function corresponds to its nature (a point Plato makes in the Timaeus and the Cratylus²²), then we must investigate what a human being is, that is, what human nature is. We'll begin with the basics—that is, general human nature, which is a composite of body and soul.

Socrates: The whole [human being], composed of a soul and a body, is called an animal—that is, a living being.²³

What is the body? The body serves the soul as its means of locomotion; it is, as it were, the soul's chariot upon the earth.

Timaeus: The mortal body was made to be the chariot of the soul. . . . It is the means of easy transportation . . . upon the earth, which has all manner of heights and hollows.²⁴

What is the soul? The soul itself has three parts, here (in the Phaedrus) compared to a charioteer with his chariot hitched to two horses. One of the horses is good and noble; the other is not. We'll discover more about these three parts of the soul in a moment.

Socrates: The soul is like the composite union that arises from a yoked pair of winged horses and their winged charioteer. . . . As for human beings, the charioteer of the soul holds the reins, driving and guiding the pair of horses. Yet another point: one of the horses is good and noble, of noble stock, whereas the other horse is quite the opposite. This is why driving the chariot of the soul is necessarily difficult and

troublesome for us.²⁵

Plato offers another image of the soul in the Republic, a dialogue that explores the nature of justice. In order to understand what justice is, Socrates and his interlocutors search for it in an imaginary city. The city itself has three basic parts: the ruling part, the auxiliary guarding and law-enforcing part, and the producing-trading-money-making part. The question is whether the soul is like the city, and so, whether the soul similarly has three parts.

Socrates: Our inquiry is to see whether the soul possesses these three parts or forms [of the city] or not. We are agreed that the same number and same kinds, or parts, are in both the city and the soul.²⁶

Shortly after their agreement, Socrates and Glaucon (Plato's brother) attempt to discover—by means of argument and a process of asking and answering questions—the three parts of the soul. Corresponding respectively to the three parts of the city mentioned a moment ago, they are the rational, the spirited, and the desiring parts.

Socrates: It would be reasonable, then, to state that these two parts of the soul are different from each other. We'll call the part of the soul by which it calculates and reasons the rational part. And the part with which it desires, hungers, and thirsts, and feels the passionate excitement of other longings, we'll call the non-rational and desiring part of the soul—the companion of various fill-me-ups and pleasures.

Glaucon: Yes, it would be reasonable. . . .

Socrates: Let us assume, then, that these two parts, or forms, have been separated from each other and marked off in the soul. Still, is the *thumos*—the heart or spirit, that by which we are provoked and feel angry—a third, spirited part, or is it the same as the rational part or the desiring part? . . . Again, is this high-spirited *thumos* a third part in the soul just as we found three separate kinds of people that held the city together—the counselor-deliberators, the auxiliary guardians, and the money-makers?

Glaucon: It must be a third part.²⁷

If there are three parts of the soul, then each part must have its own function (“what it alone can do, or what it does better, than anything else”) and virtue (“the means by which it performs its function well”). The same must be true for the body, as well as for the whole of human nature operating as a unity, body and soul (just as a city as a whole may operate well).

Keeping in mind that, for Plato, living well or virtuously amounts to happiness, let’s look at each of these happy-making virtues or excellences in turn, beginning with the body and working our way through each part of the soul until we get to the virtue or excellence of the whole. As for the body, health by means of physical training and medicine is its virtue.

Socrates: Physical training and medicine combine into a single art to care for the body.²⁸

Socrates: Simplicity in physical training or exercise begets health in bodies.²⁹

And now, the soul. The general nature of the soul is self-motion—that is, by nature, the soul is something that can move itself. To do so, however, the soul must decide where to go. Consequently, the general function of the soul is to deliberate and direct in order to get the soul moving in the best or most excellent direction.³⁰

Socrates: The very nature of the soul is self-motion.³¹

Socrates: The function of the soul is . . . management, rule, deliberation, and the like.³²

But what is the function of each part of the soul? And following upon the function, what is the virtue of each part?

The function of the rational part is to rule and direct the whole soul. It does this by means of wisdom, its virtue.

Socrates: It is the rational part’s function to rule since it is altogether wise and exercises foresight on behalf of the whole soul. . . . *The rational part will rule the desiring part . . . and guard the whole soul and body . . . by taking counsel and by deliberating. . . . We call a man wise because of the small part in him that rules*

and delivers these orders and exhortations, and by its knowledge of what is beneficial for each part and for the whole soul, the community of the three parts.³³

Socrates: The truth is that when wisdom is present, he who has it has no need for good luck.³⁴

The function of the spirited part of the soul is to listen to, obey, and carry out the rational part’s directives. Given the fight put up by the oftentimes disobedient desiring part (that unruly horse), as well as the agitation caused by pleasure and pain (what the desiring part moves toward or away from), the performance of this function requires courage, the spirited part’s virtue.

Socrates: The spirited part’s function is to listen to, obey, and be allied with the rational part of the soul. . . . *With the rational part, it will guard the whole soul and body . . . by carrying out the rational part’s resolutions by means of courage. . . . We call a man courageous, I suppose, because of the spirited part in him—when the spirited part carries out, through both pleasure and pain, the orders and exhortations of the rational part regarding what is to be feared and what is not.³⁵*

Next, the desiring part of the soul. As we see in the Symposium, for Plato, desire itself is a kind of poverty or lacking. Desire wants what it doesn’t have. Generally speaking, what is lacking is what is necessary. Therefore, the function of the desiring part of the soul is to seek what is generally necessary for survival and sufficient for well-being.

As Plato sees it, the problem with desire is not the yearning we may feel for wisdom (this is philosophy, the desire for or love of wisdom) or the desire we may feel to know and experience truth or the good or the beautiful. Instead, for most people the desire-problem appears relative to things like honor, money, food, wine, and sex. Rather than desiring enough food for health, for instance, or enough sex for reproduction and the continuation of the species, humans desire and seek these things in excess, in ways that are often positively unhealthy and harmful. We humans go beyond the necessary to the, strictly speaking, unnecessary.³⁶

Corresponding to the above function, then, the virtue of the desiring part of the soul is moderation, that excellence by which the desiring part listens to and obeys the ruling part of the soul and so properly directs desire toward what is necessary for each person's survival and well-being. When this happens, the whole soul operates together well.

Socrates: Moderation is some kind of order—power over and control of certain pleasures and desires. It is what people mean when they use the term, “self-control.” . . . The intended meaning of speaking this way seems to me to be that the soul of a man has a better part and a worse part, and to say “self-control” or “having power over oneself” means the control of the worse part by the naturally better part of the soul.³⁷

Socrates: The most significant features of moderation for most people are the following: one, listening to and being obedient to the rulers, and two, ruling over the pleasures of eating, drinking, and having sex.³⁸

Socrates: Moderation spreads throughout the whole soul, making the strongest, weakest, and intermediate parts sing in unison.³⁹

Socrates: The wise man is moderate because of the friendship and concord of the three parts of the soul, when the ruling part and the ruled agree that reason should rule.⁴⁰

The aforementioned “friendship and concord” point to the function and virtue of the soul as a whole. The whole soul is to operate in such a way that each part performs its own function well and does not interfere with or do the work of the other parts.

It may be useful to recall the imaginary city that runs well when each part does what it is supposed to do. Some in the city rule. Some enforce the directives of the ruling part. And some produce goods and trade these goods for the survival and well-being of the city. When each part functions well and does not interfere with the work of the other parts, the whole city thrives with harmony and well-being.

The same is true for the soul as a whole. When the

rational part rules with wisdom, and the spirited part listens to and enforces the directives of the rational part with courage, and the desiring part desires with moderation, heeding the rule of the rational part, then the whole soul operates in harmony. Like a string trio, it is a harmonious unity. This harmony is justice, the virtue of the soul as a whole, the means by which the soul does well.

Socrates: Justice is doing one's own work and not doing this, that, and the other thing that are not one's own.⁴¹

Socrates: The just man does not allow each part of the soul to perform the function or do the work of another part, or to interfere and meddle with another part's function or work. Rather, the just man does a good job arranging what is his own—ruling, ordering, and befriending himself, and harmonizing the three parts of the soul like three notes or intervals in a musical scale, high, low, and middle. And having joined and bound all three together, and all those in between, he himself becomes a harmonious unity, entirely one. . . . The just man believes that in everything the just, noble, and beautiful action is the one that preserves and brings about this harmonious condition of the soul, and that wisdom is the knowledge that presides over and supports such action.”⁴²

Socrates: When the whole soul follows the wisdom-loving part and there is no dissension within, the result for each part is that in every way it performs its own act and is just. Each part also enjoys its own pleasures—the most excellent pleasures and, so far as possible, the truest pleasures.⁴³

To offer a kind of summary, we see in the report of the biographer Diogenes Laertius how wisdom (or to be more specific, practical wisdom), courage, moderation, and justice were the key virtues for Plato.

Diogenes Laertius (reporting Plato's view) There are four forms or kinds of perfect virtue: practical wisdom, justice, courage, and moderation. Of these, practical wisdom is the cause of right conduct, and justice is

responsible for straight dealing in partnerships and commercial transactions. Courage is the cause that makes a man not give way but stand his ground in alarms and perils. Moderation causes mastery over desires, so that we are never enslaved by pleasure but live in an orderly manner.⁴⁴

One final point about desire. It follows from the above remarks, and more specifically from the notion of moderation, that well-being or happiness is not (merely) the satisfaction of any and every desire for any and every pleasure (or whatever it is we desire). To put it directly, happiness is not getting whatever we want. Rather, such a position, if taken to its logical end, leads to absurd conclusions. Plato demonstrates the point by recalling the conversation Socrates had with the businessman Callicles, representative of the—even if here exaggerated—sophist position.

Callicles believes that true virtue or excellence is the ability to intelligently and courageously satisfy any and every desire. This excellence, he claims, is true happiness. Consequently, the virtuous man marshals wisdom and courage in the service of unrestrained desire rather than its control. In response, Socrates suggests that Callicles' belief is no different from suggesting that the one who has an itch and can best scratch it is happiest. We may do better, he argues, to deal with the itch by means of moderation rather than inflaming it with our clawing attention.

Socrates said, "Tell me, friend, what about a man himself? What is his relation to himself? Is he a ruler or one who is ruled?"

Callicles responded, "What are you talking about?"

"What I mean to say is that each man rules himself—or is there no need for self-governance . . . ?"

"What exactly do you mean by 'self-governance'?"

"Nothing complex. I mean just what the many do when they talk about such things: moderation and self-control when it comes to things like our desires or longings and pleasure." . . .

Callicles countered, "But how can a man be happy if he is any man's slave? . . . The man who wants to live happily should let his desires be as strong and as

big as possible and not check them. Furthermore, he should be able to serve them when they are strongest thanks to his manly courage and intelligence—he should always be able to satisfy each desire as it comes. Ah, but this, I imagine, is not possible for the many. . . . And since they are unable to furnish for themselves the pleasures that would satisfy their desires, the many approve of and praise moderation and justice . . . But truly, Socrates, luxurious living, immoderation, and freedom are excellence and happiness. . . ."

Socrates responded, "I admire the way you march out and make your argument, Callicles. No holds barred! What freedom of speech! The truth is you're now declaring freely and clearly what others have in mind but are unwilling to say aloud. So don't give up. Keep on going so that we may clearly understand how to live. Now tell me this: are you saying that the desires should not be moderated or restrained in any way, . . . but that a man should let his desires grow as large as possible and then find some way to satisfy or fulfill them, from one source or another? Is this excellence?"

"That's right, Socrates. That's what I'm saying."

"In that case, it is not correct to say, as people do, that those who lack and need nothing are happy."

"It's not at all correct. If that were true, then stones and corpses would be happiest."

"Life as you describe it is strange, Callicles—the dead are the happiest ones! In that case, I wouldn't be surprised if Euripides spoke truthfully when he said, 'Who knows if living is actually dying, and dying is actually living?' It may be true that we are dead in this manner. I once heard wise men say that we are now dead. The body is our tomb, they said. And the part of the soul where the desires are located is easily persuaded to waffle back and forth. And so, some clever man—one of those bards of mythical tales, a Sicilian or an Italian man—told a story . . . in which he called this part of the soul the immoderate and leaky part. He said it was like a jar with holes because of its insatiable desire. . . . The soul was like a sieve, he said, unable to hold anything. Doubtlessly all this seems absurd. Nevertheless, the story gets to the point I wish to make in order

to persuade you to make a change—so that you might take hold of a well-ordered, moderate life, one that is satisfied with what is fitting and sufficient, rather than a life that is greedy and immoderate.” . . .

Callicles doesn't budge. So, after offering another analogy, Socrates said, “Then you're suggesting [contrary to what I've said] that the unrestrained, immoderate life is happier compared to the well-ordered, moderate life. . . .”

“I do for this reason, Socrates. The man who has filled himself will no longer experience pleasure. Such a life, after all, is the one that I just now likened to the life of a stone—the one that is all filled up and no longer feels delight or pain. Instead, the pleasant life is made up of the greatest inflow.”

“ . . . And outflow?”

“Certainly.” . . .

Socrates said, “Tell me, then, if this man is happy—the man who has an itch and wants to scratch it. But not only that, the one who is freely able to scratch the itch now and throughout his life.” . . .

Callicles replied, “Then, yes, I say that the man who is able to scratch lives his life pleasantly.”

“And if pleasantly, then happily—he lives a happy life?”

“By all means, yes.” . . .

By means of a long argument, Socrates explains why he disagrees. He concludes by saying—

“In whatever he does, the good man does well and nobly. And he who does well is blessed and happy.

The base man, by contrast, who does not do well and thus behaves in an evil manner, is miserable. . . . This is what I put to you, Callicles, what I say is the truth of the matter. And if it is true, then anyone who wishes to be happy must practice moderation and must flee immoderation as fast as his feet will carry him.”⁴⁵

We've seen that true happiness has to do with the condition of our souls. Each part must perform its natural function well with virtue so that the whole may be well. In the final selection, we hear Socrates call on his fellow Athenians to care for their souls. If they do, they will live well and be happy since, as we know, “he who lives well is blessed and happy.”

Socrates: Men of Athens, I greet and love you, but I will obey the god rather than you. And while I live and can continue, I will never give up philosophy. Nor will I stop exhorting you and pointing out the truth to any one of you whom I happen to encounter. Rather, in my accustomed way, I will say, “Best of men, you who are a citizen of Athens, the greatest of cities and the most famous for wisdom and power—are you not ashamed to care for the acquisition of the most wealth possible, and for reputation and honor, when you neither care for nor worry about wisdom and truth and your soul, that it may be in the best possible condition?”⁴⁶

SUMMARY OF HAPPINESS FOR PLATO & SOCRATES

For Plato (and Socrates), happiness is not about getting what we want; it is not about satisfying any and every desire. Rather, happiness is a matter of living well or virtuously—with excellence. To be virtuous, therefore, is to be happy.

Virtue itself is “the means by which a thing performs its function well,” where a thing's function is “that which it alone can do, or what it does better, than anything else.”

Happiness, or living well, has to do with the whole human person, which is a composite of body

and soul. The most important part to consider, however, is the soul. When the soul does well, the whole person does well. Therefore, each part of the soul must perform its function well so that the whole person may do well.

The soul has three parts. Each part has its own function and corresponding virtue. The rational part of the soul rules by means of wisdom. The spirited part takes orders from and enforces the rule of the rational part by means of courage. The desiring part obeys the rational part and thus moves toward what

is necessary and sufficient for the body and soul by means of moderation. Together, when each part of the soul performs its own proper function well without interfering with the work of the other parts, the soul harmoniously operates as a whole. This soul harmony is justice.

When soul justice (harmony) occurs, the whole

person is living well and happily, deliberating, directing, and acting in accord with wisdom. So it is that Plato concludes that virtue, or living well, is central to happiness and human flourishing. If the goal or work of human life is to “live well” or to be happy, then virtue is the means by which we live such a life.⁴⁷

So ends Reading 10. **See you in Reading 11, “Xenophon & Socrates.”**

NOTES

¹ Though most give 428 or 427 BC as Plato’s date of birth, some scholars, including *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, give 429 BC.

² For this account of Plato’s time in Sicily, see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 3.18-23, which covers his interaction with the three men. Diogenes Laertius further reports that Anniceris the Cyrenaic “ransomed Plato” when he was being sold on the island of Aegina and “sent him on to his friends in Athens.” According to the same account, Plato later turned to the “younger Dionysus” for “land and men” to help him (Plato) establish a new city and constitution (a republic). But Dionysus didn’t keep his promise to supply Plato as he desired because, it seems, the younger tyrant suspected that Plato was conspiring with Dion to overthrow him and liberate the whole of Sicily. It was only by the intervention of Archytas the Pythagorean that Plato secured his own liberty to return to Athens. Plato’s third visit to Sicily finished the whole project. “Plato came to Sicily a third time to reconcile Dion with Dionysus. But he returned home without success. And from then on he did not engage in political matters—that even though his writings deal with the art of government.”

³ Plato, *Letter* 7.326c-d.

⁴ Plato, *Republic* 9.586a-b.

⁵ Plato, *Letter* 7.335d.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 324e.

⁷ Plato, *Symposium* 215c.

⁸ The fact that Socrates shows up as a character in many of Plato’s dialogues is the reason for the title of this chapter, “Plato & Socrates.” For a similar reason, the next chapter is called, “Xenophon & Socrates.” Again, we’ll briefly explore the “Socratic problem” in the introduction to the next chapter. For the moment, suffice to say that Plato’s Socrates is somewhat different from Xenophon’s Socrates and other contemporary presentations of Socrates, such as that of the comic playwright Aristophanes.

⁹ Note: given the close connection in Plato’s thinking between happiness and virtue, much of what follows may also be found in Chapter 7 of the Cave’s *Aretē: Excellence or Virtue—What the Ancient Greeks Thought and Said about Aretē*.

¹⁰ Plato, *Republic* 1.354a.

¹¹ Plato, *Gorgias* 507c.

¹² Encomium by Aristotle preserved in Olympiodorus’ *Commentary on Plato’s Gorgias* 41.9.

¹³ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 3.78.

¹⁴ Plato, *Laws* 5.734d-e. In this case, both “excellence” and “virtue” are *aretē*.

¹⁵ Plato, *Republic* 1.353e, 1.354a. Note the last line in this selection is the simple formula for happiness given in the first selection above, that happiness equals living well. Rather than a feeling or a thought, happiness is an act, something we do (living well).

¹⁶ The word behind “virtue” is *aretē*. It may also be given as “excellence,” not to mention many other words (valor, merit, goodness, success, fertile, and so on). To learn more, see the Cave’s *Aretē: Excellence or Virtue—What the Ancient Greeks Thought and Said about Aretē*.

¹⁷ Plato, *Cratylus* 415c-d.

¹⁸ Plato, *Republic* 4.444d-e.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.353c. Faithful to Plato’s intention (evident in Socrates’ overall position), the line has been modified by transforming Socrates’ question or query into a positive statement. The question-query: “I am asking about whether a thing that has a function performs it well by means of its own virtue? . . .”

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.353a. This definition of function appears at the end of the next selection. The Greek for function or work is *ergon*.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1.352d-353a.

²² For example, see Plato, *Cratylus* 386d-387a, where Socrates states, “It is clear that things have some fixed reality (being or essence) (*ousia*) of their own, not in relation to us or under our control or fluctuating according to how they appear, but things exist according to themselves, in relation to their own reality (being or essence), which they possess from nature (in a natural manner).” Socrates next argues that “actions” (the singular is *praxis*) are also “things” with their own nature or way of being. Consequently, actions should also be “performed according to their own nature.” For example, in order to cut “well” or “rightly,” we must “cut each thing according to the nature of cutting and being cut.”

²³ Plato, *Phaedrus* 246c.

²⁴ Plato, *Timaeus* 69c and 44d-e.

²⁵ Plato, *Phaedrus* 246a. For a similar comparison, where the mortal body is compared to a chariot, and the soul is put within the body, see Plato, *Timaeus* 41e and 69c. Interestingly, a similar analogy appears in Indian philosophy in the *Katha* Upanishad 3.3 ff. Relative to the comparison we’ll look at next from the *Republic*, the “charioteer” is the rational part of the soul, the “good and noble” horse is the spirited part, and the “opposite” troublesome horse is the desiring part.

²⁶ Plato, *Republic* 4.435c.

²⁷ Ibid., 4.439d-e, 4.440e-441a. Socrates further compares the three to a guiding shepherd (the rational part), his sheep that follow him (the non-rational desiring part), and the sheepdogs that help the shepherd guide the sheep (the spirited part) (see *ibid.*, 4.440d).

²⁸ Plato, *Gorgias* 464b. “Care for the body” refers to health and fitness.

²⁹ Plato, *Republic* 3.404e.

³⁰ The best or most excellent direction, which goes along the path of virtue or excellence, is toward survival and well-being, on the one hand, and being itself, truth, goodness, beauty, and similar realities on the other.

³¹ Plato, *Phaedrus* 245e.

³² Plato, *Republic* 1.353d.

³³ Ibid., 4.441e, 4.442a-c. “Wise” is *sophos*, the adjectival form of *sophia* (wisdom).

³⁴ Plato, *Euthydemus* 280b. Wisdom is *sophia*.

³⁵ Plato, *Republic* 4.441e, 4.442a-c. Courage is *andreia*.

³⁶ For desire being a kind of poverty or lacking, see Plato, *Symposium* 203c-d. Somewhat more exactly, desire is “for good things and to be happy”; humans “desire the good” (*Ibid.*, 205d and 206a). For a discussion of “necessary and unnecessary desires or appetites,” see Plato, *Republic* 8.558.d-559d, where the “desires that we cannot turn away from may rightly be called ‘necessary,’” and those “desires [we] may free [ourselves] from by practice” are “unnecessary.” For example (the one given by Socrates), necessary desire is the desire for simple food whereas unnecessary desire is the desire for a variety of food.

The distinction between necessary and unnecessary desires, as well as between natural and groundless desires, is one that shows up later in Greek philosophers such as Epicurus. For instance, in Epicurus’ *Letter to Menoeceus*, he states, “We must consider that of the desires, some are natural, and some are groundless. Of the natural desires, some are necessary, and some are merely natural. And of the necessary desires, some are necessary for happiness, some for freeing the body from disturbance, and some for living itself.” In the *Principal Teachings*, Epicurus observes that “unnecessary desires are those that lead to no pain if they remain unsatisfied. They involve an appetite that is easily relieved whenever its satisfaction is hard to procure or when it seems likely to cause harm.” For both, see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 10.127, 148.

³⁷ Plato, *Republic* 4.430e, 4.431a. Moderation is *sōphrosunē*. Self-control is *enkrateia*.

³⁸ Ibid., 3.389d-e.

³⁹ Ibid., 4.432a.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 4.442c-d. The “ruled” here refers to both the spirited and desiring parts, those parts that listen to and obey the rational part. The spirited part does so by means of courage; the desiring part does so by means of moderation.

⁴¹ Ibid., 4.433a-b. Though this definition of justice is intended for justice in general, it may equally be applied to the soul and its parts. Justice is *dikaiousunē*.

⁴² Ibid., 4.443d-e.

⁴³ Ibid., 9.586e-587a. “Performs its own act” is the same as “function.”

What are the “most excellent” and the “truest pleasures”? If we look back a few sections, we get some idea: “To be filled with what is proper to nature is pleasure. . . . That which is more actually filled with real things”—that is, things that truly, actually *are* versus merely apparent, shadowy things—“would more actually and truly cause us to delight in a true pleasure.”

The opposite is also true. Therefore, “Those who have no experience of wisdom and virtue but are ever devoted to feasting and that sort of thing are swept downward . . . and wander here and there throughout their lives. . . . They have never been

filled with real things—things that truly are—, nor have they tasted stable or pure pleasure. Instead, with eyes ever bent upon the earth and heads bowed down over their tables, they feast like cattle, grazing and copulating, ever greedy for more of these delights.” See *ibid.*, 9.585d-586b.

⁴⁴ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 3.90-91. Note how some virtues are externally oriented, some internally oriented, and some are both.

⁴⁵ Plato, *Gorgias* 491d-494d, 507c-d. As we’ve already noted, the Greek behind “excellence” is *aretē*, which may also be given as “virtue.”

⁴⁶ Plato, *Apology* 29d-e. Wisdom, here, is practical wisdom (*phronēsis*).

⁴⁷ One final point. Notice how it takes wisdom or right knowledge for every part of the soul to do its job, that is, to work with excellence or to be virtuous. The rational part rules with knowledge and wisdom, and the other parts perform their roles well in conjunction with the rational part’s knowledge and wisdom. It is in this manner that Socrates (or Plato through Socrates) suggests, as he does, that “knowledge is virtue.” In this way, knowledge as wisdom is happiness, and so knowledge as wisdom is the most significant good we can possibly pursue.

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“He who lives well is blessed and happy.” —Socrates

“Long is the path that leads to happiness through words alone. But the path that leads to happiness through the practice of daily deeds is short.” —Crates of Thebes

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