
PLATO'S ETHICS

&

VIRTUE ETHICS

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SIGNED DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL CONTENT

In accordance with the University of Edinburgh's Regulations for Degrees by Research, par. 3.8.7(a), (b) and (c). I, Nikolaos Kakalis, hereby declare that the present thesis, entitled *Plato's Ethics and Virtue Ethics*, has been composed solely by me and therefore represents my own, original work. Additionally, no parts of this thesis have ever been submitted for any degree or professional qualification, except as specified.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

In this thesis I challenge the broadly accepted custom among moral philosophers of associating virtue ethics primarily with Aristotle's moral theory. I argue that, in fact, virtue ethics shares a number of vital theses with Plato's ethics. I further propose that the fact that this parallel has, for the most part, not yet attracted the attention of virtue ethicists is simply a historical accident rather than a choice based on philosophical grounds. In Chapter I I defend this claim by introducing the main theses of virtue ethics, which show the ways in which virtue ethics differs from the popular/dominant (in the Anglo-American philosophy) deontological or consequentialist forms of morality, and reveal that virtue ethics is a new moral approach that comes in many forms, some more radical than others. In Chapter II I argue against interpretations of Plato's ethics as an embodiment of deontological or consequentialist doctrines, and show that Plato's ethics points to a direction that is new and different from the popular/dominant ethics of his time. I thus draw the conclusion that Plato's ethics and virtue ethics have two important features in common: (a) both are neither deontological nor consequentialist, and (b) both attempt to alter the popular/dominant moral thought of their time and propose instead a new moral orientation. On the basis of these thoughts I continue by observing that the parallel between Plato's ethics and virtue ethics also needs to be examined on the basis of more substantial claims that both approaches advance. In the three chapters that follow, I discuss this parallel by focusing on the way the notion of virtue is treated in both moral systems, on the locus it is given within them, on the relation between virtue and the evaluation of actions, and on the relation between virtue and happiness. I maintain that some of the essential theses of virtue ethics (both radical and moderate), such as the emphasis on virtue, the priority of virtue over the evaluation of actions, and the strong link between virtue and happiness, are theses that can trace their origins back to Plato. In Chapter VI, I address one of the main criticisms made against virtue ethics, namely that by focusing on notions such as character and virtue, virtue ethics provides us only with an account of individual virtue, and in particular an account of individual justice. However, a complete moral theory is also required to provide an account of social justice. I then refer to the generally accepted association of virtue ethics with Aristotle's moral theory, and I argue that it does not provide any substantial help to the attempts of virtue ethicists to face this criticism, because Aristotle's account of social justice cannot be reconciled with a number of the fundamental theses of virtue ethics. I hold that virtue ethicists can find a satisfactory answer to this criticism by looking back to Plato's account of individual and social justice and the way Plato relates the two. In the last chapter of my thesis, I recognise that the parallel between Plato's ethics and virtue ethics, two chronologically remote approaches, cannot and should not go all the way down. I conclude that we have enough reasons to think of Plato's ethics and virtue ethics as two approaches that have many things in common without being identical. In the end, virtue ethics is not, and should not be seen as, a moral approach that merely replicates ancient moral claims. Virtue ethics needs to be seen as a new moral approach that cannot be accommodated within the traditional dichotomy of deontology-consequentialism. However, virtue ethics does not need to be understood as a moral approach epitomised solely by Aristotle's moral theory. By enriching their intellectual diet, virtue ethicists can reply convincingly to serious criticisms made against them. Plato's ethics is a very useful intellectual source for virtue ethicists and virtue ethicists should dedicate more of their attention to it.

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ἐάντ' αὖ λέγω ὅτι καὶ τυγχάνει μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν ὄν ἀνθρώπῳ τοῦτο, ἐκάστης ἡμέρας περὶ ἀρετῆς τοὺς λόγους ποιῆσθαι καὶ τῶν ἄλλων περὶ ὧν ὑμεῖς ἐμοῦ ἀκούετε διαλεγομένου καὶ ἑμαυτὸν καὶ ἄλλους ἐξετάζοντος, ὁ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ, ταῦτα δ' ἔτι ἦττον πείσεσθέ μοι λέγοντι. (*Apology* 38a1-7).

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In 1958 Elisabeth Anscombe published a paper entitled "Modern Moral Philosophy" in which she criticised what she called modern philosophy's preoccupation with a law conception of ethics, which deals with obligation and duty. Anscombe urged us to abandon such a way of doing philosophy since, when separated from the religious foundation on which it was originally based, it is of no help. She also advises us, to jettison act-centred moralities of obligation, such as utilitarianism and Kantianism, because of their focus on notions such as right, and wrong. Instead, Anscombe called for the restoration of Aristotelian notions of goodness, character, and virtue as central concerns of moral philosophy. She emphasised the importance of moral psychology, the need for a discussion about what type of characteristics each virtue has, and a return to ideas like flourishing and moral character. Anscombe's recommendations were taken up by a number of philosophers and constitute what we now call "virtue ethics".

Virtue ethics is a term of art associated with this current of thought introduced by Anscombe. Many philosophers shared Anscombe's worries, but not all follow the same route in exploring them. As a result, what unites virtue ethicists is that they all agree that moral philosophy needs a new direction and a fresh start, in which more emphasis will be given to notions such as virtue, moral character and flourishing. However, when it came to fleshing out exactly what the role of character, flourishing, and virtues should be and how they should be utilised to bring about an applicable ethical theory that would replace the law conception of ethics, there was wide disagreement. Different versions of virtue ethics have been proposed, and some are more radical than others.

If one asks, then, what is virtue ethics, one can reply as follows: Virtue ethics is a moral approach different from the dichotomy which was dominant in the Anglo-American philosophy for so many years, namely the one between deontology (Kantianism) and consequentialism (utilitarianism). Virtue ethics is a school of thought which started as a negative doctrine, by emphasising some insufficiencies of the dominant moral philosophy, and then showing a growing dissatisfaction with the traditional theories of deontology and consequentialism. Given the fact that more and more people added their voice to this current of thought, to mention a few, L.C. Becker, [1975], M. Stocker, [1976], P. Foot, [1972, 1979], J. Wallace, [1978], A. Flemming

[1980], E. Pincoffs, [1986], R. Taylor, [1991], the dissatisfaction formed a proposal of negation, namely that we should not do moral philosophy in the way dominant moral theories and their proponents have done so far. Gradually, out of this current of thought there started to emerge a number of positive doctrines and virtue ethics gradually became known to many not only for what it is against, but also for what it stands for. More recently, R. Hursthouse [1999], M. Slote [1997, 2001], and P. Foot [2001], have offered sophisticated accounts of virtue ethics as a moral approach which has some proposals that differ in many ways from the dominant normative theories and which, according to most virtue ethicists, can offer a better account for understanding moral behaviour and the scope of moral theory.

Given the fact that virtue, moral character and flourishing, or more precisely, *eudaimonia*, were central notions in ancient moral theories, such as Plato's and Aristotle's, one could say that virtue ethics is both an old and a new moral approach. Old in the sense that it accommodates some moral ideas which can be found in, among others, the works of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, and new in the sense that it differs from the dominant morality of its era. The majority of virtue ethicists, however, consider themselves thinkers inspired by Aristotle's moral philosophy and explore their moral approach on the basis provided by Aristotle.¹ Nevertheless, they treat notions such as charity and benevolence as virtues, whereas Aristotle did not include them in his list of virtues. On this basis some virtue ethicists consider themselves to be *Neo-Aristotelians*.²

Although this way of looking at the link between modern virtue ethicists and Aristotle's moral philosophy is well grounded, in this thesis I shall argue that it does not exhaust the possible intellectual sources for virtue ethics. To be more precise, this thesis claims that virtue ethicists should not *only* consider themselves Aristotelians or *Neo-Aristotelians*. They should also consider themselves Platonists or "*Neo-Platonians*".³ Since the majority of virtue ethicists consider Aristotle's moral theory to be their main reference for their theory in ancient times, this supports the claim that virtue ethics is epitomised *merely* by Aristotle's ethics. Yet this claim is based on a misunderstanding.

¹ See, for instance, E. Anscombe, [1958]; M. Stocker, [1976]; J. McDowell [1978]; J. Wallace, [1978]; A. Flemming, [1979-80]; A. MacIntyre, [1981]; J. Pence, [1984]; E. Pincoffs, [1986]; R. A. Putnam, [1987-88]; A. D. M. Walker, [1989]; R. Taylor, [1991]; M. Slote, [1992]; P. Montague, [1992]; M. E. Savarino [1993]; J. Oakley, [1996]; R. Crisp & M. Slote [1997a]; R. Hursthouse, [1997]; D. Solomon, [1997]; D. Statman, [1997b]; K. Stohr & C. H. Wellman, [2002].

² See R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 8.

³ I use this term as a way of contrasting it with the Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. I could use the term "*Neo-Platonic*" but this is already associated with a current of thought that does not concern me here. For "*Neoplatonism*" see, among others, R.B. Harris, [1976]; G.V. Riel, [2000].

Actually, as I argue in this dissertation, Plato is the first virtue ethicist in the history of moral philosophy. The fact that most virtue ethicists do not refer to his work to establish some of their main theses, or to draw inspiration from it, is just a historical accident rather than a choice based on philosophical grounds, or so I shall argue in this thesis. The understanding of modern virtue ethics as a moral approach that has close links with Plato's ethics will also enrich virtue ethicists' intellectual diet. Furthermore, it will provide virtue ethics with an alternative valuable source for facing the criticism which had been made of virtue ethics regarding social justice, a criticism with which Aristotle's ethics is of no help, or of insufficient help, as Santas argues.⁴

Although most virtue ethicists believe that their theory is based on notions treated as central in ancient theories, such as those of Plato and Aristotle, only a small minority of them (Watson, Trianosky and Slote) have made some comments on the relation between virtue ethics and Plato's ethics. The rest seem to follow or rely on the comment made once by Ruth Anna Putnam, namely, "to the question 'what is virtue ethics?', the simple answer is 'what Aristotle did' ".⁵ In this dissertation I am arguing that this is a very simplistic answer, though one which has unfortunately attracted most virtue ethicists in one way or another. But my proposal is that virtue ethics is not related only to Aristotle's moral philosophy, and that in some cases this parallel faces a number of serious problems. This thesis is an affirmation of the relation between virtue ethics and Plato's ethics. The latter has been ignored or deliberately placed at the margins by virtue ethicists, and as a result they appear to have underestimated another important source for their theory. I shall argue for the strong link between Plato's ethics and virtue ethics and the problems that the parallel between virtue ethics and Aristotle's moral theory faces by dividing my thesis into three parts of unequal length. The first two parts contain one chapter each, while the third part contains five chapters. More specifically:

In *Part One, Chapter I*, of my thesis I first discuss the main theses of consequentialism and deontology by focusing on their main embodiments, namely utilitarianism and Kant's ethics. After providing an analysis of the main theses of the above theories, I go on to argue that despite the enormous differences that do exist between consequentialism and deontology, these theories mutually resemble each other more than they differ from one another. For they are both act-orientated theories; their moral reasoning is a matter of applying general moral laws, rules and principles, and in

⁴ See G. Santas, [1997]: 276-281.

⁵ R. A. Putnam, [1987-88]: 379.

them the notion of virtue is not primitive. Furthermore, both consequentialism and deontology advocate that human beings are bound by some impartial duties and in a way pay no adequate attention to the notion of moral character, to personal feelings and to personal desires. Having explored the main theses of each of the above two theories as well as their essential affinities I claim that virtue ethics comes as a reaction not only to the common theses, but also to some of the main theses of either consequentialism or deontology. The main conclusion of *Part One* is that virtue ethics differs from what has been considered as dominant morality for many years. I also argue that, although virtue ethics was launched mainly as a negative doctrine, as a moral approach known mostly by what it is against, it is now fleshing out its main positive claims and is becoming known for what it is for as well. Virtue ethics falls outside the traditional dichotomy between deontology and consequentialism. It instantiates a third alternative way in which moral philosophy can be done, and it comes in many forms, some more radical than others. What unites all virtue ethicists is their opposition to traditional morality. What differentiates them is the path they have chosen to follow in order to develop this new moral approach, the emphasis they have placed and the focus they have given to the notion of virtue. Virtue ethics is a polyphonic approach, which emerges as a reaction to the way moral philosophy has been done by the proponents of the dominant/traditional morality, consequentialism and deontology.

After providing a discussion of the way the current renewal of philosophical interest in the virtues has become one of the most noteworthy developments in contemporary ethical theory, as well as a conceptual map of what virtue ethics argues against as well as of what it argues for, I then proceed to *Part Two, Chapter II*, of my thesis. In it I focus on some interpretations of Plato's ethics as either a deontological or a consequentialist. I argue that these interpretations are textually groundless and that their proponents have thought uncritically that the dominant moral theories of their times can be traced back to Plato. I also claim that Plato's ethics is not only different from current dominant morality, but also instantiates a moral approach that differs from the dominant popular ethics of his time. These two discoveries lead me to the conclusion of the second part of my thesis, namely that, although chronologically remote, virtue ethics and Plato's ethics have at least two characteristics in common:

- (a) neither of the two is deontological or consequentialist,
- (b) both attempt to alter the dominant moral thoughts of their time by proposing a new moral orientation.

The questions that emerge here are whether these are the only similarities that can be discovered between virtue ethics and Plato's ethics. I argue that we need to examine whether the parallel between virtue ethics and Plato's ethics can be seen in more substantial terms. Drawing inspiration from a minority of virtue ethicists who have suggested, but not worked substantially, on the parallels between Plato's ethics and virtue ethics, I proceed to *Part Three* of my thesis, which is made of five chapters, and explores in what terms the parallel between Plato's ethics and virtue ethics can be seen, and why that may be beneficial for virtue ethicists. In particular:

In *Chapter III*, I discuss one of the main theses of virtue ethics, namely the centrality of virtue within the moral system. I refer to Annas' distinction between primary and basic notions to illustrate the way in which the centrality of virtue can be understood within virtue ethics. According to Annas, there are two ways to understand the centrality of some notions, including virtue, namely the primary and the basic. A primary notion is a notion that we start from, and it sets up the framework of the theory, but it is not basic. Other notions are not derived from it, still less reduced to it. Only basic notions can be considered to perform this role.⁶ I claim that within virtue ethics the notion of virtue has been seen in both ways. I then argue that according to most virtue ethicists, virtue is associated with cognitive (knowledge, sensitivity, reliability, flexibility) as well as psychological (emotions, feelings, and desires) factors. Also, for most virtue ethicists, virtue is something beneficial for the agent. After this, I turn to examine the notion of virtue within the Platonic corpus, and precisely within the early and middle dialogues. I conclude that the understanding of virtue as a primary notion, its association with cognitive and psychological factors, as well as the consideration of it as something beneficial for the agent, is an understanding that can be found both with virtue ethics and the Platonic corpus.

In *Chapter IV*, I undertake the task of exploring yet another core thesis of virtue ethics, namely the relation between virtue and the evaluation of actions. I discuss the different ways this issue has been approached by virtue ethicists, namely the non-reductionist (Hursthouse) and the reductionist (Slote, Watson, Trianosky), as well as the unitary (Watson, Anscombe) and less unitary understanding (Slote, Hursthouse, Trianosky). I also examine the relation between virtue and evaluations of action within the Platonic corpus and specifically in the *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedo* and

⁶ See J. Annas, [1993a]: 9.

Republic. The main conclusion of this chapter is that virtue ethics' main thesis, that the evaluation of action depends on virtue, has its origin as far back as Plato's work.. After grasping this affinity I then go on to examine whether Plato's understanding of this relation is an instantiation of the account of reductionist, non-reductionist, unitary or less unitary virtue ethics. I argue that Plato's conception of the way virtue and evaluation of action are related is an embodiment of the less unitary reductionist and less unitary non-reductionist versions of virtue ethics.

In *Chapter V*, I discuss two other issues important for virtue ethicists, namely the locus of virtue within the moral system and the relation between virtue and happiness. I discuss Slote's agent-focused, agent-prior and agent-based virtue ethics, as three different ways to understand the locus of virtue within the moral system of virtue ethics and I reinforce Slote's claim that Plato's ethics is an example of agent-prior virtue ethics, because it anchors virtue in the Form of the Good, by providing some textual evidences to justify this claim. Next I discuss the relation between virtue and happiness and argue that within virtue ethics one can detect at least four ways to understand it: (a) Slote's independence thesis [ST]: virtue and happiness are independent, (b) Hursthouse's thesis [HT]: virtue is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness but only a reliable bet for it, (c) Watson's and Slote's thesis [WST]: virtue is a necessary and (or) sufficient constituent of happiness, and (d) the one offered by character utilitarianism [CU]: virtue is an instrumental means to happiness. I then argue that with regard to the relation between virtue and happiness Plato's ethics has affinities with WST. In order to defend my claim I turn to see how the relation between virtue and happiness has been conceived by Platonic scholars and I present four different interpretations, labelled as: (a) the Identity thesis [IDT]: the relation between virtue and happiness is constitutive *in toto*, (b) the Instrumental Thesis [IT]: virtue is desirable only as an instrumental means to happiness, (c) the Sufficiency Thesis [SFT]: the relation between virtue and happiness is constitutive, but only partly so, and (d) the Brickhouse and Smith Thesis [BST]: the virtuous condition of the soul is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness. I then focus my analysis on the Platonic corpus and argue that only the SFT is supported by the text. The main conclusion of this chapter is that Plato's understanding of *the relation between virtue and happiness* differs from Hursthouse's and character utilitarianism's and it has affinities only with Watson's and Slote's. However, I argue, the difference between Slote's agent-based virtue ethics and Plato's ethics concerning *the locus of virtue* within

the moral system should not prevent virtue ethicists from using the Platonic corpus as an intellectual source.

In *Chapter VI*, I explore a criticism directed against virtue ethics, namely that it can offer no substantial analysis for one central value in any moral system (social justice), and I reinforce Santas' argument according to which virtue ethicists' main intellectual source, namely Aristotle, provides them with very little help.⁷ Given the fact that virtue ethics needs to have an account of social justice, because otherwise it will not be a complete alternative to the traditional dichotomy, which has provided substantial accounts of social justice, and since Aristotle, their main intellectual source, provides very little help, virtue ethicists may need to reconsider their intellectual diet and see whether Plato can provide them with a way out of this impasse. I discuss Plato's distinction between social and individual justice and refer to some texts that support the understanding of social justice as the one based on individual justice. Plato's analysis of individual justice has affinities with virtue ethics since it is based on one of virtue ethics' basic claims, namely the priority of virtue over evaluation of actions. Virtue ethicists might consider drawing some inspiration from Plato's way of seeing individual and social justice as being related. Once doing this, they might be in a position to provide a reply to the serious criticism that has been made against virtue ethics, without sacrificing one of its basic theses, namely the priority of virtue over evaluation of action.

In the last chapter of *Part III*, I recapitulate my main arguments and conclude that Plato's ethics and virtue ethics share some essential considerations. This thesis, then, has attempted to prove that the fact that most virtue ethicists have referred to Aristotle's theory in order to illustrate their thesis has wrongly given the impression that virtue ethics is *solely* epitomised by Aristotle's ethics. If virtue ethicists widened their intellectual horizons they would have various ways to defend their theory against any potential criticism without abandoning some of their main doctrines.

Plato is in a way the first virtue ethicist that the history of philosophy has offered, but not enough credit has been attributed to him by virtue ethicists. Of course this is not to say that Plato's ethics has no differences from modern virtue ethics. It does, as does Aristotle's.⁸ Both Plato's and Aristotle's ethics were offered to meet different needs and worries from ours and they could not entirely overcome the conventions of their times. Also, one of Plato's main metaphysical, ontological and ethical concepts,

⁷ See G. Santas, [1995]: 260-285. See also, B. Williams, [1981]; S. Buckle, [2002].

⁸ See R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 73, n. 8, 153-157; M. Baron, P. Pettit, M. Slote, [1997]: 184 -185.

namely the Form of the Good, is something not applicable to virtue ethicists' moral theory, neither is Aristotle's and Plato's main doctrine of the unity of virtue.⁹ Virtue ethicists do not just rehearse Plato's and Aristotle's moral theories. They draw inspiration from them and produce a new moral theory, which comes to meet new needs. For instance, virtue ethicists consider charity and benevolence to be virtues, whereas Plato and Aristotle do not have them in their lists of virtues.

Although the similarities between virtue ethics and Aristotle's moral theory have been overstated, the analogous similarities between Plato's ethics and virtue ethics have so far been neglected or have been expressed very briefly. Virtue ethicists are working towards a new moral theory, which, as M. Slote underlines, needs time to develop as a substantial alternative to the traditional dichotomy.¹⁰ I argue that although virtue ethicists do not need to repeat Aristotle's and Plato's ethics, they do need to consider Plato's ethics as a possible intellectual resource and to dedicate more time to working in this direction. This thesis attempts to show that virtue ethics and Plato's ethics, though chronologically remote, do have some essential claims in common and the fact that they have not been revealed in their entirety is not because they do not exist. As some people leave room for a *Neo-Aristotelian* virtue ethics I think they also need to consider the possibility of a "*Neo-Platonian*" virtue ethics.

Before I proceed to the main body of this project I would like to raise two issues that will, I hope, prevent misunderstandings. By working on Plato, one is bound to face the well-known Socratic problem. It is an arduous task to find which is the best way to draw the line between Plato and Socrates, between Plato's Socrates and the historical Socrates.¹¹ This is indeed beyond the scope of this thesis. In discussing Socrates' view, then, I will not deal with the Socratic problem. The Socrates of this dissertation is the Socrates of Plato's early, transitional, and middle dialogues. In many parts of my thesis I have used the term Socratic dialogues and by this I mean only the early dialogues rather than something else. This brings me to the second issue, namely that I have subscribed, without providing any argument, to the claim that Plato's ideas develop from dialogue to dialogue. To illustrate this understanding I want to make clear that by early dialogues I shall mean the Socratic dialogues (*Apology, Charmides, Crito, Euthydemus, Euthyphro, Hippias Minor, Ion, Laches, Lysis, Protagoras,*) and the transitional dialogues,

⁹ See, for instance, M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 184-185; P. Simpson, [1997]: 245-259; R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 8-16.

¹⁰ See M. Baron, P. Pettit, M. Slote, [1997]: 235.

(*Cratylus*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Major*, *Meno*). By middle dialogues I shall mean *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, *Symposium*.¹² Throughout this project I have assumed the above order of the dialogues, which is widely, though not universally, accepted in its general outlines.¹³ I have tried to make my arguments as far as possible independent of particular chronological hypotheses; hence, if one challenges the above order of the dialogues my argument should not be substantially affected. Having made these two essential clarifications, I shall now turn to the first part of my thesis.

¹¹ See, among others, G. Vlastos, [1991].

¹² See T. Irwin, [1977]: 291, n.33 & [1995]: 11-13. As the latest group of dialogues I shall consider *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Philebus*, *Laws*.

¹³ For other lists see Ross [1951]: 2; Ledger [1989]: 224f; Brandwood [1990]: 9, 153-62, 206 & [1992]: 112f; Vlastos [1991]: 46-47; Penner [1992]: 124; Kahn, [1996]: 42-48; Benson, [2000]: 8, n.19; J. Beversluis, [2000]: 1.

PART ONE: CONTEMPORARY MORAL THEORY

CHAPTER ONE

TOWARDS A NEW MORAL APPROACH

1.1. Approaching Virtue Ethics

Modern moral philosophy has offered a variety of moral theories while attempting to meet diachronically pressing moral questions such as how should one act, how should one live, what kind of person should one be, and how can one become a moral person? These questions have occupied many thinkers, and the philosophical discussion has continued uninterrupted since Plato introduced it.¹ There is no single satisfactory answer to these questions. On the contrary, one can detect a variety of possible reasonable answers, depending on the particular moral theory one holds. Broadly speaking, the main stream of modern moral philosophy has been dominated for a long period by two main theories, namely deontology and consequentialism.² The main reason behind that twofold classification in modern moral theorising was that the notions of right and good were the notions around which a meaningful moral theory, according to most philosophers, should primarily revolve.³ In general, deontology has as a fundamental notion the notion of right. The latter is not defined in terms of the good and

¹ Plato addresses these questions in many of his dialogues. See, for instance, *Laches*, 187e6-188a3; *Gorgias* 472c6-d1, 492d3-5, 500c 2-4; *Republic*, 352d. It is true, however, that Plato's ethics is a remote philosophical theory and that to some people it seems unpromising to consider Plato's ethics in parallel with modern moral classifications. Although there are some reasons to share the sentiment of such critics, one can approach this issue from a different, and probably more productive, perspective, by considering Plato's views, as well as other philosophers' views, ancient and more recent, not as views of a merely antiquarian interest, but as ongoing projects, as something living and probably usable to tackle present-day moral questions. C. Megone [1990] sees Aristotle's view on the "quality of life" should be seen as an ongoing project when he holds that any adequate measure of the quality of life should take account of it. Megone [2000] also holds that Aristotle's account of potentiality has significant repercussions for different bioethical areas such as abortion, euthanasia, and treatments of animals. For the different answers given to the question "how should one live?" by writers of epic, tragedians and philosophers, see W. Prior, [1991] and Megone's [1992] stimulating review of this book.

² The way I understand these two theories will emerge shortly. To prevent misconceptions I shall place consequentialism and deontology on the map I am using. Consequentialism is a moral approach according to which the moral status of an action is determined solely by how good or bad its consequences are. Deontology, on the other hand, is the view that whether an act is morally right or wrong can be determined not by its consequences but by the kind of act it is.

³ According to J. Rawls [1971: 24], "The two main concepts of ethics are those of the right and the good; the concept of a morally worthy person is, I believe, derived from them. The structure of an ethical theory is, then, largely determined by how it defines and connects these two basic notions".

it is not determined by the goodness of the consequences.⁴ Consequentialism, on the other hand, defines right in terms of good, and thus it attributes definitional (and evaluational) priority to goodness over rightness.

In the second half of the twentieth century, significant changes have taken place in the landscape of moral philosophy. A number of philosophers launched a scathing attack on both of these traditions simultaneously. They expressed dissatisfaction with this kind of scheme on the grounds that, by focusing on general principles and on the notions of right and good, it precludes from the outset views that give virtue a more central role. Anscombe's groundbreaking paper called "Modern Moral Philosophy" was the first which argued for the need for modern moral philosophy to re-orientate itself and to search for something different from the dominant kind of morality that deontology and consequentialism represent.⁵ Anscombe urged abandoning the way that moral philosophy has been done hitherto, breaking away from the reliance on deontic ethical terms and jettisoning act-centred moralities of obligation such as utilitarianism and Kantianism. She emphasised instead the importance of moral psychology, as well as the need to return to concepts such as virtue, moral character, and flourishing, as examined by Aristotle. Anscombe's article and her suggestion that we favour speaking in terms of particular virtues and vices had a huge effect. Her recommendations, in one way or another, were taken up by number of philosophers and, as a result they constitute what we now call *modern virtue ethics*.⁶

A significant number of philosophers have considered modern virtue ethics as, in some respect, a continuation of *ancient virtue ethics*.⁷ The fact that most virtue ethicists refer to Aristotle in order to illustrate their theses gave the impression that virtue ethics is solely epitomised by Aristotle's ethics.⁸ In this project, I shall discuss the possibility of

⁴ According to J. Rawls [1971: 30], a deontological theory is defined in contrast with teleological theories as "one that either does not specify the good independently from the right, or does not interpret the right as maximising the good". C. Fried [1978: 9] stresses that "the goodness of the ultimate consequences does not guarantee the rightness of the actions which produce them".

⁵ E. Anscombe, [1958]: 1-19.

⁶ Some of them (e.g. B. Williams, M. Stocker, S. Wolf) continued her critique of modern ethical theory. Others (e.g. A. MacIntyre, J. McDowell, P. Foot, R. Hursthouse, M. Slote, G. Watson) sought to develop an ethics of virtue from within moral philosophy. Apart from Watson's articles, the articles of all the other aforementioned philosophers can be found published together in R. Crisp and M. Slote, [1997b]. Watson's article accompanied by extensive bibliography can be found in D. Statman, [1997a]: 56-81.

⁷ See P. Geach, [1977], A. MacIntyre, [1981]; N. Dent, [1975a]; E. Pincoffs, [1986]; M. Slote, [1992]; R. Crisp and M. Slote (eds.), [1997b]. D. Statman [1997a]; M. Baron, P. Pettit and M. Slote, [1997]: 175-238. R. Hursthouse, [1999].

⁸ See R. A. Putnam, [1987-88]: 379.

tracing virtue ethicists' claims even further back, namely to Plato, and suggesting the latter's philosophical corpus as a valuable intellectual source for virtue ethicists. But in order for this to be implemented I first need to discuss the main nature of virtue ethics. As in many cases in philosophy, the most efficient way to understand what X is, is to eliminate what X is not. Or, to put it differently, a very promising way to understand the main nature of virtue ethics is to focus initially on its rivals. In addition, given the recent history of ethics, the need for an independent virtue ethics may not, perhaps cannot, be appreciated until one comes across some deep-seated problems of dominant morality, i.e. deontology and consequentialism.

In order to capture better, then, what virtue ethics is all about, I shall first introduce the main theses of dominant morality, by focusing on their main expressions, namely Kantianism and utilitarianism. My main argument will be that utilitarianism and Kantianism, despite their differences, resemble one another more than they differ from one another, and thus that virtue ethics should not be understood as supplementing the development of dominant morality, but rather as an approach that falls somewhat outside the traditional dichotomy between deontology and consequentialism.⁹ The focus on the main differences, as well as on the common theses, between utilitarianism and Kantianism, will serve as a helpful preliminary to reveal dominant morality's insufficiencies, and to see where virtue ethics springs from and where it leads us. Virtue ethics, which, as we will see at various places in this project (i.e. 1.8., 3.5, 4.2., 5.5.), comes in many forms, some more radical than others, instantiates a third alternative way of doing moral philosophy and it deserves equal billing as a major moral theory alongside deontology and consequentialism.¹⁰

In order to justify these claims, my argument will take the following course: In sections 1.2. and 1.3. I shall describe the main theses of deontology and consequentialism (and in particular the theses that provide a contrast with virtue ethics) by focusing on their main embodiments, namely Kantianism and utilitarianism respectively. In section 1.4., I shall highlight the aspects that deontology and consequentialism have in common. In sections 1.5. to 1.8. I shall offer an account of what virtue ethicists argue against as well as some introductory remarks regarding what

⁹ I here agree with Slote [1992: 254 -255] that supplements to Kantian or utilitarian forms of moral philosophy are very much worthwhile, but they do not help to establish virtue ethics as a free-standing approach to ethics.

¹⁰ See M. Slote, [1992]; R. Audi, [1997]: 186; R. Crisp & M. Slote, [1997a]; R. Hursthouse, [1997] & [1999]: 2; D. Statman, [1997b].

they argue for. I hope it will become clear that virtue ethics' orientation and focus differs substantially from both Kantianism and utilitarianism. I also hope it will emerge that what unites virtue ethicists is their dissatisfaction with dominant morality and that there is no single definition of virtue ethics. To use J. Griffin's words, "when one gives somewhat more content to virtue ethics, it will emerge that there may indeed be no defining formula at all, only what Wittgenstein calls family resemblance between different forms of virtue ethics".¹¹

1.2. The Skeleton of Deontology

Let us now take a closer look at the nature and the structure of the deontological system, as well as at its origin. Deontology (from the Greek *deon*, what is necessary, what is right or what should be done) is one of the two main dominant moral theories of modern moral philosophy. According to this ethical approach, acting morally involves the self-conscious acceptance of some constraints that place limits both on the pursuit of one's interests, and on one's pursuit of the general good. To act rightly, the agent must first of all refrain from doing an act that is, prior to the act, known to be wrong. These particular requirements which restrain one from performing a wrong action are variously called rules, constraints, laws, prohibitions, limitations or norms.¹² Deontologists ask the agent to refrain from doing X even when the agents can foresee that their refusal of doing X will clearly bring about the greatest harm or the least good. The goodness of the ultimate consequences of the action is determined by what is right.¹³

According to deontology, it is not the badness of the consequences that make lying or killing wrong; rather lying or killing is wrong as such, despite the fact that one might foresee good consequences from doing so.¹⁴ Deontologists also argue against any

¹¹ J. Griffin, [1998]: 58.

¹² N. Davis [1991: 208-210] holds that three features of deontological constraints are especially noteworthy: a) deontological constraints are usually negatively formulated as "Thou shalt nots" or prohibitions; b) deontological constraints are also narrowly framed, and bounded; and lastly c) they are narrowly directed. Davis also alleges that deontologists do not think that the positive formulations are equivalent to (or entailed by) the negative ones. Deontologists view the category of the forbidden or impermissible as fundamental in several respects. "What is obligatory is impermissible to omit... [T]he largest portion of an agent's time and energy, ought to be taken up with the permissible." Deontologists understand the notion of right to be weak (or exclusionary) one. "For the deontologist, an act may be permissible without being the best (or even the good) option, whereas for the consequentialist it is never permissible to do less good than one can.

¹³ I. Kant, one of the most influential deontologists, notoriously argued that it is wrong to lie even to a would-be murderer in order to protect his intended victim. See his [1797]: 96-97, 168-169, 218-219, 220-221. See also A. Wood, [1999]: 2.

¹⁴ T. Nagel [1986: 176] offers a representative list of deontological constraints. He writes: "Common moral intuition recognises several types of deontological reasons- limits on what one may do to people

impartial consideration of the interests of others. Thus, we are forbidden to harm one innocent person to decrease the number of deaths, in case we are facing the choice of killing one innocent person in order to prevent the deaths of five other innocent people. For, within the deontological framework, personal autonomy is too valuable to be negotiable.¹⁵

Deontological theories are in contrast with what are called teleological theories (from the Greek *telos*, *end*, *purpose*). According to the teleological view, there are no special kinds of acts that are right or wrong in themselves. Conversely, the rightness or wrongness of our acts is determined by a comparative assessment of their consequences, in a spirit more or less equivalent to consequentialism.¹⁶ Deontologists present their view as a response to, and corrective of, consequentialist moral theories, by claiming that consequentialist claims are structurally and conceptually deficient.

1.2.1. Kant's Deontology

Deontology owes its most influential embodiment to the work of the German eighteenth century moral philosopher I. Kant [1724-1804], who also provides an excellent example of a thoroughly non-consequentialist approach to ethics.¹⁷ Kant's writings have generated an enormous secondary literature in several languages.¹⁸ For revealing the contrast with virtue ethics, however, it will suffice to focus on some essential features of Kant's moral

or how one may treat them. There are special obligations created by promises and agreements; the restrictions against lying and betrayal; the prohibitions against violating various individual rights, rights not to be killed, injured, imprisoned, threatened, tortured, coerced, robbed; the restrictions against imposing certain sacrifices on someone simply as a means to an end; and perhaps the special claim of immediacy, which makes distress at a distance so different from distress in close proximity. There may also be a deontological requirement of fairness, or even-handedness or equality in one's treatment of people". Nagel answers the question "what is it about a wrong answer that makes it wrong", by appealing to common moral intuitions. As we will see later on, Kant answers the same questions by appealing to supreme principles, whose claims are universal and necessary.

¹⁵ C. Fried [1978: 10] discusses this issue in a way worth mentioning in its entirety. He writes: "we can imagine extreme cases where killing an innocent person may save a whole nation. In such cases it seems fanatical to maintain the absoluteness of the judgement, to do right even if the heavens will in fact fall. And so the catastrophic may cause the absoluteness of right and wrong to yield, but even then it would be a non sequitur to argue (as consequentialists are fond of doing) that this proves that judgements of right and wrong are always a matter of degree, depending on the relative goods to be attained and harms to be avoided. I believe, on the contrary, that the concept of the catastrophic is a distinct concept just because it identifies the extreme situations in which the usual categories of judgement (including the category of right and wrong) no longer apply".

¹⁶ "Consequentialism" can also be understood as a more restricted term referring to one particular kind of teleological theory. See, for instance, E. Anscombe, [1958]: 9-11.

¹⁷ A. Wood [1999: 1] points out that "Kant's ethical thought is perhaps both the finest and the most characteristic product of the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*, *éclaircissement*)".

theory. In particular I shall discuss Kant's conception of universal and necessary moral laws; his emphasis on the *a priori* status of moral principles; his insistence on the purity of motives and his association of moral worth solely with acts done from duty; and finally Kant's understanding of the principle of one's own happiness as the direct opposite of the principle of morality.¹⁹

The central question around which Kant arranges his discussion of ethics is "what ought I to do", and he attempts to answer this question by employing various central notions, such as the categorical imperative, obligation, good will, respect for the moral law, and action from duty.²⁰ Kant's ethical writing is also marked by an unswerving commitment to human freedom, to human dignity, and to the view that moral obligations derive neither from God, nor from human authorities and communities, nor from the preferences, inclinations and desires of the human agent, but merely from reason. Kant wrote many philosophical works and most of them are directly or indirectly related to moral issues.²¹ In those that are directly related to morality he attempted, among other things, to propose a moral theory that was internally consistent. For that reason he puts morality on an entirely rational foundation and he rejected some of our ordinary practical intuitions.²² One of his main targets was to discover the *a priori* basis of morality, that is a foundation for morality in reason alone, independently of contingent human consensus and the attitudes and desires of actual people.²³ For Kant, *a priori* principles are precisely those generated through our own thinking, through our rationality. They contrast with principles we owe to external sources, such as tradition,

¹⁸ An excellent discussion of Kant's approach to morality can be found, among other, in W. D. Ross, [1930a]; H.B. Acton, [1970]; and more recently, M. W. Baron, [1995]; C. M. Korsgaard, [1996]; A. W. Wood, [1999]; R. Louden, [2000].

¹⁹ In Kant's words: "The direct opposite of the principle of morality is the principle of one's own happiness". See his [1788]: 35. Kant has been criticised for this approach to morality in several ways. R. Sullivan [1974-75: 34] argues that the moral agent who finds morally right actions only a duty has not yet entered into the authentic spirit of morality. In the same vein H. Veatch [1975: 226] maintains that Kant's understanding of happiness as something subjective is based on a failure to recognise the objective goodness of happiness. P. Foot [1979: 110-131] adds her voice against Kant's approach by holding that if morality is not a doctrine of happiness but a discipline of duty, what reason can there be for adhering to morality? What justification is there for morality unless morality is profitable?

²⁰ In the "Prize Essay" Kant identifies obligation (*Verbindlichkeit*) as the "primary concept" of ethics. He actually underscored that the project of moral philosophy is to show how there can be obligations, understood as unconditional "oughts" which both motivate and bind. This work is called "Prize Essay", because it was written for a prize offered in 1763 by the Berlin Academy. Kant, finally, did not win the prize. For more on that see Lewis White Beck, [1969]: 441-442.

²¹ See, for instance, I. Kant, [1763], [1781], [1775-1780], [1783], [1785], [1788], [1797].

²² See, A. Wood, [1999]: 17-19.

²³ C. Korsgaard [1996: 3] highlights the relation between reason and morality that Kant advocates by noting: "Bringing reason to the world becomes the enterprise of morality rather than metaphysics, and the work as well as the hope of humanity".

authority, or social prejudice. In contrast with David Hume, who argued that reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions²⁴, Kant argued that morality and rationality coincided. To be moral is to be rational and to be immoral is to be irrational.

Kant called the principle of practical rationality that can be discovered *a priori* the categorical imperative, and he formulated it in various ways in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (hereafter G).²⁵ There are various formulations of the categorical imperative, all offered as answers to the agent's question "what ought I to do?". Kant claims equivalence among them. He holds: Categorical imperatives are at bottom merely so many formulations of precisely the same law, one of them by itself containing a combination of the other two (G.4: 436).²⁶ The initial formulation is known as the Formula of the Universal Law (FUL), and states that one should "*Act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law*" (G. 4:421; cf. 4:402).²⁷ Kant has offered two other well-known formulations of the categorical imperative:

²⁴ See D. Hume, [1739-40]: 457; & [1751]: section 1 & appendix 1; J. L. Mackie, [1980]: 1.

²⁵ According to Kant (G 392), the purpose of this work is "the search for and the establishment of the supreme principle of morality".

²⁶ A. Wood [1999: 186-187] notes that the above statement "need not be taken to mean that the three formulas are intended to be logically equivalent, so that given a verbal statement of any one of them, verbal statements of the other two could simply be deduced from it. That sort of equivalence is even precluded by the claim that there is a "progression" between the formulas from FUL, through FH, to FA (which follows from the first two). For it means that FH is richer in content than FUL, and FA is still richer than FH. Nor does it make sense to attempt to demonstrate that the three formulas are "equivalent" in the sense that their practical consequences must be identical. [...] Kant's remark that the three formulas express "the very same law" might best be read as an invitation to understand each formula, and even its application to empirical circumstances, only in light of the others". See also p. 383 n. 36; O. O'Neill, [1989]: 341-361.

²⁷ With its variant, *The Formula of the Law of Nature*: "Act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature" (G 4:421; cf 4:436). According to Kant, willing universalised maxims may give rise to contradictions in two ways: the contradiction in conception and the contradiction in the will. The contradiction in conception concerns the inconsistency between the maxim and its universalised counterparts (e.g. false promising as a maxim, G. 422) and the contradiction in the will concerns the inconsistency between what one must will as a rational agent or cannot not will as a rational agent and one's maxim (e.g. an attempt to universalise a maxim of non-beneficence, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 453.). Kantian scholars discuss some problems concerning this formulation of the categorical imperative, what Baron calls "false positives" and "false negatives": instances where although the maxim is permissible, a contradiction appears when one attempts to put it in universal framework (playing squash at 4:00 p.m. on Monday), and instances where although no contradiction is detected, the maxim is without any doubt unacceptable (killing for revenge where no contradiction emerges). Baron maintains that regardless of the enduring problems associated with the notion of categorical imperative, Kant scholars do not give up this notion because the core of the categorical imperative "is the idea that is should be possible for all of us to live as equals, and at the same time to pursue our own projects." See M.W. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, [1997]: 71, 76. An illuminating discussion concerning the problems of the Formula of the Universal Law can be found in C. Korsgaard, [1996]: 77-105.

(a) The Formula of Humanity as End in Itself (FH): "*So act that you can see humanity, whether in your own person or that of another, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means*" (G 4:429; cf. 4:436)²⁸, and (b) The Formula of Autonomy (FA): "... the idea of the will of every rational being as a will giving universal law, (G 4: 431; cf. 4: 432); or "Choose only in such a way that the maxims of your choice are also included as universal law in the same volition" (G 4: 439; cf. 4:432, 434, 438).²⁹ The FUL is concerned with the form of a moral maxim, that is, with its universality. The FH is concerned with its matter, that is, with its ends. It is important here to stress that "end" should not be understood as "goal". The end must be conceived "not as an end to be produced, but as a self-existent end" (G. 4: 437).³⁰ The FA combines both form and matter.³¹

Kant's objective in the *Groundwork* is the search for and establishment of the supreme principle of morality (G 4: 392). Kant finds the latter in what he calls "categorical imperatives", which he famously distinguishes from what he calls "hypothetical imperatives". According to Kant, hypothetical imperatives presuppose an end already set and command an action as a means to that end. The following case could be considered as an example of hypothetical imperative: "If you want to pass your exams, you ought to study hard". This imperative derives from the already set end, that is, the success in the exams, and it is a mere means to that end. Throughout the first two sections of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant repeatedly reminds us that morality, as common rational cognition conceives it, is based on hypothetical imperatives. But, Kant continues, such a morality might be nothing but "high-flown fancy", a "chimera idea", or "cobweb of the brain", and the moral duties we take ourselves to have might be illusory (G 4:394,432,425,429, 440, 445).

Categorical imperatives, on the other hand, are not dependent in such a way but rather require the performance of actions (and the setting of ends) without being conditional on any prior setting of an end. There are *a priori* principles, whose claims are universal and necessary constraints on the maxims we adopt. What Kant means by universal is that those principles apply to all human beings and all circumstances without exception. If I decide to do X I also have to think that everyone else is allowed do X. For

²⁸ See also (G 4: 437). Kant uses "humanity" and "rational nature" interchangeably.

²⁹ With its variant, *The Formula of the Realm of Ends*: "Act in accordance with the maxims of a universally legislative member of a merely possible realm of ends" (G 4:439; cf 4:432, 437, 438).

³⁰ A. Wood, [1995].

instance, if I am wondering whether to obtain a loan by making a false promise or repayment, I must ask myself whether my maxim, my subjective principle on which I act (false promising while in need), can be willed as a universal law. Kant thinks it cannot be, for,

by such law there could properly be no promises at all, since it would be futile to profess a will for future action to others who would not believe my profession or who, if they did so over-hastily, would pay me back in like coin; and consequently my maxim, as soon as it was made a universal law, would be bound to annul itself. [I. Kant, 1785, trans. H. J. Paton, 1964, ch.1, 402-403]

Universality is not the only condition that Kant's supreme principles are expected to meet. They are also supposed to possess necessity.³² What Kant means by "necessity" in moral contexts is that rational principles do not apply to us merely because we happen contingently to have some desire (G 4:389). These principles constrain me to do what they prescribe irrespective of what I may otherwise desire to do at the moment. In other words, the fact that I do not want to do something can never by itself defeat the claim that I am rationally required to do it. An action has moral worth and moral content³³ when it is done out of duty, rather than in conformity with duty or from inclination.³⁴ An action has moral worth when it shows purity of motives. To put it differently, a human action is morally good neither because it is done from immediate inclination nor because it is done from self-interest, nor even because it will produce the best consequences. Rather, it is morally good because it expresses purity of motives and is thus done out of duty. The emphasis on duty as a moral motivation is central in Kant's moral system. It is the motive of duty rather than the motive of inclination that gives moral worth to an action. The motive of duty must itself be sufficient to determine the moral action. Kant's account of moral worth, and indeed his moral psychology as a whole, is the contrast between duty and inclination as two competing sources of motivation (G 4: 398). Inclination must be construed in a broad sense to refer to any stimulus to action that

³¹ O. O'Neill [1989: 357-358] argues that FUL, FA, and FH are mutually determined without being indistinguishable.

³² Kant holds that "every ought expresses a necessity of the action". In his [1763], trans. G.B. Kerferd & D.E. Walford, [1968]: 298.

³³ A. Wood [1999: 31] notes that "the terms "moral worth" and "moral content" do not refer to just any sort of value morality might attach to actions, but designate only that special degree of worth that most conspicuously elicits esteem (*Hochschätzung*) from common rational cognition."

³⁴ Actions from duty are the only actions to which Kant ascribes moral worth and moral content. Actions from duty are possible only where a rational self-constraint is required, hence where there is no incentive other than duty.

stems from our sensuous nature, as opposed to duty, which stems from our rational nature. According to Kant, an action motivated by inclination is lacking in moral worth. If a moral law is to function as an incentive, it must be in virtue of the fact that it commands rather than attracts.

Kant also distinguishes actions that are "in conformity with duty" from those done "from duty" (G 4:397-398). An action is done out of duty when it is done from the motive of duty, i.e. because it is our duty. An action is in conformity with duty when it is along the lines of what is moral but is performed from some other incentive (sympathy, honesty), rather than out of duty.³⁵ Kant does not attribute moral worth to the shopkeeper's action of returning the money to the customer who paid more than it was necessary, since he believes that the shopkeeper acts in this way in order to protect his reputation. Since the shopkeeper is motivated by self-interest, Kant argues, it follows that his scrupulous treatment of customers will continue only so long as it is perceived to be in his self-interest. Kant also denies moral worth to acts done from love or sympathy for the same reason. Actions done from inclination agree only contingently with the dictates of moral law and they are associated with motivational contingency. Only acts done from duty, Kant says, have moral worth, since motivational contingency is clearly absent.³⁶

Kant alleges that we can notice a difference in our reaction by comparing the beneficent action performed due to sympathetic inclination with a similar act performed out of duty. For in the latter case the agent's good will is not supported by any comfortable natural feeling or desire. The dutiful action is done solely because the agent's willing is good, and the agent must even rise above all natural feelings and inclinations in order to do what duty requires. When we act from duty, we do the dutiful action because the rational incentive has more value for us than the opposing incentives of inclination, and therefore we want to do it despite the cost to us this involves. Actions from duty are actions that should be done by anyone, are obligatory, and their omission is forbidden. To act from duty in the Kantian sense is just to act in light of the recognition of the moral law as supremely authoritative or equivalently as unconditionally binding. To act for the sake of duty is to act on a formal maxim irrespectively of desires and inclinations. For, as Kant holds, only dutiful actions can be

³⁵ See I. Kant, [1785], trans. H. J. Paton, [1964]: 66.

morally good. Duty is the necessity to act out of respect for the moral law. The agent has a consciousness of the moral law as supremely authoritative to him and this consciousness brings with it an incentive to follow its dictates. There is nothing left able to determine the will except objectively the law and subjectively pure respect for this practical law. The actual account of respect is that it is a feeling, self-produced from a rational concept, and therefore, qualitatively different from other feelings, which stem entirely from our sensuous nature. Respect is merely an effect and not an activity of a will (G 4:400). In Wood's words:

[...] respect results from our submitting our will to a principle or law, rather than from the process of already desiring something and then determining how to get it. [...] Respect is not a feeling "received by means of influence", but rather "self-wrought by means of a rational concept" (G. 4: 401). We respect something not because we (antecedently) *want* to respect it, but because we are aware of reasons why we *have* to respect it. Our rational response to these reasons is what makes us want to show respect for it. Respect is basic to Kantian ethics because it is the feeling that corresponds to rational self-constraint. This kind of constraint does not involve feeling unfree or imposed on. [A. Wood, 1999, p. 46].³⁷

A moral law that requires respect is a law that one follows from duty since it is valid for all rational beings as such, independently of their particular desires. Such a law appears to us as a law of duty, a law that commands or compels obedience.³⁸ Kant puts emphasis on duty or respect for moral laws and he understands them as a source of moral motivation. A man is morally good, not because of seeking to satisfy his own desires, or of attaining his own happiness, but rather because of seeking to obey the law valid for all men. Kant's moral theory is not a doctrine of happiness or a discipline of virtue that must culminate in happiness. Kant was well aware of this approach to morality and indeed argued vigorously against it.³⁹ Kant sees the prudential quest for happiness as compatible

³⁶ H. Allison, [1990]: 113. Allison [1990: 114, 117] also discusses the fact that Kant has actually neglected the possibility of taking into account the case of actions motivated by both duty and inclination.

³⁷ See also H. Allison, [1990]: 120.

³⁸ Within the Kantian framework the notion of respect is strongly associated with humanity. Kant holds that "the principle of mutual love admonishes men constantly to come closer to one another; that of the respect they owe one another, to keep themselves at a distance from one another (*Metaphysics of Morals*, 449). According to Kant, love and respect are two essential constituents of any answer to the value of humanity. Baron also argues that "respect entails recognising that others' lives -and others' characters- are theirs, not ours. It entails appreciating and honouring humanity, not just promoting it. And it entails refraining from trying to promote humanity in others if doing so is not consistent with respect". See M.W. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, [1997]: 30-31.

³⁹ For an interesting discussion on this topic, see R.Z. Friedman, [1981]: 95-110.

with profound immorality. Indeed, he says that the principle of one's own happiness is the direct opposite of the principle of morality.⁴⁰ For Kant, morality is objective, based on reason instantiated in universal moral laws, whereas happiness is relative and subjective and so it cannot be the basis of our morality. Kant would say that one cannot justify a universal and objective activity by appeal to a relative and subjective one. The moral agent is also required to follow an objective standard by showing respect for moral law and acting from duty, rather than from inclination or desire. Happiness, Kant says, is something we cannot approve as good unless its possessor has become worthy of it though having a good will (G 4:393). It is worth noting here that Kant's description of happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) often revolves around the sub-rational psychological states of pleasure, desire-satisfaction, and contentment. In his words, "happiness is the satisfaction of all our desires, extensively, in respect of their manifoldness, intensively, in respect of their degree, and protensively, in respect of their duration" [1781: B834; cf. 1785: 399]. At various places Kant also characterises happiness as the condition "that everything should always go the way you would like it to" [1797:480], as the enjoyment of the gratification of desire when "everything goes according to [a person's] wish and will" [1788: 124], and as contentment or a lasting satisfaction with one's state [1797: 387]. Kant then seems to reduce happiness to pleasure, and so it is not surprising that he sometimes refers to the quest for happiness as bestial and animalistic [1775-80: 410], and as not being a reliable basis for morality.

By way of recapitulation, Kant's moral theory is a moral system based on *a priori* moral principles whose claims are universal and necessary, it emphasises the *a priori* status of moral principles, requires purity of motives and ascribes moral worth only to acts done from duty. Also, Kant has little faith that prudential concern for happiness will lead us to do our moral duty, let alone to do it out of duty. He understands the principle of one's own happiness as the direct opposite of the principle of morality. Finally Kant's moral system displays a dark view of human nature. For Kant is convinced that the motive of duty will be dragged down and corrupted by base inclinations.⁴¹ As we shall see shortly, Kant's view of morality differs from those of both virtue ethics and consequentialism-utilitarianism. Rather than basing it on the virtues, or on the maximisation of happiness, Kant sees morality as constituted by certain rules,

⁴⁰ See I. Kant, [1788]: 35; J. B. Murphy, [2001]: 266.

⁴¹ Kant's approach differs from both Plato's and Aristotle's who had more confidence in human nature and believed that our passions could be educated by reason.

requiring the keeping of promises and so on, these rules themselves being based on abstract rationality through the categorical imperative, rather than on the rationality of virtues or of states of affairs. Kant attempted to construct a universal morality based on pure reason. Unlike consequentialists-utilitarians, Kant's main concern is not to produce some good or maximise it. Kant's ethics has very little concern with producing some good and maximising it.⁴² This contrast will emerge more thoroughly once the outlines are drawn of the main features of consequentialism as well as of its basic embodiment, utilitarianism.

1.3. The Bare Bones of Consequentialism

Deontology or Kantianism is one of the dominant theories within modern moral philosophy. The main rival of deontology or Kantianism is Consequentialism and its main embodiment utilitarianism. According to the consequentialist view, the moral worth of an action is solely determined by the consequences of this action. What makes an action right or wrong is its consequences, rather than considerations of the motive of the act (such as kindness or malice), or the intrinsic nature of the act (for example its being an act of deception). The latter, are, in themselves, unimportant. It is clear, however, that the above definition of consequentialism, as it stands, provides very little information with regard to what is to count as a good consequence. In Benn's words:

Someone who thought that the only good thing in the world was the colour green, could couple this unusual moral conviction with consequentialism by maintaining that right acts are those that bring about more green things, and wrong actions (mowing the lawn, perhaps) are those that diminish the amount of green in the world". [P. Benn, 1998, 61].

Furthermore, following up the aforementioned definition of consequentialism, one could argue that even ethical egoism is a consequentialist theory, since one could take as good consequences one's self-interest and accordingly whatever brings about one's self-

⁴² See Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, [1997]: 19. Baron [1997: 20] also argues that Kant is not open to the charge that utilitarianism faces by endorsing the maximisation of happiness. She refers to an entomologist who spends most of her time doing research about a certain type of insect, and who probably does not maximise the general happiness. Baron raises the worry that from the utilitarian point of view it might be thought that the entomologist is acting immorally in pursuing her research in entomology, or even that her choice to do her research on that shows a lack of virtue. According to Kant, however, the entomologist is not acting immorally, since she is not "morally required to maximise human happiness, but only to take it very seriously, see it as making a normative claim on us, and seek (in some ways or others) to promote it. [...] Kant's ethics allows us to pursue our own projects provided that we abide by the perfect duties and the principles of imperfect duty".

interest is good and whatever prevents it is bad. Samuel Scheffler, however, illustrates that egoism cannot be coupled with consequentialism by holding that:

consequentialism in its purest and simplest form is a moral doctrine which says that the right act in any given situation is the one that will *produce* the best overall outcome, as judged from an impersonal standpoint which gives *equal weight to the interests of everyone*". [S. Scheffler, 1988, 1; emphasis added].⁴³

Scheffler's definition of Consequentialism contains two essential claims. It proposes that Consequentialism is both an *impartial* and a *maximising* doctrine. It is impartial because it takes into account everyone's interest equally, and it is maximising because it states that the right action is that which produces the best overall outcome. In the same vein, Philip Pettit understands consequentialism as a moral doctrine according to which "an option is right if and only if it displays relevant valuable properties".⁴⁴ In order to illustrate his analysis, Pettit draws a couple of distinctions. One of them relates to values and the other relates to responses to these values. Pettit alleges that the best way to understand consequentialism is to examine how it deals with these distinctions.⁴⁵

With regard to values, Pettit holds, one can discern two kinds of values that could hypothetically concern consequentialism but, as he finally argues, only one actually qualifies. There are two dimensions, according to Pettit, on which the value-theoretic approach can ramify. One is concerned with "universal neutral values" and the other with "universal relativised values".⁴⁶ In his words:

the best way of explaining the distinction between neutral and relativized values may be to consider a situation where we are told that there is a value present and that there is someone who values it. The value will be a neutral value, we can say, if and only if we can know what it is that is valued without knowing who the valuer is. It will be a relativized value, on the other hand - an agent-relative or agent-centred value (Nagel 1986; Parfit 1984) - if and only if we cannot

⁴³ I should point out here that I discuss Scheffler's definition as an informative one, rather than as one which includes all kinds of consequentialism. For instance, it rules out "satisficing" versions of the theory.

⁴⁴ M. Baron, P. Pettit, M. Slote, [1997]: 118.

⁴⁵ M. Baron, P. Pettit, M. Slote, [1997]: 124-133.

⁴⁶ Pettit says about universal values "that in specifying them we need not rigidly refer -say, need not refer by name- to any particular individual person or place; thus they are not like the value associated, in President's Chirac's words, with the higher interest of France. "I shall assume that the only values countenanced in moral thought are universal in this way and henceforth shall speak just of neutral and relativised values, taking it for granted that the values involved are universal in character". See M. Baron, P. Pettit, M. Slote, [1997]: 125.

know what it is that is valued without knowing the valuer's identity. [M. Baron, P. Pettit, M. Slote, 1997, 125].⁴⁷

Pettit maintains that consequentialism amounts to nothing more than the view that rightness is determined on the basis of neutral universal values such as happiness, freedom, wisdom, solidarity, friendship.⁴⁸

One more distinction needs to be made here, as it is considered very important among consequentialists. It is associated with the kind of consequences on which we will base our consequentialist account. Some maintain that the consequences that actually determine the moral worth of an action are the "expected", "probable" or "foreseen" consequences. Thus, the action is right if and only if the agent expects that the consequences will be good. Since the main focus is on the consequences that the agent expects, this version of consequentialism has been called "subjective consequentialism". Some others hold that what makes an action right is that it promotes the best "actual" consequences, and call this version "objective consequentialism".⁴⁹ Thus, what the agent expects is actually irrelevant in determining rightness, though it will certainly be relevant in terms of apportioning praise and blame.

There is considerable controversy among consequentialists with regard to the kind of consequences on which a consequentialist account should be based. P. Pettit, for instance, argues that the option that maximises actual good consequences may be very objectionable. In order to defend his claim he draws our attention to the following case:

Suppose that a doctor prescribes a drug for a non-fatal skin condition and that the drug has a 10 per cent chance of killing the patient. Imagine now that the drug does not kill and that the complaint is cured. The decision made by the doctor maximises actual value but there are clearly good grounds for objecting to the doctor's procedure. What sort of probabilistic constraint should maximizing satisfy in order to count as promoting value? The most straightforward suggestion is the decision theoretic one that to promote a value V, is to maximize its expected realization [M. Baron, P. Pettit, M. Slote, 1997, p. 128].⁵⁰

⁴⁷ See also, T. Nagel, [1986]; D. Parfit, [1984].

⁴⁸ M. Baron, P. Pettit, M. Slote, [1997]: 124, 132.

⁴⁹ See M. Slote's discussion on these formulations of the principle of utility in his [1992]: 59-64.

⁵⁰ W. Shaw [1999: 27-31] argues in favour of the expected consequences. J. Driver [1995: 281-288] belongs on the other side. She favours objective consequentialism and so an account of *evaluational externalism*, in the sense that moral quality of the person's action or character is determined by factors external to the person's agency. For an analysis in favour of actual consequences, see also C.I. Lewis, [1969]; F. Jackson, [1990-1991]: 461-82.

Like any other theory, consequentialism is expressed in different forms. What all these have in common is that they propose an impartial morality; they support -some more radically than others, though- the promotion of neutral universal values; and they derive the moral worth of an action from its consequences. A very influential attempt to specify the nature of these consequences, which has actually become the main expression of consequentialism, is utilitarianism.

1.3.1. The Skeleton of Utilitarianism

There are two fundamental claims that underlie utilitarianism: first that the results of our actions are the key to their moral evaluation and, second, that one should assess and compare those results in terms of the happiness or unhappiness they cause. Utilitarians also associate happiness with pleasure and the absence of pain and, similarly, unhappiness with pain and the absence of pleasure. Utilitarianism's guiding impulse is simple and transparent. Many people have found it attractive because they have thought that happiness and well-being is what really matters. Hence, it seems reasonable to them to argue accordingly that the promotion of happiness and well-being is what morality is, or ought to be, all about.

To the diachronically pressing moral questions, such as "how should one act?" or "how can one live?", utilitarianism seems to be offering a deeply compelling answer. It informs us which actions are right, why and when they are right, and which acts are wrong. By making happiness the moral standard, utilitarianism provides an objective, non-relative guide to right and wrong, one that is independent of the particular moral codes taught by the society in which we live. Because the importance of happiness is hard to deny, utilitarianism supplies a basis for morality that seems truly universal. The first person who felt that this was the path on which morality ought to go was Jeremy Bentham [1748-1832], who was followed, more influentially, by John Stuart Mill [1806-1873] and Henry Sidgwick [1838-1900]. These three English philosophers have provided slightly different and competing ways of spelling out the utilitarian principle, according to which right and wrong actions must be measured, but the main idea remains the same, namely that overall happiness determines the moral evaluation of action.

It was Jeremy Bentham who coined the term "utilitarian" and he is considered to be the founder, or at least the first systematic expounder, of utilitarianism. Bentham saw himself to be fighting on behalf of reason against dogmatist, blind adherence to tradition, and conservative social and political ideas, which were dominant in his time. He

attempted to anchor the understanding of good and bad, and thus right and wrong, in facts about human nature and in an empirically grounded understanding of the mainsprings of human well-being, rather than in references to God, or in abstract moral rules "written in the heavens". The point of morality is seen as the happiness of beings in the world. We are required to do whatever is necessary to promote happiness. In one of his earliest works Bentham held that "the measure of the right or wrong action is nothing more and nothing less than the greatest happiness of the greatest number".⁵¹ Bentham's later work is also along those lines. In the opening passage of his book entitled *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* [originally published in 1789] he famously stresses that:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. [...] They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think. [...] The *principle of utility* recognises this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of the system. [J. Bentham, 1789, in 1988, p. 1, emphasis added].

Some lines later Bentham formulates the utilitarian ethical doctrine in the following way:

By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question [...] An action then may be said to be comfortable to the principle of utility [...] when the tendency it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any it has to diminish it. [J. Bentham, 1789, in 1988, p 2.]

Bentham's understanding of morality and his proposal of associating right action with the principle of the greatest happiness were influential and inspired various people.⁵² John Stuart Mill and, more recently, Henry Sidgwick undertook the task further of developing Bentham's theory. John Stuart Mill, in the same vein as Bentham, associated happiness

⁵¹ See J. Bentham, "Fragments on Government" [1776], in J. Bowring [1962]: 227.

⁵² Bentham [1988: 1] actually favours the word "happiness" more than the word "utility" He holds: "the word utility does not so clearly point to the ideas of pleasure and pain as the word happiness and felicity do: nor does it lead us to the consideration of the number of the interests affected [...] which contributes, in the largest proportion, to the formulation of the standard here in question; the standard of right and wrong, by which alone the propriety of human conduct, in every situation, can with propriety be tried".

with pleasure and pain, but he actually provided a more elaborate account of pleasures and pains.⁵³

John Stuart Mill was also concerned with the ambiguity of the word "utility" and acknowledged the misleading connotations of it. However, he thought that it was too late to abandon the name "utilitarianism". In his famous work *Utilitarianism*, Mill explores his idea about "utility" and "greatest happiness" by arguing:

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals "utility" or the "greatest happiness principle" holds that actions are right *in proportion* as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. [J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* 1861, in G. Sher, 1979, p. 7, emphasis added].

The above quotation from Mill's *Utilitarianism* represents John Stuart Mill's succinct exposition of the core of utilitarian theory. However, it contains some vague expressions, which create problems for readers. As W. Shaw accurately argues:

the phrase "right in proportion" suggests that there can be degrees of rightness, implying that acts A and B could both be right and yet A be "righter" than B. It also implies that if A promotes happiness for some and unhappiness for others, then it is both right to a certain extent and wrong to a certain extent. Although not incoherent, these ideas are somewhat obscure. It is also unclear how the phrase "tend to promote" applies to an individual action. For example, although as a general matter telling lies tends to promote unhappiness, it would seem that a particular falsehood doesn't "tend" to do anything; it either does or does not produce happiness. [W. Shaw, 1999, p. 9].

Unlike Bentham and Mill, H. Sidgwick was a university professor with a strong interest in the history of ethics. According to Shaw, Sidgwick's formulation of utilitarianism "developed and refined utilitarianism as a moral philosophy, bringing it to full intellectual maturity".⁵⁴ In the *Methods of Ethics*, Sidgwick defines utilitarianism as follows:

By utilitarianism is here meant the ethical theory, that the conduct which, under any given circumstances, is objectively right, is that which will produce the greatest of happiness on the whole; that is, taking into account all whose happiness is affected by the conduct. [H. Sidgwick, 1874, in 1966 p. 411.]

⁵³ Unlike Bentham, who maintained that all pleasures are of equal worth if they are equivalent in terms of intensity and duration, Mill underscored that pleasures appear to differ in quality as well as in quantity. See J. Bentham, "Rationale of Rewards" [1770], in J. Bowring [1962]: 253; J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* [1861], in G. Sher, [1979]: 10.

⁵⁴ W.H. Shaw, [1999]: 8.

Despite the different formulations of the utilitarian main principle that one can detect among its main proponents, some important affinities need to be highlighted here. One can aptly describe utilitarianism as a combination of two principles:

- (a) The consequentialist principle, that the rightness or wrongness of an action is determined by the goodness, or badness, of the results that follow it. Consequences are assessed in terms of utility and the greatest happiness of the greatest number.
- (b) The hedonistic principle that the only thing that is good in itself is pleasure, and the only thing that is bad in itself is pain.⁵⁵

Utilitarianism is not only a consequentialist doctrine. It is also a universalistic, aggregative, and maximising doctrine. It is universalistic, in the sense that in assessing actions, we must take into account not only their consequences for us, but also their consequences for other people. The utilitarian standard is impartial rather than partial, or egoistic. We are to count the consequences to ourselves, whether good or bad, as having the same weight as the consequences to others. "Each to count as one, and no one as more than one" was Bentham's motto. Utilitarianism is a universalistic doctrine. Furthermore, utilitarianism is an aggregative doctrine. For it combines the happiness and the unhappiness of each person affected by an action to determine its overall value. Finally, the utilitarian standard involves maximisation. For, according to it, the right action is that which produces the greatest amount of happiness the agent can produce. The utilitarian principle instructs us to perform the act that brings about the greatest net happiness rather than an adequate amount of it.

Utilitarianism comes in many forms, the entirety of which cannot be covered here. One essential distinction detected in the literature is that between rule-utilitarianism and act-utilitarianism. According to Smart,

act-utilitarianism is the view that the rightness or wrongness of an action is to be judged by the consequences, good or bad, of the action itself. Rule-utilitarianism is the view that the rightness or wrongness of an action is to be judged by the goodness and badness of the consequences of a rule that everyone should perform the action in like circumstances. [J.J. Smart & B. Williams, 1973, p.9].⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See A. Quinton, [1973]: 1; T.L.S. Sprigge, [1991]: 37.

⁵⁶ One other influential form of utilitarianism, which I shall discuss in detail later on (see 5.5.), is "character-utilitarianism". According to this formula, utilitarianism can be applied to evaluations of motives and character, as well as to evaluations of actions. An agent would have a virtuous character, on this kind of view, when the nature and structure of their dispositions is such as to maximise utility.

Rule-utilitarianism faces two main problems. One is that it usually collapses into act-utilitarianism and the second is that in some cases it leads us away from the utilitarian framework. Rule-utilitarians hold that they do not attribute any value to the rule itself, but only in so far as it contributes to bringing about the greatest happiness for the greatest number. In other words, they are not "rule-worshippers". Suppose that rule-utilitarians employ the rule "drivers should not drive fast". The point of the rule is to promote road safety. They think that if everyone obeyed such rules, there would be very few accidents. But, on the other hand, rules are not strict and under some circumstances it is permitted to drive fast. If we follow the rule, we have to say that as drivers we should never drive fast. But rule utilitarians leave open the possibility of considering such circumstances and allowing fast driving if that would bring about the greatest happiness of the greatest numbers. Imagine, for instance, the case where a doctor drives fast in order to arrive on time and save the life of someone who alone knows how to deactivate a nuclear weapon, which others have already activated. In this case, fast driving is permitted. But then, why should one advocate abiding by a rule when one knows that it will not in the present case be most beneficial to abide by it? According to Smart, "the reply that in most cases it is most beneficial to abide by the rule seems irrelevant".⁵⁷

However, if the motivation to keep a rule is that it brings about the greatest amount of happiness, then rule utilitarianism collapses into act-utilitarianism. For the act-utilitarian will do the same without referring to rules. On the other hand, if rule-utilitarianism accepts that there are cases in which one can break the rules without producing any harm, while simultaneously holding that adherence to the rules is better than non-adherence, then that is no longer a genuinely utilitarian position. For it advocates something that cannot be justified by appeal to the principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Act-utilitarianism has the resources to say everything that rule-utilitarianism holds. Furthermore, act-utilitarianism can correctly do so within

However, character utilitarians would not regard the virtues as objectively valuable, since they derive the value of the virtues from maximised utility. The formula of character utilitarianism was introduced by R. M. Adams, [1976]: 467-481. See also R. Crisp, [1992]: 139-160; M. Slote, [1988]: 384-397; P. Railton, [1988]: 398-416; G. Watson, [1997]: 61-62.

⁵⁷ J.J.C. Smart & B. Williams, [1973]: 10; see also, J.J. C. Smart, [1956]: 344-354; M. Slote, [1992]: 59.

the utilitarian framework.⁵⁸ Since the recommendations of rule-utilitarianism are either contained within act-utilitarianism, or sometimes fail to qualify as a utilitarian position, from now on, when I use the term utilitarianism, I shall solely be concerned with act-utilitarianism.

By way of recapitulation, one can crudely summarise the idea of utilitarianism as follows: we want to know which is a right and which is a wrong action. In order to do so we need to discover some principle in terms of which we can make these decisions; and the principle that meets our needs is the principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Utilitarianism is a consequentialist, universalistic, aggregative and maximising doctrine. According to utilitarianism, actions are to be judged as right or wrong solely in virtue of their consequences. In assessing consequences, the only parameter that matters is the amount of happiness or unhappiness that is caused. Right actions are those that produce the greatest balance of happiness over unhappiness. No one's happiness is to be counted as more important than anyone else's. Each person's welfare is equally important. The overall value of an action depends on the combination of happiness and unhappiness which every person affected by it feels.

1.4. Claims in Common

Consequentialism and deontology have for a long time been the prevailing theories in the landscape of modern moral philosophy, and have thus been considered as the two expressions of dominant morality. Between consequentialism and deontology, as well as between their main embodiments, utilitarianism and Kantianism, one can detect essential and substantial dissimilarities. For instance, according to consequentialism-utilitarianism, the notion of good is basic, and the only thing that really matters is consequences. From the deontological/Kantian point of view, on the other hand, the notion of right is basic, and the moral evaluation of the actions is not derivative from consequences. The deontologist is committed to the notion that certain acts are simply inherently right. Categorical imperatives comprise the main criterion for attributing moral worth to an action. Furthermore, within utilitarianism, morality is a matter of nature and experience, whereas within Kantianism morality should be considered as

⁵⁸ Smart [1973: 11-12] maintains: "I am inclined to think that actually an adequate rule-utilitarianism would not only be extensionally equivalent to the act-utilitarian principle (i.e. would enjoin the same set of actions as it) but would in fact consist of one rule only, the act-utilitarian one: 'maximise probable benefit'. This is because any rule which can be formulated must be able to deal with an

something *a priori*. Despite their notorious disagreement concerning the basic notion of moral theory and the way moral evaluation of actions is attributed, between the deontological-Kantian and consequentialist-utilitarian approach one can distinguish five significant similarities with regard to their main theses and their structure:

- (1) The moral system to which both theories are attached is *act-orientated*.⁵⁹ The primary concern and source of moral justification is the moral rightness or goodness of our conduct. In other words, both theories advocate that one deserves moral criticism for *performing some action* only if the action is somehow morally defective. One's being a morally bad person is determined by one's *having acted* immorally on some particular occasion. Similarly, if one deserves moral credit for acting, then one's action has some positive moral feature. The possibility of one being morally good independently of whether one has performed some specific good or right action is not taken into consideration. The main focus is on what one does, on one's conduct, rather than on what kind of person one is. Both theories are primarily concerned with evaluation of acts, and evaluate agents on the basis of their acts.
- (2) For both theories moral reasoning is a matter of applying general moral laws, rules, and principles, such as the principle of utility and the categorical imperative. Both the deontologist and utilitarian agents are invited to take into consideration that their actions are supposed to meet the requirements of either the principle of utility, or the categorical imperative. Their moral reasoning is framed by abstract universal principles and it is exceptionless, i.e. applying to all situations.
- (3) It is a common claim that the notion of virtue should not be the primitive concept in moral theory. On the contrary, the value of virtues can only be derivative from either the notion of right, or the notion of good. As I showed earlier on (1.3.1.), according to utilitarianism, one ought to promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Duty, in other words, is defined in terms of the element of ends -one ought

indefinite number of unforeseen types of contingency. Rather similar considerations have been put forward by D. Lyons [1965]. See also R. M. Hare, [1963]: 131-136; R. B. Brandt, [1963]: 119-123.

⁵⁹ As we shall see later on (1.7), the other alternative is agent-orientated and, according to it, the moral self is primarily concerned with what sort of person she ought to be, and character considerations are the primary source of moral justification in moral discourse. This is the view that virtue ethicists advocate. This distinction between act and agent-orientated theories, or ethics of being and ethics of doing, as one might find it termed in the literature, has been considered a more comprehensive way to classify ethical theories than the usual one of deontological versus consequentialist views. G. Pappas [1997: 447] holds that this classification is a result of the recent resurgence of virtue ethics. See also J. Laird, [1946]; M. Stocker, [1973-74]; N. J. H. Dent, [1975].

always to maximise utility. Similarly, the concept of virtue is also treated as derivative categories of secondary importance, definable in terms of utility. For the classic utilitarian, virtue is construed as a "tendency to give a net increase to the aggregate quantity of happiness in all its shapes taken together".⁶⁰ For the deontologist, on the other hand, duty is a primitive concept, the irreducible starting point. Any attempt to define duty in terms of good consequences is rejected from the start. The notion of right action, or action out of duty, is the fundamental notion and it cannot be explained in terms of consequences.⁶¹ Similarly, the virtues tend to be defined in terms of pro-attitudes towards one's duties. Virtue is important, but only because it helps us to do our duty. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, virtue is characterised as "the moral strength of human being's will in fulfilling his duty" (6: 405; cf. 6: 394).

- (4) Both moral theories advocate that human beings are bound by some impartial duties, such as those along the lines of the principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and the categorical imperative. Moral duties are impartial. They apply to all agents.
- (5) Both moral theories pay little attention to considerations of the notion of personal feelings, emotions, and desires as part of the character of the moral agent. From the utilitarian point of view, the only thing that really matters is consequences. The motive of the act (kindness or malice) is irrelevant. Your feelings and your emotions while performing the action that the principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number requires do not actually matter. In a sense, your action is moral merely in so far as it maximises happiness and probably regardless of the vicious motives that one might possess while doing so. The way that this specific action is related with one's moral character and with one's morality as a person is also a secondary consideration. Consequences and maximisation of happiness are the only things that really matter. Deontologists in a way also detach feelings and emotions from their moral framework. Kant, for instance, requires the moral person to act only from duty, rather than to act from any desire or feelings such as sympathy. The moral character of the moral person consists only of rational elements. The role of

⁶⁰ See J. Bentham, "The Nature of Virtue" [1774], in B. Parekh, [1973]: 89.

⁶¹ C. Fried [1978: 9] stresses that "the goodness of the ultimate consequences does not guarantee the rightness of the actions which produce them. The two realms are not only distinct for the deontologist, but the right is prior to the good".

feelings, emotions and desires is undervalued within the deontological as well as within the consequentialist moral frameworks. Both theories seem to alienate moral agents from their feelings, desires, perceptions, and contextual judgements. According to Anscombe, dominant morality lacks "an adequate philosophy of psychology".⁶²

Consequentialism-utilitarianism and deontology-Kantianism are the prevailing moral outlooks in the landscape of modern moral philosophy. Their dominance, however, has been recently threatened by an alternative approach that one can detect in the mainstream of contemporary moral philosophy and that is now called *virtue ethics*. The third proposal in moral theorising was mostly a result of the dissatisfaction that dominant morality caused some moral philosophers, as well as the inadequacy of the latter in answering pressing and essential moral questions. I shall first discuss the main expressions of this dissatisfaction, then explore the main features of virtue ethics, and finally the radical and less radical forms of virtue ethics. As the discussion progresses it will become clear that it is easier to discern what all proponents of virtue ethics argue against, than to say with certainty what they argue for. What is obvious is that all virtue ethicists are unwilling to accept that morality should be such as consequentialism and deontology propose. The reasons that have caused the dissatisfaction with dominant morality are a good starting point for revealing the main features of virtue ethics.

1.5. Reasons for Dissatisfaction

Virtue ethicists emerged to argue for the need to pursue a new orientation in moral philosophy by stressing some inadequacies of dominant twentieth century anglophone morality, in two ways: either by focusing on the common claims of consequentialism-utilitarianism and deontology-Kantianism or by pointing out certain insufficiencies within the consequentialist-utilitarian or deontological-Kantian framework. I shall first outline the main expressions of the dissatisfaction that stem from the common theses, and afterwards I shall discuss the reasons for the dissatisfaction springing from each of the two theories that constitute dominant morality. My main aim is neither to evaluate the reasons for dissatisfaction, nor to provide a complete list of them. I shall rather focus on those reasons most supported by virtue ethicists. In addition, this discussion will serve as a preliminary to understanding the background to what virtue ethicists argue for. For

⁶² See E. Anscombe, [1958]: 1.

virtue ethics initially started as a negative doctrine and gradually developed some positive theses. One way to illustrate what virtue ethics argues for is by stressing first what virtue ethics argues against. Probably, one can appreciate better the need for an independent virtue ethics by focussing on the deep-seated problems of utilitarian or Kantian morality.

1.5.1. Dissatisfaction Springing From Common Theses

Thinkers who urged people interested in morality to start looking for a new (and probably more adequate) moral framework were mostly puzzled about the common characteristics of consequentialism-utilitarianism and deontology-Kantianism and worried concerning the problems that these would probably generate. Virtue ethicists thought, for instance, that morality is a rather complicated matter and cannot be captured by *general, impartial, and abstract principles*, such as that of utility and the categorical imperative proposed by utilitarianism and Kantianism.⁶³ The worry that virtue ethicists retain concerning this proposal is associated with the fact that, in a way, deontologists and consequentialists believe that one can be moral only by following these principles, only when one is subject to codification. As we have seen in the previous sections (1.2., 1.3.), the task of both theories might be read as that of coming up with a set of universal rules or principles that would have, according to Hursthouse, two significant features:

(a) they would amount to a decision procedure for determining what the right action was in any particular case; (b) they would be stated in such terms that any non-virtuous person could understand and apply them correctly. [R. Hursthouse, 1999, pp. 39-40].

Hursthouse invites us to call this approach "the strong codifiability thesis".⁶⁴ Virtue ethicists intend to reject this way of doing moral philosophy.⁶⁵ For principles and rules underdetermine decisions, and they reduce the moral agent's practical rationality to the pursuit of neutral desires. The main target of a moral theory should indeed be right conduct. Yet universally accepted principles are not a very promising path towards this

⁶³ In J. Griffin's words: "Our ethical life needs, not the language of modern ethics pared down to a few highly abstract terms, but a rich vocabulary that expresses much of the sensitivity of which we are capable". [...] "Complete impartiality is beyond the capacity of normal human beings". See J. Griffin, [1998]: 59-60.

⁶⁴ See R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 40.

⁶⁵ See E. Pincoffs, [1971]: 552-571.

target.⁶⁶ In the same vein, McDowell argued against codification in morality and held that the enterprise of coming up with such a set of rules or principles fails to meet the needs of morality. For the gap between the abstract principles and the complex particularity of concrete moral situations becomes more than obvious. For instance, by following Kant's principle "Do not tell lies" one is required not to do so on any occasion. In the *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant actually maintains that it is wrong to lie even to a would-be murderer in order to protect his intended victim (6: 429-431). Utilitarians, also, are supposed to undertake any action that is in accordance with the principle of utility. They have to do so even when facing the well-known complex situation of Jim and Pedro, where Jim, from the utilitarian perspective, is called upon to kill an innocent person in order to save the lives of some other innocent persons.⁶⁷ So, at least for some philosophers, the idea that rules and principles should dominate a moral theory began to lose its appeal. To be an ongoing agent is not to be an agent of a principle that comes into play willy-nilly as dictated by events detached from the agent's way of living. In McDowell's words:

The picture fits only if the virtuous person's views about how, in general, one should behave are susceptible of codification, in principles apt for serving as major premises in syllogisms of the sort envisaged. But to an unprejudiced eye it should seem quite implausible that any reasonably adult moral outlook admits of any such codification. As Aristotle consistently says, the best generalisations about how one should behave hold only for the most part. [J. McDowell, 1979, p. 336].

And McDowell concludes some pages later:

Occasion by occasion, one knows what to do, if one does, not by applying universal principles, but by being a certain kind of person: one who sees situations in a certain distinctive way. [J. McDowell, 1979, p. 347]⁶⁸

The *second reason* that causes dissatisfaction, according to virtue ethicists, is associated with the way dominant morality treats *the notion of virtue*. As I have already argued (section 1.4.), consequences, the principle of utility, categorical imperatives, actions

⁶⁶ J. Griffin [1998: 60] underscores that "moral life can never be fully reduced to a code- that is, to a set of fairly brief, fairly general rules. Moral judgement may always have to be expressible without reference to particular persons, places, and times but it may often have to deal with the rare, the unusual, the highly specific". E. Pincoffs [1986: 17, 24] also argues against the capturing of moral theory in a system of general, universal rules. See also, D. Statman, [1997b]: 24.

⁶⁷ See B. Williams' example in J.J.C. Smart & B. Williams, [1973]: 96-97.

from duty and obligations have been in the forefront of dominant morality's framework. The notion of virtue does not come into play very often and when it does some rather negative or subordinate features are attributed to it. For instance, Bentham, with his customary candour, judged the virtues poor conceptual soldiers. He particularly holds:

There is no marshalling them; they are susceptible of no arrangement; they are a disorderly body, whose members are frequently in hostility with one another [...] Most of them are characterised by that vagueness which is a convenient instrument for the poetical but dangerous or useless to the practical moralist. [J. Bentham, 1834, 1:196].

One could argue, however, that Bentham's negative understanding of the role of virtue, articulated above, is a rather exceptional approach and by no means can it be considered as the way dominant morality conceives and treats virtue. Influential philosophers classified here as representatives of dominant morality, such as Kant, Mill, as well as Moore, Prichard and Ross, not only refer to virtue, but also discuss it by undertaking an attitude towards virtue which is quite positive and clearly less hostile than Bentham's attitude towards it. Kant, for instance, discusses several issues related to virtue in his *Metaphysics of Morals*. There virtue is described as the moral strength of a human being's will in fulfilling his duty (6:405cf., 6:394). Kant, however, does not consider virtue as a source that provides skills for moral judgement. The latter is strongly associated with reference to universal principles rather than solely linked to virtue, as a disposition to make such judgements.⁶⁸ Mill, as well, in the fourth chapter of his *Utilitarianism* considers virtue as something good, as a part of happiness. So, dominant morality does not rule out virtue considerations as being irrelevant to moral decision and

⁶⁸ See also Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* I.3.

⁶⁹ Some of the criticism that has been directed against Kant's ethics is not entirely fair. Unlike consequentialists-utilitarians, Kant employs some notions such as maxim, motivation, virtue and good will, which could probably, within a different context, be adopted by virtue ethicists. However, the claim that Kant's ethics is primarily an ethics of virtue rather than an ethics of rules, advocated by O'Neill, is, I think the other extreme. For my analysis here I subscribe to Loudon's thesis that the real Kant is somewhere in between these two extremes. Although Kant refers to virtue, to motivation and to good will, he also denies natural inclination any positive role in moral motivation, whereas virtue ethics requires it. Kant also holds that the determining factor of the will must be respect towards to the moral law, a notion that is not welcome within the virtue ethicists' framework. The Kantian moral agent faces the constraint of the moral law, whereas the moral agent proposed by virtue ethicists does not face such a constraint. Finally the Kantian moral agent is not required to be "properly affected" while acting from duty, whereas action from virtue presupposes that someone who does it is "properly affected". In other words action from virtue and desire to do so are in accordance, whereas in the Kantian framework this is not the case. See R.B. Loudon, [1997]: 286-299; O. O'Neill, [1984]: 397; A. MacIntyre, [1981]: 219. Cf. 42, 112; A.W. Wood, [1999]: 329-333. M.W. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, [1997]: 39-49; L.A. Kosman, [1980]: 103-116.

justification. Nevertheless, one could note that dominant morality, regardless of its sympathetic attitude towards virtue, systematically relegates virtue to the periphery of moral thought. For virtue has been discussed merely as a derivative concept, a notion that derives its force from more fundamental conceptions, such as general abstract principles, rules, rights and duties –notions that govern the moral approaches proposed, by among others, I. Kant, J. S. Mill, G. E. Moore [1873-1958], H. A. Prichard [1871-1947], and W. D. Ross [1877-1971].⁷⁰ It is the prevailing opinion that a theory of the virtues would be at most a mere epiphenomenon of the theory of right or the theory of good. Within dominant morality, the question of a person's moral character is typically approached via questions of the worth of the things she does. Since it is an act-orientated morality, matters of moral character seem not only dependent upon, but also exhaustively definable in, the language of act morality. But some people who are now proponents of virtue ethics were dissatisfied with the treatment that the notion of virtue was given by dominant morality. They initially thought that the consideration of virtue as a derivative notion, as something that possesses a "secondary" value in the moral system, contradicts our intuition. For virtue is a matter of considerable importance. Then, some philosophers started expressing this dissatisfaction by arguing in favour of the importance of virtue in the moral system and by stressing the need to reconsider the way we are doing moral philosophy.⁷¹ For it seems that a number of important topics that any adequate moral theory should address, such as motives, moral character, virtues, moral

⁷⁰ H. Prichard [1912: 21-37; 1950: 11, 14] recognises a distinction between moral goodness/obligation and virtue. He attempts to explain that some admirable people live by something other than a sense of moral obligation or an ideal of moral goodness. According to Prichard, what takes primacy in these people's life is not morality and the notion of obligation, but an ideal of being virtuous or of acting courageously, benevolently. Although Prichard observes this distinction between obligation and virtue, he maintains that moral philosophy has, quite rightly, concentrated its attention on the fact of obligations and moral goodness rather than on virtue. For an interesting discussion concerning this issue, see W. Frankena, [1970]: 1-17. In this article Frankena, drawing inspiration from the title of Prichard's aforementioned article, notes that modern moral philosophy is probably based on a mistake; but a mistake that Prichard himself did not recognise, namely the need to dedicate more space than some mere hints to an ethics of virtue and to explore virtue ethics in its entirety as an alternative or supplement to one of obligation and moral goodness. (p.17). See also W. D. Ross, [1930b], especially Ch.1-2. G.E. Moore [1965: 77] also holds that humankind took a step forward when, in making moral judgements, people began putting some weight on motives, dispositions and character traits. Moore, unlike most consequentialists, attributed intrinsic, rather than instrumental, value to motives and character traits and he maintained that their presence or absence makes a difference to the overall value of state of affairs. However, as Shaw notes, "Moore's position encounters a problem that throws its consistency into question. If one grants that certain motives have inherent value or disvalue, it is hard to see how one could avoid letting this fact influence the normative assessments of actions, so that the right thing for Geraldo to do is not simply to act in a certain way but to act that way from an intrinsically good motive. See W.H. Shaw, [1999]: 139-140.

wisdom, the role of emotions in our moral life, have been ignored or sidelined by dominant morality. Philosophers made a plea for virtue to be considered as a concept that should be central to moral theorising. They also argued that dominant morality leads us to unfortunate consequences by continuing to treat virtue as a secondary notion. For virtue is actually more fundamental than is typically supposed.

There are, for example, many times in the application of principles in to practice when matters of moral character are of the first importance - times when the issue is not how much harm has been done, or whether this specific action could be considered in accordance with the categorical imperative, but rather whether the sort of character indicated by the behaviour is "acceptable", "admirable", "virtuous". Consider, for instance, the case of a doctor. The fact that she might be arrogant, uncaring, dishonest, and self-centred is also important and needs to be taken into consideration, while she is acting. The mere fact that she has to act in accordance with certain rules is not adequate. A certain amount of virtue and moral or practical wisdom might be required both to interpret the rules and to judge which rule was most appropriately to be applied in a particular case. The focus on acts, their values and relations to dutifulness misses something crucial. Probably, what is fundamental to the moral agent is not whether she has done the right thing, but whether she is, at bottom, a good person - not what her act was, but whether it was an index of her character. Consider, for instance, the utilitarian sole end, the greatest happiness of the greatest number. A variety of morally questionable means could be employed in order to achieve this end, namely the punishment of an innocent person or the enslavement of a minority. What one can see in this case is that, although this person's action is right, in the sense that it contributes to the promotion of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, it is not necessarily the case that the person who wants and strives for the general happiness is therefore benevolent. The same applies to the deontological perspective. One can always treat others as ends but never as means, and one can do so without indicating that that was an index of one's character.⁷² Performing a morally required action is associated not only with the mere acceptance of certain principles that call for that action. Rather it is mostly a matter of being this kind of person or becoming this kind of person that the action performed indicates. Living by certain principles is substantially linked with being a

⁷¹ G. E. M. Anscombe, [1958]: 1-19; L. Becker, [1975]: 110-122; M. Stocker, [1976]: 453-466; J. McDowell, [1979]: 331-350.

certain sort of person. So, following and acting according to the principle of utility makes me someone who contributes to the general happiness, but it does not make me benevolent. For benevolence is strongly associated with a certain kind of motive and a certain kind of being, whereas the greatest happiness of the greatest number is not. In the latter case, doing the sort of action that is required does not entail or is not based on being the corresponding person. But a moral theory is probably required to associate being and doing in a more promising way, that is, to focus on those kinds of actions that indicate an index of one's character, rather than on actions that are detached from one's being and are simply in accordance with some general moral principles. Elizabeth Anscombe was the first who argued along these lines. She writes:

you can do ethics without it [viz. the notion of obligations or morally ought], as is shown by the example of Aristotle. It would be a great improvement if, instead of "morally wrong", one always named a genus such as "untruthful", "unchaste", "unjust". We should no longer ask whether doing something was "wrong", passing directly from some description of an action to this notion; we should ask whether, e.g., it was unjust; and the answer would sometimes be clear at once" [G.E. M. Anscombe, 1958, pp. 8-9].

Foot adds her voice to this current of thought and she holds that a sound moral philosophy should cease paying excessive attention to the most abstract terms involved in ethical thought and talk, terms such as "right", "good" and "ought", which find their embodiments in principles and in general rules. Terms such as sensitivity, compassion, courageousness, self interest and virtues in general are also important and actually too valuable to be considered as derivative from general principles and notions of duties. In her article "Virtues and Vices", Foot underscores the point that a sound moral theory should start from a theory of virtues and vices rather than from general principles.⁷³ In the introduction to her collection of essays, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*, she maintains that what underlies her work is "the thought that a sound moral philosophy should start from a theory of virtues and vices" and has to be directly related to practice.⁷⁴ The acts of the moral agent are expressions of her virtues, rather

⁷² See, for instance, E. Pincoffs, [1986]: 107.

⁷³ In her [1978]: 1-18.

⁷⁴ P. xi. Some years later Pincoffs shared Foot's perspective by holding: "If the cardinal sin of ethical theories is that they are reductive- that they eliminate by fiat what is morally relevant and legislate the form of moral reflection-then the question is whether a non-reductive discipline of ethics is possible. If moral reasoning and moral character are more intimately related than ethical theory allows, then there is the question of what account of morality can be offered that gives character its due. An answer

than of moral rules and principles. One can perform an action when one has the virtue to act as one judges. In other words, one can judge that "I ought to help poor people" yet one's action does not have moral value, if one lacks the virtue of charity. McDowell highlights in a nice way the contrast between dominant morality and the new approach that stems from the dissatisfaction that dominant morality caused to some thinkers by noting:

On this view [dominant morality] the primary topic of ethics is the concept of right conduct, and the nature and justification of principles of behaviour. If there is a place for an interest in the concept of virtue, it is a secondary place. Virtue is a disposition (perhaps of a specially rational and self-conscious kind) to behave rightly; the nature of virtue is explained, as it were, *from the outside in*. [...] According to this different view [virtue ethics], although the point of engaging in ethical reflection still lies in the interest of the question "How should one live", that question is necessarily approached via the notion of a virtuous person. A conception of right conduct is grasped, as it were, *from the inside out*. [J. McDowell, 1979, p. 331, emphasis added].

The *third reason* that causes dissatisfaction with dominant morality is associated with the fact that dominant morality in one way or another gives *insufficient weight to emotions, feelings, and interests of moral agents* and, in an important sense, it slights, devalues or downgrades such agents. Emotions and interests are in a sense irrelevant to proponents of the principle of utility or the categorical imperative. The moral agent is required to promote the happiness of the greatest number regardless of how the agent feels about this requirement. One might do so while feeling sad and unsatisfied, but to the extent that it produces the maximisation of happiness one's act is morally worthy. What is morally relevant is strongly associated with the situation, rather than with the moral agent's project, feelings and personal interests.⁷⁵ The moral agent is required to act in a certain way, in virtue of which general happiness will be promoted. However, morality should not be just about acts. Rather, morality should relate acts with their source, namely the moral agent, the moral agent's emotions and feelings.

The same criticism applies to Kantian moral thinking. It seems that emotions, feelings and personal interests are excluded from the moral worth that only the notion of duty provides. One might argue that, in a way, what dominant morality offers is nothing more than the agent's alienation from her concerns, virtue, interests, feelings, desires, and

to both of these questions is that the primary business of ethics ought to be with qualities of character, with the virtues and vices." In his [1986]: 5. See also p. 23.

⁷⁵ See B. Williams, [1981]: 14-15; E. Pincoffs, [1986]: 21, 27.

emotions, or a detachment from what Williams calls "agent's projects".⁷⁶ However, a form of moral theory that emphasises essential ethical categories, such as character traits, virtue, feelings, and emotions, is also required and is probably more appealing than dominant morality. For feelings, personal concerns and projects are essential rather than accidental features of deliberation. As Pincoffs maintains:

One way to assess the weight of moral consideration is to think not so much in terms merely of what I ought to do simpliciter, what my rights and duties are, but of what I would be by doing or agreeing to a given thing. What has weight with me is what I think of myself as being. This is the side of moral deliberation that tends to be overlooked or underplayed by contemporary [dominant] ethical theories. If I do not care what I am or am becoming, whether I am fair or unfair, cruel or kind, honest or dishonest, then moral talk will have little significance for me. [E. Pincoffs, 1986, p. 105.]⁷⁷

1.5.2. Dissatisfaction Springing From Utilitarianism

The different orientation in moral theorising proposed by virtue ethicists is also a result of the dissatisfaction that each of the two theories of dominant morality has caused separately. It has been argued that, on the one hand, consequentialism and its main embodiment, namely utilitarianism, are too demanding. Also since within utilitarianism the end justifies the means the possibility of a moral agent being undervalued and being treated without dignity and integrity is unfortunately open. Furthermore, since many forms of consequences, such as actual or foreseen, come into play, this unclarity leads to another disadvantage, which Slote calls "utilitarian underdetermination".⁷⁸ On the other hand, deontology and its main expression, namely Kantianism, apart from suggesting an apparently legalistic, non-intrinsic and personally unfulfilling kind of morality, also suffers from what Slote calls "self-others asymmetry" and inconsistency. For, on Kant's view, Slote holds, "we have an obligation to benefit or contribute to the happiness of the others, but no parallel obligation to seek our own well-being or happiness".⁷⁹ But before addressing the reasons that made some people unsympathetic to the Kantian perspective,

⁷⁶ B. Williams [1981:2-5, 14-19] holds that every individual person has a set of desires, concerns, or, as he calls them, projects, that help constitute a character. Williams argues that dominant morality by being impartial and abstract detaches the moral agent and her motivation from the level of particular relations to particular persons as well as from her personal concerns. For dominant morality is concerned with "abstract persons" rather than with persons that live a *distinctive life*. An essential issue, namely that different persons have different characters, according to Williams, has not been addressed by dominant morality.

⁷⁷ See also pp. 27-28.

⁷⁸ M. Slote, [1992]: 239-248.

⁷⁹ M. Slote, [1992]: 11.

let us first scrutinise the most significant reason voiced for being dissatisfied with utilitarianism. These can be grouped into the following categories:

- (a) Utilitarianism requires too much of moral agents. For only the action that produces the greatest happiness of the greatest number is good and any action that produces something less is not morally worthy.
- (b) It licenses immoral conduct, since the end justifies the means. So, if killing one innocent person can save the life of five other innocent persons, then one is justified in doing so. For this action satisfies the principle of utility. On the other hand, it has to pay the very high price that the threat to human integrity generates.⁸⁰
- (c) It does not give us the right reason to keep promises or it cannot do justice to promises.⁸¹ Because it is focused on consequences, it is a moral theory that is future oriented. It tells me to do what is best now, independently of what I have promised some time ago. If I have promised you to go for a walk and discuss something important which you want to reveal only to me and you need to do so as soon as possible, and I can now see that this would not contribute to maximising happiness (my family came to visit me after a long absence) then as a good utilitarian I must stay with my family, regardless of the fact that I know that such a choice would be very harmful for you. Furthermore, since the obligation to keep promises is based on consequences, rather than honesty, utilitarianism misunderstands what promises are, and fails to grasp the distinctive character of the obligation they create. The same applies to truthfulness. Utilitarians are against lying because of its consequences, not because of its intrinsic wickedness. For instance, non-utilitarian views maintain that lying is wrong and inherently so, not because of its results, but because it is exploitative and violates the respect we owe other rational creatures.⁸²
- (d) It is indifferent to the distribution of welfare. For utilitarianism recognises only the main imperative, namely that welfare should be promoted as much as possible; it does not really matter how that welfare is allocated. In other words, because

⁸⁰ This follows Williams's well known example about Jim's dilemma and the implications that it creates with regard to human integrity. See J.J.C. Smart & B. Williams, [1973]: 98-100. See also G. W. Harris, [1999]: 88-107.

⁸¹ Along the same lines R. B. Brandt has written that the standard version of utilitarianism "implies that if you have employed a boy to mow your lawn and he has finished the job and asks for his pay, you should pay him what you promised only if you cannot find a better use for your money. [...]. It implies that if your father is ill and has no prospect of good in his life, and maintaining him is a drain on the energy and enjoyment of others, then, if you can end his life without provoking any public scandal or setting a bad example, it is your positive duty to take matters into your own hands and bring his life to a close". In his [1963]: 109-110.

utilitarians believe that social well-being should be promoted in whatever manner will maximise it overall, it follows that it is unimportant whether some individuals end up enjoying greater well-being and happiness than others. Between a society that experiences the greatest happiness of the greatest numbers and another that experiences less overall happiness, but is egalitarian, utilitarians favour the first one. By doing so utilitarianism goes astray because any satisfactory normative theory should care more for egalitarianism than for greatest overall happiness.⁸³

- (e) It suffers from underdetermination. The formulation of the principle of utility leaves open at least two main possibilities: either that having better foreseen consequences or having better actual consequences are sufficient for an act to count as obligatory. However some utilitarians leave it undetermined whether it is actual or foreseen consequences that matter, and those who do take sides do so without providing any justification for their particular preferences.⁸⁴ Slote considers underdetermination as a serious problem for utilitarianism and as a further reason for preferring the virtue-ethical approach by holding:

These problems of underdetermination may present as great a threat to the utilitarian enterprise as the intuitive implausibilities utilitarianism clearly leads to. The utilitarian can always brazen things out with respect to the latter, but the former problems seem absolutely endemic to the utilitarians' own distinctive point of view. [...] The difficulties brought to light are ones that ought to bother any utilitarian who is thinking of things from within her own philosophical perspective. And until such a utilitarian or someone else shows us how to answer these problems, I think there is reason to regard the utilitarian approach as a self-limiting, self-undercutting failure". [M. Slote, 1992, p. 244]⁸⁵

The above reasons make some people believe that utilitarianism is a rather unpromising moral theory, or a theory that lacks an adequate formulation. In addition, some have expressed the belief that utilitarianism is a theory that proposes a view of right and wrong profoundly flawed and contend that inevitably utilitarianism has implications that are ethically repugnant.

⁸² See C. Fried, [1978]: 67; A. Donagan, [1977]: 89.

⁸³ See J. Rawls, [1990]: 91-92.

⁸⁴ M. Slote, [1992]: 240.

⁸⁵ M. Slote also argues that, even if utilitarians attempt to go beyond their utilitarian framework to solve this problem by appealing to common sense, and by doing so support the expectably better consequences, still that would not solve the problem of underdetermination, since most direct

1.5.3. Dissatisfaction Springing From Deontology/Kantianism

Deontology and its main embodiment, Kantianism, have also inspired some disdain. Kant's admirers usually see in his claims a great advance in moral theory, but critics often find Kant's contentions obscure and implausible. The vocabulary and tone in Kant's writing about morality is disturbing to many readers, especially when they contrast this with the ethical works of Hume and Aristotle. Kant focuses attention on what we morally must do, what is necessary, a command of reason. MacIntyre holds that "in Kant's moral writing we have reached a point at which the notion that morality is anything other than obedience to rules has almost, if not quite, disappeared from sight".⁸⁶

Deontology, and particularly Kant's ethics, remains an influential attempt to vindicate universal moral principles without reference to preference and to consequences. However, by doing so, it alienates agents from their feelings, desires, perceptions, and contextual judgements. B. Williams holds that Kantian moral theory treats persons in abstraction from character, and thus stands guilty of misrepresenting not only persons but morality and practical deliberation as well.⁸⁷ P. Foot chastises Kant as one of the select group of philosophers whose "tacitly accepted opinion was that a study of the topic [of the virtues and vices] would form no part of the fundamental work of ethics".⁸⁸ Although one might disagree with such a bold claim concerning Kant's attitude towards the notion of virtue, one will find it difficult to reject the claim that actually Kant attributes a subordinate role to virtue within his moral system. Virtue, for Kant, is a part of his moral system, but a part less dominant than other fundamental notions such as the notion of duty and the categorical imperative. If one conceives the fundamental work of ethics as a project associated primarily with such notions, then one could understand, in a way, Foot's bold statement about Kant's attitude towards virtue.

Slote highlights another reason to be dissatisfied with Kantian moral theory. According to Slote, a sound moral theory must be symmetric and must propose requirements one has, not simply towards others, but also towards one's self.⁸⁹ Slote maintains that Kantian morality does not meet this condition.⁹⁰ Rather, it is self-other asymmetric and, as Slote holds, this is a serious reason for a new moral outlook to

utilitarians, such as Bentham, Hare, and Smart, are unwilling, according to Slote, "to place much reliance on ordinary thought or intuition". In his, [1992]: 244.

⁸⁶ A. MacIntyre, [1981]: 219 cf. 42, 112.

⁸⁷ B. Williams, [1981]: 14, 19.

⁸⁸ P. Foot, [1979]: 1.

⁸⁹ M. Slote, [1992]: 39-44.

⁹⁰ M. Slote, [1992]: 44-49.

emerge, different from the Kantian one. For Kant recognises categorical imperatives of others' interest and does not equally refer to categorical imperatives of self-interest. Kant's moral theory leads to paradoxes and inconsistencies, Slote holds, since within the Kantian moral framework there are no duties or obligations to pursue one's own happiness. He seeks to account for this fact via the claims that every person "inevitably and spontaneously" seeks to promote his or her own happiness. However, according to Kant, what we do inevitably and spontaneously cannot be obligation or a duty.⁹¹ Furthermore, in the Kantian framework, it cannot be morally justifiable either. Slote maintains that Kant does not treat enhancement of the agent's well-being as a basis for favourable evaluation of an agent's actions and this feature of Kant's moral thinking constitutes a strong objection to it. Kantian moral thinking espouses an "agent-sacrificing self-other asymmetric view" about the pursuit of mere benefits or happiness.⁹² By doing so, Slote holds, it gives insufficient weight to the interests or well-being of moral agents, and thus, in an important sense, it slights, devalues, or downgrades such agents.⁹³ Also, Slote adds, although self-other asymmetry is a central feature in Kant's moral theory, the latter is subject to its own distinctive incoherence. According to the End in Itself formulation of the categorical imperative, the moral agent should: "Act in such a way that she always treat humanity, whether in her own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means but always at the same time as an end". Slote maintains that in the End in Itself formulation of the categorical imperative just mentioned the self-other asymmetry is absent and this sits badly and creates an unpleasant incoherence when one recalls what Kant says about the absence of duties to pursue one's own happiness. This is revealed in his attitude towards actions that harm the moral agent. On the one hand Kant maintains that we do not have an obligation to produce goods for ourselves and pursue our own happiness, because we do that automatically and on the other he argues that we do have an obligation to avoid doing harm to ourselves. Slote, however, finds these discrepancies, these inconsistencies, perplexing, and even troubling. He argues:

If Kant is allowed to have been justified in claiming that we inevitably and spontaneously aim for our good or happiness, surely there is similar reason to hold that we inevitably and spontaneously (or typically and naturally) refrain from mutilating our own bodies, and so it would appear that the argument Kant uses to justify the absence of a duty to seek one's own happiness can also be

⁹¹ M. Slote, [1992]: 45 & n. 19. See also p. 28, 40.

⁹² M. Slote, [1992]: 47. See also p. 28.

⁹³ M. Slote, [1992]: 3.

used to argue against the existence of any obligation to refrain from wilful self-mutilation. And since the self-other symmetry of Kant's End- in- Itself formulation of the Categorical Imperative entails that there is such an obligation (Kant at least argues that it does), we really do end up with an incoherence or inconsistency in Kant's theory treated as a whole. [M. Slote, 1992, p. 48]⁹⁴

In the light of these problems, some philosophers urge us to seek a genuine theoretical alternative to dominant morality, a differently orientated theory that focuses more on notions such as virtue, moral character and flourishing, abandons universal principles and their difficulties, considers virtues to be central notions in moral theorising, rather than derivative from abstract principles, and does not suffer from self-other asymmetry and inconsistencies; a new moral orientation which attempts to avoid giving insufficient weight to the interests, emotions, and psychological make-up of the individual agent, and proposes instead a more agent-orientated approach, that would probably constitute the best way of grounding our ethical thinking. Agents rather than principles should be morality's main concern and a moral approach that advances such a view is virtue ethics.

1.6. Rudiments of Virtue Ethics

Due to the aforementioned reasons for dissatisfaction, in the last few years, a great deal of energy has been expended on the critical evaluation of dominant morality. Virtue ethicists have highlighted some serious shortcomings within dominant morality. This has produced the emergence of a new attempt to reconsider morality, which will offer a fresh insight concerning morality's structure, focus, basic concepts and main targets. Many thinkers have participated in this new current of thought that have produced a plethora of issues, charges, claims and counter-claims all raised in recent work on virtue ethics.

Initially, one can observe two main distinctions within this new wave of thought. One is associated with the way it was developed and the other with the way it is expressed. R. Hursthouse maintains that one can detect that virtue ethics went through three main phases of development. At the very beginning, virtue ethics was regarded not as a third approach in its own right, but as stressing some interesting points, such as the motives, character and virtues of the moral agent but in a short although promising way.⁹⁵ Afterwards, more articles and books were written in defence of these points and it acquired the status of the "new kid on the block", but was still not equally as powerful as

⁹⁴ See also, pp. 46-49.

⁹⁵ See E. Anscombe, [1958]: 1-19.

the big boys that constitute dominant morality.⁹⁶ Recently, as, -among others- D. Statman, R. Hursthouse and M. Slote have argued, virtue ethics has acquired full status, recognised as a rival to deontological and utilitarian approaches, an interestingly and challengingly different orientation from dominant morality.⁹⁷

Apart from the different phases, one can detect two different ways of arguing in favour of virtue ethics. Most of the work done in this genre had a negative, rather than a positive, thrust. Its aim was more to criticise dominant morality and research programmes to which it was opposed, such as "the ethics of principles", or "impartialistic ethics", or simply "the ethics of action".⁹⁸ Due to this negative emphasis virtue ethics is better known to many by what it is against, rather than by what it is for, and that has made the merits of the theory difficult to assess. In a way, the negative thrust is understandable, as a result of the shortcomings within dominant morality (see 1.5.1.-1.5.3.). However, in order to better understand and better judge what virtue ethics offers, its positive side is also required. Otherwise, virtue ethicists would not have provided a sufficient and complete alternative to dominant moral theorising. Recently, virtue ethics has found its positive thrust and it is starting to become more obvious what this theory is arguing for, rather than only what it is arguing against.⁹⁹ Virtue ethics differs in important ways from Kantianism and Utilitarianism, and it is better considered as a third alternative in the contemporary moral landscape, rather than a supplement to the dominant morality. Virtue ethics instantiates the effort to shed some fresh light on dominant moral theorising.

The upshot of all this effort is a new moral approach, which comes in a multitude of forms and is associated with a variety of issues. By being dissatisfied with dominant morality, virtue ethicists moved towards a new orientation, in which the main concern, the basic notions and tools, are different from those that dominant morality uses. However, it is not only their opposition to various features of dominant morality which unites virtue ethicists. They also share some positive claims, although the way in which they employ them varies, and so virtue ethics comes in a variety of forms, some more radical than others. I shall focus first on what I consider to be essential features of most

⁹⁶ See M. Slote, [1992]: 254-255.

⁹⁷ See R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 2; D. Statman, [1998]: 2; M. Slote, [2000]: 325; Karen Stohr & Christopher Heath Wellman, [2002]: 70.

⁹⁸ M. Stocker, [1976]: 453-466; A. MacIntyre, [1981]; B. Williams, [1985]; M. Slote, [1992].

⁹⁹ See, among others, L. Blum, [1980]; R. Audi, [1995b]: 449-71; G. Watson, [1997]: 56-81; M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 175-238; M. Slote, [2001]; R. Hursthouse, [1999]; P. Foot, [2001].

version of virtue ethics and secondly I shall discuss the different forms in which virtue ethics has been expressed. Virtue ethics enriches the conceptual map of moral philosophy and virtue ethicists intend to shed new light on moral theorising. Modern moral philosophy has experienced a new moral approach, and thus it is conceptually richer.

1.7. Virtue Ethics' Main Features

Unlike *act-orientated* dominant morality (see 1.4.), virtue ethics is *agent-orientated*. Its main concern is associated with the moral agent and only secondarily with the moral agent's actions. Virtue ethicists emphasise agents and their character rather than actions, and advocate that the former should be the primary focus of ethics. Within dominant morality the actions of the moral agent, which are performed in accordance with the principle of utility or in conformity with the moral law were the criterion for attributing moral worth, regardless of the moral agent's inner state and conflicts. According to virtue ethics, however, the primary concern is associated with the moral agent's inner state. Ethics should be much more concerned with what sort of person is good or virtuous than with what makes right actions right and wrong actions wrong. In other words, although within dominant morality moral life is a matter associated with general principles and acts in accordance with them, in virtue ethics' framework "moral life primarily requires us to understand what is it to be a virtuous individual, or what is it to have one or another particular virtue, conceived as an inner trait or disposition of the individual".¹⁰⁰ This formulates the first and indeed best known thesis, which can be observed in any form of virtue ethics: "*An action is right if and only if it is what an agent with a virtuous character would do in the circumstances*"¹⁰¹. In a way, most virtue ethicists attribute priority to evaluations of virtue over action, a primacy of character in the justification of right action. For instance, in the utilitarian framework it is right to save someone's life or to reveal an important truth only when such an action will produce maximisation of

¹⁰⁰ See M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote [1997]: 177.

¹⁰¹ See J. Oakley, [1996]: 129. With regard to the primacy of character, Hudson writes: "The very notion of a courageous act- taking courage to be a paradigm for moral virtues, for the moment- is secondary to and dependent upon the notion of a courageous person. The former acquires its sense from the latter. How so? An act gets rightly called courageous when and only when it is such that the courageous person would perform it in those circumstances. The courageous man is thought of as an ideal type, who is the exemplar of courage; it is by reference to that type that we select which acts are typical of courage. Once we have, so to speak, got our hands on such an exemplar, we can, by reference to what he would do, decide whether what we and others do is in fact courageous. That task

happiness. Within the utilitarian framework, *moral agents act in accordance with the principle of utility*. Similarly, according to Kant, such an action is right only when it is performed out of duty and in conformity with the categorical imperative. Within the Kantian framework, *the moral agent acts from duty*. Virtue ethicists consider the issue differently, by holding that *the moral agent acts from virtue*. Thus, as P. Foot argues, it is right to save another's life, where life is still good to that person, because this is what someone with the virtue of benevolence would do.¹⁰² By the same token, R. Hursthouse maintains that it is right in certain circumstances to reveal an important truth to another, even when it is hurtful for them, because a person with the virtue of honesty would tell the truth in such circumstances.¹⁰³ In the same vein, P. Foot maintains that I ought to repay you the money I have borrowed, even if I know that you will waste it, because repaying the money is what a person with the virtue of justice would do.¹⁰⁴ Virtue ethicists give primacy to character in the sense that they believe reference to character is *essential* in a correct account of the right and wrong action.

As a reflection of this feature, one can find in the literature virtue ethics being characterised as an ethics of *being* in contrast with the ethics of *doing* that dominant morality seems to represent. According to virtue ethics, how it is best or right or proper to conduct oneself is understood in terms of how it is best for a human being to be.¹⁰⁵ By the same token, some have thought that, in a way, virtue ethicists alter the central question in morality. Dominant morality is mostly concerned with the question "how should one act?" and offers moral theories that employ general principles while attempting to answer this question. For some people, however, virtue ethics is asking instead "how should I live?" or "what kind of person should I be?". But such a claim in a way complicates the issue. For when someone lives her life she must act as well. But the way that someone performs such acts is what differentiates virtue ethics from dominant morality. The answer that virtue ethics provides is not similar to dominant morality's, namely, a situation by situation examination of what you should do on every single occasion. Rather, virtue ethics emphasises the development of the right sort of moral

of appraising the courageousness of acts relies essentially on our understanding of the trait of courage, a characteristic of a type of person". In his [1986]: 42-43.

¹⁰² According to P. Foot, a person with the virtue of benevolence would act in this way because benevolence is a virtue, which is directed at the good of others, and to have the virtue of benevolence is to be disposed to help others in situations where we are likely to be called upon to do so. See P. Foot, [1979]: 54 & [1979a]: 4.

¹⁰³ R. Hursthouse, [1997]: 229.

¹⁰⁴ See P. Foot, [1978]: 44-45.

¹⁰⁵ G. Watson [1997: 58] calls this the claim of explanatory primacy.

character so that you know what to do no matter what unexpected problems come up. The person of moral character, with relevant experience, education and reference to role models, will know what to do without having to rely on a strict code of rules, and will be flexible and sensitive in their decisions. Virtue ethics puts emphasis on an agent's being rather than on an agent's doing.

Although this is one essential feature of virtue ethics, the terminology used here might give the wrong impression about virtue ethics. By claiming that virtue ethics is agent-orientated, I do not mean that virtue ethics is not concerned about actions or in a way separates the moral agent from her actions, after all, there is a strong conceptual link between moral agents and their acts.¹⁰⁶ On the contrary, as Hursthouse illuminates, virtue ethics is concerned with actions as well, and can actually provide action guidance.¹⁰⁷ The contrast is between agent-orientated and act-orientated theories. This, however, does not entail that virtue ethics has nothing to propose in regards to the concept of right action, nor about which action is right and which is wrong.¹⁰⁸ But the main concern is the character of the moral agent who performs this action and how the moral agent ended up performing this particular action and not a different one.

Another distinctive feature of virtue ethics is the fact that it treats virtue as "central" notion. General normative moral theories sometimes take one of these notions to be more "basic" than others. For example, a deontological theory might say that a situation is good to the extent that it involves a person's doing his or her duty. A virtuous character might be identified with a robust disposition to do one's duty. Different virtues and vices might be identified in terms of dispositions to perform different duties. Utilitarianism or consequentialism, on the other hand, takes the theory of value to be more basic and explains the remaining elements of morality in terms of value. Moral duties might be explained as acts that make things better (or better for people generally) or that tend to do so or that are instances of rules that would make things better if everyone followed them. Moral virtues might be identified with those character traits possession of which tends to make things generally better (or better for people generally)

¹⁰⁶ See R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 81.

¹⁰⁷ According to R. Hursthouse [1999: 29], "Comparing the three [utilitarianism, deontology and virtue ethics], we see that we could say, "Virtue ethics (in its account of right action) is agent-centred rather than consequences or rule-centred. It is agent-centred in that it introduces the concept of the virtuous *agent* in the first premise of its account of right action, where utilitarianism and deontology introduce the concepts of consequences and moral rule respectively" That's true; it does. But note that it is not thereby "agent-centred rather than act-centred". It has an answer to "How shall I decide what to do?"

¹⁰⁸ R. Hursthouse, [1996]: 20, 22, 25-28; [1997]: 227-244; [1999]: 29.



and moral vices might be identified with those character traits possession of which tends to make things generally worse. In contrast, virtue ethics takes the notion of virtuous character to be central and explains moral duty and moral value in terms of a virtuous person: what one ought morally to do in a particular situation is what a virtuous person would characteristically do in that situation.

By the same token, virtue ethics offers a new account with regard to the motivation of the moral agent. Dominant morality provides criteria of right action, such as the principle of utility or the categorical imperative, which are detached from an agent's feelings and emotions and in the case of consequentialism/utilitarianism detached from the agent's motives as well. The moral agent is required to meet these criteria no matter what kinds of motives, dispositions, or character they act from in performing the action the criterion directs them to do. According to virtue ethicists, it is not part of the motivation of the virtuous person that she *morally ought* to adopt this course of action, or to be that sort of person, as the categorical imperative or the principle of utility requires. As Baron illustrates, the Kantian moral agent acts from duty and duty involves constraint. It is a matter of a commitment to do your duty, rather than a matter of affection. The Kantian agent is required to act from duty and she can do so without being properly affected. By contrast, within the framework of virtue ethics the moral agent is motivated to do X because she wants, she desires and she has the virtue to do X, and so she does so by being properly affected and from virtue rather than from duty.¹⁰⁹ This agent does X without any sense of constraint about it. She sees such a moral action to make a claim on her, but is not motivated to do so from duty. Rather she wants, she cares, and she desires to exhibit the virtue she possesses and so she does X. Furthermore, a virtuous person is one who has, and exercises certain character traits, namely the virtuous. In the same vein, virtue ethics makes primary use of aretaic notions such as "good", "bad", "admirable" and "virtuous", rather than of deontic notions such as "right", "wrong", "duty", and "obligation". The criterion of right action within the framework of virtue ethics carries certain "internal" requirements, such as that we can act rightly only if we have and act out of the kinds of motives, dispositions, character traits, and feelings that a virtuous person would have and act from in the circumstances.

Virtue ethics also attributes *a priority to goodness over rightness*. In other words, virtue ethics claims that we need an account of human goodness or what is commonly regarded

¹⁰⁹ See M. W. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 54-55.

as admirable human traits before we can determine what it is right for us to do in any given situation. As a result of this claim, one can see that virtue ethics actually differs from the Kantian approach. For within the Kantian framework the basic notion is the notion of right. Furthermore, it is a notion that can be considered only a priori and does not appeal to human nature. *Morality is something a priori and it is expressed by universal principles, such as the categorical imperative.* According to virtue ethics, however, human nature is central and the good related to it provides us with guidance to the right. *Morality is strongly associated with human nature and it is free from universal abstract principles.* One might argue, however, that virtue ethics, by attributing priority to goodness over rightness, just adopts one of the consequentialist principles. But such a claim is not on the right track. For, within virtue ethics *virtues are intrinsic goods*, far from being instrumental, as a consequentialist approach affirms.¹¹⁰

1.8. Forms of Virtue Ethics

The main features of virtue ethics have been employed in different ways and, as a result, virtue ethics comes in many forms and is concerned with a variety of issues. One way to provide a conceptual map of this multifaceted approach is by having in mind different criteria, either general or more specific ones.

A general criterion, for instance, is the *locus of virtue* in the moral system. Within the framework of virtue ethics one can detect at least two different approaches with regard to the locus of virtue within morality. According to the most radical version advanced by Slote (he calls it "agent-based" virtue ethics), virtue is an explanatorily basic, self-standing, irreducible, fundamental, not derivative notion and all other moral notions are based on or reduced to it.¹¹¹ In a more moderate version advanced by others including Hursthouse, another notion, such as happiness, is the most basic notion in the moral system and virtue derives from it.¹¹² Slote terms this version of virtue ethics "agent-prior" virtue ethics.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ See J. Oakley, [1996]: 138-140.

¹¹¹ M. Slote holds that the only example of such a radical version of virtue ethics is Martineau's *Types of Ethical Theory* [1891]. For Slote's account of the above versions of virtue ethics see M. Baron, P. Pettit, M. Slote, [1997]: 206-225.

¹¹² It is worth noting here that apart from virtue and happiness some other notions can be considered basic. In Plato's moral system, as we will see in Chapter V Section 3, forms are the basic notion.

¹¹³ Slote associates this version with R. Hursthouse's account of virtue ethics and Plato's ethics. In Chapter IV I compare Hursthouse's account and Slote's agent-prior virtue ethics and I challenge Slote's association of Hursthouse's account with his agent-prior virtue ethics. In Chapters IV & V, I support with some textual evidence Slote's association of agent-prior virtue ethics with Plato's ethics.

More specific criteria are, for instance, the relation between aretaic and deontic notions, the relation between virtue and the evaluation of actions as well as the relation between virtue and happiness.

With regard to *the relation between the notion of virtue and the notions of right and wrong* (as well as obligations, principles and rules), virtue ethics can be divided into two main versions (in which one can in turn discern various subdivisions), that is, the moderate version and the radical version. According to the moderate version, dominant morality has ignored the important questions, such as "what constitutes a virtue, and what vice, what is moral character and what is the role of virtue in moral theorising?" Although the moderate version holds that dominant morality has undervalued fundamental notions of morality, it regards dominant moral theories as incomplete rather than radically wrongheaded. Besides, the moderate version does not argue for the replacement of talk about right and wrong with discussion about the virtues. It only holds that the main focus should be on aretaic notions. They are the primary concepts –the concepts that moral philosophy should start from. They set up the understanding of the other concepts –they are primary for understanding. However, they are not basic, in the sense that other concepts are derivative from or reducible to them. The notion of virtue and of the virtuous agent is the focal concept of ethics.¹¹⁴ According to the radical version of virtue ethics, dominant morality is not just incomplete. It is misdirected. For without a clear understanding of virtues and of properly moral motivation, it is impossible to determine what is morally incumbent on us, or morally desirable for us. People who support this version of virtue ethics recommend either the *conceptual reduction* of the notions of right and wrong to aretaic notions, or the *replacement* of talk about moral right and wrong with the talk about aretaic terms.¹¹⁵

With regard to *the relation between virtue and the evaluation of actions* one can detect within virtue ethics at least two main approaches, one radical and one moderate. According to the radical approach, advanced by Watson, Triantosky and Slote, the notion of virtue is basic and the evaluation of actions derives from it. According to the moderate approach advanced by Hursthouse, the notion of virtue is disassociated from any foundational or reductivist role and it is described as the notion that provides the fine tuning in the right action. Hursthouse, then, holds that virtue can be considered as a

¹¹⁴ In favour of this argument see R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 83. See also J. Annas, [1993]: 9.

¹¹⁵ In favour of this line of thought see G.E.M. Anscombe, [1958]: 9. M. Baron, P. Pettit, M. Slote, [1997]: 177. See also K. Baier, [1998]: 126-135.

primary notion with regard to actions, but not as a basic notion.¹¹⁶ Another moderate approach to the relation between virtue and the evaluation of actions is given by what Slote terms "agent-focused" virtue ethics. According to Slote, agent-focused virtue ethics is the approach that satisfies the requirement for a focus on the agent and her virtues, as opposed to general moral principles and obligations. According to this version, the virtuous agent is also sensitive to the requirements of the circumstances, *sees* and *perceives* what is right for her and acts accordingly. However, as Slote holds, such an approach clearly indicates that act-assessment is not entirely derivative from evaluations of person or traits. On the contrary, the metaphor of perception seems to indicate that being virtuous involves being keyed into facts independent of one's virtuousness about what is admirable or called for.¹¹⁷ Slote maintains that such an approach does not provide us with a "clear cut" priority of virtue over the evaluation of action, an account that a radical virtue ethics needs.

Finally, there are at least four different approaches within virtue ethics with regard to *the relation between virtue and happiness*, namely what I call Slote's independence thesis [ST], Watson's and Slote's derivation thesis [WST], Hursthouse's thesis [HT] and character utilitarianism's thesis [CU]. According to ST, virtue and happiness are independent. According to WST, virtue is the sole or primary constituent of happiness, and accordingly something necessary and sufficient for happiness or something necessary but not sufficient for happiness. According to HT, virtue is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness, but only a reliable bet for it. Finally, according to CU, virtue has value so far as it promotes happiness, and as such it is seen as an instrumental means to happiness.¹¹⁸ Before I proceed I shall present schematically the aforementioned forms of virtue ethics in the following diagram:

¹¹⁶ A detailed analysis of these distinctions is given in Chapter IV where the relation between virtue and evaluation of action is discussed fully.

¹¹⁷ See M. Slote, [2000]: 327-328.

¹¹⁸ I discuss these views at greater length in Chapter 5, Section 5.

FORMS OF VIRTUE ETHICS

GENERAL CRITERION	MODERATE VERSIONS	RADICAL VERSIONS
LOCUS OF VIRTUE	Another notion (e.g. happiness) rather than virtue is the fundamental, basic, notion in the moral system, and virtue derives from it. (Hursthouse)	Virtue is an explanatorily basic, self-standing notion, irreducible, fundamental and all other moral notions are reduced to it or depend upon it. (Slote)
SPECIFIC CRITERIA	MODERATE VERSIONS	RADICAL VERSIONS
ARETAIC & DEONTIC NOTIONS	Dominant morality is incomplete. Change of focus from deontic notions to aretaic notions. (Hursthouse)	Dominant morality is wrongheaded. Deontic notions are conceptually reduced to aretaic notions or they are replaced completely by aretaic notions. (Anscombe, Watson, Slote)
VIRTUE & EVALUATION OF ACTIONS	<p>(a) Virtue provides the fine tuning in the right action but evaluations of action neither derive from it nor reduce to it (Hursthouse)</p> <p>(b) Act-assessments are not entirely derivative of evaluations of virtue. No clear-cut priority of virtue over evaluation of actions. (Slote's agent-focused)</p>	In relation to evaluation of actions virtue is the basic notion and so evaluation of actions derives from virtue. (Slote, Watson, Trianosky)
VIRTUE & HAPPINESS	<p>(a) Virtue and happiness are independent [ST]</p> <p>(b) Virtue is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness but only a reliable bet for it. [HT]</p> <p>(c) Virtue is an instrumental means to happiness [CU]</p>	Happiness derives from virtue and virtue is the sole or primary constituent of happiness.[WST]

Given the fact that virtue ethics comes in many forms and concerns a variety of issues, one can see that virtue ethics concerns many philosophers. The majority of the philosophers who work on virtue ethics believe that the theory they argue for is inspired mainly by Aristotle. Having given the conceptual map of virtue ethics, having explained what it is for and what it is against, and having discussed the main forms in which virtue ethics is articulated, I shall now turn to argue that the conceptual roots of virtue ethics are indeed to be found before Aristotle, in Plato. But first, let me discuss the initial reason for attempting to trace virtue ethics' roots back to Plato, namely the fact that Plato's ethics like virtue ethics, is neither consequentialist-utilitarian, nor deontological-Kantian.

PART TWO: PLATO AND DOMINANT MORALITY

CHAPTER TWO

UNDERSTANDING PLATO'S ETHICS

2.1. The Aim of This Chapter

In this chapter I shall discuss Plato's ethics in parallel with dominant in the English speaking world morality (deontology-Kantianism, consequentialism-utilitarianism). More precisely, I shall present and then attempt to refute interpretations of Plato's ethics as a deontological or consequentialist. In addition, I shall argue that Plato's ethics differs substantially not only from the dominant morality of our time, but also from the dominant ethics of its time. On the basis of these two claims, and bearing in mind the discussion of the previous chapter, I shall defend the thesis that virtue ethics and Plato's ethics share two features:

- (a) Both are neither deontological nor consequentialist.
- (b) Both attempt to alter the dominant - popular moral thought of their time.

It will emerge that these two affinities call for a more substantial engagement and research towards an analysis and understanding of Plato's ethics in parallel with virtue ethics, which will occupy Part Three (Chs.3-7) of this thesis. But, before I embark on this project, I need to provide some reasons to support the occurrence of the aforementioned similarities between Plato's ethics and virtue ethics. A good starting point for my objective is to show how Plato's ethics differs from deontology and utilitarianism. This will emerge more naturally by first briefly discussing interpretations of Plato's ethics as deontological or utilitarian.

2.2. Two Puzzling Interpretations of Plato's Ethics

One of the first attempts to construct a moral theory and to provide answers to fundamental questions of morality can be found in Plato's work. Plato's ethics revolves around one fundamental question, namely "how should one live?".¹ Since Plato addressed it, this question has become permanently pressing and some people have thought that the best way to answer it is by focusing on the acts that someone should do

¹*Laches*, 187e6-188a3; *Gorgias* 472c6-d1, 492d3-5, 500c 2-4; *Republic*, 352d. William Prior discusses different answers given to this question in his [1991]. See also C. Megone [1992].

while living his life. To be more precise, some have thought that the best way to approach this question is by asking, "how should one act?" or to claim that one should live her life by doing so and so.²

It has been argued that until recently, consequentialism and Kantianism offered the two prevailing answers to this question and others related to it.³ The fact that these two theories were dominant for a long time and the fact that they possessed some surface affinities with Plato's ethics unavoidably make some people read Plato only as utilitarian or deontologist. Frankena, for instance, interprets Plato's ethics as a theory that deals with duty and construes virtues as character traits defining the dutiful person.⁴ However, as we will see in the next section, the moral psychology, the practical reason, and the role of desires and feelings underlying deontology differ in many ways from the Platonic one. Also, deontic ethics seems to subscribe to what Moravcsik calls "the autonomy thesis" according to which, "an adequate theory of moral obligations is independent of theories concerning the human good".⁵ Kant, the leading figure of deontic ethics, views morality as a constraint on the pursuit of one essential human good, a happy life, rather than a means to or an element of it. This kind of morality prescribes our obligations, regardless of our interests. Platonic ethics, on the other hand, is orientated to the human good and interest, is a pursuit of happiness and so the latter plays an essential role in Plato's moral system.⁶ Also, unlike deontic ethics, the main objective within Platonic ethics is not primarily a matter of applying general moral principles or focusing on the idea of moral duties and the necessary presuppositions of believing that we have such duties. Rather, Platonic ethics is primarily concerned with the development and

² Unlike R. Crisp [1996a: 1], I do not consider the question "How should one live?" and the question "How should one act" as two independent questions. The question addressed by Plato is the only one at stake and the answers vary depending on the focus. One way to answer this question is by claiming that I should live my life by *doing* certain acts. The question "how should one act" is the result of this choice, and helps you to meet the first question. Another way to go is to say that I should live my life by *being* virtuous. So, the Platonic question leaves open at least two possible approaches, namely "I should live my life by being a certain kind of person" or "I shall live my life by doing certain acts". In the latter case what really matters is your actions, whereas in the former case what matters is your inner state, your being and the way that it leads you to your actions. Your being determines your doing. In the other approach, your actions, your doing is what primarily matters. You might do some actions, which are not due to a certain inner state, but from duty or in accordance with some principles.

³ See, J. Rawls, [1971]: 24; R. Louden, [1984]: 227; M. Slote, [1992a]: 358; R. Crisp & M. Slote, [1997a]: 1; P. Simpson, [1997]: 245; R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 1.

⁴ W. Frankena, [1963]: 49.

⁵ J. Moravcsik [1992: 295] holds that "the Platonic ethics belongs to that group of ethical theories whose members deny the autonomy of moral obligation, assign to the aim and character a special role among human goods [...]". See also p. 291.

maintenance of virtues. Finally, within the Platonic schema, the virtuous person acts from virtue and she possesses a harmonious condition of the soul, rather than acting from duty and being at odds with her desires and feelings.⁷

Some others have attempted to interpret Plato as utilitarian, construing his theory of virtues as the best means for acquiring and spreading happiness. Barrow, for instance, argues as follows: "the view that I shall put forward is that utilitarianism is the only acceptable ethical theory and that this was recognised by Plato in the *Republic*."⁸ Barrow is essentially concerned only with Plato's *Republic* as a source for his political, ethical and educational theory. His chief ground for interpreting Plato's *Republic* as a utilitarian enterprise is the arrangements of the *Republic*, which aim at the greatest happiness of the city as a whole. Barrow stresses the fact that Socrates directly replies to Adeimantus, who questions the share the rulers have in wealth, that he is concerned with the happiness of the whole community, not that of a select group (*Rep.* 420b).⁹ He also defends his interpretation of Plato's *Republic* as a utilitarian project by referring to the fact that the Guardians must not prefer their own *eudaimonia* to that of the community as a whole. The philosopher-kings must therefore be prepared to temporarily forgo their philosophic activities and "return to the cave" to undertake governmental duties (*Rep.* 419a-421c, 520a-d). Finally, Barrow interprets the Form of the Good as something dependent upon happiness. For, in his words, "all we need to say is that in Plato's view the Form of the Good demands or involves the supremacy of happiness".¹⁰

Barrow advocates the view that the foundation of morals can be found in the principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Following Mill, he holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness he means pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure. In his words:

it is coherent for someone to argue that pleasure and good are not synonymous, but nonetheless what is morally good has to be decided essentially by reference to considerations of pleasure and pain. The Good is therefore not identical with that which gives pleasure, but nonetheless the Good may have to be determined

⁶ See, for instance, *Apology* 28b; *Crito* 48b; *Lysis* 219c-220b; *Euthydemus* 278-82; *Gorgias* 469a-474c; *Republic* 357b-d; *Symposium* 204e-205a; *Philebus* 11d4-6;

⁷ See R. Audi, [1995]: 449-471 & [1997]: 174-192; A. Wood, [1999]: 26-40.

⁸ R. Barrow [1975]: 1.

⁹ R. Barrow [1975]: 26. J. Moravcsik [1992: 105-106] has argued that we cannot give a unified conception of the *Republic* on either the utilitarian or the Kantian interpretations.

¹⁰ R. Barrow, [1975]: 42.

by reference to what maximises pleasure, or if pleasure and happiness are seen to be intimately related, to what maximises happiness. [R. Barrow, 1975, p. 40]

Barrow, apart from associating happiness with pleasure, also understands any system that treats happiness as an ultimate end as a utilitarian system. He illustrates this point by holding that "utilitarians are those who believe it to be true that happiness is the supreme end"¹¹

It is worth addressing here some preliminary problems with Barrow's account. For instance, the proponents of a moral system X might treat happiness as an ultimate end but not believe in the utilitarian principle (e.g. the greatest happiness of the greatest number) and in what this principle involves, (e.g. sacrifice one innocent person to save five other innocent persons). Also, even if happiness is the ultimate end in a moral system, this system is not utilitarian. For the relation that this principle has to other important notions and values (e.g. equality, freedom, virtue) might not be the one that the utilitarian system, similar to the one Barrow defends, requires, namely that everything depends upon happiness and has no value in itself.¹² Other important notions could be essential parts of happiness rather than mere means to it. If this is so, then the moral system that accommodates the constitutive relation differs substantially from Barrow's utilitarian system.

So far I have raised some worries about Barrow's understanding of all systems in which happiness is an ultimate end as utilitarian moral systems and I have discussed some possible ways of disassociating the treatment of happiness as the ultimate end from Barrow's utilitarian system. I shall now move on to discuss some problems of the tempting, though unsatisfactory, association of Plato's ethics with deontological or utilitarian doctrines. I believe that although a comparison of Plato's ethics with utilitarians and deontologists might illuminate some important features of Plato's ethical thinking, what it can mostly show is that the whole thrust of Plato's moral argument is neither utilitarian nor deontological.

¹¹ R. Barrow, [1975]: 43.

¹² According to Barrow [1975: 101], "freedom is good where freedom leads to good results, bad where consequences are bad. Good results are defined in terms of the happiness they promote. The claims of freedom are subordinate to the claims of happiness". Barrow [1975: ch. 7] also argues that the principle of equality should be interpreted in the light of the overriding principle of happiness. Barrow does not discuss the essential relation between virtue and happiness, but from the way he treats the notion of happiness one could deduce that everything including virtue has value in so far as it promotes happiness.

2.3. Refuting These Interpretations

It will be helpful at this stage first to recall the utilitarian and the deontological framework and then to go on and see why they cannot be found within the Platonic corpus as claims that represent Plato's conception of morality.

Deontology takes as fundamental the notion of right. From the deontological point of view, an act is right if and only if it is in accordance with a correct moral rule or principle.¹³ Within the most influential embodiment of deontology, namely Kantianism, everyone has a duty to act in accordance with the universal law.¹⁴ Utilitarianism, on the other hand, takes as fundamental the notion of good. According to utilitarianism, an action is right if and only if it promotes the best consequences. And the best consequences are those in which happiness is maximised.¹⁵ Everyone is required to minimise misery.¹⁶ It is worth noting also that Kantianism and utilitarianism share some important features. For instance, both theories are act-orientated and treat moral reasoning as a matter of applying general principles and rules. Also both put forward moral systems in which virtue is not a primitive concept but has mostly derivative value. Finally both moral theories advocate the notion of impartial duties and prescribe obligations regardless of our interests.¹⁷

As I have argued in the previous Chapter (1.7.), virtue ethics is an approach to ethics that de-emphasises rules, consequences and act-orientation, and places the focus on the kind of person who is acting, as well as on her character and inner state.¹⁸ Virtue ethics, then, is an approach to ethics, which its adherents see as importantly different from (and superior to), two major modern rival approaches, consequentialist (utilitarianism), and deontological (Kantian) theories. Virtue ethics is not the only theory

¹³ See T. Hill, [1992]: 285-304.

¹⁴ A massive body of literature has been generated over many years as Kant's defenders have constructed ingenious devices to make the formula work as an action guide. See, among others, O. O'Neill, [1975]& [1989]; C. Korsgaard, [1985]; T. Hill, [1992]. Kant's critics have come up with new counter-examples to undermine their attempts. See, among others, N. Potter and M. Timmons, [1985]; M. G. Singer, [1971].

¹⁵ For a discussion of deontological and consequential reasons for action as well as of consequentialist and deontological moral theories see, W. Sinnott-Armstrong, [1992]: 408-409, 414-417.

¹⁶ In J. S. Mill's words: "The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure", in his *Utilitarianism* [1861], in M. Warnock, [1962]: 257.

¹⁷ Here I simply refer to the features that Kantianism and utilitarianism share. I have discussed them in some more detail in Chapter I, Section 4.

that differs from deontology and utilitarianism. Plato's ethics also shares this feature. But consequentialism and deontology, rather than virtue ethics, were dominant for a long time and people attempted to read Plato along these lines, to trace the roots of these theories back to Plato and to try to understand Plato in this framework.¹⁹

But the question that needs to be addressed here is whether one can read Plato's ethics in a deontological or utilitarian perspective. Before answering this question a caveat is required. It is worth stating as a preliminary point that labelling a theory is dangerous and often erroneous. Thus classifying a moral theory is a very delicate process. This is especially relevant to Plato's ethics, which was formulated many centuries ago and was designed to counter different problems. The task becomes even more arduous when considering that Plato himself presented various views in his dialogues and, besides, some of these dialogues are inconclusive. Bearing these difficulties in mind, and being sensitive to the problem of anachronism, I shall argue that there is textual evidence within the Platonic corpus that undermines interpretations of Plato's ethics as either deontological or utilitarian. Like Barrow, I shall mainly focus on Plato's *Republic* because I think it is -fairly- considered the work that represents Plato's most sustained attempt to vindicate the claims of morality and associate them with social matters.

2.3.1. The Threefold Classification of Good Things in *Republic II*

The claim that Plato's ethics is neither deontological nor utilitarian is not a new one. On the contrary, this argument has been put forward by two other Platonic scholars, namely J. Annas and J. Moravcsik.²⁰ Before I offer my own reasons to reject both the deontological and the utilitarian interpretations of Plato's ethics I would first like to discuss why one of the main arguments that both Annas and Moravcsik offer to support the above thesis is not compelling.

Annas and Moravcsik hold that one can find clear textual evidence that Plato is offering neither a utilitarian nor a deontological argument by just focusing on the very beginning of the *Republic II*, where the conversation between Glaucon and Socrates

¹⁸ See, for instance, J. Waide, [1988]: 455-472; R. Roberts, [1991]: 325-343; R. Crisp & M. Slote, [1997a]: 1-25; M. Baron, M. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 176-179; D. Statman, [1997]: 7-8; G. Trianosky, [1997]: 42-55; R. Audi, [1997]: 186; T. Hill, [1999]: 160 n. 48.

¹⁹ See, W. Frankena, [1963]; R. Barrow, [1975]; J. L. Creed, [1978]; D. Stoll, [1989]; D. A. White, [1993].

²⁰ See J. Annas, [1981]: 59-71; J. Moravcsik, [1992]: 93-106, 291.

takes place.²¹ Glaucon distinguishes three kinds of good things and asks Socrates where in this division justice belongs. Recalling Glaucon's threefold division of good things at the beginning of Book II of the *Republic* will help to understand better how Annas' and Moravcsik's interpretation, that Plato's theory is neither deontological nor utilitarian, works. Glaucon has the following dialogue with Socrates:

G: For tell me, do you agree that there is a kind of good which we would choose to possess, not from desire for its after-effects, but welcoming it for its own sake? As, for example, joy and such pleasures as are harmless and nothing results from them afterward save to have and to hold the enjoyment.

S: I recognise that kind, said I.

G: And again a kind that we love both for its own sake and for its consequences, such as understanding, sight, and health? For these I presume we welcome for both reasons.

S: Yes, I said.

G: And can you discern a third form of good under which fall exercise and being healed when sick and the art of healing and the making of money generally? For of them we would say that they are laborious and painful yet beneficial, and for their own sake we would not accept them, but only for the rewards and other benefits that accrue from them.

S: Why yes, I said. I must admit this third class also. But what of it?

G: In which of these classes do you place justice? he said.

S: In my opinion, I said, it belongs in the fairest class, that which a man who is to be happy must love both for its own sake and for the results. [*Republic*, 357b3-358a3, Shorey's translation.]²²

The division of the desirable things, then, has as follows:

- (a) Things good or desirable in themselves [e.g. joy, (χαίρειν)].
- (b) Things good or desirable in themselves and in their consequences [e.g. knowing (φρονεῖν), seeing (ὄρᾶν) and being healthy (ὑγιαίνειν)].
- (c) Things good or desirable only in their rewards and other such consequences [e.g. physical training (γυμνάζεσθαι), undergoing medical treatment (ιατρεύεσθαι), making money (χρηματισμός)].

Both Glaucon and Socrates agree that justice belongs to the “*fairest*” class, the second one, the class of the goods that are desirable in themselves and for their consequences. According to Annas and Moravcsik, Plato's argument here is neither deontological nor utilitarian. For Socrates does not support the idea that justice is to be chosen without

²¹ Unfortunately Barrow [1975: 19] does not pay attention to this paragraph and he does not discuss it in detail.

regard for its consequences or only in virtue of its consequences. Instead, he argues that justice is good *both* in itself *and* for its consequences. Annas' and Moravcsik's reasoning is as follows: In a deontological account, justice should be something that one would choose regardless of consequences. In deontological terms it is our duty or obligation to be just, whatever the consequences. Hence, if Plato's moral argument were a deontological one, he would have put justice in the first class, that of the goods desirable for themselves without regard to their consequences. Plato, by firmly putting justice in the second class, including its consequences as reasons for its desirability, shows clearly that his argument is not a deontological one. Since Plato's argument is not a deontological one, and since it is often assumed that a moral argument can only be deontological or consequentialist, there has been a tendency to interpret Plato's ethics, as it expands in the *Republic*, as utilitarian.²³ But this is not the form of argument that Plato offers here either. If Plato were utilitarian, justice would be put in the third class, among things desirable only for their consequences. For in a utilitarian argument, a moral justification comes only from consequences. Yet, Plato argues that justice is good not only for its consequences, but also in itself. However, according to the utilitarian moral account, as Annas puts it, "the claims that something has moral value "in itself" is either wrong or has to be interpreted as a misleading way of claiming that it has good consequences".²⁴ Hence, Plato's claim that justice belongs in the second class would be of little importance if his argument were taken to be either a utilitarian, or a deontological one. In Annas' words:

Plato carefully distinguishes three classes, not two, and deliberately (if briefly) places justice in the second. And so, if we take the form of his argument seriously, we cannot interpret it as being either a deontological or a consequentialist one. [J. Annas, 1981, 62].²⁵

Is this argument convincing? Does Plato's argument here provide us with some information to understand it as neither a deontological nor a consequentialist argument? Although I agree with both Annas and Moravcsik that Plato's ethics is neither deontological nor consequentialist, I doubt that one can draw such a conclusion from the

²² This passage has received considerable attention. Many Platonic scholars have discussed it. See, among others, G. Grote, [1875]: 117; M. B. Foster, [1937]: 386-93; D. Sachs, [1963]: 141-58; C. Kirwan, [1965]: 162-73; N. White, [1984]: 393-421.

²³ See, for instance, R. Barrow, [1975].

²⁴ See J. Annas, [1981]: 62.

above passage, to which both refer as textual evidence to support their argument. I maintain my doubt for three reasons.

First, when speaking about deontology and consequentialism, the discussion concerns issues of what makes something morally right, or morally good. The question that one can raise here is whether the above passage is operating in the same area as consequentialism and deontology. It seems to me that the above passage, that both Annas and Moravcsik discuss, is mostly associated with what makes justice good for the agent (*Rep.* 364a-b), rather than with what makes justice morally good, or morally right. Socrates undertakes the task of convincing his interlocutors that justice is not only admirable but it is also advantageous. And although the conception of justice as something admirable yet difficult to achieve is commonly accepted (*Rep.* 364a), the understanding of justice as something advantageous is not generally accepted (*Rep.* 364a6ff.) and thus, the understanding of justice as something advantageous requires more support. In the popular view described here, justice is admirable, but not advantageous; the question at issue here between Socrates and the popular view is whether justice is advantageous. In *Republic* I, Thrasymachus argued that it is better for someone to be unjust than to be just. Socrates attempted to argue against such a claim and to show that it is better for someone to be just than to be unjust. As the discussion goes on and we reach Book II, Glaucon and Adeimantus hold that Socrates has not adequately met Thrasymachus' challenge, and they ask him to show that justice is good for the agent. Within this framework Glaucon and Socrates go on and discuss Glaucon's threefold classification of good things. So, the framework is rather different than the one associated with consequentialism and deontology, namely what makes something morally good or morally right.

The second reason for rejecting Annas' and Moravcsik's interpretation is the fact that some terms used here are associated with a somewhat different background. For instance, the term "desirable as good in itself" works differently within a deontological framework. In the above passage, "desirable as good in itself" (*Rep.*357b5) has to be understood as something contributing directly to the agent's happiness, as something to be valued by anyone who is going to be blessed with happiness (*Rep.* 358a); whereas in a Kantian sense, "good in itself" needs to be understood as worth pursuing for reasons

²⁵ J. Moravcsik argues along the same lines in his [1992]: 106.

independent of happiness.²⁶ For Kant notoriously held that "even promoting one's happiness from duty must be grounded in a commitment to the duty of so doing, not in the happiness to be achieved".²⁷ So, Kantians would not accept joy as an example of something that is good in itself for that reason. Yet here joy is given as an example of something good in itself. Good will is the only good thing in itself, the only unconditional good within the Kantian system, and emotions, desires and feelings are seen as factors that will always be a counterweight to our duty. Discussing the affects and passions, Kant repeatedly describes them as kinds of mental illness. In his words: "A mind that is subject to affects and passions is always ill... [A]n affect is a rash... For pure practical reason, the passions are cancerous sores".²⁸

But these are not the only problems with Annas' and Moravcsik's argument. The third problem is associated with the fact that they both understand consequentialism as a theory associated only with consequences, and so as a theory that does not consider any state of character as being good in itself. But, in one of the most famous embodiments of consequentialism, namely utilitarianism, the claim that a state of character can be desirable in itself and for its consequences seem to be adopted. Mill, for instance, holds that although happiness is the ultimate good, virtue can be good in itself and for its consequences. Mill holds that

Virtue, according to the utilitarian doctrine, is not naturally and originally part of the end, but it is capable of becoming so; and is desired and cherished, not as a means to happiness, but as a part of their happiness. To illustrate this farther, we may remember that virtue is not the only thing, originally a means, and which if it were not a means to anything else, would be and remain indifferent, but which *by association with what it is a means to*, comes to be desired for itself, and that too with the utmost intensity. [J. S. Mill, 1861, in R. Crisp (ed.), 1998, pp. 82-83, emphasis added].

²⁶ I. Kant [1788: 24-25] holds that although happiness is an inescapable problem for man it should not be the central problem of morality. The Kantian position centres on the contention that if morality were understood as a doctrine of happiness there would be no reason to assume man to be free. Kant's understands happiness as something relative and subjective, and hence as something that cannot be advanced as a reason or justification for morality, which is necessarily universal and objective. H. Veitch holds [1975: 226] that Kant fails to appreciate and recognise the objective goodness of happiness. Kant [1788: 35] argues that morality is a constraint on the pursuit of a happy life rather than a means to it or an element of it. See also, T. Hill, [1999]: 143; J. Murphy, [2001]: 269. Kant counts happiness as morally valuable only in the sense that it is something we have a limited duty to promote. See his [1797]: pp. 190-193, 243-248.

²⁷ R. Audi [1997: 176] terms this "the exclusiveness requirement "which rules out any motive other than duty as actually motivating an action truly performed from duty".

²⁸ I. Kant, [1798]: 251, 252, 266.

Since utilitarians can have an account of things that are good in themselves and for their consequences, one could argue that as the argument of the above Platonic passage stands the fairest class can be regarded as a class of things that utilitarians can also accommodate in their moral system. So, as the threefold division is given by Glaucon, both class (b) and class (c) can be considered to be bearable to utilitarianism, an essential embodiment of consequentialism.

Nevertheless this passage provides reasons to consider Plato's argument to be different from the utilitarian one. For Plato offers a more pluralistic account of considering actions and states of character as good, namely the conjunction between good in itself and good for its consequences (*Rep.*357b9-c1), whereas consequentialist theories propose a single factor as the factor that determines the value of actions and state of character, their consequences. Even within the utilitarian account, where there is a conjunction between good in itself and good for its consequences, it seems not to be the same conjunction as the one Plato has in mind. This is so because, from the utilitarian point of view, virtue is originally valued in virtue of its consequences (i.e. in virtue of its contribution to the general happiness) and only as a result of this it is subsequently valued, by the process of habitual association, for its own sake.²⁹ But even if we accept this as a psychological explanation of the way people value virtue for its own sake, it still does not provide a satisfactory account of the value (good in itself) ascribed to virtue. On the contrary, it encourages the suspicion that, like money, virtue has no value at all considered in itself, but it is valued rationally only when it is valued as a means to happiness. Whereas, in the passage extracted from the *Republic*, as well as from the discussion of this topic in Books IV and IX, it seems that the conjunction is different and it is probably more essential than in the utilitarian framework. For, according to Socrates, something can be good in itself not by association with what it is a means to, as utilitarians understand the notion good in itself. In Plato its being valued for its own sake seems more fundamental than this. Following up this understanding, in utilitarianism either directly or indirectly, only one factor, namely consequences, is the

²⁹ In order to illustrate the notion of good in itself, Mill refers to the love of money and holds "[...] the love of money is not only one of the strongest moving forces of human life, but money is, in many cases, desired in and for itself; the desire to possess it is often stronger than the desire to use it, and goes on increasing when all the desires which point to ends beyond it, to be compassed by it, are falling off. It may be then said truly, that money is desired not for the sake of an end, but as part of the end. From being a means to happiness, it has come to be itself a principal ingredient of the individual's conception of happiness". See J. S. Mill, [1861] in R. Crisp (ed.), [1998]: 83; T. Regan, [1981]: 155-156.

dominant one, the morally important one. However, for Plato, there are two factors that are in play and determine what is morally important, namely to regard something as good in itself and good for its consequences. One could argue, then, that although a utilitarian could accommodate class (b), the conjunction that is at stake here is still different. In the utilitarian framework, the conjunction is not a real option, but only an option by association with consequences, whereas for Plato the conjunction is a real option and actually two separate factors, rather than one factor collapsing into the other, are morally important. Apart from these, there are also some other essential reasons to consider Plato's ethics neither as a deontological nor as a utilitarian.

2.3.2. Only a Few

One reason that supports such an understanding of Plato's ethics is what I call elitism. Within the deontological and utilitarian framework, whatever is considered as good or right is achievable and discernible by all people. Everyone can perform an action that is in accordance with the universal law or to the principle of utility. Within the Platonic framework, however, the situation is different. The highest knowledge is the contemplation of the Forms, of the idea of good and the highest morality is to have a harmonious condition of the soul. However, such targets are demanding and can be achieved only by few.³⁰

The highest good within the Platonic corpus, the contemplation of the Forms, is a long-term procedure (*Rep.* 505a2). It requires the undertaking of a considerable amount of training, the last part of which, namely dialectic and mathematics, can be undertaken only by few -namely those who become philosophers.³¹ No one is excluded at the very beginning. However, at the end, only very few could hold that they have achieved the highest good, namely the harmonious condition of the soul. For only philosophers have the necessary wisdom required for the harmony of the soul. And, for Plato, morality and intellect, although distinct, are inseparable.³² In Plato's ethics there is an elitist air with regard to people who can achieve the highest good, whereas from the deontological and the utilitarian point of view elitism is absent. The utilitarian and deontological framework is in a sense more accessible than the Platonic one. Probably this is so

³⁰ See *Phaedo* 90a; W. Schipper, [1971]: 70-71; J. Annas, [1981]: 323 & [1999]: 126. Aristotle also argued that the necessary harmony of three things required to become good and wise, namely nature, habit, and reason, is possible only for the fortunate few (*NE* 1180a4).

³¹ See, for instance, *Republic* 490e-492a, 521d-531c, 532d-535a, 592a7; see also E. F. Cooke, [1999]: 37- 44; J. Annas, [1981]: 272-293 & [2000]: 102.

because within the utilitarian and the deontological framework one does not find the conception of the highest goods, such as the harmonious condition of the soul, and the contemplation of the Forms, notions vital in Plato's ethics. This underscores yet another dissimilarity between Plato's ethics and utilitarian morality, namely the fact that in Plato we are given a detailed account of moral psychology, an account that is lacking within the utilitarian framework.

2.3.3. Moral Psychology

Within the utilitarian framework one is given no account of what is called moral psychology. The moral agent is required to achieve the greatest happiness of the greatest number. However, her inner state, her character and her emotions, feelings and her moral psychology in general are not taken into account. Furthermore, what is considered as the guiding principle and ultimate end, namely the greatest happiness of the greatest number, can be achieved by any kind of agent, good or vicious, occupied by anger or by feelings of pleasure. In addition utilitarians have thought that it is obvious what happiness is and that everyone wants it and is capable of possessing it regardless of what kinds of lives they lead to get it. What really matters is the greatest happiness of the greatest number, rather than the kind of life, the moral character, and the moral psychology of the person who contributes to this objective.

In Plato's view, however, moral psychology is essential and central. The inner state of the moral agent is not undervalued, or marginalised. On the contrary, the inner state is considered as something that deserves considerable attention.³³ In the *Republic*, Socrates puts forward the thesis that the human soul has three parts, the reasoning part (τὸ λογιστικόν, *Rep.* 439d), what scholars sometimes call "spirit" (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν, *Rep.* 441a), and the appetitive part (τὸ θυμοειδές, *Rep.* 439d).³⁴ The reasoning part of the soul is where knowledge lies and, especially, knowledge of what is good for the soul as a whole; the spirit is the home of emotions like love for honour and social recognition, and the appetitive part accommodates various kinds of bodily desires. According to Plato,

³² See T. Irwin, [1995]: 230-240.

³³ See J. Cooper, [1999]: 186-206; G. Klosko, [1986]: 59-80; J. Annas, [1981]: 109-152.

³⁴ The reasoning part is also called the part that loves wisdom and loves learning (τὸ φιλόσοφον, τὸ φιλομαθές, *Rep.* 581b). Its function is to search for truth, to increase one's knowledge, to rule the soul and to care for the interest of the whole soul (*Rep.* 441e, 442c). The spirited part is also called the part that loves winning and honour (τὸ φιλότιμον, τὸ φιλότιμον, *Rep.* 581b). The desiring part is also called the part that loves money and gain (τὸ φιλοχρήματον καὶ φιλοκερδές, *Rep.* 580d-581a).

each part of the soul has a specific function, the one that its nature is most suited for. It belongs to the nature of the reasoning part to rule over the appetitive part and spirited part, to the nature of the spirit to help the reasoning part, and to the nature of the appetitive to obey (*Rep.* 440b, 441e, 442c). Plato further claims that justice is obtained when each of the parts performs its natural function. And he adds:

But the truth of the matter was, as it seems, that justice is indeed something of this kind, yet not in regard to the doing of one's own business externally, but with regard to that which is within and in the true sense concerns one's self, and the things of one's self. It means that a man must not suffer the principles in his soul to do each the work of some other and interfere and meddle with one another, but that he should dispose well of what in the true sense of the word is properly his own, and having first attained to self-mastery and beautiful order within himself, and having harmonised these three principles, the notes or intervals of three terms quite literally the lowest, the highest, and the mean, and all others there may be between them, and having linked and bound all three together and made of himself a unit, one man instead of many, self-controlled and in unison, he should then and then only turn to practice if he find aught to do either in the getting of wealth or the tending of the body or it may be in political action or private business- in all such doings believing and naming the just and honourable action to be that which preserves and helps to produce this condition of soul, and wisdom the science that presides over such conduct, and believing and naming the unjust action to be that which ever tends to overthrow this spiritual constitution, and brutish ignorance to be the opinion that in turn presides over this [*Republic*, 443c8-444a3, Shorey's translation].

Plato's account takes into consideration the fact that human beings are complex creatures. He holds that their inner state is essential in their attempt to achieve the moral good. He even advocates the view that a proper inner state is a presupposition for a moral action. So, the moral action is not the one that produces the greatest happiness of the greatest number, regardless of whether the person who performs this action is virtuous or vicious, possesses or lacks a certain inner state. Rather, the moral action is the one that springs from a certain inner state. The reference to inner state and to moral psychology of the agent is unfortunately lacking within the utilitarian framework. Regardless of how the moral agent feels and regardless of which internal part is dominant, the greatest happiness of the greatest number is what is important. Within the Platonic framework, however, reason should be the dominant part (*Rep.* 441e, 442c), spirit should ensure that reason has enough motivational backing (*Rep.* 440b, 441a) and desire should acquiesce in control by the other two rather than pressing its own particular

claims.³⁵ Plato's theory that there are three parts in the soul is roughly the theory that there are three psychological determinants of choice and voluntary action. One is just only when she achieves an internal harmony, a harmony among the three parts of the soul, and each one of them does its own job (*Rep.* 441d). No psychological determinants, however, are given within the utilitarian framework.

2.3.4. Internal Conflict

Plato's moral psychology and his claim that the harmony of the soul is essential in any account of moral philosophy leads us to another reason to consider his moral theory as different from any Kantian or utilitarian approach. Within the Kantian and the utilitarian approach the possibility that the moral agent will experience internal conflict and still be considered someone who is virtuous has not been excluded. On the contrary, in both approaches, the moral agent is likely to be acting morally while being in internal conflict. For instance, the person who kills one innocent person in order to save the life of another five innocent persons does the right action within the utilitarian framework, since she contributes to the achievement of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. However, she may also experience a very strong internal conflict, since, given the fact that she is a normal person, she does not want to kill an innocent person.³⁶ Regardless of her internal conflict she is acting morally, that is in accordance with the principle of utility.

The same applies to the Kantian approach. According to Kant, one can be acting virtuously and can be virtuous even if one has strong opposing desires. A person who possesses tremendous strength in resisting temptations to act contrary to duty, and resists these temptations because she is deeply committed to acting morally, would count as virtuous on Kant's view. Furthermore, it seems that on Kant's view it could seem that this person could count as virtuous, indeed no less virtuous than someone who has the same maxims, but no desires to torture anyone or anything. In the first section of the

³⁵ Appetite is distinguished from reason, because reason desires things *qua good* things, whereas appetite desires things *tout court*. According to Cooper [1984: 14-16], the desires of spirit have their root in competitiveness and the desire for self-esteem and (as a normal presupposition of this) esteem by others. Spirit is different from appetite because appetites lack the self-reference which is essential to esteem and self-esteem. Spirit is different from reason in the way it is constituted. In the case of reason, thoughts about what is good come first, a desire being formed for whatever one thinks (rightly or wrongly) is good. But in the case of *θυμὸς* the desire for competition and esteem comes first (without regard to any antecedent question whether these things are really good, or if they are, why they are so), and thoughts about good then follow.

Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant also stresses that the moral worth of an action is most evident when duty and inclination are in conflict.³⁷ Kant can be taken to say that one cannot have a good will unless one also has conflicting inclinations, and the stronger the conflicting inclinations the better our will. Also Kant can be taken to say that the person with the good will is the one who does what is morally required, just because it is morally required, and would still do it whatever inclinations were to oppose it.³⁸ In short, in a Kantian view, our feelings, desires and inclinations are mere powers to be deployed as instruments, but always at a distance, by a good will. Kant, however, does not think that feelings and desires can be cultivated into steady states reliably oriented towards goodness. For Kant resolutely denies that the capacity for feeling (*Gefühl*) plays any cognitive role whatever. This capacity for feelings includes desires, inclinations, and passions.³⁹ Kant argues that feelings are purely subjective and contain no relation to an object of possible knowledge. Our feelings give us no information about the world or even about ourselves. In short, in a Kantian view, desires and feelings cannot be shaped by reason into a harmonious system of mutually co-operative motives, and so moral agents will always be at odds with their feelings and desires. On the basis of this conflict, Kant maintains that virtue is a capacity and considered resolve and strength to resist what opposes the moral disposition within us.⁴⁰

Within the Platonic framework, however, the virtuous person is the one who experiences no conflicts while she is performing virtuously. She is the person who has harmony in her soul (*Rep.* 443d-e), whose reasoning part rules the rest and has achieved alliance with the spirit to dominate the appetitive part. Internal conflict is a sign of imbalance, it is a state that makes virtuous actions remote and which, in the very end, produces many vices. According to Plato, harmony of the soul is strongly associated

³⁶ For a good discussion of the normally motivated agent with standard psychology see, S. Scheffler, [1992]: 382-384.

³⁷ Kant does not share Plato's and Aristotle's confidence in human nature and their belief that our passions and desires can be educated and then be in harmony with our reason. Kant has a dark view about human nature and he does not believe in the harmony between reason and desires. See T. Hill, [1999]: 171; J. Murphy, [2001]: 264-265; 269-270.

³⁸ For some instructive discussions of Kant's position see, among others, R.G. Henson, [1979]: 39-54; B. Herman, [1993]: ch.1; M. Baron, [1995]: Chs. 4-5.

³⁹ See, I. Kant, [1979]: 211.

⁴⁰ See, I. Kant, [1979]: 186, 194, 197. The Kantian virtuous person is similar to Aristotle's continent person. For Aristotle's virtuous person has reshaped or got rid of desires that might compete with her doing the right thing. Thus, Aristotle's virtuous person, being temperate rather than merely continent, has no need for the strength of will to resist temptations that Kant refers to. For Aristotle's analysis of the continent and the virtuous person see, *NE* 1145b 12-13, *NE* 1146a4-13. See, also, T. Scaltsas, [1993a]: 65-94.

with virtuous actions and the possibility that an action will be considered virtuous, although it stems from internal conflict, just because it is performed from duty or for the mere sake of good consequences, is not considered.⁴¹

As I have stated above (2.3.2.), harmony of the soul is a rather arduous task and only a few people can really achieve it, and these are the philosophers. These are the moral examples in Plato's *Republic*, and they have to convey their knowledge to the rest. They are required, after managing to leave the cave, to come back and offer enlightenment to the remaining prisoners. They do so by ceasing to contemplate for a while in order to undertake the duties of government. Now, as rulers, they are also permitted to tell some lies in order to protect the city's order (*Rep.*389b5-7, 459c-460a). The permission that the most virtuous Platonic persons have to lie stresses another dissimilarity with the well-know Kantian dictum that "lying is never permitted". On the other hand, one might argue that, if one lies then one does so for the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and so one is permitted to do so, although some personal desires might be sacrificed.⁴² However, Plato's reasons for attributing to philosophers such rights (to lie) are neither deontic nor utilitarian. On the contrary, the actual reasons, as I shall explain soon, are deeply Platonic. Let us see first under which circumstances philosophers are permitted to lie and how that entails another non-Kantian and non-utilitarian characteristic within the Platonic framework.

2.3.5. Philosophers Can Lie

According to Kant, being a moral agent means letting one's conduct be guided by universal laws, that is, moral rules that hold, without exception, in all circumstances and for all moral agents. The rule against lying was one of several absolute rules that Kant advocated and felt especially strongly about, to the extent of declaring that lying in any circumstance is the obliteration of one's dignity as a human being. So, according to Kant, even when someone is fleeing from a murderer and tells you that he is going home to hide, and then the murderer comes along and asks you where the first man went, you should tell the truth, regardless of the fact that such a choice will help the murderer to find the victim and kill him.⁴³ Kant notoriously believed that morality is a matter of

⁴¹ *Rep.* 357b-358a, 443c-444a.

⁴² Barrow follows this line of thought in order to support his interpretation of Plato's *Republic* as a work that puts forward theses compatible with utilitarianism. See R. Barrow, [1975]: 26, 32-33.

⁴³ Kant takes this extreme stance in his [1797]: 96-97, 168-169, 218-219, 220-221. A. Wood, [1999]: 2; A. Donagan [1977: 88-89], a contemporary admirer of Kant, rejects this position.

following absolute rules, rules that admit no exceptions. He did not appeal to theological considerations to justify this approach to morality. Rather, his main reason for thinking that lying is always wrong was the fact that such a prohibition derives from the categorical imperative and from the fact that reason requires that we never lie. Kant's reasoning has the following structure:

- (a) You should do only those actions that are in accordance with rules which you could will to be adopted universally.
- (b) If you choose to lie, then you seem to act according to the rule "it is permissible to lie".
- (c) Such a rule cannot be adopted universally, because if it were, people would stop believing one another.
- (d) Therefore, you should never lie.⁴⁴

Kant's rejection of any possibility that lying should be permitted appears to be another dissimilarity between his view of morality and Plato's.

Within the Platonic framework, lying is permitted under certain circumstances, but only for philosophers (*Rep.* 389b5-7, 414a-415c). The latter, although they are required to show militant devotion to truth (*Rep.* 485c-d, 490 a-d), and are aware that truth is valuable, under certain circumstance can lie to other people for the latter's interests (*Rep.* 382a, 389b-d, 459c-460a). Only philosophers possess such a right. Any other person who attempts to adopt it will be mistaken (*Rep.* 389b-c). Philosophers think of others as inferiors who have less knowledge of their own interests than they themselves have (*Rep.* 414a-415d). Although philosophers are honest among themselves, they occasionally lie towards others. They will not hesitate to lie to others, if they know, due to their expertise, that this will be better for others. They are like doctors who prefer to lie to their patients in order to avoid causing them useless panic (*Rep.* 389c). So, philosophers, the most virtuous persons in Plato's moral system, do lie occasionally. Their lies are used "medicinally" (*Rep.* 382c-d, 389b, 459c-460a) and they are justified in doing so in virtue of their knowledge.

Plato holds in a way that since philosophers are just, in some cases they might see that lying is more appropriate. Of course, in such cases philosophers are breaking the

⁴⁴ E. Anscombe [1958: 2] criticises Kant's approach by holding that "His [Kant's] own rigoristic convictions on the subject of lying were so intense that it never occurred to him that a lie could be relevantly described as anything but just a lie (e.g. as "a lie in such-and-such circumstances"). His rule about universalisable maxims is useless without stipulation as to what shall count as a relevant

rules, but when just people such as philosophers do so, it means that rules, on some occasions, ought to be broken. Such an account shows Plato's readiness to legitimise the occasional telling of lies by philosophers in the interests of some higher ends. It also highlights another contrast between Plato and Kant: Plato holds that moral rules are not absolute and that exceptions, which break the law, are always possible, whereas for Kant moral laws are absolute and no considerations of any exception are taken into account.

The fact that philosophers can lie might be used as evidence to argue that Plato's analysis is along the same line as utilitarianism, since there is a justification for lying in terms of consequences; the philosopher lies for the sake of the city's good. However this similarity is only on the surface. Actually Plato's philosophers consider lying as something intrinsically bad, though permissible in some extreme cases. Philosophers are aware what lying involves, that lying is something morally bad and only under certain circumstances needs to be employed. Furthermore, for them it is not a real lie, namely a lie that affects the harmony of their soul, but only a lie in words, which has good purposes.⁴⁵ Philosophers take care not to deceive themselves by telling lies to others. Utilitarians, on the other hand, see nothing intrinsically bad about lying, insofar as it secures the greatest happiness of the greatest numbers, though of course they think it is generally wrong to lie. The difference between the Platonic and the utilitarian reasoning with regard to lying is that in the former lying is intrinsically bad, though permissible in some extreme cases because of overriding considerations -but only to philosophers. From the utilitarian point of view, however, nothing is intrinsically bad about lying. Plato's philosophers are more aware of what lying involves and more sensitive about how to use it. Plato's position on lying is not utilitarian either.

2.3.6. Governing Instead of Philosophising

In the *Republic*, philosophers are required to stop philosophising for a while and come back to the cave to govern (*Rep.*519c-d). Such a requirement is based on the fact that philosophers have benefited from the splendid education the city has given them, and in virtue of such education philosophers are more qualified to rule than any other group. So, it is a matter of justice for philosophers to be asked to devote some of their time to the public service (*Rep.*520a-d). Here it seems that the philosophers' personal interest is

description of an action with a view to constructing a maxim about it." See also W. Sinnott-Armstrong, [1992]: 412-413.

⁴⁵ This distinction can be found in the *Republic* 382 c.

sacrificed in the interests of the good of the whole community.⁴⁶ Socrates holds that the laws of the ideal city are not designed to produce the greatest happiness of any one group of individuals, but must instead promote the good of the whole community (*Rep.*519e-520a).⁴⁷ One could argue, then, that here philosophers are acting in a utilitarian spirit, and what matters most is the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Morality here requires sacrifices from the individual for the common good. In their effort to meet this target, philosophers do not hesitate either to lie or to sacrifice their personal interest and to go back to the cave, to rule instead of philosophising. For philosophers rightly regard purely philosophical activity as better for them than the activity of ruling the city (*Rep.*521a-b). But such an understanding is not on the right track. Although what matters is the good of the whole community and not the good of a particular class, philosophers, who can guarantee the good for the whole community, are undertaking certain duties, but not on the basis of utilitarian grounds. So, although, at first glance, a utilitarian reading could seem plausible, when someone focuses upon the philosophers' reason for performing in such way he will realise that the basis is far from being utilitarian.

According to utilitarianism right action is the action that will bring about the greatest happiness of the greatest number. One wonders, however, how one can reconcile the principle of utility with personal interest. Of course a utilitarian does not think that a person who acts to bring about the greatest happiness must sacrifice her own interest, although this can happen. Neither do utilitarians believe that the reconciliation of the principle of utility with personal interest is a result of coincidence or a matter of luck. On the contrary, it might have been seen as a result of deliberate public policy. However, it is true that, for utilitarians, it is not essential to moral goodness that it be in the agent's interest. Utilitarianism advocates a kind of morality that prescribes our obligations, regardless of our interests. An imbalance in favour of the general good is at stake. Also, utilitarianism is interested in the mere sum of happiness rather than in the happiness of each individual.

Within the Platonic framework, however, the issue is different, and so attempts to interpret Plato's ethics as an embodiment of utilitarianism encounter difficulties.

⁴⁶ Some have thought that there is an inconsistency in Plato's thought. For in Book II Socrates argues that justice is always in one's own interest, and here, it seems that philosophers while being just to the city that offers them education, and undertaking some ruling, also sacrifice their interest, namely contemplation of the Forms. Among the people who have argued along these lines see A. W. H. Adkins, [1960]: 290-293; J. Annas, [1981]: 269; A. Bloom, [1968]: 407-408; T. Irwin, [1977]: 163, 236-237, 242-243, 337-338n.61 & [1995]: 299-301, 313-316; S. Aronson, [1972]: 383-398.

⁴⁷ This claim counts as R. Barrow's [1975: 26, 49] chief ground for calling Plato a utilitarian.

Among the many ways in which the *Republic* is innovative is its attempt to bridge the gap between the individual's good and the good of the community. For Plato it is important to show that the general interest can coincide with our own interest, whereas for a utilitarian one would have reason to pursue the general interest whether it did coincide or not. Plato is not aiming at the utilitarian aggregation of adding so much individual happiness, and subtracting so little unhappiness, that the sum is as high as it possibly can be. On the contrary, Plato compares the moulding of a city to the design of a statue and he claims that it is well designed only when its parts are arranged in such a way that each is happy -not as happy as possible (*Rep.* 420c-421c, 519e1-3). Plato's model emphasises the need to impose an order or structure in human relations. Each must be made happy, but each must also contribute to the happiness of others. Also, unlike utilitarianism, which does not seek to establish a structure in human relations, Plato stresses that none is to be so happy that others are as a result unhappy. Plato sees the city as a unified whole rather than as an aggregation of happiness that is as high as it possibly can be. Plato also holds that he is aiming at the greatest happiness of the city, but by this he does not mean what utilitarians mean. He maintains that, given a choice between a less happy and a more happy city, the latter is better. But by saying so, Plato does not commit himself to any utilitarian doctrine. For, unlike utilitarians, he does not hold that in order to determine the degree of a city's happiness, one needs only to determine how happy or unhappy each individual is and use the operations of addition and subtraction. On the contrary, Plato is not primarily concerned with how happy the ruling class is. An increase in the happiness of the ruling class, no matter how great, would not justify unhappiness in other classes. The happiness of the city must arise from the happiness of all of its components, and is not a mere sum.⁴⁸ All individuals should be happy.

Plato does not lay himself open to the charge that there is a difference between the happiness of the State, which is important, and the happiness of the citizens, which is not. The most famous example that highlights a possible case of divergence between personal interest and general good is the case of the philosophers in Plato's *Republic*. There, the philosopher is required to cease contemplation and to come back to govern, with appropriate reluctance, because that is the only way to achieve the best order in the

⁴⁸ See G. Vlastos, [1977]: 15; J. Annas, [1981]: 179. For an excellent discussion of the variety of the possible accounts of the relationship between happiness of the city and happiness of its citizens see D. Morrison, [2001]: 1-24.

community.⁴⁹ For the philosopher is the only person who possesses the education for political office.⁵⁰ However, by giving up what is considered as the best good, namely the contemplation of the Form of the Good, he does not sacrifice his own interest for three main reasons.⁵¹

First, according to the general programme of the *Republic*, set out in Book II and fulfilled in Book IX, justice is in the agent's interest -and that applies to the ruling class as well. The philosopher is governing because he is just and being just is in his own interest. Also, because he is just, he wants to pay back the community for providing him with a splendid education.⁵² It is better for a philosopher to be for a while a just ruler than an unjust philosopher who contemplates, because justice is in his own interest.

Second philosophers identify their interests with the city's interest and the philosopher's good is *intrinsically* bound up with that of the city's (*Rep.* 462cff). In such a way, however, both the general happiness and the philosopher's personal happiness are combined and satisfied. In addition, this relation is a result of the intentional undertaking of certain actions and is in accordance with Plato's conception of the city as an organic whole. Philosophers will be less happy when they are not just and when they are governed by someone worse. So, when they are required to set aside their philosophising for a while in order to hold political office, they do so. For the highest human activity is

⁴⁹ Their reluctance is something that Plato welcomes, because he believes that the rulers in the best city must be no lovers of governing (ἐραστὰς τοῦ ἄρχειν, *Rep.* 521b), and must be the least keen to rule (*Rep.* 520d). They rule, not because ruling is a splendid thing (καλόν τι, *Rep.* 540b), but because it is a necessary thing (ἀναγκαῖον *Rep.* 540b; προσαναγκάζοντες, *Rep.* 520a8; ἀναγκαστέοι, *Rep.* 539e3). But Plato gives just orders to just people (δικαία γὰρ δὴ δίκαιοις ἐπιτάξομεν, *Rep.* 520e1). See also R. Kraut, [1999]: 249; T. Mahoney, [1992]: 271; E. Brown, [2000]: 1-17.

⁵⁰ I could here use feminine pronouns as well, since Plato does actually believe that some women too can occupy this post. See *Rep.* 451b-457a. G. Santas has recently stated that "his [Plato's] theory of social justice *does not discriminate* between men and women; that is, it *does not discriminate on the basis of the gender* when assignments of offices and other social tasks are made" [...] "Here his [Plato's] metaphysical views about the human soul may have been an advantage. According to him, human soul can exist disembodied and can occupy several human bodies successively; and this would naturally incline him to the view that human souls are not gendered. Gender is an attribute of bodies, not souls." G. Santas, [2001]: 99, 101, italics in the original.

⁵¹ See C. D. C. Reeve, [1988]: 201-203; J. Beatty, [1976]: 545-547; R. Kraut, [1999]: 235-254; T. A. Mahoney, [1992]: 265-282. N. White has argued that in the case of philosophers an exception must be made with regard to Plato's defence of justice in terms of self-interest. See his [1968]: 22-46 & [1979]: 23, 189-196.

⁵² According to one line of thought, if the best life lies in contemplating rather than in ruling, then by ruling, philosophers sacrifice their own best interest. R. Kraut claims that we need to keep the following two questions distinct. Q1: "Is philosophical activity better than political activity?" Q2: "Would the philosopher who has been trained by the ideal state be better off (a) to continue philosophizing, thereby violating the just requirement that she rule, or (b) to spend some time ruling the city, thereby fulfilling the requirement that she hold political office?" Kraut also stresses the fact

the contemplation of the Forms and one cannot contemplate the Forms at the same time one is engaged in the practical affairs of ruling.⁵³ But, the latter is the only way to secure both the happiness of the whole and the philosopher's personal interest. For philosophers do want to contemplate, but they also want to be just, even if the latter requires them to stop contemplating for a while.⁵⁴

Finally, the philosophers' governing preserves the city and so it instrumentally preserves their interest (*Rep.* 412d-e). He does so in order to assure that he will not be governed by an inferior (*Rep.* 347c3-5), and that he will have again the opportunity to get the pleasure of knowing and learning the truth that contemplation of the Forms offers.⁵⁵ For when someone inferior governs, the city's good would be threatened and it will not be easy for the philosopher to contemplate the Form of the Good, and of the rest to do the job they are better. As a result disorder will occupy the community and no one will do the job he knows best. However, when the philosopher rules, the order of the city is secured and since governing is not a full-time occupation, after doing his duty, he will go back to contemplate the Form of the Good again. After all, ruling is not considered as something fine in which it is worthwhile to be involved for a long time and start competing for offices (*Rep.* 521a; cf. 540b). Thus the divergence between the philosopher's good and justice here is only apparent and it should not be conceived as evidence for undermining Plato's attempt, as it unfolds in the *Republic*, to show that justice is always in one's best interest.⁵⁶ By being just, by recognising his debt to the city which educated him, and by agreeing to guide this city with his education and knowledge, the philosopher both secures the well-being of the whole community and his own personal interest. For now he is a just ruler who will soon have the opportunity to contemplate again. The well-being of the whole city as well as that of the individuals coincide.

that the answer to the first question forces no answer to the second question and so the inference from Q1 to Q2 is unjustified. See R. Kraut, [1999]: 240. See, also, T. Mahoney, [1992]: 270, 272.

⁵³ The Form of the Good is the greatest object of learning (μέγιστον μάθημα, 505a2).

⁵⁴ The philosophers "value most highly what is correct and the honours arising from what is correct, and value what is just as the greatest and most necessary thing" (μέγιστον δὲ καὶ ἀναγκαιότατον τὸ δίκαιον, 540d6-e2). Philosophers choose to rule because ruling is what is just for them to do in that situation (as Glaucon says at 520e1-3).

⁵⁵ Socrates' effusive description of the contemplation of the Forms leaves no doubt that seeing the Forms is a great delight. This is why those who have seen them wish to spend their time contemplating them (517c9), and might "think they have arrived in the isles of the blessed while still living" (519c5-6).

⁵⁶ It is worth mentioning here that in Book 9, at 580c, Plato proclaims that the philosopher-ruler is happier than any of the individuals portrayed in Books 8 and 9.

However, such a condition is not required within the utilitarian framework. The principle of utility is usually associated with the undervaluing of some individuals' personal interest. It is not essential to moral goodness to be in the agent's interest, while, arguably, for Plato it is. The objective of the greatest happiness of the greatest number should always be pursued even when personal happiness does not coincide with general happiness. As I pointed out earlier some have thought that this is also the case within Plato's *Republic*, and they argued that philosophers, in particular, sacrifice their personal interest by returning back to the cave and by undertaking governing duties. However, Plato is not unfair to philosophers and has not asked them to sacrifice their personal interest, for they have to do only what is just. It has been required that the well-being of the community be secured, and philosophers are the only people who can do so, while at the same time securing their personal interest, namely to be just and to guarantee that they will go back to contemplate. So, the reason for contributing to the general well-being and attempting to meet the greatest happiness of the greatest number is not utilitarian. This is because personal interest is also important in this effort and the fact that it is essential to coincide with the general well-being makes Plato's programme different from the utilitarian one.⁵⁷ Within the former personal interest is valuable and not derivative from the general interest. On the contrary, a mutual relation is at stake here and both are important (*Rep.*412d-e). When a personal interest is harmed this does not affect only the particular person, but the whole as well. Socrates illustrates the strong relation between personal interest and general interest that he has in mind in the following way:

That city, then, is best ordered in which the greatest number use the expression "mine" and not "mine" of the same things in the same way. [...] And the city whose state is most like that of an individual man. For example, if the finger of one of us is wounded, the entire community of bodily connections stretching to the soul for "integration" with the dominant part is made aware, and all of it feels the pain as a whole, though it is a part that suffers, and that it how we come to say that the man has a pain in his finger. And for any other member of the man the same statement holds, alike for the part that labours in pain or is eased by pleasure. [...] That is the kind of state, then, I presume, that, when

⁵⁷T. Mahoney [1992: 281-282] provides an interesting explanation of the lack of conflict between personal interest and the interest of the whole, which one can detect in Plato's *Republic*. Mahoney argues that "no such conflict can arise given Plato's organic conception of the structure of the universe. This conception is clearest in the *Timaeus* in which the world is described as a living being which contains all other living beings "severally and in their families" as parts (30c). [...] The organic conception envisions the relation between the good of the whole and the good of the parts as one of mutual entailment, just as in a well-functioning human body all the parts are in good condition and functioning well only if the whole body is in good condition and functioning well, and vice versa."

anyone of the citizens suffers aught of good and evil, will be most likely to speak of the part that suffers as its own and will share the pleasure or the pain as a whole [*Republic*, 462c7-e2, Shorey's translation].

The relation between personal good and general good that one can find in Plato's *Republic* differs from that found within the utilitarian framework. In the latter, the general good is independent from personal good and is not essential to general moral good to be in the agent's interest. In Plato's *Republic*, however, personal interest and general interest are mutually determined and it is essential to general moral good to be in the agent's interest. Furthermore, Socrates underscores that being just is good for the agent and good for her interest rather than only good for the rest of the citizens alone, whereas from the utilitarian point of view being just is good only when it contributes to the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The relation between individual good and general good that one can detect in Plato's *Republic* is not that which the utilitarians endorse.

If Plato's ethics were utilitarian, Plato would not argue for such a strong relation between personal interest and general interest. Also, apart from general happiness, he also considers personal happiness as a factor that determines the value of a certain act. For instance, in the *Gorgias*, doing wrong is judged as wrong not on the basis of the bad effect that it will have on general happiness, but on the basis of the effect that this action will have on the personal happiness of the agent. In other words, in the *Gorgias*, doing wrong is worse for the agent than being wronged (474d-475e).⁵⁸ In the *Republic*, Plato stresses with more emphasis the value of personal happiness. In this work, among other things, Plato is concerned to establish that justice is of value to the person who practises it, not just to the community at large. Socrates' alternative to Thrasymachus' suggestion to consider justice as the good of someone else (ἀλλότριον ἀγαθόν, *Rep.* 343) is to consider justice as a form of psychic health. So, Plato's preoccupation with personal happiness contrasts with the utilitarian insistence on the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Furthermore, Plato sees the virtuous person as someone who acts morally without conflict or strain, whereas within the utilitarian framework someone is considered moral although he acts with conflict or strain. In addition, utilitarianism is a theory based on principles and rules, whereas within Plato's ethics it is no longer enough

⁵⁸ For a stimulating analysis of this argument see G. Santas, [1979]: 233-240.

to blankly respond to principles and moral rules. It matters, and it matters morally, what kind of person you are.⁵⁹

Plato's ethics is not deontological-Kantian either. If it were, more references would have been made to notions of duty, rules and principles, lying would be forbidden absolutely, and the moral psychology as well as the practical reason of the virtuous person would have been different. Also his morality should have been proposed as a constraint on the pursuit of the happy life rather than as an element of it.

If Plato's ethics were deontological or utilitarian, Plato would not stress so heavily that one is virtuous when one possesses a harmonious, rather than a conflicted, soul and he would not take great pains to show how the general good and the good of the individual are not, or should not be, in divergence. Furthermore, both deontological and utilitarian theories are act-orientated theories; they are most interested in defining which acts are moral, rather than which persons are moral. Moral psychology and questions about how the agent's feelings, desires and emotions are associated with the action the agent is performing are not their main concern. However, within the Platonic framework, justice, in particular, is primarily a condition of the soul, rather than a characteristic of actions. The only reference that Plato makes to just actions in the *Republic* is that they are just as far as they contribute to the just condition of the soul (*Rep.* 444e, 588a, 591a-c).

2.4. New Orientation

Plato's ethics is not only different from utilitarianism and deontic ethics -the most dominant modern types of ethical theory in Anglo-American philosophy. Plato's ethics also differs dramatically from the dominant-popular morality of its time.⁶⁰ Plato challenges the way most people think about morality and attempts, via Socrates, to show to them that a different approach is required in order to capture morality. When we read *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Gorgias*, *Euthydemus* and *Republic* we see that the views on moral matters that Plato puts forward are rather radical. Within these dialogues the main message delivered is that most people's values are quite mistaken.

As Socrates advocates, most people care up to a point about virtue, but they also care about health and beauty, money and prestige, things later called "external goods".

⁵⁹ For a relevant discussion see J.L. Creed, [1978]: 349-65; J .D. Mabbott, [1978]: 57-65.

⁶⁰ For an excellent discussion on popular morality in the time of Plato and Aristotle see, K. J. Dover, [1974]. See also J. Annas, [1978]: 437-451; J. Moravcsik, [1992]: 93-94; N. Dahl, [1999]: 212-217.

Socrates, however, holds that it is not good to value virtue only up to a point. On the contrary, virtue is something that matters much more, and he goes around attempting to persuade people to change their attitude towards virtue. He says to the Athenians:

Aren't you ashamed that you pay attention to making as much money as possible, and to prestige, and honour, but pay no attention and do not care about wisdom and truth and making your soul as good as possible?" [*Apology*.29d-e].

Socrates attempts to persuade people to rearrange their priorities. He criticises their values and tells them to live differently. In the *Gorgias*, too, Socrates argues for something the majority finds absurd, namely he holds that being moral matters so much more than other things that it is better to be wronged than to do wrong; the wrong-doer is harming himself more than his victim (469a-474c). In the *Crito*, Socrates again argues against the dominant-popular morality, when he rejects the chance to save his life from death, on the grounds that this would be doing wrong and that no outcome makes wrongdoing worthwhile.

If it becomes clear that such conduct is unjust, I cannot help thinking that the question whether we are sure to die, or to suffer any other ill-effect for that matter, if we stand our ground, ought not to weigh with us at all in comparison with the risk of acting unjustly" [*Crito* 48c].

Socrates also claims that everyone wants to fare well and to be happy (*Euthyd.* 278e, 280b; *Charm.* 175b-176a). This is a shared assumption of the time (*Gorg.* 491e-492c, *Rep.* I). Eudaimonism is the main ethical doctrine (*Prot.* 354c). The majority of the people think that eudaimonia is their life's goal and they attempt to reach it. It is a common belief as well that for someone to be happy certain goods are required. In the *Euthydemus* (278-82), for instance, we are given an idea of the conventional understanding of the goods needed for someone to become happy. The young man Cleinias - whom Socrates attempts to persuade to consider philosophy as something serious, rather than as a game, as Sophists do- holds that things like health, beauty, power and influence are required for making someone happy. He also refers to virtue, though not prominently. Socrates attempts to change the young man's conception about things required for one's happiness by underscoring that actually these can be found in wisdom and in virtue, rather than in conventional goods, such as those that Cleinias

proposes. Socrates considers justice as one of the most essential virtues that one needs to achieve in order to become happy. He holds in the *Apology*:

You are mistaken, my friend, if you think that a man who is worth anything ought to spend his time weighing up the prospects of life and death. He has only one thing to consider in performing any action: that is, whether he is acting justly or unjustly, like a good man or a bad one [*Apology*, 28b].

Now, Socrates wants to propose a new way of understanding justice, a way that radically differs from the dominant-popular one. He asks people to say how they understand justice and he receives different answers. In the first book of the *Republic* one can witness this variety more clearly than in any other place in Plato's work. There Socrates comes across different approaches to the conception of justice and attempts to persuade his interlocutors that none of them are on the right track. In particular, Socrates argues against Cephalus' conception that justice is telling the truth and giving back what is not yours (*Rep.* 331a-b). Socrates holds that justice is something more complicated, and it does not merely consist in observing a few simple rules or maxims like "do not lie" and "give back what is not yours".

According to Socrates, there are occasions when telling the truth or giving back what is not yours may not be just or may not contribute to justice (*Rep.* 331c-d). Cephalus represents a common conception of justice, a not very elaborate and quite simple one. However, he is not the only one who provides us with information concerning the common conception of justice of the time. After him, Polemarchus takes up the argument and he understands justice as giving everyone their due, spelling this out as helping one's friends and harming one's enemies (*Rep.* 331-2, 334d4-6). Socrates again finds this understanding of justice puzzling and he holds that on the one hand it is very difficult to understand what Polemarchus means by "friends" and "enemies". On the other hand, Socrates argues that even when one understands "friends" as those whom one thinks are good and "enemies" as those who one thinks are bad (*Rep.* 334c5-7), the judgement can always be mistaken or misplaced and justice needs a better justification than that (*Rep.* 334e). Furthermore, according to Socrates, it can never be just to harm someone (*Rep.* 335), so justice cannot consist of helping one's friends and not helping one's enemies.

Thrasymachus is the next person who attempts to define justice, and one could say that he represents a popular idea of justice, which only few could have the strength to

express, namely that justice is not something good. Rather, according to Thrasymachus, conventional justice amounts to doing what is in the interest of the ruling class or what is in the interest of another's good. It is because of this nature of justice that a person will be better off unjust if s/he can get away with it. Justice is something bad and against one's interests, and the profit of oneself is to be unjust (*Rep.* 334c6-8). Cleitophon also intervenes in the discussion between Socrates and Thrasymachus and attempts to interpret Thrasymachus' thesis that justice is whatever is in the ruler's interest by proposing to equate justice with what the ruler each time believes to be in his own interest (*Rep.* 340b6-8). On this understanding, the laws the ruler enacts are what justice is for his subjects, independently of whether they serve the interests of the rulers or not; thus the legal is equivalent to the just. Glaucon also gives an account of what "justice is thought to be" (*Rep.* 358c1-2) and offers his social contract theory as an account of the nature of justice. It is the fact that justice is a compromise between the best and the worst state of affairs that in a way shows that under certain circumstances a person will be better off unjust than just. Adeimantus also seems to be describing justice as something that is irksome in itself and good only for what arises from it. Socrates again undertakes the task of arguing not only against the above claims, but also, after being challenged by Glaucon and Adeimantus, of defending the claim that justice is good in itself and not only for its consequences. Furthermore, Socrates attempts to provide reasons to consider justice as something good for the agent, rather than as something that is legalistic and followed for the sake of reputation and awards, or because one cannot avoid the punishment after being unjust. Socrates also wants to argue that the just person is always happier than the unjust person. His main thesis is that for people to understand better what justice means, and how it is best to achieve it, a shift in their way of thinking is required. Socrates proposes to consider justice as a condition of the soul, as something internal, rather than as something external or a characteristic of actions. For just actions are those that make the soul just (*Rep.* 443e, 588a, 591a-c).

Plato attempts to refine the modes of thinking of his fellow citizens. He takes into consideration their ideas and works on them by making clear to them some unwelcome implications of their ideas. Plato accepts happiness as the main aim in one's life. But he holds that people should alter their priorities and reconsider their values. Virtue will help them transform their values and priorities, and will make them just and, ultimately, happy. However, Plato's eudaimonism is rather different from the dominant-popular view of his time. It is more demanding and revisionary. The moral agent is required to

undertake a long intellectual journey away from conventional beliefs and achieve wisdom, acquire virtue and become virtuous and happy. She can do so only when she undertakes long-term education, which will enable her to see the Form of the Good and to experience the order that her soul is required to possess in order for her to be virtuous and happy.

Plato proposes a moral theory that radically differs from the dominant-popular one of his time, but also from the (hitherto) prevailing approaches of our time, namely utilitarianism and deontology.⁶¹ The fact that Plato's ethics proposed a new orientation different from the prevailing one of the time, and the fact that actually Plato's ethics is not to be understood along the same lines as the hitherto prevailing moral approaches, highlights two initial characteristics common with virtue ethics. Indeed, both Plato's ethics and virtue ethics differ from deontology and utilitarianism. Furthermore, both attempted to go against the dominant-popular ethical approaches of their time, and it seems that they both do so quite successfully.

One question that arises here is whether there are some more substantial affinities between Plato's ethics and virtue ethics. In the subsequent chapters, I shall undertake this task and attempt to answer this question by focusing on the following issues:

- (a) on the role and understanding of virtue in both moral systems (Ch.3)
- (b) on the relation between virtue and evaluation of action (Ch.4)
- (c) on the relation between virtue and happiness (Ch.5), and also
- (d) on the way both theories conceive individual and social justice (Ch.6).

In the literature, virtue ethics is mostly associated with Aristotle's ethics.⁶² No extended discussion of the relation between Plato and virtue ethics is to be found. As I intend to make clear at the end of this thesis, the fact that virtue ethics is not regularly associated with Plato is simply a historical accident, rather than a choice based on philosophical grounding. Virtue ethics has more to gain and less to lose by widening its intellectual horizons. With regard to the notion of justice, in particular, virtue ethics might find a helpful suggestion in Plato's account, in order to meet the current criticism that has been made, namely that virtue ethicists, when they come to concerns of social

⁶¹ See J. Annas, [1978]: 437-51.

⁶² See, among others, A. MacIntyre, [1981]; J. McDowell, [1979]: 331; R. Putnam, [1988]: 379; L. Blum, [1991]: 701-725; R. Hursthouse, [1997]: 227 & [1999]: 8, 97; G. Santas, [1997]: 260; P. Simpson, [1997]: 246; R. Solomon, [1997]: 209; R. Audi, [1997]: 174; J. Driver, [2001]: 1-15. For an

justice, have very little to say.⁶³ However, before I discuss this possibility, some other issues need to be addressed first. Let us now see how the notion of virtue has been conceived within the virtue ethicists' and the Platonic framework and whether some similarities occur.

illuminating criticism to this approach see, among others, J. Wallace, [1991]: 469-495; M. Slote, [1982]: 70-76.

⁶³ I discuss this issue in Chapter 6.

PART THREE: PLATO'S ETHICS AND VIRTUE ETHICS

CHAPTER THREE

THE NOTION OF VIRTUE WITHIN VIRTUE ETHICS AND PLATO'S ETHICS

3.1. Virtue and Dominant Morality

One of the main tendencies of virtue ethics is to take a new and probably more fruitful approach to ethics than the one proposed by dominant morality, (consequentialism-utilitarianism and deontology-Kantianism), by putting great emphasis on the notion of virtue or moral character.¹ Within dominant morality virtue is construed as a derivative notion, as a notion with "secondary" value. That is to say that some other more essential moral notions are in the forefront. As J. Rawls puts it, "the two main concepts of ethics are those of the right and the good; the concept of a morally worthy person [virtuous person] is, I believe, derived from them".² On Rawls' theory, as well as Kantian theories generally, virtues are understood as "strong and normally effective desires to act on the basis of principles of right".³ Consequentialists also define virtues directly in terms of the good that certain traits or dispositions will bring about. Thus, within the dominant moral framework virtues have at best a secondary place in morality, amplifying and supporting moral principles and rules. McDowell's explanation of the way virtue has

¹ S. Conly [1988: 83] holds that the underlying motive of people who are not satisfied with the duty or principle-based ethics that dominant morality represents has two main sources, the syndrome of the irritating saint and the problem of integrity. Conly sees the former in the "picture of nasty do-gooders whom we hardly admire, do not want to emulate, and whose company we avoid, even while admitting the merit of their actions. In contrast to this we have the picture of those whose concerns do not lead to a life of a perfect fulfilment of duty but who attracts us by the strength, purity, and sensitivity of their characters. Second, there is the more pervasive problem of integrity. It is a fact of common experience that attention to moral duty can be felt as an intrusion in one's life, taking time and attention away from one's more heartfelt concerns and subordinating them to the stern impartial demands of moral law. Moral goodness, then, is held by some to be brought at the price of internal harmony and wholeness. The proponents of ethics of virtue, on the contrary, hope to bring about a rapprochement of meaning and morality. A virtue is generally held to be a part of one's character, and thus something within the person". For an excellent discussion about the status of saints that some theories propose and how dull they actually are see S. Wolf, [1982]: 419-439. For a discussion of maximising in connection with the "moral saints" problem, see R. Adam, [1984]: 392-401. For a discussion of two main pitfalls that have received great attention in contemporary philosophy, namely the pitfall that might be called "the excessive demands problem" and "the moral saints problems", see R. Louden, [1992].

² J. Rawls, [1971]: 24.

³ J. Rawls, [1971]: 436.

been received by the proponents of dominant morality is along the same lines as Rawls'. According to McDowell, the main reason virtue is attributed only a secondary role by dominant morality is that the latter is primarily concerned with right conduct and the principles that govern it.⁴

Virtue ethicists have attempted to alter the moral focus that had been suggested by deontologists and utilitarians. They have explored instead a moral approach that is mainly focused on the notion of virtue or moral character.⁵ Virtue ethicists' understanding of the notion of virtue and its role in their moral system differs substantially from the hitherto dominant understanding of it. Within virtue ethics' framework virtue is a central as well as an essential notion that plays various important roles within the proposed moral system, and its value is not determined by consequences or by certain abstract principles.⁶ McDowell has described virtue ethicists' attempt to alter the focus of moral theorising in the following illuminating way:

On this view [dominant morality], the primary topic of ethics is the concept of right conduct, and the nature and justification of principles of behaviour. If there is a place for an interest in the concept of virtue, it is a secondary place. Virtue is a disposition (perhaps of a specially rational and self-conscious kind) to behave rightly; the nature of virtue is explained, as it were, from the outside in. My aim [and the aim of most virtue ethicists] is to sketch the outline of a different view, to be found in the philosophical tradition, which flowers in Aristotle's ethics.⁷ According to this different view, although the point of engaging in ethical reflection still lies in the interest of the question "How

⁴ J. McDowell, [1979]: 331.

⁵ R. Hursthouse [1999: 83] understands virtue as a focal notion in the kind of Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics that she suggests. As will be shown in the next chapter, M. Slote holds that agent-based virtue ethics considers virtue not merely as a focal or primary notion, but as a basic notion. M. Slote considers agent-focused virtue ethics to be less radical than agent-based virtue ethics. The latter is the kind of virtue ethics that M. Slote proposes.

⁶ G. Watson [1997] holds that virtue ethics is at once a teleological and non-consequentialist theory. He also maintains that Rawls' distinction cannot accommodate such a case, since it suggests that theories are either teleological or deontological. Watson suggests that a way to avoid the conflation caused by Rawls' classification of moral theories is to replace it with a threefold distinction that Rawls' discussion originally suggests, namely an ethics of requirement, an ethics of consequences, and an ethics of virtue or character. According to Watson [1997: 57], the advantage of adopting this classification is that it "enables us to observe that while both ethics of consequences and ethics of virtue are teleological insofar as they are guided fundamentally by a notion of the good, Aristotle is nonetheless closer to Kant than to Bentham on the question of consequentialism. It also enables us to consider what it means to take the concept of virtue as fundamental".

⁷ J. McDowell, like the majority of virtue ethicists, holds that the new approach proposed by virtue ethics can be traced back to Aristotle's ethics. As I hope will become clear in this chapter as well as in the thesis as a whole, virtue ethics and Plato's ethics share some important theses, and if so, one could argue that virtue ethics flowers in Plato's ethics as well.

should one live?", that question is necessarily approached via the notion of a virtuous person. A conception of right conduct is grasped, as it were, from the inside out." [J. McDowell, 1979, p. 331].

In this chapter, I shall first discuss in detail the way the notion of virtue is understood within the framework of virtue ethics as well as the role it is required to undertake within this moral approach, proposed by virtue ethicists as new and more telling than the one offered by dominant morality. Second, I shall refer to Plato's account of virtue and the role that this notion possesses within the Platonic framework. It is my aim to argue that although virtue ethics is chronologically remote from Plato's ethics, to some extent some essential affinities occur, at least with regard to the way virtue is understood. In particular, I shall argue that in both moral systems virtue is understood as:

- (1) a central and essential notion⁸,
- (2) a notion strongly related to cognitive (e.g. sensitivity, flexibility, reliability) as well as to psychological conditions (e.g. emotions, desires, feelings, wants)⁹ and finally
- (3) something beneficial for the moral agent.

Let us first see how the notion of virtue is conceived within the framework of virtue ethics and what is the role that it is called by virtue ethicists to undertake.

3.2. Virtue Within the Framework of Virtue Ethics

It is a common belief among virtue ethicists that their theory proposes an understanding of virtue that differs from that which dominant morality has offered so far.¹⁰ In a way, virtue ethicists have attempted to "rescue" the notion of virtue from an unjustified mistreatment, namely being considered a secondary notion, derivative either from the notion of right or from consequences, and to attribute to virtues a more central role within moral theorising. For they all believe that virtue is essential for reliable moral behaviour, and so any moral theory that undermines the role of virtue is unpromising.

⁸As we will see in the next chapter, among virtue ethicists one can detect various ways of understanding virtue's centrality, some more radical than others. In particular, Hursthouse understands virtue to be a focal concept of ethics, but she disavows any foundational or reductionist role for it, whereas Slote considers virtue to be a basic notion and other notions to be derivative from it. See R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 82-83; M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, [1997]: 206-220.

⁹I here use the term "psychological condition" in a restricted sense which does not include cognitive factors and I draw the distinction between cognitive and psychological (i.e. non-cognitive) factors.

¹⁰ See, among others, E. Anscombe, [1958]: 1-19; L. Becker, [1975]: 110-122; M. Stocker, [1976]: 453-66; P. Foot, [1979]; A. Flemming, [1979-80]: 587-595; M. Slote, [1992]; R. Hursthouse, [1997].

G.E.M. Anscombe was the first to point out the need to attribute to virtues a more positive role in our moral theorising and regard them as notions that have a central role, and suggest that they could even replace deontic notions such as right, wrong, obligation and duty.¹¹ P. Foot, following up, in a way, Anscombe's proposal, held that the main objective of her work (entitled *Virtue and Vices*) would be "the opposition to emotivism and prescriptivism, as well as the suggestion that a sound moral philosophy should start from a theory of the virtues and vices".¹² Foot wanted to argue that this is the appropriate answer to some analytical philosophers who neglected the subject of the virtues and vices, and considered it no part of the fundamental work of ethics.¹³ E. Pincoffs also adds his voice to this current of thought and he underscores that:

If the cardinal sin of ethical theories is that they are reductive—that they eliminate by fiat what is morally relevant and legislate the form of moral reflection—then the question is whether a nonreductive discipline of ethics is possible. If moral reasoning and moral character are more intimately related than ethical theory allows, then there is the question of what account of morality can be offered that gives character its due. An answer to both of these questions is that the primary business of ethics ought to be with qualities of character, with virtues and vices.

[E. Pincoffs, 1986, p.5]

The suggestion provided by P. Foot and E. Pincoffs, namely that we consider the notion of virtue and its opposite, vice, to constitute the starting point of a sound moral theory, is a feature that characterises virtue ethics and in a way distinguishes it from what some call "virtue theory".¹⁴ The latter is the area of enquiry concerned with virtues in general. In this sense, even Kant's ethics and Mill's utilitarianism could be considered as virtue theories, since within their work an enquiry into virtues or a recognition of virtues' significance occurs.¹⁵ What however differentiates virtue ethics from virtue theory as well as from dominant morality is the fact that virtue ethics does not simply accommodate an enquiry about virtues or a mere appreciation of the subject. As R. Crisp puts it, "Virtue ethics is narrower and prescriptive, and consists primarily in the

¹¹ E. Anscombe, [1958]: 8-9. With regard to this issue see also Chapter I, Section 8.

¹² P. Foot, [1979]: xi.

¹³ P. Foot, [1979]: 1.

¹⁴ J. Driver makes this distinction in her [1996]: 111 n.1.

¹⁵ See J.S. Mill, [1861]: Ch. 4; I. Kant, [1797]

advocacy of virtues".¹⁶ That is to say that virtue ethics consists in the understanding of virtues as central notions in the moral system. Virtue ethics is not simply a project that discusses the notion of virtue. Rather, it is a project of strongly relating ethics to virtue evaluations.

There are at least two main ways in which virtue ethicists understand the *centrality of virtue* in the moral system they advocate. Most virtue ethicists consider virtue to be a *primary notion*, that is a notion that could be the starting point in any investigation of ethics and has primacy over a number of other notions. In this sense, virtue is the notion that sets up the framework of the theory and determines how other notions fit into that theory. Some virtue ethicists, on the other hand, see something more than this in virtue. They understand virtue not only as a primary but also as a *basic notion* in their system, and then they believe that they can reduce the evaluation of other concepts to the evaluation of virtue.¹⁷

3.2.1. Virtue as Primary Notion Within Virtue Ethics

To construe virtue as a primary notion in the moral system is something foreign to dominant morality. Within deontological and consequentialist accounts the starting point of investigation is something other than the notion of virtue. It is the notion of right, which within consequentialism is explained in terms of good consequences. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, considers virtue to be central and considers its role to be essential as well. Reference to the notion of virtue is required in order for an adequate answer to be provided to the question what is right and what is wrong, whereas within dominant morality, no reference to virtue is required to determine what is right and what is wrong. To put it differently, one could hold that, according to Kant, the right action is the one that can qualify as a universal law, and according to utilitarianism an action is right when it will produce the greatest happiness of the greatest numbers. Some

¹⁶ See R. Crisp, [1996a]: 5.

¹⁷ Here I rely on Annas' distinction between primary and basic notions concerning ancient virtue theories. See her [1993]: 9. I take it that P. Foot and R. Hursthouse understand virtue as a primary notion, whereas as G. E.M. Anscombe and M. Slote seem to believe that virtue can undertake a more demanding role within the moral system and thus can be considered as a basic notion within the moral system. One can attempt to expand both categories by adding more names. I have here confined myself to the most obvious cases. K. Baier [1988:126-132], for instance, has argued that M. Stocker can be considered as a radical virtue ethicist. G. Watson [1997:56-81] can also be understood as someone who proposes a radical virtue ethics.

philosophers have argued that the criterion of right action proposed by dominant morality is "external", for it locates value not in the agent's internal state but in something outside it, such as the universal moral law, or the greatest happiness of the greatest number.¹⁸ Within virtue ethics, however, the story is different. For in any attempt to define the right action the reference to the agent's internal state is present and is unavoidable. To be more precise, within the framework of virtue ethics, either virtue is more fundamental than right action, or while right action is in a way more fundamental, we need to approach that concept through that of the virtuous person.¹⁹ This articulates one of the main features of virtue ethics, namely the insistence that virtue is a primary notion. That is to say that if one makes use of other moral notions such as "right action", those notions are themselves understood in terms of virtue and not vice versa. Thus, within the framework of virtue ethics virtue has primacy over other notions. More precisely, virtue has *theoretical or explanatory primacy* over other notions.²⁰

But, one could say that such an approach seems to create another, probably more serious, problem than the one dominant morality suffers from. For if one says that right action is the action performed by a virtuous person and the virtuous person is the person who performs right actions then that is circular. But, is it right to argue so? Does virtue ethics suffer from trivial circularity? Only someone who has a skin-deep approach to virtue ethics' main theses could hold such a claim. Virtue ethics is not trivially circular. For virtue ethicists understand right actions in terms of virtuous agents, and then virtuous agents in terms of virtues, rather than actions. In other words, the virtuous person is the person who has and exercises certain character traits, namely virtues.²¹

¹⁸ See, among others, B. Williams, [1973]; J. McDowell, [1979]; M. Slote, [1995].

¹⁹ A proponent of agent-focused virtue ethics would hold that while in a way the concept of right action is more basic, we can only know what is right by reference to the virtuous agent, who is sensitive to it. See, for instance, J. McDowell, [1979]: 331-350. According to Hursthouse's agent-prior virtue ethics, although the evaluation of action is secondary to and depends upon virtue, it does not derive from it, it is not reduced to it. Also virtue is explained in terms of happiness. See, for instance, R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 80. A proponent of agent-based virtue ethics would argue that the evaluation of action does not only depend upon virtue, it also derives from it, it reduces to it. See, for instance, M. Baron, P. Pettit, M. Slote, [1997]: 206-232. I provide a detailed account of the above distinctions in Chapter IV, Section 2.

²⁰ See R. Crisp & M. Slote, [1997a]: 3. This might not apply entirely to agent-focused virtue ethics.

²¹ See R. Hursthouse, [1997]: 229.

3.2.2. Virtue & Cognitive - Psychological Requirements

Virtues are not simple dispositions to act in a certain way, which could be exhausted by a set of principles and rules. On the contrary, virtues are character traits that are strongly associated with cognitive and psychological dimensions. They are character traits that are associated with beliefs, and motives (feelings, desires, wants), as well as the activities issuing from these states.²² According to virtue ethics, then, moral virtue carries internal requirements of two categories, cognitive and psychological.²³ Let us now explore such requirements in detail.

3.2.2.1. Virtue & Cognitive Requirements

Within the framework of virtue ethics, virtue is strongly associated with cognitive conditions, such as knowledge. The majority of virtue ethicists are strongly influenced by Aristotle's account of virtue.²⁴ One of the main proponents of virtue ethics, R. Hursthouse, proposes a Neo-Aristotelian understanding of virtue.²⁵ According to

²² R. Adams [1976: 467] has termed such a morality that is concerned with wants and desires, considered as giving rise, or tending to give rise to actions, morality of motives.

²³ J. Driver provides a consequentialist backing for the virtues quite at odds with the views of proponents of virtue ethics. She claims that the importance of human psychology has been overstated in accounts of human nature used to underpin versions of virtue ethics. She argues that virtue is primarily concerned with directing human behaviour towards increasing human flourishing. Thus virtue should be primarily associated with external requirements (evaluational externalism) and in accordance with her understanding, virtues are character traits that systematically produce good actual consequences (objective consequentialist). For there is no general cognitive or psychological requirement on virtue. J. Driver is uneasy with the association of virtue with cognitive and psychological requirements and by referring to what she calls virtues of ignorance (i.e. modesty, blind charity, impulsive courage, a species of forgiveness and a species of trust) attempts to disarm the notion of virtue from cognitive and psychological requirements. She maintains that virtues are character traits that systematically promote good consequences. The moral quality of the person is determined by factors external to the agent (evaluational externalism). Although her analysis is attractive and contains originality, it also faces some problems. For it is difficult to ask virtues to produce systematically good consequences and simultaneously to disarm them from cognitive conditions. The systematic production of X and cognitive conditions related to X are more strongly related than Driver believes. Driver defends a definition of virtues along consequentialist lines, an approach that differs from the deontological and that of the virtue ethicist. Driver's analysis can be found in her [1996]: 111-129 and [2001]: Chs. 2, 3 & 4.

²⁴ M. Slote holds that his "agent-based" version of virtue ethics is not Aristotelian, but is to be found in the nineteenth century ethicist J. Martineau. See M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 206-220; C. Swanton [1997] also seems to move away from Aristotle and to focus her analysis of virtue on Nietzsche.

²⁵ According to R. Hursthouse [1999], her proposed virtue ethics is *Neo-Aristotelian* for two main reasons: although she and the proponents of such an approach of virtue ethics have Aristotle's ethics as a model, they also believe that Aristotle's ideas about slaves and women are unwelcome. In addition, they do not restrict themselves to Aristotle's list of virtues. In her words "charity and

Hursthouse, the virtuous person really has and exercises virtues only when she *knows* what she is doing. When a virtuous person risks danger to help someone in need, she is virtuous only when she is aware of what she is actually doing, namely that she is putting herself in danger by helping a person in need. The acquisition of certain knowledge is essential for a virtuous act. But what does Hursthouse actually mean when she maintains that the virtuous person knows what she is doing? What is really involved in this question is the fact that the virtuous person does not perform the aforementioned act by accident, or as a result of coincidence, for if so, then she will become virtuous by accident or as a result of coincidence and can only qualify as a coincidentally virtuous person, with no reliability and predictability.²⁶ According to Hursthouse, what one means by saying that the virtuous person is aware of what she is doing is that the virtuous person would be able, when asked, to provide "an honest answer which enables us to understand what it is about the situation and the action that made this action in this situation something that would seem to them to be an appropriate thing to do".²⁷ The virtuous person is aware of what she is doing while acting virtuously. Furthermore, since she is aware, she would also be able to explain when asked why she thought that particular act to be appropriate under these circumstances. Knowledge, then, is a cognitive requirement strongly associated with virtue. Knowledge and virtue are strongly related within virtue ethics.

There are also three main issues related to the knowledge condition that is required for the possession and exercise of virtue. One is what has been called *sensitivity* for what the circumstances call for, the second linked with the first is what some people call *flexibility*, and the final is what has been termed *reliability*.²⁸ These three issues are

benevolence, for example, is not an Aristotelian virtue, but all virtue ethicists assume it is on the list now". In her [1999]: 8.

²⁶ See R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 134.

²⁷ R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 124. Some pages later (p. 130) Hursthouse underscores that "the reasons the virtuous agent gives will not make her actions fully comprehensible to the cowardly, intemperate, untrustworthy and dishonest". Hursthouse's point here is that acting virtuously is not separable from one's grasp of what each virtue involves and from the possession of the virtues themselves, at least to some degree. Hursthouse relies here on Aristotle's thesis that "the coward calls the brave man rash, the rash man calls him coward and similarly in all other cases", *NE* 1108b 25-6.

²⁸ R. Hursthouse's account of virtue relies heavily on Aristotle's account of this notion. According to the latter, "an act is not performed justly or unjustly or with self-control if the act itself is of a certain kind, but only if, in addition the agent has certain characteristics as he performs it: first of all, he must know what he is doing; he must choose to act the way he does, and he must choose it for its own sake;

strongly associated with the cognitive condition, namely knowledge. Let us discuss them in turn. First the issue of sensitivity. The moral agent, who possesses the kind of knowledge required for virtue, will be sensitive to what the circumstances call for. In other words, she will be in a position to judge how serious the situation X that she is facing is, to appreciate the salient factors of this situation, and to act appropriately. For different circumstances require different approaches and each single case is different. McDowell terms this cognitive condition *conceptual sensitivity* when he attempts to describe how the virtuous person acts.²⁹ The virtuous person will be sensitive to the morally relevant features of a situation, she will take them into consideration before acting. Her reasoning indicates what she takes as relevant or salient, good or evil, advantageous or disadvantageous, decisive or compelling about the situation. She can read the requirements of the circumstances and she can act accordingly.

But rules and principles do not exhaust morality. Also, general principles and rules do not guide the agent's actions.³⁰ On the contrary, they are based on her perceptual knowledge, and such knowledge is taken to be an alternative to the view that virtue consists in the agent having internalised rules, or principles of ethical behaviour. But rules are too crude, too general, and a person who relies on them might be at a loss in an unusual situation that general principles cannot cover. The person who possesses perceptual sensitivity, though, will be capable of facing even the unusual situation and discerning acutely and responsively the salient features of such situations, and then acting virtuously. Virtuous agents, then, do not rely on principles. Rather they are flexible. Furthermore, such flexibility is also associated with reliability. For virtue is related to knowledge and is not something contingent or a matter of luck. So the virtuous person will react in similar ways on similar occasions. According to Hursthouse, what it is that makes the agent who does what is virtuous (V) for X reasons (i.e. reasons appropriate for the virtue in question) on a particular occasion both actually

and in the third place, the act must spring from a firm and unchangeable character", *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1105a 28-34. See also J. Driver, [2001]: 1-15.

²⁹ See J. McDowell, [1979]: 331-350. For McDowell moral education consists in enabling the person to see correctly, rather than to apply principles. McDowell holds that to be fully virtuous is a difficult achievement.

³⁰ M. Nussbaum [1990: 37] echoes this with regard to Aristotle by writing: "It is very clear [...] in Aristotle [...] that one point of the emphasis on perception is to show the ethical crudeness of moralities based exclusively on general rules, and to demand for ethics a much finer responsiveness to

and counterfactually reliable and predictable, if she is -what it is for her to be "really committed to the value of her V act" - is that she acts "from a fixed and permanent state", namely the virtue in question".³¹ The moral agent, who has knowledge, will act virtuously in any case she is facing and other people could consider such a person as a reliable example of virtuous behaviour.³² The requirement to be able to see what the circumstances call for, or to put it differently, the requirement to see things as they are and to act with reliability captures, I think, the spirit of the knowledge condition placed by many virtue ethicists on virtue. For the moral agent to be virtuous knowledge is required. That is to say that for the moral agent to be virtuous, some conceptual sensitivity to morally relevant features of a situation, reliability as well as flexibility and responsiveness to the unusual is required. Virtue is thus accessible only to those who possess knowledge.

However, Hursthouse -among others- underscores that the knowledge of what one is doing at this time is not the only condition that the virtuous person satisfies when she acts virtuously. She also acts from the right reason, that is, she does not help the person in need acting under compulsion. Rather, she acts voluntarily, but not because she expects, for instance, to get some money for saving the person in need. The virtuous person knows what she is doing and she does it for the right reason. In other words, she does not help the person in need because she has been told to do so, or because she is thinking of the beneficial consequences of such an act, or even because she wants to please the onlookers. Rather she is helping the person in need because she possesses the virtue required for such an action. She is acting from virtue and she considers such an action as a good in itself rather than a good for its consequences. She does the virtuous action because it is good for its own sake.

3.2.2.2. Virtue & Psychological Requirements

the concrete - including features that have not been seen before and could not therefore have been housed in any antecedently built system of rules".

³¹ See her [1999]: 128, 135-136 and n. 12.

³² In Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle writes: "[...] no function of man possesses as much stability as do activities in conformity with virtue: these seem to be even more durable than scientific knowledge [...]" (*NE* 1100b12). Such a person is resilient, and virtue enables him to act appropriately even under terrible circumstances (*NE* 1100b 12-21). R. Hursthouse [1999: 141, 145] holds that, "the perfect virtuous agent, when she acts virtuously, from virtue, sets the standard for 'moral motivation', for acting because one thinks it's right".

Nevertheless, the aforementioned conditions bring virtue ethics into the opposite camp to consequentialism only. Kantians could say that one is doing X, because one thinks that X is good in itself, and virtue ethics says the same. What is more, Kant also requires moral agents to act from reason, and if it is only knowledge that matters for acting virtuously, then Kant and virtue ethics do not differ. Also it is true that Kant's ethics and virtue ethics differ from the Humean approach to motivation.³³ For they do not conceive reason to be the slave of passions. But what differentiates virtue ethics and Kant's ethics is the fact that, for Kant, desires and feelings are not a part of our rationality, whereas for virtue ethics they are, and they are actually supposed to be included in or related to any analysis of virtuous action. Although feelings, and in particular pleasure, are not a motivational factor for virtue ethicists, as it is for hedonists, they do consider it as a necessary by-product of the virtuous action, and so it can be morally evaluated. For a virtuous action conveys certain cognitive as well as psychological characteristics. When the virtuous person performs the virtuous action she is also properly affected, that is, she feels pleasure by doing so.³⁴

The association of virtue with psychological requirements, such as emotions, pleasure, feelings, desires and wants, is the second main feature of virtue ethicists' understanding of virtue. Virtue is a disposition to act and also to feel emotions, Hursthouse holds, and for one more time relies on Aristotle's account of virtue, according to which virtues are concerned not only with actions, but also with feelings.³⁵ The virtuous person, while helping the person in need, does so voluntarily and is properly affected.³⁶ To put it differently, she has the appropriate feelings and attitudes when she acts. She helps the person in need gladly without any constraint, and without having in mind that this is the action that is required by duty, and is needed to meet the maxim determined by the categorical imperative. The difference between the virtuous

³³ For an interesting discussion on this topic see M. Smith, [1994]: 91-129.

³⁴ R. Hursthouse [1999: 102] holds that virtue ethicists do not argue that emotions such as sympathy, compassion, love, guarantee right action. They argue that they are morally significant rather than absent in any account of right action.

³⁵ See her [1999]: 108. Aristotle argues that virtue is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean. He also holds that to find the middle is not for everyone, but for him who knows; so, too to get angry- that is easy- or give or spend money; but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for everyone, nor is it easy. (*NE* 1006b36-37 & 1109a22-30). Virtue is associated with emotions, Aristotle says, such as anger, and it is a difficult task to feel them properly.

³⁶ This point is stressed, for instance, by L. Kosman, [1980]: 103-116.

person that virtue ethicists have in mind and the one Kant proposes relies on these psychological requirements. The Kantian virtuous person is in a way similar to the Aristotelian continent agent and differs from the Aristotelian virtuous person whom virtue ethicists seem to support. Aristotelian continent (Kant's virtuous) and Aristotelian virtuous person (virtue ethicists' virtuous) have the same motivation, they act from reason, and as Hursthouse correctly, I think, underscores, this is a common feature between Kantians and virtue ethicists.³⁷ What makes most people, myself included, consider the Kantian virtuous person as similar to the Aristotelian continent, is the fact that due to the constraint that feelings put on reason, the continent person does not need to feel pleasure when she acts virtuously.³⁸ The Aristotelian virtuous person, however, whom current virtue ethicists have in mind, does feel pleasure, while acting virtuously. Aristotle sees appropriate feelings as essential to the virtuous person's motivation, whereas Kant does not. It is part of Kant's concept of the virtuous persons that she does not need to feel pleasure when she acts virtuously. The virtue ethicists' virtuous person, like the Aristotelian virtuous person, is better disposed in relation to her emotion than the continent person that Kant seems to be proposing as an example of the virtuous person. In the latter case, psychological conditions are remote from any notion of virtue, whereas according to virtue ethics, psychological conditions, such as the feeling of pleasure while acting virtuously, is considered as a factor that completes the picture of virtue and its practise.³⁹

Foot also argues that some psychological considerations are part of any implemented picture of the notion of virtue. In Foot's words:

The disposition of the heart is part of virtue. Thus it seems right to attribute a kind of moral failing to some deeply discouraging and debilitating people who say, without lying, that they mean to be helpful; and on the other side to see virtue *par excellence* in one who is prompt and resourceful in doing good. [...]. What this suggests is that a man's virtue may be judged by his innermost

³⁷ R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 91-107.

³⁸ For an excellent discussion about what distinguishes the Aristotelian continent and virtuous person see T. Scaltsas, [1993a]: 65-69. For a comparison between the Kantian moral individual and Aristotle's virtuous person see R. J. Sullivan, [1974-75]: 24-53.

³⁹ According to virtue ethics, the feeling of pleasure is part of our rationality, as are other emotions such as love, sympathy, regret and pride. Emotions or inclinations are morally significant and should be included in any account of virtuous action. According to Kant, however, emotions come from the non-rational, animal side of our nature. For the relation between virtue and emotion see R. Hursthouse, [1999]: Ch.5.

desires as well as by his intentions; and this fits with our idea that a virtue such as generosity lies as much in someone's attitudes as in his actions. Pleasure in the good fortune of others is, one thinks, the sign of a generous spirit; and small reactions of pleasure and displeasure often the surest signs of a man's moral disposition. None of this shows that it is wrong to think of virtues as belonging to the will; [...] The man who is wise does not merely know how to do good things such as looking after his children well, or strengthening someone in trouble, but must also want to do them. [P. Foot, 1979, pp.4-6].

It seems to be a common conception among virtue ethicists that the notion of virtue associates cognitive and psychological dimensions. The virtuous person that most virtue ethicists envisage is required to combine knowledge of what the circumstances call for and the appropriate feelings, wants, and desires. That is to say that apart from possessing the required knowledge, the virtuous person is supposed to be properly affected, to feel pleasure by doing what she believes is good, and to possess the corresponding desires, feelings and wants.

M. Stocker provides an informative account with regard to the relation between cognitive and psychological requirements that the virtuous person is supposed to meet. He holds that it will be a sign of virtue when they are in harmony. For in such a way virtue ethics will not suffer from what he calls *moral schizophrenia*, a situation in which one's reasons and one's wants or desires and feelings are in contrast.⁴⁰ Stocker holds that although harmony is not in all cases the best one can ask for, since there are some cases in which it is not even necessary to achieve what is valued, any theory that ignores such harmony between reason and desires does so at great peril. For harmony is a mark of a good life.⁴¹ Stocker advances the harmonious condition between reason and desire. The origins of this theory go back to Aristotle's virtuous person, and as we will see shortly, even further back to the Platonic virtuous person. Virtue ethicists however, generally have Aristotle in mind when they describe whom they consider to be a virtuous person. However, for reasons that I will discuss in Section 3.4., where I explore the Platonic notion of virtue, if the association of virtue with cognitive and psychological

⁴⁰ See M. Stocker, [1976]: 453-455.

⁴¹ See M. Stocker, [1976]: 454-455. As cases where harmony is not necessary Stocker sees the fixing of a flat tire or the feeding of a sick person. Both actions can be done perfectly well, Stocker holds, irrespective of motive. But as he adds some lines later on (p. 455) doing your duty is only one part of ethics. "There is the whole area of the values of personal and interpersonal relations and activities; and also the area of moral goodness, merit and virtue. In both, motive is an essential part of what is valuable; in both, motive and reason must be in harmony for the values to be realised."

requirements as well as a condition of harmony between reason and desire is what virtue ethicists envisage, then their account dates back to the writings of Plato. Thus the Platonic corpus is virtue ethicists' first extant intellectual source. The fact that virtue ethicists do not usually refer to Plato is, I think, more a matter of historical accident than a choice based on philosophical grounds.⁴² But, I cannot defend this claim here. Such a task will be undertaken in the aforementioned section.

So far I have argued that within virtue ethics the moral agent's virtue is strongly associated with cognitive (e.g. knowledge, sensitivity, flexibility, and reliability) as well as with psychological dimensions (e.g. the feeling of pleasure, wants, and desires). Being virtuous consists in doing the virtuous action and being properly affected.⁴³ Virtue ethics, then, places a great emphasis not only on the cognitive requirements for virtue, but also on the integration of the latter with the psychological factors when attempting to provide an informative account of what virtue is.⁴⁴

3.3. Virtue Is Beneficial For The Moral Agent

In light of what I have argued so far, the notion of virtue is a central notion within the framework of virtue ethics, a notion strongly associated with cognitive as well as psychological requirements.⁴⁵ Another distinctive feature of the way virtue ethicists understand the notion of virtue is the fact that they integrate it with what benefits the agent. Foot holds that virtues are beneficial for the moral agent. For human beings do not get on well without them. According to Foot, virtues are beneficial characteristics,

⁴² It could also be a result of the unclarity, inconsistency and difficulty that some thinkers hold is present in the Platonic account of virtues. See P. Foot, [1979]: 1; J. Annas [1993:18] also holds: "The exclusion of systematic discussion of Plato may surprise and dismay more people; and of course I am *not* claiming that Plato can be left out of histories of Greek ethics. But in a book which examines explicit ethical theory Plato is problematic, because of his deliberate use of the dialogue form and his consequent rejection of systematic discussion of ethical theory". I discuss this issue in detail in Chapter VII, Section 2.

⁴³ As Kosman [1980] points out, being properly affected will not include emotions such as pleasure for all virtues. For instance, for particular virtues such as courage, being properly affected will include anger at the appropriate things. But still, pleasure in achieving the courageous end is necessary.

⁴⁴ One could say that with regard to the psychological dimension associated with the notion of virtue Anscombe's article "Modern Moral Philosophy" is vital. For in it Anscombe argued that we need some clarity about philosophical psychology and a better grip on terms like "intention", "wanting", "pleasure", before we can say what virtue is. Virtue ethicists also owe to Anscombe their understanding of virtue as a primary notion as well their understanding of virtue as a basic notion.

⁴⁵ R. Hursthouse [1999:207-208] holds that "to possess the virtues is, [...] not only to be well disposed with respect to actions from reason but also with respect to emotions and desires. Notwithstanding the enormous importance of our actions from reason, our emotions are also morally significant [...]".

ones that human beings need to have, for their own sake and for the sake of others. Being honest is good for me since everyone can trust me. It is also good for the others. For they can see that whatever I have promised to them will be fulfilled to the best of my knowledge. So virtues are beneficial to their possessor. Foot holds that although such a claim is clear with regard to certain virtues, namely prudence, courage, temperance, some people believe that the same does not apply to the virtue of justice.⁴⁶ Some think that the latter is a virtue that actually benefits only others and that it actually works to the disadvantage of the just man himself. Foot holds that such a worry has its origins as far back as Plato's *Republic I*, where Thrasymachus expressed such a thesis with regard to the notion of justice and Socrates attempted to show to him and to all the participants that justice is actually beneficial for the agent. Foot's reasoning is inspired by the above discussion and she offers two main arguments to support her thesis that even the virtue of justice is beneficial for the moral agent. This is so because, according to Foot, if we do unjust acts and are not caught our lives still are going to be dominated by uncertainty. In her words:

"...the price of vigilance would be colossal. If he [the unjust person] lets even few people see his true attitude he must guard himself against them; if he lets no one into the secret he must always be careful in case the least spontaneity betray him..... The reason why it seems to some people so impossibly difficult to show that justice is more profitable than injustice is that they consider in isolation particular just acts" [P. Foot, 1979, p. 129].

A question that arises here is whether virtues are character traits that benefit their possessors on a particular occasion only, or whether they are character traits that benefit their possessor overall. Hursthouse argues that without believing that virtues can guarantee one's flourishing, one could say that virtues are the most *reliable bet* for benefiting their possessor and bringing him happiness.⁴⁷ She holds that one can see that most of us believe that virtues are beneficial to their possessors from the way we bring up our children. She maintains that most of us try to bring up our children and pass on to them messages related to virtues, rather than to immorality. Parents are interested in their children's good and they are aware that the only way to achieve the greatest

⁴⁶ P. Foot, [1979]: 125.

⁴⁷ See R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 172. I explore and evaluate Hursthouse's thesis of the relation between virtue and happiness in Chapter V, Section 5.

possible satisfaction of it is to bring up their children in a way that makes them virtuous for the sake of others and for their own sake. We teach our children to be honest, because this is easier for them than trying to present things differently and look foolish under pressure. We teach our children to be honest because honesty enables human beings to rely on each other, and form intimate relationships, conditions that promote happiness.

Hursthouse, however, disagrees with the view that virtue benefits its possessor in a way that allows any possibility of the possessor being harmed to be excluded. She actually holds that virtue does not rule out any possible harm.⁴⁸ She maintains that although happiness is understood in a different way by the virtuous person and the immoral person, some conceptions of loss, harm and disaster overlap, at least with respect to such things such as death and suffering.⁴⁹ Thus, although Hursthouse agrees with the understanding of virtues as character traits that benefit their possessor and enable her to achieve happiness, she disagrees with the idea that the possession of virtues excludes any loss. The latter idea has been put forward by McDowell and Phillips who have argued respectively that "no sacrifice necessitated by the life of excellence [...] can count as a genuine loss" and that no disaster that the virtuous bring upon themselves through their virtue is a disaster.⁵⁰ Hursthouse holds that such a conception of virtues and their effect in their possessors can be described as unrealistic. Although Hursthouse is not so radical as McDowell and Phillips are concerning the beneficial effect that virtues could have to their possessors, she nevertheless maintains that virtues are the most *reliable bet* for the agent's flourishing. She holds:

To claim that the virtues, for the most part, benefit their possessor, enabling her to flourish, is not to claim that virtue is necessary for happiness. It is to claim that no "regime" will serve one better. [R. Hursthouse, 1999, p.173]

Among virtue ethicists the conception of virtue is understood as a central notion, strongly associated with cognitive and psychological requirements, and as a notion integrated with the agent's benefit (although some of them put forward more radical versions than others). After discussing the way virtue is understood within virtue ethics,

⁴⁸ P. Foot explores the same view in her [1979]: 1-18.

⁴⁹ See R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 185.

I would now like to turn to the Platonic understanding of virtue; after doing so, I shall proceed by outlining some similarities between these two approaches concerning the notion of virtue and its role in both moral frameworks. It will emerge that between two chronologically remote philosophical theories some substantial affinities concerning the notion of virtue, its role and its understanding occur.

3.4. Plato's Understanding of Virtue

Within the Platonic corpus one can witness an extended discussion of virtue and some other issues closely related to it. Virtue is connected to the main ethical issues addressed within the Platonic corpus, namely happiness and knowledge. There are also essential associations of the possession of virtue with the notion of Forms as well as with the doctrine of recollection, especially as these matters are discussed in the *Republic* as well as in *Meno* and *Phaedo*. Here, however, I shall confine my analysis to the three main features that I think both Plato and virtue ethics share with regard to virtue:

- (a) the centrality of virtue within their ethical account.⁵¹
- (b) the association of virtue with cognitive and psychological requirements and
- (c) the understanding of virtue as something beneficial for the agent.

I shall first discuss whether virtue is a central notion in the Platonic corpus and in the moral theory advanced by early and middle Plato.

3.4.1. Virtue as Primary Notion Within The Platonic Corpus

Throughout the development of the Platonic corpus and in particular in the early and middle dialogues,⁵² the notion of virtue is discussed heavily. Is it accurate, however, to construe the notion of virtue as a central notion? To be more precise, is it accurate to

⁵⁰ See J. McDowell, [1980]: 359-76; D. Z. Phillips, [1964-65]: 45-60.

⁵¹ As I have noted earlier on (3.2., 3.2.1.) virtue ethics comes in many forms, some of them more radical than others. I think most virtue ethicists understand virtue as a primary notion. However, some of them believe that virtue can be considered not only as a primary notion, but also as a basic notion. Here I shall discuss whether the understanding of virtue as a central and primary notion can also be found within the Platonic corpus. In the next two chapters I shall discuss the conception of virtue as a primary and basic notion in the moral system and the plausibility of detecting a similar approach within the Platonic corpus.

⁵² See Introduction, pp. 8-9.

hold that within Plato's ethics virtue is a primary notion, a notion that provides the starting point of the discussion and enables us to understand some other notions involved in the moral approach proposed in the Platonic corpus? The answer to this question is, I believe, "yes". By having a brief look at the object as well as at the structure of the early, transitional and middle dialogues such as *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Meno*, and *Republic*, such a claim can be vindicated. In all the aforementioned dialogues the starting point is the question "what is x?", where x corresponds to a particular virtue, such as courage in the *Laches*, temperance in the *Charmides*, virtue itself in the *Meno*, and justice in the *Republic*.⁵³ The *Euthydemus* is also concerned with a virtue, wisdom, and its relation to happiness. It is not an exaggeration to say that Plato's ethics, as it develops throughout these dialogues, is an ethical inquiry whose starting point is the notion of virtue in its various forms. In the *Meno* Socrates shows that virtue is supposed to be the starting point of the discussion when he holds:

On our present reasoning then, whoever has virtue gets it by divine dispensation. But we shall not understand the truth of the matter until, before asking how men get virtue, we try to discover what virtue is in and by itself. [*Meno* 100b, Guthrie's translation]

In the same vein, at the end of Book I of the *Republic*, Socrates confirms the understanding of virtue as a starting point of his philosophical journey when he holds:

But just as gluttons snatch at every dish that is handed along and taste it before they have properly enjoyed the preceding, so I, methinks, before finding the first object of our inquiry-what justice is- let go of that and set out to consider something about it [...]. [*Republic*, 354 b-c, Shorey's translation]

Virtue is the starting notion around which any ethical discussion undertaken in the above dialogues revolves. What is Plato's main aim? Why does Plato conceive the notion of virtue as the starting point of these dialogues, a notion that can provide us with an understanding of other notions? Plato does so for two main reasons that bring us to the cognitive as well as psychological requirements associated with the notion of virtue.

⁵³ These are the virtues discussed within the Platonic corpus. As we will see later on, within the framework of virtue ethics these are not the only virtues at stake. The account of virtues has been enriched since Plato's time and some other virtues such as charity, benevolence and caring have been added. However, this does not undervalue the fact that virtues are still central notions.

Plato wants first to show that virtue is a very difficult notion to capture, to know, to define, and anyone who believes that she knows "What virtue is", sooner or later, will realise that she only thought she knew.⁵⁴ In fact, he only held an opinion on virtue, rather than knowledge of it. However, for Socrates, such a realisation of ignorance is an achievement. Now, the interlocutor knows that he does not know, and can then continue, with Socrates' guidance, to look for virtue's definition by following another path. The second reason is to show his interlocutors that, even after realising their ignorance, it is still very difficult to define virtue. However, they should not cease in their attempt. On the contrary, they should persist. For virtue is essential for their happiness, and without knowing "what virtue is", they will never be able to achieve the virtuous and happy life.

Plato does not only conceive virtue as a primary notion, as a starting point of the discussion addressed in the above dialogues. Plato, via Socrates, also underscores how important and essential virtue is and then how overwhelming is the need to develop it. Plato's ethics revolves around the question "how should one live"⁵⁵. Plato's reply to this question is that one should live with virtue. Socrates says this in the following conversation with Crito:

S: Do we still hold, or do we not, that we should attach highest value not to living, but to living well? C: We do. S: And that to live well is the same as to live honourably and justly: do we hold that too, or not? C: We do. [*Crito*, 48b 4-10]

Socrates stresses a similar claim even before the *Crito*, in the *Apology*. There, Socrates explains himself to the court that was to sentence him to death. Addressing an imaginary fellow-citizen who is reproaching him for having lived in a way that now puts him in peril of execution as a criminal, he holds:

⁵⁴ When Socrates invites Laches to define courage the general maintains that this is an easy question and he holds: "on my word, Socrates, that is nothing difficult: anyone who is willing to stay at his post and face the enemy, and does not run away, you may be sure, is courageous" (*Laches*, 190e 3-5). Socrates immediately proceeds to show to Laches that his definition is too narrow and makes clear to Laches in the end that defining virtue is something rather difficult.

⁵⁵ For the fundamental question addressed in Plato's ethics see *Laches*, 187e6-188a3, *Gorgias*, 472c6-d1, 492d3-5, 500c1-4: cf, *Republic* I, 352d. For the answers provided to this question by writers of epics, tragedians and philosophers see W. Prior, [1991]. See also C. Megone's insightful review of this book in his [1992]: 52-61.

You do not speak well, O man, if you believe that someone worth anything at all would give countervailing weight to danger of life or death or give consideration to anything but this when he acts: whether his action is just or unjust, the action of a good or evil man. [*Apology* 28b 5-9].⁵⁶

A few lines latter, Socrates indicates one more time how essential virtue is, the achievement of which should be everyone's aim, young and old. Many things can derive from the possession of virtue. More precisely, he holds:

I go about doing nothing else than prevailing upon you, young and old, not to care for your bodies or for wealth more than for the perfection of the souls, or even so much; and I tell you that virtue does not come from wealth, but from virtue wealth and other things for human beings become good. [*Apology* 30a7-b4]

By the same token, Socrates adds some lines later:

I say that it is the greatest good for a human being to discuss virtue every day, and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being [...]. [*Apology* 38a1-5]

In light of the passages quoted above one could say that within the Platonic framework, virtue is not only the starting point of the discussion but also an essential notion, very difficult to define and capture, yet important as constituting an aim in everyone's life. For from virtue wealth and other things for human beings become good.

3.4.2. Cognitive & Psychological Requirements for Virtue

Socrates holds that the acquisition of virtue is essential for our life and only the life that is focused on searching for virtue is worth while. For the unexamined life, the life in which the debate on virtues and the search for them is not the main worry, is not worth living (*Apol.* 38a). Socrates also associates virtue with cognitive as well as psychological factors. The fact that virtue is strongly associated with knowledge is a characteristic feature of the early and middle Platonic dialogues.

According to early Plato, virtue and knowledge are strongly related. Socrates locates the virtues exclusively in the rational part of the soul. He holds that virtues are

rational, for they are all sciences. Such a claim is central in the early Platonic dialogues and it has led Socrates to some other very well known and probably controversial doctrines, such as the denial of *akrasia* and the unity of virtues, and the issue whether virtue is teachable, the analysis of which is beyond the scope of this chapter.⁵⁷ My concern here is Socrates' association of virtue with cognitive as well as with any psychological requirements.

The association of virtues with cognitive factors as well as the direct implications of that association, such as the unity of virtue, can be found in various early and transitional dialogues, such as in the *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and in the *Meno*.⁵⁸ This association can also be found in middle dialogues such as in the *Republic* and in the *Phaedo*. Let us see first how this relation unfolds in the *Charmides*.

3.4.2.1. Virtue & Cognitive Requirements in the *Charmides*

In the *Charmides* the discussion is focused on the notion of temperance. There are three active participants in this discussion, namely Socrates, Critias and Charmides. Socrates is just back from the army at Potidea (153a). Philosophical investigation however was not part of every day life while in the army and so, Socrates, after getting back home, went to the *palaestra* of Taureas. There he had the opportunity to ask about some home matters, such as the present state of philosophy, and in particular whether any of the

⁵⁶ G. Vlastos' translation. For the term "countervailing weight", see G. Vlastos, [1991]: 209.

⁵⁷ For the doctrine of the unity of virtue see, among others, G. Vlastos, [1972]: 415-458; T. Penner, [1973]: 35-68; P. Woodruff, [1976]: 101-116; M. T. Ferejohn, [1982]: 1-21 & [1984]: 105-122; D. Devereux, [1992]: 765-789. For the Socratic understanding of *akrasia* see, among others, G. Vlastos, [1969a]: 71-88. J.J. Walsh, [1971]: 235-63; G. Santas, [1966]: 3-33 & [1979]: 195-217; G.R. F. Ferrari, [1990]: 115-40; T. Penner, [1990]: 35-74. For the issue whether virtue is teachable or not see, for instance, D. T. Devereux, [1978]: 118-26.

⁵⁸ *Gorgias*, 460b-d, 509e5-7; *Protagoras*, 345c, 360d3. Indirect statements of the doctrine occur in *Meno* 87, 98; *Laches* 198; *Charmides*, 173aff. In the *Laches* virtue is knowledge of good and evil. Socrates seems to indicate the same in the *Charmides* since it is beneficial, in the sense that life in accordance with it makes us happy (*Charmides*. 174bff.). The claim that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue led Socrates to the well-known doctrine of the unity of virtue. It is true that in the *Laches* Socrates accepts the view that courage is part of virtue rather than the whole of virtue. He seems to be doing the same in the *Charmides*, where he accepts the view that temperance is one of the virtues. In the *Euthyphro* as well he distinguishes between justice and piety. But in the *Protagoras* Socrates seems to be advocating the view that virtues are not distinct from each other, and that justice, temperance, piety, courage and wisdom are really different names for one and the same thing. (*Protagoras* 329d) In the *Republic*, Plato seems to share Socrates' understanding of virtue only partially. Plato accepts that knowledge of good and evil is necessary for virtue, but he does not advocate that it is sufficient as well. Plato enriches the understanding of virtues by introducing new elements, such as the three elements of the soul, their function and relation (*Rep.* 437d-438b).

youth was remarkable for temperance or beauty or both (153d). Critias said to Socrates that of the youth entering the *palaestra*, his cousin Charmides, the son of his uncle Glaucon, had both qualities (157d). Socrates was astonished by Charmides' beauty (154c), but he wanted to see whether Charmides had a noble soul as well (154e). Critias knew that Charmides had recently suffered from headaches, and he thought that it would be easy to bring Charmides into conversation with Socrates, if Socrates was introduced as a physician who could cure such illness. Socrates agreed and Charmides easily accepted the invitation to come and speak to such a physician. However, immediately Charmides realised who he was talking with (156a), but this did not prevent the discussion from continuing.

As the discussion develops it appears that Socrates while in the army did have some philosophical conversations, namely with the physician of the Thracian king Zalmoxis. As the physician reported to Socrates their king held that "as you ought not to attempt to cure the eyes without the head, or the head without the body, so neither ought you to attempt to cure the body without the soul" (156e). This physician convinced Socrates that if the head and body are to be well, one must begin by curing the soul. In addition, the cure of the soul has to be effected by certain charms, and by the latter temperance is implanted in the soul, and where temperance comes and stays, there health is speedily imparted, not only to the head, but to the whole body. Socrates was so convinced by this physician that he promised never to be persuaded to cure anyone's head, until that person had given to Socrates his soul to be cured by the charm. For it is a great error to separate health from temperance in any attempt at treatment. So, Socrates suggested to Charmides that he should be the first person to whom he would apply such an approach and that he would first apply the charm to his soul and then attempt to apply the cure to his head. (156e-157c).

The subsequent discussion is focused on whether Charmides, apart from beauty, possesses the quality of temperance, as Critias believes (158c). Charmides is puzzled and initially he is bashful. For, as he holds, if "I affirm that I am not temperate, that would be a strange thing for me to say against myself, and also, I should give the lie to Critias, and to many others who, according to him, think that I am temperate. But, on the other hand, if I say that I am, I shall have to praise myself, which would be ill manners" (158d). Socrates, after appreciating Charmides' natural reply, provides us with his

understanding of the notion of temperance, which actually shows that one of the most essential virtues, namely temperance is associated with cognitive requirements. For, according to Socrates, "if temperance abides in you [Charmides], you must have an opinion (δόξα) about her. She must give some intimation of her nature and qualities, which may enable you to form a notion of her" (158e-159a). The association of the virtue of temperance with a cognitive condition, namely δόξα, seems to be essential in Socrates' understanding. If someone has no opinion of what temperance is, then temperance does not abide in this person. However, as one might note, the virtue of temperance is not a mere opinion. Rather it is an opinion that can provide some intimation of temperance's nature and qualities.

After this clarification Charmides provides three definitions of temperance all of which are refuted by Socrates. Charmides provides the following three definitions:

- (a) Temperance is a kind of quietness (159b5).
- (b) Temperance is the same as modesty (160e5).
- (c) Temperance is doing your own business (161b3-4).

The first two definitions are actually Charmides' opinion about temperance but, as Socrates holds, they are not satisfactory understandings of the virtue of temperance because they cannot be reconciled with another feature of temperance's nature, the fact that it is something noble and good (159b). Any association of temperance with quietness and modesty leaves open the possibility of considering temperance as something bad. For modesty and quietness are not always good and noble as temperance is supposed to be (159d-161b). Charmides' opinion about temperance does not seem to provide any intimation of temperance's nature and qualities. Temperance is a virtue whose nature is associated with what is noble and good.

The third definition provided by Charmides is refuted by Socrates, because Charmides does not have sufficient understanding of it to defend it. Charmides, here, just reports a definition of temperance offered by Critias, but he is not aware of whether such a definition carries any hidden meaning. For as Socrates claims, if one took literally such a definition, one would have to say that a state in which the law compels every man to weave and wash his own coat, and make his own shoes and flask, is a well-ordered state (161e-162a).

Critias undertakes the task of supporting his definition of the notion of temperance, for as he holds the fact that Charmides does not understand the definition of temperance does not entail that Critias does not understand it either (162d). The rest of the dialogue is between Critias and Socrates and is based on how Critias understands the aforementioned definition of temperance. As the discussion continues one can see that the notion of temperance is associated with a certain cognitive condition and this provides textual evidence that actually virtue, and in particular temperance, is linked with cognitive dimensions within *Charmides*. Socrates has given us an initial hint that temperance is associated with a kind of opinion, which is again linked to temperance's nature and qualities (158e-159a). Critias attempts to rescue his definition from rejection by proposing a different understanding of it, namely temperance as the doing of good action (163e). Socrates notes, however, that one might do the good action without knowing it. For instance, a physician may sometimes do good, without knowing what he had done, and in doing good, Socrates continues, such a physician, according to Critias, has acted temperately, without being aware of his temperance (164a-c). Critias, then, holds that he will rather prefer to admit that his understanding of temperance as doing good things is mistaken than to admit that a man who does not know himself can be temperate or wise. For I would almost say, Critias continues, that self-knowledge is the very essence of temperance (164d4).

At this stage it seems that both Critias and Socrates agree that temperance requires knowledge and in particular self-knowledge (165b3). When Socrates began the conversation with Charmides he directed him towards δόξα, to the opinion that Charmides must have about temperance and which is supposed to provide an intimation of temperance's nature and qualities. Here, the cognitive requirements associated with the notion of temperance are actually linked to temperance's nature. Temperance is associated with what is good and noble, with good actions. The additional feature that is provided here is the fact that the temperate person is required to possess self-knowledge and to know that she is doing temperate acts because she is temperate. Socrates and Critias share the view that temperance is a species of knowledge and they confirm the association of temperance with cognitive parameters (165c). If, however, temperance is a species of knowledge, then, temperance must be a science, and more precisely, a science of something (165c3-5). Critias holds that temperance is a science of a man's

self (165c6) and after Socrates warns that every science has a result (medicine is the science of health), Critias maintains that temperance is not like other sciences (165e4). It is like computation and geometry for which one cannot show results, in the sense in which one can do so by referring to the science of building and the house as a result of it. Socrates however puts forward another worry, namely to show that the subject matter of temperance is different from temperance. Critias repeats again that the science of temperance differs from the other sciences, "for all the other sciences are of something else, and not of themselves. Temperance alone is a science of other sciences and of itself (166c1-3, 166e5-6). Socrates, however, holds that if this is indeed the case then the science of science would also be the science of the absence of science. Critias seems to agree. So, for both Critias and Socrates, one is temperate when one knows one's self, and one will be able to examine what one knows and one does not know, and to see what others know, and think that they know and do really know, and what they do not know and fancy that they know when they do not. This is temperance for Socrates and Critias, at this point of the dialogue, namely to have self-knowledge and to know what you know and what you do not know (167a). The association of temperance with a certain cognitive requirement, namely self-knowledge, is strong and essential.

Socrates, however, does not seem to argue for long with the above conception of the science of temperance, namely as a science of itself, a science of the other sciences and a science of the absence of science (167c4). He actually holds that if one sees this science in parallel with some other science such as that of vision and hearing, one could probably see that the science of temperance proposed by Critias has no subject matter (167d-168a). Nevertheless, Socrates holds that one should not entirely deny the possibility of such a science, but rather continue to inquire whether such a science exists (168a10).⁵⁹ He also holds that temperance is a species of knowledge and if so then temperance is a science and more precisely a science of something (168b). Socrates doubts that temperance is the science of science and the absence of science. For, as he initially held, temperance is something good and noble and any understanding of it as science of science will not associate temperance with what is good and noble (159b). If

⁵⁹ Socrates holds some lines later " I am not certain whether such a science of science can possibly exist, and even if it does undoubtedly exist, I should not acknowledge it to be wisdom or temperance, until I can also see whether such a science would or would not do us any good, for I have an impression that temperance is a benefit and a good." (169b1-5).

one adopts Critias' understanding of temperance as the knowledge of knowledge and ignorance (172b), then, as Socrates holds, being temperate appears to be not the knowledge of the things which we do or do not know, but only the knowledge that we know or do not know. But, Socrates continues, such knowledge will not be very helpful in our life. For it will not enable us to distinguish the physician who knows what concerns his profession from someone who does not know, or pretends that he knows. Like any other artist, the temperate man will only know the man of his own trade and no one else (170d, 171c). Socrates believes that temperance is a species of knowledge and as such it is a science. But Socrates holds that temperance is knowledge of something rather than knowledge of knowledge. Socrates suggests that temperance is the knowledge of the future, past and present (174a). Critias later on seems to adopt the understanding of temperance as knowledge of something and in particular as the knowledge of good and evil (174b). Understood in this way temperance is not any more a knowledge of knowledge and ignorance (172b), but a knowledge of good and evil (174d5).

Charmides is an *aporetic* dialogue and as such does not provide us with a final and clear statement of what temperance is. Socrates holds that if we accept that temperance is knowledge of knowledge and ignorance, then it will not be something advantageous, so any understanding of it will not be associated with noble and good things. It is not clear if Socrates wants to associate temperance with knowledge of future, past and present, or with knowledge of good and evil, but it appears to me to be obvious that for Socrates every knowledge has a subject other than itself and so temperance cannot be self-knowledge, but knowledge of something else. Nevertheless, although in the *Charmides* no precise answer is given with regard to the kind of knowledge with which temperance is associated, there is, I think, enough textual evidence to support the claim that temperance is actually strongly associated with cognitive requirements, such as opinion (*doxa*), self-knowledge, knowledge of the future, past, and present, and knowledge of good and evil. The association of virtue with cognitive features, such as knowledge, is not present only in the *Charmides*. It appears that in the *Laches* too one can see that another essential virtue in the Platonic corpus, courage, is associated with cognitive features, namely with the knowledge of good and

evil in past, present and future. But let us see now in detail how courage is linked to cognitive requirements.

3.4.2.2. Virtue & Cognitive Requirements in the *Laches*

In contrast with the *Charmides*, in the *Laches*, Socrates and Nicias endeavour to define courage and they have come to an agreement that courage is part of virtue. For in their understanding virtue has many parts, all of which, taken together, are called virtue. So, justice and temperance, as well as courage are considered to be virtues (198a-b). Socrates, after drawing the distinction between fearful and hopeful things, defines fearful things as the evils of the future and hopeful things as the goods of the future. Then he goes on and argues that the knowledge of these things is called courage. (198c-d). Here, courage is a part of virtue which is associated with knowledge. As the discussion continues Socrates and his interlocutor examine whether courage is knowledge of the future, rather than whether courage is knowledge. To be more precise, the subject of the subsequent discussion is not whether virtue is knowledge. Rather, what creates the following discussion is whether courage is this specific knowledge, namely the knowledge of future good and evil things. Immediately after this Socrates focuses on this particular knowledge of the future and he holds that he and Laches believe that:

[...] there is not one knowledge or science of the past, another of the present, a third of what may and will be best in the future, but that of all three there is one science only. For example, there is one science of medicine which is concerned with the superintendence of health equally in all times, present, past, and future, and one science of husbandry in like manner, which is concerned with the production of the earth in all times. [*Laches* 198d-e, Jowett's translation]

Since the same science has understanding of the same things (196-7), then

[...] courage is a science which is concerned not only with the fearful and hopeful, for they are future only. Courage, like other sciences, is concerned not only with good and evil of the future, but of the present and past, and of any time. [*Laches* 199b9-c1, Jowett's translation]

Laches, however, is another *aporetic* dialogue and there is no final answer given with regard to what courage is. The problem which caused such a result was the fact that

Nicias had agreed earlier on that courage is part of virtue (198a) and if now courage is knowledge of the good and evil of all times, then such a courageous person seems to need no other virtue. Such a conclusion, however, does not, I think, undermine the initial reaction of associating a part of virtue, that is courage, with a kind of knowledge. For the participants in this discussion are not puzzled about the association of courage with knowledge. What they are puzzled about is finding the specific kind of knowledge that courage is associated with. So, if this understanding is on the right track, then in the *Laches* one can find some textual evidence that actually a part of virtue, namely courage, is associated with some cognitive requirements. In the *Laches*, however, one can find some hints of how the perfectly virtuous person will be when Socrates responds to Nicias by claiming:

But, then, my dear friend, if a man knew all good and evil, and how they are and have been and will be produced, would he not be perfect, and wanting in no virtue, whether justice or temperance or holiness? He alone would be competent to distinguish between what is to be feared and what is not, whether it be supernatural or natural, and would take the proper precautions to secure that all shall be well, for he would *know how* to deal aright both with gods and with men. [*Laches* 199d-e, Jowett's translation]

Socrates points out some lines later that the person described in the above passage will have all virtue (199e5). One could see in this articulation of the person who will have all virtue that some cognitive requirements need to be met, such as those of knowing how to deal aright both with gods and with men.

3.4.2.3. Virtue & Cognitive Requirements in the *Meno*

The association of the notion of virtue either in part or as a whole with knowledge can also be seen in the *Meno*. There the subject of the discussion is the notion of virtue as a whole and whether it can be taught (70a, 72a). *Meno* is another aporetic dialogue, since no certain answer to the initial question is finally offered. However, even if this is the case, still one can see that the notion of virtue is associated with cognitive requirements. In particular the relation between virtue and knowledge is mainly discussed at 87d-89b. Socrates introduces the discussion by holding: "The next point then, I suggest, is to find out whether virtue is knowledge or something different" (87c10). Socrates and Meno agree that virtue is something good. (87d2-4). They also agree that if knowledge does

not cover every good, then given the fact that virtue is good, virtue will not necessarily be any form of knowledge. If, on the other hand, knowledge does cover every good, then virtue, as something good, will be associated with knowledge (ἐπιστήμη, 87d5-10).

Now, the argument develops as follows:

- (a) Every good thing is advantageous. (87e3-4)
- (b) Non-spiritual things (wealth, strength, good looks) and spiritual qualities (temperance, justice, courage, quickness of mind, memory, nobility of character) can be either advantageous or harmful. (87e8-88b)
- (c) Everything, spiritual and non spiritual, will lead to happiness when guided by wisdom, but to the opposite, when guided by folly. (88c-e)
- (d) Virtue is something advantageous, so it must be a sort of wisdom (88d1-3). The same applies to the non-spiritual things. (88e)
- (e) *Conclusion*: So we may say in general that the goodness of non-spiritual assets depends on our spiritual character, and the goodness of that on wisdom. This argument shows that the advantageous element must be wisdom, and virtue, we agree, is advantageous; so that amounts to saying that virtue, either in whole or in part, is wisdom. (89a)

In the above reasoning two parameters can be observed. One is the association of virtue (88b) either with knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) or with wisdom (φρόνησις), both cognitive conditions, and the other is that here we are given an understanding similar to the one offered in the *Laches*. For in the *Laches* we were informed that not only a part of virtue but virtue as a whole is associated with a cognitive condition, namely knowledge. From the claim that someone who has knowledge of goods and evils, past, present and future, will not lack any virtue, Socrates infers that knowledge of good and evil, past, present and future is complete virtue (*Laches* 199e5). In the *Meno* as well Socrates does make explicit that virtue, either in whole or in part is wisdom (φρόνησις, 89a).

It must not be neglected, however, that as this dialogue goes on difficulties in maintaining this thesis appear. For if virtue is knowledge, it is teachable (89c3-4). As *Meno*, Socrates and Anytus discover later on, for something to be teachable the existence of some teachers and some students is presupposed (89d-e). But neither the Sophists nor those whom people consider as virtuous people can teach their virtue (90a-96c, 98d-e). So virtue might not be knowledge after all. Socrates attempts to rescue the

discussion by introducing the distinction between knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and right opinion. Socrates refers to what has been agreed earlier on, namely that knowledge is a good guidance towards the good (88b-e). However, he argues that someone is able to provide guidance towards what is considered good although he possesses only right opinion. If someone judges correctly, Socrates says, which is the road to Larissa, although he has never been there, and takes it, he will also guide others aright (97b). Socrates implies that not only knowledge but also right opinion can make spiritual and non-spiritual things beneficial and since virtue is something beneficial, virtue can also be associated, not only with knowledge, but also with right opinion. The worry that immediately arises, however, is that although knowledge will be always successful, the man with right opinion will only be successful sometimes. (97c5-6). As Socrates illustrates later on by referring to the statues of Daedalus, what distinguishes knowledge from right opinion is the tether (97e-98b). However, in some cases and for some practical purposes right opinion could be no less useful than knowledge. In addition, both knowledge and right opinion are things that can be acquired rather than something natural (88d). But it seems that Socrates doubts the existence of teachers. But the absence of teachers is taken to rule out only the claim that virtue is knowledge not the claim that virtue is right opinion. The latter, as Socrates understands it, does not involve teaching. Virtue is right opinion rather than knowledge. And right opinion is acquired neither by teaching nor by nature. It is acquired by divine dispensation (100a-b).

Within *Meno* virtue is a notion that seems to be strongly associated with various cognitive requirements, some more powerful than others. Virtue seems to be understood as a kind of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη or φρόνησις) in most parts of the dialogue. Towards the end of this dialogue the possibility of associating virtue with ἐπιστήμη is ruled out because no teachers and students can be found. However, people can become good not only by possessing ἐπιστήμη but also by just possessing right opinion (98c-d). Right opinion however is not acquired through teaching but only through divine dispensation. Immediately after this suggestion Socrates holds that to do justice to the way men get virtue we have first to discover what virtue is in and by itself (100b-c).

One wonders how seriously one has to take the last suggestion, namely to think of virtue as right opinion given to someone by divine dispensation. Does something so unstable as right opinion (98a-b) deserve to be called virtue? It may be that there is some

irony in Socrates' argument here. For the whole argument is conducted on the assumption that some people are virtuous. Socrates might think that real virtue is knowledge, but no one possesses this knowledge, so no one is really virtuous. Since no one seems to have the relevant knowledge- because no one teaches it- the virtue that people actually have must be right opinion, and must be explained by divine dispensation. At any rate, even if we take literally Socrates' suggestion that virtue is right opinion, which comes from divine dispensation, my analysis that virtue for Socrates is strongly associated with something cognitive remains sustainable. Divine powers possess knowledge, and if they offer virtue to human beings it is because they have knowledge. It is my understanding that if gods offer virtue to mortals, they still offer some cognitive state, such as right opinion, to manage it. However, as we will see next, in the *Republic* and in the *Phaedo* virtue is mostly associated with wisdom rather than with mere opinion.

3.4.2.4. Virtue and Cognitive Requirements in the *Phaedo* & *Republic*

It is Socrates' intention, I believe, to associate virtue mostly with something less unstable, namely knowledge, but not the knowledge that many possess, (e.g. right opinion); the knowledge that only some people have, namely wisdom; the knowledge of the experts, the knowledge provided by the Form of the Good.⁶⁰ For instance, in the opening pages of the *Phaedo* Socrates holds that philosophers alone have genuine virtue. For only philosophers possess the wisdom required for true virtue. Other people's virtues are only apparent. The association with wisdom rather than mere opinion becomes more obvious in the following interaction that Socrates has with Simmias:

Yes, my dear good Simmias: For I fancy that this is not the right way to exchange things for virtue, that exchanging of pleasures for pleasures, pains for pains, fears for fears, small ones for great and great ones for small, as though they were coins: no, there is, I suggest, only one sort of coin for which we ought to exchange all these things, and that is intelligence [φρόνησις]; and if all our buying and selling is done for intelligence and with its aid, then we have

⁶⁰ Expert knowledge is the sort of knowledge that a specialised professional ought to have, such that we would be right to trust him/her to make our decisions on our behalf. Expert knowledge is something for which there are criteria that an expert must satisfy (reliability, infallibility). Socrates knows that he does not have the knowledge of the expert (*Apology* 22d1). He also holds that poets are not experts (*Apology* 22c9). This is also the case for poets and politicians (*Meno* 99d), orators and rhapsodes (*Gorgias* 462bff.), and for a pair of experienced generals (*Laches*). For an excellent discussion on this subject see P. Woodruff, [1987]: 79-115 & [1990]: 60-84.

real courage, real temperance, *real justice; and true virtue* [ἀληθῆς ἀρετή] *in general is that which is accompanied by intelligence* [μετὰ φρονήσεως], no matter whether pleasures and fears and all the rest of such things be added or subtracted. But to keep these apart from intelligence and merely exchange them for each other results, I fear, in a sort of illusory façade of virtue [σκιαγραφία], veritably fit for slaves, destitute of all sound substance and truth; whereas the true virtue, whether it be of temperance, of justice, or of courage, is in fact a purging of all such things, intelligence itself being a sort of purge.[*Phaedo* 69a6-c3, R. Hackforth's translation, my emphasis].⁶¹

In the above passage virtue is strongly associated with wisdom or intelligence, as Hackforth translates, and Socrates makes explicit that only this kind of virtue is true.⁶² The link between virtue and knowledge is also supported in the *Republic* to which I shall turn next.

In the *Republic* virtues are discussed heavily and they are, one more time, the central theme. Justice is discussed most, but also temperance, courage and wisdom, both as virtues of the city and as virtues of individuals (Book IV, 428ff). Most of what is discussed within this book refers to the relation between city and individuals and the requirement of harmony of the agents' cognitive and psychological condition (443 d-e).

Socrates maintains that a completely good city must be wise, courageous, moderate, and just (427e). A city is really wise and that is because it has good judgement. The latter is understood as a kind of knowledge (428b), but not any kind of knowledge. It is knowledge relevant to the city as a whole and the maintenance of good relations rather than to any particular matter such as carpentry or farming (428c-d). It is knowledge possessed by the complete guardians. The city is also courageous because it contains a part that fights and does battle on its behalf (429b). This part, in its turn, is

⁶¹ For an interesting discussion of this passage see, among others, J. Burnet, [1911]: 68-69; J.V. Luce, [1944]: 60-64; R. Hackforth, [1955]: 193; P. Gooch, [1974]: 153-159.

⁶² Here I am in agreement with P. Gooch, namely that although virtue and wisdom are strongly associated still we should not consider them as identical and hence think that in the *Phaedo* the Socratic slogan "Virtue is knowledge" is restated. As P. Gooch [1974: 158-159] holds "For first, so far as wisdom is presented as a means to virtue it is in some sense distinct from it; and it cannot be denied that our sentence does place wisdom "apart" from virtue, as coin at a 9, as either accompaniment or cause (μετὰ φρονήσεως) at b3, and as purgative at c2. Secondly, even if we allow wisdom intrinsic value, it is a large step from this to the claim that wisdom is the only intrinsic value in virtue, that it is somehow the whole of virtue".

courageous because it has the power to preserve in all circumstances its beliefs about what things are to be feared (429c-d).⁶³

A complete city needs also to be moderate and just. Moderation is surely a kind of order, the mastery of certain kinds of pleasure and desires (430e). One finds all kinds of diverse desires, pleasures and pains, mostly in children, women, household slaves, and in those of the inferior majority (431c). But only a few people possess desires which are measured and directed by calculation in accordance with understanding and correct belief, those who are born with the best nature and receive the best education (431c-d). So, the city is moderate when the desires of the inferior many are controlled by the wisdom and desires of the superior few (431d-e). Finally, the city is just when it has the power that makes it possible for moderation, wisdom and courage to grow in the city and preserves the other virtues when they are grown for as long as it remains there itself (433b-c). A city is just when everyone has and does their own (433e-434a).

From the way Socrates describes the complete city it emerges that the four virtues the city consists of, namely wisdom, moderation, courage and justice, are all associated with cognitive factors. Wisdom is seen as a kind of knowledge (428b-c). Courage is strongly associated with the belief that has been inculcated through education about what sort of things are to be feared (429c-d). Moderation involves the idea of desires being measured and directed by calculation in accordance with understanding and correct belief (431c-d). Justice is the power that makes it possible for the other virtues to grow in the city and preserves them as they grow for as long as it remains there itself (433c).

The association of virtue with cognitive elements remains unchanged when Socrates describes the virtues of the individual. This is probably because Socrates earlier on advances the assumption of isomorphism between city and individual (434d- 435b).⁶⁴ Socrates, after introducing the principle of opposites (436b-c) and Leontius case (439e) on which he bases his argument that human soul is divided into three parts, reasoning,

⁶³ Socrates illustrates his understanding of courageous people by introducing the example of dyers who dye wool purple and he concludes: "What we were contriving was nothing other than this: That because they [soldiers] had the proper nature and upbringing, they would absorb the laws in the finest possible way, just like a dye, so that their belief about what they should fear and all the rest would become so fast that even such extremely effective detergents as pleasure, pain, fear, and desire would not wash it out". (*Rep.* 430a-b, Grube's and Reeve's translation)

⁶⁴ I discuss this issue and the way that it needs to be understood in Chapter VI.

spiritual and appetitive, defines someone as brave, wise, moderate and just in the following ways:

- Brave, too, then, I take it, we call each individual by virtue of this part in him, when, namely, his high spirit preserves in the midst of pains and pleasures the rule handed down by the *reason* as to what is or is not to be feared. [*Republic* 442b9-c2, Shorey's translation, my emphasis].

- But wise by that small part that ruled in him and handed down these commands, by its possession in turn within it of the *knowledge* of what is beneficial for each and for the whole, the community composed of the three. [*Republic* 442c5-7, Shorey's translation, my emphasis].

- And again, was he not sober by reason of the friendship and concord of these same parts, when namely, the ruling principle and its two subjects are at one in the belief that the *reason* ought to rule and do not raise faction against it [*Republic* 442c9-d2, Shorey's translation, my emphasis].

- But the truth of the matter was, as it seems, that justice is indeed something of this kind, yet not in regard to the doing of one's own business externally, but with regard to that which is within and in the true sense concerns one's self, and the things of one's self. It means that a man must not suffer the principles in his soul to do each the work of some other and interfere and meddle with one another, but that he should dispose well of what in the true sense of the word is properly his own, and having first attained to self-mastery and beautiful *order* within himself, and having *harmonised* these three principles, the notes or intervals of three terms quite literally the lowest, the highest, and the mean, and all others there may be between them, and having linked and bound all three together and made of himself a unit, one man instead of many, self-controlled and in unison, he should then and then only turn to practice [...] [*Republic* 443d-e, Shorey's translation, my emphasis].

The above passages reveal that Socrates associates virtues such as wisdom, bravery, moderation and justice, with cognitive elements. Wisdom is a kind of knowledge that declares what is advantageous for each part and for the whole soul. Bravery is persistence in right judgement of which things should or should not be feared.⁶⁵ Justice and moderation involve the idea of being ruled by reason. The just person is the one who is harmonious, but there is no harmony between the elements of the soul except when the highest element (reason) dominates.

⁶⁵ The truly virtuous person has knowledge rather than simply right opinion. Reason ought to rule, having wisdom and foresight to act for the whole (441e). And wisdom certainly involves knowledge. The auxiliaries have a kind of courage, although they have only true belief, because they are guided by someone's else reason. However, Socrates makes it clear that this is only a secondary kind of courage (430c). Presumably real courage involves being guided by one's own reason, so it implies knowledge.

However, at 435d, Plato argues that the account given in Book IV about virtues is a mere outline that requires a longer way.⁶⁶ That longer way involves the association of virtues with the Form of the Good, a task that is not actually undertaken within Book IV, but only in Book VI. The underlying motive for this relation is the explanatory account that ἐπιστήμη and δόξα are required to meet. In the *Meno* we are told that ἐπιστήμη is right opinion bound by an explanatory account (αἰτίας λογισμῶ, 98a). We are also told that a man with ἐπιστήμη will always be successful; whereas a man with true opinion will be successful only in so far as, like ἐπιστήμη, true opinion is bound with an explanatory account (97c). In the *Phaedo*, virtue is associated with wisdom (69a6-c1). Also within this dialogue a strong link between all αἰτίαι and Forms is stressed (97b-d). However, although *Phaedo* tells us a lot about the metaphysical nature of Forms, it does not provide us with substantial information concerning Forms' epistemological role. For, although the theory of recollection is discussed extensively, the relation of Forms and knowledge is not explicitly discussed. When one reads the *Republic's* Books V-VII however, one finds enough information about the epistemological role of Forms.

At the end of Book V a difficult argument with regard to the relation between knowledge and belief is offered.⁶⁷ One can see that some of the worries raised in the *Meno* are still present, but here any association between virtue and belief is precluded. In addition, as is stressed later on in Book VI, truth can be found only in the Form of the Good, which is the cause of what is known and what is beneficial and good (505-506). If virtues are related to knowledge, then they are also related to the Form of the Good. Furthermore, if virtues are good and beneficial, they are so only because they are associated with the Form of the Good. Reference to the latter makes just things and all the rest useful and beneficial. The Form of the Good is the object of the greatest knowledge that one can acquire. In *Republic* V, the relation between knowledge and belief is discussed as such. In *Republic* VI & VII, two sorts of knowledge (thought-διάνοια and knowledge-νόησις) and two sorts of beliefs (imagination-εἰκασία and

⁶⁶ See also, 504c9-e2. The longer way refers to the greatest thing that one can learn and this is nothing else but the Form of the Good by reference to which just things and all the rest become useful and beneficial. (505a).

⁶⁷ For a stimulating discussion of this topic see among others, G. Fine, [1978]: 121-139, & [1999c]: 215-246; T. Scaltsas, [1985]: 267-278.

confidence-πίστις) are also discussed. The Form of the Good is the object of the highest knowledge.⁶⁸ In the *Republic*, virtue is associated with the object of the highest knowledge, namely the Form of the Good. The association of virtue with any kind of belief is not any more at stake. Let us now examine more closely the main differences between knowledge and belief as they are presented in Book V.

Towards the end of this book Plato's Socrates discusses the main differences between knowledge and belief. Socrates has previously argued that philosophers, those who know Forms must be the rulers of the ideal just city (472a1-7, 473c6-e5). It is Socrates' understanding that those who know the good must be the rulers. In addition, one knows the good only when one knows the Form of the Good. Philosophers are the only people who can achieve such knowledge. Knowledge and Forms are strongly associated here. Forms, in general, are non-sensible properties, properties not definable in observational or perceptual terms.⁶⁹ Furthermore, Socrates wants to persuade the "sight-lovers" (φιλοθεάμονες, 467b) who rely on their senses, that they will never possess knowledge of X, but they will only acquire belief of X.

Socrates distinguishes knowledge from belief (477b, 478a). Knowledge and belief are two different capacities (477b8-10). For they do not relate to the same thing and they do not accomplish the same thing, as similar capacities do (477c6-d5, 477d, 478b). Knowledge is set over what is and belief is set over what is and is not (477a9ff). Belief is something darker than knowledge but brighter than ignorance (478c); belief is a capacity in between knowledge and ignorance (478d). The sight-lovers, then, according to Socrates, are those people who observe the many beautiful things, but they do not see the beautiful itself, the form, and have only belief about beautiful things, rather than knowledge of them (479e1-6). On the other hand, those who contemplate the very things themselves in each case, ever remaining the same and unchanged, have knowledge of those things rather than mere belief (479e8-10). The people who just focus on the many sensible things just have a belief about them, and we can name them φιλοδόξους, rather

⁶⁸ G. Fine [1999c: 225-226] holds that *Republic* V considers knowledge and belief statically, whereas *Republic* VI & VII do so dynamically. *Republic* V informs us only how knowledge and belief differ and *Republic* VI & VII add information about how one can improve one's epistemological condition.

⁶⁹ Beauty, for instance, can be considered as a Form as opposed to the particular object (Parthenon) and the particular observational properties (circular shape). See G. Fine, [1999c]: 215 n. 1.

than φιλοσόφους. For the latter are true lovers of knowledge and not lovers of opinions. Knowledge then is set over Forms, and belief is set over the many Fs (480a1).

The distinction between knowledge and belief, statically presented in Book V of the *Republic*, is also the subject of Books VI and VII, but their distinction is more dynamically presented.⁷⁰ The account that is provided is richer and two kinds of belief as well as two kinds of knowledge are discussed. In addition, Socrates uses the similes of the Sun and the Cave, and the discussion of the Line to illustrate his analysis of the difference between knowledge and belief. Furthermore, the object of the highest knowledge is named and is nothing else but the Form of the Good (505a, 508a5.). Belief is related to sensible things and knowledge to Forms. As the Sun is the cause (αἰτία) of vision and of the visibility of visible objects, so is the Form of Good the cause of knowledge and of the knowability of knowable objects (508b-c). As G. Fine puts it:

when one thinks about a knowable object illuminated by the Form of the Good, one knows it best; when one thinks about sensibles unilluminated by the Form of the Good, one at best has belief about them. The Form of the Good is also the cause of the being of knowable objects, just as the sun causes objects to come into being and to grow". [G. Fine, 1999c, pp. 226-227]

The Form of the Good is the cause of truth and knowledge. In the *Republic* we are told that without the knowledge of the Form of the Good we cannot know that anything else is good, and that without knowledge of this Form all other knowledge would be of no benefit to us (505-6). Among the things that are good are virtues.⁷¹ In order for them to be good an association between them and the Form of the Good, the object of the highest kind of knowledge (505a2), is required (505a). By having just a belief no access to the Form of the Good is possible. So virtue, as something good and noble, is not any more associated with belief, but is linked to more demanding cognitive requirements, namely knowledge of the Form of the Good. The latter is the unhypothetical principle that only some people can advance to. For the move from διάνοια to νόησις can be undertaken only by philosophers (532d-535a).

⁷⁰ For an excellent discussion about knowledge and belief in the *Protagoras* and in the *Meno* see T. Penner, [1996]: 199-230.

⁷¹ *Protagoras* 360b3; *Charmides* 159b-c; *Laches* 192c8-d8; *Euthydemus* 279b4-c1; *Meno* 87d;

Within the *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Republic*, then, one can observe that the notion of virtue is associated with various cognitive requirements. In the *Charmides*, temperance is understood as knowledge of the future and as knowledge of the future, past and present. In the *Laches*, courage is understood as knowledge of the good and evil of any time. In the *Meno*, virtue, either as a part or as a whole, is understood as right opinion offered by divine dispensation. In the *Phaedo* true virtue in general is that which is accompanied by intelligence. In the *Republic*, it is associated with the object of the highest knowledge, the Form of the Good.

There is also one other feature that can be detected within the aforementioned dialogues as well as in the *Euthyphro*, *Greater Hippias*, and in the *Gorgias*. The cognitive requirements associated with virtue are also related to the issues of sensitivity, reliability and flexibility, as they are within virtue ethics.

3.4.2.5. Reliability

Within the above dialogues, the notion of virtue, as within virtue ethics, is related to the issue of reliability. One possesses virtue only when one reliably expresses it in one's actions or when one possesses the reliable knowledge associated with this notion. That is to say that under similar circumstances, all things considered, the virtuous person will perform the same sort of action, or his knowledge will be reliable for all circumstances of the same sort. One does so when one knows why one acts in the particular way in the first case, and one will reason in the same way under identical circumstances. Reliability is an issue that is related to the knowledge that the virtuous agent possesses. If one observes the kind of knowledge that is associated with the notion of virtue in the early dialogues such as *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Euthyphro*, in the transitional dialogue *Meno* and in the middle dialogue *Republic*, then one could also say that for Plato the issue of reliability was at stake.

Virtue is associated with a kind of knowledge in the framework provided in the *Laches* and in the *Charmides*. The attempt to define a certain virtue is what unites the early dialogues. Socrates asks his interlocutors to provide a definition of, either courage, or temperance, wisdom, piety. Most of the definitions offered by the interlocutors do not seem adequate for Socrates. For the majority of them refer only to particular example of

the moral property in question.⁷² For instance, in the *Euthyphro* piety is the virtue at stake. Euthyphro believes that he knows what piety is and in virtue of such knowledge he prosecutes his father for murder. Euthyphro actually believes that he knows more than others do about this issue, a knowledge that allows him to recognise truths others would miss or misjudge. He has the following conversation with Socrates:

E: [My relatives say that] it is impious for a son to prosecute his father for murder-since they know so little, Socrates, of how it is with the divine regarding the pious and the impious.

S: But, by Zeus, do you think that you have such precise knowledge about divine things, how they are, and about pious and impious things, that, when those things happened as you say, you are not afraid of doing something impious yourself by prosecuting your father?

E: I would be worthless, Socrates, and Euthyphro would be no different from most people, If I were not to know precisely about all such things [*Euthyphro* 4e-5b]

Euthyphro and Socrates understand the virtue of piety to be associated with precise knowledge of what piety is, that is a kind of knowledge that as Euthyphro holds, the many do not possess. Immediately afterwards Socrates asks Euthyphro to tell him to define what piety is. And Socrates actually informs Euthyphro and his audience which kind of knowledge he believes is associated with moral qualities such as virtues. Socrates has the following conversation with Euthyphro:

S: Bear in mind then that I did not bid you tell me one or two of the many pious actions but that form itself that makes all pious actions pious, for you agreed that all impious actions are impious and all pious actions pious through one form, or don't you remember.

E: I do.

S: Well, then, teach me what this form itself is, so that I may look upon it, and using it as a model, say that any action of yours or another's that is of that kind is pious, and if it is not that it is not [*Euthyphro* 6d-e].

The above text appears to commit Socrates to a principle known as the priority of definitional knowledge, namely "only if one knows the definition of some quality (F-ness) one can know anything about F-ness or F-things, including whether any proposed

⁷² See *Laches* 190e-191b.

instance of F-ness is really an instance. This is not the only text in which Socrates makes such claims. In the *Greater Hippias* Socrates holds in similar vein:

[H]e asked me if I am not ashamed that I dare to discuss fine activities when I've been so plainly refuted about the fine, and it is clear that I do not even know at all what that is itself! "Look" he will say. "How will you know whose speech-or any other action-is finely presented or not, when you are ignorant of the fine? And when you are in a state like that, do you think it is any better for you to live than die?" [*Greater Hippias* 304d-e].⁷³

Socrates demands that any discussion of the notion of virtue should be associated with certain knowledge, a definitional knowledge of the moral quality in discussion. If we do not have knowledge of the definition we cannot have any knowledge about the virtue, including knowledge of whether particular acts are virtuous. The knowledge that the virtuous person has is knowledge about the virtue.⁷⁴ Such knowledge will hold in all circumstances. When Socrates undermines the claim of another with regard to the virtue at stake, he does not do so by attacking the truth, the centrality, or even the source of the particular item of knowledge that is in question. Instead he challenges the reliability of the person who claims knowledge, by asking him for a definition which would hold for all circumstances. Socrates does not challenge Euthyphro's intention to prosecute his father in this particular case, but wants to see whether his claim could hold for every case, he wants to see whether his knowledge is reliable. For if virtue involves knowledge, and if the knowledge in question is of a definition which holds in every case, then virtue will be reliable, since once the definition is known it will always be applicable. Now, since virtue is a matter of certain knowledge, a knowledge that is associated with reliability, any virtuous person possessing such knowledge, i.e. knowledge about the virtue, will be a reliably virtuous person. For, as Socrates holds, when one knows that X is good, he will do X, and when one knows that X is bad, one will avoid X. Reliable action is a matter of reliable knowledge, the definitional knowledge that Socrates is committed to in the early dialogues, the knowledge of F-ness. Although Socrates does not refer to the metaphysical aspect of the Forms, as we will see when we discuss the reliability issue in the *Republic*, the knowledge of what

⁷³ For the priority of definitional knowledge see also *Laches* 190e-191b; *Lysis* 223b; *Charmides* 159bff.

⁷⁴ See, for instance, *Charmides* 158e-159a, 162e, 164a, 164c-d.

makes all F things F, namely the knowledge of Forms, is what provides reliability to knowledge, and then to any virtuous person who possesses such knowledge. But, before we move on to the *Republic*, let us see how the issue of reliability is addressed within the *Meno*.

The issue of reliability appears also in the *Meno* and in particular when the discussion about knowledge and true belief is at the forefront. What distinguishes knowledge from true belief is the fact that the former is more stable than the latter and so the person who has it will be more reliable. What distinguishes knowledge from true opinion is its tether (*Meno* 98a, *Euthyphro* 15b-c.). The association of knowledge with virtue is one of the main issues in the *Meno*. It seems, however, that virtue is related to true opinion as well. But such a relation is acceptable so far as reliability is secured. True opinion can provide us something beneficial, namely virtue, so far as it is bound with an explanatory account (97c). The reliable virtuous person will be the person who has knowledge or true opinion bound by an explanatory account (98a). The association of virtue with opinion is not discussed within the *Republic*, where only one kind of knowledge is reliable, namely the knowledge of the Forms.

Reliability and certainty that the virtuous agent will be virtuous in all similar circumstances, is a matter of knowledge and in the *Republic*, virtue is associated with the object of the highest knowledge, the Form of the Good, which provides reliability. Unlike the many sensible things, which always change and move, Forms, and in particular, the Form of the Good is stable and not a subject of change. The virtuous person, who has such knowledge, will also be stable and reliable.

One can notice, however, that between Plato's ethics and virtue ethics, although reliability in virtuous behaviour is essential and is strongly associated with the knowledge that the virtuous person possesses, the kind of knowledge that is employed in these two moral approaches is different. For Plato, unlike virtue ethicists, holds that the knowledge which provides reliability in the virtuous' persons behaviour is definitional knowledge (in the early dialogues) and the knowledge that is based on metaphysical entities, such as Forms, and more precisely, on the Form of the Good (in the *Republic*). Such knowledge, as Plato holds, can be accumulated only by philosophers after undergoing lengthy training. The knowledge on which the reliable behaviour of the virtuous person is based is certain philosophical knowledge. Within virtue ethics,

however, although virtue and knowledge are strongly related, the kind of knowledge that is at stake is not philosophical knowledge, the knowledge that is based on the Forms. Within virtue ethics no reference to Forms or other metaphysical entities as sources of knowledge is made. This is not to say however that virtue ethicists relate virtue with any kind of knowledge. On the contrary issues such as reliability and certainty are also at stake. The source, however, of this knowledge is not a metaphysical one.

3.4.2.6. Flexibility and Sensitivity

Virtue ethicists also relate the knowledge that the virtuous agent possesses to the issue of flexibility. In virtue ethicists' understanding, the virtuous person acts virtuously not because she follows certain abstract principles and rules, or because she has a certain disposition towards some duties imposed by universal principles. On the contrary, it is higher knowledge that provides her the guidance towards the virtuous action. The virtuous person then is not supposed to follow the route provided by principles in order to act virtuously. Since the virtuous person is not guided by principles but only by her knowledge a certain amount of flexibility is at stake here. Virtue requires knowledge rather than mere dispositions towards some rules and principles. General abstract principles preclude or minimise flexibility, whereas knowledge related to virtue supports it. Furthermore, it is always possible for a person who bases higher virtue on certain principles and rules to come across a very unusual situation and then she will be at a loss, since no rule or principle to meet such situation has been foreseen. On the other hand, the person who bases her virtue on her practical wisdom, on her knowledge will have the flexibility to deal with such situation as well.

Now, if flexibility is a result of the absence of general principles and universal rule-guides, then one could say that Plato's ethics as it is explored in the early, transitional and middle dialogues, allows for such flexibility. For no general principle is proposed as a guide to virtue, apart from the need to acquire definitional knowledge of the moral quality in discussion. In the *Republic* in particular, virtue is strongly related to the Form of the Good. In so far as the Platonic virtuous person does not follow any general principle or any abstract law she can use her knowledge to act virtuously rather than being attached to abstract general principles. Flexibility for the virtuous person to

act virtuously is, I think, something common between virtue ethics and Plato's ethics. Socrates tends to reject general principles in terms of simple descriptions of acts (e.g. "standing firm in the face of the enemy", "paying debts").

Virtue ethicists relate also the issue of sensitivity to the knowledge that the virtuous person possesses in order to act virtuously. A virtuous person, because of his knowledge, shows sensitivity to the requirements of the circumstances, bears in mind all the salient features of it and then acts appropriately. Does Plato's virtuous person, because of his knowledge, show sensitivity to what the circumstances call for?

Sensitivity is required within the Platonic corpus. I shall explore this issue by referring to a discussion that takes place in the *Gorgias*. In the *Gorgias* the issue of sensitivity emerges as a reply to Callicles' conception of happiness. Within this dialogue, the main contrast is between two kinds of justice. The one is Socrates' justice (Callicles calls it conventional justice), which connects justice with the notion of other-regarding, while the other is Callicles' justice (natural justice) which is focused on the individual's power and wealth. These two conceptions of justice provide also two related conceptions of happiness. According to Callicles' natural justice, happiness requires the development and satisfaction of the sorts of desires whose whole-hearted pursuit is incompatible with the conventional conception of justice. Callicles holds that most people cannot achieve the happiness that he describes, both because they lack the necessary resources and because they are irresolute and cowardly (*Gorg.*492a1-3). Callicles' natural justice requires the allocation of all resources to superior people, who have the power to satisfy any desire they possess. The superior people are not self-controlled people, who have moderate desires to satisfy. According to Callicles, such a person lives like a stone, neither enjoying pleasure nor feeling pain; pleasant living, by contrast, requires the largest possible inflow of satisfaction, and therefore requires the most demanding desires, since only these require a large inflow to satisfy them (*Gorg.*494a6-c3). In defence of this conception of happiness Callicles introduces hedonism, and thus identifies happiness with maximum pleasure. How could a human being become happy, Callicles wonders, when being enslaved by anything?⁷⁵ (*Gorg.*491e5-6).

⁷⁵ T. Irwin [1995: 117] calls this conception of happiness "expansive".

Socrates disagrees with both Callicles' conception of justice and his conception of happiness. He initially challenges Callicles' understanding of the notion of "superiority", on which his account of justice is based. Socrates holds that Callicles' identification of superiority with strength is unsound. In Socrates' view, many inferior people are collectively stronger than a single superior person is. Socrates maintains that the same applies to Callicles' identification of superiority with wisdom. Callicles cannot adequately argue why the wiser people ought to have more (*Gorg.* 490a1-491a3).

Socrates also refutes Callicles' conception of happiness as the satisfaction of any desire. He does so by leading Callicles to self-contradiction. Callicles has accepted that bravery is virtue (*Gorg.* 491a7-b4). Within a hedonistic account of happiness, however, virtue is useful for maximising pleasure. If this is so, then, according to Socrates, there is no reason to believe that bravery is useful for this purpose. Socrates refers to the cowardly person, who in battle gets at least as much pleasure as the brave one. It seems that bravery is no more effective than cowardice in securing pleasure. Socrates shows that Callicles' hedonism is incompatible with his conception of bravery as a virtue. As an alternative, Socrates propounds an account of happiness (*Gorg.* 493c5-7) that one can possess after undertaking a kind of life that is orderly, supplied and satisfied with the things that are present on each occasion, an "adaptive" conception of happiness, to use Irwin's terminology.⁷⁶ Socrates believes that what most secures happiness is the adaptation of desires to the requirements of particular circumstances, rather than seeking to satisfy unfeasible desires. Socrates' suggestion that we look for an "adaptive" conception of happiness is related to the issue of sensitivity raised by virtue ethicists. In order to be happy, the moral agent should feel what the circumstances call for and form her desires appropriately. In other words, the moral agent is required to show sensitivity to the requirements of the circumstances, to adapt her desires to them, and then to act accordingly. Sensitivity is a feature that a moral agent should have, as well as the ability to adapt her desires to the requirements of the circumstances, to show sensitivity to what is achievable under these circumstances. For what is achievable under these circumstances is probably what is right, good, and appropriate, under these circumstances.

⁷⁶ T. Irwin, [1995]: 106, 117-118.

Sensitivity as well as reliability and flexibility are issues related to the knowledge that the virtuous person is required to have both in Plato's ethics and in virtue ethics. But the notion of virtue is not associated only with cognitive parameters within these two ethical systems. Psychological requirements (pleasure, emotions, desires) are also associated with the notion of virtue within virtue ethics and I shall now turn to see whether the same can be detected within the Platonic corpus.

3.4.2.7. Virtue & Psychological Requirements in Plato's Ethics

Within the framework of virtue ethics the virtuous person, apart from having certain knowledge, is also expected to be properly affected while being virtuous. By "properly affected" virtue ethicists mean the feeling of pleasure as a by-product of virtuous action, and the condition of harmony between cognitive and psychological dimensions. The virtuous person is the person who possesses knowledge, and her rational part is in harmony with her emotions and feelings, according to Stocker.⁷⁷ One could say then that the conception of virtue within virtue ethics is not merely associated with cognitive factors, but also takes into account the agent's feelings, emotions and desires. In addition, the state of harmony between cognitive and psychological factors is what characterises the virtuous person. Is virtue associated with psychological factors within the Platonic corpus? Is the Platonic virtuous person required to be properly affected? Is she expected to achieve a harmonious condition between cognitive and psychological parameters, such as knowledge, feelings, desires, and emotions? So far we have seen that within the Platonic corpus the notion of virtue is strongly associated with some cognitive factors. I shall now turn to examine whether some psychological parameters are also associated with the notion of virtue.

Starting from the early Platonic dialogues, the main thesis there is that if one knows what virtue is, then one will act virtuously. For instance, if one knows what justice is, then one will act justly. Socrates holds that knowledge is a necessary and sufficient condition for having and practising virtue. If one knows what virtue is, then it is impossible to voluntarily act viciously. Such a thesis is known as Socrates' intellectualism.⁷⁸ Socrates identifies virtue with knowledge and he excludes the

⁷⁷ See M. Stocker, [1976]& [1979].

⁷⁸ See A. Nehamas, [1987]: 275-316; A. O. Rorty, [1987]: 317- 330

possibility of someone acting contrary to her knowledge voluntarily. According to Socrates, it is impossible to harm myself while knowing that I am doing so, and for me to do something morally wrong knowing that it is morally wrong when it is in my power to do otherwise. Virtue is strongly associated with knowledge and so all desires are focused on what we take to be good. Socrates then locates the virtues exclusively in the rational part of the soul.⁷⁹ Most of Plato's commentators follow this line of analysis. T. Irwin is one of them. He holds that Socrates' view "requires all desires to be rational or good-dependent; if A wants X, he wants it for its contribution to some good y, and ultimately to the final good, and if he ceases to believe that X contributes to the final good, he will cease to want X".⁸⁰

As the above orthodox analysis stands, one could say that Socrates account of virtue is too intellectual and in a way fails to take into account psychological factors, such as emotional and volitional issues. G. Grote, for instance, has attributed to Socrates "the error ...of dwelling exclusively on the intellectual conditions of human conduct, and omitting to give proper attention to the emotional and volitional".⁸¹ If that is the case then by way of comparing early Platonic dialogues with virtue ethics, one could say that Socrates neglects the psychological states in his account of virtue and he associates it merely with knowledge. However, such a claim is not entirely correct. For early Plato does refer to some psychological states such as emotions and feelings as well as desires and wants and thus it would be premature at this stage to draw the above conclusion. Let us see first some texts in which some issues about virtue and psychological factors are discussed, and afterwards we can evaluate how strong is the link between them.

In the *Laches*, where the virtue of courage is at stake, Socrates seems to associate such a virtue not only with cognitive (198d-199c), but also with psychological dimensions. For in his attempt to enrich Laches' conception of courage he holds:

And this is what I meant just now by saying that I was to blame for your wrong answer, by putting my question wrongly. For I wanted to have your view not only of brave men at arms, but also of courage in cavalry and in the entire warrior class; and of the courageous not only in war but in the perils of the sea, and all who in disease and poverty, and again in public affairs, are courageous;

⁷⁹ See *NE* 1144b28-30: "whereas Socrates held that the virtues are "reasons" (λόγους), for they are all sciences, we hold that they are with reasons (μετὰ λόγου)".

⁸⁰ See his [1977]: 78. On "good-dependent desires" see, V.2.2, VII. 6.2.

⁸¹ G. Grote, [1875]: 399.

and further, all who are not merely courageous against *pain or fear*, but doughty fighters against *desires and pleasures*, whether standing their grounds or turning back upon the foe- for I take it, Laches, there are courageous people in all these kinds. [*Laches*, 191c5].⁸²

In the above passage Socrates seems to have in his mind the association of virtue with some psychological states such as fear, desires, pleasure, which I have italicised. The passage also counts against the view that Socrates does not recognise psychological factors as distinct from cognitive ones. This is not something that appears only in the *Laches*. By the same token in the *Protagoras* Socrates holds that the power of knowledge with which virtue is associated is supposed sometimes to conquer (κρατεῖν) some other motivating factors, such as pleasure and everything else (357c1-4). Socrates also reports what is other people's view that one may know what is best, but is not always be "ruled" by this knowledge. Instead, people are often ruled by anger, fear or pleasure.

Laches and *Protagoras* give us some ground on which to base the claim that Socrates does actually recognise some psychological factors and does seem to associate them with the notion of virtue. But in the early dialogues what is mostly stressed is the association of virtue with cognitive factors rather than with psychological ones. In addition, the fact that in these dialogues such an association is discussed does not ground the claim that Socrates adopts this association. One could say then that although Socrates discusses the relation between virtue and psychological factors, such as certain feelings, emotions and desires, he does not accommodate this relation in his account of virtue because, for him, virtues are strongly associated with knowledge.

D. Devereux has argued that the above association between virtue and non-rational factors found in the *Laches* and *Protagoras* indicates that Socrates does recognise irrational desires and considers the virtuous person as one who experiences conflict between his knowledge and his irrational desires. Then, Devereux thinks, one could say that Socrates' virtuous person is closer to the Kantian virtuous person, who reminds us of Aristotle's continent person.⁸³ There are three main problems with such an

⁸² It is true, however, that Socrates does not undertake again to show how courage is associated with feelings and psychological requirements, at least within *Laches*. According to G. Santas [1969: 460], with regard to the relation between virtue and psychological dimensions "in the *Laches* Plato has made only a beginning, but a very fruitful one".

⁸³ D. Devereux, [1995]: 381- 408.

understanding of Socrates' virtuous person, namely the one that can be seen in the early Platonic dialogues. The first is that Socrates believes that some desires are part of our rationality, namely the ones that are good dependent (*Gorg.* 468b), whereas Kant does not believe that desires are part of our rationality.⁸⁴ The second is that Socrates' conception of virtue (as we will see in the next section as well as in Chapter V, where I discuss in detail the relation between virtue and happiness) is strongly associated with the agent's happiness, whereas as in the Kantian framework, this is not the case. Finally, by associating virtue with happiness, Socrates does imply that his virtuous person is properly affected, namely he feels pleasure in being virtuous. In the *Protagoras*, for instance, Socrates associates virtue with pleasure, by first identifying the good with pleasure and then claiming that whatever is fine or admirable is good (359e-360a). The feeling of pleasure in being virtuous, is what distinguishes the Aristotelian virtuous person from the Aristotelian continent person. Devereux's claim, however, that Socrates' virtuous person is closer to the Kantian virtuous person undermines these important issues. I suggest, instead, that the information provided in the early Platonic dialogues, such as *Laches* and *Protagoras*, about the relation between the notion of virtue and psychological factors, is to be understood in the following way: Socrates strongly associates virtue with knowledge, and although he speaks about some psychological states he does not take them into consideration in his account of virtues. However, what he does take into account is one psychological parameter, namely the feeling of pleasure as by-product of virtue. For his conception of virtue, unlike Kant's, is associated with happiness and, in the latter, pleasure is present.

It is well known that in the *Protagoras* Socrates excludes the possibility of *akrasia*. According to him, when one knows that A is better than B, it is impossible to desire to have B, and if one does so, one will do so out of ignorance, rather than weakness of will. Some have suggested that from what Socrates says in this dialogue it is obvious that Socrates excludes the existence of irrational desires, or other motivational factors such as fear, desire, pleasure. As we saw earlier on Socrates does not exclude the existence of such factors. Socrates does not consider the virtuous person to be a person who has only knowledge and no feelings, emotions, desires and pleasures. What Socrates holds is that those psychological parameters cannot be strong motives

against the virtuous person's rationality. Because Socrates has focused his account of virtue on its strong relation with cognitive conditions he does not refer to such psychological factors directly. He does so by implication, since he associates virtue with happiness, and so with pleasure. He also holds that the virtuous person has good desires and motives. Socrates cannot think of a virtuous person as having bad desires and motives. All his desires are good, rational and good-dependent. One could say now that even emotions such as fears can be good factors, since they help the moral agent to become virtuous. But Socrates does not consider it something necessary for virtue, and so does not associate this conception of virtue directly with something else apart from cognitive factors. In the *Protagoras*, in particular, Socrates puts forward a strong argument for the association of virtue with knowledge, the well-known thesis of the unity of the virtues. Socrates, unlike Protagoras (333b7-c3), holds that one cannot have any virtue if one does not have them all. In Socrates' understanding one cannot display one virtue while displaying any of the vices. The temperate person cannot also display foolishness (332a4-333b6). Socrates' underlying motive behind this thesis is that knowledge is sufficient for virtue, and whoever does not follow this claim, believes that knowledge is insufficient for virtue and that different virtues have different non-cognitive components. Socrates wants to prove that virtue and knowledge are so strongly associated that virtues do not differ by having different non-cognitive components. What determines the nature of virtues is knowledge. Furthermore, because virtue is knowledge, one cannot act against what one knows to be good, so *akrasia* is excluded as a possible phenomenon of action.

But *akrasia* and moral weakness are supposed to be familiar facts of experience. If so, then Socrates' approach in the early dialogues is at odds with our intuition. Thus, many have argued against it. Plato, in his mature work was one of them.⁸⁵ In the *Republic*, as we saw above, Plato did not deny the association of virtue with knowledge, but he held that although having the required knowledge of what justice is, we can act unjustly. The main reason for such an action is the fact that some of the desires you possess overcome your knowledge, and then you act unjustly. However, Plato also held that the virtuous person would not be overcome by her desires. According to Plato, the

⁸⁴ See R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 109.

virtuous person is one whose desires and feelings are in harmony with, and generally supportive of, the decision and commands of reason (*Rep.* 444d-e).

The story given by Plato in the *Republic*, then, is different. In the early dialogues and in the *Meno* Socrates holds that all desires are good. In the *Republic*, Plato holds that desires bear no qualifications, neither good, nor bad. When thirsty we desire to drink a glass of water, rather than a cold, or less cold, glass of water (*Rep.* 439a). Plato's psychological theory differs from the Socratic one and the reason for this differentiation is the fact that Plato wants to have an account that can accommodate the possibility for someone to be akratic. For Plato holds that it is possible for one to know that X is good, but to choose B, as the appetitive part governs him. Plato holds that knowledge is essential for virtue, but it not the only element that relates to it. This thesis is based on Plato's tripartite division of the soul that is discussed in various places in the *Republic* (e.g. 436a-441b, 505a-d, 581b).⁸⁶

In the *Protagoras*, as well as in all the early Platonic dialogues, the Socratic conception of virtue is a purely intellectual thing and no direct account of any other part of the soul is involved. In the *Republic*, human virtue is discussed directly as a whole, and according to Plato, virtue is a complex interrelation between three separate psychological elements, the λογιστικόν (rational), the θυμοειδές (spirited), the ἐπιθυμητικόν (appetitive), each of which has its own indispensable contribution to make.⁸⁷ The basic distinction among these parts is between rational and irrational parts.⁸⁸ λογιστικόν is the rational part and θυμοειδές and ἐπιθυμητικόν the irrational part. Each part has its own job. The λογιστικόν calculates (ἀναλογισάμενον) concerning what is better and worse (441c1) and has the care of the whole soul and body (442b6). It is also assigned the job of being wise and knowing the truth (441e4-5, 442c5-8), and the knowledge of what is advantageous (τὸ συμφέρον) for each of the parts and for the whole (442c5-8). It is also φιλομαθές (436a9, 580d10), and φιλόσοφον (581b9). The

⁸⁵ *Republic* 440e, 442a-b, 443d-e. See also Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1145b 22-29; W. Jaeger, [1943]: 64-65; F. M. Cornford, [1932]: 51; J. Gould, [1955]: 6.

⁸⁶ C. Kahn [1987:77] holds that "Plato, in the *Republic*, is the first philosopher to formulate a full-scale theory of the psyche, and hence the first to articulate the concept of desire in a systematic way".

⁸⁷ For a discussion about the parts of the soul and the relation among them see, among others, J. Cooper, [1977] & [1984]; G. Lesses, [1987]; J. Moline, [1978]; T. Penner, [1978] & [1990]; R. Robinson, [1971]; M. Woods, [1987].

θυμοειδές is the part that loves honour and winning (φιλότιμον, φιλόνηκον, 581b). It is to be found in children and animals (441a-b, 357a-b), but also in adults. Plato shows that the spirit can conflict with appetite by referring to the case of Leontius (439e-440a). Leontius felt a desire to have a look at some corpses and immediately after he saw them he felt angry and ashamed of himself, and rebuked his eyes, the seat of his enjoyment, in a melodramatic way. Such a desire is turned down because it is felt to stand against what is accepted as right and good by the person. The ἐπιθυμητικόν part is the part that is entirely limited to its object with no further consideration. When someone has a desire for drink, he has a desire to drink rather than a desire to drink something good, cold, warm, as Plato illustrates at 437d-e, 438a-439b. It also called the part which loves money and gain (φιλοχρήματον and φιλοκερδές, 580d-581a).

Now what characterises Plato's virtuous person is not only the focus on the rational part but the harmonious association among all three parts. The virtuous person's reasoning part is ruling, the spirited is ensuring that reasoning has adequate motivational backing and desire is controlled by the two other parts rather than putting forward its own particular claims. For Plato virtue is "a kind of health and beauty and good condition of the soul" (444d-e).

Plato holds that although knowledge is by itself a factor strongly associated with virtue, it is not the only one. Some other factors are also associated with virtue and so to be virtuous consists in having these cognitive and other factors in a certain condition. Plato, by discussing two other parts of the human soul, namely the θυμοειδές and the ἐπιθυμητικόν in relation to the notion of virtue that he has in mind, maintains that it is not only knowledge about what is good and bad which determines virtue. An account of how one feels and how one is affected is also required for the complete picture of the notion of virtue. The message that Plato attempts to put over in the *Republic* is that virtue involves not only well-informed, correct thought about what is good and bad, but also certain states of feelings, and desires about these matters.⁸⁹

⁸⁸This, of course, does not exclude the existence of some rationality in the ἐπιθυμητικόν and θυμοειδές. What this distinction articulates is the fact that rationality is not the dominant feature of this two parts. A minimal cognitive element is present in all three parts of the soul. See C. Kahn, [1987]: 85.

⁸⁹ Some people see Plato's thesis as a progression from mere Socratic rationalism, and closer to Aristotle's theory that moral virtue is an interfusion of reason and desire. See J. M. Cooper, [1984]: 3-4. For an interesting discussion on dissimilarities between Plato's and Aristotle's conception of desire and its relation to reason see C. Kahn, [1987]: 79-80.

The association of virtue with a number of psychological factors in Plato's *Republic* can be reaffirmed by recalling the two main components of the early education of the guardians (Book III). There, music and gymnastics are focussed primarily on the child's feelings and emotions. The main aim is not only to provide them with the right knowledge, but also to inculcate the proper affection, the right emotions and feelings, which are associated with such knowledge and complete the picture of the factors that are combined with the notion of virtue.

On Plato's account virtue is a result of the healthy condition of the soul, and for that to occur, the three parts of the soul, reason, spirit and appetite should be in harmony. Virtue is not just a result of reason, of knowledge, but a result of the harmonious association among reason, spirit and appetite. Reason is still the dominant part and essential for virtue, but not the only one. Psychological and cognitive dimensions are associated with the understanding of virtue. This association however is clearer in the *Republic* than in the earlier dialogues. One could say, then, that Socrates' intellectualism does not entirely make psychological considerations marginal, but one could see that they are taken into account, since the underlying motivation for being virtuous is the fact that it is beneficial for someone to be virtuous. In the *Republic*, in virtue of the division of the soul in three parts, the association of cognitive and psychological dimensions with regard to virtue is more clearly stressed.

3.4.3. Virtue Is Beneficial for the Moral Agent

Virtue, however, is not only associated with cognitive and psychological requirements. Throughout the early, transitional, and middle Platonic dialogues the claim that virtue is beneficial to its possessor is repeatedly underscored. In the *Charmides*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno* as well as in the *Republic* it is argued that doing what is just always benefits the agent, and doing what is unjust always harms the agent. Consequently, the argument goes, it is always better for the agent to do justice than to do injustice. Socrates argues for the beneficial effect that virtue has on its possessor.

In the *Charmides* the virtue of temperance is at stake. While Socrates and the young Charmides are searching for an adequate answer to the frequent Socratic question "what is temperance?", they both seem to be in agreement that temperance belongs to the class of the noble and the good (159b-c). Such agreement is not ephemeral, but it

continues to be accepted between Charmides and Socrates some Stephanus pages later (161a-b). There Charmides' proposal to define temperance as modesty is rejected by Socrates on the basis of the earlier agreement, namely that the presence of temperance makes men good, and more precisely makes them always good. Critias also agrees with the understanding of temperance as something good and beneficial for the agent, when he attempts to defend his definition of temperance as "doing one's own business", offered initially by Charmides (163a). While Socrates and Critias attempt to articulate Critias' definition, they reach a state where Socrates maintains that temperance is a benefit and a good (169b). At the end of this dialogue also, Socrates holds that any inquiry that undermines the fact that temperance is really a great good and that who ever has it is happy, is unpromising (175e). Socrates says to Charmides that if he has temperance he is happy, and he also underscores that the more wise and temperate Charmides is, the happier he will be (176a). Temperance is one of the virtues that is discussed within the Platonic corpus and, as it appears in the *Charmides*, is considered as something good, noble and beneficial for the agent who possess it.

In the *Meno*, virtue, either as a whole, or as a part, is discussed in detail and an adequate definition of it is again the subject. Here, again, Socrates agrees with his interlocutor, Meno, that virtue is something good. (87d). It is also held by Socrates and accepted by Meno that it is virtue which makes us good and if virtue is something good it is also beneficial and advantageous for us. Virtue, in the *Meno* also, is considered as something beneficial and advantageous for the person who possesses it (87e).

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates refers to the virtue of justice and temperance and holds that it is impossible for someone who has behaved unjustly to be happy (472 d-473c). Socrates maintains that it is impossible for a man to be happy while doing injustice and being unjust, and a man who does injustice and is unjust is wretched in every way. Vice is not beneficial for its possessor. Only virtue is beneficial for its possessor. Socrates makes a strenuous effort in the *Gorgias* to convince Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles that virtue is beneficial to its possessor, to whom it brings happiness, and that it is impossible for a wrongdoer to be happy. Socrates doubts that people who have been unjust and then become kings, such as Perdiccas' son Archelaus, could be happy as well. For in Socrates' understanding a good and honourable man or woman is happy, and an unjust and wicked

one, wretched (*Gorg.*470b-471a).⁹⁰ The unjust man is never happy, as Socrates holds, because if a man does injustice, that shows that he has injustice in his soul; and the further doing of unjust acts causes him to continue to have injustice in his soul and possibly to have even greater injustice than before.⁹¹ Socrates' idea is that injustice in the soul is an evil, and thus the man who does injustice harms himself. By the same token Socrates holds that doing injustice is worse for the agent than suffering it is for the sufferer (*Gorg.*472-3). For, according to Socrates, injustice in the soul is the greatest evil one can possess (*Gorg.*477b-e).

Socrates follows the same line of thought in the first book of the *Republic* where he argues against Thrasymachus' understanding of justice. According to Thrasymachus, it is against one's benefit to be just, and so it is better to be unjust. For in Thrasymachus' understanding injustice is more profitable than justice to a man of strength and wit.⁹² Socrates attempts to reject such an understanding of one of the most essential virtues in his moral system, namely justice, and he holds that it is beneficial for the moral agent to be just rather than to be unjust. For, if one acts unjustly one does so because one possesses injustice in the soul, and such a disharmony in the soul is everything but beneficial to the agent. Virtue, or the harmonious condition of the soul, is beneficial to its possessor. Socrates is so convinced that virtue is beneficial to its possessor, that he recognises no evil but the loss of virtue's benefit. Socrates makes this correlative claim in the *Apology* by saying: "To a good man no evil comes either while he lives or when he is dead" (41d).

Socrates, then, seems to be advocating a more radical idea than Hursthouse's concerning the benefit that virtue provides to its possessor (see 3.3). Although they both hold that virtue is beneficial to its possessor, Hursthouse recognises that some losses

⁹⁰ Socrates considers happiness to be the final end. We find this characterisation of happiness as final end explicitly given in the *Symposium*, where it is held that "the happy are happy by the acquisition of good things; and there is no longer need to ask further for the sake of what the man who wants to be happy wants to be happy; the answer seems to be final" (204e-205a)

⁹¹ Socrates does not disagree with Polus only on the idea that it is better to suffer than to do injustice. Socrates also has a radically different view of punishment from that of Polus. The latter regards punishment, just or unjust, as the greatest of evils to the punished person; Socrates, on the other hand, regards punishment as beneficial, for it relieves the soul of the wrongdoer from the vice of the soul, including injustice, ignorance, cowardice and the like (*Gorg.*477a).

⁹² According to P. Foot [1979: 125], if we cannot show that justice benefits the moral agent, then justice can no longer be recommended as a virtue.

could happen to the possessor of virtue, whereas Socrates holds that no evil and no loss can come in the way followed by virtuous persons, either in life or in death.

3.5. Plato's Ethics and Virtue Ethics on Virtue

Virtue ethics and Plato's ethics, although chronologically remote, do, to some degree, share essential affinities with regard to the notion of virtue and the role that the latter plays in the moral system that both theories propose. Virtue ethicists' understanding of virtue as a central notion in the account of morality, as well as their association of virtue with cognitive and psychological requirements, can be traced back to Plato. Furthermore, the thought that virtue is strongly associated with one's flourishing, and that it could be beneficial for its possessors, is also something that both theories have in common.

However, such similarities do not go all the way. For instance, in both ethical systems virtue is associated with cognitive factors. One of the essential conditions for someone to be virtuous is to acquire certain knowledge. Also, in both systems knowledge is related to issues such as sensitivity, flexibility and reliability. But, when one takes a closer look, then one detects that actually virtue ethicists and Plato have different kinds of knowledge in mind, when they refer to the knowledge that is associated with virtue. Within the Platonic corpus the kind of knowledge that is associated with virtue is definitional knowledge, the knowledge or true belief bound by an explanatory account in the early and middle dialogues, and the knowledge of the Forms, in the *Republic*. It is a kind of knowledge that not many have or could acquire, and in particular in the *Republic*, it is a kind of knowledge only philosophers could possess. In the early dialogues Socrates holds in different places, that even he, the wisest person, according to the Delphic oracle, does not possess such knowledge.⁹³ He differs from the rest in the sense that he is aware of his ignorance, but he does not yet have the knowledge of F-ness, which makes all F things F.

The kind of knowledge that virtue ethicists associate with virtue is not a matter of nature, as Plato also holds in the *Meno* (98d). It is rather a result of a long training. It is not also possessed by many people but only by few. But whoever is able to acquire

⁹³ *Apology* 21d2-6, 22c-3; *Gorgias* 508e-509a; See G. Vlastos, [1985]: 1-31.

such knowledge is not required to experience what Hursthouse calls the "platonic fantasy". In her words:

This is the fantasy that it is only through the study of philosophy that one can become virtuous (or really virtuous), and, as soon as it is stated explicitly, it is revealed to be a fantasy that must be most strenuously resisted. Of *course* people can be virtuous, really virtuous, without having spent clockable hours thinking about eudaimonia, coming to the conclusion that it is a life lived in accordance with the virtues, and working out an account of acting well, just as they can possess a really good will without having spent clockable hours working out whether various maxims can be willed as universal laws. [...] The way to avoid the mistake, at least for virtue ethicists, is to insist that it is the ascription of virtue that is basic. [R. Hursthouse, 1999, p.137]

Hursthouse does not want the knowledge associated with virtue to be so demanding, as it is for Plato's philosophers. However, she does want the virtuous person to show reliability in her virtuous actions, as well as to be in a position to offer an honest explanatory account of why she has acted as she has. But, such requirements related to virtue do ask for a kind of knowledge that can provide reliability and an explanatory account of the virtuous action. Plato has founded such knowledge on metaphysical properties, such as Forms. Virtue ethicists do not want to bring in such properties and they are seeking for a kind of knowledge that is not a result of philosophical training. However, they do not provide any source of such knowledge, apart from the required training.

Although the kind of knowledge associated with virtue seems to differ between virtue ethics and Plato's ethics, it can be proposed that they share at least two common issues: the understanding of virtue as something beneficial for the agent and the requirement for virtuous persons to have their cognitive and their psychological dimensions in harmony. Of course, some virtue ethicists (i.e. Phillips and McDowell) seem to agree with Plato that virtue is always beneficial for the agent, whereas some others (i.e. Hursthouse), although they share with Plato the understanding of virtue as something beneficial for the agent, doubt that virtue can be always beneficial for the agent. Nevertheless Hursthouse still believes that virtues are the most reliable bets for one's happiness. One could say then that virtue ethicists share with Plato the understanding of virtue as something beneficial for the agent but not all of them agree with Plato that virtue can be always beneficial for the agent. The difference however

should be seen only as a difference in degree rather than as a difference with regard to the substance of the thesis at stake here, the beneficial character of virtue.

Also the understanding of the virtuous person as someone who has her cognitive and psychological dimensions in harmony is another feature that Plato's ethics and virtue ethics have in common. They also, however, probably share a worry that accompanies this feature. Understanding the virtuous person as someone who has managed to have her cognitive and psychological dimensions in harmony gives the impression that it is actually difficult to become virtuous, since the harmony between rational and irrational parts is not an easy task. On the contrary it does require considerable training, and a lot of hard work, from the prospective virtuous person, and one wonders how many can actually achieve it. Early and middle Plato do agree that only few can achieve virtue, although early Plato does not have the middle Platonic harmony in mind. Virtue ethicists seem to drive towards the same direction, that of moral elitism. J. Driver, in her recently published book entitled *Uneasy Virtue* actually underscores that the greater the requirement placed on virtue, the more open it is to this charge.⁹⁴ Whether virtue ethics represents a sort of moral elitism is something to be decided.⁹⁵ As things stand now -and given the fact that virtue is associated with certain cognitive and psychological requirements, which one, if virtuous, is expected to meet- they lead us to think that virtue ethics does work towards a moral elitism. But this is just an implication. Hursthouse seems to propose that not only philosophers will be virtuous. The issue of moral elitism, however, is not to be decided here. Some more pressing issues related to virtue ethics need to be addressed.

Emphasis on the notion of virtue and association of it with cognitive and psychological dimensions is something common among virtue ethicists. Virtue is central in virtue ethicists' proposals. It is true, however, that within virtue ethics the centrality of virtue has been conceived in a more radical way as well. M. Slote, for instance, claims that virtue should be understood not only as a primary notion, but also as a basic notion from which evaluations of other notions, such as action and happiness could be derived.⁹⁶ In the next two chapters I shall explore some influential virtue ethicists' understanding of virtue as a central notion (primary or basic) and I shall also discuss

⁹⁴ See, J. Driver, [2001]: 53.

⁹⁵ See, N. Athanassoulis, [2000]: 218 and n. 8.

whether within the Platonic corpus virtue is a basic notion, in particular with regard to notions such as action and happiness (flourishing).

⁹⁶ M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 206-235; M. Slote, [1997]: 239-262 & [2001]: Ch.1.

CHAPTER FOUR

VIRTUE AND ACTION

4.1. An Essential Thesis for Virtue Ethics

An essential and characteristic element of virtue ethics is the claim that the action cannot be characterised as virtuous independently of the agent's state of character. In virtue ethics the criterion for good or bad action is neither consequences of actions, nor its falling under some ethical maxim. The criterion of good action is the state of character of the person performing this action.¹ More precisely, virtue ethicists hold that an action is right if it is the act that the virtuous person would do in the circumstances.² Virtue ethicists also maintain that the virtuous person is the person who has and exercises certain character traits, namely virtues. So, virtue ethicists understand the notion of (right) action in terms of the virtuous agent and the latter in terms of virtues (right action→virtuous agent→character traits (virtues)).³ To put it differently, virtue ethicists believe in the primacy of character traits over the evaluation of actions (action is secondary and depends upon character traits). However, as we shall see shortly, not all virtue ethicists rely on the same kind of primacy.⁴

One way to understand better the aforementioned thesis, which is essential for virtue ethics, is to see it in contrast with dominant morality's conception of the relation between virtue and action. The comparison between virtue ethics and dominant morality reveals that the priority of virtue over evaluation of actions is not only an important element of

¹ See G. H. Wright, [1963]: 142; S. Hudson, [1986]: 42. J. L. Garcia, [1990]: 69, 76-77; G. Cullity, [1995]: 289; J. Oakley, [1996]: 129-138; D. Statman, [1997]: 3-4; G. Trianosky, [1997]: 43; G. Watson, [1997]: 58; M. Baron, J. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 176-179; J. Griffin, [1998]: 57; G. Sher, [1998]: 1; R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 28-29.

² H. Alderman [1997: 146-147] holds that the "the task of re-thinking moral philosophy [...] requires retrieving the concept of paradigmatic character, the concept whose elucidation points directly to the universally human context of moral practices. It is only in this context that it is possible to have something like a rational and non-relative resolution of moral arguments". Alderman [1997: 151] also maintains that the character of a paradigmatic individual can offer a promising ultimate moral appeal, but it needs to be imitated appropriately.

³ Here the arrows represent the order of analysis rather than the order of explanation. J. Moravcsik [1990:47] maintains that "questions about what to do and how to react to others should lead us ultimately back to the question of what we should be. And this is a question that no human can side-step".

⁴ See J. Griffin, [1998]: 56-57.

virtue ethics, but also a claim distinctive of it. For virtue ethics advances a new understanding of the relation between virtue and evaluation of actions, substantially different from the one proposed by dominant morality.

The proponents of the latter suggest that we understand right action as the action that promotes the best consequences, or as the action that is in accordance with a correct moral rule or principle. Also, within dominant morality, the good moral agent is understood to be the person who has the tendency to act in accordance with these principles (character traits→ actions→principles).⁵ Dominant morality's approach does not consider reference to character as essential in order to judge the quality of action. So, dominant morality does not support the primacy of character (character traits) over evaluation of actions.⁶ However, as Watson holds, according to virtue ethics, "right and proper conduct is conduct that is contrary to no virtue (does not exemplify a vice). Good conduct is conduct that displays a virtue. Wrong or improper conduct is conduct that is contrary to some virtue (or exemplifies a vice)".⁷

Another way to express the contrast between dominant morality and virtue ethics and shed light on the relation between virtue and evaluations of actions is to hold that virtue ethicists attempt to reject four main theses shared by the proponents of dominant morality:

⁵ J. Oakley [1996:132-133] points out that "the Kantians claim that the goodness of an agent's character is determined by how well they have internalised the capacity to test the universalisability of their maxims, while Utilitarians claim that the person with good character is one who is disposed to maximise utility".

⁶ See J. Oakley, [1996]: 131. According to dominant morality, the value of character traits is dependent on the value of the conduct that these traits tend to produce. The notion of right behaviour rather than the notion of character traits is theoretically prior. Virtue ethics reverses the order of justification and, as D. Statman [1997:7] holds, "virtue ethics call for a real revolution in ethical thought, for what might be described in Kuhnian terms, a change in a paradigm. Shifting our focus from actions to virtues within ethical theory is no minor change." M. Savarino [1993: 244, 246, 250] maintains that "in virtue ethics the question 'what kind of person it is good to be' replaces the question 'what actions are right for me to do?'. If this is the case", Savarino continues, "then there must be the possibility of being (developed into) that kind of person. If being that kind of person is reducible to, and understood only as, what that person does, then it is difficult to see how virtue itself plays a central role in ethics. What human virtue is becomes an important question for anyone who is serious about virtue ethics" [...] "Virtue ethics is about being (possessing certain qualities, habits, 'first actualities') and not merely about doing (actions)." Savarino sees virtues as actual qualities of persons and by actual dispositional quality she means the kind of quality Aristotle describes when he classifies virtue as a *hexis*, a *hexis* which is also a *first actuality*. Aristotle identifies virtue with *hexis* after eliminating the possibilities of classifying virtue with *pathos* (feelings or passions) and *dunamis* (power or faculties). See Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a25, 1105b20, 1106a12, *De Anima*, 417a21-417b2, *Metaphysics* 1048a35-1048b5, and *Categories* 9a4.

⁷ G. Watson, [1997]: 61.

- (a) All human beings are bound by universal duties, which are either primary or derivative from some notion of the good.⁸
- (b) Moral reasoning is a matter of applying general principles.⁹
- (c) The value of the virtues is derivative from general principles. Virtues are mere tendencies to act in accord with principle.¹⁰
- (d) Only judgements about right action are basic in morality, and virtue derives from them.¹¹

Due to the above claims, dominant morality has been given the following descriptions: "ethics of duty", "ethics of principles", "ethics of doing", or "act-centred" ethics, which has as central the question "What shall I do?" and relies on deontic notions such as obligation, duty, right and wrong.¹² Virtue ethics, by challenging the aforementioned claims, has been rendered as the "agent-centred" ethics, the "ethics of being", or as the ethics whose main question is "What kind of person should one be", and relies on aretaic notions such as good, bad, excellence, virtue, admirable, deplorable.¹³ Although these characterisations are not entirely correct, and might lead to misunderstanding, they can, however, illustrate one of the main concerns of virtue ethicists.¹⁴ That is to say that

⁸ See G. E. M. Anscombe, [1958]: 1-9; B. Mayo, [1958]: 200; R. Taylor, [1991]: 2-3; H. Alderman, [1997]: 146.

⁹ See A. MacIntyre, [1981]: 119; C.R. Roberts, [1991]: 325.

¹⁰ See W. K. Frankena, [1973]: 65; J. Rawls, [1971]: 192; T. Beauchamp & J. Childress, [1983]: 261. For an illuminating discussion about the relation between virtue and principles (or rules) and how virtues should not derive from principles and should not be seen as mere dispositions to act in accordance with principles, see C. R. Roberts [1991]: 325-343; J. Waide, [1988]: 455-472.

¹¹ See R. Becker, [1975]: 111; J.L.A. Garcia, [1990]: 70-71.

¹² For the descriptions attributed to dominant morality and to virtue ethics see among others R. Loudon [1997]:180-181, 287-288; M. Slote [1997]: 128; P. Montague, [1997]: 194-195; R. Hursthouse, [1996]: 19.

¹³ I do not mean here, of course, that each kind of ethics ignores the matters that the others take to be central. An adequate moral theory must accommodate an account of the agent, the deed and the outcome of the deed, and of how all these are related. The difference, to put it crudely, relies on which of these is taken as a primary source of value and significance, on what derives its moral importance from what. In dominant morality it has more or less unconsciously been taken that it is in the acts that moral value reposes first and foremost. And anything else has its significance by reference to that. In the ethics of virtue, on the other hand, the primary object possessing moral worth is the condition of the agent, the quality of her character, her virtue. As we will see later on, in virtue ethics, actions have moral value that they borrow from the character trait they issue from or are exemplary of, given its worth as part of an excellent overall condition for a man to be in. For the relation between virtue and actions, see among others, J. Laird, , [1946]: 113-132; W. K. Frankena [1970]: 1-17; M. Stocker, [1973-74]: 42-61; N.J.H. Dent, [1975b]: 318-335; G. Sher, [1998]: 1-17.

¹⁴ R. Hursthouse [1999: 25,47, 69] raises this worry and she shows how these characterisations need to be understood. Her main claim is that by labelling virtue ethics an "agent-centred" theory we do not mean that virtue ethics cannot accommodate rules and cannot provide guidance. She also shows that the above rendering of virtue ethics can make better sense of dilemmas with remainders and of irresolvable dilemmas.

virtue ethicists consider the notion of virtue (and the virtuous agent)¹⁵ as a central notion in the moral theory they espouse and they reject as inadequate any account of ethics that considers it to be secondary in relation to principles and the evaluation of actions. This centrality, as I noted in the previous Chapter (3.2.), has been seen in two different ways (primary and basic notion) by virtue ethicists, some more radical than others.¹⁶

To illustrate better our understanding of the above issue I shall discuss it by focusing on the relation between virtue (character traits) and evaluation of actions that virtue ethicists propose. As we shall see below (4.2.5), although most virtue ethicists hold that the notion of right action is secondary or dependent upon the notion of virtue (and the virtuous person), they do not all rely on the same kind of primacy or dependence. In what follows, I shall present the different views of the relation between the notions of virtue and action within the framework of virtue ethics, and then examine the relation of these two notions within the Platonic corpus. I shall claim that Plato's ethics accommodates claims about the relation between virtue and evaluation of action that are relevant and in a way similar to the ones held by virtue ethicists. If it is accepted that one of virtue ethics' main concerns is to consider the notion of virtue and the character associated with it as prior to the evaluation of action, then it needs to be pointed out that that was also Plato's concern. However, the justification of this thesis presupposes an account of the relation between the notions of virtue and action as it unfolds within the framework of virtue ethics, and it is to this that I turn now.

4.2. Virtue and Action Within Virtue Ethics

J. Oakley holds that one of the commonly accepted theses among virtue ethicists is the one that expresses virtue ethicists' understanding of right action. According to J. Oakley this claim unfolds as follows: *An action is right if and only if it is what an agent with a virtuous character would do in the circumstances.*¹⁷ This claim, as Oakley notes, is a

¹⁵ Virtue ethicists do not understand virtue as a mere tendency to act in a certain way, but as a character trait. So, when they hold the primacy of character claim, namely "an act is right iff it is what a virtuous agent would do in the circumstances", they understood a virtuous agent to mean, not the one who has the tendency to act in accordance with general principles, but the one who has and exercises certain character traits, namely the virtues. Virtue, then, is a character trait, rather than a tendency to act in a certain way. When virtue ethicists speak about primacy of character, they mean primacy of virtue, because virtue is a character trait.

¹⁶ See J. Annas, [1993]: 9, 91; J. Griffin, [1998]: 56-57.

¹⁷ See J. Oakley, [1996]: 129. This statement has its roots in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 1105b 5ff when Aristotle holds: "Actions, then, are just and temperate when they are such as the just or the temperate man would do". As it will emerge soon actually Plato was the first who claimed this order

claim about the primacy of character in the justification of right action. The right action is not the action whose maxim can qualify as a universal law, or the action that can bring about the best outcomes. Rather the rightness of action seems to depend upon the notion of the virtuous agent. The inner state of the latter determines the status of the action; when one reveals the truth, one does so because one has the corresponding character trait, the virtue of honesty. What defines an act as virtuous is the possession of the relevant character trait. Although within the framework of dominant morality the reference to the character traits –virtues– was not essential in order to assess the quality of an action, within virtue ethics character traits are what determine the quality of the action. An action is dependent upon the character traits of the person who performs it, and actions are expressions of them. By subscribing to this line of thought virtue ethicists change the focus of ethical theory from the judgement of actions to the judgement of character.¹⁸ The central concern of virtue ethicists is the character traits of the moral agent, the virtues and her internal state, her input. They also hold that virtues cannot be understood as mere tendencies to act in a certain way because actions now depend upon virtues. Virtue ethicists have also shown that an action can be bad even when it has been done in accordance with duty.¹⁹ What determines the quality of an action is the agent's character traits, the agent's virtue.²⁰

The dependence of action and the dependence of notions that dominant morality has associated with action –such as deontic notions and principles– upon virtue and the notions virtue ethics has associated with it –such as character and aretaic notions– has been expressed by virtue ethicists in various ways. It is worth exploring them here in detail, in order to evaluate each one separately, and to see whether all virtue ethicists

of dependence between predicating temperance or justice of an act and predicating temperance or justice of a man. See, in particular, *Republic* 443c9-444a3.

¹⁸ Virtue ethics does not only suggest a theoretical revolution. It embodies a normative one as well. See D. Statman [1997b]: 22.

¹⁹ G. Trianosky [1998] holds that there is no close relationship between views about what motives are vicious and views about what conduct is wrong. He bases his argument on the distinction between obligatory acts and supererogatory acts and he claims that a virtuous person will be willing to do both what morality requires and what is only recommended. He also maintains that although one does only what is required, the fact that he did not do what was recommended reveals a shortcoming in the agent's motivational structure. Trianosky argues that a particular motive may be vicious even though the action to which it gives rise is entirely permissible. Although most virtue ethicists would agree with Trianosky that an action can be vicious even when it is in accordance with what is permitted, because of its vicious motive, they would not accept the step further that Trianosky takes that there is no close relation between views about what motives are vicious and views about what conduct is wrong. Most virtue ethicists, (e.g. R. Hursthouse [1999]; M. Stocker [1973-74]; M. Slote, [1995]; G. Watson [1997]) hold that there is a close conceptual connection between views about motives (and virtues) and views about conduct.

espouse the same kind of dependence of evaluation of acts upon virtues. As I hope will become clear, the way this dependence has been understood by leading figures of virtue ethics, such as Trianosky, Watson, Hursthouse and Slote, varies. A justification of this claim can be offered by discussing the above virtue ethicists' understanding of the relation between virtue and action. Let us start with Trianosky's account.

4.2.1. Trianosky on Virtue and Action

Trianosky maintains that "an ethics of virtue in its pure form holds that only judgements about virtue are basic in morality, and that the rightness of actions is always somehow *derivative* from the virtuousness of traits".²¹ Trianosky formulates more precisely this analysis by holding that a pure ethics of virtue makes two claims:

- (a) At least some judgements about virtue can be *validated independently* of any appeal to judgements about the rightness of actions.
- (b) It is this antecedent goodness of traits which *ultimately makes* any right act right. [G. Trianosky, 1997, p. 43, my emphasis].

Trianosky concludes that "in both these cases the rightness of action supervenes on some appropriate relation to what is antecedently established as virtue" and he adds that "for the pure ethics of virtue the moral goodness of traits is always both independent of the rightness of actions and in some way *originative* of it as well".²²

4.2.2. Watson on Virtue and Action

Watson, too, makes great efforts to illustrate the relation between virtue and action and the way the former determines the latter. Watson holds that "on a virtue of ethics, how it is best or right, or proper to conduct oneself is *explained in terms of* how it is best for a human being to be."²³ Watson calls this claim explanatory primacy and he adds: "to be explanatory, of course, virtue must be *intelligible independently* of the notion of right conduct." Watson clarifies more fully his thesis when he adds:

[...] I have formulated the thesis too narrowly, for it should also encompass terms of appraisal besides "right". It should include more generally the concept that falls under the heading of "morally good conduct". An ethics of virtue is

²⁰ G. Cullity [1995] justifies this claim by employing the notion of callousness.

²¹ G. Trianosky, [1997]: 43. My emphasis.

²² G. Trianosky, [1997]: 44. My emphasis.

²³ G. Watson, [1997]: 58. My emphasis.

not a particular claim about the priority of virtue over right conduct but the more general claim that action appraisal is *derivative* from the appraisal of character. To put it in another way, the claim is that the basic moral facts are facts about the quality of character. Moral facts about action are ancillary to these. [G. Watson, 1997, p. 58, my emphasis].

As Watson makes clear later on, he associates the explanatory primacy thesis with the reductionist and replacement version of virtue ethics.²⁴ According to the reductionist view, all deontic notions (right, wrong) are reduced to the aretaic notions (good, bad, untruthful, unjust, unchaste), whereas according to the replacement view, deontic notions are replaced altogether by the aretaic ones.²⁵ The reductionist relation can also be applied to other notions associated with the aforementioned ones, such as evaluation of action and virtue.

4.2.3. Slote on Virtue and Action

Slote seems to be taking a view similar to Watson's when he deals with the relation between virtue and action. According to Slote, judgements about virtue are fundamental, self-standing and not derivative from something else. Slote illustrates his analysis by proposing a distinction between three main versions of virtue ethics, the agent-focused, the agent-prior and the agent-based. According to his account, agent-focused virtue ethics, and its intellectual source, namely Aristotle, is against any conception of ethics based on general principles, laws and rules. It focuses instead on the virtuous individual and her inner traits. However, Slote holds that agent-focused virtue ethics should be considered as less radical than agent-prior and agent-based virtue ethics. This is so because for agent-focused virtue ethics

the excellence or rightness of an action does not essentially depend on the motives or habits that gave rise to this action, or on the character of the person who did it. Rather, the virtuous person is someone who, without relying on rules, is sensitive, and intelligent enough to perceive what is noble or right as it varies from circumstance to circumstance, but this metaphor of perception seems to indicate that being virtuous involves being keyed in to facts

²⁴ G. Watson, [1997]: 58-59. For the forms of virtue ethics see Chapter I, Section 8.

²⁵ Reductionist and replacement views are two approaches that make up what D. Statman [1997b: 8] calls radical version of virtue ethics. The moderate version is the version, which "contends that though judgements of character are independent of judgements of actions, at least some judgements of acts are similarly independent of judgements of character". I, however, believe that the reductionist view can be expressed within the less unitary version of virtue ethics, namely that although not all judgements of actions are dependent upon judgements of character, those which are dependent are wholly derivative from judgements of character.

independent of one's virtuousness about what acts are admirable or called for.
[M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote, 1997, p. 178].

What Slote attempts to argue here is that this version of virtue ethics does not provide as with a "clear-cut" priority of virtue over evaluation of action. The perennial question here is the Euthyphro-type one: are these standards for action morally appropriate only because the virtuous person follows them, or are they followed by him because they are morally appropriate? To put it differently, the action that the virtuous person performs is virtuous not because she performs it, but because it was the action that the circumstances called for. In that case act-evaluations are not derivative from virtue. However, on this view virtue is still primary in a way, in that right action cannot be specified by a rule, and it is only through the virtuous person rather than rules and principles that we can gain an awareness of what actions are right. Slote seeks for a more radical version of virtue ethics, which, apart from the rejection of lawlike moral theorising and the focus on the virtuous individual's inner traits, can also accommodate the claim that act-evaluations are derivative from virtues. Slote seeks a kind of virtue ethics that evaluates the rightness of actions in terms of virtues, and finds this in two other kinds of virtue ethics, what he calls agent-prior and agent-based virtue ethics. These two radical versions of virtue ethics have two main claims in common:

- (a) Moral thinking is not to be captured in general principles and rules. (like agent-focused)
- (b) The evaluation of actions is *derivative* from the evaluation of virtues. Virtues, with regard to actions, are basic notions.²⁶ (unlike agent-focused)

What differentiates these two versions of virtue ethics is the way they associate the notion of virtue with some other notions, such as the notion of happiness or human flourishing and the locus of virtue within the moral system they propose. I shall address this topic and the relation that one might find with the Platonic corpus in the next chapter. For the subject discussed in this Chapter (virtue and action) these two versions share the same view and then I shall discuss these two versions as one, namely as the radical version of virtue ethics. The latter conceives the evaluation of actions as derivative from the evaluation of virtues. They both put forward the thesis of the evaluative primacy of virtue over actions. The latter needs to be understood as an account of dependence, which is expressed in terms of derivation. Evaluations of actions

²⁶ See M. Slote, [2000]: 7; K. Stohr & C. H. Wellman, [2002]: 49, 51.

reduce to virtues and they derive from virtues. The notion of virtue is basic and evaluations of action derive from it.

What is worth noting here is that the three already discussed accounts of the relation between virtue and evaluation of actions, namely Trianosky's, Watson's and Slote's, share the understanding of dependence of the evaluation of actions upon virtues as a reductive, derivative relation. That is to say that they all consider the notion of virtue to be a more basic notion than the evaluation of actions. When they speak about the primacy of virtue, the primacy of character, they mean that the evaluations and judgements of actions are derivative from them and reduced to them. When Slote describes the agent-prior version of virtue ethics, he holds that this version can be found in Hursthouse's writing and can even be traced back to Plato. I shall evaluate this claim in association with Hursthouse's work in this section and I shall undertake the part concerning Plato's work in Section 3 of this chapter.

4.2.4. Hursthouse on Virtue and Action

Hursthouse is another virtue ethicist who believes in the primacy of character over the evaluation of actions. In her words, "an action is right iff it is what the virtuous agent would, characteristically, do in the circumstances".²⁷ Hursthouse qualifies this specification some lines latter with regard to tragic dilemmas and she writes:

An action is right iff it is what the virtuous agent would, characteristically, do in the circumstances, except for the tragic dilemmas, in which a decision is right iff it is what such an agent would decide, but the action decided upon may be too terrible to be called "right" or "good". (And a tragic dilemma is one from which a virtuous agent cannot emerge with her life unmarred)". [R. Hursthouse, 1999, pp. 78-79].

Hursthouse seems to argue along the same lines as the aforementioned virtue ethicists, who believe that the evaluations of acts is secondary and dependent upon virtue and virtuous character. However, Hursthouse's recent work *On Virtue Ethics*²⁸ reveals that she does not subscribe to the line that Slote attributes to her, namely the understanding of the evaluations of actions as *derivative* from virtues. She seems to undertake a view in which she proposes something more than definitional or conceptual priority of the notion

²⁷ By "characteristically" Hursthouse wants to rule out "the everyday ways in which virtuous people act "out of character"- when they are exhausted, dazed with grief, ill, drunk (through no serious fault of their own, we must suppose), shell-shocked, and so on", See R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 78.

²⁸ R. Hursthouse, [1999].

of virtue over the notion of acts.²⁹ Although she does not deny the conceptual connection between actions and virtues (terrible actions are the very sort of things that the most callous characteristically do), she holds that by "secondary" and "dependent" she means something more complicated than "only to be defined or understood at all in terms of".³⁰

Hursthouse clearly disowns two things with regard to the primacy of character:

- (a) "the idea that we cannot understand the v-rules "do what is courageous, do what is honest, do what is loyal, etc", until we have understood what it is to be a courageous, honest, loyal, etc, person." [R. Hursthouse, 1999, p. 80]³¹
- (b) " the claim that "character has primacy over action" is supposed to commit one to a reductive definition of terrible or horrible acts in terms of the virtuous (or perhaps the vicious?) agent." [R. Hursthouse, 1999, p. 81].

Hursthouse's thesis is that the notion of character traits, or virtue is primary in the sense that it is needed to go beyond the dictionary entries and mothers-knee rules which are used to elucidate the v-adjectives (i.e. courageous, honest, loyal, temperate, charitable, etc.) as applied to actions and provide the *fine tuning*. ("Face danger or endure pain when and only when a courageous person would", "Eschew being economical with the truth when and only when the honest agent would").³² Hursthouse holds that in order to express her thesis concerning the relation between virtue and action, and in particular with regard to the claim of the "primacy of character", she "needs an expression that

²⁹ R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 80. Aristotle was the first who spoke about priority in definition. Aristotle's idea is that one thing is prior in formula (definition) to another if, and only if, the one is mentioned in the definition of the other, but not the other in the definition of the one (e.g. *Metaphysics X*). For instance, if one defined a just person as one who has strong desires to act according to principles of justice, and in one's statement of justice she made no reference to the just person, then in one's theory just principles would be prior in definition to just individuals. If, however, one defines right conduct in terms of human traits and if in defining human traits makes no reference to right conduct, then one attributes definitional priority to human traits over right conduct. I must note here that in ethics Aristotle seeks real definitions of the good (or happiness), virtue and acting rightly rather than nominal definitions. Real definitions depend on the nature of things defined and the way they are related, rather than on how we use words or define words lexically or stipulatively (nominal definitions). For a recent accounts of Aristotle's notion of priority in definition, see M. Ferejohn, [1980]: 117-118 and D. Keyt, [1991]: 126. Conceptual dependence of A upon B is the relation according to which the understanding of A depends upon B. For instance the concept niece can only be understood in terms of the concept female. For the notion of "conceptual dependence" see, R. Audi, [1995a]: 192.

³⁰ R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 80.

³¹ According to Hursthouse v-rules are the rules that virtue ethics comes up with and they are rules derived from the virtues and vices and they are given different backings from the deontologists' or consequentialists' rules. In her words, "each virtue generate a prescription- do what is honest, charitable, generous- but each vice a prohibition- do not do what is dishonest, uncharitable, mean." [...] It is true that these rules of virtue ethics (henceforth "v-rules") are couched in terms, or concepts, that are certainly "evaluative" in some sense, or sense, of that difficult word." See R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 36-37. See also p. 36 n. 7 & p.39

explicitly disavows any foundational or reductivist role for it", and makes it clear that she subscribes to the thesis that "the concept of the virtuous agent is the *focal concept* of ethics".³³

With this claim Hursthouse seems to subscribe to the line of virtue ethics that Slote described as agent-focused. However, according to the latter, the evaluation of actions does not essentially depend on agent's character traits. Hursthouse does not deny such dependence and although she holds that virtue is the focal concept of morality, she does not mean by that that the evaluation of action does not depend on virtues. What she means is that character traits, virtues, are in a sense prior to the evaluation of actions, but the latter is not derivative from or reduced to the former. In other words, for Hursthouse virtue is prior but not basic in relation to the evaluation of actions. For if it were basic, then evaluations of actions would be derivative from virtue or reduced to it. The virtuous agent provides only the fine-tuning to good action and only in this sense does evaluation of actions depend upon virtue. So Hursthouse's virtue ethics has two main tenets, which distinguish it from Slote's agent-focused and agent prior virtue ethics.

- (a) Virtue ethics does employ rules, the v-rules couched in terms derived from virtue and vices.³⁴
- (b) The evaluation of actions depends upon virtues, but it does not wholly derive from them. Virtues are primary notions with regard to actions, but not basic.³⁵ In other words, virtue cannot be characterised without reference to action, but right action still cannot be characterised without reference to virtue (because virtue is needed for fine-tuning). So the two concepts depend on one another.³⁶

Hursthouse concludes that we need the notion of virtue and of the virtuous person in order:

³² R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 81

³³ R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 83. My emphasis

³⁴ Unlike Slote's agent-focused virtue ethics R. Hursthouse [1999] does not hold that virtue ethics is a theory without principles and rules. On the contrary she argues that in fact virtue ethics comes up with a large number of rules. (p. 36). She maintains that virtue ethics has what she calls v-rules (p.37), which employ evaluative terms (p.38), provide action-guidance not only to adults but also to children (p.38-39), and they are "generated" by the terms for the virtues and vices (p. 80).

³⁵ M. Slote holds that according to agent-focused virtue ethics although moral thinking is not captured in general principles and rules, the evaluation of actions does not depend on the agent's virtuousness. According to agent-prior virtue ethics, moral thinking is not captured in general principles and the evaluation of action wholly derives from virtues. See M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 176-179, 206-208; M. Slote [2000]: 326-330.

³⁶ According to the reductionist or derivation view, advanced by M. Slote, G. Trianosky and G. Watson, right action is characterised in terms of virtues.

[...] to understand both action guidance and action assessment, to understand why it is sometimes so difficult to see what should be done and why we accept advice, to understand irresolvable and tragic dilemmas and the unity of the virtues, and to fine-tune, and thereby fully understand, our virtue and vice concepts [...] and the so-called 'moral motivation'. [R. Hursthouse, 1999, p. 83].

Hursthouse's virtue ethics then, if it is to be understood in Slote's terms, is not agent-focused. However, it is not agent-prior either. Hursthouse believes in the primacy of character, but not in the way Slote's agent-prior ethics describes it, namely as a basic notion in relation to evaluation of actions. One way to grasp a better understanding of this difference is to attempt to make a distinction between radical and moderate understandings of the relation between virtue and action discussed among virtue ethicists.³⁷ According to the moderate version of virtue ethics advanced by Hursthouse virtue is prior to evaluation of actions but not basic. For the evaluation of actions is dependent upon virtue but not reduced to it. On the other hand, according to radical virtue ethics advanced by Trianosky, Watson and Slote, since evaluation of action does not only depend but is also reduced to virtue, the latter is basic in relation to the evaluation of actions.

4.2.5. Virtue and Action: Radical and Less Radical Virtue Ethics

After exploring the understanding of the relation between virtue and action of four leading figures of virtue ethics it appears that they do not all share the same understanding of this relation. Watson, Trianosky and Slote consider the notion of the virtuous agent and the character traits she possesses, namely virtues, as basic and they derive the evaluations of actions from it. Hursthouse, on the other hand, disassociates the notion of virtuous agent and her character traits, virtues, from any foundational and reductivist role, without, however, denying the conceptual connection between virtue and action and the dependence of evaluation of action upon virtue. She holds that the notion of virtue and the notion of the virtuous agent offer primarily the fine-tuning we need for right action. Hursthouse (H), then, holds that the notion of virtue, the notion of virtuous character, can be considered as a primary notion with regard to actions, but not as a basic notion.³⁸ Watson, Slote and Trianosky (WST), on the other hand, seem to

³⁷ I here refer to Slote's classification of agent-prior and agent-based virtue ethics as radical versions, in the sense that they both support the dependence of the evaluation of actions upon virtue.

³⁸ As we saw in the previous Chapter (3.2.), a notion can be primary when it is the starting notion and helps us to understand the other notions. They differ from basic notions in the sense that other

adopt a more radical view, since they consider the notion of virtue to be basic, and then propose that the value of action is derivative from virtue.³⁹ What all virtue ethicists have in common is that they consider actions as secondary and dependent upon character traits, upon virtues. The way, however, they understand dependence can take either a radical turn (WST), or a moderate turn (H). Hereafter, for the sake of clarity, I shall refer to the radical view advanced by Watson, Trianosky and Slote as the *reductionist view* and to the moderate advanced by Hursthouse as the *non-reductionist view*.

It is worth noting here that neither Slote nor Hursthouse adopt a unitary view, a view that subscribes to the thesis that *all* judgements of action are secondary, or dependent upon judgements of virtue. They both hold that there are some descriptions of actions that bear a connotation of depravity regardless of the character, (or of the virtue) they spring from.⁴⁰ Some actions are wrong, indeed abhorrent, irrespective of who carries them out, and of what her motivation is. Also, no virtuous person would do depraved actions, and hence we do not have to look at the agent's character in order to decide that these actions were wrong. Slote maintains that "the ethical status of acts is not *entirely* derivative from that of traits, motives, or individuals, even though traits and individuals are the major focus of the ethical view being offered".⁴¹ By the same token, Hursthouse believes that virtue ethics does not deny any form of absolutism, and along the same lines as Aristotle, she believes that some descriptions of actions connote depravity regardless of the motive, or the character trait they spring from, actions such as adultery, theft and murder.⁴²

By way of recapitulation, I have argued that among virtue ethicists one can detect two main versions of the relation between virtue and action, the *reductionist* and the *non-reductionist*. According to the latter advanced by Hursthouse, the virtuous moral

concepts are not derived from them or reduced to them, as is the case for the basic notions. I here rely on Annas' distinction between primary and basic notions as it unfolds in J. Annas, [1993]: 9.

³⁹ For the claim that the moral value of action derives from that of character and the reflection on it see among others K. Baier, [1988]: 127; D. Solomon, [1997]: 165-167; S. Conly, [1988]: 84-85; P. Montague, [1992]: 53; W.K. Frankena, [1973]: 63; G. Cullity, [1995]: 289-299.

⁴⁰ See R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 87.

⁴¹ M. Slote, [1992]: 89. Note that in this book Slote proposes a *Neo-Aristotelian* virtue ethics and like Aristotle he believes that some names of actions connote depravity regardless of the character traits they spring from. Slote, however, in his more recent writing detaches himself from the Neo-Aristotelian version of virtue ethics and he proposes a more radical version of virtue ethics, what he calls agent-based virtue ethics. Although there are some essential dissimilarities between early [1992] and later [1997] Slote, even in his later writing he believes that some actions connote depravity regardless of the motive they are based upon. Slote replaces right and wrong with admirable and deplorable and he holds that some judgements of admirability and deplorability are not grounded in terms of character. Some acts are deplorable, irrespectively of any consideration about virtue.

⁴² See R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 58; *NE* 1107a10-11.

agent and her character traits do not play any foundational or reductionist role with regard to evaluation of actions. Evaluation of actions is secondary to or dependent upon virtues, in the sense that virtues and the moral agent who bears them offer the fine-tuning to concepts of right actions. According to the reductionist version *a la* Trianosky, Watson and Slote, virtues are basic and the evaluation of action derives from them.

Furthermore, given the fact that some virtue ethicists, such as Hursthouse and Slote, hold that actually there are some descriptions of actions that connote depravity no matter the character they come from, one could maintain that among virtue ethicists some proposed views about virtue and action are less unitary than others (all or most, but not all, act evaluations depend upon virtues). In other words, some virtue ethicists hold that although virtues can be characterised independently of actions, and most evaluations of actions depend or derive from judgements of virtue, there are some evaluations of actions that do not. D. Statman holds that only within the unitary version can one find the reductionist view.⁴³ However, the above analysis of Slote's thesis shows that reductionist views can be expressed in the concept of less unitary views as well. But Slote is one of the three reductionists discussed above. Do Trianosky and Watson subscribe to the less unitary reductionist approach as well?

Trianosky gives the impression that he subscribes to the less unitary view when he holds that "*at least some* judgements about virtue can be validated independently of any appeal to judgements about the rightness of actions."⁴⁴ However some lines later Trianosky makes explicit that the view he describes is the unitary reductionist view when he holds: "It is the antecedent goodness of traits that ultimately makes *any* right act right".⁴⁵ Watson, however, does not make explicit whether he would like his reductionist account to be seen as unitary or less unitary. Given this unclarity, it might be useful to leave open for Watson the less unitary reductionist view about the relation of virtue and action that Slote seems to accept. On the other hand, the fact that Watson does not explicitly mention any evaluation of action as being independent from the agents' character provides us with a good reason to consider him a proponent of the unitary reductionist, view that Trianosky puts forward.

⁴³ See D. Statman, [1997]: 8.

⁴⁴ G. Trianosky, [1997]: 43, emphasis added.

⁴⁵ G. Trianosky, [1997]: 43, emphasis added.

Apart from Trianosky, Alderman and Solomon, have advanced the unitary reductionist view.⁴⁶ They both hold that the evaluation of all actions not only derives from but is also reducible to virtue, to character traits. Alderman holds that the character of the paradigmatic individual is the highest good, irreducible and fundamental. Other notions such as rules, and the evaluation of actions derive from it.⁴⁷ In the same vein Solomon holds that according to virtue ethics,

the assessment of human character is [...] more fundamental than either the assessment of the rightness of action or the assessment of the value of the consequences of action. [...] [Virtue ethics] takes judgements of character or of agents as basic in that it construes the fundamental task of normative theory to be to depict an ideal of human character. [D. Solomon, 1997, 166].⁴⁸

I shall provide the following schema to illustrate the versions of the relation between virtue and evaluation of actions that can be detected among the aforementioned leading figures of virtue ethics. The two versions can be divided into the reductionist and non-reductionist and within them one can distinguish between unitary and less unitary views, as indicated in the following table:

VIRTUE & EVALUATION OF ACTIONS

A. Reductionist View	B. Non-Reductionist View
A1. Unitary Reductionist (Alderman, Solomon, Trianosky, Watson? ⁴⁹)	B1. Unitary Non-Reductionist (None)
A2. Less Unitary Reductionist (Slote, Watson?)	B2. Less Unitary Non-Reductionist (Hursthouse)

After providing a conceptual map of the way the relation between virtue and action has been conceived by influential virtue ethicists, I now wish to turn to the Platonic corpus,

⁴⁶ See H. Alderman, [1997]: 145-164; D. Solomon, [1997]: 165-179; D. Statman, [1997]: 8.

⁴⁷ See H. Alderman, [1997]: 155,162.

⁴⁸ See also p. 174, 176.

⁴⁹ I have added a question mark next to Watson's name because we are not provided with adequate material to classify him as a unitary or less unitary reductionist. H.Alderman [1997] and D. Solomon [1997] advance a unitary reductionist virtue ethics.

and to discuss how the relation between virtues and evaluation of actions has been viewed there. In particular the question I would like to address is whether virtue within the Platonic corpus is a primary or a basic notion, and whether the understanding as well as the evaluation of action depends upon it or even derives from it. I shall also examine whether there are any descriptions of actions that Plato considers to bear a connotation of depravity regardless of the character trait the action sprang from, or does Plato subscribe to the line of the unitary view, namely that the evaluation of all actions depend upon or derives from virtues?

4.3. Virtue and Action in the Platonic Corpus

In the early, transitional and middle dialogues Plato discusses heavily the notion of virtue and it is obvious that he considers it as a key notion in his ethical system. But how does Plato relate this notion with that of action? Plato addresses questions about persons, and about actions, in various dialogues, for instance in the *Laches*, in the *Charmides*, in the *Gorgias* and in the *Republic*.

These questions are distinct, but they may not be separable. We may seek to define a courageous action, independently of defining a courageous person, and then define a courageous person as one who tends to do courageous actions. In this case, a courageous action is prior to the definition of a courageous person. Conversely, we may discover that a courageous person is prior to the definition of a courageous action. Or, again, we may claim that the definitions are independent, so that neither one of them is prior to the other. Another way to see the relation between persons and action is in terms of the way we evaluate them. If one evaluates an action in terms of the consequences produced and one makes no reference to the character traits of the person who perform this action, then one associates the evaluation of this action with consequences, rather than with the doer's character traits. In that case, the evaluation of the action depends on the consequences the action produces. Also one can evaluate the action by referring to the character traits of the doer, and then, the evaluation of the action depends on the character traits of the doer. Plato does not declare his view on this question about priority. However, his arguments in the *Charmides*, in the *Laches*, in the *Gorgias* and in the *Republic* suggest that he does not understand the notion of virtue as a mere tendency to act in accordance with principles, but as a character trait which determines the evaluation of action. One can find implicit evidence of this claim in the *Laches*, and in the *Charmides*. In the *Gorgias*, we are given information about the conceptual

connection between evaluations of actions and virtues but it is unclear which kind of priority, if any, is at stake. The most explicit account of this issue is provided, I believe, in the *Republic*. But let us see first how the relation between virtue and action is treated in the *Laches*.

4.3.1. Virtue and Action in the *Laches*

The main conversation in the *Laches* is about courage, one of the virtues discussed within the Platonic corpus.⁵⁰ Two older men of Athens, Lysimachus and Melesias, are worried about the education of their children. Both come from well-known families and their fathers were eminent Athenians.⁵¹ Despite their origin, both Lysimachus and Melesias feel inferior to their fathers, they feel idle aristocrats rather than active citizens. They do not want their children to feel as they do, and become inferior in comparison to them. On the contrary, they wish for their sons to be like their own fathers, active citizens and eminent Athenians. Having this worry, Lysimachus and Melesias ask different eminent people for sound advice about their sons' education. Someone recommends to them for this purpose a new military exercise, fighting in armour. Two eminent generals of the day, Nicias and Laches, are invited to see with them an exhibition of fighting in armour. Lysimachus and Melesias seek the generals' opinion about its worth.

One might ask, why does Socrates participate in this discussion? He neither knows anything about fighting in armour, nor is he a military expert of any kind. Socrates is introduced to the discussion by the generals and, to be more precise, by Laches. The latter believes that it would be strange not to ask Socrates' advice concerning this matter, since he is of the same district as Lysimachus and spends his time discussing the pursuits of young people. Laches argues for the need to call Socrates to participate in this discussion by saying:

Indeed, Lysimachus, you ought not to give him [Socrates] up, for I can assure you that I have seen him maintaining, not only his father's, but also his country's name. He was my companion in the retreat from Delium, and I can tell you that if others had only been like him, the honour of our country would have been upheld, and the great defeat would never occurred. [*Laches* 181a7-b4, Jowett's translation.]

⁵⁰ The other four virtues discussed are wisdom, temperance, justice and piety. See D. Carr [1988].

⁵¹ Thucydides (the Elder) and Aristides (the Just).

Socrates, then, has been introduced as someone who has spent plenty of time addressing and discussing matters concerning the education of young people, and also as a man of courage, the very quality on which the dialogue will soon focus. Socrates, however, maintains that matters of this sort should be solved by appeal to knowledge, rather than to votes. He calls the generals, then, as the "experts" on this subject, to speak first.⁵² In the course of the discussion, the generals stress the pros and cons of fighting in armour. But, since the generals are in disagreement, Socrates is invited to lead the discussion. Socrates, then, by pointing out an important condition, changes the orientation of the discussion. It has been agreed first that experts should speak concerning any issue and hence concerning fighting in armour. So, one should look for experts. But, before one does so, one should be clear about what she seeks an expert in. It is not only fighting in armour that we should be concerned with, Socrates says. We should also ask "for the sake of what is this pursuit and other similar pursuits undertaken?" The answer given by Socrates to this question is for the sake of the treatment of young men's souls.⁵³ Socrates argues that if fighting in armour is intended to develop courage, its worth cannot be estimated before it is known what courage is. He holds: For how can we advise anyone about the best mode of attaining something of whose nature we are wholly ignorant? (190c). Socrates, then, alters the orientation of the discussion by arguing that an investigation of that sort, in order to be successful, must be clear about what it seeks in an expert and, before it does so, a prior question must be answered, namely, why is this pursuit undertaken. (184c4-7). By doing so, Socrates establishes himself as an expert. "Not an expert in fighting in armour of course. Nor a sophistic expert or orator, one who gives the answer in a great speech, *a la* Protagoras. Not even an expert about courage. Socrates is an expert in a search for the nature of courage".⁵⁴

Nicias confirms Socrates' expertise in searching and making his interlocutors do so in themselves and in their opinions concerning various matters by answering to Lysimachus:

Because you seem not to be aware that anyone who is close to Socrates and enters into conversation with him *is liable to be drawn into an argument*, and whatever subject he may start, he will be continually *carried round and round by him*, until at last he finds that he has to *give an account* both of his present and past life, and when he is once entangled, *Socrates will not let him go until*

⁵² *Laches* 184d9-185a7.

⁵³ *Laches* 185e5, 186c3-4

⁵⁴ G. Santas, [1969] : 437.

*he has completely and thoroughly sifted him. [...] And I think that there is no harm in being reminded of any wrong thing which we are, or have been, doing. [...] Indeed, I was fairly certain all along that where Socrates was, the subject of discussion would soon be ourselves, not our sons, and therefore, I say for my part, I am quite willing to discourse with Socrates in his own manner. [Laches, 187e5-188c2. Jowett's translation.]*⁵⁵

The discussion, then, continues as Socrates suggested. The theme of it is courage. The discourse is divided into two main rounds, one between Socrates and Laches (190d3-194c5), and the other between Socrates and Nicias, but with Laches participating often (194c6-end).

Within the first round of the discussion about courage, Laches offered three definitions of courage and they were all partly or totally refuted by Socrates. Laches' first attempt to define courage is a general's answer:

Indeed, Socrates, I see no difficulty in answering [what is courage]. He is a man of courage who does not run away, but remains at his post and fights against the enemy. There can be no mistake about that. [Laches 190e 2-5, Jowett's translation.]

Socrates, initially, does not disagree.⁵⁶ However, along the way, he reminds Laches of the variety of tactics, such as that of the Scythians or of the Spartans at Plataea, who have shown courage and have earned a high reputation in warfare, by fleeing and then turning back on the enemy. Apart from this fact, Socrates has one more reason to criticise Laches' definition, which he sees as too narrow and confined to military matters. But one can express courage in many other circumstances, Socrates says, and becomes more precise by listing different sorts of cases of courage. Socrates widens Laches' horizon more by holding:

[...] I meant to ask you not only about the courage of the heavy-armed soldiers, but about the courage of cavalry, and every other style of soldier - and not only who are courageous in war, but who are courageous in perils by sea, and who in disease, or in poverty, or again in politics, are courageous, and not only who are courageous against pain or fear, but mighty to contend against desires and pleasures, either fixed in their rank or turning upon their enemy. [...] *I was asking about courage and cowardice in general. And I will begin with courage, and once more ask what is that common quality which is the same in all these cases, and which is called courage?* [Laches 191c-191e, my emphasis.]

⁵⁵ My emphasis.

⁵⁶ He replies: "Very good" (190e6). He initially compliments Laches.

In his list of cases where courage can be shown Socrates includes not only war, but also situations such as disease, poverty, and public affairs. He also refers to feelings with respect to which one can be courageous. One can be courageous in enduring pain, in overcoming fear, in controlling desire, and in resisting pleasure. So, one can show courage in the battlefield, in situations concerning public affairs, but also with regard to herself, to her own feelings.⁵⁷ What are the benefits of this widening of the notion of courage?

According to Socrates, one main benefit is not defining courage by referring to specific behaviours or circumstances. Santas argues that "Socrates has introduced enough variety of behaviour and circumstances to make such an effort look unpromising".⁵⁸ Socrates proposes a new way to define courage. Instead of focusing on specific actions and circumstances in which one can show courage, one may look for the common quality in all cases of courage. Courage is a matter of this common quality that underlies all courageous actions in all circumstances. But, according to Socrates, one will be unable to define this common quality by looking at the variety of behaviour and circumstances in which it takes place. Socrates wants to find what is common, or what is the same, in all the different sorts of cases in which courage is shown. Socrates' request makes Laches supply two new definitions of courage, yet they are not sufficient to satisfy Socrates. These are the following:

- (a) Courage is a certain endurance of the soul. (192c)
- (b) Courage is wise endurance. (192d11)

Socrates rejects both of them for different reasons. He rejects the view that courage is a certain endurance of the soul because he finds this definition to be too wide. Endurance of the soul may be common to all cases of courage but it is not that which defines courage. Something must be added to endurance if we are to get closer to courage. This leads Laches to redefine courage as wise endurance. Socrates, again, brings in some counterexamples. He asks Laches whether he considers someone who spends money wisely or refuses to give food to a person who suffers from inflammation of the lungs as courageous?⁵⁹ They both agree that these cases are not instances of courage. For courage is admired not only because the end is noble, but also because the achievement makes some unusual personal demands on the agent. Socrates then proceeds to supply one more

⁵⁷ G.Vlastos [1956: xlvii] points out that Socrates is extending "enormously" the range of application of the concept of courage.

⁵⁸ G. Santas,[1969]:441

counterexample, which makes Laches admit that in some cases foolish endurance can be courage.⁶⁰ Laches has been led by Socrates to contradict his last definition that courage is a sort of wisdom and then is reduced to a state of *aporia*.

Since Laches is in this state Socrates suggests that they ask Nicias to offer some help. Nicias makes a fresh start in the discussion. He recalls what he has heard from Socrates, namely, that every man is good in the things he is wise about and bad in those he is ignorant of. Hence, he says, if the courageous man is good he must be wise. Socrates takes Nicias to say that courage is wisdom. When Laches asks, "what kind of wisdom?", Nicias offers a new definition:

"[...] courage is the knowledge of that which inspires fear or confidence in war, or in anything."⁶¹

Socrates rejects Nicias' definition [ND] too, with an argument, which has the following structure:

If [ND] then:

- (1) Courage is knowledge of future goods and evils (198b2-c3).
- (2) The science of all goods, past, present, and future, is the same science (198d1-199a8).
- (3) Courage is the science of all goods and evils, past, present, and future (199b9-d1).
- (4) Whoever has the science of all goods and evils has not only courage (and wisdom) but temperance, justice and piety as well (199d4-e1).
- (5) From (3) and (4) he infers: courage is not a part of virtue, but the whole of virtue (199e6-7).
- (6) (5) contradicts the previous admission that courage is only one of the parts of virtue (199e6-7).
- (7) We have not discovered what courage is (199e11).⁶²

⁵⁹ *Laches* 192e-193a

⁶⁰ *Laches* 193d7-8

⁶¹ *Laches* 195a1-2. Although this definition is attributed to Nicias, it is actually Socrates' own. Evidence for this can be found in the *Protagoras*, where Socrates offers as his own the definition offered here by Nicias and in the *Republic*, where he reinforces it. The words of Nicias in the *Laches* can be considered as indirect evidence. Nicias has said that he is well acquainted with Socrates and has been at many of his talks. That, he claims, makes him recall a definition given by Socrates, namely, that every man is good in the things he is wise about and bad in those he is ignorant (194d). Santas holds that "in the round with Nicias, Socrates is examining his own favourite doctrines (a situation that is repeated in Socrates' examination of Critias in the *Charmides*), and that, at another level, Plato is examining and turning over in his mind central Socratic doctrines", G.Santas, [1969]: n.10. and [1973]:110.

Towards the end of the *Laches* it is more than clear that the discussion will lead to *aporia*. No final answer to the initial question "what is courage" (190e1) has been reached by the participants in this discussion. Nicias and Laches, however, are in a better state of knowledge, since they now know that they do not know "what courage is". Similarly, Socrates confirms his ignorance concerning courage, but he knows more than Nicias and Laches. For he has known since the beginning that he did not know what courage is. Since none of them can define courage, they have no real knowledge of it.

Although the dialogue ends with *aporia* and leaves us just with the promise that it will be continued in Lysimachus' house next day, by looking back to Socrates' method one can detect some essential points for the relation between virtue and evaluation of actions.

Socrates calls upon his interlocutors to examine an aretaic notion, courage, and to attempt to define it, since they are generals, and one expects them to know it better than anyone else. When Laches refers to courageous action, trying to meet Socrates' request, the latter asks him to follow a different orientation. This is so, according to Socrates, because we are looking to define the common quality, that which underlies all those actions and gives them the name of courage (192a-b9). Laches then undertakes another attempt, defining courage as endurance of the soul (192d6-7) and enriches this definition by adding wise in front of endurance (192d10). For reasons that I have already explained Socrates is not satisfied with the above definitions. So, he asks Nicias to make his contribution to this investigation. Nicias ends up with the claim that courage is knowledge of what is to be dreaded or dared, either in war or in anything else (195a1-2).

Even if Socrates leads his interlocutors to contradict themselves, and reconsider what, until then, they had taken for granted as correct, he shows the path an investigation of that sort must follow. In other words, Socrates teaches that when one is looking to find "which actions are courageous", one should primarily search for the common quality which determines courageous actions. Courage, the common quality that all courageous actions share (192a1-6), is the starting point of such an investigation. Socrates also holds that a courageous person performs a courageous action, since she has in her character qualities required for such action. One cannot be courageous by undertaking no effort to do so. On the contrary, an achievement of a courageous action makes some unusual and personal demands on the courageous person, who is so because

⁶² For the structure of the argument and for the problems, which arise from it see G. Santas [1969]: 451-460; G. Vlastos, [1973]: 266-269.

she can face these demands. On these grounds, Socrates doubts that the person who spent money wisely, and the doctor who refused to give food to someone who suffers from inflammation of the lungs and begs, are courageous (192e-193a).

Socrates focuses the investigation on an aretaic notion, courage, and then defines courageous actions in terms of the virtue courage. He is searching for the common quality of courageous actions, which makes all of them belong to this category. He attributes, then, a priority to this common quality with regard to evaluation of actions, and maintains the priority of virtue (courage) over evaluations (courageous) of actions. He does not define the virtue courage by referring to courageous actions. He does exactly the reverse. He holds that what makes an action courageous is the courageous character of the moral agent, the fact that she can face a special, personal demand, rather than the consequences or the falling of the action under a universal maxim.

In addition, the factor that shows "what courage is" is knowledge, rather than actions. The latter will express this knowledge and will be dependent upon it. For Socrates, courage is not to be defined by reference to independently defined courageous action. This is so because the variety of actions resulting from courage cannot be independently characterised as having some single property apart from their connection with the virtues of persons. Bearing this in mind, Laches proposes that courage is "some sort of endurance of the soul" (192b9-c1). Laches realises that one cannot be called courageous by simply behaving courageously in certain situations described without reference to virtue or to courage.

Socrates' approach to the relation between virtue and evaluation of actions, between courage and courageous actions, marks an important influence on virtue ethicists. One of the main aims of virtue ethics is to focus on the agent, rather than on principles or obligations, and then argue for the primacy of character over evaluation of actions, namely that a virtuous action can be performed only as an expression of character. In other words, virtue ethics attributes to character a primitive role and renders the evaluation of actions dependent upon character traits, upon virtue.⁶³ Socrates, as he argues in the *Laches*, could be considered as a virtue ethicist from the remote past. For he seeks for this common quality that underlies all courageous actions, and thus makes them courageous. In addition, he considers courage to be a state of the soul, a kind of knowledge, rather than a behavioural tendency. Defining actions in terms of virtue and

⁶³ G. Watson [1997: 58] argues along the same lines. He writes: "basic moral facts are facts about the quality of character. Moral facts about actions are ancillary to these".

considering character as a primitive factor in the performance of any action is not something that occurs accidentally in the *Laches*, out of the whole Platonic corpus. In the *Charmides*, in the *Gorgias*, and in the *Republic*, one can find approaches with the same morals. In order to supply more textual evidence to examine whether Plato's ethics and virtue ethics theory share the thesis of the primacy of character over evaluation of actions, I shall discuss the relation of virtue and action in the *Charmides*, in the *Gorgias* and in the *Republic* in turn.

4.3.2. Virtue and Action in the *Charmides*

In the *Charmides*, the discussion focuses again on an aretaic notion, namely temperance (*σωφροσύνη*). The young Charmides, Critias and, of course, Socrates, take part in this conversation. As is often the case in the Socratic dialogues, Socrates asks for a definition, and in this particular case, asks for a definition of temperance. Throughout the dialogue, one can notice several dissimilarities in comparison with *Laches*.⁶⁴ Both interlocutors of Socrates are aware of what he is looking for, when he asks: "what is X?".

In the *Laches*, for example, Socrates, after Laches' first unsuccessful attempt to meet this question, explains to him and to other interlocutors that when he asks "What is X?" he refers to what is common in all cases of X, rather than to instantiations of X. In the *Charmides*, however, Socrates, neither makes this illustration, nor gives any examples of the sort of definition he is looking for. Charmides and Critias seem quite familiar with Socrates' method. With their attempts to define temperance, they seem to know the sort of thing Socrates is after. So, from their first attempt to define temperance, they meet the requirement of generality that Socrates is asking for.⁶⁵

What is also peculiar in the *Charmides* is the fact that the discussion focuses on a notion that it is very difficult to define. Unlike courage, *σωφροσύνη* had a great variety of meanings or uses.⁶⁶ This ambiguity concerning the meaning of temperance makes the work of Socrates and his interlocutors rather difficult. The number of definitions supplied throughout the *Charmides*, no fewer than seven, proves this difficulty. The first four definitions are offered by Charmides; the remaining three by Critias. The list of the definitions offered as an answer to the questions "what is temperance" runs as follows:

⁶⁴ Also with *Euthyphro* and *Meno*.

⁶⁵ G. Santas [1973: 10] notes that this familiarity with Socrates' requirement is rather surprising with regard to Charmides, since he is meeting Socrates for the very first time.

⁶⁶ See T. G. Tuckey [1951]: 9; H. North [1966]:156.

- (1) Temperance (σωφροσύνη) is doing (πράττειν) everything quietly and in an orderly fashion.⁶⁷ (159b2-3)
- (2) Temperance is a kind of quietness (ήσυχιότης). (159b6)
- (3) Temperance is the same as modesty (αιδώς). (160e4)
- (4) Temperance is minding one's own business.⁶⁸ (161b4-5)
- (5) Temperance is doing good things. (163e10-11)
- (6) Temperance is knowing oneself. (164d4)
- (7) Temperance is the science of the sciences including itself (or knowledge of knowledge). (166e5-6)

At the first glance, these definitions seem to have no connection among them, apart from the first two. This plurality of definitions shows that, by using the method of counterexamples, Socrates manages to refute Charmides' and Critias' initial definitions and makes them offer new ones. Furthermore, it seems that neither Charmides nor Critias had core opinions concerning temperance and, therefore, they were easily persuaded to give up definitions that they had just offered, and try out some new ones. The discussion, however, as in the *Laches*, leads to *aporia*, perplexity. Despite this finale, one can learn a great deal from the *Charmides* concerning the relation between persons and actions, virtue and conduct.

Looking back at the definitions that had been supplied by either Charmides or Critias, one can detect the direction in which Socrates leads the discussion, and what he believes with regard to the relation between virtue and action. Charmides' first definition of temperance is "doing (πράττειν) all things orderly and quietly". The young man defines an aretaic notion, namely temperance, in terms of actions. He also indicates that temperance is a matter of manner or style of behaving. Socrates foresees the consequences of a definition of this kind, and is unwilling to accept them. By treating "quietly" as equivalent to "slowly" and "arduously" he objects that, there are many, or

⁶⁷ M.F. Burnyeat [1971: 216] holds that "σωφροσύνη" is untranslatable, because the phenomena it groups together for Greek culture do not form a whole to our outlook".

⁶⁸ G. Santas [1973: 109] holds that "Plato himself at the time of the writing of the *Charmides* had not made up his mind as to what temperance is. The fact that a formula (minding one's own business) later used for the definition of justice in the *Republic* appears as a candidate for the definition of temperance in the *Charmides* coheres with this line of explanation". The claim that Plato was not clear about temperance at the time he wrote *Charmides* can be confirmed from the fact that he does not define temperance as harmony between reason and the appetites in the *Charmides*. It was in the *Republic* that Plato explicitly made the distinction among different elements of the soul (reason, spirit, appetite), a distinction that he considered as necessary for a definition of temperance as harmony. For

even more, actions where the manner which "looks well" is not slowness, but speed and agility (159c-d).⁶⁹ He then makes Charmides, who begins by clarifying temperance with doing (πράττειν), shift to quietness (ἡσυχιότης) and then to modesty (αἰδώς).

In the second definition, Charmides drops "orderly" (κοσμίως), and switches from the adverb "quietly" (ἡσυχῆ) to the abstract noun "quietness" (ἡσυχιότης). Socrates shows that he is unwilling to define virtue, in this case temperance, in terms of actions, and then persuades Charmides to do exactly the reverse, namely, to define virtue in terms of a state of character, rather than in terms of actions. Socrates approaches the relation between virtue and action, agent and conduct, by making clear to Charmides that temperance is not to be defined in terms of actions (by what is done, or by how it is done, or both). On the contrary, temperance needs to be defined by reference to properties or qualities of the soul, such as quietness and modesty, which presumably tends to produce certain sorts of conduct.

During the second round of the discussion, that with Critias, Socrates follows the same tactic. Socrates, after reducing the young Charmides to *aporia*, turns to Critias, and asks for his contribution to the common effort to define temperance. Initially, Critias commits the same fault as Charmides, by defining temperance in terms of conduct, by saying: "temperance is doing good things" (163e10-11). One might expect Critias, since he has heard all the discussion thus far, to make a fresh start and to come up with something better than Charmides' suggestions. However, Critias does not seem to have understood that Socrates is unwilling to define temperance in terms of conduct. After a while, Socrates makes this clear to Critias as well, by using the method of counterexamples. Critias, then, although he begins by defining temperance as "doing X", now shifts and ends up defining temperance as "knowing X". By doing so, Critias abandons all reference to conduct, and even to "good things", and comes up with "knowing oneself" and "knowledge of knowledge" as definitions of temperance. Nevertheless, in the *Charmides* we are given no final answer to the initial question, "what is temperance". Despite this deficiency, Socrates and his interlocutors supply the

the tripartite division of the soul, see, *Republic* 435c-441c, 580d-583a, 588b-589d, 608a-612a; J. Annas [1981]:123-146; T. Irwin [1977]:191-195 & [1995]:203-222; T. Penner, [1978]: 96-118.

⁶⁹ M. Burnyeat [1971: 216-217] holds that "the main thrust of his [Socrates'] accumulation of examples is against any attempt to equate modesty with whatever manner gives merit to the performance of the particular type of action, on the grounds that this may vary from action to action: to the extent, indeed, of involving contrary modes of execution, like fast and slow". It is worthy to note here that Burnyeat maintains that the Greek word *σωφροσύνη* may be represented as modesty. *Ibid.* 216

reader with some information concerning the way they conceive the relation between virtue and action. Although no definite answer is offered, through the search for the appropriate definition of temperance, Socrates uncovers one essential component of his ethical theorising: *the refusal to define virtues in terms of conduct*. Virtues are to be defined by reference to state of the soul, by reference to something other than actions. The priority of virtue over evaluation of action, and the primacy of the character over action implied by such a claim, incorporates a very Socratic doctrine, as can be seen in dialogues such as *Laches* and *Charmides*. Let us now examine whether Socrates argues in favour of considering the definition and evaluation of actions to depend upon character traits in the *Gorgias* too. In our day one can see many virtue ethicists arguing for the need to recall such ideas in order to face contemporary moral problems, for which, -according to virtue ethicists- only unsatisfactory answers have been offered by consequentialism and deontology.

4.3.3. Virtue and Action in the *Gorgias*

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates, among other things, defends his conception of happiness against Callicles'. Socrates values other-regarding justice and this makes Callicles offer some arguments against this version of justice. Callicles argues that Socrates has no good reason to value other-regarding justice. He holds that this kind of justice is not justice at all, and is really shameful, rather than fine. As Callicles puts it, Socrates' justice is just and fine "by convention", but not "by nature" (482e2-483d6). Callicles argues that it is just to give people what they deserve, and he holds that common-sense views about justice are based on mistaken assumptions with regard to what is appropriate for different sorts of people. This consensus gives what Callicles refers to as 'inferior people' the chance to restrain and inhibit the aims of 'superior people' (483e1-484a2). Callicles believes that a natural justice is better than conventional justice. He also holds that it is fine and beneficial for 'superior people' to observe natural, rather than conventional justice, and that it is mere cowardice for such people to observe the rules of conventional justice. What Callicles' finds unacceptable in conventional justice is the fact that the interest of many 'inferior people' should determine the appropriate treatment of each person. He wants to shift the centre of gravity and argue for the necessity of another kind of justice, the natural justice, whose standards will be set by the 'superior people'. The latter are not self-controlled people who have moderate desires to satisfy. According to Callicles, a self-controlled person lives like a stone, neither

enjoying pleasure nor feeling pain. How could a human being become happy, Callicles wonders, while being enslaved by anything? (491e5-6).⁷⁰ In defence of this conception of happiness, Callicles introduces hedonism (494a6-c3) and thus identifies happiness with maximum pleasure.

As an alternative Socrates propounds an account of happiness that one can possess after undertaking a kind of life that is satisfied with the things that are present on each occasion, "an adaptive" conception of happiness.⁷¹ According to Socrates what most secures happiness is to adapt desires to the requirements of the circumstances, rather than to seek to satisfy unfeasible desires (*Gorg.* 493c5-7).

Socrates' suggestion that we look for an "adaptive" happiness supplies important information concerning the relation between virtue and the evaluation of actions. In order to become happy, the moral agent should feel what the circumstances call for. In other words, to show sensitivity to the requirements of the circumstances, to adapt her desires to them, and then act accordingly. The way Socrates approaches the relation between virtue and action in the *Gorgias* might make someone think that Socrates does not provide sufficient grounds to consider his account as an account which puts forward an analysis of virtue as prior to definition or evaluation of action. For it seems that the moral agent is supposed to adapt her desires to the requirements of the circumstances and to act accordingly.⁷² But this approach recalls something from Slote's agent-focused virtue ethics. As I have noted, Slote considers Aristotle's ethics to be an example of "agent-focused" theory. Aristotle refers to the factor of sensitivity, which is an essential part of a virtuous agent's moral character and helps him understand what the circumstances call for. In the *Gorgias*, by suggesting the "adaptive happiness", Socrates subscribes to the same kind of ethics as Aristotle, in the sense that he is not explicit whether there is any clear-cut priority of virtue over the evaluation of action. It seems that the rightness or wrongness of the action is determined by what the circumstances call for, rather than by the virtuousness of the agent.

However, it seems that this line of thought does not do justice to one important claim that appears in the *Gorgias*. For Socrates in several places in this dialogue

⁷⁰ T. Irwin [1995: 117] calls this conception of happiness "expansive".

⁷¹ This is Irwin's terminology. See T. Irwin, [1995]: 106, 117-118. I have discussed this issue in detail in 3.4.2.6.

⁷² The expression "requirements of the circumstances" refers both to what is *achievable* in the circumstances and to what is *appropriate* in the circumstances, because the two ideas cannot be wholly separated.

undertakes the task of showing that there is not only a conceptual connection between the evaluation of actions and the virtues, between one's doing and one's being, but also that one's doing seems to be dependent upon one's being. At 472b-c Socrates discusses the case of someone who is happy though he is evil and acts wickedly, and the connection between someone's being and doing is explicit. Someone is not evil only when he will not do what the circumstances call for, but when he possesses the relevant character trait as well. By the same token at 487e Socrates reminds Callicles that of all inquiries, the noblest is that which concerns what a man should be, and what he should practice and to what extent both when older and when young. The conceptual connection between one's being and one's doing and the dependence of the latter on the former is something that Socrates has always in his mind in the *Gorgias* and any attempt to associate his analysis with Slote's agent-focused virtue ethics underestimates this important issue. For there is a passage where Socrates indicates that the evaluation of action depends upon one's character trait, one's relevant virtue, when he describes temperance in terms of the order of the soul and he holds that the doer of just and pious deeds must be just and pious (506e-507b3). The latter, apart from sensitivity, also shows that she possesses the character trait that is relevant to the action that she performs.

Socrates seems to propose a kind of happiness that differs from the one proposed by Callicles. He proposes an adaptive happiness and, by doing so, he seems to argue that the evaluation of one's actions is determined by the requirements of the circumstances, rather than by one's virtuousness. However, as I argued above, Socrates repeatedly connects the evaluation of action with one's character traits, with one's virtues and it seems also to anchor the former in the latter. So, Socrates' analysis of the relation between virtue and action in the *Gorgias* has only apparent similarities with Slote's agent focused virtue ethics.

It is not, however, clear whether it is to be understood as reductionist or non-reductionist virtue ethics. Socrates seems to be concerned more to show the connection between evaluation of actions and virtues and to suggest that we see the former as dependent on the latter, rather than as wholly derivative from it. In this sense I think it is better to understand it as non-reductionist virtue ethics. It is not however clear whether Socrates is willing to take one step further and to say that evaluations of actions not only depend upon virtues but also wholly derive from them. The account given in the *Republic* offers a more substantial ground for dealing with this issue, and I think this dialogue provides some evidence for considering Plato's analysis of the relation between

evaluations of actions and virtues in parallel with reductionist virtue ethics. But this claim will become more obvious after we explore the relation between virtue and action as it unfolds in the *Republic*.

4.3.4. Virtue and Action in the *Republic*

In the *Republic* the discussion is, among other things, about justice. This aretaic notion receives considerable attention and is the subject of many conversations between Socrates and different interlocutors in the early and middle dialogues. However, if one compares the *Republic* with the other Platonic works that have been discussed here, one can realise that justice is not one among the other three aretaic notions, (courage, wisdom, temperance), but is something that requires more elaborate analysis.⁷³ What is peculiar about justice can be better seen in the *Republic*.

Plato's *Republic* begins by presenting Socrates and Glaucon visiting the Piraeus, the port of Athens, for a festival. There they are jokingly forced to visit the house of Cephalus and his sons' Polemarchus and Lysias. Cephalus asks Socrates to visit them more often (328d), and he holds that he enjoys discussion even more as he loses the capacity for bodily pleasures. For one who knows that Socrates considers discussion and philosophy as the most important and urgent things in life -the unexamined life is not worth living (*Apology* 38a)- it is obvious that Cephalus' invitation to Socrates does not satisfy Socrates. Cephalus holds many other opinions, which make Socrates disagree and go through a long discussion, not only with him, but also with other interlocutors, such as Polemarchus, Cleitophon, Thrasymachus, Adeimantus and Glaucon.

Cephalus has spent all his life making money (320b). This can explain why he believes that doing philosophy is nice once you have nothing better to do, and that this activity is better suited to old men. Socrates asks whether Cephalus is able to achieve tranquillity because of his temperament, or because he is well off (329e). Cephalus responds that, although riches are not actually sufficient for a man to be just, they are a

⁷³ In the *Euthyphro* Socrates focuses on another aretaic notion, namely piety. In the *Protagoras*, where the unity of virtue and its relation are discussed at length, it is assumed that there are five virtues making up the whole of virtue, the four already mentioned and piety. The latter refers to dealings with gods and what concerns them (rituals, sacrifice, taboos). In the *Republic* 427e10-11 Socrates holds that if the city is completely good, then it will clearly have the four virtues of wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. It seems, then, that between the *Protagoras* and the *Republic* there is a considerable alteration concerning the number of virtues. In the *Republic* it becomes obvious that Plato does not consider piety as a fifth virtue, but he holds that piety is not distinct from justice. Dealing with the gods is merely a special case of dealing with others, and the latter is what defines justice.

significant help. He goes on by saying that it is very hard for a poor man to be just throughout his life, though rich men also can fail to be just (330a).

Cephalus maintains that "justice is telling the truth and giving back what is not yours" (331a-b). His notion of justice consists in observing a few simple rules or maxims like "do not lie" and "give back what is not yours". Socrates at once objects that there may be occasions when telling the truth and giving back what one has received may not be just. To justify his claim Socrates refers to the case of someone who borrows a weapon from another person and when the time comes to return it realises that the latter has become mad (331c). By doing so, Socrates rejects Cephalus' attempt to define an aretaic notion, namely justice, by referring to specific actions (331d). Socrates wants to define and approach the notion of justice not as a notion that can be understood by referring to different actions but as the common quality which is the source of just actions. In this sense Socrates seems to attribute priority to virtue over evaluation of action. An action is just because it is determined by a certain quality, namely justice.

Cephalus is another case where Socrates' interlocutors, who are presented as having a certain virtue and when asked, "what is this virtue", reply by specifying actions of a certain type. We have seen that in the *Laches*, Laches offered a similar answer and in the *Charmides* Critias and Charmides start, at least, in the same way.⁷⁴ Similarly, Cephalus, whom most people think is a just man, defines justice as performing some duties like telling the truth and not keeping what is not yours. In all these cases, Socrates comes up with counterexamples, in which one can discern that the definition that has been offered by his interlocutors concerning one, or other, aretaic notion, is misleading. The moral that one might draw from all these cases is the same: *no virtue can be defined in terms of actions, for the same kinds of actions might not display that virtue, and the virtue might be displayed in other kinds of actions.*

After Cephalus' refutation, Polemarchus takes up the argument. Although his first attempt to define justice shows that he is aware that virtue is not to be defined by offering a list of duties, in his second attempt he seems to do just this. Polemarchus suggests, first, that justice is giving everyone "what is owed", by quoting the poem of Simonides (331e4-6). Socrates holds that this is a poetic way to define justice, by saying that "justice gives to everyone what is due and appropriate" (332c). He asks for

⁷⁴ In the *Euthyphro*, Euthyphro seems to add his voice to this kind of answer. Euthyphro, who is a supposed expert on piety, is asked what that is, and he replies, "the pious is just what I am doing now, prosecuting for murder and temple theft and everything of that sort" (5d-e).

clarification and, by doing so, he shows that he takes Polemarchus' definition more seriously than Cephalus'. This round with Polemarchus makes clear that it is hopeless trying to characterise justice by appealing first to just actions. However, it does not offer a clear-cut definition of what justice is. Socrates challenges Polemarchus by claiming that if what he says is true, then justice is trivial, because there is no special field for it to be concerned with (332a-333e).

After being asked by Socrates, Polemarchus is gradually cornered and his second attempt to define justice brings him to the category of the people who define justice as a list of duties. Polemarchus holds that "justice is to do good to your friends and harm your enemies" (334d4-6). Socrates objects that it is ambiguous what exactly Polemarchus' means by "friends" and "enemies" and the moral that arises from Book I is that various definitions of virtue in terms of action are rejected. Polemarchus attempts to clarify his point by saying that a man's friends are those whom he takes to be good and enemies those whom he takes to be bad (334c5-7). Socrates, once again, points out that this is misdirected and refers to cases where the judgement of good or bad can be mistaken (334e). Polemarchus is shocked by the idea of harming someone who is in fact good, even if on the other side. Polemarchus' opinion is thus vulnerable. He seems to argue for a set of rules that constitute justice, but are not integrated with the way he actually lives. Finally, by using the idea that "no power can produce its opposite", Socrates gets Polemarchus to admit that justice cannot involve harming anyone at all, even one's enemies (335e). This is so because justice is a human excellence (335c), and excellence makes things excellent, not the opposite (335d). Polemarchus seems to represent the best that common sense has to offer about justice, but for Socrates, even this is not sufficient to define justice. As the discussion unfolds within Book I it allows us to hold that the definition of justice is not a matter of the performance of certain defined actions, a set of external demands to be fulfilled. Even if the view that justice is to be defined in terms of actions is not explicitly rejected, Socrates, by rejecting various specific definitions of justice in terms of actions, prepares for the association of the notions of justice primarily with inner states rather than with actions.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ One could argue that the possibility of finding a definition of justice in terms of a common feature of just acts still remains open within *Republic* I. However, in Book I we are offered many reasons to start associating the notion of justice primarily with internal states rather than acts. In addition, in Book IV this approach is proposed with clarity.

Cephalus and Polemarchus seem to represent, good or bad, what common sense has to suggest with regard to justice. According to Socrates, both attempts are unsound. Thrasymachus is the next person to participate in the conversation. His position is very different from Polemarchus', and is in a sense a natural reaction to it. What Thrasymachus argues has been considered very important. His theory about justice is an intellectual challenge. However, there is considerable controversy among scholars concerning what definition of justice Thrasymachus is presented as holding here. This is so because Thrasymachus states his thesis in different ways, which cannot be reconciled. We may discern four different interpretations:

- (a) Thrasymachus defines justice as the pursuit of the interest of the stronger or the ruler.⁷⁶
- (b) Thrasymachus defines justice as obedience to the laws.⁷⁷
- (c) Thrasymachus defines justice as the pursuit of the interest of another.⁷⁸
- (d) No consistent thesis can be ascribed to Thrasymachus in the *Republic* I.⁷⁹

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to argue for Thrasymachus' actual definition of justice in the first book of the *Republic*. In addition, the implications of any of the definitions that are put forward by Thrasymachus are the same for the relation between virtue and action and for justice. Thrasymachus holds that justice is not good for the agent and it is better for him/her to be unjust. Socrates undertakes the task of arguing not only against this claim, but also, after being challenged by Glaucon and Adeimantus, of defending justice as being better than injustice.

Cephalus, Polemarchus, Thrasymachus, Cleitophon, attempt to understand the notion of justice and see why justice is or is not good in itself. All approach justice by referring to actions. Cephalus holds that "justice is to tell the truth and to give back whatever you have borrowed" (331a-b). Polemarchus says "that justice is to do good to your friends and bad to your enemies" (334d 4-6). Cleitophon holds that "justice is to do what the rulers say" (340d). All of Thrasymachus' possible definitions of justice define justice in terms of actions. For all associate justice with certain actions that promote the

⁷⁶See J. Adam, [1902]: 25, 37; E. Barker, [1906]: 95; J. Burnet, [1914]: 121-22; F. M. Cornford, [1941]: 15; I. Crombie, [1962]: 81ff.; J. Findlay, [1974]: 162; P. Friendlander, [1964]: 61ff.; W. Guthrie, [1969]: 88-97; R. Nettleship, [1901]: 28ff.; J. Wilson, [1981]; A. Hatzistavrou [1998].

⁷⁷See B. Bosanquet, [1895]: 49; T. Gomperz, [1905]: 56-57; G. Grote [1869]: 195; G. Hourani [1962]; T. Irwin [1995]: 174-77.

⁷⁸See G. Kerferd [1947] & [1964]; J. Annas [1981]: 34ff.; P. Nicholson [1974]; T. Scaltsas [1993b]; F. Sparshott [1966]; and possibly T. Henderson [1970].

⁷⁹J. Maguire [1971]; Cross & Woosley [1964]: 23ff.; C. Reeve [1985].

interest of the stronger and none of them refers to any internal quality, such as virtue, which will be the source of just action.

At the beginning of Book II, Glaucon and Adeimantus, after a brilliantly fashioned defence of Thrasymachus' position, raise the possibility that the just person does just actions because of the consequences, and not because he wants to do so. Socrates argues against all these interpretations of justice. He wants to reject both the definition of justice as a set of rules and any assumption that undervalues justice, and to show that justice is good in itself, and for its consequences, as well.

Some scholars have argued that Socrates commits the fallacy of equivocation throughout his reasoning.⁸⁰ In other words, they have accused Socrates of proving something different from what he is asked to prove. Socrates is asked by Glaucon and Adeimantus to prove that it pays to be just in the sense of not doing unjust acts, even if one could get away with it. Socrates approaches this request by focusing on the just person. Does Socrates then change the subject of discussion? Does he commit the fallacy of equivocation, as some scholars suggest?

The factor that creates this problem is that the interlocutors of Socrates have a different understanding of the virtue of justice than the one Socrates has. Socrates' interlocutors reduce justice to acts and to a lawlike sense of justice. Socrates was asked to defend what has been called "vulgar" or "ordinary" justice, namely doing just acts and refraining from the unjust ones.⁸¹ However, Socrates believes that this orientation is not the correct one for what it is asked for, namely justice. For in Socrates view it is not possible to give an account of just acts *except* in terms of the underlying state of character. Plato gives prominence to this orientation very vividly in the *Republic IV* where he holds that:

[...] the truth of the matter was, as it seems, that justice is indeed something of this kind, *yet not in regard to the doing of one's own business externally, but with regard to that which is within and in the true sense concerns one's self*, and the things of one's self. It means that a man must not suffer the principles in his soul each to do the work of some other and interfere and meddle with one another, but that he should dispose well of what in the true sense of the word is properly his own, and having first attained to self-mastery and beautiful order within himself, and having harmonised these three principles, the notes or intervals of three terms quite literally the lowest, the highest, and the mean, and all others there may be between them, and having linked and bound all three

⁸⁰ See D. Sachs, [1963]: 141-158; R. Demos, [1978]: 52-56; J. Annas, [1978]: 437-51 & [1981]:162-169.

⁸¹ See D. Sachs, [1963]:142-144; J. Annas [1981]:153-169.

together and made of himself a unit, one man instead of many, self-controlled and unison, he should then and then only turn to practice if he find aught to do either in the getting of wealth or the tendance of the body or it may be in political action or private business -in all such doing believing and naming *the just and honourable action to be that which preserves and helps to produce this condition of the soul, and wisdom the science that presides over such conduct, and believing and naming the unjust action to be which ever tends to overthrow this spiritual constitution, and brutish ignorance to be opinion that in turn presides over this.* [Republic 443c9-444a3, Shorey's translation.]⁸²

Socrates' view of the relation between just acts and just men emerges rather clearly, I think, from the above passage. A harmonious soul is a precondition for just acts being worthwhile, because only with such a soul can one discern which acts are just, so that acting upon this knowledge, we can preserve the harmonious state. And the harmonious condition of the soul is what Plato understands as virtue. The evaluation of acts derives from the contribution that these acts made in producing or preserving virtue. Acts that are in accordance with virtue, with the harmonious condition of the soul, are good acts. Bad acts are those acts that do not contribute to virtue, and are against it.⁸³

Socrates' new orientation towards defining and evaluating just acts shows that the sphere of justice is not external requirements for actions, but a man's own inward self. It is the just agent, and his/her inner state, which are primary for him. By holding the above statement, Socrates consciously goes against the understanding of justice as expressed by Cephalus, Polemarchus, Thrasymachus, Cleitophon, as well as by Glaucon and Adeimantus, which takes justice to be essentially a matter of doing or refraining from certain actions. For Socrates, however, the primacy belongs to character, to the agents' inner state. As he says, the just man will deem and call just only that action, which preserves and helps produce this state of psychic harmony (443e). Harmony in the soul is like health in the body (444c-445b). And as healthy action produces health, so doing just action produces justice, and doing unjust action, injustice (444c10-d1).

Socrates' attempt to build a notion of the just agent and derive from it the notion of just actions is not accidentally present in the above passage only. The whole progress of Books II through IV has been an attempt to change the orientation and to look first to the notion of the just agent. Socrates, through the extended comparison between the soul

⁸² My emphasis.

⁸³ It is worth mentioning here Watson's claim of the explanatory primacy according to which "Right and proper conduct is conduct that is contrary to no virtue (does not exemplify a vice). Good conduct is conduct that displays a virtue. Wrong or improper conduct is conduct that is contrary to some virtue (or exemplifies a vice)". See G. Watson, [1997]: 61.

and the state, concentrates on the individual's soul, goodness and virtues. By considering also at length the environment that would produce and reinforce good people, the education that would bring them about, the proper artistic surroundings that they should have, and the psychological basis of all these, he has set aside the question of just acts. He has made the question of the just agent primary, rather than the question of just actions, which dominated the concerns of his interlocutors.

By doing so, Socrates has not changed the subject, as some scholars have thought. Rather, he has changed the method of approaching justice, of approaching virtue.⁸⁴ Socrates performs a great shift from the "act-centred" theory of justice of his interlocutors to the "agent-centred" theory of justice, and it is then implausible to expect any entailment between the two notions.⁸⁵ Just actions are derivative from the inner state of soul and they are just only when they preserve and create this inner state.⁸⁶

Socrates reinforces this understanding of the relation between virtue and action when he describes four types of deviant people, namely the timocratic, oligarchic, democratic and tyrannical. According to Plato, someone becomes timocratic by handing over (παραδιδόναι) to the spirited part (550b6). The oligarchic man is dominated by his appetitive part (553b-c), the democratic man experiences many desires with no clear hierarchical structure (561a6-b6) and, finally, the tyrannical man is dominated by demanding and lawless appetites (572d5-573c10). In the process of this description, which distinguishes the deviant persons from the just person, Socrates does not refer to their actions but only to the condition of their soul. For their actions derive from their inner states. Their character state determines their actions. Also many unjust actions look unattractive to just persons because they have their souls formed differently from the deviant people's souls.

4.3.5. Virtue and Action in the *Phaedo*

The dependence of the evaluation of action upon virtues can gain further support from the discussion in the *Phaedo*. In this dialogue Socrates holds, among other things, that

⁸⁴ J. Annas [1981: 161-163] holds that "it is to some extent a matter of taste whether we say that he [Plato] has changed the subject, or say that he has retained the subject but drastically changed the method of treating it. [...] *Republic* is best viewed as a magnificent balancing-act an attempt to answer troubling problems about justice by providing an improved account of what justice is. [...] They [Socrates and his interlocutors] end with a revisionary account of justice as psychic harmony, which is then checked against our ordinary intuitions about justice".

⁸⁵ See J. Annas [1981]: 162.

⁸⁶ See *Republic* 485dff., 443d-444e, and 588e-591e.

the soul is more valuable than the body (64b-e). For the latter is a hindrance in our effort to gain wisdom (65b) and since death is a release and parting of soul from body (65c, 67d) we should not be resentful when death comes to us (67e). The above claims provide some useful information for our investigation concerning the relation between virtue and the evaluation of action. For instance, one could argue that, since Socrates values the soul more than the body, and since virtue is understood as a condition of the soul and action as a notion associated with the body, then Plato attributes more value to virtue than to action. Also, one could hold that the evaluation of actions depends upon virtue. This understanding can find some support in the way Socrates defines an aretaic notion. Socrates defines temperance in terms of *being*, rather than in terms of *doing*, when he holds:

And then temperance too, even what most people name "temperance"- not *being* excited over one's desires, but *being* scornful of them and well-ordered-belongs, doesn't it, only to those who utterly scorn the body and live in love of wisdom? [*Phaedo*, 68c8-12, Gallop's translation, my emphasis]

Although the above statement does not provide us with enough material to classify Plato's ideas as reductionist virtue ethics, some Stephanus pages later Plato offers an analysis of the relation between body and soul which could be interpreted as an early expression of the reductionist view. Socrates holds that:

When soul and body are present in the same thing, nature ordains that the one shall serve and be ruled, whereas the other shall rule and be master [*Phaedo* 79e-80a. Gallop's translation]

Some lines later Socrates holds that the soul rules the body (80a5-10). It can be argued that the above passage does not only reveal the relation between soul and body. It also reveals the relation of notions strongly linked to the soul (virtues) with notions strongly linked to the body (actions). For in the Platonic corpus virtue has not been seen as a mere tendency to act in accordance to some principles but as a condition of the soul, and as such it is given evaluational and definitional priority over action, a notion associated with body. Actions are understood as servants of virtues, and then as notions dependent upon virtues. Also their evaluation as good or bad actions not only depends upon virtue but also derives from it. For actions derive their evaluation from their contribution towards the condition of the soul, towards virtue. In this sense the aforementioned

passage supports the reductionist view with regard to the relation between virtue and action.

4.4. Plato and Radical Virtue Ethics

Where does Plato's analysis of the relation between virtue and action in the aforementioned dialogues leave us? I think what is common among these dialogues is Plato's attempt to define the notion of virtue as a character trait, rather than as a tendency to act in accordance with some principles. So one can say with some certainty that Plato favours the priority of virtue over the evaluation of action, and that he seems to be the primary source of one essential and distinctive element of virtue ethics.

Within the Platonic corpus this priority is mostly priority in definition; for in the dialogues mentioned above the question "what is X" is central. However, this is not to say that evaluative and conceptual priority are not to be detected within the Platonic corpus. For in Plato when something is defined as virtue it is also taken to be good and beneficial for the agent and so has value. So definitional and evaluative priority are closely related in Plato. The same applies to conceptual priority. One cannot understand which action is just without knowing first what is just. In Socrates' words, how do we know whether someone has spoken finely or not, or done any other thing whatsoever, when you do not know the fine? (*Hippias Major*, 304d-e).

In discussing the relation between virtue and action within virtue ethics I have argued that the priority of virtue over evaluation of actions has been expressed in a reductionist and a less reductionist way. Given the fact that Plato believed in the priority of virtue over evaluation of action, can one draw some more parallels between Plato's ethics and the above versions of virtue ethics? One could hold that Plato provides some good reasons to believe both that he is a reductionist and that he is a non-reductionist virtue ethicist. For Plato is greatly concerned with the conceptual connection between act-evaluations and virtues and as we saw in the *Gorgias* the link is quite strong. There Socrates maintains that the doer of just and pious deeds must be just and pious (507b3-4). Socrates holds that act evaluations *depend upon* virtues, and this brings his account close to non-reductionist virtue ethics.

Also, the analysis of the relation between evaluation of action and virtue as it unfolds in the *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Republic* and *Phaedo* seems to provide some more reasons to consider act evaluations not only dependent upon, but also derivative from virtues and so in parallel with the reductionist view. Hence, Plato's account of the

relation between evaluation of actions and virtues seems to be in parallel with both the reductionist and non-reductionist virtue ethics.

One question that remains to be addressed is whether Plato's analysis of the relation between virtue and action subscribes to the unitary or the less unitary view. Does Plato believe that the evaluation of all actions depends upon virtues and character traits, or does he believe that there are some descriptions of actions that connote depravity regardless of the motive and character acts came from? I think an answer to this question can be found in the *Phaedo*. There, Socrates attempts to explain to Cebes that committing suicide is always wrong regardless of the character of the person who did it. For we as human beings belong to God and one should not kill oneself until God sends some necessity, like the one God sent to Socrates (62b-d). So, in the *Phaedo* one can detect a non-unitary reductionist view. But *Phaedo* is not the only dialogue of the Platonic corpus in which this relation between virtue and action has been advanced. In the *Republic* Plato does not only hold a reductionist view, but also a less unitary reductionist view. For he holds that there are some actions like stealing and killing, committing adultery, whose names connote depravity regardless of the character of the person who performed them (*Rep.* 443a3-10).

Plato's analysis of the relation between the evaluation of actions and virtues, as it is presented in the *Gorgias* can be considered as the forerunner of non-reductionist virtue ethics. The account offered in the *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Phaedo* and *Republic* has things in common with reductionist virtue ethics. In addition, from what is said in the *Phaedo* and in the *Republic* Plato seems to have in his mind some actions, such as suicide, stealing, killing, committing adultery, which are evaluated negatively without any reference to the agent's character. So, Plato subscribes to the less-unitary view. Plato's analysis of the relation between virtue and evaluation of actions is a first instance of non-reductionist (*Gorgias*), or reductionist (*Laches*, *Charmides*,) virtue ethics and less unitary reductionist virtue ethics (*Phaedo*, *Republic*) as the following schema illustrates:

VIRTUE & EVALUATION OF ACTIONS

A. Reductionist View	B. Non-Reductionist View
A1. Unitary Reductionist (Alderman, Solomon, Watson?, Trianosky, Plato's <i>Laches?</i> , Plato's <i>Charmides?</i>) ⁸⁷	B1. Unitary Non-Reductionist (Plato's <i>Gorgias?</i>) ⁸⁸
A2. Less Unitary Reductionist (Slote, Watson?, Plato's <i>Republic</i> , <i>Phaedo</i>)	B2. Less Unitary Non-Reductionist (Hursthouse, Plato's <i>Gorgias</i>)

The relation between the evaluation of actions and virtue is only one of the main issues virtue ethicists are concerned with. Some of them, (e.g. Slote [1995] & [2000]) believe that the notion of virtue can be the self-standing, fundamental, and basic notion in a moral system, and thus exclude the possibility of deriving its value from something else. Slote terms this kind of virtue ethics "agent-based" and he considers it as more radical than agent prior virtue ethics. For although they both share the claim that the evaluation of action depends on virtues, agent-prior virtue ethics holds that the value of the notion of virtue is based on something else, whereas agent-based virtue ethics maintains that virtue's value is self-standing. In the next chapter, I shall discuss in detail Slote's agent-prior and agent-based versions of virtue ethics, as well as the way (if any) in which Plato's ethics is related to them.

⁸⁷ Watson, Plato's *Charmides*, and *Laches* advance the reductionist view but no clear evidence is given about whether they are unitary or less unitary.

⁸⁸ Plato's *Gorgias* advances the non-reductionist view but once again no evidence is provided about whether it is unitary or less unitary.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Locus of Virtue and Its Relation to Happiness

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the relation between the evaluation of actions and virtue. Among other things I claimed that this relation, although essential for understanding virtue ethics' doctrines, is not the only relevant one. According to some virtue ethicists an informative account of virtue ethics can be discovered when one also focuses on virtue's locus in the whole structure of moral theory as well as on the relation between virtue and happiness.¹ These issues will occupy this chapter.

There are different ways to structure a moral theory, some more radical than others, not only concerning the relation between virtue and evaluation of actions (see 4.2.5.), but also with regard to virtue's locus in the theory. Slote's three main kinds of virtue ethics, namely "agent-focused", "agent-prior" and "agent-based" can be seen to represent, among other things, three different ways to conceive virtue's locus in the whole structure of the moral theory.

According to Slote, agent-focused virtue ethics is less radical than agent-prior and agent-based. For agent-focused virtue ethics does not subscribe to the claim that evaluation of actions depends upon the agent's virtuousness, as the other two do. From the way Slote describes the above kinds of virtue ethics it emerges that the claim of the priority of virtue over the evaluation of actions is something that agent-prior and agent-based virtue ethics have in common. What differentiates these two versions of virtue ethics is the locus they attribute to virtue within the overall structure of their system as well as the relation between virtue and happiness. To be more precise, according to Slote, agent-prior virtue ethics has the following structure: *Evaluation of actions derives from virtue and virtue depends on the notion of happiness or something else* (evaluation of actions → virtues → happiness or something else²). On the other hand, agent-based

¹ See, among others, M. Slote, [1995]; R. Hursthouse, [1997]; G. Watson, [1997].

² The arrows here represent the order of analysis rather than the order of explanation. If happiness is the basic notion then this is a kind of happiness-based agent-prior virtue ethics. See M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote [1997]: 209. Slote does not hold that agent-prior virtue ethics can take only the above

virtue ethics derives *the evaluation of actions from virtue, since virtue is an independent and self-standing notion, not derivative from any other. With regard to the relation between virtue and happiness, either the evaluation of happiness derives from virtue, or it is independent from it.* (evaluation of actions = virtue & happiness = virtue or evaluations of actions = virtue evaluation of happiness is independent from virtue).³

Slote belongs to the minority of virtue ethicists who discuss virtue ethics in parallel with Plato's ethics.⁴ He does so as part of his attempt to support the claim that virtue ethics "needs a more varied diet than Aristotle or Aristotelianism alone can provide".⁵ Slote also holds that Plato's ethics needs to be seen as agent-prior virtue ethics. For, Slote argues, Plato anchors the notion of virtue in the Form of the Good, and so he does not understand the notion of virtue to be explanatorily basic, and other ethical notions to derive from it or reduce to it.⁶ In what follows I shall discuss Slote's understanding of Plato's ethics and argue that Plato's ethics has similarities with agent-prior virtue ethics, but it also has dissimilarities with two current versions of it. In particular, I shall suggest that:

(a) *With regard to the locus of virtue*, Plato's ethics has affinities with agent-prior virtue ethics because the notion of virtue is not explanatorily basic. In Plato, virtue is strongly associated with the Form of the Good (as Slote claims, although he provides very little textual evidence).⁷

form. It can take any form in accordance with the basic notion. What is common to all these forms of agent-prior virtue ethics is that they do not attribute to virtue an independent and self-standing value.

³ Slote's analysis of agent-focused, agent-prior and agent-based virtue ethics can be found in his [1995]: 83-101, [1997]: 176-179, 206-220, [2000]: 326-330, [2001]: 3-37.

⁴ See, for example, M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote [1997]: 178, 210, 217-220. The other two members of this minority are G. Watson and G. Trianosky. However, they both discuss virtue ethics in parallel with Plato's ethics in a less direct and substantial way than Slote does. See in particular G. Watson, [1997]: 62 and G. Trianosky [1997]: 43-44. In Hursthouse's latest work on virtue ethics one can detect several references to Plato's work but Hursthouse does not discuss her virtue ethics in parallel with Plato's ethics. Her version of virtue ethics is Neo-Aristotelian. See R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 8, 167, 136-139, 172 n.12.

⁵ See M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 235.

⁶ See M. Baron, P. Pettit, M. Slote, [1997]: 210-211, 216-220. J. Annas, [1993]: 9.

⁷ L. Zagzebski distinguishes two kinds of virtue ethics, the motivation-based virtue ethics and the happiness-based virtue ethics. She also holds, I believe correctly, that Slote's agent-based virtue ethics is not happiness-based because it does not anchor everything in happiness. For according to Slote's agent-based virtue ethics, virtue rather than happiness is the fundamental notion of the proposed system. Slote holds that benevolence can perform this role, either seen as universal benevolence or as caring. Zagzebski derives from the latter claim that Slote's agent-based virtue ethics is motivation-based. She chooses this terminology because, for her, the virtuous person is the one who is characteristically motivated to bring about the well-being of others. For instance, the benevolent person is the person who is characteristically motivated to bring about the well-being of others. Another possible way to understand Slote's agent-based virtue ethics is to propose that it is a benevolence-based theory rather than a happiness-based theory. I do not intend to suggest a different

(b) *With regard to the relation between virtue and happiness*, however, Plato's ethics differs from two versions of agent-prior virtue ethics, one more influential than the other, namely Hursthouse's and character utilitarianism.⁸ According to the most influential agent-prior virtue ethics, proposed by Hursthouse, virtue is a *reliable bet* rather than something necessary and (or) sufficient for happiness. As I shall explain later on, although Hursthouse does not explicitly hold it, when she explores the above statement, she provides, I believe, evidence that she understands virtue as an instrumental means to happiness, though neither necessary nor sufficient for achieving that goal. According to character utilitarianism, on the other hand, it can be argued that virtue is a necessary and sufficient instrumental means to happiness.⁹ However, in Plato's ethics virtue is a necessary and probably sufficient constituent of happiness, rather than an instrumental means to it. The latter, I shall argue, brings Plato's ethics in parallel with Watson's agent-based virtue ethics (and possibly with one version of Slote's view as well)¹⁰ in which virtue is seen as the sole or primary constituent of happiness.¹¹

To support the above understanding of Plato's ethics, I shall work in the following way: First, I shall introduce Slote's agent-based virtue ethics and the way the locus of virtue has been understood in it.¹² Second, by providing some textual evidence, I shall offer additional support for Slote's claim that, with regard to the locus of virtue, Plato's ethics

terminology from Zagzebski's here. On the contrary, I refer to her work to better illustrate that Slote's agent-based virtue ethics differs from happiness-based virtue ethics, which is an instantiation of agent-prior virtue ethics. It is also worth noting here that although Plato's ethics and agent-prior virtue ethics share, as we will see, an understanding of virtue as not a basic notion, this does not entail that they are both happiness-based. Although agent-prior virtue ethics is an embodiment of happiness based virtue ethics, Plato's ethics, as I will argue shortly, is a Form of the Good-based theory. For the distinction between happiness-based and motivation-based virtue ethics see L. Zagzebski [1996]: 78-84, 165-166.

⁸ Slote illustrates his understanding of agent-prior virtue ethics by referring to Hursthouse's work. See M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 207-209 & [2000]: 327-329. Some philosophers think that character utilitarianism can be understood as a kind of virtue ethics. They have also argued that utilitarianism can be applied not only to evaluation of actions but also to evaluation of motives and character. In this case, when the nature and structure of someone's disposition is such as to maximise happiness, then this person has a virtuous character. For this analysis see among others, R. Adams [1976], R. Crisp, [1992], M. Slote, [1988], and P. Railton, [1988]. J. Oakley [1996; 148] outlines six claims as essential for any version of virtue ethics and he argues that character utilitarianism satisfies only three of them. As we will see later on (5.5.) Watson [1997] argues along the same lines.

⁹ There are more internal dissimilarities between Hursthouse's account and character-utilitarianism which I shall emphasise when I discuss Hursthouse's account in detail. See Section 5.5.

¹⁰ It can also be seen in parallel with Slote's agent-based virtue ethics, but Slote does not provide us with a detailed account of this relation. He only holds that happiness derives from virtue, or is independent from it. Yet the former claim, as I will explain shortly, can be compatible with an understanding of virtue as necessary or sufficient for happiness. But the latter (independence) cannot be detected in Plato's ethics In the latter virtue and happiness are strongly related rather than independent.

¹¹ See G. Watson [1997]: 62.

¹² According to Slote, agent-based virtue ethics instantiates the most radical version of virtue ethics.

has affinities with agent-prior virtue ethics, namely that in both projects the notion of virtue is not explanatorily basic. Finally, I shall hold that Plato's understanding of the relation between virtue and happiness differs from Hursthouse's agent prior virtue ethics as well as from character utilitarianism's¹³, and it has affinities with Watson's agent-based virtue ethics (and with one version of Slote's).¹⁴

5.2. Slote's Agent-Based Virtue Ethics

Agent-based virtue ethics is the most radical of the three versions of virtue ethics that Slote discusses. For, according to Slote, agent-based virtue ethics supports two main theses, whereas the other two (agent-focused and agent-prior) do not. Agent-based virtue ethics, as Slote reasons, has two main tenets:

- (a) "the ethical character of actions is not thus independent of how and why and by whom the actions are done".¹⁵ (as is the case for agent-prior, but not for agent-focused).
- (b) "[we] don't bring in claims about what constitutes human happiness or well being in order to ground judgements about the aretaic goodness of inner traits and the deontic or aretaic status of actions as well. Rather, claims or theories about human well-being are themselves derived from claims about virtue and rightness [...] or (perhaps more plausibly) treated as partly or wholly independent of such claims"¹⁶. (unlike agent-prior and agent-focused).

Slote illustrates the last claim in the following way:

In the latter case [b], aretaic evaluations of the inner life and claims about what constitutes human well being both count as fundamental and occupy the ground floor of ethics together. But precisely because agent-basing can proceed with moral evaluation *separately from any particular theory of human well-being* (and human good in the sense of human well-being, not of moral goodness), I won't be saying very much from now on about the specific character of human well-being or happiness. The whole idea of agent-based virtue ethics probably seems odd enough at this point just because of the way *it allows us to ignore theories of human well-being and base all moral evaluations of actions on the inner life*, so the most important thing now, as I see it, is to show why such an approach to ethical theory isn't really odd or irrelevant and is in fact very promising. [M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, 1997, p. 210, emphasis added]

¹³ See n. 9 above.

¹⁴ See n. 10 above.

¹⁵ M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, [1997]: 178.

¹⁶ M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, [1997]: 210.

Slote, as the above passage reveals, conceives virtues as basic, self-standing and fundamental notions. The locus that Slote attributes to virtue within the overall structure of his agent-based version of virtue ethics is that of the most valuable notion, upon which other ethical notions depend. Another way to express Slote's conception of virtue within agent-based virtue ethics is to say that virtue possesses an independent, self-standing value and it is the source of any other valuable thing within this domain. According to Slote, "agent-based virtue ethics bases all morality on aretaic notions, on the aretaic value, the moral admirability, of benevolence".¹⁷ Annas believes that "few if any have thought that virtue can do all the work in a theory".¹⁸ Slote seems to be one of them. As we will see shortly, this understanding of virtue is foreign to ancient moral theories and in particular to Plato. Annas probably has a similar thought in mind when she refers to Slote's work as an example of a philosopher who treats virtue systematically as part of a whole theory and has taken his model from the modern rather than the ancient tradition.¹⁹

Slote, however, holds that he has drawn inspiration not only from modern, but also from ancient sources, although, as he makes explicit, agent-based virtue ethics inspired from ancient theories is second best.²⁰ He distinguishes between *cool* and *warm* agent-based virtue ethics, and he seems to consider the latter better than the former.²¹ Plato's *Republic* and Stoics ethics are the ancient theories that Slote refers to as historical examples of *cool agent-based virtue ethics*. They both put forward a kind of moral theory that believes in the value of inner health and strength. The same applies to more recent theory provided by Nietzsche, Slote argues. The problem with these theories, according to Slote, is that they consider the notion of strength as fundamental and so they treat the aretaic notions of benevolence, compassion, kindness and the like as only *derivatively* admirable and morally good. And as Slote believes, this seems highly implausible to the modern moral consciousness.²²

Slote then turns to the work of J. Martineau and, more recently, to the works of N. Noddings and C. Gilligan and considers them as examples of *warm agent-based*

¹⁷ M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, [1997]: 220.

¹⁸ J. Annas, [1998]: 37.

¹⁹ J. Annas, [1998]: 41, and n.13.

²⁰ M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, [1997]: 216-220.

²¹ M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 219-220.

²² M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, [1997]: 219-220.

virtue ethics [WAB]²³ though not of the same kind. To be more precise, Slote holds that there are two versions of warm agent-based virtue ethics, namely one inspired by Martineau's *universal benevolence* [WABM], and the other by Noddings' and Gilligan's *morality of caring* [WABNG].

According to WABM, morality is better captured in terms of a ranking of human motives, from the lowest to the highest, and all moral decisions are accounts of the conflict between low and high motives. Also, according to Martineau, the right action is the action that springs from the higher motive and the wrong action is the action that springs from the lower motive. As Slote informs us "Martineau's hierarchy of motives ascends (roughly) as follows: vindictiveness; love of sensual pleasure; love of gain; resentment, fear, antipathy; ambition, love of power; compassion; and, at the apex, reverence for the Deity."²⁴ According to Slote, if we confine ourselves to secular motives, Martineau's theory is based on an aretaic notion, namely compassion or universal benevolence, and this is a fundamental, self-standing, basic notion.²⁵ For, as Slote argues,

[the notion of universal benevolence] is not committed to any particular conception of human well-being and is quite happy to allow us to admire a person's concern and compassion for human beings without attributing to that person, or ourselves having, a settled view of what human well-being consists on. [M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, 1997, p. 224]

Morality as caring is the other version of warm agent-based virtue ethics. According to this version, morality is a matter of showing care for near and dear ones. Slote also holds that morality of caring should be sensitive to the balance between near and remote ones and he maintains that:

morality as caring should say, then, that it is best and most admirable to be motivated by concern for others in balance with self-concern and that all and only actions and activities that are consonant with and display such balance are morally acceptable. [M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, 1997, p. 227-228].

²³ M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, [1997]: 220-229; M. Slote, [1992a]: 366; M. Slote, [2000]: 329-332, 337-339; M. Slote, [2001] ch. III and V. See also Slote's objections to some of Noddings' and Martineau's claims in his [2001]: 31-33.

²⁴ M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, [1997]: 221; J. Martineau, [1891].

²⁵ Slote considers Martineau's theory from a secular perspective, according to which compassion is the highest motive. See M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 217 & [2001]: 24, 29.

Slote makes no clear-cut choice between the two warm versions of agent-based virtue ethics, namely between the one that proposes universal benevolence and the other that proposes caring as a fundamental notion of the moral system. Actually, Slote believes that this is an arduous task.²⁶ What he is willing to propose is a moral theory based on aretaic notions, such as universal benevolence and caring, which treats them as fundamental, basic notions, rather than as notions anchored in independent conceptions of human happiness -something which is promising indeed.²⁷

As I mentioned in the introductory section of the present chapter (5.1) Slote belongs to the minority of virtue ethicists who discuss Plato's ethics in parallel with some versions of virtue ethics (e.g. agent-prior virtue ethics). I find this approach very fruitful but I feel that more needs to be done in order to do justice to Plato's ethics. Slote, for instance, reasons that Plato's ethics anchors everything, including virtues, in the Form of the Good, and so it does not treat virtues as fundamental, self-standing and basic notions, but rather as notions that derive their value from the Form of the Good. Slote, however, does not discuss the Platonic text closely enough to support this claim.

I shall now turn to reinforce Slote's thesis, that the status of virtue depends upon the Form of the Good, by discussing some texts essential for this claim. I shall also provide reasons to support the view that this parallel between Plato's ethics and agent-prior virtue ethics cannot be accommodated by the versions of agent-prior virtue ethics provided by Hursthouse and character utilitarianism; for the relation between virtue and happiness is understood differently in these two projects. Inspired by Slote's and Zagzebski's terminology²⁸, I shall argue that one could describe Plato's ethics as *Form of the Good-based agent-prior virtue ethics* in which:

- (a) virtue is not the most fundamental notion, is not explanatorily basic and
- (b) the relation between virtue and happiness differs from the one found within Hursthouse's and character utilitarianism's agent-prior virtue ethics, whereas it has affinities with Watson's (and maybe Slote's) agent-based virtue ethics.²⁹

In order to better illustrate this approach, I shall discuss the relation between virtue and the Form of the Good in the following section, and I shall dedicate the remaining sections to the relation between virtue and happiness among virtue ethicists and Plato scholars.

²⁶ M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, [1997]: 235.

²⁷ M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, [1997]: 179, 210, 235.

²⁸ See n. 7 above.

5.3. Virtue and the Form of the Good

Slote holds that Plato's ethics is closer to agent-prior than to agent-focused virtue ethics but cannot be considered an agent-based virtue ethics. For Plato, like Hursthouse, does not consider virtues to be the most fundamental notions in his moral system, since he anchors his moral system in the Form of the Good. In Slote's words:

And even Plato, who in the *Republic* insists that we evaluate actions by reference to the health and virtue of the individual soul, is perhaps better conceived as offering (only) an agent-prior view, since he also seems to think that (appreciation of) the nature of the Form of the Good represents a level of evaluation prior to the evaluation of souls, with souls counting as virtuous when properly appreciating and being guided by the value inherent in the Form of the Good. [M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, 1997, pp. 210-111].

Although Slote does not provide substantial textual evidence to support this claim, I believe his analysis is on the right track.³⁰ For Slote's claim that Plato derives the value of virtues from the Form of the Good is certainly supported by textual evidence in Plato's *Republic*. Plato does speak about the Form of the Good as being the most central notion in his ethical, as well as metaphysical and epistemological, theorising.³¹ He supplies us with explicit information about it when he relates it to the education of the rulers (550ff). We are told that it is not sufficient for the rulers to learn what justice, courage, wisdom and temperance are, according to the definitions offered in Book IV. He maintains that these definitions do not provide sufficient understanding of the virtues. There is something greater than these virtues and there is a "longer way" to understanding these things. Plato defines the effort to approach the Form of the Good as the greatest study. He holds:

- (1) The Good is higher than justice and the other qualities we discussed, i.e. the virtues (504d).

²⁹ See n. 10 above.

³⁰ Slote provides no explicit reference with regard to the *Republic*. Socrates articulates the thesis that Slote discusses in the above passage in *Republic* 443c9-444a3.

³¹ Plato discusses Forms in many of his dialogues. There is a famous passage in the *Symposium* in which one can see, quite explicitly, how Plato conceives Forms. Plato describes there the Form Beauty, the highest object of love at the top of the ladder of love by saying: "first of all is eternal, and neither comes into being nor perishes, neither waxes nor wanes; then it is not beautiful in part and ugly in part, nor beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in relation to one thing and ugly in relation to another, nor beautiful from one point of view and ugly from another" (211a). The Forms are at once the best objects of their kind and the best objects to know. For instance, in studying the Form of the Circle one learns at once what a circle is and what the best circle is.

- (2) The greatest study is the Form of the Good, by participation in which just things and all the rest become useful and beneficial. (505a).
- (3) If we do not know the Form of the Good, then even if without such knowledge we know everything else, it (the knowledge of everything else) would be of no benefit to us, just as no possession is useful without the Good. (505a-b).
- (4) If we know all things without knowing the Good, (this would be of no benefit because) we would not know (that) anything (is) beautiful and good. (505b).
- (5) The Form of the Good gives the objects of reason their reality and to reason knowledge of them. The Form of the Good is the cause of truth and knowledge. (508b, 508d-f, 509a).³²

In the above passages, we are told that just things and all the rest receive their being and essence by participating in the Form of the Good. In addition, nothing is good and beneficial without knowledge of this Form.³³ The Form of the Good is the cause of truth and knowledge as well as of when and how something, such as virtues, can become and be beneficial. It seems, then, that the Form of the Good is given a very privileged treatment; it is prior ethically, epistemologically and ontologically to everything else in Plato's universe. Even the virtues should be defined and conceived in terms of the Form of the Good. The latter represents a level of evaluation prior to the evaluation of virtuous souls. Souls are considered virtuous when guided by the value inherent in the Form of the Good.

Although Plato argues for the priority of virtue over the evaluation of actions in earlier books of the *Republic* (e.g. IV, 443c9-444a3), when he reaches Book VI he implies that an analysis of the virtues must be based on the Form of the Good. This tendency confirms Slote's claim that Plato anchors everything, including virtues, in the

³² Shorey's transl. For the Form of the Good and its value in Plato's *Republic* see G.Santas, [1980]: 374-403 & [1985]: 223-245.

³³ Santas calls the Form of the Good in the *Republic* a perfectionist and objectivist theory of goodness. "It is perfectionist in that perfect specimens of goodness, the Forms, are set up as the only measures of goodness of things in this world, with the Form of the Good as their formal, perfection-making property. It is an objectivist theory because whether anything, Form or sensible participant, is good, is independent of any desire, attitudes, or interest a sentient being may take in it". He also recognises two theories of Good in Plato's *Republic*, the functional (Books II-V) and the metaphysical (Book VI). He holds that we must seek the agreement between the two theories of good and to attribute "priority" to the metaphysical theory. "Plato must be assuming (1) that what function a sensible has "depends" on what it is, i.e. what Forms it resembles; and (2) how well it carries out its function "depends" on how far it resembles these Forms". See G. Santas, [1985]: 239-244.

Form of the Good. If this is so, Slote holds, then virtues finally derive their evaluation from something else, namely the Form of the Good.

It seems, then, that Plato's ethics, at least as it is presented in the *Republic*, can be considered as a forerunner of what Slote nowadays calls agent-prior virtue ethics, in the sense that virtue is not explanatorily basic.³⁴ However, between Plato's ethics and two versions of agent-prior virtue ethics articulated by Hursthouse and character utilitarianism, an essential dissimilarity also occurs; that is the relation between virtue and happiness.³⁵ With regard to the latter, Plato's ethics has affinities, I shall argue, with Watson and Slote, who in the framework of agent-based virtue ethics have proposed, or allowed, the possibility of understanding virtue as a sole or primary constituent of happiness.³⁶

In the following sections, then, I shall defend this claim by discussing how virtue ethicists and Platonic scholars have conceived the relation between virtue and happiness and in particular whether virtue is something necessary, sufficient, instrumental to or constitutive of happiness. As we will see soon, with regard to the aforementioned issues, the relation between virtue and happiness has been understood in a variety of ways, not only by virtue ethicists, but also by Plato scholars. First I shall highlight four different understandings of this relation within virtue ethics, namely (a) Slote's independence thesis [ST], (b) Watson's and Slote's thesis [WST] (c) Hursthouse's thesis [HT] and (c) character utilitarianism's thesis [CU]. The first two can be seen as representatives of agent-based virtue ethics and the other two as representatives of agent-prior virtue ethics. Then, I shall focus on the interpretations about the relation between virtue and happiness offered by Platonic scholars, namely (a) the sufficiency thesis [SFT], (b) the instrumental thesis [IST], (c) the identity thesis [IDT], and (d) the Brickhouse and Smith thesis [BST]. Finally, I shall argue against the instrumental, and Brickhouse and Smith thesis, and

³⁴ In his recently published book, G. Santas [2001: 1] argues that not only virtue but also happiness "are derivative ethical concepts, to be explicated in terms of Goodness".

³⁵ The relation between virtue and happiness is heavily discussed in the early and middle dialogues, whereas the Form of the Good is introduced directly only in the middle dialogues and more explicitly in the *Republic*. Slote's suggestion that we consider Plato's ethics as agent-prior is based only on the account given in the *Republic*. Mine, on the other hand, as will emerge later on, is based not only on the *Republic* but also on some other early and middle dialogues. While bearing in mind a broader picture of the Platonic corpus, it will emerge that Plato's ethics has also an essential dissimilarity with current forms of agent-prior virtue ethics, the relation between virtue and happiness, which should nevertheless not discourage us from examining the relation between Plato's ethics and virtue ethics. The dissimilarity between Plato's ethics and agent prior-virtue ethics reveals an affinity that Plato's ethics shares with the most radical, according to Slote, kind of virtue ethics, that is agent-based virtue ethics.

³⁶ See n. 10 above.

conclude that Plato's understanding of the relation between virtue and happiness is partly similar to Watson's and Slote's, while differing from Slote's independence thesis, as well as from those of Hursthouse and character utilitarianism.

5.4. Virtue Ethics on Virtue and Happiness

Virtue ethics possesses an ambiguity concerning the relation between virtue and happiness (good), as a result of which one can find in the literature four different theories which might be counted as a virtue ethics: Slote's independence thesis [ST], Watson's and Slote's thesis [WST], Hursthouse's thesis [HT], and character utilitarianism [CU]. All theories support in a radical or a moderate way the primacy of virtue over evaluations of actions.³⁷ However, their disagreement concerning the relation between virtue and happiness is quite significant.

5.5. Four Different Approaches

With regard to Slote's theory I have already (5.1) highlighted the main theses of the way in which virtue and happiness are related. Slote holds that either happiness derives from virtue or, more plausibly, that virtue and happiness are partly or wholly independent. In his words:

[we] don't bring in claims about what constitutes human happiness or well being in order to ground judgements about the aretaic goodness of inner traits and the deontic or aretaic status of actions as well. *Rather, claims or theories about human well-being are themselves derived from claims about virtue [...] or (perhaps more plausibly) treated as partly or wholly independent of such claims*". [M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, 1997, p.210, emphasis added.]

³⁷ According to Rawls, a moral theory treats primarily three concepts: the concept of right (wrong, permissible), the concept of good, and the concept of the morally worthy. Of these concepts he takes the latter to be derivative: "the two main concepts of ethics are those of the right and the good; the concept of a morally worthy person is, I believe, derived from them. The structure of an ethical theory is, then, largely determined by how it defines and connects these two basic notions". In Rawls' theory virtues are construed as "strong and normally effective desires to act on the basic principles of right". J. Rawls [1971] 24,436. Recently, a number of philosophers, such as G. Watson [1997] and G. Trianosky [1997], have expressed dissatisfaction with this kind of scheme on the grounds that it precludes from the outset views that give virtue a more central place (such as those, by and large, of the ancients). Watson maintains an explanatory primacy of virtue over right conduct and Trianosky claims that at least some judgements about virtues can be validated independently of any appeal to judgements about rightness of actions. Virtue ethics appears as a third alternative to the Rawlsian twofold scheme, which corresponds to another prevalent division of theories into teleological and deontological. According to Watson [1997:57], "we can avoid some unfortunate conflation by replacing this distinction as Rawls draws it with the threefold distinction that this discussion originally suggests: an ethics of requirement, an ethics of consequences, and an ethics of virtue or character".

In the above quotation Slote provides us with two possible accounts with regard to the relation between virtue and happiness, namely:

Slote's Independence Thesis: Virtue and happiness are partly or wholly independent

Slote's Derivation Thesis: Happiness derives from virtue.

Although Slote maintains that perhaps the relation that is more plausible is the relation that I have here called Slote's independence thesis, I think that, given the fact that Slote does not entirely exclude the derivation thesis, it is worth discussing both of them and seeing which one, if any, has its origin in Plato. One more compelling reason for discussing both theses is that another proponent of agent-based virtue ethics, namely Watson, seems to be in favour of the derivation thesis. For although Slote makes it explicit that it is possible to consider virtue as explanatorily basic in relation to happiness, he does not provide us with any account of whether he understands virtue to be a sole or primary constituent of happiness. Nevertheless his understanding of virtue as explanatorily basic in relation to happiness excludes the possibility of valuing virtue as an instrumental means to happiness. For if A is an instrumental means to B, then A derives its value from B. One could say, then, that given one of Slote's understandings of virtue, as explanatorily basic, it is very plausible to think that Slote's view is compatible with the claim that virtue constitutes happiness. But since Slote does not deal directly with this question we can gain some insight on this issue by turning to another exposition of agent-based virtue ethics, provided by Watson. Slote and Watson share the understanding of virtue as explanatorily basic and although Slote does not deal with whether virtue constitutes happiness, Watson does. I shall therefore continue by exploring Watson's analysis of the relation between virtue and happiness, I shall tentatively credit Slote with this thesis as well, and I will contrast what I call the Watson and Slote thesis [WST], with Slote's independence thesis [ST], Hursthouse's thesis [HT] and character utilitarianism [CU].

In his article, *On the Primacy of Character*, Watson suggests considering virtue ethics to be at once a teleological and a non-consequentialist theory.³⁸ What is the structure of this kind of theory? One can reasonably classify virtue ethics as a teleological theory, Watson writes, since it supports the view that the good is defined independently from the right. However, it is mistaken to think that consequentialism is the only way of asserting the primacy of the good. Virtue ethics differs from

³⁸ G. Watson [1997]: 57.

consequentialism.³⁹ "For Aristotle", Watson continues, "the virtuous person is not one who is out to maximise anything, nor is virtue itself defined as a state that tends to promote some independently definable good (these being two ways in which virtue can be treated in a broadly consequentialist theory)".⁴⁰ A virtuous person performs a virtuous action because it has value in itself rather than because it receives its value from some independently definable good. The conceptual scheme defining this Watsonian ethics of virtue is as follows:

- (a) Living a characteristically human life (functioning well as a human being) requires possessing and exemplifying certain traits, T.
- (b) T are, therefore, human excellences and render their possessors to that extent good human beings.
- (c) Acting in way W is in accordance with T (or exemplifies or is contrary to T).
- (d) Therefore, W is right (good or wrong). [G. Watson, 1997, p. 64].

It appears from (c) and (d) that, in a virtue ethics, right conduct is defined in terms of, or derived from, or explained by, reference to the virtues. Evaluation of virtue is prior to right conduct or to evaluation of actions more generally.

Concerning, now, the relation that virtue has with the good (happiness), Watson initially distinguishes virtue ethics from character utilitarianism, which he believes does not qualify as a virtue ethics theory; for character utilitarianism neither treats virtue as an explanatorily basic notion, nor as the sole or primary constituent of good, as virtue ethics does.⁴¹ But let us see first the main theses of character utilitarianism:

According to character utilitarianism,

- (1) the virtues are human traits that promote human happiness (the good) more than alternative traits; and in turn,
- (2) right conduct is defined as conduct which is contrary to no virtue and wrong conduct contrary to some virtue.⁴²

Character utilitarianism gives a more prominent role to virtues than do rule or act utilitarian theories, or even deontological theories. According to character utilitarianism,

³⁹ Ibid. 57.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 57.

⁴¹ Ibid. 62.

⁴² Watson [1997: 61] agrees with (2) but rejects (1). Instead, he puts forward the following claim: Virtues are human excellences, that is, those traits that enable one to live a characteristically human life, or to live in accordance with one's nature as a human being.

virtues are primary over right conduct. If this is so, then, as Santas argues,⁴³ this theory can even satisfy the two conditions by which Trianosky isolated a “pure” virtue ethics from deontology and consequentialism, namely:

- (a) at least some judgements about virtue can be validated independently of any appeal to judgements about the rightness of actions;
- (b) it is this antecedent goodness of traits which ultimately makes any right act right. [G. Trianosky, 1997, p. 43].

Watson disagrees with Santas, and is unwilling to accept character utilitarianism as a meaningful candidate for virtue ethics.⁴⁴ Even if character utilitarianism satisfies Trianosky’s conditions, as Santas argues, it does not affirm the primacy of virtue over other values, because it lacks one of the essential features that Watson’s virtue ethics should possess.⁴⁵ If character utilitarianism were an ethics of virtue, we would not have succeeded in identifying an ethics of a third kind, that is, an ethics different from deontology and consequentialism, as Watson maintains.⁴⁶ To observe this, recall Rawls’ central concepts of moral philosophy, namely right, good and moral worth, and virtue ethics’ main thesis that virtues are prior to right conduct. One can reasonably argue that the three central concepts of moral philosophy correspond to the three distinct types of theory that take one of these as basic: the concept of right to the ethics of requirement, the concept of good to the ethics of consequences, and the concept of moral or worth to the ethics of virtue or character. Plainly, character utilitarianism belongs to the second category, even though character utilitarianism differs from its cousins, such as rule and act utilitarianism. It is not taking the consequences of actions as the direct standard of appraisal for those actions, - and hence is not consequentialist in the sense that Rawls’ attributes to the term.⁴⁷ The value of the outcome of possessing and exercising certain traits is the ultimate standard of all other value. However, it shares with act utilitarianism the idea that the most fundamental notion is that of good consequences or states of affairs, and that compels Watson to classify character utilitarianism as a part of the

⁴³ G. Santas [1997]: 263.

⁴⁴ However, some virtue ethicists hold that character utilitarianism could be considered as a version of virtue ethics. See n. 8 above.

⁴⁵ G. Watson [1997]: 62.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 61.

⁴⁷ It defines the right in terms of the good. An example of this is classical utilitarianism which defines right action as maximising human happiness, (or the satisfaction of rational desire), which is taken to be an intrinsic or the ultimate end.

general class of theories that he calls *ethics of outcome*.⁴⁸ The facts that character utilitarianism takes to be morally basic are not facts about virtues. Virtues are so identified because of their relation to independent values, such as happiness. Although character utilitarianism attributes to virtues a prominent role, virtues are still logically posterior to happiness (or to good). Virtues, then, promote happiness and are instrumental means to happiness.

According to Watson, if virtue ethics constitutes a theory of a third kind, different from the ethics of requirements (deontology) and the ethics of consequences, we should avoid classifying it as a species of *ethics of outcomes*.⁴⁹ On the basis of the relation between good and right conduct, both virtue ethics and the ethics of outcomes consider the good independently from the right. If one is to limit the investigation to the relation between good and right, then virtue ethics and ethics of outcome are inseparable from each other.

However, if one is to extend the investigation to also examining the relation between virtue and happiness (good), then different results will emerge. When it comes to the relation between virtue and happiness, virtue ethics and character utilitarianism support different accounts, which provide sufficient reasons for them to be considered different theories. What distinguishes an ethics of virtue from character utilitarianism is that the former –unlike the latter- sees virtues as explanatorily basic and takes them to be at least partially constitutive of happiness. So, virtue and happiness are strongly linked rather than independent. Watson rejects the account of virtues as instrumental to happiness and holds that virtues should be the sole or primary constituent of happiness.⁵⁰ Watson argues that:

if there were other constituents of flourishing, it would be arbitrary to make the theory the namesake of virtue. (It should then be called an ethics of virtue plus whatever else constitutes flourishing). Thus virtue must be construed as the sole or primary constituent of flourishing, as it was by Socrates.⁵¹

⁴⁸ G. Watson [1997]: 61.

⁴⁹ Ibid.62.

⁵⁰ Ibid.62.

⁵¹ Ibid.62. In 5.6.3.2, I argue that Watson's reference to Socrates is partially valid. Socrates holds that virtue is the primary, rather than the sole, constituent of happiness. Note that here happiness, flourishing and living well are used interchangeably. For the different possible translations of the word *eudaimonia* and the advantages as well as the disadvantages of each one of them see Hursthouse's insightful discussion in her [1999]: 9-10. For an illuminating discussion of tensions

According to Watson, then, an ethics of virtue should support two main claims concerning the relation between happiness and virtue:

- (a) Virtues are not instrumental means to happiness.
- (b) Virtues are the sole or primary constituent of happiness (and so strongly linked rather than independent).⁵²

Hursthouse also associates virtue with happiness, but her understanding of this relation differs from Watson's and it is not an exaggeration to argue that it is, in some respects, more similar to that provided by character utilitarianism. Virtue ethics, Hursthouse claims, forges a conceptual link between virtue and flourishing (or living well), by holding that "a virtue is a character trait a human being needs to flourish or live well".⁵³ Virtue ethics, then, specifies "right action in terms of the virtuous agent and then specifies her in terms of the virtues, and then specifies these, not merely as dispositions to right action, but as the character traits (which are dispositions to feel and react as well as act in certain way) required for *eudaimonia*."⁵⁴

Hursthouse, however, in her more recent work uses a more cryptic terminology to express her understanding of the relation between virtue and happiness. She, unlike Watson, denies subscribing to the claim that virtue is a necessary and sufficient constituent of happiness. For if virtue is the sole constituent of happiness, then virtue is not only necessary, but also sufficient, for happiness. Hursthouse actually believes that although virtue is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness, it is nevertheless the only *reliable bet* for the latter.⁵⁵ Hursthouse illustrates her claim with the following example:

Suppose my doctor said, "You would benefit from a regimen in which you gave up smoking, took regular exercise, and moderated your drinking". Her grounds

between modern conceptions of happiness and ancient ideas of *eudaimonia* see J. Annas [1998]. For different facets of flourishing see T. Hurka, [1999]: 44 -71.

⁵²Concerning the locus of virtue, Watson's virtue theory treats virtue as an explanatorily basic notion. Watson holds that this is the main difference between his virtue ethics and character utilitarianism. Now, recalling Slote's terminology, Watson's virtue ethics is an agent-based virtue ethics. However, since Watson can be interpreted as holding the claim that virtue is the sole or primary constituent of happiness, then virtue and happiness are not independent as Slote's independence thesis requires. Thus, Watson's understanding of the relation between virtue and happiness coheres with Slote's derivation thesis.

⁵³ R. Hursthouse, [1997]: 229.

⁵⁴ R. Hursthouse, [1997]: 229.

⁵⁵ R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 172-177.

are that that's the way to flourish physically, to be healthy, to live a long, healthy life. But she does not thereby offer me a guarantee of a long healthy life. If, despite following her advice, I develop lung cancer or heart disease or my liver fails, in my youth or middle age, this does not impugn the correctness of what she said; I can't go back to her and say, "You were wrong to tell me I should give up smoking, etc.- look, it hasn't worked". She and I both know that doing as she says does not guarantee perfect health. Nevertheless, if perfect health is what I want, the only thing to do is to follow her advice and hope that I shall not be unlucky. Similarly, the claim is not that possession of the virtues guarantees that one will flourish. The claim is that they are the only reliable bet. [...] Why should we accept that "the only thing to do" is to acquire and exercise the virtues, as if, despite not being a sufficient condition of happiness, virtue was necessary? [...] Does my doctor's right answer to my question about how I should live claim that following the regimen she outlines is necessary for a long healthy life? No, because if it did, it would be readily falsified; the newspapers regularly describe the lives of people who have achieved remarkable longevity and are in as healthy a state as anyone of their age could possibly be expected to be, despite flouting as least some of the requirements she laid down. [...] To claim that the virtues, for the most part, benefit their possessor, enabling her to flourish, is not to claim that virtue is necessary for happiness. It is to claim that no "regimen" will serve one better- no other candidate "regimen" is remotely plausible. [R. Hursthouse, 1999, 172-173]

One could say with some certainty that Hursthouse proposes a happiness-based moral theory or more precisely a happiness-based agent-prior virtue ethics. However, when one attempts to examine the relation between virtue and happiness that Hursthouse has in mind it is not easy to grasp a clear understanding of the issue. For Hursthouse's terminology, although carefully chosen, is not very informative. What does "reliable bet" mean? What is the best way to grasp this term, and the value of the notions named after it? Let us focus once again on Hursthouse's reasoning.

Hursthouse holds that virtues are "reliable bets" rather than something necessary and (or) sufficient for happiness. If virtues are valuable only when they promote happiness, then virtues are instrumental means to happiness. As Hursthouse's reasoning seems to allow, virtues are probably instrumental means to happiness, but neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness. Although an understanding of virtue as an instrumental means to happiness is not a favourite view of virtue ethicists, Hursthouse's terminology appears to permit it. In fact, the idea that something is generally reliable, but also subject to luck,⁵⁶ seems to work better with what we consider to be instrumental means than with what we consider to be the sole or primary constituent. Another reason that provides further support to this line of interpretation of Hursthouse's account is the list of goods that Hursthouse mentions as goods that virtue

promotes, namely, life, continuance of the species, characteristic pleasure and freedom from pain, good functioning of the social group. Most of them seem to be goods distinct from virtue.⁵⁷

However, one could say that neither Hursthouse, nor any other virtue ethicists, would be happy to see virtue as an instrumental means to happiness. For if this is the case how can one distinguish Hursthouse's virtue ethics from character utilitarianism? One could provide the following possible answers to this worry. For instance, Hursthouse's theory is in some degree an instrumentalist, though of course not a utilitarian, one. The requirement of maximisation of happiness, central within character utilitarianism, is not part of Hursthouse's theory. Also, Hursthouse holds that virtue can promote several incommensurable goods. But the notion of maximisation does not make sense if there are several incommensurable goods. Furthermore, promoting goods or making them possible need not involve maximising them. Finally, Hursthouse seems to be largely, though not exclusively, concerned with the agent's good, and perhaps that of her community and those close to her, rather than with the general good, as character utilitarianism is.⁵⁸

Bearing in mind the above debate, which occupies virtue ethics' proponents, it would be very difficult to explicate which one of the four approaches, Slote's independence thesis [ST], Watson's and Slote's thesis [WST], Hursthouse's thesis [HT], and character utilitarianism [CU], is the most promising. Any attempt, then, to find similarities and dissimilarities between Plato's ethics and virtue ethics, concerning the relation between virtue and happiness, would be misdirected, unless it clarifies which

⁵⁶ See R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 172, 185.

⁵⁷ It is worth noting here that it is possible the latter two goods may include virtue to some extent. Hursthouse's account of virtue and the good that it promotes can be seen in her [1999], ch. 9-10, see in particular p. 200-201, 211-216.

⁵⁸ Although most of the evidence supports the view that Hursthouse's view is an instrumental one, though not utilitarian, one could also attempt to interpret her position in the following way: Given the fact that Hursthouse is a proponent of virtue ethics and she is mostly concerned with revealing the essential role that virtue can perform in a moral theory of this kind, one could say that the term "reliable bet" also allows to see virtue as a constituent of happiness, though not the sole or the primary constituent of happiness. Within character utilitarianism, on the other hand, there is no room for such a consideration. Hursthouse's suggestion, then, that we see virtues as reliable bets for happiness rather than as something necessary or sufficient for happiness, can be understood in the instrumental way (which is probably the most plausible), but also in the constitutive way. But the latter differs substantially from Watson's. For one could say that Watson proposes two versions of the constitutive theory (sole or primary constituent of happiness), and he is willing to support either of them, whereas Hursthouse could be considered to support a third version, namely to see virtue as a constituent but neither as sole nor as primary constituent of happiness. Although understanding Hursthouse in the above way might be tempting, her account provides more evidence to support the instrumental view and so I shall treat Hursthouse as representative of the instrumental, though not utilitarian, position.

one of the above theses it is referring to. One might avoid addressing this question while examining the relation between Plato's ethics and virtue ethics on the basis of the claim that virtues are prior to right conduct. This is so, because this claim is viewed as generally acceptable, although with some variations, by the approaches to virtue ethics that I am discussing in this chapter. However, concerning the relation between virtue and happiness the controversy among the supporters of virtue ethics is crucial, and one should make clear that one is comparing Plato's conception of this relation with either ST, WST, HT or finally with CU. Furthermore, this attempt presupposes a generally accepted analysis of Plato's ethical theory and in particular of the relation between virtue and happiness. However, a brief investigation of the literature should be enough to show that this is not the case. Initially, then, any attempt to compare Plato's ethics and virtue ethics calls for a discussion of the historical and contemporary controversy concerning the relation between virtue and happiness in Plato to which I shall now turn.

5.6. Plato on Virtue and Happiness

There is considerable controversy among Platonic scholars with regard to the relation between virtue and happiness, as it unfolds in the Platonic corpus. The literature offers four main interpretations of the above relation. These are:

- (1) *The instrumental thesis [IST]*, according to which, virtue is desirable only as an instrumental means to happiness, rather than for its own sake. This interpretation is offered by T. Irwin according to whom it applies only to early Platonic dialogues, such as *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Euthydemus*, and *Protagoras*.⁵⁹
- (2) *The sufficiency thesis [SFT]*, according to which the relation between virtue and happiness is constitutive, but only partly so. The proponents of this thesis hold that virtue is a principal, a primary component of happiness, but not the only thing desirable for its own sake. This is Vlastos' and Irwin's interpretation. Vlastos, however, argues that this interpretation applies both to the early and middle Platonic dialogues, whereas Irwin proposes this interpretation for the middle Platonic dialogues but not for the early ones.⁶⁰
- (3) *The identity thesis [IDT]*, according to which the relation is constitutive *in toto*. According to this theory, virtue is happiness -the only thing that makes life good and

⁵⁹ T. Irwin [1977]: 37-110 & [1995]: 31-126.

⁶⁰ G.Vlastos [1991]: 200-233; T. Irwin [1995]: 169-261.

satisfying. Vlastos offered this interpretation in his article *Socrates' Contribution to the Greek Sense of Justice*.⁶¹ Yet in his book *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, he explains why he thinks that this interpretation is unsound for Plato's ethical theory.⁶² Recently, Annas has reinforced this claim by arguing that virtue is actually sufficient for happiness and thus its sole constituent.⁶³

- (4) *The Brickhouse and Smith thesis [BST]*, according to which the virtuous condition of the soul is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness. Only good action, and especially unimpeded activity guided by virtue, will enable us to live a happy life. Such activity is both necessary and sufficient for happiness. And living without impediment a life that is guided by virtue ensures the happiest life.⁶⁴

The above disagreement further complicates our task of comparing Plato's ethics and virtue ethics on the basis of the relation between virtue and happiness. However, one can say with some certainty that Slote's independence thesis is a thesis that does not have its origin in Plato's ethics. For what all the proposed interpretations above reveal is that virtue and happiness are in many ways connected rather than independent.⁶⁵ Yet it seems that, in some sense, all but one -namely Slote's independence thesis [ST]- of the aforementioned approaches within virtue ethics drew inspiration from Plato; for either their instrumental or their constitutive understanding of virtue occurs in his work according to Platonic scholars. One way out of this impasse is to examine whether the proposed accounts concerning the Platonic analysis of virtue and its relation to happiness are sound. Some of them are probably misdirected. If this is so, then one can focus the analysis on the remaining interpretations by comparing them with the three virtue ethics theories, namely Watson's and Slote's theory [WST], Hursthouse's theory [HT] and

⁶¹ G.Vlastos [1980]: 311,314. See also J. Mabbott, [1971]: 57-65.

⁶² G.Vlastos [1991]: 200-233.

⁶³ J. Annas, [1999]: 33.

⁶⁴ T. Brickhouse & N. Smith [1994]: 103-136. Vlastos insists that their claim concerning the insufficiency of virtue is "textually groundless, for it is built up on a supposed "Socratic distinction between [a] virtue considered as a condition of the soul, and [b] (virtue considered as) virtuous activity" which has no foundation in our Socratic texts: such a distinction is never mentioned in any of Plato's earlier dialogues nor could it be expressed in their vocabulary, as its proponents would have realised if they had asked themselves how the quoted statement could be translated into Greek without resort to Aristotelian idiolect, ἔξις for [a], ἐνέργεια for [b]. To give Socrates' moral theory the benefit of one of Aristotle's salient innovations would be plainly anachronistic". See G. Vlastos [1991]: 232 n.103. Zeyl maintains that a virtuous soul and a virtuous activity are equivalent. It is impossible, Zeyl writes, "to possess a virtuous soul without performing its function, that is to act virtuously". See D. Zeyl, [1982]: 263.

⁶⁵ G. Santas [2001: 48] holds that although Socrates has a conception of happiness independent of conditional goods, he has no conception of happiness independent of virtue. Socratic happiness cannot be defined or explicated without reference to virtue. See also p. 56 n. 32.

Character utilitarianism [CU]. However, in order for this to be implemented it is vital to examine the main line of argument that each one of the four aforementioned accounts about the Platonic conception of the relation between virtue and happiness puts forward. Also, we need to consider their faithfulness to the Platonic text, as well as how they cohere with some other essential doctrines of Plato's ethics. Let us begin with the instrumental thesis.

5.6.1. The Instrumental Thesis for Socrates

The main proponent of this thesis is T. Irwin, who holds that this analysis does not apply to the entire Platonic corpus but rather only to the early Platonic or Socratic dialogues. Irwin's argument has the following structure:

- (a) Virtue is always good (ἀγαθόν), admirable (καλόν) and beneficial (ὠφέλιμον).⁶⁶
- (b) In the Socratic dialogues all the good things are defined either as goods in themselves or as goods for something else.⁶⁷
- (c) Happiness is the only good in itself, the only ultimate good which we all want (*eudaemonism*).⁶⁸
- (d) Happiness is different from virtue.⁶⁹
- (e) Therefore, virtues can only be good for something else.⁷⁰

Let us see in detail what motive is behind this argument and where, according to Irwin, it gets support from.

5.6.1.1. Virtue as Always Good, Admirable and Beneficial

In all the early Platonic dialogues, Socrates never ceases to insist that any virtue must always be admirable (καλόν), good (ἀγαθόν) and beneficial (ὠφέλιμον). In the light of this requirement, Socrates refuses to accept Laches' definition of bravery as endurance.⁷¹ As Socrates says, not every case of endurance is good, admirable and beneficial, whereas bravery is a virtue, and so must always be good, admirable and beneficial (192c4-d5).

⁶⁶ *Protagoras* 360b3; *Charmides* 160b6-13; *Laches* 192c8-d8; *Euthydemus* 279b4-c1. T. Irwin [1977]: 35 & [1995]: 31-51.

⁶⁷ *Lysis* 220a7-b5 & T. Irwin [1995]: 67.

⁶⁸ *Euthydemus* 278e3-6, 27914-b3, 280b6 & T. Irwin [1995]: 52-54.

⁶⁹ I should underscore here that Irwin does not actually use this premise, though his argument needs it. The discussion of craft analogy (*Laches* 198d1-199a5, *Charmides* 174b11-175a8) and the discussion of hedonism in the *Protagoras* (351b3-c6, 353b-354e) can support this premise.

⁷⁰ T. Irwin [1995]: 73.

⁷¹ Laches, after Socrates' refutation, comes back with a different definition of bravery as some sort of endurance of the soul (192b 9-c1).

Since foolish endurance is shameful and harmful, endurance and bravery are not identical; not all endurance can be brave.

Socrates treats Charmides' definition of temperance (*σωφροσύνη*) as shame in the same manner (160e 2-5). According to Charmides, the person who does the right thing out of temperance does it out of a feeling of shame or scrupulousness (*αἰδώς*). Socrates maintains that this is not a sound definition of a virtue, such as temperance. Shame and temperance cannot be identical, since temperance, as a virtue, has to be always good, while shame can often turn out to be bad (160e6-161b2). We often condemn shame as bad, when people display shame on the wrong occasion, for instance, a person's being wrongly ashamed of doing an action that is in fact fine and virtuous;⁷² However, according to Socrates, we never suppose that it is bad to display temperance on this or that occasion.

Socrates consistently holds that any virtue must always be admirable, good, and beneficial. Furthermore, any definition that does not conform to this principle must be rejected.⁷³ We should look for a definition of virtues that is generally acceptable, and which will be accurate for every circumstance. Since we seek to describe a virtue, we recognize that this must be a fine and admirable state of character and always good and beneficial. Attempts to define bravery as standing firm and temperance as quietness do not qualify as definitions of virtues, since they are not always good.

One can argue on the same lines against the definition of bravery as endurance and the definition of temperance as shame, respectively. If virtues are always good and beneficial they cannot contradict one another; no virtue can prescribe actions that are rejected by any of the other virtues. Socrates maintains that the only acceptable definition of virtues is the one that defines them as always good, admirable and beneficial.

Socrates wants to overcome some common views about both bravery and temperance that represent these two virtues as opposites. Many believe that bravery makes us pursue our own aims vigorously and fearlessly, whereas temperance moderates our own aims and desires to fit our plans for our own welfare. From the temperate person's point of view, the brave person is impulsive and aggressive, but from the brave person's point of view the temperate person is cold and sluggish (*Statesman* 306a12-

⁷² *Apology* 28b 3-5; *Crito* 45d8-46a4.

⁷³ *Charmides* 159c1, 160e6; *Laches* 192c 5-7; *Protagoras* 349e 3-5, 359e 4-7; *Meno* 87e 1-3, *Republic* 331c5-9.

308b8). For similar reasons bravery often seems to conflict with justice: some people believe that the brave person pursues her own aims vigorously and that only cowardice persuades people to abide by the requirements of justice (*Republic* 561a1). Socrates assumes that we will reject common views about virtues such as bravery, temperance and justice, from the moment we begin to realise that virtues are always good, admirable and beneficial.

5.6.1.2. Happiness as the Only Ultimate Good

Socrates argues that virtue is always good, and in the light of this, rejects all definitions of virtue that do not satisfy this condition. However, a new question needs to be answered. If we accept that Socrates' thesis stands as "virtue is always good", one can then reasonably ask Socrates: what kind of good do you have in mind, Socrates? For, in the early Socratic dialogues, the following distinctions of good are proposed:

- (a) Good for themselves and good for other goods (*Lysis* 219c).
- (b) Conditionally and unconditionally good (*Euthydemus* 278-9).
- (c) Variably good and always good (*Gorgias* 468).⁷⁴

The above distinctions possess one common feature: they all put forward a twofold division of good things and exclude the possibility of attributing the two separate predicates to one subject. All the distinctions support the claim, that the predicates are mutually exclusive. If something has one predicate attributed to it, it cannot simultaneously bear the other. In other words, if virtues are good in themselves, they cannot at the same time be good for something else; when virtues are conditionally good they cannot be unconditionally good; when virtues are variably good they cannot be always good. How does Socrates classify virtues, as good in themselves, or as good for the sake of other goods?

Irwin argues that one can find a satisfactory answer to this question in the *Euthydemus*, where Socrates argues that everyone wants to fare well and to be happy.⁷⁵ Once this is agreed Socrates goes on to ask how we are to achieve happiness, and what we must do to get it.⁷⁶ Socrates seems to maintain that every practical question should be formed in this way. This applies to the most important question of *how should one live*,

⁷⁴ It is worth noting here that I do not take these three divisions to go together. One might have one of them but not the other two. In particular, virtue might be always and unconditionally good, but not good for itself. This could be the case if it were defined as the kind of activity required for happiness.

⁷⁵ *Euthydemus* 278e 3-6, 280b6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid* 279a 1-2, 282a 1-4 and T. Irwin [1995]: 52.

around which Plato's ethical theory revolves. The right answer to this question will direct us to what we must do in order to be happy. In the *Charmides*, Socrates follows on the same thought by arguing that if Charmides has any reason for cultivating temperance, temperance must benefit him, and if it benefits him, it must promote his happiness.⁷⁷

Irwin stresses that common beliefs, as summarised by Aristotle, correspond to the views of Socrates in taking happiness to be an end that we aim at with all our actions.⁷⁸ "But Socrates", Irwin argues, "goes further, by making happiness the overriding end that determines the rationality of any action". Socrates, according to Irwin, commits himself to a *eudaemonist position*, insofar as he claims that:

- (1) in all our rational actions we pursue our own happiness.
- (2) we pursue happiness only for its own sake, never for the sake of anything else, and
- (3) whatever else we rationally pursue, we pursue for the sake of happiness. [T. Irwin, 1995, p. 53]

In the *Euthydemus*, Irwin continues, Socrates takes *eudaemonism* to be an obvious truth while not considering it necessary to explain why.⁷⁹ However, Socrates does so in the *Lysis*, where he draws the distinction between good that is good for itself and good that is good for other goods. On the basis of this distinction, Irwin believes that one can realise why *eudaemonism* might seem reasonable. Socrates distinguishes the things that may be loved from the things that we may love them for. In other words, he distinguishes subordinate objects of love from primary objects of love. The subordinate object of love is loved for the sake of the primary object of love; but the primary object of love is loved for its own sake and not for the sake of any further object of love. If this is so, then, according to Socrates, only the primary object of love is loved for its own sake and any good that is chosen for the sake of the primary object of love cannot be

⁷⁷ *Charmides* 175d5-176a5.

⁷⁸ Aristotle's account of common ethical views supports Socrates' assumption about the ultimate end: "For practically every person individually, and for everyone in common there is a goal that all aim at whatever they choose and avoid; and this, to speak in summary form, is happiness (*eudaimonia*) and its parts" *Rhetoric*, 1360b4-7.

⁷⁹ Irwin argues that in the *Euthydemus* Socrates does not make any distinction between the questions why one pursues happiness (explanatory eudaemonism) and why happiness is worth pursuing (rational eudaemonism). On the contrary, he commits himself to both rational and psychological eudaemonism, and regards happiness as the only end that brings explanation (*Lysis*) and justification (*Euthydemus*) to a halt, because it needs no further explanation or justification, but makes other aims intelligible and justifiable. See T. Irwin [1995]: 53-54, 87.

chosen for its own sake as well (219c1-d5, 220a6-b5). Socrates concludes that “what is truly loved (*φιλον*) is not loved for the sake of anything else (220b 4-5).

The main thesis in the *Lysis*, then, is that the line of the things for whose sake things are loved *must be finite* otherwise one will face a vicious regress. Trying to explain why one performs a specific action one can offer a number of reasons that justify this specific action. For instance, if one asks someone “why did you offer money for charity?” the answer could be “because I want to help poor people”. If one continues by asking “why do you want to help them?” the generous person could reply “because this makes me happy”. By offering this reply the generous person makes the questioner think that it is worthless to ask why one wants to be happy.

In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates explains the action and the motivation of the rational agent in the same manner. He suggests that happiness is the only ultimate end and that it meets, according to Irwin, the conditions laid down in the *Lysis* for being a primary object of love.⁸⁰ Socrates assumes that we pursue happiness not for the sake of something else but for its own sake. What is more, he maintains that we pursue other recognised goods, besides happiness, only for one reason: their promotion of happiness. According to Socrates, then, happiness is the only good that is good in itself and the reason for all other goods, since the latter qualify as goods insofar as they promote happiness.

Socrates’ confirmation in the *Euthydemus* that happiness is the only ultimate good is not accidental. Socrates follows the same line of argument in the *Apology* (41c8-d2), where he argues that the good person cannot be harmed and nothing except his happiness needs to be, or should be, considered when he is deciding what to do or what not to do. Similarly, in the *Crito* (48b4-10) he insists that *living well* not *just living* must be our primary concern.

5.6.1.3. Happiness as Pleasure

Now, apart from the fact that happiness is the ultimate good, the only good that is good in itself, one can reasonably ask for more information concerning the nature of this happiness, Irwin maintains. What does happiness mean? Is happiness the contemplation of the good, the satisfaction of any desire, or strict obedience to generally acceptable rules? Socrates addresses this question in the *Protagoras* where he maintains, according

⁸⁰ Ibid. 54.

to Irwin, that happiness means pleasure, since we pursue pleasure as good and pain as evil (354c3-5). It is also said that pleasure is always good (355-6). Socrates seems to argue for a hedonistic account of happiness when he holds that the many accept the possibility of incontinence because they conceive hedonism wrongly.⁸¹ Let us see how Socrates, according to Irwin, argues for hedonism (353b-354e):

One can say that x is painful and y is pleasant, but nonetheless x is better than y. The many believe that this claim contradicts hedonism. Socrates starts from this claim in supporting his account of hedonism. He argues that one undertakes this pain for a pleasure that will come up in the future. When, for instance, one insists on staying in and studying although outside it is sunny, one undertakes this pain in order to achieve one's target, such as to qualify as a graduate student. It is this achievement that makes this person happy, and for the sake of which he can undertake a temporary pain. The same can be argued in the case of one who takes a very bitter-tasting pill while unhealthy. In both cases, the person who adopts this behaviour expects the "painful" course of action to yield more pleasure than pain, and the "pleasant" course of action to yield more pain than pleasure, once their total long-term effects are considered.

Socrates argues that this explanation about good and pleasure applies to all actions and he confirms this claim by addressing to the many the following question: "do you not pursue pleasure as good and avoid pain as evil?" (354c 3-5) and they agree. The many also agree that in the case in which one pursues x instead of y, though one is aware that x is painful, one does so in the belief that x finally yields greater overall pleasure than y. As Irwin notes "Socrates is entitled to conclude that whenever we pursue x rather than y for x's pleasure, we pursue x because we believe that x yields greater overall pleasure than y".⁸² Socrates, then, maintains that we choose x though painful rather than y, which is pleasant, because at the moment of the choice we believe x to yield on the whole more pleasure than y (354b5-d3). We then pursue pleasure as good and avoid pain as evil.

Following this argument, Socrates seems to regard pleasant and good as two names of the same thing.⁸³ In addition, when he refers to the good here, he means the

⁸¹ I explore here Irwin's understanding of this dialogue. However, there is a considerable controversy among Platonic scholars concerning whether Socrates argues for hedonism here, or whether he offers an *ad hominem* argument and does not commit himself to this view. Here I only discuss Irwin's view. For discussions against the hedonistic view see D. Zeyl [1980]; Gosling and Taylor [1982]; R. Parry, [1983], D. Rudebusch [1999].

⁸² T. Irwin [1995]: 82.

⁸³ "we can no longer say by pleasure, because it has changed its name to good". *Protagoras* 355 c1.

good for the sake of which all actions are performed. It is the ultimate good, it is the happiness that he attempts to define in the *Euthydemus* and of which he now offers a more informative account. It seems that *Euthydemus*' eudaemonism, *Lysis*' psychological eudaemonism and *Protagoras*' hedonism can be considered as accounts of the same good that Socrates takes to be the ultimate good, namely happiness. Socrates, as Irwin notes, does not offer hedonism as an alternative to eudaemonism. On the contrary, hedonism is a more informative account of the good that eudaemonism takes as ultimate good.⁸⁴

If this analysis is correct, then, it seems that Socrates relies on hedonism in order to clarify eudaemonism. I mentioned earlier on that, if the ultimate good is happiness, and goods could be either ultimate goods or goods for the sake of another good, then virtues, since they are good, could be good only for the sake of the ultimate good.⁸⁵ Virtues are valuable insofar as they promote happiness. They are valuable only as instrumental means to happiness. However, the question that arises here is the following: Is this analysis of virtues also valid for the account of happiness as pleasure? In other words are the virtues still instrumental means to happiness?

5.6.1.4. Virtue as Instrumental Means to Happiness/Pleasure

Irwin attributes an epistemological hedonism to Socrates and maintains that, according to this account, judgements about goodness must be derived from judgements about pleasure, which do not in themselves rely on judgements about goodness.⁸⁶ According to this interpretation, virtues should be considered only as instrumental means to pleasure. If virtues were components of happiness they should constitute a special kind of pleasure that we enjoy only insofar as we regard virtues as good for their own sake. However, *Euthydemus* informs us that happiness is the only ultimate good. In addition, in the *Lysis*, good things are divided into two categories, as good in themselves and good for other goods.

These two dialogues, Irwin maintains, provide us with evidence to show that virtues can be considered only as good for other goods and, since happiness is the good for the sake of which any good is considered good, virtues must be considered as good

⁸⁴ T. Irwin [1995]: 83. Irwin attributes to Socrates an epistemological hedonism, since Socrates takes judgements about pleasure to be epistemologically prior to judgements about goodness.

⁸⁵ See 5.6.1.2.

⁸⁶ T. Irwin [1995]: 89.

that promote happiness, as instrumental means to happiness.⁸⁷ Epistemological hedonism re-enforces these claims and makes it more obvious that virtues are instrumental means to happiness, Irwin argues. The consequences of epistemological hedonism, as Irwin notes, are not unwelcome to Socrates.⁸⁸ On the contrary, epistemological hedonism puts forward an analysis of virtues which Socrates implies in the shorter dialogues but never makes so clear.⁸⁹

5.6.1.5. The Analogy Between Virtue and a Craft

The analysis of virtue as an instrumental means to happiness or pleasure can be further reinforced, according to Irwin, if one considers Socrates' analogy between virtue and a craft. Throughout the early Platonic dialogues, Socrates insists that knowledge is sufficient for virtue. He illustrates his point by offering examples of crafts.⁹⁰ When Socrates refers to that sort of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) he never suggests that it belongs to anything except a craft (τέχνη).⁹¹ Socrates attempts to show that one has knowledge of something when one is capable of giving an account of his knowledge, that is, *explaining why*. According to Socrates, only craftsmen show knowledge of their craft (*Apology* 22b9-d4) by giving an account of what they do. The capacity to give an account of what they do distinguishes a real craftsman from someone who merely has a technique, which he cannot explain (*Gorgias* 456a, 501a).

Does Socrates believe that moral knowledge is a craft? When Socrates attempts to define virtue, he does so by seeking an adequate definition of virtue that will provide paradigms or standards for deciding whether actions or persons are virtuous. He notes that any definition of virtue that raises peculiar kinds of disputes should not be acceptable. Socrates seeks a definition of virtues that will eliminate disputed terms, such

⁸⁷ It might seem that this argument itself does not establish that virtues are valuable as instrumental means to happiness, since it relies on the assumption that virtues are distinct from happiness, something that Irwin's opponents would deny. See, for instance, Lesses [1985]. Only if one adds the craft analogy to this argument has one the full argument of the instrumental thesis. The craft analogy shows that virtue must be distinct from happiness the end it produces. The *Euthydemus* shows that if virtue is distinct from happiness its value must be purely instrumental, since only happiness is valuable for its own sake.

⁸⁸ T. Irwin [1995]: 89.

⁸⁹ In the *Euthydemus* Socrates asks how we are to be happy and answers this question by mentioning virtues and eventually wisdom, but he does not say whether he takes virtue to be a component of happiness or instrumental to it. Epistemological hedonism makes it more reasonable to say that virtue is purely instrumental to happiness.

⁹⁰ *Laches* 198d1-199a5, *Charmides* 174b11-175a8.

as shame and endurance, in the case of bravery and temperance, respectively. The knowledge of the craftsmen who know and can explain each step of production by its contribution to the product is simply not disputed knowledge.

If this is the case, then, Socrates faces the following questions:

- (1) Every craft has a product. Does virtue have a product and if yes what is this product?
- (2) Craft can always be misused for bad ends. However, as Socrates proposes, virtues are always good, admirable and beneficial. How can these two theses be reconciled?

Socrates does not make use of Aristotle's distinction between craft knowledge and practical knowledge. Aristotle believes that this distinction is essential since craft knowledge has a product while practical knowledge does not. This is so because moral knowledge (wisdom-φρόνησις) is concerned with action (πράξις), whereas craft is concerned with production (ποίησις). Action and production differ in relation to the ends they aim at:

Wisdom is not craft-knowledge, because action and production belong to different kinds. The remaining possibility, then, is that wisdom is a state grasping the truth, involving reason, concerned with action about what is good or bad for a human being. For production has its end beyond it; but action does not, since its end is doing well itself. [*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140b 3-7].

Socrates does not make this distinction that Aristotle considers necessary. A confirmation of this can be provided by Socrates' permanent thesis in the *Crito* that every science must have a product that is something other than the science itself (166a3-7). In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates maintains the same when he argues that wisdom should produce something that is distinct from itself and not knowledge for knowledge (292d8-e7).

Since Socrates does not make the distinction between productive and practical knowledge, he seriously believes in the analogy between virtue and craft. In addition, Socrates stresses not only that virtue is a craft, but also that virtue has a product that is distinct from its existence, since it is just an instrumental means to this product.

⁹¹ Different attempts have been made to understand the analogy between craft and virtue in the early and middle dialogues. For an insightful discussion about this analogy and its consequences for the relation between virtue and happiness see, R. Parry [1983]: 19-38.

5.6.1.6. The Misuse of the Craft and its Effects on Virtue

Socrates' psychological eudaemonism can offer a way out from the puzzle that the possibility of the misuse of a craft for bad ends, and the conception of virtues as always good, admirable and beneficial, create. Socrates' psychological eudaemonism shows that although the possibility of misusing the craft does exist, the virtuous person will never resort to it. The virtuous person will never choose to perform an action for any other end than that of his happiness. Virtues then are crafts and their product is the happiness of the person who has possessed them. Virtues do have value but only insofar as they produce happiness. Although the misuse of virtue is logically possible, it is psychologically impossible.

The instrumental conception of virtues is supported by Socrates' eudaemonism in the *Euthydemus* and in the *Lysis*. Socrates' analogy between virtue and craft reinforces this analysis. The hedonistic thesis that, according to Irwin, Socrates puts forward in the *Protagoras* defends this claim with more clarity. However, according to Irwin and Vlastos, this interpretation is not sound for the middle Platonic dialogues, where the sufficiency thesis takes its place. Vlastos also argues that the instrumental thesis is not valid for the early Platonic dialogues either. I shall examine first the agreement between the two scholars and then focus on Vlastos's analysis of the early Platonic dialogues, an analysis that also expands the sufficiency thesis in them.

5.6.2. The Sufficiency Thesis for Plato

Both Vlastos and Irwin agree that the instrumental thesis should not apply to the middle Platonic dialogues.⁹² In those dialogues, Plato did not entirely accept the doctrines of the earlier period, as Irwin understands them, such as that knowledge is sufficient for virtue, that virtue is an instrumental means to happiness, the doctrine of hedonism or of the impossibility of incontinence, which was mostly based on the instrumental thesis. Plato begins to doubt some of them, like hedonism and the impossibility of incontinence, in the *Gorgias*.⁹³ He offers a better defence of this disagreement in the *Republic* II and IV.⁹⁴ By doing so, Plato rejects the instrumental thesis.

In the *Gorgias* Callicles defends a conception of happiness that expresses the hedonism of the *Protagoras*. According to Callicles, we should replace the dominant

⁹² G. Vlastos [1991]: 7.

⁹³ See G. Santas [2001]: 52-53.

⁹⁴ See G. Santas [2001]: 53 and n.34.

account of justice, other-regarding justice, because it is based on a mistake. If we accept conventional justice, then the interests of the inferior people will determine the appropriate treatment of every person. Instead of the conventional conception of justice, Callicles argues, we should adopt the natural account, which will guarantee the happiness of the superior people. Callicles refuses to accept Socrates' account of other-regarding justice as beneficial. He claims that it is not really justice at all, and is really shameful, rather than fine. It is just and fine by convention, but not by nature (482e2-483d6). Callicles holds that conventional justice is fine and beneficial only for the inferior people who attempt to cover their weakness of character by following conventional justice and arguing that temperance is fine and self-indulgence is shameful (492a3-b1). However, for the superior people, the people who can carry out all their aims and have the material resources to do so, it is fine and beneficial to observe natural rather than conventional justice. What is more it is mere cowardice if such people observe the rules of conventional justice.

Socrates refutes Callicle's hedonistic account of happiness by challenging Callicle's understanding of the "superior people" (491d-e) and by showing that Callicle's hedonistic account of happiness does not justify Callicle's preference for bravery over cowardice (497d-499b). By doing so Socrates not only rejects Callicles' account of happiness, which actually identifies good with pleasure, but also abandons an account of justice that Socrates himself offers in the *Protagoras*.⁹⁵ It might be argued that, as an alternative, Socrates suggests an account of happiness that one can possess after undertaking a kind of life that is orderly supplied and satisfied with the things that are present on each occasion, an adaptive conception of happiness, to use Irwin's terminology.⁹⁶ Socrates believes what is most certain to secure happiness is adapting desires to the requirements of the circumstances rather than seeking to satisfy unfeasible desires. That conception of happiness is the opposite of Callicles' happiness, the satisfaction of any desire regardless of the circumstances; what is more, it renders Plato's Socrates anti-hedonist.

⁹⁵ Callicles affirms the identity of the pleasant and the good. Although Socrates accepts this thesis in the *Protagoras* (354e8-355a2, 355b3-c1) he rejects it in the *Gorgias* (495d2-5).

⁹⁶ Irwin [1995: 106, 117-118] holds that "If my desires grow greater, then I must, on my view, find more and more resources to satisfy them (494b6). Such a view of desire and happiness ignores the plasticity and adaptiveness of desire." [...] The adaptive conception of happiness does not tell us what sorts of desires we ought to form for the sake of our happiness; it sets out from common sense views about the sorts of things that are worth pursuing, as Socrates does in the *Euthydemus* (279a-c). It advises us on the regulation, cultivation, elimination, and satisfaction of our initial desires so that they become suitably adapted to circumstances". See also *Gorgias* 493c5-7.

5.6.2.1. The Defence of Incontinence

Hedonism, as it unfolds, according to some people, in the *Protagoras*, is associated with the understanding of virtues as instrumental means to pleasure, as well as with the impossibility of incontinence.

In the previous section we saw that in the *Gorgias* Socrates argues against Callicles' hedonistic account of happiness. Apart from the rejection of hedonism, the *Gorgias* offers some textual evidence to invalidate the claim that "incontinence is impossible". For Socrates' argument against incontinence in the *Protagoras* is based on the association of virtue with knowledge and on hedonism. Since Socrates rejected hedonism in the *Gorgias*, the impossibility of incontinence and the instrumental account of virtue requires a new support. In the *Gorgias*, however, although hedonism and the impossibility of continence are denied, the instrumental conception of virtue, an essential part of the hedonistic account, is still accepted.

Let us see first how incontinence is possible. Socrates' argument against incontinence in the *Protagoras* is based mainly on his claim that virtue is knowledge. If someone knows that something is against his good, his happiness, he will not do it. All cases of incontinence are a matter of ignorance. The person who performs an incontinent action believes that this action will make him happy. In addition, when someone undertakes a painful action over a pleasant one, he does so because he believes that it will be better for his overall happiness. The belief in the impossibility of incontinence squares with Socratic psychological eudaemonism. Socrates assumes that happiness provides a self-explanatory end and that every other end must be explained by reference to happiness.

If one argues that incontinence is possible, this claim conflicts with Socratic psychological eudaemonism. A claim running along similar lines is found in the *Gorgias*. The claim that incontinence is impossible implies that virtue possesses only cognitive components, that virtue is knowledge. However, this identification is not so powerful in the *Gorgias*. Socrates does recognise some non-cognitive components of virtue when he distinguishes two parts of the soul with two different types of desires. He maintains that the soul has two parts, the rational and the irrational. The former accommodates rational desires that are concerned with one's overall good and the latter possesses irrational appetites indifferent to overall good. This part is unruly and insatiable (493b1-3). The rational part of the soul has the role of providing the soul with

a rational planning, a rational order in one's desires. However, it is possible for it to fail to do so. That could happen when the irrational part overcomes the rational part's order for the sake of the unrestricted satisfaction of desires; this causes conflicts within a person's purposes and destroys the rational order of the soul.

The division of the soul into rational and irrational parts makes the impossibility of incontinence unsound. It makes it clear that some other non-cognitive components should be taken into account, such as unruly and insatiable appetites. The latter could conflict with a person's desire for the overall good. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates denies the existence of these non-rational desires and then rejects the possibility of incontinence. In the *Gorgias*, however, the existence of these irrational desires is clearly acceptable (493b1-3), and at that point Socrates can no longer deny the possibility of incontinence.

Although in the *Gorgias* Socrates seems to abandon some of the essential claims he put forward in the *Protagoras*, he still argues for the role of virtues as instrumental to the adaptive conception of happiness.⁹⁷ In *Republic* II and IV, however, one can find adequate textual evidence to argue against the instrumental analysis of virtues. Plato rejects any account that underestimates virtues, considering them as good for the sake of something else, as instrumental means to happiness. Virtues should be considered instead as the primary components of happiness. Plato puts forward this thesis in numerous places, but makes it explicitly clear in *Republic* II.⁹⁸

5.6.2.2. Virtue as Good in Itself

Glaucon opens the second book of the *Republic* (357b-d) by offering the following tripartite classification concerning the things that can be considered as goods:

- (1) things that are good for their own sake but not for their consequences (joy, pleasure).
- (2) things that are good both for their own sake and for their consequences (understanding, sight, and health).
- (3) things that are good not for their own sake but only for their consequences (exercise, being healed when sick, the art of healing, the making of money).

After making this division of goods, Glaucon asks Socrates: "In which of these classes do you place justice?" (357d3). Socrates replies with confidence: "In my opinion it

⁹⁷ Irwin uses this terminology. T. Irwin [1995]: 117.

⁹⁸ The same line of argument is supported in the *Phaedo* (68c5-69c3).

belongs in the fairest class, that which a man who is to be happy must love both for its own sake and for the results" (385a1-3).

Glaucon's tripartite classification of the things that can be considered as goods appears here for the first time in the Platonic corpus. The threefold division of goods is not present in the early Platonic dialogues. The classifications of goods that one can find in the early Platonic dialogues, are all bipartite: goods desired in themselves and goods desired for the sake of other goods (*Lysis* 219c), goods conditionally and goods unconditionally (*Euthydemus* 278-9), things variably good and things always good (*Gorgias* 468).⁹⁹ Why is this tripartite classification of good essential for the issue discussed here? It is important because the vital virtue in Plato's ethical theory, namely justice, is classified as part of the category missing from the early Platonic dialogues. According to the bipartite division of the things that can be considered as good, only one good can be an ultimate good, or good in itself, namely happiness. This claim formulates Socrates' eudaemonism.

Eudaemonism is found in the *Euthydemus* and appears again in the *Lysis*, with the latter being more lucid. Socrates holds that the motivation that one possesses while performing an action is based on the desire to be happy. Since one wants to be happy one will perform any action that can make one's happiness possible. What is more, one will avoid any action that will make unhappiness possible. Happiness, then, according to Socrates, can provide the explanation of any action, since all are undertaken for the sake of happiness. If this is so, then, happiness is the only ultimate end, the only end that is good in itself, and the end from which the goodness of everything else derives. Happiness is the ultimate good and, since only one good can be ultimate, virtues are not good in themselves. Virtues can only be good for the sake of the ultimate good, that is happiness. Virtues are goods insofar as they promote happiness. They do not have value in themselves since the only ultimate good is happiness and the goods that contribute to other goods are not goods in themselves.

Glaucon's tripartite division vindicates the possibility that something is both good in itself and good for its consequences. Since this is so, the good that belongs to this category has its own value and should not be considered as simply an instrumental

⁹⁹ In the early Platonic dialogues Socrates refuses to accept definitions of good things that are rarely disputed. Socrates intends to build up a theory of good that can explain why these things are good. These bipartite distinctions are part of this task, which seems, however, to be achieved in the *Republic*, where Plato recognises the possibility of something being good for itself and for its consequences.

means. Justice, then, is not simply an instrumental means to happiness.¹⁰⁰ On the contrary, it can be reasonably seen as a component of happiness and so as something good for itself.

Ethical eudaemonism is still valid for Plato.¹⁰¹ Our happiness should be our primary concern. We should perform any action that can promote happiness and must avoid any action that will be against it. Happiness is the only ultimate end and everything that shares the features of happiness can only be a part, a component, of it. According to Glaucon's classification, justice shares one of the features of happiness. It is also good in itself. Since only one good can be ultimate, all the goods that share this feature, that is, that are good in themselves, can only be part of the ultimate good, they can be only components of happiness. Justice, then, is a good in itself, it is a component of happiness, directly produces happiness. It is also good because of its external consequences (rewards). For it is a good "which anyone who is to be happy welcomes both for its own sake and for the consequences" (*Rep.* 358a).

If justice is good in itself it must not be considered as a merely instrumental means. If justice was a merely instrumental means it would have value only for its consequences and, it must be admitted, justice will no longer be valuable if the good consequences are removed. However, Socrates insists that one should always be just, even when it would be possible to be invisible, like Gyges, or when one suffers the penalties of injustice although just (*Rep.* II). Since justice is good in itself, it is always good. Then the possibility that it is just an instrumental means is no longer sound. Merely instrumental means are good only under certain circumstances.

Recalling, now, Socrates' reply to Glaucon's question, one can see that Socrates does not only argue that justice is good in itself, but also stresses that justice is good for

¹⁰⁰ Hereafter, I use the term justice to refer to all virtues. This is so because all virtues, bravery, temperance, wisdom and justice are inseparable. Among them only concord (*Republic* 431d8, 432a6-9) and even friendship (*Republic* 442c10-d3) can be found. Temperance, bravery, wisdom and justice do not conflict but are in harmony, a psychic harmony. Plato seems to accept the Reciprocity thesis, namely that every virtue is fine and beneficial and that no virtue can prescribe actions that are rejected by any of the other virtues. He might argue for the unity thesis, namely that knowledge is sufficient for virtue and that therefore all virtues can be identified with knowledge of the good, but his account of knowledge is not similar to the Socratic one. In the *Meno*, Plato distinguishes knowledge from true belief and maintains that, although an inquiry can start from true belief, virtue and true belief are not identical. Knowledge differs from true belief because belief by itself is unstable, whereas knowledge makes it stable by reasoning about the explanation (97e5-98a8). An accurate account of virtue must consider virtue as knowledge that provides counterfactual reliability, rather than empirical reliability (87d-89a).

¹⁰¹ Apart from the *Republic*, Plato maintains eudaemonism in the *Symposium* 205a2-3: If someone wants to be happy there is no longer any point in asking. For what reason does he want to be happy? This answer is already final.

its consequences. Could it be argued then, that virtues are not only goods in themselves but also instrumental means to a further good, to happiness?¹⁰² One could plausibly advocate this claim, although one also needs to consider the following essential matter. When something is an instrumental means to a further good, as the shoemaking craft is for the shoe, the good as well as the means by which it is achieved are *separable*. In addition, the means, the shoemaking craft, is valuable only insofar as it produces shoes. It does not have value in itself. Also, the craft and the product are two different things related on the basis of causality. The shoemaking craft is the cause of shoe production.

Now the relation between justice and happiness works differently. Happiness and justice have one common feature. They can both be considered as goods in themselves. Furthermore, they are not related on causal grounds, they are not distinct. Justice contributes to happiness by being a part of it. Justice contributes to happiness and that contribution is a feature of what a part is like in itself, not a causal consequence of what it is like. Let me provide an example here to illustrate my point: a healthy eye contributes to the health of the body by being healthy and by being part of the body. In this sense, the healthy eye contributes to the health of the body but not causally. The contribution is closer in nature. The two parts, healthy eye and healthy body, are inseparable. The eye performs its function by being part of the body and the body works better by having the eye as part of its function. Happiness consists of justice among other things. Furthermore, justice makes the just person happier than the unjust person. The substitution of justice for a healthy eye and happiness for a healthy body is adequate to prove that justice and happiness have something in common and their relation is stronger than initially implied. However, it does not satisfy Plato's claim that the just person is happier than the unjust person. One who has a healthy eye might have a less healthy body than someone who does not have a healthy eye. This, however, is not the case, if one considers more vital organs of a healthy body such as the brain or the heart. The person who carries a healthy brain or possesses a healthy heart is, reasonably speaking, healthier than someone who lacks healthiness in these cardinal parts of the body. In the same respect, since the just person is happier than the unjust person, justice is a dominant

¹⁰² Here I only discuss this claim but I do not subscribe to it. As it will emerge shortly, I believe that "good for its consequences" refers to external consequences, rewards; and the relation between virtue and happiness is constitutive rather than instrumental.

rather than a minor part of happiness. Justice is the primary part of happiness, the one that secures happiness.¹⁰³

By recalling one essential distinction that occurs in the *Phaedo* one can give more ground to the view that Plato considers justice to be a good in itself and a primary constituent of happiness, rather than an instrumental means to happiness.¹⁰⁴ When *Phaedo* recalls Socrates after being asked to do so by Echebrates, he maintains that Socrates speaks about two kinds of virtue:

- (1) The façade of virtue, which is the virtue that is separated from wisdom and fit for slaves indeed (69b7).
- (2) The real virtue, which is inseparable from wisdom and can be achieved only by philosophers (69c1-6).

The above distinction is essential for the issue under discussion here, namely the sufficiency thesis, and becomes even more paramount when we consider Adeimantus' contribution in the *Republic*, concerning the just person. Adeimantus contrasts this just person with those who choose just actions only for their consequences. He maintains that exclusive attention to the consequences expresses an outlook that is a mere façade of virtue (365a4-c6). One who undertakes a just action only when the consequences are good will not do so when the consequences are different. What is more, such a person would be willing to act unjustly if the conditions required it. However, one who values justice for itself and not exclusively for its consequences will have a real conception of virtue and will never undertake an unjust action. On the contrary, s/he will perform a just action regardless of whether the conditions allow for such action to be undertaken fully. Plato maintains that the just person will be just in every case. If this is so, then, the just person can always be just because s/he does not bear an illusion of virtue but possesses real virtue.

¹⁰³ T. Irwin [1995]: 193.

¹⁰⁴ In the *Republic* II Plato makes the same distinction between a façade of virtue and genuine virtue.

5.6.3. The Sufficiency Thesis for Socrates - The Identity Thesis¹⁰⁵

Irwin's and Vlastos's agreement on the sufficiency thesis concerning the middle Platonic dialogues has been confirmed by Vlastos himself.¹⁰⁶ However, Vlastos denies accepting the validity of the instrumental thesis for the early Platonic dialogues, and puts forward an analysis, which supports the view that the sufficiency thesis is the only sound analysis not only for the middle Platonic, but also for all the early dialogues.¹⁰⁷ "It might be even more reasonable for them than for the middle dialogues", Vlastos writes.¹⁰⁸ Let us now see how Vlastos argues for the sufficiency thesis in the early Platonic dialogues.

5.6.3.1. The Sovereignty of Virtue

Vlastos initially rejects the instrumental analysis of virtue in the early Platonic dialogues. He maintains that one can easily understand why this thesis is misdirected if one examines carefully a number of texts. Socrates never argues, Vlastos writes, that virtue is an instrumental means to happiness. What further strikes Vlastos' attention is that, according to the instrumental thesis, happiness and virtue are "entirely distinct", "[...] so much that the happiness desired by all human beings as the final end of all their actions is the same for all of them, regardless of difference in their moral character: all of them, the noblest and the most depraved, have the same "determinate" final end; they differ only in their choice of means".¹⁰⁹

Moral knowledge is only technical knowledge of means. Vlastos then asks: "Is such a view ever stated by Socrates in our texts? And he answers: "Obviously not".¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ By articulating the sufficiency thesis one can see the main claims of the identity thesis as well. Nevertheless I would like to clarify at this point one essential difference between the sufficient and the identity thesis. One might think, for instance, that if virtue is necessary and sufficient for happiness, it must constitute happiness all by itself. But, as we will see shortly, according to the sufficiency thesis, however, while the virtuous are always happy, there are other things which, when combined with virtue, make one happier.

¹⁰⁶ "[Irwin] replaces [utilitarianism] with 'instrumentalism', the view that virtue is only an 'instrumental means' to happiness-'entirely distinct' from happiness, only causally connected with it. The question then becomes crystal clear: Does the relation of virtue to happiness in Socrates' moral philosophy satisfy this specification? In his investigation of the works of Plato's middle period Irwin's answer to the precise question is, precisely, 'No'. But when discussing the Socratic dialogues of Plato's earlier years Irwin's answer in that book is no less precise 'Yes'. [I agree] with the 'No' in Irwin's book – certainly, Plato is no 'instrumentalist'". G. Vlastos [1991]: 7.

¹⁰⁷ Vlastos arguments for the Sufficiency thesis concerning the middle Platonic dialogues have already been presented in the Section 5. 6.2.

¹⁰⁸ "I dissented sharply from its 'Yes': there was even less of that, I felt, in Socrates than in Plato" Ibid. 7 This disagreement initially took place in the *Times Literary Supplement* [TLS], 1978 and lasted for nearly six months (March-September). According to Vlastos, it was the longest philosophical exchange on record in the correspondence columns of TLS. See G. Vlastos, [1978b] & [1991]: 7.

¹⁰⁹ G.Vlastos [1991]: 8.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.8.

What leads Vlastos to think that the unsoundness of the instrumental thesis is so obvious? He offers two main arguments in defence of his refutation. One is the following textual evidence from the *Apology*:

You don't speak well, O man, if you believe that someone worth anything at all would give countervailing weight (ὑπολογίζεσθαι) to danger of life or death or give consideration to anything but this when he acts: whether his action is just or unjust, the action of a good or evil man. [*Apology*, 28b 5-9]¹¹¹

Socrates addresses this answer to an imaginary fellow-citizen who is reproaching him for having lived in a way that now puts him in peril of execution as a criminal. What Socrates actually says is this: virtues and virtuous action give value to our lives, and it is unacceptable to underestimate them for the sake of the consequences. The stressing of the sovereignty of virtue is not accidental here. Socrates puts forward the same claim a few lines later and says:

This is the truth of the matter, men of Athens: wherever a man posts himself on his own conviction that this is best or on orders from his commander, there, I do believe, he should remain, giving no countervailing weight (ὑπολογίζεσθαι) to death or anything else when the alternative is to act basely. [*Apology*, 28d 6-10].¹¹²

Socrates reiterates this principle, namely being virtuous no matter what the consequences, in two other passages, which also reflect his philosophy of life. While on trial he proved that being virtuous is not just an instrumental means of achieving happiness. In the light of this thought, Socrates maintains that he will insist on being virtuous regardless of the consequences. Socrates tells the court: "I would much rather die, having defended my self as I did, than do as you would have had me do and live" (*Ap.*38e). This passage puts forward an analysis of virtues, which can prove that virtues are very far from being instrumental means; the passage can also be considered as the second argument that Vlastos offers. It is the identification of honourable and just actions with happiness. Socrates queries Crito making him respond with two affirmative answers:

¹¹¹ Vlastos's translation.

¹¹² Vlastos's translation.

Do we still hold, or do we not, that we should attach highest value not to living (ζῆν), but to living well (εὖ ζῆν)? And that to live well is the same (ταυτόν) as to live honourably and justly: do we hold that too, or not? [*Crito* 48b4-10]

In the early Platonic dialogues, Socrates has repeatedly confirmed the sovereignty of virtue and its superiority over other things, such as consequences, making it obvious that Plato's teacher has refused to underestimate virtues and consider them as instrumental means without value in themselves. Socrates' analysis of virtues echoes Glaucon's threefold division of the good, and Plato's classification of justice and, according to the *Reciprocity Thesis*, of all the virtues as in the category of good things which are good in themselves in any circumstances.

5.6.3.2. The Denial of the Identity Thesis

Socrates does not underestimate virtues. On the contrary, it seems that he sometimes overestimates their value by considering them the same as living well. But this leads to the identity thesis. According to the latter, happiness is identified with virtue and virtue with happiness, and all non-moral goods have only instrumental value. Does Vlastos believe that after rejecting the instrumental thesis the only alternative that is left is the identity thesis? This question is essential since, in his attempt to refute the instrumental thesis, Vlastos recalls a passage from the *Crito* (48b4-10) that confirms the identity thesis. Vlastos also argues against the identity thesis by maintaining that this interpretation is only *prima facie* sound and that a closer examination will not only show that it is misdirected, but will also prove that the identity thesis creates numerous problems for the entire Platonic moral theory.

Vlastos initially focuses his argument on the aforementioned passage from the *Crito* where Socrates concludes that living well is the same (ταυτόν) as living honourably and justly. In order to illustrate his argument against the identity thesis, Vlastos recalls the Aristotelian distinction of things that can be considered to be the same. According to Aristotle, the first Greek thinker who investigated the innocent-looking term "same", as Vlastos notes¹¹³, when two general terms A and B are said to be three different things could be meant:

- (1) that A and B are synonyms or that they are the same in definition (συνώνυμα).

¹¹³ G.Vlastos [1991]: 217.

- (2) that B is a "proprium" (ἴδιον) of A, i.e. that while B is not the "essence" (τί ἢ ν εἶναι) of A, the two are nonetheless necessarily interentailing (ἀντικατηγορεῖται).
- (3) that the relation between A and B is accidental sameness (κατά συμβεβηκός).¹¹⁴

Drawing inspiration from the Aristotelian threefold classification of Vlastos undertakes a complicated deduction which, though long, is, I think, worthy of being presented in its entirety. Vlastos writes:

The first, which Aristotle takes to be the "primary and principal" use of the term, will not fit our text [Crito 48b4-10] at all: "happiness" and "virtue" are certainly not meant to be synonyms, nor are they supposed to have the same definition. His [Aristotle] third, accidental sameness, is also irrelevant to the analysis of T15 [Crito 48b4-10]. What about the second? It clearly fits on the Identity Thesis, where "happiness" and "virtue" are the same form of living differently described. But it also fits on the Sufficiency Thesis: when *A* and *B* are necessarily interentailing, then, necessarily, *x* has attribute *A* if, and only if, *x* has attribute *B*, and then *x* may (but need not) have certain additional attributes, say, *C* and *D*, necessarily interentailing with attributes *E* and *F*, respectively. On the Sufficiency Thesis *A* would stand for virtue, *B* for the happiness which is found necessarily and exclusively in virtue; *C* and *D* might stand for, say virtuous health and virtuous wealth, and *E* and *F* for the increments of happiness associated with health and wealth, respectively, when these are virtuously used. On these terms "happy" and "virtuous" would be interentailing and would, therefore, qualify for being "the same" in sense (2) [b according to my classification] though the degrees of happiness experienced by virtuous persons differently circumstanced with respect to non-moral goods would differ. Thus the Sufficiency Thesis would fit T 15 [Crito 48b4-10] no less than would the Identity Thesis. [G. Vlastos, 1991, pp. 217-218].¹¹⁵

What Vlastos has proved with this argument is the necessity of considering both the identity and sufficiency theses as possible interpretations of the above text (Crito 48b4-10). If this is so, however, one must apply it to all the other passages that *prima facie* argue for the identity thesis. Vlastos offers a list of texts that *prima facie* seem to be supporting the identity thesis.¹¹⁶ I will refer to the three of them that I take to be most informative for Vlastos's argument.¹¹⁷ Let me, first, give the passages that I refer to, and then discuss them.

¹¹⁴ Aristotle's *Topics* 103a23-31, b10-12.

¹¹⁵ See also G. Vlastos, [1991]: n. 67.

¹¹⁶ *Apology* 30c5-d5, 29e5-30a2, 30a8-b4, 41c8-d2, *Republic* I, 335c1-7, *Gorgias* 470e4-11, 507b8-c7.

¹¹⁷ G. Vlastos [1991]: 218-219.

- (1) You should know well that if you kill the sort of man I say I am you will harm yourselves more than me. *Me neither Meletus nor Anytus could harm*; they could not, for it is not permitted that a better man be harmed by someone worse than himself. He could kill me, perhaps, drive me into exile, deprive me of civic rights. *He and others might think that these are great evils*. But I don't. Much greater is the evil he is attempting now- to send a man unjustly to death. [*Apology* 30c5-d5].
- (2) But you too, my judges, must be of good hope towards death and bear this truth in mind: *no evil* can happen to a good man either in life or in death. [*Apology* 41c8-d2].
- (3) So there is every necessity, Callicles, that the temperate man who, as we have seen, will be just and brave and pious, will be a perfectly good man, and the good man will act well and nobly in whatever he does, and *he who acts well will be blessed and happy*; and that he who is wicked and acts badly will be miserable. [*Gorgias* 507b8-c7.]

Vlastos maintains that a close examination of the above passages is necessary. By reading them carefully one can realise that Socrates does not really claim that no evil can happen to the virtuous person. What Socrates claims is that no *great evil* can happen to the virtuous person. Why is this difference so important? This point is essential because the identity thesis does not consider this difference and its proponents do not pay attention to the way that Socrates uses the language in the aforementioned texts. Vlastos notes that “in all natural languages, Greek no less than English” there is a special use of negation, whose purpose is not to deny the applicability of the predicate, but to de-intensify its application. You ask, “Might I trouble you to post this letter for me?” and I reply. “It would be no trouble -none at all” although I know and you know that the errand would take me several blocks out of my way. You understand me to say “no trouble” and mean “a mini-trouble- too trivial to be worth mentioning”.¹¹⁸ If this is the case, Vlastos continues, then the constituent thesis is sounder than the identity thesis, since virtues do not entail happiness without any evil, but they do so with some evils that are not great. Furthermore, Socrates seems to recognise some other kinds of good, apart from virtues, that can make one happy. Of course, he does not say that they are as essential as virtues, but neither does he claim that only virtue is part of happiness. One can support this claim, Vlastos writes, by recalling two passages, one from the *Apology* and one from the *Gorgias*.¹¹⁹ In the *Apology* Socrates says:

[I ask you] to make your first and strongest concern not wealth but the soul-that it should be as virtuous as possible. For virtue does not come from wealth, but

¹¹⁸ G.Vlastos [1991]: 219.

¹¹⁹ See G. Santas [2001]: 20.

through virtue, wealth and everything else, private and public, become good for men. [*Apology* a8-b4, G. Vlastos 1991, p. 219]

If Socrates had identified virtue with happiness, then he should not need to mention any other goods that contribute to happiness. Here he clearly proposes that a number of other things are important for our happiness, but only when they derive from virtue. Virtue then, is the primary component of happiness but does not seem to be the only one. This passage from the *Apology* can be considered as the forerunner of what Socrates holds in the *Gorgias*:

Now is there anything in existence that isn't either good or bad or intermediate between the two: neither good nor bad? [...] And you call "goods" wisdom and health and wealth and other things of that sort? [...] And by "neither good nor evil" do not you mean things of this sort: which partake now of the one now of the other and at times of neither- for example, sitting and walking and running and sailing; and again stones and sticks and other things of that sort? And when people do those intermediate actions, do they do them for the sake of the good things, or good things for the sake of the intermediates? So it is in pursuit of the good that we walk when we walk, thinking this would be better, and when, on the contrary, we stand, this too we do for the sake of the good? Is it not so? [*Gorgias* 467e1-468b4]

In this passage Socrates recognises that, apart from the good and the bad things, there is yet another category -of things he calls intermediates. These are things such as walking, sitting, running and sailing, which have only instrumental value. What is more, in the category of the things that he considers as goods, apart from wisdom, Socrates unexpectedly places two other non-moral goods, wealth and health. What does that mean for the identity thesis? It means that although *prima facie* it is suitable for some passages of the early Platonic dialogues a closer examination of these and of other passages, such as this one from the *Gorgias*, can show that the sufficiency thesis is more suitable.

The identity thesis attributes to the non-moral good only instrumental value. But Socrates argues that non-moral good, such as wealth and health, are part of the good, rather than instrumental means to happiness. However, by following the sufficiency thesis one can see that this condition can be satisfied. The identity thesis can only be useful when one has to choose between vicious and virtuous alternatives. It does not provide any information on what to do when both alternatives are morally acceptable. Throughout one's life these choices may make a difference in terms of one's happiness. One could probably be happier if one were able to accommodate one's virtues with

living next to the beach. Of course, living next to the beach is not a moral good and is indifferent to one's virtue but can provide more happiness to a virtuous person. Having money and being healthy can make one happier than being virtuous on its own. One might argue that one could be happy by just being poor and virtuous. However, one cannot reasonably argue the same for the other non-moral good that Socrates recognises, which is health. A virtuous person can be happy while unhealthy but can be happier while healthy. By classifying non-moral goods such as wealth and health in the category of goods that are not instrumental, Socrates argues that the picture of happiness is not monochrome, such as, say blue, standing for virtue. On the contrary, the picture of happiness is polychrome, most of it painted blue, but flecked out with a multitude of other colours, standing for non-moral goods. Each of the colours, apart from blue, makes a tiny but essential contribution to the colour of happiness.¹²⁰

5.6.4. The Brickhouse and Smith Thesis

Brickhouse and Smith offer the fourth interpretation, according to our initial classification (5.6.), concerning the relation between happiness and virtue. In their book *Plato's Socrates* they hold that virtue is neither sufficient nor necessary for happiness, but rather merely contributory to it.¹²¹

The insufficiency of virtue for happiness is based on the distinction between virtue as a condition of the soul, and virtue as virtuous activity, which, argue Brickhouse and Smith, is a Socratic distinction. On the basis of this distinction, Brickhouse and Smith undertake to show that Socrates takes only good or virtuous activity to be necessary and sufficient for happiness; the virtuous condition of the soul, however, valuable it is according to Socrates, is not sufficient for happiness. The claim that virtue is not necessary for happiness is based on Socrates' case, which they believe proves that one can be happy without being virtuous.¹²²

5.6.4.1. The Insufficiency of Virtue for Happiness

Brickhouse and Smith maintain that by "living well and doing well" Socrates means happiness. What is not clear, however, is what Socrates takes the terms "living well" and "doing well" to refer to. As they put it:

¹²⁰ G.Vlastos [1991]: 223.

¹²¹ See T. Brickhouse & N. Smith [1994]: 103, 105.

¹²² Ibid. 103-136.

On the one hand, he may take the terms to refer to a particular condition of the soul, and whatever activities might be performed under the guidance of the condition of the soul (see, eg., *Ap.* 28b5-9; *Charm.* 160d5-e1; *Rep.* I 335d11-12). In this case, the condition alone would appear to be sufficient for happiness. But it might also mean that some level of achievement in one's activity is required, for which external factors such as opportunity and the powers to accomplish that level of achievement are necessary conditions. Such a level of achievement might at least sometimes require the use of the body, or at least that the body not be an impediment. In this case, the possession of virtue may not always be sufficient for living justly and, hence, for living well, since there may be circumstances that prevent one from attaining the necessary level of achievement in one's activities". [T. Brickhouse & N. Smith, 1994, p.113].

In order to reinforce the claim that happiness is based on the agents' acts rather than on the agent's condition of the soul, Brickhouse and Smith quote the following passage from the *Gorgias*:

The temperate one is not one to pursue or flee from what is not fitting, but the affairs, and men, and pleasures, and pains he ought to flee and pursue, and to endure remaining where he ought. And so it is most necessary, Callicles, that the temperate person, just as we have reported, being just and brave and pious, is completely good, and *the good person acts well and nobly in what he does, and the one who does well is blessed and happy. But the base person and the one who acts evilly is wretched.* (507b5-c5). [T. Brickhouse & N. Smith, 1994, p. 114, their emphasis].

Since Brickhouse and Smith argued that living well and doing well, the two states that Socrates uses in biconditional relation to happiness, refer to the acts that the agent performs and not to the condition of the agent's soul. They maintain that virtue cannot be sufficient for happiness because it is possible that the agent should suffer some disasters and impediments that can make him unable to achieve happiness. Because of bad luck, the agent will no longer have the power to accomplish the level of achievement that happiness requires. So, virtue is not sufficient for happiness; in addition one must actually pursue right ends. If one is prevented from engaging in the right activities, (from leading the examined life, for example) by some diseases or impediments, one can be virtuous, but not happy.¹²³

5.6.4.2. Virtue is not Necessary for Happiness

After arguing that virtue is not sufficient for happiness, Brickhouse and Smith focus on the case of Socrates to support the second claim of their thesis, i.e. that virtue is not necessary for happiness either.¹²⁴ They hold that there is no doubt that Socrates regards himself as a “good man” by saying that “no evil comes to a good man in life and death, nor are the concerns of this person neglected by the gods”.¹²⁵ Socrates, however, insists that he lacks the moral knowledge that virtue requires.¹²⁶ But Socrates is the paradigmatic happy person and the one who has led an exemplary examined life. Since Socrates does not consider his own life to be unhappy, his case can be used to show that one can be happy without virtue. Brickhouse and Smith summarise their argument concerning the relation between virtue and happiness as follows:

the virtuous condition of the soul is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness. [...] Only *good action*, and, especially unimpeded activity guided by virtue, will enable us to live a happy life. Such activity is both necessary and sufficient for happiness. And the happiest life is ensured by living without impediment a life that is guided by virtue. [T. Brickhouse & N. Smith, 1994, p. 135, emphasis added].

5.7. Comparing Platonic and Virtue Ethicists Accounts of Virtue and Happiness

So far, I have articulated how Platonic scholars and the proponents of virtue ethics treat the relation between virtue and happiness. I have discussed four theses within virtue ethics' framework, namely:

- (1) *Slote's Independence Thesis [ST]*, that virtue and happiness are independent.
- (2) *Watson's and Slote's Thesis [WST]*, that virtue is the sole or primary constituent of happiness, and accordingly something necessary and sufficient for happiness or something necessary but not sufficient for happiness.
- (3) *Hursthouse's Thesis [HT]*, that virtues are neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness, but only reliable bets for it. A natural way to interpret the latter is by understanding Hursthouse's position as instrumental, though not utilitarian.

¹²³ Ibid. 123.

¹²⁴ In an earlier article [1987] Brickhouse and Smith argued that virtue is not sufficient for happiness but that it is necessary. In this book, however, they change their position by maintaining that virtue is not necessary for happiness either. See Brickhouse and Smith [1994]: 105 n.6.

¹²⁵ *Apology* 41c9-d2 & Brickhouse and Smith [1994]: 124.

¹²⁶ *Laches* 186b8-c5, 194d1-2; *Protagoras* 361b1-2; *Apology* 21b1-d7, *Euthyphro* 5a3-c7; 15c11-16a4; *Gorgias* 509c4-7.

(4) *The Character Utilitarianism Thesis [CU]*, which claims that the virtues' contribution to happiness is important, but happiness is the ultimate end, and that in this sense, virtue is just an instrumental means to that end. Virtue has value so far as it promotes happiness; virtue does not have any value by itself.

I have also dedicated Section 6 of this chapter to exploring the four interpretations that have so far been offered on the Platonic conception of the relation between virtue and happiness. These are:

- (1) *The Instrumental Thesis [IST]*, namely that virtue is desirable only as an instrumental means to happiness, and not at all for its own sake. This thesis has been offered by T. Irwin and only applies to early Platonic dialogues.
- (2) *The Sufficiency Thesis [SFT]*, namely that the relation between virtue and happiness is constitutive, but only partly so. The proponents of this thesis hold that virtue is a principal, that is, a primary component of happiness, but not the sole thing desirable for its own sake.
- (3) *The Identity Thesis [IDT]*, namely that the relation is constitutive *in toto*. According to this theory, virtue is happiness -the only thing that makes life good and satisfying.
- (4) *The Brickhouse and Smith Thesis [BST]*, namely that the virtuous condition of the soul is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness. Only good action, and especially unimpeded activity guided by virtue, will enable us to live a happy life. Such activity is both necessary and sufficient for happiness. And living without impediment a life that is guided by virtue ensures the happiest life.

As I mentioned when I introduced the understanding of the relation between virtue and happiness by Platonic scholars (5.6.), Slote's thesis does not have its origin in Plato's ethics. For, as all the above interpretations indicate, virtue and happiness are notions related in many ways, rather than independent from each other.

Some *prima facie* comments, however, on the relation between the remaining three (virtue ethics) and the four (Platonic scholars') theories make the comparison more complicated. Let us take character utilitarianism [CU], Hursthouse's thesis [HT] and Watson's and Slote's Thesis [WST] in turn, and see some *prima facie* relations with the theses proposed by Platonic scholars.

Character utilitarianism [CU] seems to have something in common with the instrumental thesis. Both theses propose to see virtue as something that does not have value in itself but only as an instrumental means to happiness. Also virtue and happiness are seen as distinct, though not independent. However, one can also point out some

prima facie dissimilarities with this analogy, such as, that the instrumental thesis [IST] presumably refers to personal happiness whereas CU is mostly focused on general happiness.

Hursthouse's thesis [HT] now appears to share similarities with two theses proposed by Platonic scholars, namely the instrumental thesis [IST] and the Brickhouse and Smith thesis [BST]. For both HT and IST conceive virtue to be an instrumental means to happiness. Also both refer to personal happiness. HT also possesses essential similarities with BST, since they both understand virtue as something neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness.

It is worth recalling here that BST understands happiness as virtuous activity and virtue as something separate from happiness, since they distinguish between virtuous activity and virtue, and then they share with character utilitarianism and Hursthouse's thesis the understanding of happiness as something distinct from virtue. However, within character utilitarianism, virtue is a necessary and probably sufficient means for happiness, whereas according to Brickhouse and Smith's thesis, virtue as a mental state is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness.

Watson's and Slote's Thesis [WST], the sufficiency [SFT] and the identity thesis [IDT] support the claim that virtue and happiness are not distinct. More inter-relations can be found among these theories. If Watson and Slote insist that virtue is the sole component of happiness, then they share the claim supported by the identity thesis. On the other hand, if Watson and Slote claim that virtue is the primary component of happiness, though not the only one, then it seems that they subscribe to the sufficiency thesis. Before I proceed, I shall present schematically the aforementioned possible similarities and dissimilarities:¹²⁷

[1] *Character Utilitarianism*

<u>CU= IST</u>	<u>CUγ BST</u>	<u>CU IST</u>
Virtue is an instrumental means to happiness and something distinct from it.	According to CU, virtue is a necessary and sufficient means for happiness, whereas according to BST, virtue is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness.	CU is based on general happiness, whereas IST is based on personal happiness.

¹²⁷ I have here used symbols "=" and " γ " in order to indicate relations of similarity and dissimilarity respectively, rather than relations of identity and distinctiveness.

[2] *Hursthouse's Thesis*

HT=IST	HT=BST
Virtue as an instrumental means to personal happiness	Virtue as something neither necessary nor sufficient for personal happiness.

[3] *Watson's and Slote's Thesis*

WST= SFT	WST=IDT
Virtue as primary but not sole constituent of happiness	Virtue as the sole constituent of happiness

The *prima facie* approach of the above theories, which Platonic scholars and virtue ethicists support, offers a variety of combinations to choose from. The only way out of this impasse is to examine which theories are unsound or less valid. I shall do so by focusing on the Platonic theories themselves, which I am discussing here, and by arguing against the BST, the IST and the IDT. I shall hold that from the above *prima facie* parallels only one seems plausible, namely the one between WST and SFT. I shall begin with the BST and its claim that virtue is neither sufficient nor necessary for happiness.

5.7.1. Criticising the Brickhouse and Smith Thesis

The insufficiency of virtue is based on what Brickhouse and Smith call the Socratic distinction between virtue as a condition of the soul and virtue as virtuous activity. Brickhouse and Smith argue that the virtuous condition of the soul is not sufficient for happiness.¹²⁸ Vlastos maintains that this argument is based on a distinction that is textually groundless. Vlastos continues his arguments by writing:

[...] such a distinction is never mentioned in any of Plato's early dialogues nor could it be expressed in their vocabulary, as its proponents would have realised if they had asked themselves how the quoted statement could be translated into Greek without resort to Aristotelian idiolect ἔξις for [a], ἐνέργεια for [b]. To give Socrates' moral theory the benefit of Aristotle's one salient innovation would be plainly anachronistic. [G. Vlastos, 1991, p. 232, n. 103]

Brickhouse and Smith reply that Vlastos' comment simply blunts the evidence that they cite against the sufficiency of virtue for happiness thesis.¹²⁹ As evidence for the insufficiency of virtue, Brickhouse and Smith offer the bad luck of a diseased body or disasters and impediments that the virtuous person may not overcome, since some of the

¹²⁸ T. Brickhouse & N. Smith [1994]: 105.

¹²⁹ T. Brickhouse & N. Smith [1994]: 119 n.30.

functions of the soul, such as management, have their limits. Although the soul can manage and rule over itself, it cannot do so over the acts of the person whose soul it is. Only the soul that is concerned with good action, and not merely with the maintenance of its own condition, can do so. It is virtuous actions that can make one happy and not the virtuous condition of the soul. The condition of the soul by itself is not sufficient for happiness.¹³⁰

There are two problems with this interpretation. The first is that Brickhouse and Smith do not make it clear whether disasters or a diseased body are impediments for the condition of the soul or for the virtuous activity. One can have a virtuous condition of the soul despite the diseased body that one might possess. Also one can be virtuous with respect to one's soul, despite the bad luck which one is unlikely to overcome. The disasters and the diseased body can be great impediments when one attempts to perform an action rather than when one possesses a virtuous soul. Socrates has probably this in his mind when, even though he has been condemned to death, he faces the end of his life with equanimity by saying: "no evil comes to a good person either in life or in death".¹³¹ The goodness of his soul alone seems to be sufficient for Socrates to be happy and to overcome bad luck. The well being of the soul is prior to the performance of a virtuous action.¹³²

The second problem with the BST is that, even if one accepts this distinction between the virtuous condition of the soul and virtuous activity, one can refer to passages from the early Platonic dialogues and the *Republic* in order to argue that Plato actually maintains that the evaluation and definition of virtue is prior to action and not vice versa, as BST implies. Socrates' repeated refusal to accept definitions and evaluations of virtues that refer to specific actions can be considered as a forerunner of this claim. When Charmides defines temperance as quietness, Socrates replies that this is an external feature of a person's behaviour, similar to slowness in walking or speaking. Socrates maintains that if we take such external features of action to be a sufficient condition for temperance, without any reference to motivation, one can provide many counterexamples.¹³³ Similarly, Socrates convinces Laches that bravery is not to be defined by reference to independently defined brave action, for the variety of actions resulting from bravery cannot be independently characterised as having some single

¹³⁰ Ibid. 115. & *Gorgias* 507b-c5.

¹³¹ *Apology* 41d1-2.

¹³² M. Burnyeat [1971]: 211, 232.

property apart from their connection with the virtue of persons. Laches then suggests that bravery is not merely to stand fast in battle. Instead it is some sort of endurance of the soul.¹³⁴ So, bravery consists of some state of the soul rather than of a behavioural tendency.

In the *Republic*, Socrates explicates the priority of virtue as a condition of the soul over virtue as a virtuous activity by arguing:

But the truth of the matter was, as it seems, that justice is indeed something of this kind, yet not in regard to the doing of one's own business externally, *but with regard to that which is within and in the true sense concerns one's self, and the things of one's self*. It means that a man must not suffer the principles in his soul each to do the work of some other and interfere and meddle with one another, but do that well of what in the true sense of the word is properly his own, and having first attained to self-mastery and beautiful order within himself, and having harmonised these three principles, the notes or intervals of three terms quite literally the lowest, the highest, and the mean, and all others there may be between them, and having linked and bound all three together and made of himself a unit, one man instead of many, self-controlled and in unison, he should then and then only turn to practice if he find aught to do either in the getting of wealth or the tending of the body or it may be in political action or private business – in all such doing believing and naming *the just and honourable action to be that which preserves and helps to produce this condition of soul*, and wisdom the science that presides over such conduct, and believing and naming the unjust action to be which ever tends to overthrow this spiritual constitution, and brutish ignorance to be the opinion that in turn presides over this. [*Republic*, 443c9-444a3, Shorey's translation, my emphasis]

In the above passage, Socrates maintains that the priority of virtue over the evaluation of action, over right conduct, is necessary. An action cannot be considered virtuous when the soul of the person who performs it is not virtuous or harmonised. In addition, the actions that can be considered virtuous are these that preserve and produce this condition of the soul. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates rejects Callicles' expansive conception of happiness and suggests as an alternative the adaptive conception of happiness.¹³⁵ Socrates asks the virtuous person to adapt his desires to the circumstances and suggests that by doing so he can secure his happiness.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, to adapt one's desires to a particular set of circumstances requires the virtue to get things right and choose the desires that can be satisfied under these circumstances. Then, before one acts, one has formed one's actions, being virtuous. Virtue precedes action.

¹³³ *Charmides* 159b7-160d4.

¹³⁴ *Laches* 192b9-c1.

¹³⁵ T. Irwin [1995]: 117.

Brickhouse and Smith refer to Socrates' case in order to defend their claim that virtue is not necessary for happiness. But their argument is not convincing. Brickhouse and Smith hold that Socrates is the paradigmatic good and happy man, yet he does not possess the knowledge that virtue requires. Since this lack of knowledge does not make him unhappy, Brickhouse and Smith write, virtue is not necessary for being happy. The knowledge of virtue is presupposed for one's happiness, and if this is so, then virtue is necessary for happiness. According to the Delphic oracle, no person is wiser than Socrates.¹³⁷ If this is so, then Socrates is happier than the rest. The reason is that he knows that he does not know and that proves that he knows more than the rest. His happiness derives from his knowledge of virtue. Even Socrates' happiness derives from his virtue of knowing himself. Now, it is true that Socrates insists that he does not have the knowledge that virtue requires but he does not insist that he is the best possible instance of the happiest person. He just confirms, through his examination of people, the Delphic oracle's assertion that he is wiser than the rest and so happier than everyone else. Socrates honestly denied that he possessed the knowledge that virtue requires. On the other hand, he is happy because he possesses some of the knowledge of virtue and his happiness is based on this awareness. Socrates could not be happy without virtue. His virtue of knowing that he does not know makes him happy. It is a necessary condition for his happiness. He is not a happy person, however, since he does not have all the knowledge that virtue requires. The person who has all the knowledge that virtue requires, will be happier than Socrates. For the happy person virtue will also be necessary.

If this argument is on the right track then the BST is not plausible. Given the fact that our main concern is the possible similarities between Plato's ethics and virtue ethics on the basis of the relation between virtue and happiness, any parallel between BST and virtue ethics should be withdrawn. So our initial schema of the possible parallels between Plato's ethics and virtue ethics now takes the following form:

¹³⁶ 493c5-7.

¹³⁷ *Apology* 20c4-23c1.

[1] *Character Utilitarianism*

<u>CU= IST</u>	<u>CU, BST</u>	<u>CU IST</u>
Virtue is an instrumental means to happiness and something distinct from it.	According to CU, virtue is a necessary and sufficient means for happiness, whereas according to BST, virtue is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness.	CU is based on general happiness, whereas IST is based on personal happiness.

[2] *Hursthouse's Thesis*

<u>HT=IST</u>	<u>HT=BST</u>
Virtue as an instrumental means to personal happiness	Virtue as something neither necessary nor sufficient for personal happiness.

[3] *Watson's and Slote's Thesis*

<u>WST= SFT</u>	<u>WST=IDT</u>
Virtue as primary but not sole constituent of happiness	Virtue as the sole constituent of happiness

5.7.2. Against the Identity Thesis

Nevertheless, even when one argues that virtue is both necessary and sufficient for happiness the disagreement concerning whether one should conceive it as a necessary and sufficient instrumental means to happiness or as a sufficient and necessary component of happiness is significant.

The instrumental thesis [IST], the identity thesis [IDT], and the sufficiency thesis [SFT] treat virtue as necessary and sufficient for happiness. But their agreement does not go very far. The IST supports the claim that virtue is just an instrumental means to happiness and that it does not have any value by itself. Conversely, virtue has value only insofar as it promotes happiness. The proponent of this analysis (Irwin) maintains that it applies only to the early Platonic dialogues. The IDT and the SFT put forward that virtue is a component of happiness and not an instrumental means to happiness. Their disagreement is based on whether virtue is the only component of happiness [IDT] or whether it is its primary component [SFT]. According to the proponent of this interpretation (Vlastos), the claim that virtue has value in itself applies to the middle Platonic dialogues. Socrates, in the *Republic* and elsewhere, offers enough evidence for

considering virtue as good in itself by classifying it in the fairest category in Glaucon's threefold division.

One can then reasonably argue that the possibility of considering virtue as an instrumental means to happiness appears only in the early Platonic dialogues. Within the middle Platonic dialogues, virtue is treated only as an essential component of happiness and so as good in itself. If this is so, after recalling the three different theories that virtue ethics offered regarding the same issue, one can maintain that Watson and Slote's conception of virtue as primary component of happiness drew inspiration only from the middle Platonic dialogues and therefore holds no relevance to the early Platonic dialogues. Character utilitarianism [CU] and Hursthouse's thesis [HT] on the other hand, appear to find their cousin in the early Platonic dialogues, where the instrumental conception of virtue is, according to Irwin, the only sound one.

It is, therefore, important to examine the affinities among SFT, IDT and, WST within the middle Platonic dialogues on the one hand, and between CU, HT, and IST, within the early Platonic dialogues on the other. Irwin might agree with this, since he approves the difference between the early and the middle dialogues. However, Irwin would suggest excluding the IDT, a claim which Vlastos could happily reinforce. They both maintain that virtue and happiness are not identical for Plato. Virtue is dominant in happiness but not identical to happiness.¹³⁸ In order to illustrate this claim, Vlastos refers to, among other things, the case of someone who must spend the night in a strange house and has two choices: either to sleep on a bed, which is freshly made with clean sheets, or to sleep on a bed that the night before was used by someone in a drunken stupor who vomited on the bed so that the sheets are still soggy from the remains. If virtue and happiness were identical, then, "since my virtue would be unimpaired if, clenching my teeth and holding my nose, I were to crawl in between those filthy sheets for a bad night's sleep, why should not my happiness be similarly unimpaired?"¹³⁹ Vlastos maintains that the same applies to cases that concern happiness for a longer period than that one night.¹⁴⁰ So the IDT is not sound, because if it were, then no ground for rational preference between multiple courses of action indistinguishable in respect of virtue but otherwise different materially could be provided.¹⁴¹ What is more, in the *Gorgias*

¹³⁸ T. Irwin [1995]: 193.

¹³⁹ G. Vlastos [1991]: 215.

¹⁴⁰ G. Vlastos compares an inmate of Gulag with an inmate of a Cambridge college. If virtue and happiness were identical then these two inmates should be equally happy.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 216.

Socrates is concerned with wealth and health as forms of the good, as well as with wisdom.¹⁴² In this respect, Watson's and Slote's claim that virtue is the sole constituent of happiness cannot be considered as a view held by Socrates too, as Watson argues.¹⁴³ Our schema, then, becomes as follows:

[1] *Character Utilitarianism*

<u>CU= IST</u>	<u>CU= BST</u>	<u>CU IST</u>
Virtue is an instrumental means to happiness and something distinct from it.	According to CU, virtue is a necessary and sufficient means for happiness, whereas according to BST, virtue is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness.	CU is based on general happiness, whereas IST is based on personal happiness.

[2] *Hursthouse's Thesis*

<u>HT=IST</u>	<u>HT=BST</u>
Virtue as an instrumental means to personal happiness	Virtue as something neither necessary nor sufficient for personal happiness.

[3] *Watson's and Slote's Thesis*

<u>WST= SFT</u>	<u>WST=IDT</u>
Virtue as primary but not sole constituent of happiness	Virtue as the sole constituent of happiness

5.7.3. Virtue as a Primary Constituent of Happiness

By rejecting the possibility of the IDT, two parallel alternatives are left. One concerns the early Platonic dialogues, IST, CU and HT, and the other all the Platonic dialogues, namely SFT and WST.¹⁴⁴ Vlastos rejects the IST and maintains that only the SFT is sound. He says that it is unreasonable to accept that, for Socrates, virtue and happiness are distinct as IST proposes.

According to IST, virtue has no value in itself. To consider virtue as having no value in itself contradicts a number of texts in the early Platonic dialogues, where Socrates says that virtue does not come from wealth, but through virtue, wealth and

¹⁴² *Gorgias* 467e5.

¹⁴³ See G. Watson, [1997]: 62.

¹⁴⁴ I here put aside the difference between IST and CU, namely the fact that the first appeals to personal happiness and the second to the general happiness.

everything else, private and public, becomes good for men.¹⁴⁵ What is more, in the *Charmides*, Socrates defines virtue as always good (161a2-10) and in the *Protagoras* he goes even further by saying that virtue is the most important good (313a6-b1). The sovereignty of virtue is a doctrine that Socrates puts forward in almost all the early Platonic dialogues and any interpretation that doubts it is missing the point.¹⁴⁶

Furthermore, the IST implies that virtue and happiness are distinct. Socrates holds, in different passages, that virtue and happiness are far from being separate. In the *Crito* he argues that living well is the same as living honourably and justly (48b9, 48d). In the *Apology* he gives the first evidence of this claim by arguing that a man should give countervailing weight (ὑπολογίζεσθαι) to whether his action is just or unjust rather than to danger or to death (28b5-9). He reinforces this claim some lines later: no evil comes to a good person either in life or in death (41d1-2). Socrates' virtuous person is concerned only for just actions regardless of the consequences. The happiness of the virtuous person is not distinct from him and from his actions. Furthermore in the *Gorgias* Socrates virtually identifies justice and virtue with happiness by replying to Polus "Yes, in my opinion, Polus, for the man and woman who are noble and good I call happy, but the evil and base I call wretched" (470e). Finally, but not least, in the *Euthydemus* Socrates stresses once more the strong relation between virtue and happiness by holding that "since you think it [virtue] can [be taught], and that wisdom alone in the wide world makes a man happy and fortunate, don't you say it is necessary to love wisdom, and don't you mean to do it yourself?" (282c-d).

Virtue and happiness are strongly related without being identical. Virtue is the primary component of happiness, but not the only one.¹⁴⁷ Some other components, which are neither necessary nor sufficient, can make the difference in any account of happiness. According to Vlastos, these are the non-moral goods, such as living next to the beach and sleeping on a bed with clean sheets. Socrates considers them also by maintaining that, apart from wisdom, wealth, health and all other such things are goods and their

¹⁴⁵ *Apology* 30a8-b4.

¹⁴⁶ Irwin [1977: 85] holds that in the *Lysis* Socrates commits himself to an instrumental thesis by holding two principles a) If A chooses x for the sake of y, A does not choose x for its own sake and b) If x and y are goods, and x contributes to y, x is not good in itself. Lesses discusses these two principles and he holds that Socrates neither clearly states a) and b) nor distinguish between them. He also holds that "Socrates is mostly concerned in this passage of the *Lysis* with the nature of propositions about what we value and, especially, their justification. Yet his concern does not imply that anything done for the sake of something else cannot be an intrinsic good". The relation *heneka tou* is not always an instrumental one. See also G. Lesses, [1985]: 166, 169, 171.

¹⁴⁷ See G. Lesses, [1985]: 170 and n.13.

opposites are evils.¹⁴⁸ For Socrates, virtue is an essential and primary component of happiness. Happiness, however, is a multitude of different colours, rather than a solid colour, such as virtue. If this is so, then, WST that virtue is the sole or primary component of happiness has its predecessor in the Platonic dialogues, but only if it abandons its first part. CU and HT drew inspiration, if any, from many theories. Platonic moral theory, however, is not to be found among them, at least with regard to the relation between virtue and happiness that the latter proposes. Our schema, then, finally becomes as follows:

[1] *Character Utilitarianism*

<u>CU=IST</u>	<u>CU=BST</u>	<u>CU=IST</u>
Virtue is an instrumental means to happiness and something distinct from it.	According to CU, virtue is a necessary and sufficient means for happiness; whereas according to BST, virtue is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness.	CU is based on general happiness, whereas IST is based on personal happiness.

[2] *Hursthouse's Thesis*

<u>HT=IST</u>	<u>HT=BST</u>
Virtue as an instrumental means to personal happiness	Virtue as something neither necessary nor sufficient for personal happiness.

[3] *Watson's and Slote's Thesis*

<u>WST=SFT</u>	<u>WST=IDT</u>
Virtue as primary but not sole constituent of happiness	Virtue as the sole constituent of happiness

In this chapter I have discussed two main issues, the locus of the virtue and the relation between virtue and happiness.

With regard to the relation between virtue and happiness, Plato's ethics differs substantially from Hursthouse's and character utilitarianism's agent prior virtue ethics. Within the latter versions virtue is seen as an instrumental means to happiness. Yet in the Platonic theory virtue is a necessary component of happiness rather than an instrumental means to it. In the light of this claim one can hold that Plato's ethics shares some

¹⁴⁸ *Gorgias* 467e5.

essential partial affinities with the Watson and Slote thesis, (both proponents of the agent-based virtue ethics), namely that virtue is a primary constituent of happiness.

The Platonic moral theory, however, *so far as the locus of virtue within the whole structure of the theory is concerned*, is a *Form-based agent-prior theory* and in this sense differs from Slote's and Watson's agent-based virtue ethics and it can be seen as an agent-prior virtue ethics. For both Plato's ethics and agent-prior virtue ethics do not see the notion of virtue as an explanatorily basic notion. Rather, virtue derives its evaluation either from the Form of the Good or from happiness respectively.

Slote's agent-based virtue ethics and Plato's ethics conceive the locus of virtue within their moral system in different ways. Slote, however, has not only proposed agent-based virtue ethics. He is also concerned about the notion of social justice and the way the latter can be captured within virtue ethics' framework. The dissimilarity that occurs between Plato's ethics and Slote's agent-based virtue ethics with regard to the locus of virtue should not prevent us from examining other aspects of Slote's virtue ethics in parallel with Plato's ethics.¹⁴⁹ Slote believes that virtue ethics can provide an account not only of individual justice, but also of social justice. I shall now turn to examine Slote's proposal of virtue ethics' social justice in parallel with Plato's account of justice.

¹⁴⁹ As it did not prevent us from seeing the parallel between Plato's ethics and Watson's and Slote's agent-based virtue ethics with regard to the relation between virtue and happiness.

CHAPTER SIX

JUSTICE IN PLATO AND VIRTUE ETHICS

6.1. The Criticism

Virtue ethicists attempt to offer a new moral theory. They do so by arguing that the thus far dominant moral theories, namely deontology-Kantianism and consequentialism-utilitarianism, propose an inadequate, disoriented and over-demanding ethical approach.¹ Proponents of virtue ethics focus their concern on notions which, according to them, are not given the treatment they deserve by the supporters of the two dominant theories in moral theorising. Notions such as virtue, moral character, human flourishing, emotions and feelings, virtue ethicists argue, have been considered by Kantians and utilitarians as "secondary" notions, that is, as notions derivative from something central in their system, such as the principle of utility or the categorical imperative.²

In arguing for a new moral theory, virtue ethicists give the notion of virtue a central role, and attempt to provide a more informative account of their theory by focusing on the relation of this notion with other notions such as action and happiness or human flourishing.³ With regard to the relation between virtue and action and between virtue and happiness, the proponents of virtue ethics -as I argued in the last two chapters- have offered a variety of approaches.⁴ Although one detects a pluralistic air within virtue ethics, this does not undervalue virtue ethicists' attempt to support a new way of doing moral philosophy.⁵

Moral philosophy, however, is not only concerned with notions of virtue, moral character, feelings and emotions of the moral agent and her inner state. The ambition of moral theories is, among other things, to solve in a conclusive manner moral

¹ See D. Statman, [1997b]: 3-11. G. Trianosky, [1997]: 42-43; M. Baron, P. Pettit, & M. Slote, [1997]: 176-199.

² G. Watson, [1997]: 57-68.

³ See M. Slote, [1997]: 239-246. Also, R. Hursthouse, [1997]: 229 & [1999]: 25-42, 121-140.

⁴ For instance the reductionist, non-reductionist, unitary and less unitary views with regard to the relation between virtue and evaluation of actions, and Slote's independence thesis, Slote's and Watson's thesis, Hursthouse's thesis and Character utilitarianism with regard to the relation between virtue and happiness.

⁵ See M. Slote, [1992]; J. Oakley, [1996]: 128-152; M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 175-206.

disagreements, and thus to provide guidance to any moral individual on how she can live her life. But, as Aristotle has taught, any human being is primarily a political animal.⁶ So any moral theory should not only provide answers to questions that concern the inner state of the individual, but must also accommodate her status as a member of a society.

Virtue ethicists, however, have mostly focused on the moral agent, her inner state, and on the level of individual decision-making. Thus, although there is considerable pluralism among the proponents of virtue ethics concerning the moral agent as such, and her individual justice, when they come to concerns of social justice, they have very little to say on how their preferred theory deals with such an essential matter.

The proponents of virtue ethics have attempted to counter various criticisms raised by the supporters of moral theories dominant until recently.⁷ R. Hursthouse, among others, has attempted to face a criticism made by the opponents of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics has been criticised for providing no moral guidance to the moral agent since it is just a trivially circular theory, which specifies right action in terms of the virtuous agent and the virtuous agent in terms of right action. Hursthouse answers that this is not what virtue ethics does. In her words:

[...] the theory is not trivially circular; it does not specify right action in terms of the virtuous agent and then immediately specify the virtuous agent in terms of right action. Rather, it specifies her in terms of the virtues, and then specifies these, not merely as dispositions to right action, but as the character traits (which are dispositions to feel and react as well as act in certain ways) required for *eudaimonia*. [R. Hursthouse, 1997, p. 229].⁸

Slote, Solomon, Oakley and Watson, among others, have also attempted to show how virtue ethics actually differs from consequentialism and deontology, and offers an interesting, rather than a highly autistic and antinomian, moral approach that undermines the familiar, intuitive notion that moral life involves living up to certain standards of behaviour or action, as some have argued.⁹ Regardless of whether virtue ethicists' answers are convincing, one can hold with some certainty that virtue ethicists have attempted to face criticisms made of their favoured theory.¹⁰ However, the well-based

⁶ See W. Kullmann, [1991]: 94-117.

⁷ See R. Loudon, [1984]; G. Harman, [1999]; M. Nussbaum, [1999]; B. Hooker, [2002]; K. Stohr & C. H. Wellman, [2002].

⁸ Hursthouse [2002] also argues that virtue ethics does not collapse to rule-consequentialism.

⁹ See M. Slote, [1992]; M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 177-206; J. Oakley, [1996]; D. Solomon, [1997]; G. Watson, [1997]; See also G. Cullity [1995] and N. Athanasoulis, [2000].

¹⁰ See also D. Solomon, [1997]: 165-179.

criticism that virtue ethicists have yet to accommodate an account of social justice, a vital notion for any moral system, seems to be passively accepted by the majority of virtue ethics' proponents.

The main line of this criticism comes from J.B. Schneewind who attempts to reply to those arguing that modern moral philosophy neglects virtues and suffers from schizophrenia.¹¹ Schneewind holds that a brief look at the modern history of philosophy is sufficient to show that virtue ethics did not suffer from neglect. Rather, its misfortune is due to the fact that it could not grasp one of the main notions in any moral system, namely justice. Justice could be captured only by the use of general principles and laws. However, virtue ethics, as is well known, does not accept this way of moral theorising. Schneewind also adds that, "it is up to virtue ethicists to show that that it was not virtue's own weakness" [in particular with regard to the notion of justice], "that brought its misfortunes down upon its own head".¹²

The need for virtue ethicists to initiate searching in this direction was announced a few years ago by two influential modern proponents of virtue ethics, namely Roger Crisp and Michael Slote. They concluded their jointly written introduction of a volume entitled *Virtue Ethics* by noticing that:

[...] the present volume may perhaps in the not-too-distant future have a companion volume called Oxford Readings in Virtue Politics. [R. Crisp & M. Slote, 1997a, p. 25].

Crisp and Slote propose that virtue ethicists should work towards this orientation because they are aware of some problems that current virtue ethics faces. The fact that virtue ethics has yet to offer an account of social justice, and of political morality more broadly, is hardly a minor problem for this theory. If virtue ethics declines to offer any sort of political philosophy, it simply gives up any attempt to develop a full-scale ethical alternative to currently dominant theories, which are capable of generating accounts of both individual and social values. In addition, if virtue ethics has to borrow from Kantian ethics or consequentialism in order to generate plausible political philosophy, then it acknowledges its inferiority in one major sphere of ethics.

¹¹ L. C. Becker, [1975]: 110-122. M. Stocker, [1976]: 453-466. For an argument along this lines see also P. Foot, [1979]: 1. Some years earlier G.H. von Wright [1963: 136] expressed the same thesis. He argued that virtue is a neglected topic in modern ethics and Kant is one of the culprits.

¹² J. B. Schneewind, [1990]: 63; See also G. Santas, [2001]: 267-268.

In what follows, I shall discuss whether virtue ethics can offer an account of social justice and if so of what sort. I shall do so by first examining whether virtue ethicists' favourite intellectual source, namely Aristotle, can offer any help to virtue ethics, and shall argue that Aristotle's analysis of social justice is actually based on acts and states of affairs. However, approaches of this sort cannot be accommodated by virtue ethics. Secondly, -on the basis of a number of similarities between Plato and virtue ethics that I have discussed in the previous chapters- I shall propose going back to Plato and endeavouring to determine whether his account of individual and social justice can provide any assistance to virtue ethicists in order for them to face this serious challenge. Finally, after exploring Plato's analysis of the relation between individual and social justice, I shall compare it with Slote's recent proposal of a concept of social justice for virtue ethics, namely the ethics of benevolence or caring, and I will discuss its possible similarities and dissimilarities with Plato's account.

6.2. Aristotle's Analysis of Justice

Aristotle's account of justice as a social virtue unfolds mainly in one of the common Books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics* (*EN* V = *EE* IV), and occasionally in the discussion about friendship (*NE* VIII & IX).¹³ Aristotle also discusses justice as a political institution in *Politics* (III, IV, & V). The philosopher from Stagira considers justice to be one of the central notions in his moral system and dedicates a considerable segment of his work to this notion. I shall begin with Aristotle's account of justice in the *Ethics*.

Aristotle distinguishes two notions of justice, the general and the particular (*NE* 1130a9-1130b16-17, 1130b30, 1130b31-1131a6). He also refers to two kinds of particular justice, distributive justice (τὸ διανεμητικὸν δίκαιον) and corrective or rectificatory justice (τὸ διορθωτικὸν δίκαιον). He pins down the semantic unity between distributive and rectificatory justice in two ways: first by associating it with "equality" (*NE* 1129a34, 1130b9), defining it as "proportional" (*NE* 1131b16) or "geometrical" equality (*NE* 1131 b12-13); secondly, by contrasting it with graspingness (πλεονεξίαν) (*NE* 1130a17ff).¹⁴ Let us see how Aristotle defines and relates general and particular justice Aristotle understands as general justice what is equivalent to what is lawful (*NE*

¹³ For a detailed exposition of the relevant chapter in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics* see D. Keyt, [1991a]: 238-278.

¹⁴ See G. Santas, [2001]: 279.

1129a 39- 40, 1130b 21-30). In this sense "just" is used to describe the person who obeys the law while the term "unjust" is used to describe the one who breaks the law. The law commands us to do whatever is required for the common good. If the common good is happiness, then the law requires us to create and preserve happiness in the community, that is the *polis*. The law also commands us to act in accordance with the various virtues, bravery, temperance and the like. General justice includes all the moral virtues; it is a complete virtue. This is so,

because the person who possesses it can exercise his virtue not only in himself but towards his neighbour also. For many men can exercise virtue in their own affairs, but not in their relations to their neighbour. This is why the saying of Bias is thought to be true, that "rule will show the man". For a rule is necessarily in relation to other men, and members of society. For this same reason justice, alone of the virtues, is thought to be "another's good", because it is related to our neighbour. [...] The best man is not he who exercises his virtue towards himself but he who exercises it *towards another*" [NE 1129b11-1130a13].

Aristotle understands justice as an other regarding notion rather than as a self-regarding one. Apart from the claim that relates general justice with whatever is considered as lawful, Aristotle also makes clear that his main aim in giving this account is to show that the virtue of justice can be accommodated within the theory of the mean. His aim is to investigate the sort of action that the virtue of justice is concerned with, what sort of a mean it is and what the extremes are between which justice is a mean (NE 1129a 3-5).¹⁵ This is so because general justice is identical with complete virtue (NE 1130b18-30), and virtue, according to Aristotle, is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect. (NE 1006b36)

This sense in which justice embraces the whole of virtue is contrasted with one in which it applies to a particular virtue. Aristotle holds that we think of people as unjust in the particular sense when they take more than their fair share of some good. He claims that there are two main kinds of particular justice (NE 1130b30-1131a9). One of these, distributive justice, is shown when money, honour, or other goods are to be distributed among the members of the community.¹⁶ The other, corrective or rectificatory justice is shown in rectifying the outcome of some actions.¹⁷ Both kinds of particular justice

¹⁵ See C. Young, [1989] & [1996]; D. Keyt, [1991a]; G. Santas, [2001]: 279.

¹⁶ See D. Keyt, [1991a].

¹⁷ Such transactions as selling, purchasing, loaning for consumption, pledging, loaning for use, depositing, and letting, stealing, committing adultery, poisoning, procuring, enticing slaves,

involve a form of equality.¹⁸ In distributive justice, the essential thing is not to treat everyone alike, but rather to treat equal people equally and unequals unequally (*Polit.* IV 9, VI 6). Justice consists in proportionality. If, for instance, two people are participating in a common enterprise to create something and one puts in more effort than the other does, it would not be fair, according to Aristotle, for both participants to partake equally in the rewards of the enterprise. Rather, the rewards should be proportioned to the contributions each of the people has made. Aristotle argues that, although all agree that justice in distribution must be in accordance with merit in some sense, not all mean the same kind of merit. In the democratic approach the criterion is free birth, in the oligarchic approach the criterion is wealth or good family, while in the aristocratic approach the criterion is excellence (*NE* 1131a25-b19).

Rectificatory justice involves what Aristotle calls arithmetical equality (*NE* 1131b25-1132b20). For instance, in crimes the criminal has gained an unfair advantage over her victim. Justice consists in attempting, as far as possible, to equalise the situation by requiring the criminal to compensate her victim. In rectificatory justice, judges should concentrate exclusively on the gains and losses that have been sustained. It seems that a state of affairs will be the pattern of justice here.

In *Politic III.9*, Aristotle provides an answer to questions about the justice of institutions. He believes that every institution has a specific target, and promotes whatever contributes to and sustains it. According to the oligarchic view, the city is an institution designed to protect property. Any discrimination among citizens on the grounds of property is associated with this purpose. According to the democratic view, the city exists to protect freedom. The main discrimination it should make is therefore between those who are and those who are not free citizens. Both oligarchic and democratic cities embody a kind of justice but are just only in relation to a particular end. For Aristotle, the city is an association, which exists for the sake of the good life that is required for virtuous activity. But the good life is based on different grounds, namely either the protection of property or the protection of freedom.

assassinating, acting as a false witness, assaulting, imprisoning, murdering, robbing with violence, mutilating, insulting (*NE* 1131a3-9).

¹⁸ T. Scaltsas [1995: 248] argues that "there is a domain for the application of justice which is not introduced either by distributive or by rectificatory justice. This is the domain of reciprocal justice [...]". Scaltsas reinforces the view advanced by D.G. Richtie [1894]: 185-192; W.F.R. Hardie, [1968]: 193-200. For a different understanding of reciprocal justice and its relation to distributive and rectificatory justice, see T. Irwin [1988]: 625; J. A. Steward, [1892]: 441-446; J. Burnet, [1900]: 224; H.H. Joachim, [1951]: 148f.; W. Hatch, [1879]: 243 f.

For Aristotle, justice is strongly associated with the city's good life. Just action is the action performed according to the pattern of the law. And just law is the law that contributes to or sustains the city's good. Justice is strongly associated with the city's good. Aristotle builds his theory of justice on the following pattern:

- (a) justice is a disposition that makes us do what is just and wish what is just (*NE* 1129a).
- (b) The just is the lawful and the fair (*NE* 1129a39-40, 1130b6).
- (c) The lawful is whatever sustains the city's good (*NE* 1129b13ff; *Polit.* III. 9) and the fair what preserves the purpose of the city (*NE* 1131a25-29).

The nature of Aristotle's analysis of justice is institutional and legal. Let us now see how general and particular justice are related.

While distinguishing between general and particular forms of justice, the philosopher from Stagira recognises in the latter form two essential parts, what he calls distributive and rectificatory justice. He also holds that particular justice is part of general justice (*NE* 1130b). In this sense, if general justice is legal, this also applies to particular justice. Further, both kinds of justice are particularly related to one's behaviour towards others, since general justice is another's good (*NE* 1129b11 - 1130a13). In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines injustice as the vice due to which each has what is another's, and not in conformity with the law (1366b 9-11). Aristotle understands justice as complete virtue, at least in so far as it concerns our relations with others.

Having explored how Aristotle considers the notion of justice I shall now focus on issues related to virtue ethics, and examine why the philosopher from Stagira does not, in my view, accommodate a virtue ethics analysis of justice. Aristotle employs two main factors in his analysis of the notion of justice:

- (1) conformity with the law
- (2) the notion of equality

Plato's pupil explicates general justice in terms of lawful actions and particular justice in terms of proportional equality in the distribution of certain kinds of goods. He holds that justice is a disposition that makes one do what is just and wish what is just towards others. In the same way, injustice means the state that makes one do what is unjust and wish what is unjust (*NE* 1129a). It seems, however, that an act is just or unjust not on the basis of the state of the doer's character, but on the basis of the doer's action, which is

performed according to or contrary to the law.¹⁹ Let me borrow at this point Annas' well-known distinction between agent-centred and act-centred accounts of virtue and vice in order to illustrate my point. According to Annas,

[...] act-centered theories are the kind most familiar in recent traditions of moral philosophy. They begin from a focus on the notion of *the right act*: the primary question is taken to be "what is the right thing to do?" and the primary notions are taken to be those of *duty*, *obligation*, and *morally ought* [...] If we go on to ask what a good person is like, we will be told that the good person is the person who does what he or she ought to do, that is the person disposed to perform the right action on all or most occasions. We identify the good person as the person who can be relied on to do his or her duty, and their virtue lies in conscientiousness about doing the right thing.

By contrast, an agent-centered theory begins in a different place. It focuses on the notion of the *good agent* or *good person*. It takes the primary question to be, "What kind of person should I be?", "what is the good life?", "What kind of life is admirable?". We find out what is the right thing to do, by asking what kind of thing the good person would do in these circumstances. The right thing to do is identified as the kind of thing done by the good person. For the agent-centered approach, the primary notions are not duty and obligation, but *goodness* and *virtue*. [J. Annas, 1981, p. 157, Annas' italics].

Virtue ethicists argue that they advocate an agent-centred theory.²⁰ Furthermore, Annas' distinction could also be written by one of them.²¹ Bearing this distinction in mind, and

¹⁹ G.Santas [2001: 279] highlights four stages in Aristotle's procedure: 1) justice is explicated as a disposition in terms of just actions, b) just actions are explicated in terms of lawful actions for general justice and in terms of proportional equality in terms of particular distributive justice, c) just laws and just proportional equality are explicated in terms of just constitutions and finally 4) just constitutions are explicated in terms of the contribution a constitution makes to the end or the good of the state.

²⁰ J. Annas and virtue ethicists some times use different terminology. In order to illustrate these differences a comment of clarification is required. Annas' agent-centred theory must here be understood primarily as Slote's agent-focused virtue ethics. The common feature that all kinds of virtue ethics share, according to Slote, is the main focus on the agent rather than on general principles and rules. In this sense one of the main characteristics of virtue ethics is that it is agent-centred. Slote, however, draws more sensitive distinctions concerning this issue than Annas. The latter by using the term "agent-centred" runs together Slote's three kinds of virtue ethics, namely agent-focused, agent-prior and agent-based. J. Annas has later become more sensitive to these distinctions. In the *Morality of Happiness* Annas [1993: 9-10] distinguishes between primary concepts, i.e. those on which a theory focuses, and the basic concepts, those in terms of which others are defined. She argues that in Aristotle's ethical theory virtue is primary but not basic. Slote seems to agree with her by holding that Aristotle has to be understood as an agent-focused virtue ethicist. However, this account does not apply to his analysis of the notion of justice, which is possibly not compatible with any kind of virtue ethics.

²¹ J. McDowell [1979: 331] draws a similar distinction, and understands Aristotle's ethics as an agent-centred / agent-focused theory. As I shall argue later on such an approach does not represent Aristotle's account of justice. McDowell writes: "On this view, the primary topic of ethics is the concept of right conduct, and the nature and justification of principles of behaviour. If there is a place for an interest in the concept of virtue, it is a secondary place. Virtue is a disposition (perhaps of a specially rational and self-conscious kind) to behave rightly; the nature of virtue is explained, as it

going back to Aristotle's analysis of justice, one can detect that Aristotle actually confirms that the character of the agent is not directly relevant to determining whether an act is just or unjust in the particular case. For, Aristotle understands the virtuous person as someone who sees or perceives what is good or right to do in any given situation. But such language implies that the virtuous individual does what is noble or virtuous because it is the noble or virtuous thing to do. What makes these actions virtuous is not that the virtuous person has chosen them. On the contrary the actions' status is treated as in some measure independent of agent-evaluations.²² Aristotle also allows that properly guided or momentarily inspired individuals can perform good or virtuous acts even if the individuals are not themselves good or virtuous (*NE* 1105b, 1145a34ff.) In this sense, Aristotle does not provide an agent-centred account of justice and injustice. But is this quite right? One difficulty might arise while recalling Aristotle's definition of just and temperate acts and his definition of virtue. Aristotle holds:

Actions, then, are called just and temperate when they are such as the just or the temperate man would do. [*NE* 1105b5-7]

Virtue is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. [*NE* 1006b36-40]

In the above passages, Aristotle seems to put forward a rather agent-centred account. Nevertheless Santas indicates that Aristotle's analysis of virtues is not the same for all the virtues. And if someone can detect a kind of virtue ethics approach in Aristotle's understanding of virtues, he will face great difficulty in doing so with regard to the virtue of justice.²³

Although Aristotle pays lip service to the idea that justice is a state of character, he in practice treats it as an attribute of actions and states of affairs. One can see this imbalance in Aristotle's thought while reading *Nicomachean Ethics* Book III. Although this book begins with the assertion that the unjust man and the unjust act are both unfair, the account of particular justice in that book and the two that follow is entirely concerned

were, from the outside in. My aim is to sketch the outlines of a different view, to be found in the philosophical tradition which flowers in Aristotle's. Thus, according to this different view, although the point of engaging in ethical reflection still lies in the interest of the question "How should one live?", that question is necessarily approached via the notion of a virtuous person. A conception of right conduct is grasped, as it were, from the inside out."

²² See M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 178.

²³ See G. Santas, [1997]: 266, 276-281 & [2001]: 267-268.

with just and unjust acts. In addition, as Aristotle himself claims, justice is a sort of mean, but it is not a mean in the same way as the other virtues but because it aims at the mean while injustice aims at the extremes (*NE*1133b 32-4). Aristotle seems to admit here that the particular virtue of justice does not fit into his own agent-centred theory of other virtue.

Aristotle's general justice is explicated in terms of lawful actions, whereas particular justice is explicated in terms of proportional equality in the distribution of certain kinds of goods. The notions of law and equality, which Aristotle employs while analysing justice, are based on an approach different from the main thesis of virtue ethics. For a virtue ethics account is not based on laws and general principles. It is rather focused on the character of the moral agent, in terms of which virtuous and just action is defined.

The notion of equality is also a notion that cannot be accommodated in a virtue ethicist approach. Particular justice is based on equality, arithmetical or geometrical. However, for equality to be attributed, a state of affairs is required. For instance, in the case of rectificatory justice a criminal must compensate the victim on the basis of the consequences of his actions.²⁴ A moral system, however, which functions on the basis of laws or states of affairs can satisfy Aristotle's account of general and particular justice, but it cannot satisfy a virtue ethicist's account.

Aristotle makes the justice of acts definitionally prior to the justice of dispositions.²⁵ The explication of general justice in terms of law and the explication of particular justice in terms of proportional equality, which can be applied on the basis of the consequences of an action, is very strong evidence against any inclination to consider Aristotle's account of justice as relevant to virtue ethics. Moreover, Aristotle appears to

²⁴ This also applies to Scaltsas' suggestion that we consider reciprocal justice as a third kind of justice which is neither distributive nor rectificatory justice. Actually, Scaltsas offers a utilitarian argument, not offered by Aristotle, but, Scaltsas maintains, it is required for Aristotle's position, to distinguish between reciprocal and rectificatory justice. Even if we go along with Scaltsas' suggestion, still Aristotle's account of reciprocal justice could not be seen as parallel with virtue ethics' main theses. See T. Scaltsas [1995]: 249, 260-262.

²⁵ " Now we observe that everyone means by justice the disposition which makes us do just actions, that makes us do what is just and wish what is just. In the same way we mean by injustice the state that makes us do injustice and wish what is unjust" (*NE.*, V, 1, 1129a). This is an explication of a just person in terms of wishing and doing what is just. Santas claims that Aristotle's analysis of justice is not along the same lines as virtue ethics. He holds that it is rather teleological since Aristotle explicates a just person in terms of doing just acts; "just acts in terms of laws; just laws in terms of just constitutions; and just constitutions in terms of the contribution which constitutions make to the end or good of the state". According to Santas [1996: 73-75], Aristotle's analysis of justice both in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and in *Politics* is a version of a universalist or non-egoistic teleological analysis.

focus more on social justice than on individual justice. He explicates general and particular justice as a personal virtue in terms of the justice of laws and constitutions, and so he does not have an ethics of virtue for justice. Furthermore he does not provide any informative account with regard to the relation between social and individual justice apart from the fact that he considers the latter as a part of the former. Finally, he considers justice to be other-regarding rather than self-regarding. Can Plato's analysis of social justice be reconciled better with the main theses of virtue ethics and with the primacy of character in particular? Can Plato provide a way out of the criticism that virtue ethicists face, namely that they have offered no account of social justice and are probably unable to do so in accordance with their main theses? Aristotle, virtue ethicists' main intellectual source, offers to virtue ethicists an account of social justice, but at the same time, this account seems to require virtue ethicists to pay a very high price, in case they want to adopt it: the abandonment of some essential virtue ethics theses. Can Plato's ethics provide virtue ethicists with an account of social justice that coheres with virtue ethics' main theses?

6.3. Plato's Analysis of Justice

Plato's account of justice is quite different from the Aristotelian analysis of justice. Plato's approach to justice in the early, transitional and middle dialogues makes no reference to ideas such as equality and liberty, which play a central role in most other philosophers' account of justice, and in particular Aristotle's.²⁶ Aristotle's teacher relates justice to harmony, stability and order in the city. And the stability of the city can be protected and secured by giving each person their due and by ensuring that each person does his or her own job and does not meddle with what is properly the concern of others (*Rep.* 433a). Plato's dictum with regard to justice consists in "having and doing what is one's own". (*Rep.* 433e).²⁷

²⁶ Both Socrates and Callicles in the *Gorgias* (488e-489a & 483c5, 484a1), and again Glaucon at the beginning of Book II of the *Republic* (359c6) take it for granted that for the public at large "justice" and "equality" can be understood interchangeably. But in the *Republic* Books IV and V, where he propounds, defends and applies his definition of justice no word for "equality" gets into the text. G.Vlastos notices that only in Book VIII Plato refers to equality "in his brush with democracy, where he handles the word brusquely in non-committal reportage, or wry epigram, or poison-dipped gibes, without a moment's pause to pick it up and probe its meaning" Vlastos also writes that when "[Plato] comes to work out the allocation of rights in the central books of the *Republic* he cold-shoulders it: not even a remote allusion to proportional equality there". But, as Vlastos notes, Plato finally refers to proportional equality in the *Laws*, 757c1-7. See G.Vlastos, [1977]: 19, 22-23.

²⁷ With regard to the relation between "doing one's own" and "having one's own" Vlastos [1977: 9] notes: " This claim enables us to see how "doing one's own" ties up with "having one's own" in Plato's

At this point we can recall Aristotle's thesis that justice is another's good and that it is mainly a virtue which concerns our behaviour towards other (*NE* 1129b11-1130a13). Furthermore, according to Annas' aforementioned distinction, Aristotle's account of justice is closer to act-centred theories. Plato, on the other hand, seems to put forward an analysis of justice that is closer to agent-centred theories such as virtue ethics. Justice turns out to be primarily concerned with the internal constitution of our souls, rather than with our behaviour towards others. (*Rep.*433c-d). But, such a claim requires considerable argument, since it is not obvious at first glance.

Plato distinguishes between justice in the city and justice in the individual in a clearer way than Aristotle does. He also dedicates a considerable segment of his work to illustrating the relation between social justice and individual justice. However, the relation between the just city and just individuals in Plato's *Republic* is quite complicated. This is so because Plato, unlike Aristotle and Rawls, does not merely hold the claim that a just individual is one who subscribes to the principles of a just society and displays them in her behaviour.²⁸ On the contrary, Plato advances the assumption of isomorphism and claims that a just individual is one whose soul is structurally similar or isomorphic to a just society.²⁹

It is this belief that has caused considerable controversy among scholars concerning the relation between the just city and the just individuals.³⁰ This problem is often approached on the basis of priority considerations.³¹ Some scholars have argued that Plato first fleshes out his theory of the just city and then simply applies it to the just individual.³² Others have maintained that a theory of the just individual is mechanically

thinking. He is assuming that where A is "doing his own" with reference to B and C, A is acting with the intention that B shall have B's own and C shall have C's own and neither of them shall have what is another's, and that his conduct towards B and C instantiates justice."

²⁸ See G. Santas, [1988]: 37 & [2001]: 113-129, 150-153.

²⁹ According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1963, s.v. "Analogy", 842), the early Greek concept of an analogy was based on its derivation (*ana logon*, "according to a ratio") and meant a "*similarity in proportional relationships*" (on the model of: as A is to B so C is to D), and it was not until later that an analogy came to be thought of on the sense of a "*similarity of function* performed by two elements in their respective contexts" (on the model of: as A is in B so C is in D). Neu [1971: 249 n2] holds that from the passage (*Rep.* ,368d-e), it will appear that Plato's analogy follows the first model with justice being present in "larger proportion" and its counterpart being on a "smaller scale". The plan of finding justice in the state and looking for its "counterpart" in the individual, however, is more evident on the second model.

³⁰ See among others R. C. Cross and A. D. Woozley, [1964]; R. G. Mulgan, [1968]; J. Neu, [1971]; B. Williams, [1971]; G. Vlastos, [1977]; J. Annas, [1981]; G. Brown, [1983]; G. Santas, [1988] & [2001]; T. Irwin, [1995]; D. Morrison, [2001].

³¹ We have a relation of priority when the relation of dependence runs in one direction only.

³² See J. Neu, [1971]: 238-254.

transferred to the just city, making that into a super-individual, and hence considering any individual man as subordinate to the city.³³

Before I proceed to examine the relation between the just city and the just individual in Plato's *Republic*, I shall make a pause for drawing some preliminary distinctions with regard to the notions of priority. There are various kinds of priority. Logical and causal priority are the kinds most relevant to our discussion here. As versions of logical priority in a broad sense I shall consider definitional priority and logical derivability. According to *definitional priority* A is prior in definition to B when B is defined in terms of A but A is not defined in terms of B. For instance, if one defines a just person as the person acting according to principles of justice, while making no reference to just persons in the definition of principles of justice, one then attributes priority in definition to just principles over just persons. According to *logical derivability*, to say that B's are logically derivative from A's means that to understand what B is, you must understand what an A is, or that the concept of a B can be explained or understood only through the concept of an A. For example, it could possibly be claimed that the concept "uncle" can be understood only in terms of the concept male. Now *logical derivability* can be seen at least in two ways, either *in order of discovery*, or *in order of justification*. One, for instance, can discover first A and secondly B, and then A has a priority of discovery over B. However, the order of discovery might be different from the order of justification. Although A is discovered initially and prior to B, A might be justified in terms of B and B will have a logical priority in order of justification over A. In the case of *causal priority*, A possesses a causal priority over B when A is not caused by B, but B is caused by A. In other words although A can exist without B, B cannot exist without A.

In the remainder of this chapter I shall discuss the relation between the just city and the just individuals in Plato's *Republic* in the light of the above distinctions. I will claim that there *is no definitional priority* between the just city and the just individuals. I shall also argue that, although there is in fact *a logical priority* of the just city over the just individuals, this is so only *in order of discovery* (*Rep.* 368d-e) rather than *in order of justification* (*Rep.* 443c-d). For the manner in which one discovers things is not and should not be the same as the manner in which things are justified. I shall also hold that Plato attributes *a causal priority* to the just individual over the just city (*Rep.* 441 d-e).

³³ See K.R. Popper, [1962]: 76; R. C. Cross and A. D. Woozley, [1964]: 111, 132-133.

While constructing his just city, Plato works with an eye to the just individual and does not determine his/her psychology by reference to the form of the just city.³⁴ In order to defend my claim I shall proceed as follows: First I shall supply Plato's account of isomorphism as it is presented in *Republic* II. Second I will defend the claim that the relation between just individuals and the just city is not based on considerations of priority in definition. Third, I shall discuss some passages that provide a basis on which to consider just individuals as causally prior to the just city and logically prior in order of justification. Finally, I shall present Slote's account of social justice. I shall argue that, if my analysis of Plato's individual and social justice is on the right track, then Plato can offer some help, probably more crucial than Aristotle's, to the proponents of virtue ethics, who have recently faced the challenge that their theory cannot provide an adequate account of the notion of justice.³⁵ I will also discuss a common feature of both Plato's and Aristotle's conception of justice which virtue ethics might need to avoid, since it seeks to meet different targets than Plato and Aristotle. Let us see first how Plato structures his argument.

6.3.1. Plato's Argument

In Book II Glaucon and Adeimantus have challenged Socrates to show that justice pays. In order to meet this challenge Socrates takes the rest of the *Republic* and produces various arguments. One of them unfolds in the second book of the *Republic*, where Plato displays the well-known analogy between the just city and just individuals. Earlier on, he has faced a serious difficulty in defining justice in the individual. He attempts to overcome this problem by turning abruptly (*Rep.*363d) to justice in the city. He writes:

The inquiry we are undertaking is no easy one but calls for keen vision, as it seems to me. So, since we are not clever persons, I think we should employ the method of search that we should use if we, with not very keen vision, were bidden to read small letters from a distance, and then someone had observed that these same letters exist elsewhere larger and on a larger surface. We should have accounted it a godsend, I fancy, to be allowed to read those letters first, and then examine the smaller, if they are the same. Quite so, said Adeimantus, but what analogy to this do you detect in the inquiry about justice? I will tell you, I said. There is a justice of one man, we say, and I suppose, also of an entire city? Assuredly, said he. Is not the city larger than the man? It is larger, he said. Then, perhaps, there would be more justice in the larger object, and more easy to apprehend. If it please you, then, let us first look for its quality in

³⁴ See A.W.H. Adkins, [1960]: 312 n.1; E. Barker, [1959]: 103 n.4; R. Robinson, [1953]: 211-212.

³⁵ See G.Santas, [1997]: 262-263; J.B. Schneewind, [1990]: 42-63.

states, and then only examine it also in the individual, looking for the likeness of the greater in the form of the less. [*Rep.* 368d-369a, Shorey's translation].

When we are not clear about justice in the individual, Plato says, we would do well to turn to justice in the city, for there we will find the same thing only written in larger letters, and so easier to make out.³⁶ He explicates what he means by this analogy later on in Book IV where he stresses that the just man and the just city will be no different but alike as regards the very form of justice (*Rep.*435a-b). He concludes by holding that the manner in which a man is just is similar to the manner in which a city is just (*Rep.* 441d).

6.3.2. Individual Justice and Social Justice

The fact that Plato attempts to give an account of the just individual by referring to something broader, namely the just city, has been considered by some scholars as evidence that Plato derived the account of the just individual from the account of the just city, and in accordance with this derivation, he considers the just city to be prior to the just individual. Others have argued that regardless of the order of exposition Plato's real argument mechanically transfers the account of the just individual to the state. It seems that both interpretations approach the relation between the just city and the just individuals on the basis of priority considerations, logical or perhaps causal. In other words they deal with the problem by asking, "which is prior in Plato's thought, the state or the individual?" A closer examination of the definitions of the just city and the just individual indicates that we do not have here a case of definitional priority. It can also be shown that, although there is a logical priority of the just city over the just individual, this is only in order of discovery, rather than in order of justification. Also it will emerge that just individuals are indeed causally prior to the just city. Let us see first why there is not any definitional priority between just city and just individuals. Plato defines the just city by holding:

For what we laid down in the beginning as a universal requirement when we were founding our city, this I think, or some form of this, is justice. And what we did lay down, and often said, if you recall, was that each one man must perform one social service in the state for which his nature was best adapted.

³⁶ The analogy thesis appears as an implicit assumption here, becomes explicit at 435a-b and then appears as a conclusion at 441d.

Yes we said that. And again, that to do one's own business and not to be a busy-body is justice is a saying that we have heard from many and have very often repeated ourselves. We have. This, then, I said, my friend, if taken in a certain sense appears to be justice, this principle of doing one's own business [*Republic* 433 a-b, Shorey's translation]

Plato also defines the just person by holding:

We must remember, then, that each of us also in whom the several parts within him perform each their own task- he will be a just man and one who minds his own affair. [*Republic* 441d9-e2, Shorey' translation]

It was Aristotle who first attempted to define how one should consider priority in definition. It is worth mentioning again here that according to the philosopher from Stagira, one thing is prior in formula (definition) to another if and only if the one is mentioned in the definition of the other but not the other in the definition of the one.³⁷ If, for instance, one were to define a just person as one who has strong desires to act according to principles of justice, and in one's statement of justice one makes no reference to a just person, one attributes priority of definition to justice over the just person.

Bearing Aristotle's definition of priority in formula in mind and looking back at the two definitions, that of the just city and that of the just individual, one can discern that Plato neither mentions the notion of just individual when he defines the just city nor does he refer to the just city when he defines the just individual. Neither definition makes reference to, or mentions the concept of, the other. So, there is no priority in definition between the just city and just individuals. Of what kind is then the relationship that occurs between just city and just individuals?

Santas argues that although there is no priority in definition between just city and just individuals, "Plato in fact derives the definition of just person from the definition of a just city, the assumption that a just city and the just person do not differ at all with respect to justice, and that the tripartite division of the soul is parallel to the tripartite division of the city".³⁸

Santas suggests dealing with the problem of the relation between the just city and the just person not in terms of priority in definition, but in terms of *logical derivability*,

³⁷ *Metaphysica* Z10, in particular 1034 b24-31. For the Aristotelian notion of priority in definition, see M. Ferejohn, [1980]: 117-28; D. Keyt, [1991b]: 126.

³⁸ See G.Santas, [1997]: 262-263 & [1988]: 37-59.

as he calls it. According to Santas' approach, although there is not to be found a priority in definition of the just city over the just person, Plato logically derives the notion of the just individual from the notion of the just city. I think that Santas' proposal to understand the relation between just city and just individuals is based on Socrates' suggestion to begin by inquiring what justice means in the state and, following that, to look for its counterparts on a smaller scale in the individual (*Rep.*368d-e). Although Santas' suggestion is supported by the passage quoted earlier on, it nevertheless faces the following problem. For Socrates first explores his understanding of the just city and, following that, examines the notion of the just person without committing himself to anything further than the relation of logical derivability of the just individual from the just city in order of exposition or discovery. However, the order of discovery differs from the order of justification. In other words, as will be shown, just individuals possess priority in justification and causal priority over the just city.

Let me support this claim. Socrates stresses in a clear way his actual thought concerning the relation between the just city and the just individual in the very well known passage in the *Republic* 443c-d, where he attributes *logical priority* (in order of justification) to the just individual over the just city. There he holds that the justice of the city is an *eid lon* an image of the real justice, which is the internal justice of the individual soul. The central point is that an image derives its properties from the original rather than the other way around. What makes it an image is its relation to the original. The original is strongly associated with truth whereas images are not. Plato however stresses that justice in the soul is the true justice (*Rep.* 443c-d), and thus this kind of justice is logically more fundamental than the justice in the city which is an *eid lon* of the real justice. Also, in various places Socrates actually provides quite informative, although indirect, accounts maintaining that what determines the character of the city is actually the character of the individuals rather than the other way around. Just individuals are *causally prior* to the just city. For instance, Socrates claims:

Is it not, then, said I, impossible for us to avoid admitting this much, that the same forms and qualities are to be found in each one of us that are in the state? They could not get there from any other source. It would be absurd to suppose that the element of high spirit was not derived in states from the private citizens who are reputed to have this quality, as the populations of the Thracian and Scythian lands [...] [*Republic* 435e, Shorey's translation]

Likewise Greece is held to be intellectual because Greeks are, and Egypt and Phoenicia are money-loving because Egyptians and Phoenicians are. Plato by analogy maintains here that a city has some characteristics A because the individuals, the citizens, have the characteristics A. Socrates reinforces this claim some lines later when he holds:

Are you aware, then, said I, that there must be as many types of character among men as there are forms of government? Or do you suppose that constitutions spring from the proverbial oak or rock and not from the characters of the citizens, which, as it were, by their momentum and weight in the scales draw other things after them? [*Republic* 544d7-e1, Shorey's translation]

Furthermore, in a revealing passage in Book IV, Socrates directly holds that what determines the character of the city is the character of the individuals in the following conversation he has with Glaucon:

And so whereby and as the individual is brave, thereby and so is the state brave, and that both should have all the other constituents of virtue in the same way? Necessarily. Just, too, then, Glaucon, I presume we shall say a man is in the same way in which a city was just. That too is quite inevitable. But we surely cannot have forgotten this, that the state was just by reason of each of the three classes found in it fulfilling its own function. I don't think we have forgotten, he said. We must remember, then, that each of us also in whom the several parts within him perform each their own task- he will be a just man and one who minds his own affairs [*Republic*, 441d-e, Shorey's translation].

In the same vein at 435 Plato maintains that some forms and characters experienced in the city can only come from individuals. Similarly, in Book VI (*Rep.* 544d6-e5, 545d1-3), where Socrates argues that what determines the character of a city as timocratic, oligarchic, democratic etc, is the character of those individuals in it who are in command: where people dominated by spirit, concerned about competitive values, govern, the city will be a timocracy (*Rep.* 547e1-4, 548c6-7), and so on for the other cases. What the above passages have in common is that they advance an account of individual justice as the notion that causally determines the character of the city. Such an approach becomes more explicit by focusing on the kinds of justice Plato discusses in the *Republic*. It is possible to distinguish four kinds of justice, two for the city and two for the individual. Plato recognises three of these, an internal and an external kind of

justice for the individual, and an internal justice of the city.³⁹ The internal justice of the city (social justice) has to do with the harmony among classes, namely how each class performs its own functions (*Rep.* 369b; 370b-c; 372a; 414b-415a; 421a-c; 433b; 442e; 434a-c; 435b). The external justice in the individual is what has been called *vulgar justice*, the doing of just acts and the non-performance of acts of certain kinds such as adultery, neglect of parents (*Rep.* 443d10-443b2). Internal justice in the individual is what has been called Platonic justice, *the harmony of the soul* (*Rep.* 351d3; 433e2-4; 443b1-3; 443e4-444a2).⁴⁰ The following drawing might be helpful to illustrate my point here:

Isomorphic Matrix:

ASPECT SUBJECT	EXTERNAL	INTERNAL
CITY	FOREIGN	SOCIAL
INDIVIDUAL	VULGAR	PLATONIC

Now, what is essential for Plato is the relation between the two internal justices. This is so for two main reasons. First, because the external justice of the city is not prominent in the *Republic*. Plato is not interested in the state as an agent in international affairs, but in its internal ordering. Secondly, because the external justice of the individual is determined by the internal justice.⁴¹ For as Socrates holds an action is just when it produces or maintains the harmonious condition of the soul (*Rep.* 443e). Now, what is the relation between the internal justice of the city and the internal justice of the individual? One way to understand the internal justice of the city is to see the justice of the city as consisting of the acts of the individuals. Each one of them as a part of a certain class functions in a certain way and by doing so contributes to the harmony among the classes. But if the external justice of the individual is based on her internal justice and if the internal justice of the city is captured in individuals' external acts it follows that the internal justice of the city is based heavily on the internal justice of the individuals. The internal justice of the individuals produces the internal justice of the city. And citizens are externally just only when they maintain or promote their internal

³⁹ In the *Republic* 469e-471c Plato discusses interstate relations and although the word justice is not explicitly mentioned, this passage might well be read as about justice in interstate relations. Plato also discusses interstate relations at 373d-e, 422a-423b, 428d.

⁴⁰ For the notion of vulgar justice, see D. Sach, [1963]: 142-44. For the notion "harmony of the soul", see G.Vlastos, [1968]: 666.

justice. The internal justice of the state consists of the external justice of the individuals, which is based on their internal justice, just as the courage of a state is produced by the courage of its citizens. This is not to deny, of course, that some particular way of organising the state is also required. However, what primarily causes the internal justice of the city is the external justice of its citizens, which in its turn is based on their internal justice.

Bearing in mind that a city's internal justice is caused by the individuals' external justice, one can argue that, for Plato, the inner state of the soul is the causally fundamental notion for the individual and for the city alike. For Plato holds that just actions are those which produce and maintain the harmonious condition of the soul (*Rep.* 443e). If one has harmony of the soul one can also do just acts, since one knows, according to Plato, that just acts are those that can maintain the harmonious condition of the soul. "What a man does for Plato is only an "image" of what he is; his external conduct is only a manifestation of his "inner" life which is the life of the "real" man, the soul".⁴²

Plato holds that the external justice of the individual is based on the harmony of the soul. Furthermore, the external justice of the individual causes the internal justice of the city. Therefore, the internal justice of the city is based on the internal justice of the individual. "If a city is just, it is so only in so far as its people are just persons: only their justice could make it just".⁴³ If this analysis is correct then the just person is causally prior to the just city (*Rep.* 441d-e).

Plato also holds quite explicitly that the justice of the city is an εἰδωλόν, an image of real justice, which is the internal justice of the individual soul (*Rep.* 443c-d). Earlier on, Plato held that some forms and characters found in the city can only come from individuals. Also Plato holds that the city that is best ordered is the city whose state is most like that of an individual man (*Rep.* 462c). Furthermore, Plato holds that the character of the individual is what determines the character of the city, not only for the just individual and the just city, but also for the timocratic or oligarchic or democratic individual and the corresponding cities (*Rep.* 544d6-e5, 545d1-3, 547e1-4, 548c6-7). Plato then also holds that the just person is logically prior in order of justification over the just city.

⁴¹ See J. Schiller, [1968]: 1-14; A. Hobbs, [2002]: 54.

⁴² G.Vlastos, [1969b]: 514.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 512.

The relation between individual and social justice that Plato proposes satisfies at least two central theses of virtue ethics, namely the main focus on the moral agent and the primacy of character. For, in the case of individual justice, just actions are defined in terms of the condition of the soul rather than as a disposition in accordance with principles and rules. Also, individual justice possesses logical priority in the order of justification (*Rep.*443c-d) over just actions and confirms the primacy of character over the evaluation of actions. Moreover, social justice seems to be causally determined by the just individual (*Rep.*441d-e). Plato also seems to put forward an account of justice that is mostly self-regarding rather than other-regarding, since justice has been considered as excellence of the soul, the good performance of the ψυχή (*Rep.* 353e7).⁴⁴ A person is just when each element in her soul performs its function well, and these functions are presumably directed towards the good of the person as a whole. This is confirmed by the analogy of the state; the functions of the classes in the state are certainly directed towards the good of the state as a whole, rather than to external goods. Finally, Plato seems to be quite sensitive to the relation between individual and social justice, and he attempts to provide a more informative account of their relation than Aristotle does. For Plato does not only hold that something smaller (individual justice) is part of something bigger (social justice), as in a way Aristotle does (*NE* 1130b). Plato also provides an account of their causal and logical relation and he actually holds that individual justice is causally prior to social justice and logically prior in order of justification. Plato's proposal of the isomorphism, the parallel relation between social and individual justice, and the causal and logical priority (in order of justification) he attributes to individual justice over social justice could provide virtue ethicists with a very valuable tool in their effort of facing their intellectual rivals' criticism that they do not possess any adequate account of social justice. However, before I draw any conclusion with regard to the relation between Plato's account of justice and virtue ethics, I shall offer an analysis of the only virtue ethical approach to social justice that I am aware of, namely Slote's justice of caring or benevolence. It will emerge that Slote's attempts to relate individual and social justice are in essence similar to the Platonic approach.

⁴⁴ E. Havelock [1978: 321] holds that "when Plato proceeds to implant justice in the human soul he leaves tradition firmly behind him".

6.4. Slote's Social Justice

Slote holds that virtue ethics can actually offer an account of social justice and it is thus not in an inferior position in comparison with Kantianism and Utilitarianism. However, Slote continues, virtue ethics' account of social justice will be different from any that has been offered so far and will be based on the moral agent and her inner strength to be socially just rather than on the following of general abstract principles.

Let us see how Slote understands social justice within a virtue ethical framework. Slote holds that an approach counts as virtue ethical if and only if it focuses more on agents than on their actions, and treats "aretaic" notions like admirability and moral goodness as prior to "deontic" ones like permissibility and wrongness.⁴⁵ In the light of this claim, he considers Plato's assertion that just action is that which *creates* or *sustains* the strength and the order of the soul as a virtue ethical approach. However, he holds that a more radical version of this virtue ethical approach could be the theory that defines just action as the action, which *exhibits* and *expresses* the inner strength of the soul.⁴⁶ The notion of inner health and strength is essential to the Platonic corpus, since Plato attempts to show that the strength or the health of the soul determines any just action. Slote finds this thought quite exciting and actually holds that social justice can be causally produced by the inner strength of the individual. He also holds that Plato does not provide us with a clear account of the relation between inner strength and the just act, and a more informative account for this relation can be found in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Nietzsche builds his theory on the notion of self-sufficiency and shows how this notion can be considered as a justification for certain forms of altruism. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he writes:

[t]he noble type of man [...] honours whatever he recognises in himself: such a morality is self-glorification. In the foreground is the feeling of plenitude, of power, which seeks to overflow [...] the consciousness of a wealth which would fain give and bestow: -the noble man also helps the unfortunate, but not -or scarcely- out of pity, but rather from an impulse generated by the superabundance of power [section 260].

As Nietzsche understands it, the person who feels self-sufficient will not only seek nothing more for herself, but, in the natural course of events, also feel that she has

⁴⁵ See M.Slote, [1998]: 172.

⁴⁶ M.Baron, P.Pettit & M.Slote, [1997]: 218.

enough to spare for others. In this sense, self-sufficiency is the basis of acts towards others. Yet not every kind of sharing with others is considered as virtuous, but rather only the sharing that may represent a substantial portion of what the person has gained, and only when this sharing is not ephemeral but rather diachronic. So the person who has won the lottery and simply offers some drinks to her friends will not be considered generous, since her sharing is disproportional to her gains and only exhibits self-sufficiency on a short-term basis. Instead, if she offers considerable help to people in need on a long-term basis she will be considered as a self-sufficient person who shares her gains with others. She will be the person who exhibits her self-sufficiency on a long term-basis in her actions towards others.⁴⁷

Slote finds Nietzsche's approach to altruism on the basis of self-sufficiency interesting. He considers this account an example of a moral theory based on inner strength, on the character of the moral agent. The moral agent's concern for others is based on her inner strength, on her self-sufficiency.⁴⁸ This kind of theory defines the moral in terms of caring, responsibility and concern for others. Such a moral approach has been considered as a "feminine" approach, whereas an approach to morals in terms of rights, justice and autonomy has been called "masculine".⁴⁹ One could consider Schneewind's conception of justice as an example of the "masculine" approach. Virtue ethicists might propose an alteration to the way people understand the notion of justice while attempting to face the criticism made by their intellectual opponents. Probably a more detailed analysis of the notion of justice is required.

What is interesting about this claim is the contrast between justice and caring that it brings into the account. In the same vein Noddings puts forward an analysis of morals on the basis of particularistic caring. She holds that we actually care more about near and dear ones than the people we do not know.⁵⁰

It is this contrast between justice and caring which mostly concerns Slote. One can detect that the focus of the morality of caring is on the moral agent, on his inner strength. It is an agent-based theory. For a morality of caring might evaluate human actions in terms of how fully or well they exhibit caring motivation, rather than in terms

⁴⁷ See M. Slote, [1993]: 7-9.

⁴⁸ The virtue of self-sufficiency has several aspects in Slote's account. First, generosity derived from a sense of "superabundance"; second, moderation, which is a lack of neediness and greediness; and third, self-reliance and non-parasitism. Slote holds that these aspects of self-sufficiency underpin the society's political values.

⁴⁹ See C. Gilligan, [1982].

⁵⁰ See N. Noddings, [1984].

of consequences. What is more, this kind of theory seems to relate everything in morality to the motive, the attitude of caring, rather than bringing in independent principles, considerations of justice, truth telling.

But how does an ethics of caring relate to larger social and political issues, such as social justice? Slote holds that the same relation that exists between the moral agent and her acts can be detected between institutions and individuals. According to Slote:

The laws, customs and institutions of a given society are, at it were, the actions of that society -they exhibit or express the motives (though also the knowledge) of the social group in something like the way actions express an agent's motives (and knowledge), though in a more enduring manner that seems appropriate to the way societies typically outlast the individual agents in them. So just as individualistic agent-basing regards individual acts as good if they reflect morally virtuous motives, and wrong if they reflect vicious or deficient motives, an agent-based account of social morality will treat customs, laws, and institutions as good (positively and admirably just) if they reflect virtuous (enough) motives on the part of (enough of) those responsible for them, and bad (or unjust) if they reflect morally bad or deficient motives. [M. Slote, 1998, p. 186].

In the above passage Slote argues that the same agent-based approach can be found in individual and in social morality. This approach conceives the justice of any society as dependent on the "ethical soul" of that society, as embodied or realised in the persons who make up the society. As the acts of the individual moral agent will derive their moral evaluation from her motives, in the same way the acts of the society, namely the constitution, will derive their moral value from the motives of the people which it consists of. In other words, Slote's intention is to provide an account of social morality that is based on individual morality.⁵¹ He starts examining how ethically to evaluate individuals and their actions and uses this as the basis for large-scale social evaluations. He holds that

what enables us to move from ethical evaluations of individuals to claims about justice of a society as a whole is that social groups and even entire societies can naturally be characterised in terms of the same notions of self-sufficiency and

⁵¹ Christine Swanton [1993: 38] holds that Slote's analysis is very important and strikingly original. She refers to Nozick's distinction between "push" and "pull" views of normative ethics. According to "pull" considerations, values inhering in the objects of moral concern demand response from moral agents. According to "push" views values possessed by, espoused by, moral agents motivate those agents to exhibit moral responses. Swanton argues that Slote's account could be considered as a "push view" of normative ethics. See also, R. Nozick, [1981]: 400ff.

dependence (and consequently dignity and lack of dignity) that we have applied to individuals. [M. Slote, 1993, p. 16].

In the same vein, a few pages later he adds:

For in the present agent-based virtue ethics, judgements about the justice or admirability of a social unit depend on ethical judgements about the groups or individuals it contains. [M. Slote, 1993, p. 19].

The morality of caring is an example of this consideration. The moral agent who cares about others does not do so by following a certain general principle, but she performs this action on the basis of her virtuous motives. However, as Slote holds, an ethics of caring should not be particularistic, that is, a concern solely for those who are near and dear. Rather, it should be understood as a universal benevolence. It is a concern for all others in balance with self-concern.⁵² Consequentialism might be considered as a theory arguing for a universal benevolence. However, it does have the tendency to devalue the moral agent's well being by demanding too much sacrifice. It is a concern for all others but not in balance with self-concern.⁵³

For Slote, then, social justice is considered as a morality of universal benevolence, a morality of caring for all people, rather than only for those who are near and dear. The self-sufficiency of the moral agent and her inner strength, which enables her to provide care to anyone who needs it, completes Slote's analysis of social justice. It is an account of social justice based on the moral agent, her caring for others and her strength to do so, rather than on general principles of justice. In general, Slote's main proposal is that virtue ethics should work with regard to social justice on the same basis as it applies to individual justice. In the case of the latter inner state and motives possess evaluational priority over actions and state of affairs. Society is nothing else than a larger schema of the individual. We can understand society and in general bigger groups by focusing on the agents they consist of. Moreover, individual motives should be understood as a basis for social justice, since society's motives are made up by the motives of the individuals. The latter determine causally the motives of the society; they have a causal priority over the motives of the society.

Also, Slote seems to attribute a logical priority (in order of justification) to individual justice over social justice. For he offers a theory by starting with a view of

⁵² See, M. Slote, [2001]: 66-68; K. Stohr & C. H. Wellman, [2002]: 50-51.

how ethically to evaluate individuals and their actions and uses this as the basis for its larger-scale social evaluation. He also considers individual motives as the basis for social justice. Individual justice is causally prior to social justice. That stands in marked contrast with Aristotle's analysis of justice, since Aristotle holds an account of justice according to which a theory of the justice of the basic structure of society is supposed to precede any account of individualistic moral norms. It is also the opposite at least of Plato's procedure in the *Republic*, where Plato attributes a logical priority (in order of discovery) to social justice over individual justice. For justice "writ large" in society or the state is treated as heuristic for a correct understanding of justice in the individual. However, it shares with Plato two essential features. Slote and Plato attribute causal priority to individual justice over social justice, as well as logical priority in order of justification. Moreover, in the case of individual justice, Slote's thesis that actions are evaluated in terms of virtues can be traced back to Plato.

6.5. A Platonic Suggestion for Virtue Ethicists

In Plato's account just individuals are logically derivative from the just city (in order of discovery or exposition). Yet the order of discovery is not and should not be the same as the order of justification. For, as Plato underscores in the *Republic* 443c-d the justice of the city is an image of real justice, which is the internal justice of the individual soul. And, although one discovers the image first, one should not forget that the image, according to Plato, derives (logically) its properties from the original, in our case from the internal justice of the individual soul. Furthermore, it is the just individual who determines the character of the just city since s/he is causally prior to the just city (*Rep.* 441d-e). The rulers utilise the reasoning part, the guardians the spirited part and the economic class the appetitive part of their souls. Each person does her own only if the elements of her soul do their own, and justice in the state is constituted by each citizen doing his/her own. Plato's distinction between social justice and individual justice and the causal analysis of the social on the basis of individual justice could be considered an very essential spiritual source for virtue ethicists. Plato indicates that the state of society is good if it *resembles* that of a virtuous agent (*Rep.* 443c-d); he also believes that such a society will reflect virtuous motives as well (*Rep.* 441d-e, 442e-443a, 485a-487a). Slote seems to employ an analogous relation between individual and social justice. According

⁵³ M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 192

to Slote, customs, laws and institutions are good and just when they *reflect* individual motives of goodness and justice.

It is worth noting here that Plato's conception of the relation between individual and social justice is stronger than Slote's. For Plato's approach requires *a resemblance* of social justice to individual justice, whereas Slote's seeks simply *a reflection* of individual motives in customs and laws. One wonders whether the difference is a substantial one or only a difference in matter of degree. They both want social justice to be a result of individual justice. One, however, might argue that Plato's account cannot accommodate just actions, which do not resemble a just person. Plato's argument for the view of justice in the soul turned on the claim that "justice" must refer to the same quality whether it is applied to the soul or the state (*Rep.* 435a-b). But this argument clearly cannot apply to just actions, which do not resemble a just person. Probably Slote wants to avoid this problem by simply saying that a just society reflects rather than resembles the character of its members. If just actions are those that produce and preserve just character (*Rep.* 443e), why cannot a just state be one that simply reflects rather than resembles a just character?

But, before one underscores the different approaches that Plato and Slote take (i.e. resemblance and reflection respectively) attention should be paid to the differential dimensions of the city that Plato and Slote have in mind. According to Plato, the ideal city must be not too big, not too small and it must not contain extremes of wealth and poverty (*Rep.* 370aff). Instead it should be based on the principles of specialisation (*Rep.* 369e; 370b), on unity and stability (*Rep.* 422e). Furthermore Plato underscores that the unified state is the state that resembles a person (*Rep.* 462b-d). Slote, however, in offering his account of the relation between individuals and the city, has in mind a bigger community, which in fact contains extremes of wealth and poverty as his examples discussed above (6.4.) reveal. In his latest book entitled *Morals From Motives*, Slote adds to his discussion of the relation between individuals and city one more factor, namely humanity as a whole, an aspect that Plato never took into account. Slote, then, applies his account of the relation between individuals and society not only to a particular community or society, but also to humanity as a whole. He does so by advocating a particularistic ethic of caring, which, as he believes, can accommodate considered conviction that we should be concerned with everyone, but we need not care for all to the same extent or in the same way. In his words:

So an ethic of balanced caring falls somewhere between the extreme demandingness of a Singerian or consequentialist morality and the extreme lack of demandingness we find in William's theory of moral integrity. It permits us to devote more time, energy, and money to our families [...] than Singer wants to allow. However, it also tells us that it is morally wrong to spend as much time as almost all of us do helping those we most naturally want to help, namely those near and dear to us. Rather, we must devote a quite substantial amount of money, efforts, time, concern toward humanity generally. [M. Slote, 2001, p. 73].

Slote insists that more attention needs to be given to those near and dear, but also maintains that an appropriate balance both among intimates and between one's intimates as a group, on the one hand, and humanity as a whole, on the other, is required. Slote's recent work reveals that he considers society not only in local terms but also in its biggest possible dimensions, namely human society as a whole. It also reveals that Slote applies his account of the relation between individual and society both to a particular society and to humanity as a whole. For these reasons Slote prefers to argue that social justice *reflects* individual justice. Plato, on the other hand, argues that social justice *resembles* individual justice presumably because he has in mind a society with smaller dimensions than Slote's (*Rep.* 460a). Plato also holds that a state is unified when it resembles a single person (*Rep.* 462b-d). If the society is not very big all its citizens, in a way, can be seen as near and dear, as a big family, a project that Plato advanced and he could not have done so if his society had been as big as Slote's.

However the above dissimilarities between Slote's and Plato's account should not prevent us from observing that in the systems that Plato and Slote advanced, social justice is shaped after individual justice. Also the notion of inner strength is used in the process of providing an account of social justice. Moral agents who are self-sufficient, who are virtuous, care about other people and attempt to share their virtue and self-sufficiency with others. They propagate their virtue, their individual justice and their intent to promote it to social justice. They base this process on the moral agent rather than on general principles of justice. They are both focused on the virtuous individual's inner traits rather than on laws, rules and principles, and they both derive the moral status of acts from basic assessments of character traits. Plato and Slote seem to share some thoughts with regard to the relation between individual and social justice. Aristotle's analysis of justice, however, does not provide any help to virtue ethicists' attempt to propose an account of social justice in accordance with their main theses.

Although virtue ethicists can always draw inspiration from ancient philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, they must always bear in mind as well that their theory is called to meet different needs than those that the Platonic-Aristotelian society was calling for. Regardless of the considerable dissimilarities between Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of justice there are also considerable similarities between them, which virtue ethics needs to overcome. The main worry is that both Plato and Aristotle agree that justice consists in making proper discriminations among the citizens, that is in treating alike people alike and unlike people differently. Neither of the two provides an egalitarian or democratic account of social justice. Plato, for instance, holds that it is just for the guardians not to possess property and to have family because that will promote the unity and stability of the state (*Rep.* 416b-426b; 457d-466d). Aristotle, also, holds that offices and honours should be distributed in accordance to the citizens' worth (*Polit.* 1281a2-6). Virtue ethics needs to overcome any discrimination of that sort and to work instead towards an account and justification of democratic and liberal values. Virtue ethicists need to employ in a selective way the ancient virtue ethics of Plato and Aristotle in order to propose an account of social justice that can be considered as a convincing alternative to the consequentialist or Kantian approach. Plato's individual justice and its causal and logical priority in order of justification over social justice could be considered as useful tools in order to help virtue ethicists to understand and justify modern-day political ideas. The Platonic and Aristotelian temptation to discriminate, however, could be a great obstacle towards a contemporary conception of social justice.

Let me then, by way of conclusion, expand a little more on the overall structure of the notion of individual justice and its relation to social justice defended in this chapter. According to virtue ethics, traditional moral theorising needs a new orientation. This is so because it neglects virtues and is based on notions of principles, obligations and duty. Schneewind argues against such claims and holds that "at least during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the formative period of modern moral philosophy, virtue did not suffer from neglect. Its misfortune stemmed from the fact that virtue ethics is inadequate for the "artificial" virtue of justice and its "perfect duties". An analysis of justice requires reference to principles and laws. As Schneewind puts it, "the misfortune of virtue has not been its neglect but the finding in modern times that a virtue ethics analysis is inadequate for a central part of morality, such as justice".⁵⁴

⁵⁴ See J.B. Schneewind, [1990]: 63.

Virtue ethics, then, faces a serious challenge and it seems that looking back to Aristotle for any possible answer looks rather unpromising, since Aristotle's account of justice is strongly linked with the notions of law and equality, which call for an abandonment of some essential theses for virtue ethics. Nevertheless, it seems that there is a possible answer for virtue ethics but virtue ethicists need to enrich their intellectual diet and turn back to Plato to detect it. Plato's account of individual justice can be considered as a forerunner of one of the main corollaries of virtue ethics theory, namely the intention to attribute priority to virtue over evaluation of action. Plato advances a similar claim by maintaining that an act is just when it produces or maintains the harmonious condition of the soul (*Rep.* 443e).

When Schneewind holds that virtue ethics cannot provide an account of justice, he refers to social justice. Santas, also, has in mind Aristotle's distributive and rectificatory justice (*NE* 1130b31-1131a6) when he holds that Aristotle's analysis of justice is not in accordance with virtue ethics' main claims. They claim that virtue ethics cannot provide an adequate analysis of the notion of social justice, and what is more, that virtue ethics' main intellectual source, namely Aristotle, does not hold a virtue ethics' analysis of social justice. Virtue ethicists can face this challenge in a more promising fashion if they widen their intellectual horizons by going back to Plato. The distinction that Plato draws between social and individual justice and his attempt to base the former on the latter, could be a plausible answer to the contemporary challenge that virtue ethics faces. Plato and virtue ethics have more doctrines in common than research on virtue ethics hitherto has shown. Furthermore, Plato can provide an analysis concerning the notions of social and individual justice, which virtue ethicists might advance. But this presupposes an alteration to virtue ethicists' habit of considering themselves as intellectual descendants of Aristotle. Slote has already altered this habit. Last, but not least, virtue ethicists must be aware that their account of social justice is called to meet the needs of a different age and thus their reliance on ancient virtue ethics is required to be selective.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IS PLATO THE FIRST VIRTUE ETHICIST?

7.1. Tackling the Question

Is Plato the first virtue ethicist? To answer this question we need to take into account primarily three questions: (a) who is considered to be the first virtue ethicist?, (b) does Plato have a virtue ethics theory, and if yes which kind? (c) does Plato's ethics have essential differences with virtue ethics and if yes, do these dissimilarities disqualify Plato's ethics from being the first demonstration of virtue ethics?

I will defend the claim that Plato is the first exemplar of virtue ethics by tackling the above issues in turn, and by referring to the conclusions of the previous chapters.

7.2. The Orthodox View About the First Virtue Ethicist

It is generally accepted among virtue ethicists that Aristotle is not only their intellectual source, but also the first exemplar of virtue ethics. Consequently, virtue ethicists refer solely to Aristotle's work to support their main theses. It appears that Aristotle is the starting point of the way of thinking virtue ethicists represent, and it is in this direction that Anscombe's influential paper "Modern Moral Philosophy" pointed in 1958.¹

The majority of virtue ethicists consider this direction as the only way to proceed and Aristotle's work as the first expression of the ideas and claims virtue ethicists prefer. Also, the majority of virtue ethicists in one way or another consider themselves to be *Neo-Aristotelians*. For they do not simply repeat Aristotle's conception of virtue, moral character and happiness. Virtue ethicists attempt to modify Aristotle's understanding of the notion of moral agent and to formulate it in order to meet the needs of the current state of the world. It is in this sense that they call themselves *Neo-Aristotelians*; but also because they detect the problems of some main Aristotelian theses, such as the doctrine of the mean and the unity of virtue, claims which virtue ethicists do not generally include in their moral system.² But, although they reformulate or deny some of Aristotle's moral

¹ E. Anscombe, [1958]: 1-19.

² See, among others, M. Baron, P. Pettit & M. Slote, [1997]: 184-185; P. Simpson, [1997]: 245-259; R. Hursthouse, [1999]: 8-16.

theses, virtue ethicists all agree that the core of virtue ethics is what Aristotle proposed in his work on morality.

Although the above understanding carries some truth, it does not justify the claim that Aristotle's moral work is the first instantiation of the doctrines of virtue ethics. For virtue ethicists, having in mind Anscombe's initial suggestion, focus on Aristotle's moral work and exclude from their conceptual map other expressions of their theory which have taken place prior to Aristotle, expressions which could provide them with an additional intellectual source. I believe that virtue ethicists consider Aristotle's moral work to be the first and the only intellectual source of their theory for four main reasons:

- (1) Virtue ethicists have underestimated the fact that Aristotle was Plato's pupil, and that although significant dissimilarities exist between their projects, some essential similarities can be detected. One of them is the way Plato and Aristotle view the role of virtue within their moral systems, an essential thesis for virtue ethicists. Another similarity between Plato and Aristotle, equally important for virtue ethicists, is the fact that they both relate virtue to happiness. By focusing mostly on the dissimilarities between Plato and Aristotle, virtue ethicists have failed to search for an intellectual resource proceeding Aristotle, and that has virtually eliminated their ability to find another antecedent of their main theses.
- (2) Virtue ethicists read selectively Anscombe's initial suggestion to look for a new moral orientation as the one proposed by Aristotle. For although Anscombe referred mostly to Aristotle as an exemplar of the new orientation that modern moral philosophy should start seeking, towards the end of this groundbreaking article, she also referred to Plato's work.³
- (3) The third reason which I believe prevented most virtue ethicists considering Plato's work as an intellectual resource for their main thesis is the fact that some influential philosophers specialising in ancient philosophy (such as J. Annas, who has done a lot of work on virtue ethics),⁴ have argued that any survey which examines or is interested in explicit ethical theory, should consider Plato's work problematic. This is because Plato deliberately used the dialogue form and so did not offer a systematic

³ E. Anscombe, [1958]: 18.

⁴ Note however that, in her earlier works, J. Annas has suggested that the *Republic* is best understood as an attempt to redirect Greek ethical thought from a preoccupation with right actions to a concern with the good character or agent, and that Plato's views on education in the *Republic* should be interpreted in the light of this overall aim. See J. Annas, [1978]: 437-451 & [1981]: 59-71, 324-331.

discussion of ethical theory.⁵ Contemporary virtue ethicists are probably influenced by Annas' understanding and, given the fact that they hope to develop a systematic moral theory, have not included Plato's work in their conceptual map.

- (4) Finally, Plato is often seen as a metaphysician more than as an ethicist, and his ethics is studied in the light of his metaphysics, which is now generally not favoured.

7.3. Tracing Virtue Ethics Back to Plato

Bearing in mind virtue ethics' main theses and reading Plato's work, it is apparent that the dialogue form that Plato deliberately uses is hardly a considerable obstacle to approaching virtue ethics and Plato's ethics in parallel. On the contrary, it becomes evident that Plato's ethics is the first presentation of a number of fundamental theses of virtue ethics. For as we have seen in Chapter II of this thesis, Plato's ethics and virtue ethics have initially two features in common. Namely:

- (a) both are neither deontological nor consequentialist.
- (b) both attempt to alter the dominant moral thought of their time and to call for a new moral orientation.

These two initial similarities are crucial and inevitably call for further substantial research in this direction. As we saw in Chapter III, virtue ethicists' understanding of virtue as a central notion of the moral system and a notion strongly associated with cognitive and psychological factors is not remote from Plato's conception of virtue. On the contrary, both theories have a similar conception of how essential virtue is in their system and virtue is in both theories linked to common cognitive and psychological factors, such as knowledge, sensitivity, reliability, flexibility, desires, pleasures and feelings.

Another important thesis put forward by virtue ethicists is the priority of virtue over the evaluation of actions, a thesis commonly accepted among virtue ethicists although with some variations.⁶ In Chapter IV, I examined how the relation between virtue and the evaluation of actions has been interpreted by virtue ethicists and claimed that the roots of this thesis go back to Plato's work. Plato not only has accommodated

⁵ J. Annas, [1993]: 18. On the previous page, Annas argues that "it is Aristotle who first lays out for us the framework of Greek Ethics (and hence Aristotle who figures largest in the first part of the book) and subsequent schools walk in his footprints". I believe that Annas here has committed herself to an overstatement. The footprints of Greek ethics belong to Socrates, the most influential account of whom has been offered by Plato.

⁶ See Chapter IV, Sections 2-5.

this thesis -essential for virtue ethicists- but also has a sophisticated theoretical framework in which this thesis plays an essential role.

Plato's ethics has two more substantial similarities with virtue ethics. Most forms of virtue ethics, apart from agent-based virtue ethics, consider the notion of virtue central but not basic. Virtue is a notion that determines the evaluation of actions, but not a notion that all else derives from. For Plato as well, as I believe I have illustrated in Chapter V, virtue is a central but not a basic notion. Plato is an agent-prior virtue ethicist who considers the notions of virtue as central but not basic. Rather he strongly associates virtue with the Form of the Good and derives its value from it.⁷

However, the fact that virtue is not a basic notion for Plato does not rule out any possibility of associating Plato's ethics with agent-based virtue ethics. This association gains support when one focuses on the relation between virtue and happiness that these two approaches advance. Also this parallel brings to light Platonic ethics' dissimilarity with current forms of agent-prior virtue ethics. Although it is true that in both versions of virtue ethics (agent-based and agent-prior) as well as in Plato's ethics virtue and happiness are strongly linked, the relation between virtue and happiness differs substantially between current forms of agent-prior virtue ethics on the one hand and Plato's ethics and current forms of agent-based on the other. For according to agent-prior virtue ethics, as advanced by Hursthouse and character utilitarianism, virtues are valuable only when they promote happiness and so only as instrumental means to happiness.⁸ Yet in both Plato's ethics and the agent-based virtue ethics advanced by Watson and Slote virtue is seen as a primary component of happiness rather than as an instrumental means to it.⁹

Furthermore Plato's ethics can also be understood as a theory that has affinities with Slote -one of the main proponents of agent-based virtue ethics- and his proposal regarding social justice, especially in the way it needs to be associated with individual justice. Slote has offered this analysis as an attempt to counter a serious criticism made against virtue ethics by the proponents of dominant morality. As we saw in Chapter VI, the orthodox intellectual source for virtue ethicists, namely Aristotle, does not provide substantial help to virtue ethics' proponents. Slote attempts to supply virtue ethicists with a way out of this impasse and his suggestion is not a new one. It was probably first

⁷ See, for instance, *Republic* 504d; 505a-b; 508b; 508d-f; 509a.

⁸ See Chapter V, Section 5.

⁹ See Chapter V, Section 7.3.

fleshed out by Plato in the *Republic*. Hence, Plato can be an intellectual source for virtue ethicists, and probably a very useful one, for it provides them with protection against a serious criticism, which is a threat to virtue ethics' sufficiency as a third alternative moral approach.

7.4. Towards a "Neo-Platonian" Virtue Ethics

The fact that Plato's ethics and virtue ethics have affinities and share some substantial theses does not exclude the existence of dissimilarities between them. This is actually the case for the understanding of Aristotle's ethics as an example of virtue ethics. Contemporary virtue ethics and Plato's or Aristotle's virtue ethics are chronologically remote theories with essential similarities and dissimilarities. The majority of virtue ethicists have rejected the plausibility of the unity of virtues, a doctrine which both Plato and Aristotle believe in. Additionally, one of the important Aristotelian claims, namely the doctrine of the mean, has also been ruled out by virtue ethicists as a formula for capturing what is virtuous. But this did not prevent virtue ethicists from considering Aristotle as their fundamental and initial intellectual resource.

The same, I believe, can apply to Plato's ethics and its relation to contemporary virtue ethics. To be more precise, the majority of virtue ethicists are interested in what is happening in this world, and how their theory can provide substantial guidance to moral action. Hence, by reading Plato more as a metaphysician they might judge that Plato's metaphysical entities, Forms, would be of no help to their project.¹⁰ But even if we accept this very tendentious statement on behalf of virtue ethicists, it still does not rule out the fact that substantial similarities also occur between these two theories. We can think of Plato's ethics and virtue ethics as two theories with many elements in common, but not identical. In the end, virtue ethics is not, and should not be seen as, a moral approach that merely rehearses ancient moral claims. Virtue ethics needs to be seen as a new moral approach that cannot be accommodated within the twentieth century anglophone dichotomy of deontology-consequentialism. As a moral approach, it draws inspiration from ancient moral theories such as Plato's and Aristotle's, and attempts to reformulate them in accordance with the needs of our times.

Plato's ethics and virtue ethics share essential features, which call for a reconsideration of Aristotle's ethics as the only and first intellectual source for virtue

ethicists. The affinities between Plato's ethics and virtue ethics do not reside on the surface. On the contrary, they are substantial, and when people attribute only some marginal credit to Plato as an influential writer for virtue ethicists, they do so on a mistaken basis. The link between Plato's ethics and virtue ethics needs to be understood more closely and be examined more seriously. For Plato may be a valuable source for virtue ethicists, not only in order to widen their horizons, but also to help them from being held up by criticisms that threaten virtue ethics' sufficiency as a third alternative moral approach. However, virtue ethics is not merely an old theory that some currently propose. Although virtue ethics' main theses can be found within the Platonic corpus, virtue ethicists expect their theory to deal with problems different from Plato's and to provide answers to some ethical questions that did not occur in Plato's times. Virtue ethicists have already done that by widening their list of virtues: apart from the Platonic virtues they have also considered notions of virtue such as charity, benevolence, and caring. One could say, then, that virtue ethics is partly a new theory and, given that it shares some features with Plato's ethics, one could suggest that more work needs to be done towards a "*Neo-Platonian*" virtue ethics. The material that enables people to speak about *Neo-Aristotelian* virtue ethics, currently the most popular, is no greater than that which can be detected by examining Plato's ethics and virtue ethics in parallel.

¹⁰ It is worth noting here that, according to Plato, Forms are relevant to the world and can provide guidance to our action. See *Republic* 500ff.

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