

Vice and the Soul's Unity

In Book 6 Socrates solemnly declares that the good is what every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does all it does, dimly divining its existence but unable to grasp its nature (505d-e). This characterization of the soul's unity faces two threats, vice and *akrasia*. While *akrasia* deserves attention—if only because its importance in this dialogue has been exaggerated—in this paper we will focus the threat posed by the *prima facie* plausible claim that the vicious soul does not pursue the good.

Socrates describes vice in the constitutions of souls, in Books 8-9. In succession, honor, money, bodily appetites, and grand erotic passion become the soul's ruler and organizing principle. However, Socrates offers no account of the highest good in the soul—a role which each of these might respectively play. And he certainly does not relate any of them to the good as it is described in Book 5. So far, then, no reason is given to think that any of these souls is in some sense pursuing the good.

Nevertheless, we shall maintain that the vicious really want the good. This result follows from a development in the *Republic* that is not often appreciated. In Book 9—for the first time in the dialogue—Socrates gives an account of the relation between the metaphysics and epistemology of the central books and virtue and vice in Book 4. In the virtuous soul, knowledge of the forms is true pleasure, while satisfying bodily desire is less true pleasure. Because the vicious know only less true pleasure, they are fooled by mere appearances of pleasure. For instance, they suffer insatiable appetite because they conceive mad erotic passion for phantoms (*eidōla*) of true pleasure (585b-586c).

Always a signal feature of vice, insatiable appetite here depends on the phantom of true pleasure. It causes insatiable appetite in that it is a false belief that takes the form

of (a) a persistent expectation of true pleasure (b) consistently disappointed. (b) The vicious are disappointed because (B) they really want true pleasure. (B) is defended in two textual arguments. First, the relation between true pleasure and its phantom implies that if the vicious knew what true pleasure is, they would want it and not what the phantom holds out as true pleasure. Second, if they wanted what the phantom holds out, they would be satisfied with that. But, they clearly are not satisfied. (a) Their expectation is persistent because (A) it is based on an intense illusion of true pleasure that can be shown false only by the kind of knowledge the vicious cannot have. Thus, their appetite is insatiable because the phantom both provokes the desire for true pleasure and frustrates it. Like every soul, then, the vicious soul pursues the good because it is really striving for true pleasure—which just is knowledge of the forms, including the good—dimly divining its existence but unable to grasp its nature.

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