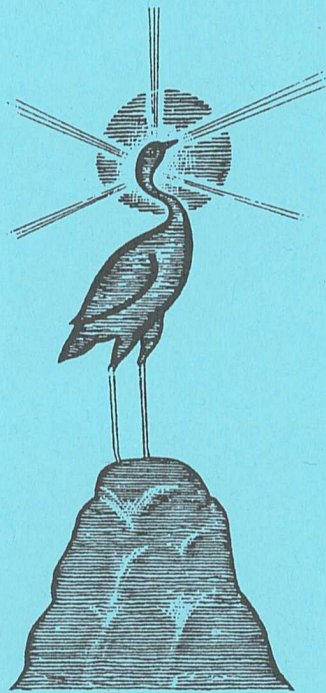


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## PLATO ON THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PLEASURE AND PAIN

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THE THESIS THAT THE JUST MAN is happier than the unjust is, arguably, the most important thesis to Plato's project in the *Republic*. This overarching thesis first emerges in the context of Glaucon's challenge in Book 2, but it is not until much later in the *Republic* that Plato completes his argument for it: after much preparatory work (including the grand metaphysics of the central books) Plato offers three proofs of this thesis in Book 9. The second and third of these aim to make the case by showing that the philosopher's life is more pleasant than all the competing lives—those of honor-lovers, oligarchs, democrats, and tyrants.<sup>1</sup> The third proof, however, stands out: it is where Plato presents his account of pleasure and pain—his most comprehensive account until the *Philebus*. More importantly, Plato deems this proof the “greatest and most decisive” argument for the thesis in question (583b6–7). The merits of this particular proof, therefore, are of utmost importance for our evaluation of Plato's contention that the just man is happiest. Given the significance of this view for the *Republic*, our evaluation of this dialogue itself should be greatly informed by the soundness or otherwise of this proof.

The received view about this proof, however, has been not only negative but dismissive as well: the account of pleasure on which it is based has been treated as an ill-conceived and deeply flawed account that Plato thankfully retracted and replaced in the *Philebus*.<sup>2</sup> I am convinced, however, that this received view of the *Republic*'s account is false. In this paper, I will not concern myself with whether, or in what way, Plato's account of pleasure in the *Republic* falls short of what we find in the *Philebus*, but will rather focus on the merits of the former. My

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<sup>1</sup>It has been a matter of controversy whether the shift from arguing that the philosopher's life is happiest to arguing that his life is the most pleasant is self-contradictory, given that Plato emphatically rejects hedonism in *Rep.* 6.508e–509a. Gosling and Taylor (1982: 103) have argued, I believe successfully, that there is a solution to this apparent inconsistency: “The solution seems to be that when Socrates ‘proves’ that the just life is the best in Book IX he is answering the challenge posed by Glaucon and Adeimantus . . . we must see the ‘proof’ of Book IX not as showing that the good life is best *tout court*, but as showing it to be best by the criteria set.”

<sup>2</sup>See, especially, Gosling and Taylor 1982: 97–128; Frede 1992: 435–437.

concern will be further narrowed down to the first half of the third proof: the proof involves two criteria for the evaluation of pleasures, the criteria of *purity* and of *truth*, both of which yield the result that the philosopher's pleasures are the most pleasant (because it turns out that only those pleasures are pure and only they are true). I will be addressing the criterion of purity, which is based on a psychological/phenomenological account of pleasure and pain.<sup>3</sup> This account has been harshly criticized as full of ambiguity and confusion, as I explain in detail below.<sup>4</sup> I believe, however, that these criticisms result from misunderstanding, and failing to appreciate the complexity of, Plato's account. In this paper, I will offer an interpretation of Plato's psychological account of pleasure and pain in *Republic* 9, showing that this account is, contrary to its detractors, both interesting and persuasive on many points.

## I

The third proof begins at 583c3–8 with Socrates' claim that pleasure and pain are opposites, with a neutral state between them. This intermediate state between pleasure and pain is said to be a sort of calm (ἡσυχία) of the soul, where there is neither pleasure nor pain (583c7). Socrates then argues that this neutral state is often mistaken to be pleasure when it follows an experience of pain.<sup>5</sup> He explains this by pointing out that sick people claim "that nothing is more pleasant than being healthy, but that they had not realized that it was most pleasant until they became ill" (583c13–d1). Similarly, those who are in great pain claim that nothing is more pleasant than the cessation of their suffering (583d3–4). They mistakenly identify the neutral state as pleasure, not only while they are suffering but also once they have arrived at the neutral state. This happens because, we are told, the neutral state appears (φαίνεται) pleasant when it is next to what is painful, and painful when it is next to what is pleasant (584a7–8).<sup>6</sup> Plato finds this mistake especially grievous because the

<sup>3</sup>The criterion of truth, on the other hand, is based on the metaphysics of the central books of the *Republic* and the "degrees of reality" theory. This criterion is developed after the criterion of purity, at 585a–586a, and is followed by claims that draw on both criteria.

<sup>4</sup>A notable exception to the negative consensus about *Republic* 9, Russell (2005: 120–135) offers a sympathetic reading of both the second and third proofs, but does not delve into the details of the criterion of purity and the psychology of pleasure and pain.

<sup>5</sup>In other words, people often mistake the cessation of pain to be pleasure. The view that such a mistake is possible is an unpopular one, going against the widely shared view that an agent must be experiencing pleasure if the agent believes that this is the case. See, for example, Penelhum 1964: 86. For a more direct criticism of Plato on this point, see Urmson 1984. I offer a defense of Plato's view in Erginel 2006, where I focus on this particular mistake.

<sup>6</sup>Though Socrates' examples (mentioned above) are cases of people who mistake the neutral state for pleasure while in pain, the unqualified statement that the neutral state appears pleasant when it is next to what is painful—and not that it appears so while one is in pain—shows that the mistake takes place while at the neutral state as well. This reading is further supported by the metaphor of up-down-middle (584d6–9), which I discuss in detail below.

phenomenology of the neutral state and pleasure are fundamentally dissimilar: both pleasure and pain, when they arise in the soul, are a kind of motion, whereas what is intermediate between them is a calm state which involves no motion at all (583e9–584a2).<sup>7</sup> Having established that the cessation of pain, i.e., the neutral state, cannot be a pleasure in any way, Socrates proceeds to discuss “pleasures that do not come out of pains, so that you will not suppose in the present circumstances that it is nature of pleasure to be the cessation of pain, and of pain to be the cessation of pleasure” (584b1–3, my emphasis). He gives the pleasures of smell as an example, and as proof that they exemplify pleasures that do not come out of pains, he indicates that they “without being preceded by pain, become extraordinarily *great* and when they cease, they leave no pain behind” (584b6–8). He concludes from this that we should not mistake liberation (ἀπαλλαγὴ) from pain for *pure* pleasure (584c1–2). Given that we were just warned about the distinction between the pleasures that do not come out of pains and the cessation of pain (παύλα λύπησ), one might suppose that this last warning is making the same point in a slightly different way.

But Socrates’ next line makes it clear that “cessation of pain” and “liberation from pain” refer to different things, the former referring to a *state* preceded by pain and the latter to some kind of *process*.<sup>8</sup> For he points out that liberations from pain, which he finds it crucial to distinguish from pure pleasures, include “the most and the greatest of the so-called pleasures that reach the soul through the body” (584c4–7), which are not cases of cessation of pain.<sup>9</sup> Those pleasures

<sup>7</sup>Plato is here putting forward a view he further develops in the *Philebus* (33c–34c): all pleasure and pain comes to be in the soul, because all pleasure and pain is necessarily perceived. This perception requirement, however, does not exist for the neutral state. This is not accidental—the neutral state *just is* a condition of non-perception. See Erginel 2006: 449. Of course, one *may* be conscious of being in the neutral state, but such consciousness is not the same sort of perception, but rather the mind’s recognition of the absence of either pleasure or pain.

<sup>8</sup>This does not necessarily mean that the human body ever remains static. In the case of hunger for example, the process of emptying may begin as soon as the process of filling ends. In fact, there is reason to believe that Plato takes the body to be incapable of standing still, even for a moment: in the *Symposium* (207d5–8), Diotima informs us that while a person is said to be the same from childhood until old age, he never consists of the same things, and is constantly undergoing renewal and passing away. Moreover, at *Philebus* 43a Socrates mentions the view of some wise men (οἱ σοφοί) that everything is in an eternal flux (presumably alluding to the Heraclitean Flux theory), from which it follows that the human body too is always moving in one direction or other. Plato develops his account of pleasure by way of resolving a difficulty the Flux theory might pose, and he never challenges its implication that the body is always in flux. Yet the difficulty in question and its resolution are critical: the difficulty is that if our bodies are always in flux, there might be no such thing as a neutral state (with respect to bodily pleasures/pains)—we would be experiencing either pleasure or pain at any given time. The resolution is that only large changes cause pleasure or pain as small changes escape our notice, remaining unperceived (43b–c). The *Republic* too is consistent with the view that the body is always in flux, the neutral state being experienced when these changes do not “reach the soul through the body” (584c3–4).

<sup>9</sup>In *Republic* 9 Plato focuses on the bodily liberations from pain that are mentioned here, but it is clear from the text there are other kinds of liberation from pain as well. Plato argues that each of

cannot be cases of cessation of pain because: (1) Plato's prime examples of bodily pleasure in *Republic* 9 as well as elsewhere are the pleasures of eating and drinking, which are obviously not neutral states; and (2) the notion that these "pleasures" reach the soul (through the body) rules out their being neutral states, since Plato tells us that pleasure and pain are a sort of motion when they reach the soul, whereas there is no such motion, and nothing reaches the soul, in the case of the neutral state (583e9–584a2). The distinction between the cessation of pain and liberation from pain is clarified with the metaphor of up-down-middle,<sup>10</sup> which Plato introduces to help explain the mistakes people make about pleasure:

Do you think that someone being brought from the lower region towards the middle would suppose anything other than that he was being brought up? And standing in the middle and looking at the place from which he was brought, would he think he was anywhere other than the upper region, as he hasn't seen what is truly up? (584d6–9)

Plato is here pointing out two kinds of mistake: (i) moving from below towards the middle and thinking that one is moving into the upper region; and (ii) standing in the middle and thinking that one is in the upper region. I discuss this metaphor in greater detail later, but these two mistakes are best understood as corresponding to the two mistakes Plato has already warned us against: (a) thinking that liberation from pain is pure pleasure (584c1–2); and (b) thinking that the cessation of pain is (pure) pleasure (584b1–3).<sup>11</sup> This correspondence is supported by the observation that the middle represents the neutral state, as it is neither up nor down, but rather in between, just as the neutral state is neither pleasant nor painful. The metaphor makes it clear that there is a difference between the process leading up to the middle and arriving at the middle, which fits the difference between a process of liberation from pain and arriving at the neutral state (i.e., cessation of pain). If "liberation from pain" were the same thing as "cessation of pain," (a) and (b) would in fact be the same mistake, and

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the three parts of the soul—rational, spirited, and appetitive—have their own pleasures (580d–581d) and that only the pleasures of the rational part are pure (583b3–6). It follows that the pleasures of the spirited part, such as the pleasure of defeating one's enemy, are liberations from pain as well. This is confirmed at 586c7–d2, where Plato points out that those who pursue the pleasures of the spirited part are in the same condition as those who pursue the bodily pleasures. This explains why not all liberations from pain reach the soul through the body.

<sup>10</sup>That explaining liberations from pain is the primary purpose of the metaphor is evident from the fact that Plato introduces the metaphor by asking, at 584d1, "do you know of what sort they are and what they most resemble?" This question comes immediately after discussing cases of liberation from pain, which means that the metaphor is being offered to illustrate what liberations from pain are like.

<sup>11</sup>The mistakes (a) and (b) are, of course, intimately related, since the cessation of pain necessarily follows the liberation from pain. It is *possible* to make one mistake and not to make the other (that is, judge falsely in one case but truly in the other), but this is extremely unlikely, because the psychological reasons why people make the two mistakes are basically the same. (This should become clear in what follows, especially in section v.)

then they could not correspond to (i) and (ii) in the metaphor. Both (a) and (b) would presumably correspond to (ii), and then we would be left unable to make sense of what mistake (i) represents.<sup>12</sup>

Gosling and Taylor are therefore mistaken in their view that the text is ambiguous about whether liberations from pain are neutral states or “processes of fulfillment.”<sup>13</sup> Plato does not use the terms “cessation” and “liberation” interchangeably, nor does he switch between them out of carelessness or in order to confuse us. The deliberate shift and the consistent use of the terms reflect a critical distinction in Plato’s account of pleasure. Furthermore, the metaphor of up-down-middle can only be understood with this distinction in mind.

However, even those who have recognized the distinction have not provided a full explanation of what “liberation from pain” means. Yet the *purity* criterion of the third proof cannot be adequately understood without such an explanation: we have been warned against mistaking “liberations from pain” for pure pleasure, the former including the most intense bodily pleasures and thus constituting the most compelling rivals as objects of pursuit. But to understand the superiority Plato attributes to pure pleasures over these alternatives, we also need to understand the status, as pleasures, of liberations from pain—the “so-called pleasures” (λεγόμεναι ἡδοναί). For designating one class of “pleasure” as “pure pleasure” does not specify the nature of what it is contrasted with—whether the so-called pleasures are really no pleasures at all, or just a lower grade of pleasures.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup>The only difference between the mistakes (ii) in the metaphor and (b) as Plato explains earlier concerns the timing of the false judgment. Plato presents both of the false judgments in (i) and (ii) as concurrent with the experience at issue, i.e., he does not mention the possibility of anticipatory false judgment about the neutral state, whereas this possibility was made explicit earlier. My guess is that Plato does not mention this possibility here because the critical point is that people mistake the cessation of pain to be pure pleasure, and it is of secondary importance that one can make this mistake while still in pain.

<sup>13</sup>Gosling and Taylor (1982: 110, 113) apparently think that if “liberation from pain” means a process of fulfillment (as it does on my view), the sense in which such a pleasure may lack in truth/purity must be that someone in pain makes a false judgment that the anticipated liberation from pain is true/pure pleasure. This reveals a misunderstanding of not only what liberation from pain is but also the mistakes Plato thinks people make. For, as I have pointed out, he thinks that people make mistakes about whether an experience is a pure pleasure during the experience (concurrently) as well as in anticipation. What is more, there is no evidence in *Republic* 9 that lack of purity is related to any sort of false judgment. Plato makes it clear that the purity of a pleasure is determined according to the psychological/physiological nature of the experience; it is only because a pleasure is not pure in the first place that judging it to be pure is a false judgment. Gosling and Taylor’s view is untenable also because it would follow that for a philosopher—who does not make mistakes about pleasures—eating would be a purer pleasure than it is for the ignorant man. It is impossible to reconcile with the text of *Republic* 9 the claim that the same kind of pleasure—with respect to both its physiological basis and its phenomenology—has a different degree of purity depending on who is having it.

<sup>14</sup>The translation “so-called pleasures” may be misleading, because all that is said (at 584c5) is that they are called pleasures (λεγόμεναι ἡδοναί), which does not necessarily mean they are wrongly so called, though this translation, used by almost all translators, is more suggestive of that. This

We must, therefore, turn to Plato's text to clarify his view about liberations from pain. However, Plato does not make his position explicit, and this has led to the charge that the status of liberations from pain is left ambiguous in *Republic* 9. Frede argues that the text contains evidence for both the view (i) that liberations from pain are not pleasures at all, and the view (ii) that they are an inferior kind of pleasure. If she is right about this, we must agree with her judgment that Plato's account of pleasure in *Republic* 9 is seriously flawed,<sup>15</sup> since the claim that the philosopher's pleasures are pure makes little sense in the absence of a clear position about the alternatives. As evidence for (i) Frede claims that "on the one hand the motion from below (liberation from pain) is treated like a pseudo-pleasure . . . (584d/e)."<sup>16</sup> But it is debatable whether the passage on the metaphor of up-down-middle in fact treats liberation from pain as pseudo-pleasure: motion from below to the middle can be considered a pseudo-pleasure only under the assumption that only the upper region is, or contains, pleasure (in any real sense), and this is exactly what is in question. As evidence for (ii), on the other hand, she writes "[Plato] also claims that they are not 'pure' (584c1)—which seems to suggest that he does regard them as pleasures, albeit impure ones."<sup>17</sup> But the evidence for the latter view, that liberations from pain *are* some kind of pleasure, is much stronger than this weak argument suggests.<sup>18</sup> Two arguments for this view stand out in particular:

(a) While distinguishing liberations from pure pleasures, Plato does not shrink from calling them "pleasures," whereas he very carefully avoids calling neutral states "pleasures," always making clear that those who think that they are pleasures are wrong. This treatment of liberations from pain is confirmed later at 586b7–8: "Isn't it necessary, then, for such people to live with *pleasures* that are mixed with pains, phantoms and shadow-paintings of true pleasures?" It is indeed liberations from pain that he is referring to as "pleasures," because the issue in this passage is the pleasures of people who are "brought down and then back again to the middle and throughout life wander in this way" and who never reach the upper region (586a1–6). Since Plato has already used the motion from below to the middle as a metaphor for liberation from pain (584d–e), he must be taken as referring to liberations here as well. Furthermore, the context makes it clear that Plato has in mind the class of pleasures that contains intense bodily pleasures, and these are liberations from pain. If Plato considered liberations from pain and cessation of pain in the same class, as non-pleasures, this con-

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"λεγόμενοι" might be indicating the falsehood of believing that such "pleasures" are pleasures in the full sense, or that they are unqualifiedly pleasures, which they turn out not to be.

<sup>15</sup> Frede 1985: 159–161.

<sup>16</sup> Frede 1985: 15.

<sup>17</sup> Frede 1985: 159.

<sup>18</sup> The argument is weak because the claim that liberations are not "pure" does not rule out the possibility that pure pleasures are being contrasted with pseudo-pleasures that do not contain any real pleasure at all.

sistent difference in their treatment would be meaningless. This suggests that, unlike the cessation of pain, liberation from pain is actually an inferior kind of pleasure.

(b) Plato characterizes the pleasures that are not pure, i.e., the liberations, as shadowlike (ἔσκιαγραφημένη), at 583b5 and 586b8. This must be meant to remind us not only of the *skiagraphia* technique—which I discuss in some detail below—but also of the Cave analogy, where we find shadows that resemble what they are shadows of.<sup>19</sup> The reference to the Cave analogy has been recognized by others, but I think that its significance has not been fully appreciated.<sup>20</sup> For the suggestion that liberations from pain are similar to the Cave analogy's shadows is more significant than the notion that liberations from pain are similar to shadows as we ordinarily construe them: the shadows in the Cave analogy resemble what they are shadows of in a different and much stronger sense than in our common-sense belief that the shadow of a dog has a dog-like shape. (If that were all there is to the shadows, it would be irrelevant for our purposes, since the shadow of a dog is no dog at all.)

The central books of the *Republic* establish the “degrees of reality” theory, according to which an item at the bottom of the Line or the Cave (shadows) has a low degree of being, as determined by its participation in the appropriate Form(s).<sup>21</sup> It nevertheless does have a degree of reality/being, since something that is, is F, by virtue of its resemblance to the Form of F, and something that is more/less, is more/less F, by virtue of its greater/smaller resemblance to the Form of F.<sup>22</sup> The shadow of a dog, then, does have some dogness according to

<sup>19</sup> *Skiagraphia* is, according to the LSJ, “painting with the shadows.” The comment that liberations from pain are shadowlike, coupled with the premise that they are inferior to pure pleasures, must be meant to remind us of the shadows in the Cave analogy, which are mere images of the real objects, and which are less real than (and thus inferior to) those objects. The second reference in particular (586b8), where the image of the shadow-paintings of true pleasures appears after Plato has already linked the truth of pleasures to the “degrees of reality” theory, is almost certainly meant to remind us of the shadows in the Cave analogy—the less real copies of the genuine things.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Frede 1985: 159.

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, 477a–479b. The objects casting shadows need not be Forms—the Cave analogy involves shadows both inside and outside the cave (of objects inside and outside the cave, respectively; 515a, 516a). In each kind of shadow, the shadow is less real than that of which it is a shadow, yet not completely unreal. Frede acknowledges that the inferior items on the “degrees of reality” theory are nonetheless real to some (lesser) extent, but she does so only when discussing the criterion of truth (585a–586a), where the “degrees of reality” theory becomes explicit, and not in relation to the shadows. In the course of developing his criterion of truth, Plato makes it abundantly clear that a liberation from pain, such as the pleasure of eating, qualifies as pleasure—since it is a case of “being filled with what is appropriate to our nature” (585d11)—albeit a less true/real pleasure, on account of its lower degree of participation in “being” and “truth.” In this paper, however, I leave these passages aside and evaluate the criterion of purity on its own, in order to establish its internal consistency and cogency. I offer my reading of those passages in Erginel 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Thus a circle drawn on paper deserves to be called a “circle,” despite its weak resemblance to the Form Circle. For an excellent discussion of questions concerning the degrees of reality and participation in the attributes of Forms, see Vlastos 1965 and Santas 1983. For my discussion of “degrees of reality” as it relates to *Republic* 9, see Erginel 2011.



Plato's "degrees of reality" theory, even though our common-sense metaphysics does not attribute such a reality to the shadow. If liberations from pain are shadows of pure pleasures in this Platonic sense, then they must be a sort of pleasure albeit less real/true than pure pleasures. In other words, liberations from pain are only images of *pure pleasure*, but therefore also a species of *pleasure*.<sup>23</sup>

The above reasons compel us to consider liberations from pain as an inferior species of pleasure, impure pleasure, rather than disqualifying them from the whole genus of pleasure. If this is right, the problem of ambiguity that Frede regards as such a detriment to *Republic* 9 seems to dissolve. However, to reach a satisfactory understanding of this matter, we still need to find out what kind of experience an impure pleasure is, and what the psychological/phenomenological upshot of its inferiority is supposed to be.

## II

It is obvious that liberation from pain is intimately linked with pain, but the precise relationship is not so obvious. In trying to interpret Plato's conception of liberation from pain, we find ourselves necessarily confronting the question about what Plato thinks about pain itself. Unfortunately, Plato scholars have so far given very little thought to what Plato thinks about pain, especially in the *Republic*.<sup>24</sup> Yet the nature of pain is neither uncontroversial nor unimportant for understanding Plato on pleasure. We can begin to see this by first considering two other Platonic works where pain and its relationship with pleasure come up explicitly, the *Gorgias* and the *Philebus*.

In the *Philebus* Plato provides us with his most sophisticated and detailed account of pleasure, in the course of which he also explains his view on pain. The passages concerning pain have generally been interpreted as presenting the following view: pain is the process of dissolution/disintegration of a human being's harmonious condition, while pleasure is the process of its restoration.<sup>25</sup> On this view, there is pain while some part of us is disintegrating, for example getting hungry, but not while we are restoring the harmonious condition, that is, eating and satisfying our hunger—only pleasure exists during that process.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup>We may think of liberations from pain as analogous to fake paintings: a genuine painting by Cezanne is superior to a fake Cezanne, but the fake Cezanne is nevertheless a painting. The fake/copy resembles the superior painting, but lacks the required qualities of a masterpiece, and so belongs to an inferior species of painting. (Of course, this analogy is limited because any inferior pleasure is an image of pure pleasure, whereas not all inferior paintings are copies of great ones.)

<sup>24</sup>Even in such a comprehensive work as Gosling and Taylor 1982, and despite their extended discussion of Plato's view on impure pleasures (i.e., pleasures that are mixed with pain), no account of pain itself can be found. Evans (2007) offers a detailed examination of pain in the *Philebus*, but focuses on a different aspect of pain than what I discuss below.

<sup>25</sup>See, especially, Frede 1993: xlii, where she writes "[pain and pleasure] are rather identified with *processes of dissolution and restoration*." (This view is implied but not made very clear in the two articles by Frede that I cite.)

<sup>26</sup>I believe that this standard interpretation of the *Philebus* is wrong, but I will not address that issue in this paper, due to limitations of space.

This view is in stark contrast with the view of pain that Plato puts forward in the *Gorgias*: in arguing against Calliclean hedonism at 496b–497a, Socrates puts forward (and gets Callicles to accept) the view that hunger, thirst, and all other appetites (ἐπιθυμῖαι) are painful. This means that pain exists as long as there is thirst—there is pain from the moment that we begin feeling thirsty until we satisfy our thirst and are fully hydrated again. It is clear that this is the view being put forward, since Socrates’ anti-hedonistic argument turns on the premise that pleasure and pain coexist and then cease together (at least as far as the Calliclean pleasures are concerned): hedonism is wrong precisely because doing well and doing badly cannot coexist with respect to the same thing, whereas pleasure and pain with respect to the same thing do coexist (496e–497a). Thus, for example, the pain of thirst and the pleasure of drinking coexist, and they cease together when our thirst is satisfied. In other words, this view has it that pain exists during both disintegration and restoration. Since disintegration and restoration are processes moving in *opposite directions* from one another—away from the harmonious condition and towards that condition, respectively—we may call this view the *bidirectional* view of pain. By contrast, the first view above may be called the *unidirectional* view of pain.

For our present purposes, the pressing question is which of these two views (if any) Plato subscribes to in the *Republic*. This is indeed an important question not only for understanding Plato’s view on pain as such, but also because it makes a significant difference to the claims Plato makes about impure pleasures. For whether pain is unidirectional or bidirectional determines the way in which pleasure is mixed with pain in impure pleasures: if pain is unidirectional, then impure pleasures may consist of pleasure that is mixed with pain only *sequentially* but not *simultaneously*. In other words, pain may precede and follow an impure pleasure, such as the pain of hunger preceding and then following the pleasure of eating, but it may not exist simultaneously with the pleasure.<sup>27</sup> This difference between the two views is importantly relevant to Plato’s claim that pure pleasure is necessarily and incomparably more pleasant than impure pleasure,<sup>28</sup> since the overall pleasantness of an impure pleasure depends, in part, on whether the pleasure-component of the experience is contaminated by pain *during* the pleasant phase as well as before and after it.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup>This is clear because on the unidirectional view, pain is the process of deterioration while pleasure is the process of restoration—two processes which clearly cannot coexist. There may be simultaneous mixtures of pleasure and pain only when we may partition that which undergoes those processes: we may feel both the pain of itching and the pleasure of scratching because restoration takes place at the surface while deterioration continues at deeper levels. (Cf. *Philebus* 46d–e.)

<sup>28</sup>That Plato considers pure pleasure to be incomparably more pleasant than impure pleasure is evident from the up-down-middle metaphor: impure pleasures are represented by the movement from below towards the middle, whereas pure pleasure is being in the upper region. I explain in detail below why this metaphor needs to be understood as Plato claiming that no amount of impure pleasure can be as pleasant as even a small amount of pure pleasure.

<sup>29</sup>My concern here is the directionality of pain, and not of pleasure. Whether or not pleasure is a unidirectional process is separate matter from whether or not pain is.

Before examining the textual evidence regarding this question, I would like to point out that I find the bidirectional view of pain the philosophically superior view: the view that we feel pain only while we deteriorate but not during the restoration process strikes me as untenable, for it does not seem plausible to me that pain disappears completely once restoration begins. According to the unidirectional view of pain, even if I am starving to death, pain will cease the moment a bit of food is perceived to reach the stomach. But this is not the case: my pain may decrease as soon as I start eating, but it does not cease altogether. Or if I am being stretched on a rack, it might alleviate my pain for my torturer to reduce the tension just a little bit, but my pain will certainly not cease. Think also of being in an extremely hot environment, and the temperature dropping gradually; clearly, pain does not simply cease once the slow process of restoration begins. I believe that the bidirectional view is plausible with respect to all kinds of pain, but its truth is perhaps more obvious in cases where a deteriorated state with a considerable amount of pain is ameliorated through a slow process of restoration.<sup>30</sup> If I am right about this, the principle of charity would suggest that we attribute the bidirectional view to Plato, all other things being equal.

Fortunately, we are not left to decide the matter through the principle of charity, as the text contains an abundance of evidence in favor of the bidirectional view:

- (i) Plato makes it clear at 583c–584b that “cessation of pain” occurs when a painful experience ceases and is followed by the neutral state. This means that, whenever a cessation of pain occurs, the neutral state of being in the harmonious condition is preceded by a painful episode. This episode has to coincide with the restoration process, since the harmonious condition can only be achieved by undergoing this process. It turns out, then, that we may experience pain during restoration as well as deterioration, affirming the bidirectional view of pain.

According to the unidirectional view, on the other hand, pain ceases as soon as the process of deterioration is reversed and restoration begins, at which point we experience only pleasure. It follows that, on this view, the cessation of pain consists of a painful experience being followed by a pleasant one, but this cannot be reconciled with the text: Plato explains the absurdity of mistaking the cessation of pain for pleasure by pointing out that the very same experience, the neutral state, appears pleasant when it follows pain and painful when it follows pleasure (583e–584a).<sup>31</sup> The unidirectional view’s denial that the neutral state follows painful episodes is therefore plainly inconsistent with Plato’s text.

<sup>30</sup>Of course, a sudden and large restoration may be so pleasant that one may describe the experience as wholly pleasant and not at all painful; Plato is neither unaware of such cases nor unequipped to handle them. I will turn to his view on these experiences below, section v.

<sup>31</sup>In both cases, Plato takes the neutral state to follow the pain/pleasure *immediately*: in both pairs the two experiences are “next to” (παρά, 584a8) each other.

It is also inconsistent with the text to suggest that painful episodes are always followed by pleasant ones, for that is clearly incompatible with Plato's emphatic warning against mistaking the cessation of pain for pleasure. In fact, on this view there would be no mistake at all, since any painful episode would indeed be followed immediately by a pleasant episode. The unidirectional view thus contradicts one of the cornerstones of Plato's account of pleasure in *Republic* 9.<sup>32</sup>

- (ii) The unidirectional view is inconsistent with important features of Plato's account of pleasure. For this view's entailment that impure pleasures involve only a sequential mixture of pleasure and pain undermines the fundamental contrast between pure pleasures and impure ones: on this view, impure pleasure is necessarily preceded and followed by pain, but the pleasure between those painful episodes is unadulterated by pain, and hence pure pleasure. The experience is an impure pleasure only when considered in its long-term context: eating when hungry yields pure pleasure while you eat, but this phase is necessarily preceded and followed by the pain of hunger, which makes this pleasure impure when the preceding and following phases are taken into account. But this makes impure pleasures "impure" in a less powerful sense than Plato seems to have in mind. In fact, it makes nonsense of Plato's contention that people mistakenly value impure pleasures because they are inexperienced in pure pleasure (584e–585a): according to the unidirectional view we all have plenty of experience with pure pleasure because *all* of our pleasures are pure as long as they last. What non-philosophers are inexperienced in is pleasure that is not sequentially juxtaposed with pain, but they know exactly what these pleasures are like—just like their other pleasures except without the pain-component. This reading can hardly be reconciled with the clear indications that, according to Plato, those who are inexperienced in pure pleasure have no sense of how pleasant pure pleasures can be. This unfortunate majority has only reached as far up as the middle, and has never seen what is truly in the upper region (584e3–4, 586a4–5); they have only seen as much light as there is in gray, but do not know white at all (585a3–5).<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup>I should emphasize that I am rejecting only the view that *pain* is a unidirectional process, and not the view that *pleasure* is a unidirectional process. In fact, I believe that pleasures *are* such processes according to Plato: pleasure occurs only during the restoration process, or according to the metaphor in *Republic* 9, during the process of filling a lack. Reeve (1988: 306–307) too maintains that both the process of emptying and the state of being empty are painful, but he does not give an adequate explanation of this. But he also argues, I believe wrongly, that pleasure can be a state (i.e., need not be a process).

<sup>33</sup>The bidirectional view of pain is also supported by the distinction between liberation from pain and cessation of pain: on the unidirectional view of pain, pain ceases the very moment the process of emptying is reversed, so there can be no gradual liberation from pain, leaving no room for the distinction in question.

- (iii) The unidirectional view cannot make psychological sense of mistaking the neutral state for pleasure. As I explain in detail below, the mistake takes place only when the neutral state follows pain, and precisely *because* it follows pain: the neutral state appears pleasant because it is hedonically superior to the preceding experience, just as the middle appears high if one reaches it from below (584d6–9).<sup>34</sup> The unidirectional view, however, cannot make sense of this phenomenon, since it takes the restoration process to contain only pleasure. Accordingly, becoming full after eating amounts to moving from a purely pleasant experience to a non-pleasant one; this would create the appearance not of pleasure but of pain, as Plato points out (584a7–8). It turns out, then, that mistaking the neutral state for pleasure can be understood only under the bidirectional view. For the reasons given above, it seems reasonable to conclude that Plato's account of pleasure and pain in *Republic* 9 is based on the bidirectional rather than the unidirectional view of pain. In what follows, we will see that many vital features of Plato's account can only be understood under the bidirectional view.

### III

Armed with the above interpretation of Plato on pain, we can return to our question about what sort of experience an impure pleasure is. Answering this question will, in turn, enable (a) a better understanding of pure pleasure, and ultimately (b) a well-grounded assessment of Plato's contention that impure pleasures are necessarily less pleasant than pure pleasures.<sup>35</sup>

We may begin by asking whether impure pleasures are simple (homogeneous) or complex experiences. It might at first seem that impure pleasures are simple: we have seen that (i) impure pleasures are liberations from pain (584c4–7), and (ii) pain exists during the restoration process as well as the disintegration process. We might, therefore, be inclined to think that impure pleasures are merely processes of the reduction of pain. The pleasure of eating is, on such a view, nothing but the pain of hunger decreasing during the process of satisfying our hunger. Accordingly, an impure pleasure is a liberation from pain because we are gradually being liberated from pain as we move from more pain to less pain, up until there is no pain at all. Appealing as this interpretation may seem, I do not think it is correct.

I believe that impure pleasures should be understood, instead, as complex experiences that are mixtures of pleasure and pain. That impure pleasures some-

<sup>34</sup>The full explanation is, in fact, quite complex, since there is both pain and pleasure during restoration. I explain in section v that arriving at the neutral state after restoration appears pleasant because the neutral state is hedonically superior to the mixture of pleasure and pain we experience during restoration. The important point for the present purposes, however, is that the restoration process must contain pain so that the neutral state may be superior by comparison.

<sup>35</sup>I will address (a) and (b) in sections iv and v, respectively.

how involve pain is suggested by the very notion that they are impure, and confirmed by Plato's claim that the people who are not capable of enjoying pure pleasure necessarily live with *pleasures that are mixed with pains* (586b7–8). The critical point, however, is that the mixture in question is a *simultaneous* (and not merely sequential) juxtaposition of two distinct elements, as on the model Plato puts forward in the *Gorgias*.<sup>36</sup> The bidirectionality of pain tells us that impure pleasures contain pain, but they must also contain pleasure as a distinct component, and cannot be merely processes of the reduction of pain. For, as I argue above, Plato takes impure pleasures to be an inferior species of pleasure, but a species of pleasure nevertheless. It would be inconsistent with the reality of impure pleasures as pleasures to claim that they contain nothing but varying degrees of pain.<sup>37</sup> Such a view would also be inconsistent with the notion that these pleasures are *impure* because they would then contain no impurity—they would consist simply of pure pain in varying degrees.

So much for establishing that the impure pleasures are genuine mixtures of pleasure and pain as two distinct elements. The troubling interpretive question that remains is why Plato claims that these pleasures *are* some kind of liberation from pain, as though they were homogeneous experiences rather than mixed ones. One possible answer is that Plato simply wrote carelessly, and that he meant to write that the so-called pleasures are *mixed with* some kind of liberation from pain. This is not entirely implausible, but it is not an attractive interpretive option either. I believe we can do better by turning to the metaphor of up-down-middle, which Plato offers to explain what sort of things the impure pleasures are, and what they most resemble (584d1).

Though pleasure and pain have been introduced as opposites, it is clear that the metaphor of up-down-middle does not construe them as the opposite endpoints on a linear scale, as one might suppose from the common examples of opposites, such as black and white (an example that Plato himself uses as an analogy at 585a3–5). Let me repeat the passage where Plato presents the metaphor:

<sup>36</sup>It was agreed between Socrates and Callicles, and the principal anti-hedonistic argument assumed (496b–497a), that the pleasure of eating and the pain of hunger coexist, both ceasing when we reach satiety (and similarly for all the pleasures in question). This assumes that in such cases there are two separate phenomena—the pain of the lack (e.g., hunger) and the pleasure of its filling (e.g., eating). Supposing that a liberation from pain is a process of reduction of pain, one may still speak of pleasure and pain as distinct things that coexist: a condition and the process of its decline/regression are distinct and may coexist, just as sickness and recovering (from sickness) coexist, even though recovering is nothing but the liberation from the sickness. But this is a very superficial sense in which the pleasure is distinct from the pain; if such a pleasure is nothing but a process of reduction of pain, then it seems to be entirely parasitic upon the pain, with no independent status, as with recovering and sickness.

<sup>37</sup>We should keep in mind that in *Republic* 9, pleasures are just as real as pains, and cannot be treated as asymmetrically dependent on pain.

Do you think that someone being brought from the lower region towards the middle would suppose anything other than that he was being brought up? And standing in the middle and looking at the place from which he was brought, would he think he was anywhere other than the upper region, as he hasn't seen what is truly up? (584d6–9)

As I explained above, Plato is here pointing out two kinds of mistake, which are intimately linked: (i) moving from below towards the middle and thinking that one is moving into the upper region; and (ii) standing in the middle and thinking that one is in the upper region. I have already made some comments about this passage, but we must now dig deeper.

The text makes it clear that the three positions represent three kinds of *hedonic value*, and not the *causes* of the experiences that have these hedonic values. (By “hedonic value” I mean values such as pleasure, pain, or neutrality with respect to pleasure and pain. As will be seen below, the scale representing the range of possible hedonic values can be richer than one that consists solely of these three values.) Having pointed out that the person who has moved upwards in the lower region and arrived at the middle makes the mistakes in question due to inexperience (584e4–5), Plato makes explicit what the metaphor represents:

Would you be surprised, then, if those who are inexperienced in truth, just as they have unsound beliefs about many other things, are so disposed toward pleasure and pain and what's in between them that, when they are brought to the painful, they believe truly and are really in pain, but, when brought from the painful to what's in between, they strongly believe that they have reached fulfillment and pleasure; as in the case of comparing black and gray without having experienced white, are they not deceived when they compare pain to painlessness, without having experienced pleasure? (584e7–585a5)

The only way to make sense of the metaphor is to take it as representing a scale of hedonic value, the middle representing a neutral state, while the lower region and the upper region represent negative and positive hedonic values, respectively. The model here is richer than we might initially suppose: it is not simply the case that being in the lower region is being in pain and being in the upper region is having pleasure. For the model is meant to capture the impure pleasures (and them in particular), and the only candidate for representing them is the movement from the lower region towards the middle. Having arrived at the middle from the lower region, on the other hand, represents the cessation of pain. What we have in the upper region, then, is not just any pleasure, but pure pleasure.<sup>38</sup> The two mistakes, therefore, are the following: (i) mistaking the liberation from pain (impure pleasure) for pure pleasure; and (ii) mistaking the cessation of pain (the neutral state) for pure pleasure. There is an important

<sup>38</sup>This shows that pleasure and pain are not opposites in the way black and white are, since they are not opposite end-points on some scale or spectrum. I think Plato uses black and white as a loose analogy because I find it unreasonable to think that he was unaware of this significant difference; he uses the analogy for a purpose, and it works as far as that task is concerned.

asymmetry here: there is pain only in the lower region and none at all in the upper region, whereas there must be some pleasure in the lower region as well as the upper region, because impure pleasure is represented by an upward movement within the lower region. But if there is pleasure in the lower region as well as the upper, how should we understand the hedonic scale that the metaphor is meant to capture?

Answering this question involves answering two other, related, questions: (a) what does it mean to designate the whole lower region as pain/painful (and the upper region as pleasure)? (b) what does a movement within that region represent? It is important at this point to keep in mind that Plato is working with the bidirectional view of pain and how this applies to processes of fulfillment, such as eating. On this view, pain continues during the eating, but it need not remain constant during that process. This might suggest that the upward movement in the lower region represents simply a recession of pain, a movement from more pain to less, up until the neutral state. But we have seen that an impure pleasure is represented by an upward movement in the lower region, and that an impure pleasure is a mixture of pleasure and pain. Clearly, then, our account of an upward movement in the lower region must be capable of accommodating the coexistence of pleasure and pain.

I think the following account meets this requirement while providing answers to the above questions, (a) and (b). I start getting hungry several hours after eating, and the longer I go without food the hungrier I become, and thus the more pain I will be suffering. When I start eating again, not only does the pain of my hunger start to lessen but I also feel the pleasure of eating, until I reach fullness, at which point both the pain of hunger and the pleasure of eating cease. I often welcome this state of satiety, despite the fact that my pleasure of eating has ceased too, because the pain involved always outweighs the pleasure, and the neutral state is an improvement over the combination of pleasure and pain. Considering the experience of eating-when-hungry as a whole, that is, I am able to weigh the pleasure against the pain, and find that the pain is greater than the pleasure throughout this process. This is the sense in which, throughout the process, the net hedonic value of the experience is negative, up until satiety is reached and the process ends, at a net value of zero.

So the answers to the questions (a) and (b) are these: the lower region represents negative hedonic value ranging from immediately below the neutral state, i.e., the smallest amount of negative net hedonic value, downwards to the most painful experience. The pain and pleasure involved in any impure pleasure are quantifiable in the sense that each has a specific magnitude that can be weighed against the other, and the negative value of (the magnitude of) pain can be subtracted from the positive value of (the magnitude of) pleasure. The net result of such a hedonic calculation can be represented as a point somewhere on this linear scale, the particular position depending on the extent to which the pain outweighs the pleasure. Given this, moving downwards from the middle



represents an increase in the negative hedonic value, brought about by an increase in the magnitude of pain being experienced. On the other hand, moving upwards from anywhere in the lower region towards the middle represents a decrease in the negative hedonic value.<sup>39</sup>

On Plato's model, then, every impure pleasure involves a mixture of pleasure and pain such that it is a process whereby the agent experiences a decreasing preponderance of pain over pleasure, i.e., a negative but increasing net hedonic value. This account, then, explains why Plato claims that impure pleasures *are* some kind of liberation from pain, even though he thinks that pleasure and pain coexist during these experiences: "liberations from pain" are not merely processes of the reduction of pain, but rather processes of the reduction of negative net hedonic value.<sup>40</sup>

## IV

The above was an account of the lower region on Plato's metaphor of up-down-middle. But Plato's ultimate purpose is to establish the superiority of the upper region, so we must inquire into what happens there as well. Given the above account of the lower region, it can be seen that the upper region must represent positive hedonic value, ranging from the smallest amount of positive net hedonic value to the most pleasant experience. This region is the positive segment of the very same scale of hedonic value, the negative segment of which is represented by the lower region. And an upward movement in the upper region represents a movement from less pleasure (or no pleasure) to more pleasure. It is important to clarify what the hedonic scale in question is a measure of: since Plato believes that impure pleasures are the most intense/greatest pleasures and that impure pleasures belong in the lower region, the scale cannot be a measure of the intensity/size of a pleasure (584c4–7). Instead, it is a measure of pleasantness as Plato construes it. This explains why the more pleasant pure pleasures are of greater hedonic value than the more intense impure pleasures. The reason for

<sup>39</sup> Plato gives us no indication as to whether an upward movement in the lower region is brought about mostly by a decrease in pain or by an increase in pleasure. It is clear that the pain-component decreases, as it eventually ceases, and our experience suggests that it is a gradual decrease, as opposed to a sudden disappearance. It is also clear that the end-point of the process of restoration is a cessation of pain, as opposed to an exact balance of pleasure and pain, which would also yield zero as their net hedonic value: the process ends with a *neutral state*, which is a calm state that is free of both pleasure and pain. Plato seems to think that such a balance of pleasure and pain is impossible, the pain always outweighing the pleasure, until they cease together at the end of the process. It is unclear, however, whether the pleasure-component increases throughout this process, remains constant, or starts out strong and decreases as the pain decreases. It is possible that Plato left this point undecided to leave room for some variety in the way the process can take place.

<sup>40</sup> During any impure pleasure (e.g., the pleasure of eating), two closely linked yet distinct processes run parallel to each other: (i) the physical process of restoration (e.g., filling the stomach), and (ii) the phenomenological process of reduction of the negative hedonic value of the complex experience. (The latter process is, of course, entirely dependent on the former.)

the greater intensity of impure pleasures, on the other hand, is to be understood in terms of the deceptive comparative evaluations, as I explain below.

My account of the upper region allows, in principle, for an impure pleasure to be represented in the upper region by virtue of its pleasure-component outweighing its pain-component. This would result in a positive net hedonic value and place the experience above the neutral state, on the positive side of the scale. But it is clear that Plato considers the upper region to be occupied solely by pure pleasures. This is presumably because the nature of impure pleasures is such that their pleasure-component can never outweigh their pain-component. An impure pleasure is so fundamentally parasitic on the painful condition that it tracks the removal of pain, diminishing as it diminishes, and not ever surpassing it.<sup>41</sup> Pure pleasures, on the other hand, “do not come out of pains,” the pleasure being the satisfaction of a painless desire, which means that the agent starts out from the neutral state and moves upwards from there.<sup>42</sup>

We should also be aware that, even though both pure and impure pleasures result from processes of restoration/fillings, their hedonic values follow very different trajectories. First, the hedonic value of any impure pleasure has a natural point of termination, the neutral state, whereas there is no such point for pure pleasures. Second, the hedonic value of an impure pleasure is represented by an *upward movement* towards the neutral state, because the net value of the experience increases as long as the process of restoration continues. The hedonic value of a pure pleasure, on the other hand, must increase at first (from zero), but it need not keep going upwards—it may hit a plateau and remain there until the restoration stops and the hedonic value returns to zero, or it may vacillate within the positive range. While I enjoy reading and thinking about the *Republic*, my pleasure may remain relatively constant, or may spike up as I get to particularly rewarding passages.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> It is possible for some combination of pleasure and pain to have a positive hedonic sum, placing it in the upper region. We may consider, for example, an impure pleasure together with various pure pleasures, such that the positive value of the pure pleasures outweighs the negative value of the impure pleasure, yielding a positive net sum. But Plato is interested in evaluating particular pleasures, not combinations of distinct pleasures. There is no point, as far as Plato's purposes are concerned, in evaluating the total pleasantness of a group of distinct pleasures (and/or pains), even if these could possibly be experienced all at the same time.

<sup>42</sup> It should be noted here that upward movements take place in either the lower region or the upper exclusively—there is no such thing as starting from below and crossing through the middle into the upper region. Once I have reached the neutral state by satisfying my hunger, I can only go down again, experiencing the pain of hunger as my stomach empties. The processes of liberations from pain (impure pleasures) are complete once the neutral state is achieved, and the movement from the neutral state upwards (i.e., pure pleasure) is an altogether different kind of process. This is because positive hedonic value can only be attained by pure pleasure, which can only be experienced by a filling of the rational part of the soul. All other pleasures are condemned to the cycle from the lower region up to the neutral state and then back down again (586a).

<sup>43</sup> Even if the hedonic value of the pleasure remains constant, there must be an ongoing restoration process for the pleasure to occur at all.

Since, however, any position in the upper region represents a positive hedonic value, it does not matter much whether the hedonic value of a pure pleasure fluctuates or how far into the upper region the pleasure takes us. Whereas the distance covered by an upward movement in the lower region is of great significance—since whether or not the neutral state is reached is essential—the distance covered by an upward movement in the upper region is not especially important, as there is no particular point (on the hedonic scale) that needs to be reached. Nevertheless, it is true that one's pure pleasure will be the more pleasant the higher it goes in the upper region, even though Plato shows no interest in distinguishing between the pleasantness of different kinds of pure pleasure by means of his hedonic scale.<sup>44</sup>

Plato draws an explicit distinction only between the impure pleasures, which are represented as upward movements in the lower region, and pure pleasures, which are represented as being somewhere in the upper region.<sup>45</sup> One might therefore read the text as suggesting that all pure pleasures are pleasant to the very same extent. Yet denying that there may be any difference whatsoever between the pleasantness of different pure pleasures, and between the different stages of any given pure pleasure, renders Plato's account of pure pleasure counterintuitive, as well as making the metaphor of up-down-middle confused and misleading.

The alternative, and more charitable, reading of these passages is that Plato does not deny the possibility of the differences in question, and fails to make the possibility explicit only because doing so is unnecessary for the overarching purpose of his whole account of pleasure in *Republic* 9. He wishes to prove that the philosopher's pleasures constitute a superior class of pleasures, and differences within the superior class are of no importance as far as this goal is concerned. Given also the density of these passages, it is understandable that Plato wasted no space to make explicit or clarify points that are not of urgent need for his purposes, points that he nevertheless endorses. I therefore believe that the upper region represents a range of positive hedonic value, and that different pure pleasures may differ both in how far up they go, and in the particular trajectory they follow throughout the whole

<sup>44</sup>When Plato turns to the criterion of truth, he does bring in the machinery to draw distinctions between the pleasantness of different pleasures that qualify as superior pleasures: the superior pleasures are true, but some true pleasures are truer than others. This reading of the text, however, requires a detailed examination of the relevant passage (585b–e), which I offer not in the present paper but in Erginel 2011.

<sup>45</sup>That being in the upper region represents pure pleasure explains why the person arriving at the middle thinks that he is in the upper region, and not that he is moving upwards in the upper region. Plato claims, on the other hand, that the person moving upwards in the lower region thinks that he is moving really upwards, i.e., into the upper region. This is presumably because an increase in hedonic value in the negative segment of the scale is mistaken as an increase in the hedonic value to positive values.

experience—the model is capable of accounting for diversity within the class of pure pleasures.<sup>46</sup>

The above model for the measurement of pleasure and pain is reminiscent of the hedonistic calculus we find in the *Protagoras* (356a–c). According to the quantitative analysis in the *Protagoras*, pleasures and pains can be evaluated only by weighing them in terms of their size, number, and frequency, taking into consideration both the short and the long term. This analysis is entirely consistent with the model offered in *Republic* 9, even though the *Protagoras* does not itself develop a hedonic scale (with positive, negative, and neutral parts). It is also worth noting that Sidgwick argues for a scale that is very much like the hedonic scale Plato develops:

If pleasures, then, can be arranged in a scale as greater or less in some finite degree; we are led to the assumption of a hedonistic zero, or perfectly neutral feeling, as a point from which the positive quantity of pleasures may be measured . . . . [P]ain must be reckoned as the negative quantity of pleasure, to be balanced against and subtracted from the positive in estimating happiness on the whole.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the similarity with Sidgwick's view or the hedonistic calculus of the *Protagoras*, however, it should be clear that Plato does not, in the *Republic* at least, endorse a purely quantitative approach to evaluating pleasure. This is because Plato does not endorse the Benthamite notion that pleasures differ from one another only in quantity, each pleasure having the same quality regardless of its source.<sup>48</sup>

That Plato is against this kind of view is clear in *Republic* 9: Plato argues, in the second proof for the thesis that the just man is happier than the unjust (580c–583a), that each of the three parts of the soul has its own distinctive pleasures. This shows that Plato did not conceive of pleasure as being a single kind of experience that is logically distinct from its source.<sup>49</sup> This line of thought is confirmed by the criterion of truth (585a–586a), according to which pleasures are ranked (with respect to pleasantness) on the basis of how true they are. The truth of a pleasure is based, in turn, on what kind of desire-satisfaction the pleasure consists of, or more specifically, the nature of the desire, as well as the nature of what satisfies that desire.<sup>50</sup> That is, the pleasantness of a pleasure is tied to the nature of its constituents, leaving no room for the notion that

<sup>46</sup>It should be noted that every pure pleasure must end with a downward movement, back to the neutral state. Whereas the downward movement in the lower region represents an increase of pain, the downward movement in the upper region represents only a decrease of pure pleasure.

<sup>47</sup>Sidgwick 1907: 124. Sidgwick was undoubtedly well-acquainted with the ancients, but he seems to be unaware that Plato had already developed the notion of a hedonic scale.

<sup>48</sup>It has been argued that Sidgwick himself sides with Mill in rejecting Bentham's view (Sumner 1996).

<sup>49</sup>Cf. Reeve 1988: 151.

<sup>50</sup>It is an essential feature of the pleasure of eating that it consists of satisfying a bodily lack with food, just as it is an essential feature of the pleasure of learning that it consists of satisfying a psychic lack with knowledge (or belief).

there can only be quantitative differences between pleasures, regardless of their source.

This is not, however, inconsistent with the quantitative approach employed by the hedonic scale. As Reeve argues,

[a]lthough Plato recognizes irreducibly distinct pleasures . . . he thinks they are commensurable. Again, this is not because there is a single experience the extent or intensity of which provides a common measure of their pleasantness, but because assessing things as pleasures involves judging them by a single set of standards.<sup>51</sup>

The upshot of this is that the quantitative approach to evaluating pleasure is for Plato only one of two ways of evaluating pleasure. The hedonic scale is thus only part of the story, but it is the part that does most of the work for Plato in making sense of our experiences, as I explain in the next section.<sup>52</sup>

v

Reading the metaphor of up-down-middle in terms of a hedonic scale provides, I believe, the best way to make sense of the second mistake (standing in the middle and thinking that one is in the upper region), as well as the first one (moving from below towards the middle and thinking that one is moving into the upper region): it is because the movement in the lower region towards the middle (e.g., satisfying hunger) constitutes a process of increasing net hedonic value that such a process gives rise to a sense of improvement and elation; throughout the process one is being liberated from pain, moving from bad to less bad. And this sense of elation, when coupled with a lack of experience with pure pleasures, leads to the mistake of believing that the liberation from pain constitutes genuine, pure pleasure (584e4–5).<sup>53</sup> Familiarity with pure pleasures allows one to appreciate how different pure pleasure is from the liberation from pain. Someone who lacks such familiarity, on the other hand, will be prone to mistaking the sense of elation produced by that liberation for pure pleasure.

The explanation of the second mistake is simply an extension of this account: just as the liberation from pain produces a sense of improvement, so the cessation of pain (arriving at the middle from below) marks the arrival of a relatively superior condition. The person ignorant of the good condition, of course, will be unaware that the neutral state is superior only with respect to the bad condition, and will fall prey to the appearances.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup>Reeve 1988: 151.

<sup>52</sup>The third proof employs the non-quantitative approach to evaluating pleasure in the second half of the argument, where Plato develops the criterion of truth.

<sup>53</sup>Of course, people do not ordinarily think of their experiences in terms of purity. What they do sometimes think is shown in the examples of sick people—they believe that something is most pleasant, or extremely pleasant etc. And in those terms, Plato's claim is that many of those things are either not pleasant at all, or much less pleasant than the pleasures he advocates as pure.

<sup>54</sup>There is a noteworthy difference between the sort of false judgment we have in the two mistakes: in the second mistake, the agent makes the false judgment that a pleasure is occurring

Evaluations of a condition based on an instinctive comparison with what precedes it yield only an appearance, which may or may not correspond to the reality of that condition. The experienced person, in contrast with the inexperienced, will recognize liberations from pain to be what they are, though he will not deny that these are processes of improvement along the hedonic scale. (Even the philosopher prefers satiety to hunger!) And likewise, he will not be deceived into thinking that the cessation of pain is pleasure—just like someone who knows white will not think gray to be white, even when it is compared to black (585a3–5). Plato's contention that comparative evaluations of our condition yield unreliable appearances, and that inexperience makes us susceptible to being deceived by those appearances, strikes me as appealing. But the critical question is whether Plato succeeds in making the case for his central claim that pure pleasures are incomparably more pleasant than impure pleasures. It would be fair to say that most commentators have not found Plato's case convincing. Reeve, for instance, maintains that the purity criterion is unable to establish the greater pleasantness of the philosopher's pleasures:

But for all that has been shown so far the philosopher's pleasures might be no more pleasant than those of making money or being honoured. For the latter, though impure, might yet contain enough pure pleasure to make them more pleasant overall than learning the truth, even when the pure pain they contain is taken into consideration.<sup>55</sup>

It is important to see that Plato can rebut this criticism if we understand his claim as based on the bidirectional view of pain, and the hedonic scale that I explain above: pain continues throughout an impure pleasure, in addition to the pain that precedes and follows it. And, critically, the pleasure-component of an impure pleasure is dependent on the pain-component in such a way that the pleasure can never outweigh the pain that it accompanies. Thus the impure pleasures always remain below the neutral state—there is no moment at which the impure pleasure contains more pleasure than pain. In other words, the net hedonic value of an impure pleasure is always negative, whereas the net hedonic value of a pure pleasure is always positive. Given also that every impure pleasure is preceded and followed by pure pain (e.g., whenever we are hungry and not eating), it turns out that an impure pleasure is part of a cycle that contains far more pain than pleasure. Consequently, it is impossible that the pleasure involved in an impure pleasure may contain a large enough portion of pleasure for the impure pleasure to be more pleasant than the philosopher's pleasures.

Critics may respond, however, that this account fails to do justice to the phenomena, since it cannot explain the appeal of impure pleasures, and why some people actually prefer those to the neutral state. We can find people

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when in fact no such event is taking place; in the first mistake, on the other hand, two phenomena are perceived—pleasure and pain—and the false judgment is that the agent takes this complex experience to have a positive net hedonic value when in fact this value is negative.

<sup>55</sup> Reeve 1988: 148.

who wish to get hungry so that they can enjoy eating again, and even more people who prefer the pleasure of having sex to the contentment of having had sex. The above model cannot explain this, and it would be a significant blow to Plato's account of pleasure if he could not tackle this problem. Plato *does*, however, provide us with the resources to address this worry. The response to this problem lies in Plato's claim that the juxtaposition of pleasures and pains makes them appear intense. Plato claims at 586b7–c2 that in the case of mixed (impure) pleasures "pleasure and pain are colored (ἀποχραιομέναις) by their juxtaposition, so that each appears intense (ὥστε σφοδρὸς ἑκατέρως φαίνεσθαι)." Plato must have been impressed by the similarities between color perception and our perception of pleasure and pain, since there are two other metaphors in *Republic* 9 based on color perception, one of which sheds light on how Plato thinks this mutual intensification occurs.<sup>56</sup> Plato refers to the inferior variety of "pleasures" as shadow-paintings (ἐσκιαγραφημένη) and as shadow-paintings of true pleasures, at 583b5 and 586b8, respectively.<sup>57</sup> This reference to shadow-paintings is meant to remind the reader of the shadows in the Cave analogy in Book 7, as I have already pointed out.

Plato's metaphor, however, is twofold: these are also references to the painting technique *skiagraphia*, a technique that Plato is not only familiar with, but also fond of employing as a metaphor.<sup>58</sup> On this matter we must turn to Keuls's valuable work, *Plato and Greek Painting*.<sup>59</sup> Keuls tells us that *skiagraphia* "was developed by the Athenian painter Apollodorus, who lived in the latter half of the fifth century."<sup>60</sup> She explains the difficulties involved in figuring out what exactly *skiagraphia* was, and argues that Plato's references to this technique provide the best evidence. Yet, she notes, Plato employs the term for metaphorical purposes, and "its literal meaning is sometimes concealed in the imagery."<sup>61</sup> From her study of all the references—two in Aristotle and ten in Plato—Keuls identifies the following characteristics of the technique: (i) it is a device meant for viewing from a distance; (ii) color surfaces are broken up into distinct patches or dots; (iii) it features the mutual intensification of colors; (iv) it is (in Socrates' view) suitable for the painting of landscapes but not for the representation of living creatures, and (v) it is a metaphor for deception or for the blurring of issues vs. distinct outlining. The items (ii), (iii), and (v) are, as Keuls notes, relevant for the two references to *skiagraphia* in *Republic* 9, but (ii) and (iii) are the more interesting ones: our condition appearing one way or another depending on what is next to it, finds the perfect metaphor in this

<sup>56</sup>The other is the black-gray-white analogy (585a3–5), which I have already discussed in section III, above.

<sup>57</sup>The inferior "pleasures" are, it turns out, the impure pleasures/liberations from pain.

<sup>58</sup>The *Republic* itself contains two more references to *skiagraphia*, at 365c and 523b.

<sup>59</sup>Keuls 1978.

<sup>60</sup>Keuls 1978: 72–73.

<sup>61</sup>Keuls 1978: 73.

painting technique that uses patches of contiguous colors obeying the law of mutual intensification.<sup>62</sup>

We saw above, in the metaphor of up-down-middle, the effect of evaluating one's condition on the basis of an instinctive comparison with what precedes it. The metaphor of *skiagraphia*, on the other hand, highlights another feature of our phenomenology, that contrasting experiences that are temporally juxtaposed intensify each other.<sup>63</sup> Just as a color patch may appear more intense due to being viewed together with a contrasting color patch, a pleasure too may appear more intense due to its being experienced right after pain.<sup>64</sup> What we have here, to be more specific, is the contrast between an episode of pure pain and an episode of impure pleasure, as we find when one starts to enjoy eating. Even though the net hedonic value of eating is negative (as I explained above), its being higher on the hedonic scale than the pure pain of hunger constitutes a contrast in hedonic value, especially if one has become quite hungry prior to eating. This contrast between the hedonic value of two temporally juxtaposed experiences, according to Plato, results in a mutual intensification of both experiences.<sup>65</sup>

Now Plato claims that the juxtaposition of pleasure and pain makes them *appear* intense, but he *does not* mean by this that those pleasures are not in fact intense. Plato *agrees* that impure pleasures can be very intense, indeed claiming that the greatest (*megistai*) pleasures are impure pleasures (584c4–7). I take this claim to be equivalent to claiming that the most intense pleasures are impure pleasures, since it is clear that the greatness here cannot be a measure of pleasantness, and there does not seem to be any other feature of pleasure that

<sup>62</sup>Keuls (1978: 129–131) maintains that Plato's object of criticism is not merely falling prey to the appearances resulting from the way we naturally experience pleasure and pain: she argues that Plato is attacking a formulated view that pleasure and pain are interdependent, and that they "follow each other in an inexorable chain"; she speculates that this was Democritus' view. I am not convinced that Plato is attacking such a view, and in any case remain convinced that the critical point here is Plato's observation about our phenomenology, and his warning against being deceived due to inexperience.

<sup>63</sup>This feature too turns on the comparative status of the two experiences, since the contrast that is necessary for intensification emerges from the comparative/relative status of the juxtaposed experiences. The difference is that here the experiences in question intensify each other, whereas the phenomenon discussed earlier is simply one of mistaking what is good (hedonically) merely comparatively for what is good absolutely.

<sup>64</sup>The black-gray-white analogy at 585a3–5 also relies on different colors as the analogues to our different experiences. There Plato argues that people who are inexperienced in pure pleasure are deceived when they compare painlessness to pain, "just like comparing gray to black without experience of white." Even though color perception is used elsewhere as the metaphor for mutual intensification, it seems that this metaphor is about comparative evaluations as in the metaphor of up-down-middle. This makes sense given that the black-gray-white analogy appears as an addendum to the metaphor of up-down-middle, one metaphor coming to the aid of another. The key idea in both metaphors is that being inexperienced leads one to being deceived about the absolute, and not merely comparative, value of one's experience.

<sup>65</sup>Aristotle agrees, at *Nicomachean Ethics* 1154a29–31, that bodily pleasures are intensified by the contrast with the pain that they necessarily follow.



this greatness could be the measure of. What the *skiagraphia* metaphor tells us, then, is that the juxtaposition of impure pleasure and pain really makes the impure pleasure more intense.

In fact, this effect can make the pleasure (and pain) so intense that “they cause frenzied loves of themselves in the foolish and are fought over, just like the phantom of Helen that Stesichorus says the men at Troy fought over out of ignorance of the truth.”<sup>66</sup> (586c2–5)

This passage makes it clear that Plato is well aware of the appeal that impure pleasures have for many people. He acknowledges the appeal and offers a diagnosis, according to which the juxtaposition of pleasure and pain makes the pleasure appear to be something that it is not, thereby causing a frenzied love of itself. The warriors at Troy fought over the phantom of Helen, falsely believing that it was Helen—they fought for an object (phantom of Helen) under a false description (as the real Helen). Similarly, Plato tells us, people who pursue mixed pleasures do so under a false description of those experiences.<sup>67</sup> But the falsity in question is not one of supposing that a pleasure is intense when in fact it merely appears intense, as we have seen. What Plato has in mind must be that the intensity of the pleasure leads “the foolish”—those who are inexperienced with pure pleasures—to overvalue the combined experience with respect to its pleasantness. The foolish confuse the intensity of impure pleasures with how pleasant they are. They fail to recognize the critical distinction between intensity and genuine pleasantness, supposing that the more intense pleasures are therefore the more pleasant. They end up pursuing impure pleasures under a false description, as having great positive hedonic value, when in fact the net hedonic value of the mixture is negative.<sup>68</sup> The foolish, being fooled by the intensity of impure pleasures, judge falsely that impure pleasures have greater

<sup>66</sup> See *Phaedrus* 243a. According to the story Plato recounts, Stesichorus—a poet of the early sixth century B.C.—spoke ill of Helen, and his sight was taken away as punishment. He regained his sight as soon as he composed a *Palinode* (a “taking-it-back” poem), where he claimed that it was not Helen herself but a phantom of Helen who was at Troy.

<sup>67</sup> See *Protagoras* 365c–d for a different metaphor for deception about pleasures: mistaking the nearer to be greater than the distant pleasure. Cf. Moss (2006), who argues that optical illusions are closely related to pleasure. Moss discusses Plato’s use of optical illusions as a metaphor for the deceptiveness of pleasure in the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and the *Republic*. She explains Plato’s use of this metaphor in the *Republic* by discussing passages from Book 10; we have seen that Book 9 too contains a fine example of this kind of metaphor.

<sup>68</sup> Though Plato does not make this explicit, it seems reasonable to suppose, given his analysis of comparative evaluations, that it is not only at the level of belief that falsity occurs—the foolish presumably experience the impure pleasures as *positively pleasant* (i.e., as having a positive hedonic value), falsity coming into play at the level of awareness (of the impure pleasure). The philosopher, on the other hand, will not be deceived by such appearances. He will either not experience the mixed pleasure as positively pleasant (but only as intense), or else he will prevent this falsity from infecting his beliefs, and will judge the hedonic value of the experience correctly, acting on the basis of this correct judgment. (For a discussion of Plato on the possibility of false awareness of pleasure, see Erginel 2006: 457–458.)

hedonic value than the neutral state, or even pure pleasures (though they have never actually tasted those). Plato is therefore well prepared against the claim that so many people so strongly prefer impure pleasures: that is exactly what he would expect from “those who are inexperienced with knowledge and virtue” (586a1).

We have seen that there are two features of how we experience pleasure and pain that explain a variety of false appearances—comparative evaluations and mutual intensification—which in turn explain how people come to make false judgments about their pleasures and pains. Plato does not go into the detail of how these two deceptive mechanisms interact in different sorts of impure pleasure, but it is clear that different cases are to be explained differently. The mutual intensification feature may lead one to prefer eating when hungry to being optimally full. But this feature is not the dominant one in the case of health appearing pleasant after sickness, where the comparative evaluation plays the primary role. Together, the two features explain the different ways in which people are deceived about the true status of their pleasures and pains.

I believe that Plato’s view that we evaluate our experiences comparatively, and that our experiences are colored by their comparative status, is fairly commonsensical. What is highly controversial is his verdict that the appearances resulting from the comparative evaluations are illusory. The commonplace view is that, when it comes to pleasure, the appearance is identical to reality—“whatever complex of experience may produce pleasure, its intensity and reality is the intensity and reality the subject feels it to have.”<sup>69</sup> Thus Penelhum protests against Plato: “Even if the magnitude of the pleasure is due to the magnitude of the distress, the magnitude of the pleasure is as great as the magnitude of the distress makes it seem to be.”<sup>70</sup> But this objection misses the mark because it fails to acknowledge the distinction Plato draws between the pleasantness and the intensity of a pleasure.

With respect to impure pleasures, Plato grants that our experiences are intensified by their comparative status and that there is no falsity in this aspect of the appearance resulting from our natural comparative evaluations. In other words, Plato is not interested in denying the felt intensity of the pleasure of quenching our thirst under the scorching sun. Nor is he interested in claiming that that pleasure is not *really* intense. In this sense, the reality of the experience is not denied at all. Criticisms of Plato’s view are therefore misguided to the extent that they turn on the intensity/magnitude of pleasure.<sup>71</sup> Plato’s quarrel

<sup>69</sup> Penelhum 1964: 90.

<sup>70</sup> Penelhum 1964: 90.

<sup>71</sup> A distinction that Plato does not make explicit throughout the string of metaphors that he employs is that between the felt intensity of an experience and our judgments about the intensity of an experience. Using this distinction on his behalf, we could point out that on his view, neither the felt intensity of a liberation from pain nor our judgment about how intense it is involves deception. As for the cessation of pain, Plato holds that no pleasure is experienced and hence no pleasure of any

is with our evaluations of those experiences *qua* pleasures, and more specifically, our judgments about how pleasant they are. His contention is that the intensity of a pleasure is a wholly separate matter from how pleasant it is, and that people are deluded into conflating intensity and pleasantness only because they do not really understand what pleasure is. In the absence of experience with pure pleasures, the appearance created by the comparative status of our experience leads to false judgments about the pleasantness of those experiences, whereas such mistakes would not be made by someone who understands what pleasure really is.

But what is the basis for Plato's claims about how pleasant our experiences really are? What grounds his claims about how impure pleasures fare on the scale of hedonic value? His anchor is the thesis that those who are experienced in the required sense are qualified to judge the relative pleasantness of different experiences. This thesis has intuitive appeal, since it identifies experience, and not theoretical considerations, as the standard in disputes concerning pleasantness. Plato's views on the relative pleasantness of pleasures, then, are brought before the tribunal of experience, and the question is whether the verdict is as favorable to those views as he claims it is. This question calls for an extended discussion of empirical evidence on pleasure, and lies outside the scope of this paper. Whatever the ultimate conclusion of such a discussion might be, however, we have seen that Plato's views about the pleasantness of pure versus impure pleasures rest on a far more sophisticated and stronger foundation than his critics have supposed.

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intensity is experienced; any judgment to the effect that a pleasure of some intensity is experienced is therefore false.

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