
Early Thinking about Likings and Dislikings

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Abstract

In Plato's *Protagoras*, Socrates argues that 'the many' are confused about the experience they describe as 'being overcome by pleasure'. They think the cause is 'something other than ignorance'. He argues it follows from what they believe that the cause is 'ignorance' and 'false belief'. I show that his argument depends on a premise he does not introduce but they should deny: that when someone is overcome by pleasure, the desire stems from a belief. To explain why Plato does not make Socrates introduce this premise, the account I construct is speculative. It starts from the assumption that Plato is thinking through an understanding of human beings and what they must do to live good lives that he takes the historical Socrates to set out.

Keywords: Plato's *Protagoras*, Overcome by Pleasure, Beliefs, Likings and Dislikings

Introduction

Socrates, in Plato's *Protagoras*, asks Protagoras to join him 'to persuade and to teach the many what is this experience which they call being overcome by pleasure according to which they fail to do the best thing when they know what it is' (352e5–353a2).¹ The many think the cause is 'something other than ignorance' (357e4), and Socrates tries to show that they are confused. He argues it follows from what they themselves believe that the cause is 'ignorance' and 'false belief' (357e2, 358c4).

It is not clear, though, this does follow. What the many describe as being overcome by pleasure does not initially seem to have anything essentially to do with 'ignorance' and 'false belief'. It is natural, then, to suspect that in the argument Socrates uses to show that they are confused, he is assuming something they should deny. At the same time, there appears no reason to think Plato makes Socrates give them an argument he knows they should reject.² The point is to 'persuade and teach' them what being overcome by pleasure is. So, if the conclusion does not follow, it seems Plato must not have recognised that the argument he makes Socrates use is missing a crucial premise.

I argue there is reason to suppose this happened. In sections I and II, I give an interpretation of the common view of human nature the many hold. The interpretation relies on passages in Xenophon and Isocrates where they give instruction and advice. On this interpretation, the cause of what the many describe as being overcome by pleasure is what the many think it is. In sections III-V, I use this interpretation to show that the argument Socrates uses against them depends on a premise he does not introduce but they should deny: that when someone is overcome by pleasure, the desire on which he acts stems from a belief. In section VI and VII, I construct an explanation for why Plato does not make Socrates introduce this premise for the many to approve. The explanation is speculative.³ It starts from the assumption that Plato is thinking through an understanding of human beings and what they must do to live good lives that he takes the historical Socrates to set out. This assumption is consistent with supposing that Plato recognised the need for the premise, but the evidence points against this.

I. The Common View of Human Nature

One of the instructions Xenophon gives in his manual on equitation is that it is 'well to accustom (ἐθίζειν) oneself to sit still, especially on a spirited horse, and to touch him as little as possible with anything other than the parts that give us a safe seat by contact'.⁴ To understand this instruction, he does not expect his readers to need a philosophical theory. He expects them to understand that sitting still on a horse is uncomfortable in the beginning, that the novice dislikes sitting this way, and that to recondition himself, he needs to resist the desire to move around to relieve his discomfort.

Xenophon does not expect his readers to need a theory because he takes himself to presuppose nothing more than the common view

human beings have about themselves. They like doing things they experience pleasure in doing, and they dislike doing things they experience pain in doing. Some of these likings and dislikings may be innate. Others they acquire over time, and some they can change through practice. The novice dislikes sitting still because he finds it unpleasant, but Xenophon expects his readers to know that with practice it is possible to come to dislike the experience less.

Isocrates too presupposes this same common understanding of human nature in his advice to Nicocles (who became king of Salamis in Cyprus in 374 BCE). He advises Nicocles to 'not contract any intimacy heedlessly or without reflection, but accustom [himself] to take pleasure (ἔθιζε σαυτὸν χαίρειν) in that society which will contribute to [his] advancement and heighten [his] fame in the eyes of the world'.⁵ Nicocles should not choose his associates in the common way according to whether he has taken pleasure in his past experiences with them. Instead, he should make the effort to train himself to like the company of those who can 'heighten [his] fame in the eyes of the world'.

Isocrates does not expect Nicocles to need a philosophical theory to understand this advice. Like Xenophon, he expects his readers to share the common view that human beings can change their likings and dislikings when they have a reason. A king easily could find himself keeping company with the self-indulgent because he took pleasure with them in his youth, but this will not help him in his role as king. So Isocrates counsels Nicocles to 'govern [himself] no less than [his] subjects, and consider that [he is] in the highest sense a king when [he is] a slave to no pleasure but rule[s] over [his] desires more firmly than over [his] people'.⁶ Isocrates may worry Nicocles will not take this advice, but he does not worry Nicocles will have trouble understanding what he is being told to do.

In this common view of human nature Xenophon and Isocrates presuppose,⁷ likings and dislikings are psychological states human beings develop in their experiences of pleasure and pain. It is a commonplace that as someone has experiences of eating different kinds of foods, for example, he develops likings for the kinds he takes pleasure in eating and dislikings for eating the kinds he finds unpleasant to eat. Such likings and dislikings provide goals and thus guide the way human beings live their lives. Someone who likes eating a certain kind of food typically takes pleasure in eating it if he is hungry, has not eaten it in the recent past, and so on. When he believes these conditions are in place, he forms a desire for the food. Once he has the desire, he turns to what he can do to satisfy it.

Likings and dislikings are psychological states, but they are not beliefs in the model of the mind in the common view. This is not to say the ancients who held the common view clearly thought that likings and dislikings are not states of belief. They probably did not, but the distinction is necessary for being overcome by pleasure to be what the many think it is. If what they think is true, likings and dislikings function as sources of motivation. Beliefs do not. They only supply information. Likings and dislikings, unless they are innate, are states a human being acquires in conative conditioning in the course of his experiences of pleasure and pain. To revise the strength of a liking for a kind of activity he has developed in such conditioning, he has to recondition himself. One way is to resist the desire for the activity.⁸ By resisting the desire so that he does not engage in the activity and thus does not experience the pleasure, he weakens the strength of his liking for the activity.⁹ To abandon a belief in this model of the mind, it is enough to conclude that the evidence does not support its truth.¹⁰

II. What the Many Describe as Being Overcome by Pleasure

This interpretation of the common view provides a way to understand the thinking Socrates attributes to the many. He says that they 'think this way about [knowledge], that it is not a powerful thing, neither a leader nor a ruler,' but that 'while knowledge is often present in man, what rules him is not knowledge but rather anything else – sometimes desire, sometimes pleasure, sometimes pain, at other times love, often fear; they think of his knowledge as being utterly dragged around by all these other things as if it were a slave' (352b3-c2). They think, he says, that 'most people are unwilling to do what is best, even though they know what it is and are able to do it' because 'they are overcome by pleasure or pain or are being ruled by one of the things I referred to just now' (352d6-e2).

Socrates offers no further explanation of what the many think happens, but this is not surprising. Because the many hold the common views people normally acquire as they become adults, Socrates assumes that everyone sufficiently understands the thinking he attributes to them. Moreover, the method he uses against them is dialectical. He tries to argue from premises and inferences they accept to show that their beliefs and reasoning commit them to something they have denied. So if Socrates thinks it is necessary to have a more detailed

explanation of what they think happens when someone is overcome by pleasure, it is natural to expect that he will get it during his questioning.

The problem is that Plato seems not to understand what the many should think. According to the model of the mind in the common view, knowledge can be overcome by pleasure. Coming to know or believe that something is true does not itself change someone's likings and dislikings. To change his likings and dislikings on the basis of something he has come to know or believe, he must recondition himself to bring his likings and dislikings into accord with what he has come to know or believe. Because this takes time and can be hard to do, someone can know what is best but do something else because he is guided by a liking for some pleasure and thus acts contrary to his knowledge.

So, when Plato makes Socrates argue that the many are confused, he makes Socrates use an argument they should reject. They may be confused about the commitments of their view because they have not thought through what happens in the experience they describe as being overcome by pleasure, but they should not accept that the cause is 'ignorance' and 'false belief'. Given that their view is the common view of human nature Xenophon and Isocrates presuppose, and given the interpretation of this view I have set out, someone can be overcome by pleasure even if all of his beliefs about the situation are true. He can know that some action is the best thing he can do in the situation in which he finds himself, not be confused about what is good and what is bad in the situation, but nevertheless do something else because he has a liking that does not accord with what he knows is best.¹¹

III. Socrates' Argument Against the Many

To preserve his understanding of knowledge 'as a powerful thing and a leader and a ruler,' Socrates uses a *reductio ad absurdum* to demonstrate that the many are committed to thinking that knowledge cannot be overcome by pleasure. They think that someone can be 'unwilling to do what is best, even though [he] know[s] what it is and [is] able to do it' because '[he is] overcome by pleasure' (352d-e1). So, in the argument Socrates uses against them, the initial premises are:

1. *x* is the best thing for *S* to do.
2. *S* is able to do *x* and believes that doing *x* is good.

3. *S* does *y*, where *S* knows $y \neq x$, because *S* is overcome by pleasure.

The many also believe, as Socrates works hard to get them to understand and admit (353c-355a), that:

PG. The pleasant is the good.

The question is whether 'knowledge is ruler' and hence whether *S* can be overcome by pleasure if he is both able to do and knows what is best in the situation. So, the assumption for *reductio* is:

4. *S* knows that doing *x* is the best thing to do.¹²

Further, since the many think that *S* is not confused about what is best in the situation in which he is overcome by pleasure, the first inference in the *reductio* is from (4) to:

5. *S* does not believe that doing *y* is as good as doing *x*.

This inference provides the conclusion from the assumption for *reductio* that Socrates makes the many contradict. From premises (2), (3), and (PG), he argues it follows that:

6. *S* does believe that doing *y* is as good as doing *x*.

If the many admit (6) follows, they must admit they are wrong. They cannot accept (4) because they think that (5) follows. From (1) and $y \neq x$, it follows that the belief in (6) is false. So, contrary to what they think is possible, *S* does not know what is best but acts from 'ignorance' and 'false belief'.

IV. How the Immediate Pleasure and Pain are Different

To see why Socrates thinks the many must accept that (6) follows from (2), (3), and (PG), it is necessary to know how he understands what happens in the experience they describe as being overcome by pleasure. This understanding begins to come clear once he gets them to accept (PG). He uses this premise to argue that 'by "being overcome" [they] mean getting more bad things for the sake of getting fewer good things' (355e2-3). To the response that 'the immediate pleasure is very much

different than the pleasant and the painful at a later time' (356a5–7), he explains that the values of possible actions cannot be 'different in any other way than by pleasure and pain, for there is no other way that they could differ' (356a7–8) if (PG) is true. These values only can appear different to someone who does not 'weigh' the pleasures and pains properly because he does not 'put the pleasures together and the pains together, both the near and the remote, on the balance scale' (356b1–2).

This leaves the question of how 'the immediate pleasure' an action causes can appear to someone in such a way that he does not take into account the pleasure and pain the action causes 'at a later time'. To explain this appearance, Socrates appeals to the readily understandable mistakes that can occur when someone judges the sizes of objects by looking at them. He calls attention to the fact that objects appear 'larger when seen near at hand and smaller when seen from a distance' (356c5–6) to show that someone who is overcome by pleasure is like someone who aims to possess the largest objects he can see but fails to realise that the near objects appear larger than they are.

Socrates does not explain how the two are alike. He knows of course that although human beings can judge the difference in the sizes of objects by looking at them, they cannot judge the difference in the quantity of pleasure and pain actions cause by looking at the actions. So, he does not take the analogy to indicate that the appearance is a belief someone forms by looking, but he does not explain just what does happen. Instead, he observes that '[w]hile the power of appearance often makes us wander all over the place confused and regretting our actions and choices, both great and small, the art of measurement, in contrast, would make the appearances lose their power by showing us the truth, would give us peace of mind firmly rooted in truth and would save our life' (356d4–e2).

If Socrates does not explain the analogy because he expects everyone to be thinking about the common view the many hold, there is a straightforward way to understand how he thinks the 'power of appearance' figures in the explanation of what happens when someone is overcome by pleasure. It can be cognitively demanding to determine the quantity of pleasure and pain an action causes. Eating a certain kind of food, for example, might result initially in a quantity of pleasure but later in a much greater quantity of pain because it causes gout. It might be that knowledge of this fact could be acquired by reasoning about the outcomes of a series of experiments, but human beings obviously do not normally engage in such reasoning to decide what to eat. Instead, given that Socrates has in mind the common view of human nature, he

thinks that human beings normally do what the common view says they do. To make their decisions about what it is best to do, they are guided by the likings and dislikings they have acquired in the course of their experiences of pleasure and pain.

This makes it possible to understand why Socrates thinks 'the immediate pleasure' appears the way it does. Likings and dislikings start from the immediate consequences of the action. The subsequent pain that comes with gout is not reflected in the strength of the liking because it has yet to be experienced. Moreover, although Socrates does not stress this fact, the pain in the experience of gout will not diminish the liking if the subject does not think that eating the food causes the gout.¹³ So when likings and dislikings are the basis for a decision to 'perform that action in which the pleasant prevails' (356b8), they provide an estimate of the weight of all the pleasure and pain 'both the near and the remote' that the action causes. The calculation treats 'the immediate pleasure' and the immediate pain differently from 'the pleasant and painful at a later time'. The immediate pleasure and pain is reflected in the strength of the liking and disliking, but the subsequent pleasure and pain is not. This pleasure and pain is not reflected in the strength of the liking and disliking until the subject experiences it.

It is also possible now to see how Socrates thinks being overcome by pleasure is like aiming to possess the largest objects one can see but failing to realise that near objects appear larger than they are. The near objects look larger than they are. Eating the food seems to cause more pleasure than it does. In both cases, a psychological state that helps explain the action is one the subject gets in the course of his experiences. In the first, it comes from looking at the objects. In the second, it comes from experiencing pleasure in eating the food.¹⁴ Because Socrates takes everyone to know that false belief is the state in the first case, he expects them to think it is false belief in the second case too.¹⁵

V. Socrates Needs a Premise he Does not Introduce

This interpretation brings the missing premise to the surface. Socrates thinks the many are committed to accepting that (6) follows from (2), (3), and (PG) because they think *S* acts on a desire that stems from a belief, but they should deny they think this. They can think that *S* has developed a liking that continues to guide his behaviour even though he has come to know from the experiences of others that the activity causes pain in the future. So, they can accept that from (3), it follows that

S desires to do *y*. This, however, is not enough for Socrates to complete his *reductio*. He needs them to think what he thinks about the desire on which *S* acts: that it stems from a belief about what is good.¹⁶

Socrates can show the many they are committed to thinking this, and thus can complete his argument against them, if he can get them to accept that the desire to do *y* stems from a belief about pleasure. This, however, is not something he tries to do. He takes great care to explain the importance of (PG) to his argument, but he never asks what kind of psychological state they think gives rise to *S*'s desire to do *y*. Instead, he proceeds as if the state can only be belief and that they must think that:

DBP. *S*'s desire to do *y* stems from his belief that doing *y* is pleasant.

If the many do think this, contrary to what they should think, Socrates can complete his argument. Since they accept (PG), it follows that this belief is about what is good and thus that:

DBG. *S*'s desire to do *y* stems from his belief that doing *y* is good.

Now, given that the many accept (2), the *reductio* is complete. For the belief in (DBG) to give rise to the desire to do *y*, *S* must think that the good he attributes to doing *y* in this belief is at least as large as the good he attributes to doing *x* in the belief in (2). This is the negation of (5).¹⁷

So, if, in addition to (PG), the many accept (DBP), Socrates can refute them. They commit themselves to thinking that beliefs about what is good are the psychological states that have 'power' to make someone act as he does when he is overcome by pleasure. In this case, they are wrong about knowledge and are confused about the cause of being overcome by pleasure.¹⁸ When someone is overcome by pleasure, the cause is his belief that the pleasure is a larger good than it is.

VI. The beginning of an explanation

To explain why Plato does not make Socrates introduce (DBP) for the many approve, one of Michael Frede's remarks about the historical Socrates provides a good place to begin. Frede says that what we seem to know¹⁹ about the historical Socrates 'strongly suggests' that he thought some 'beliefs' are 'embedded in the way we feel and behave'. What we seem to know, according to Frede, is that 'in spite of his extreme intellectualism – that is to say, his view that the way we act is completely determined by our beliefs, in particular our beliefs concerning the good and related matters – Socrates' life seems to

have been characterised by a remarkable degree of asceticism'. Frede does not provide an argument,²⁰ but he says that this 'strongly suggests' that the historical Socrates 'thought that it is not a matter of pure rational argument which beliefs we espouse and which we fail to espouse, but that, precisely because some of our beliefs are so deeply embedded in the way we feel and behave, our openness to their rational rejection or their rational acceptance, our openness to rational argument, also is a matter of our pattern of behaviour and the control we have over our behaviour'.²¹

Frede's description of what the historical Socrates 'thought' is brief. He makes the point in one sentence,²² but a plausible way to supply the missing detail is to take the point to be that Socrates thought that to have the knowledge one needs to live a good life, one must not only reason correctly but also behave correctly. One must behave correctly because behaviours that make us 'feel' certain ways can produce beliefs in the absence of reasoning, and some beliefs these behaviours produce and reinforce are inconsistent with living a good life. Since these beliefs are not 'espoused' on the basis of 'pure rational argument', having a reason is not enough to abandon them. One must change the behaviours that produced and reinforce them because the control human beings have over these beliefs is 'a matter of [their] pattern of behaviour and the control [they] have over [their] behaviour'.

An argument for this interpretation of the historical Socrates Frede may have had in mind but does not provide is that it explains the asceticism in his life. He would think that as a result of behaviours in which human beings 'feel' pleasure and pain, they typically try to arrange their lives so that they behave in more of the pleasurable ways and in fewer of the painful ways because the pleasure and pain in their experiences cause them to develop psychological states that motivate them to behave in these ways. He would think too that these states are capable of motivating this behaviour because they can give rise to desires and that the behaviour they motivate is habitual. This understanding of human beings is part of the common view of human nature, but since Socrates accepted 'extreme intellectualism', he thought these psychological states are beliefs about what is good or bad that are not held purely on the basis of reasons. Moreover, he came to realise that he himself had developed such beliefs and that they were inconsistent with living a good life as he had come to understand this life. So, he changed his 'pattern of behaviour' to rid himself of these beliefs, and this change in his behaviour changed his life so that it came to be 'characterised by a remarkable degree of asceticism'.

It is possible that (i) Plato understood the historical Socrates this way and that (ii) this framework for understanding human beings and what they must do to live good lives is in his mind when, in the *Protagoras*, he makes the character Socrates argue against the many. This, of course, is not to say that (i) and (ii) are true. It is hard to know what the historical Socrates thought, what Plato understood the historical Socrates to have thought, and what Plato is thinking when he makes the character Socrates and the other characters in the dialogues say the things they do. If, however, the historical Socrates did accept 'extreme intellectualism' and thought that some beliefs are 'embedded in the way we feel and behave' in the manner my interpretation sets out, then he thought that:

7. All desires stem from beliefs or knowledge about what is good and what is bad.
8. As they become adults, human beings develop psychological states from their experiences of pleasure and pain that guide their lives. To live good lives, they must take control of themselves to resist the desires that arise from some of these states.
9. The psychological states human beings develop from their experiences of pleasure and pain are not knowledge of what is good and what is bad.

In (8), the psychological states are likings and dislikings. It follows from (7) and (9) that these psychological states are beliefs. In the *Protagoras* in his argument against the many, Socrates assumes that these psychological states are beliefs. So if Plato sets out this argument in the context of wondering whether the historical Socrates is right about (7)–(9), there is the beginning of an explanation for why he did not recognise that he should make Socrates give the many the opportunity to deny (DBP).

VII. Likings and Dislikings are Beliefs

The assumptions (i) and (ii) do not entail that Plato failed to recognise this because he himself thought that the psychological states in (8) are beliefs. The two assumptions make it natural to conclude that when he has Socrates argue against the many, he is thinking about whether the desires that stem from the psychological states in (8) are counterexamples to the intellectualism in (7), but this could have

happened in two ways. He could have been thinking about whether these states are beliefs, or he could have thought that these states are beliefs and have been thinking about whether they are beliefs about what is good and what is bad. The evidence points toward the second possibility.

The word that translates as 'belief' in 'false belief' at 358c4 is the noun δόξα. Given its ordinary meaning, the psychological states in (8) are uncontroversial cases of δόξα, or 'belief'. The -α suffix in δόξα makes its etymology a little unclear,²³ but its root δοκ- suggests that it is related to the verb δοκεῖν, 'to appear or seem to someone'. The root δοκ- in the verb δοκεῖν itself derives from the root δεκ- in the verb δεξασθαι, 'to take, accept, or receive what is offered'.²⁴ This puts the emphasis in the conditions for application in the meaning of δόξα on the passiveness of the cognitive response.²⁵ It is not on a specific kind of cognitive response. This is secondary. So given the ordinary meaning, the states in (10) are clear cases of δόξα, or 'belief', because these likings and dislikings are psychological states human beings get in their experiences and rely on to make decisions about what to do.

In the argument against the many, Socrates stresses the passiveness of the cognitive response in those who are overcome by pleasure. They 'give into themselves' and act from 'ignorance' and 'false belief'. They should 'control themselves' and act from 'wisdom'. Someone with this wisdom knows what to do because he has the art that measures pleasure and pain. Socrates makes the many agree that this art would be 'our salvation' (357a6–7).²⁶ He tells Protagoras that they can 'inquire into' (357b6) what exactly this art is after they have explained to the many what being overcome by pleasure is. This inquiry does not occur in the *Protagoras*, but the clear implication is that someone with this wisdom is not one of the many. He somehow controls his thinking about what it is best to do in a way that someone who aims to possess the largest available objects but fails to realise that objects appear 'larger when seen near at hand and smaller when seen from a distance' does not. About the sizes of the objects he has the opportunity to possess, this person simply gives into his eyes for his beliefs.²⁷

Socrates' appeal to the example of determining size by looking to indicate what happens when someone does not weigh pleasure and pain properly suggests that he thinks of the δόξαι, or 'beliefs', someone gets in the experience of looking as the paradigm case. Human beings get δόξαι in their experiences. They get these psychological states when they look at objects, and they get them when they have experiences of pleasure and pain. Socrates thinks everyone understands what happens

when human beings look at objects, so he treats this as the paradigm that shows what happens when human beings get likings and dislikings in the course of their experiences of pleasure and pain.

This understanding of likings and dislikings also occurs in the *Phaedo*, although there is a tantalising passage that can appear to show otherwise. This passage, as I interpret it, is part of another and presumably subsequent attempt on Plato's part to understand (8).²⁸ Socrates says that before philosophy takes possession of the soul, each pleasure and pain 'fastens it to the body' so that it has 'the same beliefs as the body and enjoys the same things (ὁμοδοξεῖν τῷ σώματι καὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς χαίρειν)'.²⁹ This, he says, forces the soul to adopt 'the same ways and sustenance' as the body (83d5, 7–8, 8–9)³⁰ and thus to live a life proper to the body but not itself. He makes these remarks in the context of his previous assertion that 'lovers of knowledge are aware'³¹ that when philosophy takes possession³² of the soul, it has been thoroughly bound and glued to the body' (82d9–e2). So, the point is that the lover of knowledge comes to think that his past experiences of pleasure and pain have 'fastened' his soul to his body. Further, he comes to think that if he is to start living a good life as he now understands it, he must 'unfasten' his soul in order to stop living as he had been living.

The phrase 'the same beliefs as the body and enjoys the same things' can suggest Socrates means to claim that before philosophy takes possession of the soul, it gets intentional states of two kinds: beliefs, on the one hand, and likings and dislikings, on the other. The evidence, however, is against this interpretation. When earlier in the dialogue Socrates says, and Simmias agrees, that 'we say justice itself is something', and 'beauty', 'goodness', and the other forms too, the very next thing he asks Simmias is did he ever 'see (εἶδε) any such things with [his] eyes' (65d9). He then goes on to contrast this way of having a thought about something, where seeing with the eyes is the paradigm, with what he says is the 'seizing', or 'laying hold of' a form by the 'reasoning of the intellect' (79a3).³³ This shows his conception of belief is the same as the one in the *Protagoras*.

In making the contrast, Socrates does not mean that δόξαι, or 'beliefs', are psychological states whose content is restricted to thoughts about things whose existence is the kind he calls 'visible' and opposes to the 'invisible' existence he attributes to the forms (79a6–7). This is clear from his use of δόξα at 66b1. The context is why the lover of knowledge who becomes a 'genuine' philosopher lives the way he does. Socrates gets Simmias to agree that the philosopher who engages in the love of wisdom correctly regards the pleasures of food and other 'services to

the body' as a distraction (64d8). Simmias also agrees that this philosopher regards the kind of thinking in which one sees with the eyes as a hindrance to gaining 'wisdom' and 'truth' (65a19, 65b9). So, because lovers of knowledge who have become 'genuine' philosophers have these thoughts, Socrates says that 'some such view ($\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha\nu$) as this must present itself' to them (66b1–2).³⁴ This $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$, or 'view', that presents itself is about how the body leads them, 'together with [their] reason, astray' (66b4) and about how they must live ascetic lives in order to 'know through [their] very selves all that is unsullied... [for] that is what the truth is; because never will it be permissible for the impure to lay hold of the pure' (67a8–b2).³⁵

The view that presents itself to genuine philosophers is different in content from the views someone gets when he 'sees with his eyes', but they share a crucial feature. This feature is not easy to specify precisely, but in both cases the view 'presents itself'. The subject finds himself with the thought. It is not produced in the kind of thinking in which someone is 'seizing', or 'laying hold of' a form by the 'reasoning of the intellect'. It is natural of course to take Socrates to think that the 'some such' view is closer to the 'truth' than the view of someone who simply thinks some object he 'sees with his eyes' is red because it looks red, but in both cases the thought 'presents itself' to the subject. It is not a thought he comes to think as the conclusion of an argument or whatever exactly Socrates takes to happen when someone 'lays hold of' a form by the 'reasoning of the intellect'.

This interpretation leaves the thinking in 'laying hold of' a form by the 'reasoning of the intellect' without a clear explanation, but it does enough to show that when Socrates says that each pleasure and pain 'fastens [the soul] to the body' so that it has 'the same beliefs as the body and enjoys the same things', his intention is not to distinguish beliefs from likings and dislikings. He thinks that the cognitive response in which someone forms a liking or disliking in experiences of pleasure and pain in connection with the 'services to the body' is a $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$, or 'belief', because the passiveness of the response is of the same sort that occurs in the paradigm case when someone forms beliefs by 'seeing with his eyes'. In both, it is something that happens to the subject. The lover of knowledge realises that he has been passive. He realises that his experiences of pleasure and pain have given him $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$ i, or 'beliefs', that have made him live in service of his body.³⁶ In the language of the *Protagoras*, he realises he has been 'giving into' these experiences and thus living as one of the many and that he must instead take 'control' of himself if he is to live a good life as he now understands it.

So, the *Phaedo* provides no evidence to show that Plato distinguished beliefs from likings and dislikings. Given the traditional ordering of the dialogues and that he continues to think about the framework he takes the historical Socrates to set out, this is more reason to suppose that Plato thought that the likings and dislikings in (8) are beliefs when he wrote the *Protagoras*. He makes Socrates say that he goes on about (PG) in so much detail because it is on 'this very point that all the arguments rest' (354e7–8), the arguments that being overcome is 'getting more bad things for the sake of getting fewer good things' and that knowledge cannot be overcome because the cause is 'ignorance' and 'false belief'. This implies that (PG) is the only thing the many can plausibly deny to preserve their claim about knowledge. Plato might make Socrates convey this implication even though he himself knows it is false because he thinks it is questionable whether the liking that gives rise to the desire when someone is overcome by pleasure is really a belief, but in the absence of a reason to think Plato did think this, the assumptions (i) and (ii) together with the evidence suggest he did not.

VIII. Conclusion

This interpretation of the *Protagoras* gives Plato a conception of belief different from one in which beliefs provide information only and thus do not function as sources of motivation, but it helps explain why he has Socrates argue against the many as he does. The assumptions (i) and (ii) place the argument in an historical context. Plato is thinking through a framework for understanding human beings and what they must do to live good lives that he takes the historical Socrates to set out.

Given what the many think is possible, Plato wonders whether the desires to which the historical Socrates called attention in connection with his asceticism are counterexamples to his view that desires stem from knowledge or belief about what is good and what is bad. They think when someone is overcome by pleasure, he fails to resist a desire for some pleasure he likes and that this can happen even if he is able, knows, and is not confused about what is best in the situation.

Plato makes Socrates argue the many are wrong, but the argument he makes him use misses what they should think because Plato thought that the likings and dislikings human beings acquire in their experiences of pleasure and pain are beliefs. As he understands the argument and the threat the many pose to what the historical Socrates thought, the question is not whether the desire in someone overcome by

pleasure stems from a belief and thus whether the liking that gives rise to this desire is a belief. It is whether the belief from which this desire stems is a belief about what is good.

It is hard to know what Plato thinks the answer is, but it is easy to suspect he was close to concluding that the historical Socrates was wrong and that not all desires stem from knowledge or belief about what is good and what is bad. His reason, if he was close, was not that beliefs are not sources of motivation and hence that likings and dislikings are not beliefs. It was that desires stem from two kinds of beliefs, that the likings and dislikings human beings acquire in their experiences of pleasure and pain are beliefs about what is pleasant and what is painful, and that the argument against the many forces them into contradiction because they accept that the pleasant is the good.³⁷

Notes

1. My translations of the *Protagoras* are the ones in Lombardo & Bell 1992 with possibly minor changes. The Greek text is Burnet 1903 (Lombardo & Bell 1992: xxxvi).
2. It is possible that Plato is doing this. (See Frede 1992: 204–205). He might believe the historical Socrates never indicated that he thought there was a problem with the argument, and his intention might be to act mainly as a reporter of what the historical Socrates thought. Alternatively, he might intend for his philosophically-minded readers to figure out for themselves that the many should reject the argument. The problem, though, with these and other interpretations along these lines is that although they are possible, they are not very plausible. This is especially true for the first interpretation. Plato might be acting mainly as a reporter of what the historical Socrates thought, but it is more common to think that he is trying to understand the philosophical significance of the sorts of things the historical Socrates said and the unusual way he lived. This, for example, is the understanding of Plato in Long 1998: ‘Socrates is generally the vehicle or personified representation of his author’s methodology and philosophical ideals. ... [And in] using Socrates as his philosophical vehicle, Plato is also commenting on and interpreting *the significance for philosophy of Socrates’ life*’ (119).
3. It is possible to reject this explanation but accept my interpretation of the argument against the many.
4. *On the Art of Horsemanship* 9.9. The translation and text is Marchant & Bowersock (1925).
5. Isocrates 2.29. The date is 370 BCE (Mirhady & Too 2000: 10). The translation and text is Norlin 1928. Mirhady & Too (2000): ‘make a habit of enjoying those activities...’
6. Isocrates 2.29. ‘Practice self-control (ἐγκράτειαν ἄσκει) in all the things by which it is shameful for the soul to be controlled, namely, gain, temper, pleasure, and pain. ... [G]overn your pleasures on the principle that it is shameful to rule over one’s servants and yet be a slave to one’s desires’ (Isocrates 1.21). (The translation and text is Norlin (1928). The date is 374–370

- BCE (Mirhady & Too 2000: 10.) This kind of advice seems to have been common. See *Gorgias* 491d and *Republic* IV.430e.
7. This view also shows itself in relatively non-philosophical contexts in the philosophers. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates considers what steps someone who lives in a city run by a tyrant should take to ensure that he suffers as little injustice as possible. The answer is that he should 'get himself accustomed (*ἐθίζειν*) from childhood on to like and dislike (*χαίρειν καὶ ἄχθεσθαι*) the same things as the master; and to make sure that he'll be as like him as possible' (510d6–8; Zeyl 1987). Rackham (1926) uses 'like' and 'dislike' to translate a similar passage in Aristotle. 'Hence the importance, as Plato points out, of having been definitely trained from childhood to like and dislike (*χαίρειν τε καὶ λυπεῖσθαι*) the proper things' (*Nicomachean Ethics* II.3.1104b11–13; cf. Plato, *Laws* II.653a, II.659d). For some discussion of how Aristotle understands this, see Lawrence (2011: 261).
 8. Another way, it seems, is to imagine negative consequences. So, for example, to help smokers quit, the US government's 'Tips From Former Smokers' campaign features in graphic images the horrific 'stories of former smokers living with smoking-related diseases and disabilities and the toll these conditions have taken on them' (<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/about/index.html>). The campaign intends these images to help smokers change their behaviour in a way belief in the evidence that smoking contributes to various diseases does not. The belief or knowledge that smoking is bad is not itself enough. Smokers must recondition themselves, and the campaign uses the gruesome images in their ads to 'communicate in a very human way' that smoking is bad for their health (<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/about/faq/campaign-faq.html>, in the answer to 'Everyone knows that smoking is very bad to your health. What new information are these ads providing?').
 9. Cf. *Laws* VIII.841a6-b2.
 10. As far as I know, Pollock (2006) is the most extensive attempt to fill in the details in a model of the mind in which there are both beliefs and likings and dislikings. Pollock thinks human beings have both states. In my argument in this paper, I take no stand on whether the sources of motivation in human beings are or are not beliefs and thus whether likings and dislikings are beliefs.
 11. For an expression of this view in the many, see Euripides, *Hippolytus* 377–383.
 12. Socrates says that 'no one who knows or believes' (358b7), so the assumption for *reductio* can be weakened to 'S believes that doing x is the best thing to do'.
 13. Cf. Pollock (2006: 49): '[I]t was very difficult to discover that smoking causes cancer. A person may have been conditioned to liking smoking because it was pleasurable. When he later learns (or becomes convinced) that smoking causes cancer, he is faced with the problem of changing his [liking for smoking] to bring it into line with what he now conceives the abstract value of smoking to be'.
 14. It is common to offer the sort of explanation Wolfsdorf (2006: 128) offers, that '[i]t is not the actual quantity of the goodness or badness of the action on balance that motivates the man, but the perceived (or more precisely, misperceived) quantity' and that '[b]y analogy with visual perception, Socrates suggests that the propinquity to the agent of the good aspect of the action makes the good aspect appear greater than it is', but this leaves open what Socrates thinks the 'misperceiving' is.
 15. Cf. *Philebus* 41e.
 16. Brickhouse & Smith (2010) take the Socrates of the early dialogues to think there are 'rational desires' and 'nonrational desires'. He thinks, on their interpretation, that although all action stems from beliefs or knowledge about

what is good, nonrational desires are 'appetites and passions' that can 'influence judgment by the way in which they represent their aims to the soul' (52, note 6). They see evidence for this interpretation in the *Protagoras*. 'Socrates believes that appetites and passions can be either strong or weak and that a strong appetite or passion is more likely to cause an unknowing agent to believe that the pleasure at which it aims is in fact a good. It is appetite or passion, then, that accounts for the object of the appetite or passion having the power of appearance – and the stronger the appetite, the more 'convincing' this power will be' (71). This view of the mind is similar to what some Platonists and Peripatetics think in late antiquity. See Frede (2011: 52–53, 59–62).

17. This interpretation of the argument is consistent with a suggestion Frede makes: that '[g]iven the appropriate assumptions about the mind', the argument 'can be reformulated without relying on the hedonist thesis' (Frede 1992: xxviii) that the pleasant is the good. Frede does not formulate the argument in any detail in the first place, so it is unclear just how he understands it. He does, though, describe the 'appropriate assumptions about the mind'. He takes Socrates to think the 'passions' are 'beliefs about what is good or bad' (Frede 1992: xxix). Cf. Frede (1996: 7).
18. Burnyeat can seem to say that Socrates succeeds in showing that the many are confused. 'Historically, the greatest challenge to the intelligibility of akrasia was the argument mounted by Socrates in Plato's *Protagoras* (351b ff.), which showed that weakness of will is unintelligible on the assumption, precisely, that there is only one "object of pursuit" – one category of value, within which all goods are commensurable, as it were, in terms of a single common coinage. Pleasure was the coinage chosen for the argument...' (Burnyeat 1980: 87). It may be, though, that Burnyeat does not mean to express an evaluation of the argument. Others have expressed an evaluation and have said that Socrates' argument is fallacious, but they have not located the problem in the assumption that likings and dislikings are beliefs. Taylor is the most prominent example. He thinks Socrates establishes a necessary condition and fallaciously infers that it is a sufficient condition (Taylor 1991: 199–200).
19. To claim knowledge of what the historical Socrates thought about any philosophical issue is to touch one of the hottest third rails in all of ancient philosophy. As Frede puts this point, '[i]t is notoriously difficult to determine the historical truth about Socrates' position' (Frede 2000: 9).
20. He says little more than I quote.
21. Frede (2000: 9–10).
22. As far as I know, Frede (1996: 15) is Frede's only other discussion of this interpretation of the historical Socrates. It is equally brief and, I think, harder to understand.
23. 'With its final -α, the word could be Pre-Greek' (Beekes 2009: 348).
24. Beekes (2009: 320–321, 344–345).
25. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates stresses the specific kind of cognitive response and downplays its passiveness (189e-190a). He does this in part to oppose a conception of belief he takes Protagoras to champion and that he thinks makes dialectic impossible because it overemphasises the passiveness of the cognitive response (161d-e). (For discussion, see Frede 1987.) So, in the *Protagoras*, it is possible that Plato does not make Socrates introduce (DBP) because he counts on the reader to understand that Protagoras (whom Socrates will subsequently refute on the basis of what he and Protagoras have taught the many) will mistakenly see no need for this premise. This possibility is more plausible than the possible interpretations I mention in note 2, but it is still not very plausible.

26. Socrates says this art would ‘make the appearances lose their power by showing us the truth’ (356d8-e1), but he does not explain how this would happen and hence exactly what should occur in the mind of someone who decides what to do. Given the discussion of virtue in the *Phaedo* at 69a-d, the suggestion is that someone with this art no longer relies on the likings and dislikings he formed in his experiences of pleasure and pain. This, however, is not something he says in the *Protagoras*.
27. This is suggestive of the thesis in Vogt (2012:11) that ‘Socratic epistemology explores the idea that, in coming to know something, knowledge that *p* transforms and replaces belief that *p*’. According to this interpretation, the conception of belief ‘Socratic epistemology explores’ is not the ‘take something to be the case or regard it as true’ conception that some contemporary philosophers think they themselves possess (Schwitzgebel 2015) and that permits knowledge to be understood as a kind of belief. In my argument in this paper, I take no stand on this interpretative issue.
28. There is a third attempt in the education program in the *Republic*.
29. Sedley & Long (2011). Gallop (1975): ‘sharing opinions and pleasures with the body’.
30. Sedley & Long (2011). Gallop (1975): ‘force to become of like character and nurture to it’.
31. Sedley & Long (2011). Gallop (1975): ‘recognise (γινώσκουσι)’.
32. Sedley & Long (2011). Gallop (1975): ‘when philosophy takes their soul in hand’. Cf. Burnet (1911: 75): ‘παραλαβοῦσα, “taking in hand”, as a doctor takes his patient in hand for treatment’.
33. Socrates uses a form of ἐπιλαμβάνω.
34. For recent discussion of how Plato uses δόξα in this passage, see Moss (2020).
35. Gallop (1975) with ‘through our very selves’ and ‘lay hold of’ replacing ‘our own selves’ and ‘touch’ respectively. Sedley & Long (2011): ‘taking us with our reason towards the quarry in our inquiry’. For discussion of the text here, see Gallop (1975: 227, note 10). Sedley & Long (2011): ‘will know through our very selves everything that is unalloyed, which is, equally, the truth. For it may be that it is not sanctioned for someone impure to grasp something pure’.
36. The philosopher also realises that in the course of his experiences of pleasure and pain, he took on the false belief that the things involved in these experiences (the things he takes pleasure in eating and drinking, for example) are ‘most clear and most real’ (*Phaedo* 83c7–8).
37. I am grateful to Bill Stephens, to two referees, and to the Editorial Board of the journal for insightful comments that helped me improve the argument and exposition in this paper.

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