

Plato on a Mistake about Pleasure

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Abstract

Plato argues in *Republic* IX that people are often mistaken about their own pleasures and pains. One of the mistakes he focuses on is judging that an experience of ours is pleasant when, in fact, it is not. The view that such a mistake is possible is an unpopular one, and scholars have generally been dismissive of Plato's position. Thus Urmson argues not only that this position is deeply flawed, but also that it results from a confusion on Plato's part. In this paper, I show that Urmson's criticism is misguided. I then defend Plato against the idea that it is impossible for someone to make the mistake in question. In doing so, I bring out details in Plato's text and show that his account of the phenomenology involved in making this mistake is far more sophisticated than has so far been recognized.

In Book IX of the *Republic*, Plato sets out to give three proofs of the superiority of the philosopher's life. Among these arguments, the third proof (583b2-587c3) stands out as providing "the greatest and most decisive of the overthrows" (583b6-7). In this dense and complex passage, Plato tackles, among other things, the phenomenology of pleasure and pain. He presents his views on this subject by discussing, and explaining, two mistakes people make about pleasure. My focus in the present paper will be on the first of these mistakes, which is a matter of judging that an experience of ours is pleasant when, in fact, it is not. Plato claims that people commonly make this mistake, and he proceeds to explain why this mistake is so widespread, while offering arguments as to why the judgments in question are indeed false. However, the

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claim that such a mistake is possible, let alone that it is widespread, is an unpopular one among contemporary philosophers. Thus Penelhum writes, "If I am in no doubt that I am pleased, I am."¹ In a more direct assault on Plato's position, Urmson argues not only that this position is deeply flawed but also that it results from a failure, on Plato's part, to draw an obvious distinction.² This assessment is in accord with the general reputation of Plato's treatment of pleasure in *Republic* IX: it is typically criticized as fraught with insurmountable problems and grave inadequacies, so much so that it gets treated as an unfortunate incident along the way to Plato's mature views on pleasure in the *Philebus*.³ My aim in this paper is to take some steps toward rehabilitating this undeserved reputation.

First, I take on Urmson and demonstrate that his criticism is misguided: Plato's position is neither false for the reason Urmson gives, nor confused in the way Urmson suggests. I then address, more generally, the view that it is *impossible* for someone to make the mistake Plato claims we make. This view can be seen as a corollary of the view that it is impossible for us to be mistaken about *any* of our mental states. This Cartesian claim of incorrigibility is, I argue, untenable. In the course of discussing this issue and applying it to Plato's position, I bring out details in Plato's text and show that his account of the phenomenology involved in making the mistake at issue is far more sophisticated than has so far been recognized. I do not, in this paper, try to answer the question about whether this mistake is indeed possible and widespread, for doing so requires an interpretation and evaluation of Plato's whole account of pleasure. I believe I do show, however, that Plato's explanation of the mistake provides the foundation for defending the possibility of the mistake, and that refuting Plato's position requires more work than its critics have deemed necessary.

1.

At 583c3-8, Socrates claims that pleasure and pain are opposites, with a neutral state, one in which we feel neither pleasure nor pain, intermediate between them. The mistake at issue is based on the existence of an intermediate state between the opposites of pleasure and pain. This intermediate state is said to be a sort of calm (*hēsuchia*) of the soul, where there is neither pleasure nor pain (583c7). This neutral state is sometimes mistaken to be pleasure when one arrives at it coming from a painful state.⁴ Socrates clarifies 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). Likewise, those who are in great pain claim that nothing is

more pleasant than the cessation of their suffering (583d3-4). They wrongly identify the neutral state as pleasure, not only while they are suffering but also once they have arrived at that neutral state. When someone reaches the neutral state from pleasure, that is, when someone ceases to feel pleasure, on the other hand, the calm appears painful (583e1-2).⁵

Having established that pleasure, pain, and the neutral state are three distinct conditions, it is a mistake by definition to take the neutral state to be either pleasure or pain. It is therefore absurd to think that the same state may be either pleasure or pain depending on the preceding condition; the cessation of pain itself clearly cannot be real pleasure, since the mere absence of pain is a condition distinct from pleasure. Plato further clarifies the impossibility of the cessation of pain being pleasure (and vice versa) by adding the following point: 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 (583e9-10). Plato is here hinting at a point pursued not here but in the *Philebus* (33c-34c), that all pleasures—even those that consist of satisfactions of bodily desires, such as eating—come to be in the soul. Pleasure (and pain) arises insofar as the soul perceives the relevant phenomena, such as eating, drinking, or learning. Each of these phenomena is construed as a “filling” (*plērosis*) in the *Republic*’s metaphorical terminology, and a “replenishment”/“restoration” (*anachoresis*) in that of the *Philebus*.⁶ When it does so arise, it may be described as a sort of motion (*kinēsis*). This motion in the soul tracks the filling in question (whether it is a bodily filling or a psychic one), which is itself a motion.⁷ This idea that pleasure consists of a double motion is captured vividly in *Philebus* 33d2-6, where Plato introduces the perception requirement for pleasure.

You must realize that some of the various affections of the body are extinguished within the body before they reach the soul, leaving it unaffected. Others penetrate through both body and soul and provoke a kind of upheaval that is peculiar to each but also common to both of them.⁸

All pleasures and pains, including bodily ones, then, involve a motion in the soul. These are contrasted with the intermediate state, where there is no such motion, since it is a condition of nonperception, and there is no phenomenon of the relevant sort reaching the soul. This contrast between pleasure and pain on the one hand and the neutral state on the other underscores the distinctness of the latter from both of the former. Believing that the absence of pain is pleasure, or that the absence of pleasure is pain, therefore, is a grave mistake.

When it is next to the painful, the calm (*hōsuchia*) appears pleasant, and when it is next to the pleasant, painful; and there is nothing sound in these appearances as far as the truth about pleasure is concerned, only some kind of witchcraft. (584a7-10)

Here we can see how Plato construes the phenomenology of making such a mistake: even though there is no filling taking place, and, *ipso facto*, no mental state that tracks a filling,⁹ there is a second-order mental state with the false content that such a tracked filling is occurring.¹⁰

Plato has told us that there are three distinct conditions and that it would be a serious error to mistake the neutral state for pleasure.¹¹ But how is such a mistake possible? How can we suppose an experience of ours to be pleasure when it is not a pleasure at all? Here Plato is putting forward a controversial view, that pleasures and pains do not come with identifying marks or name-tags, that our judgments about whether we are experiencing pleasure and pain are not incorrigible. In fact, our judgments on these matters are so far from incorrigible that we are unable to distinguish not only between pure and impure pleasure but also between pleasure (or pain) and a calm state, which is not a pleasure at all. The rejection of the common but naïve view that pleasure is a generic and unmistakable feeling underlies Plato's account of pleasure and pain in both the *Republic* and the *Philebus*.¹²

Another way of putting Plato's position is that he defends an objective, as opposed to subjective, account of what constitutes pleasure and pain. One is, as a matter of fact, experiencing pleasure if the criteria in question are satisfied, regardless of what one thinks one is experiencing. Of course, this is not to suggest that pleasure and pain can be divorced from our subjective experiences: the point is that we can be wrong in our classification of those experiences. Plato's account of pleasure and pain is objective insofar as the question about whether we are experiencing pleasure or pain is a question of fact independent of our beliefs on the matter. Yet the account does not lose sight of subjectivity insofar as pleasure and pain necessarily involve perception on the part of the agent, and they are experienced in particular, distinct ways, such that a competent judge can tell accurately—at least in the vast majority of cases—whether an experience is pure pleasure, impure pleasure, or not a pleasure at all, from how it *feels*.

2.

Many philosophers today are open to the idea that we can make mistakes about our pleasures and pains—such as being mistaken about the true object of our pleasure/pain—but few will allow that we can be mistaken about whether or not we

are in fact experiencing a pleasure.¹³ Thus Urmson objects to the possibility of mistaking the neutral state for pleasure (or pain): “But does anyone ever confuse the absence of a pleasant feeling with the presence of an unpleasant feeling or the absence of pain with a pleasant feeling? I doubt it.”¹⁴ Urmson argues that Plato’s fault here is in failing to distinguish between experiencing a pleasant sensation and finding a situation pleasant or enjoyable.¹⁵ Accordingly, he maintains that, in the contexts that Plato is referring to, “[w]hat [people] find, and say, is that in the circumstances the absence of feeling, pleasant or unpleasant, is pleasant; the *hēsuchia* is pleasant as being what it is.” That is to say, on Urmson’s view, when people find the neutral state pleasant, they are not making the false judgment that they are experiencing a pleasant sensation, but rather judging that it is pleasant to be in the neutral state.¹⁶

But it strikes me as quite obvious that many people either fail to make, or reject, the distinction Urmson is advocating. In other words, Plato is not battling phantom adversaries when he criticizes people for mistaking the neutral state for pleasure—people do (never mind how many people and how frequently) believe and say that the cessation of their pain is pleasant, without distinguishing this pleasantness from other kinds of pleasure. Of course, no one really holds before their mind the nonsensical conscious thought “the neutral state I am experiencing is pleasant,” given that the neutral state is defined as the state in which one experiences neither pain nor pleasure, but Plato’s claim is that they believe the cessation of their pain to be pleasant.¹⁷ People also speak of how wonderful it is for their pain to cease, without speaking in terms of pleasure. Such utterances and thoughts amount to the same thing for Plato: people overrate the cessation of pain, supposing it to be the experience most worthy of pursuit, when in fact there is a class of experiences—pure pleasures—that are wholly superior (hedonically) to the cessation of pain.

Urmson is also wrong to claim that Plato’s position on this matter illustrates his failure to make the distinction between experiencing a pleasant sensation and finding a situation pleasant. Plato’s project in *Republic* IX is to provide an account that captures all pleasure, regardless of the possible distinctions within that class. Unless finding a situation pleasant is not a matter of pleasure at all, it has to be analyzed along the same lines as any other pleasure. If there is such a thing as finding satiety pleasant (as distinct from the pleasure of eating) this pleasantness has to be analyzed, according to Plato, as some sort of psychic filling.¹⁸ Finding the neutral state pleasant is then understood as a second-order pleasure (which is *about* the neutral state), bringing into the picture the psychic motion lacking in the neutral state. The key here is to distinguish

between being in the neutral state with respect to the satisfaction of a specific desire and being in a neutral state unqualifiedly; we may be in the neutral state with respect to hunger while we experience pleasure due to some other filling process—in this case a psychic filling consisting of the belief that the pain is over. If we recognize this pleasure to be what it is, we are free from the mistake in question. If, on the other hand, we suppose this second-order pleasure to be just the pleasure of being at the neutral state, or if the second-order pleasure rests on the false belief that the cessation of our pain is itself pleasant, we are committing the mistake Plato is warning against. And I see no reason to deny the possibility of someone making such false judgments while experiencing the second-order pleasure.

To be sure, Plato's discussion of this mistake makes no reference to second-order pleasures, but my point is that his account is capable of accommodating Urmson's distinction. Plato's concern is that people overrate the neutral state, believing that X is a pleasure when in fact X is merely the cessation of their pain. Urmson's distinction does nothing to remove the possibility of this mistake, and Plato's position on the matter has nothing to do with whether or not he makes the distinction. In fact, the distinction helps illustrate the strength of Plato's position: denying the possibility of the mistake entails not only that (a) if A believes that she is experiencing pleasure, she is indeed experiencing (some) pleasure; but also that (b) if A is experiencing X and believes that X is a pleasure, X is indeed a pleasure; which entails (c) if A is pleased that she is experiencing X where X is not a pleasure, A does not believe that X is the pleasure that she is experiencing; and (d) if A is pleased that she is experiencing X where X is the cessation of her pain, A does not believe that X is a pleasure. We may be inclined to accept (a), but (b) is harder to swallow, since (c) and (d) are implausible.¹⁹

The scenario to imagine is one where there are two conditions—a cessation of pain and a second-order pleasure about the cessation—and two judgments—one about each of those conditions. Take, for example, a man who has just eaten and satisfied his hunger. Item (c) above tells us that it is *impossible* for this man to judge that the satisfaction itself is a pleasure. That is, when this man is gleefully digesting his food, he is supposed to be quite clear that the satisfaction itself is merely a cessation of pain and not a pleasure. For, (d) tells us, he cannot fail to be clear that his glee consists of being pleased about his pain having ceased. But it seems obvious to me that people can fail to be clear about such things, and they can be confused about what exactly it is that their pleasure consists of. Imagine asking people who have just finished dinner what their pleasure consists of (if they agree that they are experiencing

pleasure). Would every one necessarily answer that they are pleased that the pain of hunger has ceased? Would no one claim that they are enjoying being full?

Urmson might respond that the false answers in such a case stem from the agents' failure to appreciate the question: if only they had a grasp of the theory and the distinctions behind the question, they could not fail to give the right answer; if only they understood that there may be a neutral condition that we experience upon the cessation of pain, and that there may be a second-order pleasure about being in this condition, they would always get the right answer. But this response will not do, for it amounts to claiming that people would be clear about their pleasure if only it were clarified for them. (In this context, this is equivalent to claiming that they would give the right answer if only the answer were given to them.) Plato's claim is that people can be, and often are, mistaken in their diagnosis of their cessations of pain—not that everyone is so mistaken, or that those who are mistaken are afflicted with some incurable ignorance. That people may be enlightened on the subject and cease to make the mistake is perfectly consistent with Plato's view.²⁰

3.

Rejecting the possibility of mistaking the neutral state for pleasure—whether in Urmson's way or in any other way—is, I think, overly optimistic about the extent of our self-knowledge and the extent to which our pleasures and pains are transparent to us. This is tied to a more general question about whether it is possible for us to be mistaken about *any* of our mental states. If, as some philosophers have claimed, it is impossible to be mistaken about our mental states, it follows that, contrary to Plato's view, it is impossible to be mistaken about our pleasures and pains. But I believe, and will argue in what follows, that the view that we are infallible with respect to our mental states is untenable. In the remaining sections of this paper, I will offer various reasons for rejecting that view and will explain the ways in which these reasons may be invoked on Plato's behalf.

The Cartesian view that we are infallible with respect to our mental states strikes me as utterly implausible.²¹ Hume was as guilty of this false confidence as any other philosopher, arguing that "all actions and sensations of the mind" are completely transparent; since they are known to us by consciousness, "they must necessarily appear in every particular what they are, and be what they appear."²² As Moran points out, between Descartes and the twentieth century,

major figures within both empiricist and rationalist traditions could take for granted that there is nothing in the mind of which

the person is not conscious, and that a person's knowledge of his own current mental states is both certain and infallible; in short, that the mind is "transparent" to itself.²³

Although various prominent philosophers in the twentieth century—sense-data theorists²⁴ as well as others²⁵—have also endorsed the infallibility thesis, most philosophers of mind now believe, based on a variety of arguments, that Cartesian infallibility about our own mental states is an untenable view.²⁶ Given this rejection of infallibility, it is possible to be wrong about our mental states, and this opens up the possibility of being wrong about our pleasures and pains.

The question here is not whether we have privileged access to our own mental states, since privileged access is not equivalent to perfect access. One may, and some philosophers do, maintain that we have privileged access to our own mental states but that our access is not perfect, and that our judgments about those states can be false.²⁷ Siding with Plato on this point does not, therefore, commit one to Ryle's diametrically opposed and similarly extreme view that there is nothing special about our access to our own mental states.²⁸ It is sufficient to give up the Cartesian, strong view on privileged access, according to which we are omniscient with respect to our own occurrent mental states. Many reasons have been given for rejecting this strong view and making room for the possibility of being wrong about our pleasures and pains. I cannot delve into all of those reasons here, but I will discuss a few influential arguments, because they enable a more sophisticated understanding of Plato's position. Let me begin with Austin's criticism of the Cartesian view—as defended by Ayer—in his *Sense and Sensibilia*.

Taking up Ayer's view that sense-datum sentences are incorrigible, Austin explains that Ayer concedes the possibility of a speaker producing the wrong word but that "Ayer tries, as it were, to laugh this off as a quite trivial qualification."²⁹ Austin proceeds to show, however, that a speaker may produce the wrong word in much more significant ways than those of mere slips of the tongue.

I may say "Magenta" wrongly either by a mere slip, having meant to say "Vermilion"; or because I don't know quite what "magenta" means, what shade of colour is called *magenta*; or again, because I was unable to, or perhaps just didn't, really notice or attend to or properly size up the colour before me. Thus, there is always the possibility, not only that I may be brought to admit that "magenta" wasn't the right word to pick on for the colour before me, but *also* that I may be brought to see, or perhaps remember, that the colour before me just wasn't *magenta*. And this holds for the case in which I say, "It seems, to me personally, here and now, as if I were seeing something magenta," just as much as for the case in which I say,

“That is magenta.” The first formula may be more cautious, but it isn’t incorrigible.³⁰

Austin’s argument shows vividly how we can have false beliefs about our own mental states. Just as I can be wrong about whether it seems to me, here and now, as if I were seeing something magenta, I can be wrong about whether I am experiencing pleasure now. I may make this mistake because I am unable to, or just do not, attend to or properly size up the experience before me, but the dominant cause of error in the case of pleasure must be that of not quite knowing what “pleasure” means.

Our grasp of the concept at issue (with respect to a mental state) is also fundamental to the argument Sellars offers against the Cartesian view. In the course of attacking the “myth of the given,” he argues that all knowledge from perception—including knowledge about our own mental states—requires sensory data to be placed under concepts.³¹ He writes,

In characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says.³²

And sensory data can enter the logical space of reasons only by being placed under concepts. On this view, knowing that my tie is blue requires a capacity to follow the rules for “color-talk” and to apply the concept “blue” correctly (which involves the correct application of other related concepts, such as “green”). If, for example, I do not know what count as normal conditions for making the report that something is blue, I can make a mistake when I am under nonstandard conditions, such as under nonstandard lighting. The capacity required for knowing that my tie is blue is also required for knowing, or simply being aware, that I am having a blue sense impression. Thus I am just as likely to be wrong in my report about my own experience as in my report about what color my tie is, if it happens that I lack this capacity.

Knowledge that one is in such-and-such a mental state requires a capacity to apply the relevant concepts correctly with respect to all of our mental states, and not only when the experience is a case of (external) sensory perception. In order to know that one is feeling queasy, for example, one must be capable of applying the concept “queasy” correctly, or else one may judge falsely on the matter. Even when the concept at issue has no application in the external world (unlike the case of having a blue impression), the capacity to apply the concept correctly is a necessary condition for having knowledge about our mental state.

Sellars's point is very general in its scope: though he often speaks of knowledge in particular, his view is that mere awareness requires the use of concepts, since it cannot otherwise enter the logical space of reasons and cannot enter into rational relations with knowledge or belief. The point also applies to both sensory perception and awareness of our own mental states, since his view is that *all* awareness requires classification under concepts. It follows that, on this view, there may be falsity not only in our reports about our mental states but also in our awareness of those mental states, since this awareness may be operating with an erroneous understanding of the relevant concepts, and its content may therefore be plagued with that error.³³ It is possible, therefore, that (i) my sincere report that my tie is blue is false; (ii) my sincere report that my tie seemed blue to me is false; and (iii) the content of my awareness of it seeming to me that my tie is blue is false.

A more recent defense of this view appears in McDowell's influential *Mind and World*.³⁴ He argues that awareness of the world as well as awareness of one's own mental states requires the possession and use of concepts, specifically those concepts that would figure in a proper description of the content of the awareness. According to McDowell,

experience is already conceptual. A judgment of experience does not introduce a new kind of content, but simply endorses the conceptual content, or some of it, that is already possessed by the experience on which it is grounded.³⁵

On his view too, clearly, it is possible to be mistaken about one's own mental states, since one may lack, or have an inadequate grasp of, the relevant concepts. However, Sellars's and McDowell's views also involve the much stronger thesis that all representational content is conceptual, denying the possibility of nonconceptual representational content.³⁶ Accordingly, only conceptual content qualifies as "content," since "experience has its content by virtue of the drawing into operation" of capacities that

must also be able to be exercised in judgments, and that requires them to be rationally linked into a whole system of concepts and conceptions within which their possessor engages in a continuing activity of adjusting her thinking to experience.³⁷

This thesis now has many worthy opponents, who contend, roughly, that an agent need not possess the concepts for the properties, objects, and relations that are included in the representational content of her experience.³⁸ I have argued that we can find support for Plato's position in the views developed by Sellars and McDowell. But would Plato go along with them

in denying the existence of nonconceptual content, and does he have to face the challenge against that thesis?

4.

Republic IX gives us no reason to think that Plato wishes to deny the possibility of nonconceptual content *as such*, since he is interested in our awareness of, and our beliefs about, pleasure and pain specifically. Thus, he may be perfectly happy with there being mental states with a nonconceptual representational content, so long as our awareness of pleasure and pain do not belong in that class. It follows that Plato need not quarrel with the proponents of nonconceptual content. If our awareness of pleasure and pain employs the concepts of pleasure and pain, then Plato's purposes are served. But does Plato construe even our awareness of pleasure and pain as conceptualized? There are some reasons for supposing that he does not.

First, if the concern is that Plato needs the awareness of pleasure itself to have truth-value, he need not insist on this awareness being conceptualized, since nonconceptual content too is understood as having truth-value. Nonconceptual content differs from conceptual content with respect to truth-value only in that the use or misuse of concepts does not play a role in determining the truth-value of the content. Both sides of the debate take the content of our experiences to be representational, and both sides maintain that this content carries information on which judgments can be based.³⁹ The information—whether already conceptualized or not—can be accurate or not, true or false.⁴⁰

Second, it is not clear how interested Plato is in the truth-value of the awareness of pleasure itself. His primary interest seems to be our false beliefs/judgments/reports about pleasure and pain and not an error in our awareness of those mental states. In complaining that people mistake the cessation of pain for pleasure, Plato says it is wrong to “believe” (*hēgeisthai*) that the absence of pain is pleasure (584a4-5), and, in the metaphor of up-down-middle too, the mistake is expressed in terms of believing (*hēgeisthai*, *oiesthai*) falsely (584d6-9). This is not surprising given that Plato is concerned about our mistakes about pleasure because of the role these mistakes play in how we choose to live our lives. Those choices are informed by our belief system and by our experiences only insofar as they are absorbed into that belief system. From this perspective, it does not matter much whether the content of our experiences may themselves contain falsity, or whether only beliefs are susceptible to that condition.

However, Plato also says that the cessation of pain “appears” (*phainetai*) pleasant, which may be read as saying that the

agent's awareness of her experience is as of something pleasant, which suggests that the experience itself has a false content. He writes,

When the calm (*hēsuchia*) is next to the painful it appears pleasant, and when it is next to the pleasant it appears painful. There is nothing sound in these appearances (*phantasmata*) with respect to the truth concerning pleasure, but only some kind of magic. (584a7-10)

Plato's use of "*phantasma*" suggests that he is referring to the experience itself, and not merely to the agent's belief, as one might in speaking of "appearance."⁴¹ In denying that the appearances are sound, Plato could be either attributing falsity to their content, or merely pointing out that they cause false beliefs, without necessarily attributing falsity to the content of the appearances. Given the above understanding of "appearance," however, Plato's claim that the cessation of pain appears pleasant needs to be understood not as "the cessation of pain causes one to believe that one is experiencing pleasure," but rather as "the cessation of pain is experienced *as pleasant*." This suggests not only that the content of our experiences themselves may contain falsity but also that our awareness of pleasure employs the concept "pleasure." It seems, then, that Plato *does* understand our awareness of pleasure and pain as involving the possession and use of the relevant concepts (however wrong we may be about those concepts).⁴²

We have so far established the following: (a) Plato thinks that we may falsely believe that the cessation of pain is pleasure; (b) he thinks that our awareness of pleasure and pain involves the possession and use of the concepts "pleasure" and "pain" and that our awareness of pleasure and pain may itself contain falsity. What remains to be seen is how the two kinds of falsity are related. Is the falsity in our beliefs straightforwardly contracted from the falsity in our awareness, or are these two related in some other way? As I explicate in the following section, the answer to this question emerges from the answer to the central question "how is it possible to mistake the cessation of pain for pleasure?"

5.

In order to appreciate Plato's analysis of mistaking the cessation of pain for pleasure, we need to observe that the cause of error we have in the above cases—not having an adequate grasp of the relevant concepts—is not the only kind that he takes into account. To help understand the alternative kind of cause of error, consider the Freudian cases of judging falsely about one's own mental states (including our pleasures and

pains): Freud's theory of the mind explains how we may experience some pleasure and sincerely deny having experienced it, as when we deny having experienced *Schadenfreude*. We may, for similar reasons, be pained by the success of a friend or colleague, and be utterly incapable of admitting this to ourselves. We are prone to make such false judgments when it is unpleasant to face the correct diagnosis, and a defense mechanism shields us from the unpleasantness. It is evident that the cause of error here is unlike what we have in the cases Sellars and McDowell discuss. The impediment to self-knowledge in the Freudian cases is not an inability to apply a concept correctly but rather a defense mechanism. This means that the agent who judges falsely need not lack the cognitive capacity to judge truly about the matter—the lack of self-knowledge is caused by the presence of an additional factor. These are two distinct types of reason for lacking self-knowledge (two types of cause of error): the absence of some capacity on the one hand, and the presence of a psychological phenomenon that prevents self-knowledge on the other. Plato's account of how we mistake the cessation of pain for pleasure involves both of those types of reason.⁴³

Plato maintains that there are two independently necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for mistaking a neutral state for pleasure. First, there must be an absence of a capacity. To be specific, the agent who mistakes the cessation of pain for pleasure lacks the capacity to apply the concept "pleasure" correctly, due to her inexperience with pure pleasure.⁴⁴ The mistaken agent does not really know what "pleasure" is, and it is for this reason that he is fooled by the appearance arising from the phenomenon of comparative evaluation. Second, the neutral state must follow an episode of pain, that is, it must be a cessation of pain. People mistake the cessation of pain for pleasure because they instinctively evaluate their present phenomenological condition in comparison to their most recent experiences, and they compare their anticipated conditions to their present condition. The sense of elation that we experience upon the cessation of pain carries that sense precisely because it was preceded by pain, not because of an independent evaluation of that condition. This is obvious given that the same condition, the neutral state, is perceived positively or negatively depending on what precedes it (584a7-8).⁴⁵ This psychological phenomenon—the comparative evaluation of our well-being—plays a role akin to Freudian defense mechanisms insofar as its presence causes (partially) a lack of self-knowledge.

The first condition can be satisfied in the case of pleasure but not in the case of pain, since everyone has had plenty of experience with pain. This is why Plato does not suggest that anyone ever mistakes the neutral state for pain, even though he claims it *appears* painful when it is next to pleasure (583e1-2).⁴⁶

The “magic” that is responsible for this appearance, as it turns out, is the phenomenon I have called “the comparative evaluation of our well-being,” and this passage indicates that this phenomenon occurs in both directions—responding to either an improvement or a deterioration—even though the agent holds a false belief only in the case of an improvement. Since no one is inexperienced with pain, we all possess the capacity to apply the concept correctly in our judgments; even though the neutral state appears painful when it follows pleasure, we do not judge the cessation of pleasure to be pain because we know what pain is actually like. Unlike the cases brought up in discussing Sellars’s and McDowell’s views, then, in this case the content of the experience contains falsity not because we do not grasp what “pain” is, but rather because comparative evaluation acts as a deceptive factor.⁴⁷

At this point we can state confidently that the relationship between the truth-value of our awareness and the truth-value of the corresponding belief is complex. The case of experiencing the neutral state after pleasure shows that (i) it is not the case that the truth-value of an awareness and that of the corresponding belief always match, and therefore (ii) it is not the case that a false awareness always simply infects the corresponding belief. The puzzling result is that we may be capable of applying a concept correctly at the level of belief even though we cannot apply it correctly at the level of awareness.

It may be useful at this point to recall McDowell’s point that we possess a whole system of concepts, which is exercised in having experiences as well as making judgments, and that we engage in a continuing activity of adjusting our thinking to experience. In the course of this continuing activity, factors such as comparative evaluation perhaps momentarily loosen our grasp of a concept relevant to the context, or cause inattentiveness to the whole system, thereby allowing an experience with false content. It may be possible that this falsity does not infect the judgment about the experience because the deceptive factor is not strong enough to have a lasting effect on our grasp of the concepts at play, given how firm (or flimsy) our grasp of those concepts is. In the case of mistaking the cessation of pain for pleasure, the falsity of the appearance carries over to our belief system unchallenged if we are inexperienced with pure pleasure, since in that case we have no reason to resist the false appearance, and furthermore, we form a false concept of “pleasure” out of the repeated and consistently false appearances throughout our lives.

What remains to be questioned is whether Plato is in fact right in claiming that one may be so wrong about what pleasure is. Defending this claim is particularly challenging because the claim is not merely that *some people* may be wrong about pleasure *some of the times*, but rather that *most people* are

wrong about pleasure *most of the time*. The plausibility of this claim ultimately depends on whether Plato's whole account of pleasure is plausible. If Plato's hedonic classification of various pleasures is tenable, and there is indeed a class of pleasures wholly superior, *qua* pleasure, to the class of pleasures non-philosophers foolishly spend their lives pursuing, it may then be plausible to claim that people who are unacquainted with the wholly superior pleasures have an inadequate grasp of the concept pleasure.

It is plain that Plato is not addressing, or attempting to analyze, the ordinary conception of pleasure. Rather, Plato's aim is to reconceptualize and redefine pleasure—as in the more familiar case of “justice”⁴⁸—in light of various arguments. The question to be answered, then, is not whether Plato's use of pleasure is consistent with the ordinary usage of that term (which it clearly is not), but whether he makes a good case for his own conception of pleasure. Tackling this question, however, lies outside the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, I believe I have shown that we are not entitled to laugh out of court Plato's contention that we may mistake the cessation of pain for pleasure. On the contrary, Plato's position appears to be based on a fairly sophisticated account of the phenomenology of pleasure.

Notes

This paper is a revised version of a chapter in my PhD dissertation, “Pleasures in *Republic IX*.” I am grateful to the members of my dissertation committee, Jim Hankinson, David Reeve, David Sosa, Stephen White, Paul Woodruff, and especially my supervisor, Alex Mourelatos. I also wish to thank Matt Evans, Antony Hatzistavrou, Iain Morrisson, George Rudebusch, and Dory Scaltsas for their valuable comments and support.

¹ T. Penelhum, “Pleasure and Falsity” in “Symposium: Pleasure and Falsity.” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1/2 (1964): 81–91, at 86.

² J. O. Urmson, “Pleasure and Distress, A discussion of J. C. B Gosling and C. C. W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*” [*Pleasure and Distress*], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 2 (1984): 209–21.

³ See, especially, J. C. B. Gosling and C. C. W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 129, and D. Frede, “Disintegration and Restoration: Pleasure and Pain in Plato's *Philebus*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, edited by R. Kraut, 425–63 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), at 435–7.

⁴ In the metaphor of up-down-middle, at *Republic* 584d-585b, Plato claims that people commonly make a second mistake: we mistake impure pleasure (pleasure mixed with pain) for pure pleasure. In this paper, I leave aside this second mistake and focus on the first one, though they are intimately related.

⁵ To distinguish between judgments made about a condition while

in anticipation of it and judgments about it when one is actually in that condition, let us call the former “anticipatory” judgments and the latter “concurrent” judgments. Plato acknowledges the possibility of concurrent mistakes (i.e., concurrent judgments that are false) at 583e1-2, with respect to arriving at the neutral state from pleasure. The contrary concurrent mistake (i.e., arriving at the neutral state from pain) is confirmed slightly later with the metaphor of up-down-middle (584d-585b). In what follows, I will point out and explain an asymmetry between the cases from the perspective of pain and those from the perspective of pleasure.

⁶ It is often not recognized that *Republic IX*’s account of pleasure and pain involves this perception requirement. (See, for example, Gosling and Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, ch. 6.) Indeed, it has been argued explicitly that this is a point on which the *Philebus* advances beyond *Republic IX*, which supposedly identifies pleasure simply with replenishments/restorations, whether or not they are perceived: Bobonich, for instance, argues that in *Republic IX*, “Plato seems to understand pleasure as being the replenishment of a lack,” and that it is not until the *Philebus* and *Timaeus*—where “Plato’s views about pleasure grow more complex”—that the perception of replenishments comes into play (Bobonich, *Plato’s Utopia Recast: His Later Ethics and Politics* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], 351–4). See *Timaeus* 64a-65b for an account of how bodily pleasure and pain involve the perception of bodily changes by the soul.

⁷ Pleasure and pain are not, however, just the motion in the soul. In the case of bodily pleasures, we experience pleasure when the bodily change reaches the soul; bodily pleasure is a perceived process of bodily change, not merely the perception of that change. Since perception is a necessary ingredient of pleasure (and pain), there is a motion in the soul whenever there is pleasure (and pain). This understanding of 583e9-10 receives confirmation at 584c4-5, where Plato refers to bodily pleasures as the pleasures that reach the soul through the body; this kind of pleasure is not just in the soul or the body, it is in both.

⁸ Translation by D. Frede, *Plato, “Philebus,”* translated with introduction and notes (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Frede’s translation, 1993).

⁹ Plato’s treatment of the tracking as the bodily motion reaching the soul indicates that the soul may fail to track the bodily change, but there can be no false tracking, i.e., only the mental side of the double motion taking place in a motionless body.

¹⁰ The second-order mental state here is the awareness of the first-order mental state and not a belief about the first-order mental state—the belief is yet a third-level mental state. I will shortly offer a defense of this reading and will have more to say about this three-tier mental picture.

¹¹ Likewise with pain, though this mistake is not as important for Plato; his argument in *Republic IX* is focused on a classification and evaluation of pleasures, not pains.

¹² Thus Guthrie misses the point when he criticizes *Republic IX*’s account of pleasure, arguing that “The philosopher may say that he enjoys a higher quality of life than the sensualist, but he cannot say that he enjoys it more, enjoyment being solely a matter of individual preference” (W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy, Vol. IV*;

Plato: The Man and His Dialogues, Earlier Period [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975], 541). This is merely reasserting the view Plato means to discard.

¹³ Cf. Penelhum, "Pleasure and Falsity," 86.

¹⁴ Urmson, "Pleasure and Distress," 213.

¹⁵ I will shortly have more to say on what Urmson might mean by "finding a situation pleasant or enjoyable."

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Since the context is intensional, we cannot simply substitute "neutral state" for "cessation of pain." The consciously held belief in question—that the cessation of pain is pleasant—would be transparently self-contradictory if the substitution were made.

¹⁸ Though the *Republic* does not develop the idea of nonrational psychic fillings/restorations to the extent that the *Philebus* does, I believe Plato is aware of the need for such fillings and makes room for them.

¹⁹ Perhaps Urmson wishes to argue that Plato is wrong about what constitutes pleasure, or that he is wrong to apply the same analysis to all pleasure, but those would be altogether different arguments than the one he has offered. On a non-Urmsonian line against Plato, it could be argued that the first mistake cannot take place because pleasure is, by definition, whatever we experience when we think we are experiencing pleasure.

²⁰ It should be clear that Plato's account of pleasure does not aim to capture the ordinary conception of "pleasure." On the contrary, Plato believes that most people are incapable of grasping what pleasure really is. The question we face, then, is not whether Plato succeeds in capturing the ordinary conception but, rather, whether Plato's extraordinary conception is the correct one. I will have more to say on this in section 5.

²¹ See Descartes' *Meditations* II and III, where Descartes denies the possibility that we may be wrong about our mental states themselves (as opposed to whether those mental states correspond to anything external to the mind), which include such things as emotions and desires.

Now the principal error that can be found in judgments consists in the fact that I judge that the ideas, which are in me, are similar to, or in conformity with, certain things outside me. Indeed, if I consider these ideas only as certain modes of my thought, and do not refer them to something else, they can hardly give me any cause for error. (III, 37)

Although Descartes does not mention pleasure and pain explicitly in this passage, he seems to make no exception to the rule that we have perfect access to our mental states themselves, and that our judgments about those states are infallible. Even if there are alternative ways of interpreting Descartes, this is how he has been traditionally understood, and it is this view that philosophers have in mind when they refer to the Cartesian view. Cf. W. Alston, "Varieties of Privileged Access," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8/3 (1971): 223–41; D. M. Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of the Mind* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 100–13; and R. Audi, ed. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univer-

sity Press, 1995), 648–9 (entry on “privileged access”). Moran discusses the history of the “Cartesian doctrine of introspective infallibility” but notes that Descartes himself may not have been a Cartesian in this sense (R. Moran, *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge* [*Authority and Estrangement*] [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001], 12n9).

As Alston explains, there are different versions of the view that we need not be skeptical with respect to our judgments about our own mental states. It may be that (a) these judgments cannot be false (they are incorrigible), or we cannot be mistaken about them (we are infallible with respect to them); (b) that it is psychologically impossible to doubt them; (c) or, as Alston himself contends:

Each person is so related to propositions ascribing current mental states to himself that it is logically impossible for him to believe that such a proposition is true and not be justified in holding the belief. (235)

There are, of course, further distinctions to be made. However, I will not be concerned with the significance of the distinctions between the various versions, since Plato’s view is opposed to all of them. I will refer primarily to the strongest version (a), which is how the Cartesian view is understood, for the sake of simplicity, though my defense of Plato’s view is meant to defeat all versions.

In my discussion of Cartesian infallibility I will refer to the “first mistake,” that of mistaking the cessation of pain for pleasure, though the question of infallibility clearly applies just as well to Plato’s “second mistake,” that of mistaking the liberation from pain for pure pleasure.

²² *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd edition, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1978), 190.

²³ Moran, *Authority and Estrangement*, 4.

²⁴ See, for example, A. J. Ayer, *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge* (London: Macmillan, 1940).

²⁵ For example, N. Malcolm, “The Privacy of Experience,” in *Epistemology, New Essays in the Theory of Knowledge*, ed. by A. Stroll (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1967), and S. Shoemaker, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967). For a review of much of the literature on the subject up to that point, see Alston, “Varieties of Privileged Access.”

²⁶ See, for example, C. Wright, B. C. Smith, and C. Macdonald, eds., *Knowing Our Own Minds* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), a collection of essays where most authors reject the Cartesian conception of self-knowledge.

²⁷ According to *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*,

Proponents of the weaker view [on privileged access] hold that, while persons are currently the best authorities as to the occurrent contents of their own minds, evidence such as conflicting readings of brain states could eventually override such authority, despite the dependence of the evidence on earlier first-person reports. (648–9, entry on “privileged access”)

Davidson holds a version of the weaker view on privileged access ("Knowing One's Own Mind," *The Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 60 [1987]: 441–58).

²⁸ Ryle held that we come to know about our own mental states in just the same way as we come to know about other people's mental states (*The Concept of Mind* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949], 155). There is now very little support for this view.

²⁹ J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, reconstructed from the manuscript notes by G. J. Warnock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 112.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

³¹ W. Sellars, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," in *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 1, edited by H. Feigl and M. Scriven, 253–29 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956).

³² *Ibid.*, 298–9.

³³ It remains possible, of course, that with respect to any given mental state, it is psychologically impossible to lack the relevant concepts, except under extraordinary circumstances. The most obvious example would be pain, which is often said to be impossible to attribute to oneself falsely: if I believe that I am in pain, then I necessarily am in pain. See, for example, Shoemaker ("Self-Knowledge and 'Inner Sense': Lecture II: The Broad Perceptual Model" [*Self-Knowledge*], *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54/2 (1994): 271–90), who denies the possibility of being unaware that we are experiencing pain. Although I am not myself convinced that this is right (at least in such unqualified form) I see no evidence that Plato denies it; here too we see the asymmetry between the Platonic conceptions of pleasure and pain. I will shortly explain why Plato thinks that false attribution is possible in the case of pleasure, which will also shed light on why it is not in the case of pain.

³⁴ J. McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 48–9.

³⁶ This thesis is generally treated as following Kant's dictum that "thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" (*Critique of Pure Reason* B 75). This received view on Kant's position has recently been challenged by Hanna, who argues that Kant did not deny the existence of nonconceptual cognitive content, and furthermore, that contemporary nonconceptualism can actually be traced back to Kant's *Critique* (R. Hanna, "Kant and Nonconceptual Content," *European Journal of Philosophy* 13/2 (2005): 247–90).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 46–7.

³⁸ Some of the most prominent advocates of nonconceptual representational content are G. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); F. Dretske, *Naturalizing the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995); C. Peacocke, *A Study of Concepts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992); and M. Tye, *Consciousness, Color, and Content* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000).

³⁹ It is the representational theory of awareness that introduces the possibility of falsity in one's awareness of a mental state, not the particular account of the representation relation (i.e., not whether the representation makes use of concepts). The critical premise held in common by both McDowell and Sellars on the one hand, and

proponents of nonconceptual content on the other, is the denial of the Cartesian view that “it is of the essence of mental entities, of whatever kind, to be conscious, where a mental entity’s being conscious involves its revealing its existence and nature to its possessor in an immediate way” (Shoemaker, *Self-Knowledge*, 271). (In this paper, Shoemaker rejects both the Cartesian view and the representational theory of awareness, where he understands the latter view as precluding the right sort of privileged access, which, for Shoemaker, secures the reliability of our awareness in a noncontingent way. I disagree with Shoemaker about what sort of privileged access we actually have, but this is not the place for that discussion.)

⁴⁰ It is possible, of course, that Plato would reject nonconceptual content, given his views on perception and epistemology. His attack on empiricism in *Theaetetus* 184a-186e may be read as hostile to the notion that nonconceptual content can enter the “logical space of reasons” and justify beliefs. (See M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato* [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1990], 52–65, for the interpretive options and difficulties concerning those passages.) Whether or not this is so, my claim is that his view on our fallibility with respect to whether we are experiencing pleasure can be detached and defended without denying the possibility of nonconceptual content.

⁴¹ Consider, for example: “it appears to me that the president is lying.” It is clear, in this case, that the “appearance” is a belief, since there is no perception involved directly, but the meaning of “appearance” is more ambiguous in “it appears to me that my tie is blue”—the “appearance” here could be either a perceptual experience or a belief. “*Phantasma*,” however, carries a very strong sense of being a presentation to consciousness, such as a vision or dream, and it would be difficult to argue that it refers to belief. “*Phainomai*” by itself might be somewhat less inhospitable to being read as “I believe,” but since what *phainetai* is a *phantasma*, this verb too must be taken as referring to the experience itself in this context.

⁴² I suspect that McDowell would welcome my reading of Plato as being in agreement with his reading, at least about our awareness of pleasures and pains: McDowell argues that his rejection of nonconceptual content rests on a tradition that can be traced back at least as far as Plato. He writes that “in the reflective tradition we belong to, there is a time-honoured connection between reason and discourse,” complaining that Peacocke, a proponent of nonconceptual content, “cannot respect this connection” (*Mind and World*, 165).

⁴³ Clearly, mistaking the cessation of pain for pleasure is not a case of the Freudian sort: the mistake is not facilitated by a defense mechanism, and awareness of the truth is not repressed in the unconscious. What is more, the false judgment in the Freudian cases is the denial of a condition that does (or did) in fact exist, whereas the Platonic mistake is one of supposing that pleasure exists when in fact it does not. What matters in the present context, however, is that the Platonic mistake is similar to the Freudian cases in that they involve the presence of a psychological condition acting as a deceptive factor. (It is also noteworthy that Freud put a nail in the coffin of incorrigibility even before Sellars did, revealing how far we are from the fantasy of a mind that is transparent to itself.)

⁴⁴ This condition is put forward in Plato’s metaphor of up-down-middle (*Republic* 584d-585a).

⁴⁵ This depends, of course, on Plato's objectivist approach to pleasure and his view that our phenomenological condition is determined by our objective bodily and/or psychic condition being perceived. There is, accordingly, a fact of the matter about our condition—that the filling/restoration in question is taking place or that it is not—and this condition is either perceived or not. The fact about our condition and the fact about whether we perceive it are jointly sufficient to determine our phenomenology with respect to that pleasure/pain. Our awareness of, and judgments about, that phenomenology are separate phenomena (and separate elements of the totality of our experience at that time), which may or may not get things right about that pleasure/pain. A subjectivist about pleasure would claim that, since we experience pleasure whenever we think we do, the neutral state exists only when we think it does. That a certain bodily/psychic condition may appear pleasant or painful depending on the preceding hedonic condition (i.e., condition with respect to pleasure and pain) shows, on such a view, that the sequencing of our experiences is a factor in determining the hedonic condition a particular perceived bodily/psychic condition will correspond to.

⁴⁶ Unfortunately, Plato also suggests, at *Republic* 584e4-5, in explaining the up-down-middle metaphor, that the person inexperienced with pleasure is also inexperienced with the neutral state and pain. This must be careless writing, since the claim does not hold on the metaphor itself: the person who has been brought from the lower region to the middle has, by stipulation, experienced these conditions, and Plato's claim at 584e4-5 is that this person is inexperienced with the lower region and the middle as well as with the upper region. It does not make sense for Plato to be employing here the distinction between having experienced something and *being experienced* with that thing, since Plato's view in *Republic* IX is that nonphilosophers (i.e., most people) spend their lives with pain and only those pleasures that are mixed with pain. Plato cannot, therefore, maintain that the person in question may not have had sufficient experience with pain. The badly expressed thought might be, instead, that this person has a skewed view of even pain, due to her inexperience with pure pleasure: on account of this inexperience, she is under a false impression about the range of possible experiences. She judges falsely about the status of painful experiences since she does not understand the status of any given experience on the true range of possible experiences. (Griffith's translation of the sentence in question captures the sense I am attributing to it, though this translation clearly rests on an interpretive choice and is not a literal rendering of the Greek: "Would the cause of all this be his not having experienced the true range of top, middle and bottom?" Plato's text makes no mention of "range," and states that this kind of person "is not experienced with what is truly above, in the middle, and below" (*mē empeiros einai tou alēthinōs anō te ontos kai en mesōi kai katō*) (T. Griffith, *The Republic*, trans. by G. R. F. Ferrari [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 303).

⁴⁷ This is like the Freudian defense mechanisms concealing the truth from the agent's consciousness, even though the agent possesses the cognitive and conceptual apparatus to judge truly.

⁴⁸ In the classic article "A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*," Sachs argues that Plato is guilty of a "fallacy of irrelevance" in the case he builds against the challenge Thrasymachus poses in Book I and Glaucon and

Adeimantus develop in Book II (D. Sachs, "A Fallacy in Plato's Republic," *Philosophical Review* 72/2 [1963]: 141–58). The fallacy arises, according to Sachs, because Plato responds to the challenge by employing an altogether different conception of "justice" than the one employed in the challenge—the former is the Platonic conception and the latter is "the vulgar conception." In arguing that the just are always happier than the unjust, therefore, Plato is purportedly offering a response that is irrelevant to the Thrasymachean challenge that those who are successfully unjust are happier. Penner has recently argued, convincingly in my opinion, that Sachs's charge is misguided "because of a false—and certainly un-Platonic—doctrine, to the effect that meaning (or conception) determines reference" (T. Penner, "Platonic Justice and What We Mean by 'Justice'," *Journal of the International Plato Society* 5:1–76, at 1). Penner agrees that Plato's conception of justice is very different from that of Thrasymachus; he explains that, if what Thrasymachus is talking about is determined by *his own conception of "justice,"* then Thrasymachus and Plato are indeed talking about different things. But, he argues, both Thrasymachus's challenge and Plato's response are actually about "*what justice really is,*" and this is why Plato's response is perfectly appropriate. It is an entirely separate question, of course, whether Plato is right about what justice really is (and Penner proceeds to defend Plato on that front too).

A similar issue arises with respect to pleasure: the account of pleasure Plato puts forward is so far removed from the ordinary conception of "pleasure" that his account might be dismissed as irrelevant to the judgments *we* make about pleasure. Yet Plato is not concerned to capture our ordinary conception of "pleasure," and a meaningful discourse between us and Plato can be established only if we agree that both parties are talking about *what pleasure really is.*