CHAPTER 1

Plato on Making Life Worth Living by Doing One's Job

> If I say that it is impossible for me to keep quiet because that means disobeying the god, you will not believe me and will think I am being ironical. On the other hand, if I say that it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for men, you will believe me even less.
>
> (Plato, *Ap.* 38a)

> When a carpenter is ill, he expects to receive an emetic or a purge from his doctor or to get rid of his disease through surgery or cautery. If anyone prescribed a lengthy regimen to him, telling him that he should rest with his head bandaged and so on, he'd soon reply that he had no leisure to be ill and that life is no use to him if he has to neglect his work and always be concerned with his illness. After that he'd bid good-bye to his doctor, resume his usual way of life, and either recover his health or, if his body couldn't withstand the illness, he'd die and escape his troubles.
>
> (Plato, *Resp.* iii, 406d–e)[1]

1.1 Happy Life and Life Worth Living

All humans, according to Plato, desire to be happy, that is, to live well (*kalôs*).[2] But most of them have deeply misguided views about what living well amounts to. The main purpose of Plato's ethical theory is to expose these misconceptions and to offer his own account of what happiness and the truly good or beneficial things are. Commentators have noted that Plato sometimes refers to things that are conducive to the happy life as things that make a life 'worth living' (*biôtos*): 'The task is to give an account of happiness. This is understood in terms of specifying what makes life "worth living" as Plato sometimes puts it' (Sheffield 2018: 476). But the

[1] All translations of Plato's works, unless otherwise noted, follow translations in Cooper (1997).
[2] E.g. *Symp.* 204d–205a; *Men.* 77a–b; *Euthyd.* 278e–282d.

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notion of a life worth living also carries implications that are absent from the notion of a happy life. In particular, it implies a comparative assessment: to say that a life is worth living means that there is enough reason to choose life *rather than* death. This is brought out by the fact that Plato typically mentions a 'life worth living' when he talks about lives that are *not* worthwhile, or lives that are even on the whole harmful for those who live them. From this comparative perspective, rather than defining the good life, the notion of a life worth living shows Plato's concern with defining when life is (still) a good, or at least not a bad. It may well turn out that, in his view, life is a good only if it is good; but this should not be presupposed from the start.

The idea that there is a philosophically significant difference between a happy life and a life worth living was floated, but not systematically pursued, by Christopher Bobonich: 'If happiness is a maximally good state including virtue and the possession of some other goods, then it seems reasonable to hold that some of these other goods might be subtracted from such a life while still leaving the person a life well worth living, although not one that attains happiness' (Bobonich 2002: 213).[3] If this suggestion can be backed by sufficient evidence, it would point towards the possibility that Plato construes the relationship between the best human life and a human life worth living in terms of the target–threshold distinction. This distinction would also be compatible with the possibility that happiness is a scalar notion, that is, that one can be happy to a greater or lesser degree; in that case, the threshold would be defined as a point on that spectrum.

The objective of this chapter is to consider what Plato says about the notion of a life worth living in its own right, rather than as a proxy for happiness, and on that basis to spell out his conception of the relationship between a happy life and a life worth living. To this end, the core body of evidence to be considered consists primarily of passages, and their broader contexts, where Plato explicitly talks about life being 'worth living' or 'not worth living'. These passages can be found in works that span all the traditional stages of the Platonic corpus – early, middle and late – but I shall focus on two texts in particular, namely the *Apology*, with its dictum that 'unexamined lives are not worth living', and the *Republic*, where Plato affirms that a life with an unjust soul is not worth living. The relationship between these two assertions raises questions about the compatibility of different claims about a life worth living across Plato's works.

[3] See also Bobonich (2002: 32). His view is that Plato does not grant this view in the *Phaedo* or the *Republic*, but that it is implicit in the *Laws*.

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For the purposes of my interpretation, I shall give a privileged status to the theory in the *Republic* by making it explanatorily central and representative of Plato's views about life worth living more broadly considered. For the purposes of this book, Plato is primarily (though not exclusively) the Plato of the *Republic*. This is, of course, a controversial move; but given the diversity of the Platonic corpus, such choices must be made in a work of this kind, and the *Republic*, as arguably Plato's most influential text, is the obvious choice. It should be kept in mind, though, that a different picture of Plato's axiology of life, or one with different distribution of emphases, may emerge if other dialogues, such as *Phaedo* or the *Laws*, are given more central consideration.

The characteristic aspect of the ethical theory in the *Republic* is the centrality of the notion of 'function' (*ergon*). This includes an individual's social or professional function or job in the city, but also the function of one's soul. The good exercise of this function is what constitutes the excellent condition, or health, of the soul, which Plato also calls 'justice', and this health of the soul turns out to be the unconditional worthmaker. I shall also suggest that this account of a life worth living can accommodate, and further explain, the dictum from the *Apology*. But whereas all humans with healthy souls have lives that are robustly above the threshold for a life worth living, not all of them are equally happy. In particular, the lives of philosophers, or those who have lived examined lives in a particularly genuine or first-hand manner, are happier than the other citizens of Plato's ideal city.

1.2 The Unexamined Life Is Not Worth Living

No doubt the most familiar – and controversial – evidence on Plato's view about a life worth living is the dictum from the *Apology* that the 'unexamined life is not worth living for humans' (*anexetastos bios ou biôtos anthrôpôi*). Plato puts this claim in the mouth of Socrates, who defends himself against the charge that his public intellectual engagements have been corrupting the young. Socrates justifies his own philosophical mission by reference to his obedience to the command of god, who stationed him in the city to do the 'job' (*ergon*) of 'persuading and reproaching' its citizens (*Ap.* 30e). But this defence goes along with a more far-reaching normative claim, namely that a human life is not worthwhile unless it is itself subjected to rational examination, enquiry or scrutiny (*exetasis*). In other words, it is a life that is programmatically reflective about how one should live and why. The activity of examination may have some value

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in its own right,[4] so that we are invited to spend time in a continuous examination of our lives, but clearly it is also regarded as the instrument for taking 'care' (*epimeleia*) of the soul, that is, for bringing about the 'best possible state' of the soul and maintaining it (*Ap*. 29e). In this latter sense, we are encouraged to live not only a life that is *being* examined but also a life that *has been* examined.[5] To achieve this state, what one has to care about is not conventionally valued things, such as reputation or honour, but rather 'wisdom and truth' (*phronêsis kai alêtheia*) (ibid.; cf. 36c); this is why the rational examination is of paramount importance. An important part of this procedure is purgative, that is, cleansing the soul of unreflectively accepted convictions about what matters in life that do not stand closer scrutiny. This scrutiny typically has the form of dialectical refutation, the so-called *elenchos*, in which Socrates refutes his interlocutor's views by means of exposing contradictions among them.

It has been rightly remarked by commentators that Socrates' dictum is not about suicide.[6] When Socrates claims that an unexamined life is not worth living, his point is not that humans who cannot live up to that ideal should actively choose death, but rather that for him, in his specific situation, it is worth risking the death penalty because there would be no point for him in staying alive had he to denounce his current way of life. The appreciation of this point also has implications for the translation. Richard Kraut proposed that instead of the established version 'worth living', *biôtos* should be read as 'to be lived' (Kraut 2007: 231). On this reading, then, what Socrates really means to say is (only) that 'no human being should live an unexamined life': this is not a statement about the conditions of life's worthwhileness, but about how one ought to live. Grammatically this construal is possible, but it is not a good fit with the context of Socrates' speech.[7] Socrates' point is not only moral but also existential: for him, a continued existence deprived of public intellectual pursuits would be meaningless. This existential urgency of Socratic ethics is brought out perhaps most powerfully in the *Crito*, where Socrates defends his decision to remain in prison and to accept his punishment despite the chance to save his life by escape: if a life should be saved at the cost of acting unjustly, such a life would be not worth living anyway. On Kraut's reading, Socrates

[4] Cf. Bett (2010: 230): Socrates 'seems to regard the pursuit as itself a valuable and worthwhile exercise', even 'regardless of the prospects for actually finding the definitions he is seeking'.

[5] It is this latter sense (but not so much the former) that is the focus of the *Republic*.

[6] Warren (2001); Long (2019: 177–178).

[7] This duality of interpretive options emerges also in *Symp*. 211d. See Nehamas and Woodruff (1989: 59) for the translation of *biôtos* as 'should a person live his life'.

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would be making the more impersonal claim that he would not do what humans in general ought not to do.

All the same, Socrates' claim does seem to express a more generally binding normative commitment. What he says is that an unexamined life is not worth living for humans in general, and not only for him in particular. If people don't critically reflect on their own lives, ever, do they have a life fit to be led? We have seen that the idea that an unexamined life is not worth living has alienated some modern commentators. One problem is the appearance of elitism: on the assumption that the examined life is the philosophical life, that is, the life lived exclusively by philosophers, this dictum seems to imply an 'extremely harsh attitude to one's fellow citizens' (Kraut 2007: 230) who do not have the privilege and leisure to lead a philosophical life. A related, but different issue, concerns the justification of this claim: why, precisely, should rational examination – regardless of its accessibility to different social classes – be the necessary condition for living a life worth living? In the introduction, I quoted this concern as voiced by Fred Feldman: surely there are people who lead respectable and rewarding lives even without engaging in any form of philosophical reflection (Feldman 2006: 15). In the later dialogue *Philebus*, Socrates easily gets his interlocutor Protarchus to agree that an extremely primitive and cognitively impoverished life, such as 'the life of a jellyfish or of one of those creatures in shells that live in the sea' is not 'worth choosing (*hairetos*) for us (*hêmin*)'[8] (*Phlb*. 21d).[9] Many would agree with this claim. But the requirement of living a reflective life may seem to set the threshold for worthwhile lives much higher, indeed too high. Also, the activity of theoretical philosophical reflection is narrow in its own way.

There are reasons to think that Plato himself made a concession to these objections in later works. In the passage from the *Republic* quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, he approves of the carpenter's view that his life is not worth living for him if he cannot do his job, but also that it *is* worth living if he can.[10] While the carpenter's life does involve some exercise of

[8] This qualification is important, since such a life is naturally worth choosing for a jellyfish (cf. Nussbaum 1995: 99–102).

[9] Interestingly, it is also established in the dialogue that a life of intelligence that is deprived of any kind of pleasure and pain and is 'insensitive' (*apathes*), too, is not worth choosing (21d–e). This is consistent with the conclusion that the good life includes *both* reason *and* pleasure. The view that a rational life of total insensitivity is not worth choosing seems also compatible with the theory from the *Republic*. For, as we shall see, only life of virtue is worth living, but virtue also brings about some pleasures, most importantly the pleasures of reason (*Resp*. ix).

[10] There is also an alternative and more pedestrian interpretation of carpenter's view, pointed out to me by Karel Thein, namely that he simply cannot afford not to work.

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the rational capacities of the human soul, similarly to other crafts (*technai*), it is hardly an examined life in the sense of the philosophical life embodied by Socrates. Indeed, by Plato's own lights in the *Republic*, insofar as carpenters belong to the inferior social class of producers, they *ought* not aspire to a philosophical life in Plato's ideal city, and should leave this type of life to the philosophers – the rulers. And yet Plato does seem to think, or so I shall argue, that a good carpenter's life is robustly worth living for him. One possible explanation of this apparent discrepancy between the *Apology* and the *Republic* is that Plato's position has shifted, or, more precisely, that in the *Republic* he emancipates himself from the original Socratic view of the *Apology* and corrects it: 'Yes, says Plato [in the *Republic*], the examined life is the best available to a human being; but it is not good for everyone to try to live it' (Kraut 2007: 232). On this view, there are multiple paths to a life worth living, and not all of them presuppose rational examination in the Socratic sense. In fact, some humans are ill-suited to pursue such a life, and it would even be a mistake for them to aspire to it.

There are two alternative perspectives on the relationship between the *Apology* and the *Republic*, both denying that any significant shift takes place. One is that the position in the *Apology* is elitist, but so is the position in the *Republic*. On this view, Plato in the *Republic* does not in fact make any noteworthy concessions towards acknowledging the value of non-philosophical lives, and still maintains that a life worth living requires wisdom that is accessible only to philosophers (e.g. Bobonich 2002). Another possibility is that Plato's position in the *Republic* is not elitist, as suggested by the carpenter's case, but that nor is the position from the *Apology*. On an influential and rather attractive reading of the *Apology* by Gregory Vlastos (1991), Socrates' outlook there is far from elitist; rather, he is on a mission aimed at encouraging all citizens to lead an examined life. Not only professional philosophers but all citizens can and indeed ought to aspire to the examined life. Could this also turn out to be Plato's position in the *Republic*? *Prima facie*, this hardly seems to be the case, insofar as carpenters are not allowed to do philosophy. But it is perhaps also possible, or so I shall argue, that even in the *Republic* Plato thinks that all just citizens, including non-philosophers, do live an examined life, at least in a peculiarly qualified, second-hand sense.

Whereas the dictum from the *Apology* will never quite disappear from the picture, I shall also turn to other – relatively neglected – evidence about 'life worth living' found elsewhere in Plato's corpus. I begin in Section 1.3 by showing that, and explaining why, lives not worth living are consistently associated with the condition of having a corrupted or

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unjust soul. In Section 1.4, taking the *Republic* as the point of reference, I establish that all humans – including non-philosophers – can in Plato's view live a fully worthwhile life because their soul can be kept in a healthy condition insofar as they do their job, or function (*ergon*), well. In Section 1.5, I discuss a passage from the little-read dialogue *Clitophon* that espouses the view that those who do not know how to 'use' their soul would be better not living at all. The arguments in this passage further confirm and supplement the account from the preceding sections. In Section 1.6, I revisit the controversial dictum from the *Apology* and propose in what sense it is contained in, rather than superseded by, the account in the *Republic*. I conclude in Section 1.7 by summarising the main findings and anticipating what is to come.

1.3 Death Better than Life with a Corrupted Soul

The condition most commonly associated in Plato's dialogues with a life *not* worth living is not so much a failure to live an examined life, but a corruption (*diastrophê*) of the soul. There is good evidence for this view spanning Plato's early, middle and late works. Consider first the two following passages, one from the early dialogue *Crito* and another, later, from the *Republic*:

> Come now, if we ruin that which is improved by health and corrupted by disease by not following the opinions of those who know is life worth living (*biôton estin*) for us when that is ruined (*diephtharmenou*)? And that is the body, is it not? – Yes. – And is life worth living with a body that is corrupted and in bad condition? – In no way. – And is life worth living for us with that part of us corrupted that unjust action harms and just action benefits? Or do we think that part of us, whatever it is, that is concerned with justice and injustice, is inferior to the body? – Not at all. – It is more valuable (*timiôteron*)? – Much more. (*Cr.* 47d–48a)
>
> Even if one has every kind of food and drink, lots of money, and every sort of power to rule, life is thought to be not worth living (*ou biôton*) when the body's nature is ruined (*tou sômatos tês phuseôs diaphtheiromenês*). So even if someone can do whatever he wishes, except what will free him from vice and injustice and make him acquire justice and virtue, how can it be worth living (*biôton ara estai*) when his soul – the very thing by which he lives – is ruined and in turmoil (*tarattomenês kai diaphtheiromenês*)? (*Resp.* iv, 445a–b)

Before I analyse these arguments more closely, let me note that what Plato seeks to establish in these passages is that life with a corrupted soul lacks worthwhileness. But in other passages, one from the *Gorgias* and another

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from the *Laws*, which is traditionally considered to be Plato's last work, he also makes a stronger claim, namely that humans with a corrupted soul would be better off dead. This means not only that these lives are not worth living, in the sense that they lack what it takes to live a worthwhile life, but also that they are robustly negative and that death is the preferable option for those who lead these lives.

In the *Gorgias*, Plato argues against Callicles, an oligarchic hedonist, that the art of self-preservation cannot be the true purpose of rhetoric. To this end, he draws an analogy between the orator and the helmsman. A point is made that even a helmsman is rightly reserved about the value of his skill, since he cannot be certain that by saving lives, he actually benefits those whom he rescues:

> For he's [i.e. the helmsman] enough of an expert, I suppose, to conclude that it isn't clear which ones of his fellow voyagers he has benefited by not letting them drown in the deep, and which ones he has harmed, knowing that they were no better in either body or soul when he set them ashore than they were when they embarked. So he concludes that if a man afflicted with serious incurable physical diseases did not drown, this man is miserable for not dying (*athlios estin hoti ouk apethanen*) and has gotten no benefit from him. But if a man has many incurable diseases in what is more valuable than his body, his soul, life for that man is not worth living, and he won't do him any favor if he rescues him from the sea or from prison or from anywhere else. He knows that for a corrupt person it's better not to be alive (*hoti ouk ameinon estin zên tôi mochthêrôi anthrôpôi*), for he necessarily lives badly. (*Grg.* 511e–512b)

The idea of 'being miserable for not dying' also appears in a passage from the *Laws* which has received attention as evidence for the view that Plato regards suicide, in some circumstances, as permissible and even appropriate.[11] The following advice is addressed to those tempted by an 'evil impulse' to commit the most serious crime of robbing temples:

> When any of these thoughts enters your head, seek the rites that free a man from guilt; seek the shrines of the gods who avert evil, and supplicate them; seek the company of men who have a reputation in your community for being virtuous. Listen to them as they say that every man should honor what is fine and just – try to bring yourself to say it too. But run away from

[11] Cf. Cooper (1989). This raises questions about the compatibility of this view with a passage from the *Phaedo* (61c–62c), where Plato seems to endorse, or at least does not reject, a presumably Pythagorean prohibition on suicide on the grounds that we are to gods what slaves are to their owners (Warren 2001; Werner 2018; Christensen 2020). In any case, gods are the decisive presence in both cases.

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> the company of the wicked, with never a backward glance. If by doing this you find that your disease abates somewhat, well and good; if not, then you should look upon death as the preferable alternative, and rid yourself of life. (*Leg.* ix, 854b–c)[12]

With the exception of the last passage, all the texts cited earlier contain an argument based on a juxtaposition of, and a parallel between, soul and body: (1) life is not worth living with serious incurable diseases in one's body; (2) the soul is more important or 'valuable' than the body; and hence (3) life with an incurably diseased or corrupted soul will be even less worth living than life with a ruined body. This raises three questions. First, is Plato's philosophically considered view expressed in (1), and if so, what is the justification for it? Secondly, on what grounds does Plato think that disease of the soul matters *more* than disease of the body? Thirdly, what does disease of the soul amount to and why should it be so devastatingly bad for the one who suffers from it? The first question is most conveniently addressed jointly with the third; so I start with the second.

This second question touches upon the much-discussed theme of the soul–body relationship and its development in early Greek philosophy.[13] Without delving into details, it suffices to say that Plato's valuation of soul over body is motivated by an account of the soul that combines the standard, non-philosophical view in the Greek literature that the soul – and not the body – is the life-conferring element,[14] with some distinctively Socratic–Platonic innovations in the understanding of the soul. These innovations evolved from a tendency in fifth-century BCE medical and philosophical texts, particularly by Heraclitus and Democritus, to juxtapose body (*sôma*) and soul (*psuchê*) as two interrelated but different elements that are each subject to a special regimen of cultivation and care (*epimeleia*).[15] Plato draws on these views, but further dissociates the soul from the body, establishing a clear hierarchy between the two, putting soul in the controlling position,[16] and even associating them, as in the *Phaedo*, with two different metaphysical realms, that of immaterial, imperishable entities on the one hand and material, perishable entities on the other.

[12] In a similar spirit is the following assessment from the *Republic*: 'But as for the ones whose bodies are naturally unhealthy or whose souls are incurably evil, won't they let the former die of their own accord and put the latter to death?' (410a).

[13] Among the most important studies are Snell (1946); Claus (1981); Holmes (2010). Lorenz (2003) is a useful overview of ancient theories of the soul.

[14] As Plato puts it in the passage from the *Republic* quoted above, the soul is 'the very thing by which we live' (445a).

[15] Nussbaum (1972) is the classic article on this theme.

[16] *Alc*. 130a; *Phd*. 80a; *Phlb*. 35d.

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This hierarchical conception goes hand in hand with regarding the soul as the proper source and locus of individual agency or, if you like, the self.[17] The relationship between the notion of the soul as the ruling element and the soul as the self is explicitly affirmed in the *Alcibiades*.[18] From the premise that what uses (e.g. a lyre player) and what is being used (e.g. the lyre) cannot be the same thing, the conclusion is reached that what we are is our soul (*Alc.* 130c2–3). Since what one is is what rules (or: uses) the body (130a), what we are must be different both from the body and from the combination of soul and body; and this is the soul.

There are some important general implications of the Platonic view of the immortality of the soul for the question about life worth living. If I am my soul, rather than my body, and the soul is immortal, then it is not possible for me *not* to exist. So when Plato says that it is better for those with a corrupted soul not to be alive what he means is, presumably, that it is better for them to depart from the specific instance of the embodied existence that they are now having, that is, to separate their soul from this particular body. The myths at the end of *Gorgias* and the *Republic* specify in what sense the disembodied existence could be regarded as better for these humans: the appropriate punishments will be administered to the vicious souls so as to cure them of wickedness before they embark on another cycle of birth. According to the myth from the last book of the *Republic*, all souls after having been rewarded or punished also have a chance to 'choose' (*hairein*) their next life. This gives them the chance to choose for themselves a better life than the one they lived before. The souls that lived miserable lives and suffered from their punishments will be rather careful in making their choice. At the same time, Plato maintains in the *Gorgias* that some souls are wholly incurable even in the disembodied state; the punishments they have to suffer won't make them any better, and their suffering is nothing but punishment (*Grg.* 525b–d). This implies that the end of embodied existence is good news for all vicious souls, with the exception of these extreme cases.[19]

Turning to the question of why having a corrupted soul is worse than having a corrupted body, it should first be made clear that Plato's point is not just that your moral corruption makes your life worthless in a moral

[17] The classic formulation of this thesis is Burnet's (1916), but the claim that the notion of the soul as the locus of conscious personality was an ex-nihilo invention of Socrates has in important respects been qualified (e.g. Claus 1981).

[18] This dialogue is no longer regarded as spurious by the majority of commentators.

[19] So would it not be in everyone's interest to depart from embodied life as soon as possible? I discuss a Neoplatonist answer to this question in Chapter 6.

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sense, but that life with a corrupted soul is bad *for* you, so much so that you would be better off dead. The reason why a ruined condition of the soul makes life insupportable should be understood in similar terms to the reason why life is unbearable when your body is ruined. It is a kind of disease: 'just and unjust actions are no different for the soul than healthy and unhealthy things are for the body' (*Resp*. iv, 444c).

But why, precisely, does a disease, whether bodily or psychic, make life not worth living? Perhaps the most obvious reason is pain. Just like bodily ailments, the disease of the soul can presumably be painful as well; and it has been argued that in the *Philebus*, for instance, Plato does characterise the condition of tyrants who suffer from *pleonexia*, or insatiable greediness for power, as inherently painful (Ionescu 2019: 111); we shall come to this point later in this section. But Plato nowhere says that it is the pain in and of itself that makes a life not worth living. Rather, the evidence suggests that the culprit is incapacitation or impaired functioning. This is clearly implied in the sick carpenter's case from the *Republic*: the disease is regarded as something bad because it impedes him in doing his job. Even bodily disease or injury appears to be bad not primarily because it is painful but because it thwarts the function of the body, and, as a consequence, and more importantly, thwarts those activities that fulfil the soul's function and that cannot be exercised unless the body is in a sufficiently good condition.

These considerations bring us back to the first of the earlier questions, namely whether Plato thinks that serious bodily ill-being can on its own make life not worth living. I do not think that the sources yield a conclusive answer. On the one hand, for the above arguments from *Crito* or *Gorgias* to work, the two branches of the comparison between bodily and psychic ill-being must have an independent validity. It is established, first, that life is not worth living with a corrupt body. This must be established without any reference to psychic ill-being, for only then can the move to psychic ill-being have real argumentative force. If the bodily corruption turns out to have been deemed bad only because of its dire consequences for the soul, then the whole argument is undermined. On the other hand, we do not find any evidence for the view that it is possible to have a well-functioning soul while suffering from such serious bodily corruption that this corruption would make life not worth living independently of, and indeed in spite of, the psychic functioning. Several scholars did find it to be Plato's view that even in the case of a philosopher, and not only a carpenter, extreme ill health can on its own be sufficient to thwart the psychic function and make even the life of a previously good person not

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worth living.[20] But this still does not make the bodily corruption a worthbreaker *per se*. It is also possible, as suggested by Betegh (2020: 233), that the very definition of what counts as bodily corruption is revisionist in the sense that it depends on the consequences for psychic functioning. Are you a philosopher with a disease that is quite painful, yet not painful enough to prevent you, on the whole, from doing your job? Then your bodily condition is not really quite wretched yet. But if this is right, the force of the arguments from the comparison between body and soul is still compromised, because bodily corruption is not a worthbreaker independently of its consequences for the soul.

In any case, Plato's perspective on physical diseases and life worth living seems to diverge, or even deliberately oppose, the position adopted in the medical literature of his time. According to different parts of the Hippocratic corpus, chronic bodily diseases should be treated even if they 'last seven or nine years' (*Diseases* 2: 49), and medical care ought to be provided even if prolonged suffering and death is the most likely outcome (*Glands* 14). Even those who have suffered life-threatening conditions such as amputation or gangrene were regarded as not entirely hopeless cases and were given the appropriate treatment (*Instruments of Reduction* 34; *On Joints* 68–69).[21] This starkly contrasts with Plato's stern views from the *Republic*. Even less compromisingly than the carpenter's case may suggest, Plato says that the judges in his ideal city will 'let die' those who have naturally deformed or dysfunctional bodies and – even more disturbingly – that they'll kill those who have ill-grown and irreparable souls (*Resp*. iii, 410a).

This brings us to the question of disease of the soul. Plato understands psychic disease in terms of a dysfunction and equates this dysfunction with the vice of injustice. The foundations for this account are laid in the first book of the *Republic*, where Plato defines what function is in general, and then specifies the function of the human soul in particular. The function (*ergon*) of each thing is defined as 'what it alone can do or what it does better than anything else' (*Resp*. i, 353a). So, for instance, the function of a pruning knife is pruning, since a pruning knife is better for pruning than other tools or even other knives; the function of eyes is seeing because there is no other part of the body with this capacity.[22] The soul has several interrelated functions, or functions which only the soul can do, namely

[20] Kraut (1984: 38), n. 31; Vlastos (1985: 8), n. 62.
[21] I owe these references to Levin (2014: 119–120), who addresses Plato's ambivalent relationship with the medicine of his time in a book-length study.
[22] Santas (2010); Keyt (2006).

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'taking care of things, ruling, deliberating, and the like', but also, first and foremost, 'living'. But it is one thing to exercise function and exercise it *well*, for 'anything that has a function performs it well (*eu*) by means of its own peculiar excellence (*aretê*) and badly (*kakôs*) by means of its badness (*kakia*)' (353c). If living is the function of the soul, then the good exercise of this function amounts to living well, and bad exercise to living badly. It is the excellence or excellences of the soul that enable the soul to achieve its goodness. As becomes clear from later chapters of the *Republic*, it is when one lives well that the soul also exercises well its other, more specific functions, such as taking care of things and deliberating.

In the fourth book of the *Republic*, Plato fills out this preliminary account and articulates what living well and the excellence of the soul amount to. This theory rests on a structural account of the soul: the excellence of the soul turns out to be a harmonious arrangement and interaction among different elements within the soul. This harmony emerges when each of these elements is fulfilling its own peculiar function.[23] Here, again, the analogy between soul and body is deployed to bring out that the harmony within the soul is a kind of health which, like bodily health, is secured when a certain hierarchy and proportion among different elements is established as befits their natural affinities.[24] This healthy condition of the soul is called 'justice' (*dikaiosunê*):

> To produce health is to establish the components of the body in a natural relation of control and being controlled, one by another, while to produce disease is to establish a relation of ruling and being ruled contrary to nature. – That's right. – Then, isn't to produce justice to establish the parts of the soul in a natural relation of control, one by another, while to produce injustice is to establish a relation of ruling and being ruled contrary to nature? (*Resp*. iv, 444d)

The path by which Plato arrives at this definition of justice rests on a postulate of isomorphism between the city and the soul. This postulate posits a close correspondence between the different parts or 'kinds' (*eidê*) of the city, as well as their characteristic activities and functions, and the parts and functions of the human soul.[25] In mapping the different

[23] It has been common in the literature to refer to these elements as 'parts', though Plato's own vocabulary in referring to these elements is quite diverse. It has been debated in the scholarship whether these parts are to be understood as more or less independent agents, or merely as different aspects or faculties of a unified whole. Barney et al. (2012) is an excellent collection of articles on this theme.

[24] For an illuminating account of the analogies between bodily and psychic health in the *Republic*, including its indebtedness to ancient medicine, see Torres (2020).

[25] In the following reconstruction, I follow Santas (2010: 90).

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parts, activities and functions of the city onto those of the soul, this isomorphism entails a much stronger and tighter analogy than the analogy between body and soul. For a city to be just, people of different 'natural classes' (*genê phuseôn*; 435b) must do the job that fits their natural aptitudes (443a–c). There are three main functions of the city: to rule; to defend; and to provide for the necessities of life (369b ff.; 428d ff.). Correspondingly, people in the city fall into one of three natural kinds, so that their natural aptitudes (intelligence, spiritedness and abilities for agriculture, crafts or trades) predetermine them to fulfil one of the three functions (435b): philosophers should rule; the military class or guardians should defend; and the producers should provide. A city is just when everybody does their job and does not meddle with the jobs of others (443c). The same structure can also be found in the human soul, and its justice precisely mirrors the justice of the city. There are three main sub-functions of the soul, and a human soul is just when each of its parts fulfils its natural function with the corresponding excellence (441e). The rational part should rule over the other two parts by means of 'wisdom' (*phronêsis*). The spirited part should be educated so that its capacity to feel anger is channelled towards helping the rational part enforce its commands by means of 'courage'. The appetitive part, which cares for the satisfaction of bodily needs, has no characteristic virtue of its own but does share in two other virtues that are common to all parts of the soul: 'temperance' or 'sound-mindedness' (*sôphrôsunê*), defined as an agreement (*homonoia*) about who in the soul/city should rule and who should be ruled (432a); and, of course, justice.

A just person establishes and preserves appropriate relationships among these parts, and thereby also establishes the health and 'well-being' (*euexia*) of the soul (444d) as a whole, by making sure that each part of the soul is doing its job and does not meddle with the jobs of other parts. Most importantly, the non-rational parts of the soul, the spirited and appetitive, must be governed by the rational part, because only the rational part 'has the knowledge of what is advantageous for each part and for the whole soul' (442c). Thus, the universally human excellence, justice, would be the psychological condition in which the *entire* soul can exercise its function well because each of its parts is doing own job, so that the three parts have been brought into a 'harmony' (*harmonia*) and what is 'many' has come to be 'one' (443d–e). In a diseased soul, there is a disharmony among its different parts, which causes a strife in the soul that is similar to civil strife in the city. In *Republic* viii and ix, Plato describes in detail the miserable condition of the unjust soul, and of the tyrannical soul as its worst case. In this soul, the lowest, appetitive part of the soul acquires disproportional strength and

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comes to rule over the entire soul. Insofar as the soul is ruled by the element that is to be ruled, and hence is naturally ill-suited to rule the soul, this soul as a whole is slavish and unfree (577d). What makes this condition robustly bad is the inversion, and perversion, of the hierarchy among the different parts of the soul, as determined by their natural aptitudes.

It is worth stressing, again, that the condition of the unjust soul is bad not only in the objective sense of dysfunction and vicious actions, but also in the sense that it is harmful, in a very palpable way, for those who suffer from it. After all, Plato's main contention in the *Republic*, as announced in the first book, is to prove, against Socrates' doubtful interlocutors, that being just is most beneficial not only for the city as a whole but also for the individual citizens, and that being unjust is harmful for them; the parallel between psychic and bodily health serves precisely this purpose. Accordingly, Plato offers a remarkably vivid account of the suffering of unjust humans. As a consequence of their objective psychological corruption, their ill-being has two subjective dimensions that are remotely reminiscent of two contemporary subjectivist theories of well-being: the hedonic theory and the desire-satisfaction theory. First, the lives of unjust souls, taking the tyrannic soul as the worst example, are painful; it feels bad to live like that. The tyrant's 'waking life is like a nightmare' to him (576b); he is filled with 'regret' (577e) and 'fear' (579d); and he is full of 'convulsions and pains throughout his life' (579e).

Plato's description of the tyrannical man suggests that this affective misery is largely a consequence of the second subjective dimension of ill-being, namely the frustration of one's desires. Such a person is 'least likely to do what he wants' (577d); he is 'far from satisfying his desires in any way' (579d−e).[26] This permanent frustration is due not so much to the unavailability of external resources as to the fact that his soul is 'unsatisfiable' (*aplêstos*) (578a) or, as Plato puts it in the *Gorgias*, it is like a leaky jar (*Grg*. 493a–c). The dissatisfaction and unsatisfiability comprise two different levels, and at both levels they follow from the fact that it is the appetitive part, rather than the rational part, that is in the ruling position. On one level, the tyrant cannot effectively satisfy vicious desires for pleasure and power, since they are excessive and so prevent him from achieving the state of satisfaction. At another, more fundamental, level, the tyrant is not able to satisfy the universally human desire for happiness. This follows from the view that what a tyrant desires is only what *seems* good to

[26] The idea that vicious humans necessarily fail to achieve, or even want, what they *actually* want is centrally discussed in the *Gorgias*, esp. 466a–468e (see below in this section).

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him; this is not what actually *is* good for him, that is, virtue, which is the good for all humans (*Grg*. 466a–468e). For this reason, even if his vicious desires were to be securely satisfied, his desire for happiness would still be frustrated.[27] In the contemporary vocabulary, one could say that, in this sense, all desires of unjust humans are inherently misinformed.

To sum up, the fundamental flaw that necessarily makes life *not* worth living is the objective incapacity of the human soul to exercise its function, which amounts to the vice of injustice. This objective flaw is an unconditional worthbreaker in its own right, but it goes hand in hand with associated subjective disturbances. So much, then, for Plato's claim that life with an unjust soul is worse than death. With this account in mind, we can now proceed to the question about a well-functioning carpenter. On the elitist reading of the dictum from the *Apology*, it would follow that life is not worth living for him since it is an unreflective life. But it is also possible, as I shall argue in the next section, that in the *Republic* Plato regards the carpenter's life as robustly worthwhile, even though it may fall short of the highest happiness of the philosophical life. The reason is that a well-functioning carpenter has a healthy soul.

1.4 Why Is a Good Carpenter's Life Worth Living?

In the third book of the *Republic*, Plato exemplifies a commendable attitude to illness by the case of a carpenter. He contrasts the carpenter's attitude with that of other sick people who choose for themselves 'a slow death' by undergoing all sorts of medical treatments to extend their life as far as possible. The reason that Asklepios, the god of medicine, decided not to transmit his medical skills to further generations is that he knew that 'in a well-ordered city everyone has their own job to do, and that no one has the leisure to be ill and let oneself be treated all life long' (*Resp*. iii, 406e).[28] The carpenter's attitude is exemplary, since he lets himself be treated by

[27] There are two other notable attempts to explain why injustice is harmful for the agent that are compatible with my suggestions. One is Terence Irwin's view that 'without psychic justice other goods cannot have the value for us that we expect them to have' (Irwin 1995: 255). On this view, then, it is not about the weighing of a set of justice-unrelated goods against the badness of injustice; rather, the psychic disease cancels any goodness that these conventional goods may otherwise have, similarly to the way that chronic bad health does. Another possible strategy, suggested by Lloyd Gerson, is that living unjustly is a 'sort of self-deconstruction', or that committing an unjust act is a kind of suicide (Gerson 1997: 10). The justification for this claim combines the view that self is soul with the view that we have our 'identity' only insofar as reason remains in the ruling position. The subordination of reason to appetites 'deconstructs a self as an agent of effective rational activity' (ibid.).

[28] Cf. the relevant remarks in the preceding section about Plato's engagement with the medical views of his time.

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a doctor only if there is a decent chance that the cure will enable him to carry on with his job, insofar as 'his life is no use to him (*ou lusitelei*) if he has to neglect his work' (406d–e) or 'if he doesn't do his job (*ergon*)' (407a). This indicates that carpenter's life is worth living for him, and rightly so, because, and in so far as, he can do his job. This is consistent with the claim that it is justice that makes life worth living and injustice that makes it not worth living. For the carpenter is doing his job, and that is precisely how justice is defined: doing 'one's own' job *is* justice' (*ta hautou prattein dikaiosunê esti*) (*Resp*. iv, 433a–b; cf. 434a).[29]

The fundamental idea behind this view is that if you do your proper job in the city, and do it well, then your soul necessarily also does its job well, that is, you live well. Before I consider some further evidence and justification for this claim, it is worth noting that this view bears on the bigger question about the relationship between life's worthwhileness and its meaningfulness. In Plato's view from the *Republic*, these two values appear to be fully coextensive and interdependent: you achieve your individual flourishing, or psychic health, to the extent of, and by means of, your contribution to the city of which you are a part. It is exclusively via specific professional and social roles in the city that each member of the city enacts, in a specific way, the function of the human soul in general and of their own soul in particular. Philosophers, guardians and producers can all have healthy souls, and thus live worthwhile lives, when, and insofar as, they do their jobs well, and, one could even add, *no matter what* these jobs are, if they contribute to the well-ordered society.

This view is premised on what Julia Annas (1981: 71–74) has called the principle of specialisation: to do a good job in any area of human action that is necessary to secure the city's needs, each citizen has to channel all their psychological resources into a single occupation; the best results will be achieved when each person 'does one thing, does it at the right time, and is released from having to do any of the others' (*Resp*. ii, 370c). This division of labour should take into account differences in individual constitutive natures, since 'we aren't all born alike, but each of us differs somewhat in nature from the others (*diapherôn tên phusin*), one being suited to one task, another to another (*allos ep' allou ergou praxin*)' (370a–b).[30] As Annas has pointed out, this view has to do less with valuing psychological attributes

[29] One may object to this claim that it rests on a conflation of political justice as the welfare of the city and psychic justice as the well-being of an individual soul: justice as 'doing one's own' could be political justice, but not necessarily psychic justice (cf. Kamtekar 1998: 317 against Vlastos 1978). For a compelling response to this objection, see Santas (2010: 147–148).

[30] 'It is right for someone who is by nature a cobbler to practice cobblery and nothing else, for the carpenter to practice carpentry, and the same for the others is a sort of image of justice' (*Resp*. iv, 443c).

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that are unique and distinctive for an individual human being and more with acknowledging that 'people come in different types suited for different kinds of life' (Annas 1981: 74).

If each person contributes to the city in their own proper way, then they will, by so doing, also have a share in the city's flourishing, so that 'each class will partake of happiness in a way suitable to its nature' (*hekastois tois ethnesin hê phusis apodidôsi tou metalambanein eudaimonias*, *Resp*. iv, 421c). Supposedly, this means that the different classes will achieve their share of happiness by taking different paths. It is less clear, however, whether Plato also wants to say that the degree to which they are happy is different, too. I shall return to this question shortly. At this point, we should ask whether the non-philosophers indeed have excellences of the soul, as implied by the claim that they have a share in the city's happiness, and what these excellences are. Let me consider here only the lowest class of producers and leave the complexities attaching to the ethical status of the military class aside. The producers clearly do not have wisdom, since only philosophers are wise; they will also lack courage, the virtue of the military class. But besides justice, they may have a reasonable claim to 'sound-mindedness' (*sôphrôsunê*) insofar as they agree to be ruled by the philosophers, for sound-mindedness is defined as 'unanimity, agreement between the naturally worse and the naturally better as to which of the two is to rule both in the city and in each one' (432a).[31]

There has been significant opposition in the scholarship against the view that non-philosophers in general, and producers as the lowest class in particular, could be just – and therefore happy to any degree.[32] Two objections have been raised. One derives from the doctrine of the unity of the virtues defended in some of Plato's dialogues.[33] If producers lack wisdom, insofar as they remain in the Cave (*Resp*. vii, 516c–d), then, if all virtues are strictly interdependent, they cannot be just either. In its general form, this objection is weakened by the fact that it is not clear whether Plato means to uphold this doctrine in the *Republic*; some have argued that he does not (Devereux 2017: 52; 59–65). But a more specific version of this objection has more traction. If psychological justice requires the knowledge of what justice is, and this in turn requires wisdom that is accessible only to philosophers, then non-philosophers cannot be just (Bobonich 2002).

[31] For this view, see Kraut (2010) and Devereux (2017).

[32] Bobonich (2002, esp. 51–58) has been perhaps the most eloquent defender of the view in the recent scholarship that non-philosophers in the *Republic* cannot be happy to any degree.

[33] The strongest statement can be found in the *Protagoras* 333b.

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Another kind of objection against the justice of producers is that the *type* of one's preoccupation, or what one does, does entail fatal constraints on the happiness and even bare worthwhileness of one's life. There are better jobs and there are worse jobs, and the quality or status of the job puts important limitations on one's flourishing.[34] So, Plato says that the souls of producers are 'cramped and spoiled by the mechanical nature of their work, in just the way that their bodies are mutilated by their crafts and labors' (*Resp*. vi, 495d–e). This is reiterated later in the *Republic*, where we read that 'the condition of a manual worker is despised' because the 'best part', being 'naturally weak', 'can't rule the beasts within him but can only serve them and learn to flatter them' (*Resp*. ix, 590c). This latter claim is especially disturbing. If indeed it is characteristic for these occupations that they weaken the rational part to the extent that it fails to rule the other parts, then these lives would seem to be unjust. In effect, the psychological condition of the producers would be no better than that of the corrupt rulers, the only difference being that they do not have the necessary resources at their disposal to act as they would like to. It is difficult to see, then, how these lives could be even barely worthwhile.

On a closer look, though, there are indications that Plato's assessment of producers' lives is less grim than it may seem.[35] As to the passage from the *Republic* ix, the broader argumentative context (589a ff.) indicates that Plato's point is not so much that it is the type of activity that is necessarily harmful *per se*, but that the non-philosophers need, for their own sake, to be ruled by philosophers, because their reason is 'naturally weak'. This claim indicates clearly that the weakness of the rational part is not a corruption, precisely because it is a natural condition. But this natural condition does make it necessary that the producers be guided by philosophers, lest their souls become corrupted, as with slaves who need to be guided by their masters: 'It isn't to harm the slave that we say he must be ruled … but because it is better for everyone to be ruled by divine reason, preferably within himself and his own, otherwise imposed from without' (*Resp*. ix, 590d).

Thus, the inherent weakness of the non-philosophers' reason can, and ought to, be compensated for from outside. As regards the claim about

[34] Kamtekar (2001) raises this objection against the view espoused by Vlastos (1978) and Kraut (1973) that the producers' *ergon* can be their own good.

[35] A more optimistic view on the non-philosophers' condition was adopted by Vlastos (1991), Kraut (2010b) and Santas (2010, esp. 146–157). Santas also rebuts the objection raised by Bobonich.

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the inherently distortive effect of the banausic occupations on the soul, it is worth noting that the words Plato uses – *sunklaô* and *apothruptô* – do not necessarily imply the kind of corruption and perversion that is characteristic of the unjust soul; the former means that the soul is cramped or stunted, the latter that its vitality is drained. These words could indicate that the soul of a manual worker is constrained in its flourishing in the sense that it cannot aspire to the other psychic virtues that are accessible to rulers, but this does not necessarily mean that banausic activities positively corrupt the soul. The virtues of the producers are clearly what Plato calls 'ordinary' or 'popular' (*dêmotikai*) virtues (*Resp*. vi, 500d), that is, those that are inculcated into their souls by the philosophers; but, as Kraut (2010: 58) notes, these are of a 'lower order of virtue', not just a mere 'appearance' or semblance of virtue, and, we can add, they are certainly different from vice.[36]

The idea that the producers can achieve and maintain a healthy condition of the soul on the condition that they willingly submit themselves to the rule of philosophers can help to mitigate other objections raised against the possibility that non-philosophers could be just. Most important among these is that psychological justice requires the knowledge of what justice is, and this in turn requires wisdom that is accessible only to philosophers. One might also point out that the lack of wisdom entails that non-philosophers cannot really benefit from any other good things they may have; in fact, without wisdom, they are bound to be harmed by them. This seems to follow from Plato's view that the goodness of things other than wisdom entirely depends on wisdom, which tells us how to use these things well (*Euthyd*. 278d–282b). But, as I shall argue in the next section, it is Plato's view that non-philosophers can in fact use things well on the condition that they follow the external wisdom of the philosophers. Their willing deference to this wisdom does not by itself remedy the cognitive impoverishment of their own souls, but is sufficient to compensate for it so as to establish that these souls are ruled by reason and therefore just.

Thus, from the account in the *Republic*, the lives of at least some non-philosophers in the ideal city, including the lives of producers, can be worth living without any reservations. But are these lives less happy than the lives of philosophers? And here I think the answer should be yes. Plato does say, repeatedly, that no part of the city should be 'outstandingly happy', but

[36] As in the *Phd.* 69b–c.

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that the whole city should be happy 'as far as possible' (*Resp*. iv, 420b–421c; cf. also *Resp*. vii, 519e–520d).[37] These qualifications leave it open, and in fact imply, that there are necessary differences in the degrees of happiness among the different social classes. Besides the clear tendency in *Republic* vi and vii to regard philosophers as happy and non-philosophers as pitiable, Plato also makes an explicit comparison between the military class and the producers, saying flatly that the former lives are 'finer and better' (*kalliôn kai ameinôn*) than the latter (*Resp*. v, 466a), since they have a sense of what is 'fine' (*kalon*). The difference in the quality of life between the philosophers and the producers must, then, be even greater. This is consistent with the view that the producers can have only two virtues at best, sound-mindedness and justice, whereas the philosophers and guardians also have other virtues peculiar to them. Thus, as regards happiness as a target notion, the lives of just non-philosophers fall short of the supremely blessed philosophical life, owing to the nature of their activities and their psychological consequences. However, judged from the perspective of life worth living as a threshold notion, Plato's view may well be that just carpenters are as safely above the threshold as philosophers are. As long as they fulfil their *ergon*, no matter what that *ergon* is, their lives do qualify as worthwhile.

To support this interpretation, I now turn to a passage from the little-read dialogue *Clitophon*. This dialogue is no longer regarded as spurious by the majority of scholars,[38] though its standing and significance within the Platonic corpus remain unclear. For the purposes of the following interpretation, I subscribe to the hypothesis that the text is closely related to the *Republic* and in particular to its first book, where the character called Clitophon briefly appears. The *Clitophon* is possibly an introduction to this book (Altman 2011), possibly a missing part of it (Orwin 2004), or perhaps contains a speech to which the first book of the *Republic* is supposed to respond (Grube 1931; Annas 1981: 17). While this last hypothesis is controversial,[39] we shall see that in some important respects the claims espoused in the *Clitophon* are compatible, and indeed complementary, with those in the *Republic*; this compatibility in turn may be regarded as indirect support for this textual hypothesis. A particularly welcome contribution of the *Clitophon* for our discussion is that it integrates the topic

[37] Even the happiness of philosophers is curbed, insofar as they must return to the cave in order to 'share labours and honours' with the non-philosophers (*Resp*. vii, 519d); cf. Smith (2010) for a good discussion of the implications of this return.

[38] E.g. Annas (1981); Slings (1999); Kremer (2004).

[39] For a critical discussion of this hypothesis, see Bowe (2007).

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of life worth living with an important Platonic topos of 'correct use' (*orthê chrêsis*). In so doing, it also comes to have important implications for the question whether mere living has a non-instrumental value.

1.5 Bad Use of the Soul and the Value of Mere Living

Clitophon is an atypical dialogue insofar as Socrates remains largely passive in the conversation and emerges in a critical light. Before criticising Socrates for offering insufficient instruction on what justice is and how it is to be achieved, Clitophon praises him for his views about the good and bad uses of the soul:

> When, Socrates, I hear you say such things time and time again, I'm very impressed and I praise you to the skies; and also when you go on to the next point, that those who discipline the body while neglecting the soul are doing something else of the same sort, neglecting that which should rule while busying themselves with that which should be ruled; and also when you say that it's better to leave unused what you don't know how to use (*mê epistatai chrêsthai*): if someone doesn't know how to use his eyes or his ears or his whole body, it would be better for him not to use it all, whether for seeing or hearing or anything else, rather than use it in some haphazard way (*hôpêioun*). In fact, the same applies to skills; for someone who doesn't know how to use his own lyre will hardly be able to use his neighbor's lyre, nor will someone who doesn't know how to use the lyre of others be capable of using his own lyre, nor any other instrument or possession whatsoever.
>
> Your speech delivers a wonderful coup de grace when it concludes that someone who doesn't know how to use his soul is better off putting his soul to rest and not living at all (*to agein hêsuchian têi psuchêi kai mê zên*) rather than leading a life in which his actions are based on nothing but personal whim (*kreitton ê zên prattonti kath'hauton*). If for some reason he must live, it would be better for such a man to live as a slave than to be free, handing over the rudder of his mind, like that of a ship, to somebody else who knows that skill of steering men which you, Socrates, often call politics, the very same skill, you say, as the judicial skill and justice. (*Clit.* 407e–408b)

The argument has the following structure. (i) The explicit premise: rather than using a thing badly, one is better off not using it at all; (ii) the implicit premise: to use one's soul means to be alive; (iii) hence, combining (i) and (ii): if one cannot use one's soul well, one is better off not alive. The very notion of 'using one's soul' strikes one as somewhat unusual, because soul for Plato is something that itself uses other things, rather than something that is being used, and is something that we *are*, rather than something that we *have*. Two considerations come to mind that could explain this

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atypical use. One is that one part of the soul, namely the rational part of the soul, uses the non-rational part(s) of the soul. Another is that the soul as a whole is used by someone else, namely by the philosophers-rulers. This latter option is implied in the final section of the passage.

The notion of bad or harmful use echoes more familiar passages from Plato's other dialogues concerning 'correct use' (*orthê chrêsis*). It is in the *Euthydemus* that we find a passage that is most closely parallel to the *Clitophon*.[40] Socrates argues there that all things, including those that are conventionally considered good, such as health or wealth, but even virtues such as courage, are not 'in themselves good by nature', but rather that their value depends wholly on whether it is ignorance or wisdom that 'controls' them (281d). Consequently, and in addition to this, Plato argues not only that the use of these things is of benefit only when they are used wisely, but that they do harm whenever they are used badly, or 'in whichever way': 'There is more harm done if someone uses a thing in whichever way (*hotôioun*) than if he lets it alone – in the first instance there is evil (*kakon*), but in the second neither evil nor good' (*Euthyd*. 280e–281a). On this view, mistakes entail not only lack of benefit, but harm:

> Would a man with no sense (*noun mê echôn*) profit more if he possessed and did much or if he possessed and did little? Look at it in this way: if he did less, would he not make fewer mistakes (*hêtton hamartanôn*); and if he made fewer mistakes, would he not do less badly (*hêtton kakôs prattoi*), and if he did less badly, would he not be less miserable (*hêtton athlios*)? (*Euthyd*. 281b–c)

On the grounds of this understanding of mistakes, Plato in the *Euthydemus* counsels 'a kind of quietism' (McCabe 2015: 240). If you do not know how to use things, it is better for you to have fewer things and use them less, for you will cause yourself less harm. We could call this an idea of 'inverted value': if used badly, things that in most circumstances would be good become evil. The conditional goodness that health or wealth have does not disappear but is rather inverted into its opposite. We shall see in Chapter 5 that this notion of inverted value is adopted and further developed by the Peripatetics.

A premise at work in this argument of *Euthydemus* is that good use and 'whichever' use, as well as benefit and harm, are contradictories: whenever

[40] Another candidate is *Meno* (87d–88e) but the discussion there, in contrast to *Euthydemus*, does not echo the distinctive idea from *Clitophon* that all mistakes constitute harm, not just a lack of benefit. McCabe (2015: 237–247) has an illuminating discussion of the differences between the relevant passages in *Meno* and in *Euthydemus*.

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you do not use a thing well, you use it badly, and whenever it does not benefit you, it harms you.[41] The harm itself does allow for degrees – that is, you can fare more or less badly – but this differentiation is clearly within the territory of harm, not just of a lack of benefit. So, along with maintaining that objects of use do not have any intrinsic value, Plato also maintains that they must have either positive or negative value whenever they are actually used.

It is precisely this Euthydeman perspective on the use of things and their value that is adopted in the *Clitophon*. A main difference is that in the *Clitophon* the objects of use are not putative goods such as wealth or health, but objects, including a body, bodily parts and in general possessions and instruments.[42] In a striking move, this list is extended to the human soul as well. Hence the quietistic perspective on life: just as in the case of using other things, when it comes to the human soul, no use is better than bad use, which means that not living at all is preferable to bad living or living in whichever way.

This account from the *Clitophon* usefully connects the topos of good use, characteristic of Plato's early or so-called Socratic dialogues, with themes that he expounds in more detail in the *Republic*. One such theme is whether non-philosophers can live a life worth living, and if so, under what conditions. The idea that those who do not know how to use their soul would do better to 'hand over the rudder of their mind' to experts in politics unmistakably echoes the view from the *Republic* that the producers should let themselves be ruled by the philosophers to make their lives worth living. In the *Clitophon*, just like in the *Republic*, the inferior but worthwhile lives of well-governed non-philosophers need to be distinguished from lives of corrupted humans, whether rulers or non-rulers, who use their souls badly. In fact, Plato's claim from the *Clitophon* that even the lives of non-philosophers can be worth living counts as an important piece of evidence to support the interpretation of the *Republic* on which even non-philosophers can be just: if life can be worthwhile only if it is just *and* the lives of non-philosophers can indeed be worthwhile, then it follows that the lives of non-philosophers can be just.

[41] There is no neutral, third option: if you do not use it at all, then you do not exist.

[42] The use of simple objects (lyre, gold) also appears in the *Euthydemus*. One might be puzzled why any incompetent use of these objects should be harmful rather than just deficient in benefit. Why, precisely, should my bad lyre-playing necessarily harm me? Presumably, the idea here is, as in the *Euthydemus*, that the value of use is ultimately assessed with regard to living well. To use a musical instrument well, on this view, is to use it in a manner that is conducive to the good life, i.e. to play the right kind of music, at the right time, for the right sake, etc.; to use it badly means to use it in a way that is conducive to a bad life. On the bad use of music in Plato, see e.g. *Resp.* iv, 424c–d.

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Although an explicit link between good use from the *Euthydemus* or *Clitophon* and good functioning from the *Republic* is never established, the idea of the good or bad use of the soul sits well with the idea of good or bad functioning. To have a well-functioning soul means to live well; but living well also means to use one's soul well. To use a thing well, obviously, means to use a thing in accordance with its function and with skill and knowledge of how to optimise that function. To use a soul well, similarly, means to use it in a specific skilful, rather than haphazard, way, one that accords with the soul's constitution and function. If we read *Clitophon* from the vantage point of the *Republic*, this could mean, in particular, that the rational part of the soul rules over, and indeed uses, the non-rational parts of the soul.

Finally, the extension of the notion of right use to the specific case of using the soul has one remarkable implication that is particularly important for the topic of this book. This implication is that Plato regards the value of mere living, that is, the mere fact of using one's soul, as wholly instrumental. Whether being alive is something good or bad depends entirely on how the soul is used, that is, on whether one lives well or badly. This tallies with Plato's claim from the *Crito* 'that the most important thing is not living (*to zên*), but living well (*eu zên*)' (48b). Whereas this formulation leaves some space for the view that even mere living, while not most important, could still have some non-instrumental value, the passage from the *Clitophon* pre-empts this possibility: mere living, like other objects of use, has no non-instrumental value whatsoever.[43] Moreover, it is also the case that the fact of being alive, besides having only instrumental value, is never axiologically neutral: being alive always becomes either something good or something bad, depending on how well or badly you live. Either your soul is being used with knowledge, whether your own or another's; or it is being used without such knowledge, and hence 'in whichever way', which always inflicts net harm. In the former case, your life is worth living; in the latter, it is not.

1.6 The Unexamined Life Reconsidered

According to the account in Plato's *Republic*, what makes a life worth living is the exercise of one's job. If the job fits your 'nature' and your social role,

[43] Insofar as Plato's point is that the value of objects of use depends or is conditional on wisdom, their value is extrinsic rather than instrumental (McCabe 2015). But, of course, mere living also has an instrumental value, since it is a prerequisite for living well.

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and if it is exercised well, then your life is worth living, no matter whether you live philosophically or not. Is this position compatible with the claim from the *Apology* that the unexamined life is not worth living? The option suggested by Kraut, namely that in the *Republic* Plato allows for alternative, non-reflective ways to achieve a worthwhile life, implies that it is not: human lives do not have to be reflective to be worth living. So did Plato change his mind on this point?

One possible strategy to square the *Apology* with the *Republic* is to argue that in the latter Plato is committed to a plurality of evaluative perspectives on human lives that enables him to contain, and preserve, the position from the *Apology* by linking it with one of these evaluative perspectives. This strategy was floated by Rachana Kamtekar in her suggestion that Plato may be differentiating between different social functions, on the one hand, and universal human function, on the other: 'carpentry is the carpenter's function *qua* carpenter, but *qua* human being, it must be justice, the excellence of the soul' (Kamtekar 2001: 199). On this view, then, we should dissociate one's specific job in the city from one's job *qua* human being, and assess their significance for life's worthwhileness on separate terms. This interpretation would make it possible to concede that even an unexamined carpenter's life is genuinely worthwhile, insofar as it is assessed from the perspective of his social role, and yet to maintain that it is *not* worth living from the more universal perspective of the human role.

However, the earlier discussion has indicated why a dissociation of these two evaluative perspectives is problematic. Plato seems to believe that you can achieve a healthy condition of the soul only *by means of* fulfilling your specific role in a well-governed city. In other words, you can only have a life worth living if your life is meaningful, that is, makes a due contribution to your city. There is no universal educational curriculum to become a perfect human being, but only specific curricula to acquire specific sets of excellences required for specific social roles: those of rulers, auxiliaries and producers. Plato explains in considerable detail that these curricula are quite different as regards the character and expertise they cultivate, as well as the means by which they do so, but ultimately they are all conducive to making the soul just. Learning to become a good carpenter is one of many paths to enacting justice as the excellence of the human soul.

There is a more promising strategy available to accommodate the dictum from the *Apology* within the account in the *Republic*, namely to show that even non-philosophers can, in a peculiarly qualified way, live an examined life, as indeed they can do in the *Apology*, at least according to some modern readings of it. They do not live an examined life in the sense

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of an ongoing engagement in the activity of rational examination, or a life that is being examined, but in the sense of a life that is conducted on the basis of a rational examination, or a life that has been examined.

The basis for this interpretation is the close connection between examination and self-knowledge. As the *Apology* itself indicates, the crucial objective of examination is not only to improve one's cognitive states about the good, wisdom or justice, but also to arrive at a better understanding of what or who you are, including your station within the cosmos (e.g. as a mortal being) and within society (e.g. as a philosopher or a carpenter), as well as of the prerogatives and constraints associated with this station (*Alc*. 124a–b). To arrive at this knowledge is precisely the objective of living an examined life. It is the achievement of self-examination that Socrates knows what he does not know, but also that he knows what he knows, for example, 'that it is wicked and shameful to do wrong, to disobey one's superior, be he god or man' (*Ap*. 29b). In the more specific sense of Socrates' own life, this entails an unwavering commitment to living a philosophical life and educating others, since this is Socrates' own 'function' (*ergon*) for which the god placed him in the city (*Ap*. 30e).

Now, the rationale for ascribing self-examination and self-knowledge to non-philosophers from the *Republic* is the fact that they possess the virtue of sound-mindedness (*sôphrôsunê*). It is in the *Charmides* that the definition of sound-mindedness as a kind of self-knowledge – more specifically, as self-knowledge in the sense of knowing one's place in the society (*Charm*. 171e–172a; 173a–d) – is seriously entertained (164d ff.).[44] This view is echoed in the definition of sound-mindedness in *Republic* iv, where it is defined in terms of a cognitive state, namely a 'correct belief' (*orthê doxa*) and 'agreement' (*homonoia*) about who should rule and who should be ruled (431d; 432a). Thus, insofar as even the producers can be sound-minded, they also have a claim to a sort of self-knowledge. This self-knowledge consists, first and foremost, in the acknowledgement of the serious limitations of their own cognitive capacities and the recognition that their well-being depends on the wisdom of philosophers. Thus, like Socrates' self-knowledge from the *Apology*, its chief achievement is a concession of one's own ignorance.

1.7 Retrospect and Prospect

Plato discusses the conditions of a life worth living in several dialogues spanning the early and late periods. While the question is nowhere tackled

[44] Cf. Annas (1985: 120–125).

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in a systematic manner, and is addressed from different perspectives and in different argumentative contexts, the evidence adds up to a fairly coherent picture. The common denominator of Plato's discussions about what makes a life worth living is his concern with the function (*ergon*) of an individual soul. In most general terms, life is worth living whenever one's soul is healthy, that is, whenever it is under the rule of reason, whether its own or imposed from outside. This justice, or the health of the soul, is the unconditional worthmaker, and its absence – the vice of injustice and psychic disease – is the unconditional worthbreaker.

I have suggested that this account of a life worth living implies a gap between worthwhile lives and best possible lives. There is some evidence in Plato for the view that the lives of philosophers approximate, as much as is possible for humans, the lives of the gods, and are thus better and more desirable than the lives of non-philosophers. That does not mean, however, that they are more worth living in the sense of passing the threshold test. These lives may be happier than the lives of producers, but even the producers can have their fair share of happiness if they are just and sound-minded. When it comes to clearing the threshold of a life worth living, good carpenters are not any worse off than good philosophers; insofar as it exercises its function, the soul of a good carpenter is as healthy as the soul of a good philosopher. Since the good and bad uses of the soul are contradictories, there are no indifferent lives in Plato's picture: either your life is worth living or it is not.

From a larger axiological perspective, the distinction between the best human life and a life worth living is enabled by Plato's fourfold notion of the virtue of the soul. This notion warrants a degree of axiological pluralism that grounds this distinction. Virtue is necessary both for the best life and for a life worth living, but whereas the former requires justice and sound-mindedness, but also wisdom, justice and sound-mindedness alone are sufficient for a life worth living. If this interpretation is right, it serves as an indication in favour of the view that Plato no longer maintains in the *Republic* a strict version of the doctrine of the unity of virtues that he adopts in his earlier dialogues.

Plato also takes a position on the value of mere living, that is, the bottom level of the axiology of life. He understands the state of being alive as an activity of using one's soul. In itself this state is axiologically indifferent, as are all cases of the instrumental use of things. But because every use must be either good or bad, mere living is in practice always beneficial or harmful. We can say, therefore, that the value of mere living is both wholly instrumental, insofar as it is the prerequisite for living well, and

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wholly extrinsic insofar as its value depends on the particular mode of use. As for the relationship between life's worthwhileness and its meaningfulness, Plato regards these perspectives as interdependent and coextensive. The only path to the health of your soul is to exercise your job in the city. A good exercise of this function makes you just, not only in a political but also in a psychological sense, insofar as different parts of your soul are in a harmonious relationship.

We shall see in the next chapter that Plato's functionalist perspective on a life worth living, as well as the target–threshold distinction, was in its fundamental features adopted by Aristotle. But within this shared functionalistic framework, we shall identify two remarkable shifts. One is that Aristotle does attribute some non-instrumental value to mere living. Translated into Plato's terminology, Aristotle maintains that even the mere fact of using the soul is a good, regardless of whether it is used well or badly. While this position may seem to go against the grain of the functionalist approach, it is in fact motivated by it. The second shift concerns the relationship between worthwhileness and meaningfulness. In Aristotle's view, there are kinds of human lives that may be of genuine benefit for the city, and yet they may not be worth living from the internal perspective. So it turns out that the non-instrumental value of mere living cannot make up for the absence of some important contents that make life worthwhile.

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