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Habituation and Role-Modeling in Plato's Thought

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Introduction

In "On the Old Saw that Dialogue is a Socratic but not an Aristotelian Method of Moral Education," Kristján Kristjánsson (2014) attempts to "chip away at [the] received wisdom" (33) concerning certain distinctions between Socrates/Plato's and Aristotle's ideas on moral education. Kristjánsson argues against "the old saw" that it is only Socrates who promotes dialogue as a necessary component of moral education. According to Kristjánsson, contrary to the received wisdom, Aristotle also promotes dialogue, believing that it is central to the development of certain virtues. I find Kristjánsson's argument persuasive and believe that he has made an important first step in "blur[ring] the boundaries between the two thinkers" (33). This paper aims to further blur the boundary between them by arguing that there is another "old saw" that needs to be buried: namely, that it is only Aristotle that believes in the necessity of imitation and habituation in the development of virtues. I argue that, contrary to the received wisdom, Plato is not indifferent to imitation and habituation but actually sees it as central to moral education.[1] The standard interpretation, popularized among educators by the towering figure of Lawrence Kohlberg (1981, 29-38), holds that Plato considers knowledge to be sufficient for virtuous action and a virtuous life. I argue that this interpretation is false. While Plato believes that knowledge is, at times, an extremely important handmaiden of moral education in the initial stages of an individual's development, it is not sufficient to complete the education. Only imitation and habituation can do that work. One of the aims of this paper is to make Plato's position on this clear, and in so doing make clearer the similarity between Plato and Aristotle.

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[1] While the view that habituation is central to Plato's thought is a minority view, several theorists have, as we shall see, drawn attention to it. See for example, Vasiliou (2008) and Lane (2001).

There is another aim to this paper, however. It is to show that the fact that Plato *does* emphasize the role of knowledge in the *initial* stages of education makes his conception of moral education particularly useful to contemporary educators of secondary students. Indeed, in this respect Plato's vision is superior to Aristotle's insofar as it includes a process by which students who missed the proper imitation and habituation in their youth can develop it later in their lives. Aristotle says such people are not morally educable (NE, 1179b4-31; Burnyeat, 1980, p. 75; Sherman 1999, p. 237), whereas Plato believes that they are educable, and even provides insights into how to go about educating them.

Kohlberg and the Orthodox Interpretation of Plato's Conception of Moral Education

In "Education for Justice: A Modern Statement of the Socratic View," Kohlberg (1981) attributes to Aristotle what he calls the "bag of virtues" approach to moral education. Kohlberg claims that Aristotle's "bag of virtues" demands that students should be given a list of virtues that are supposedly constitutive of good character and then they "should be exhorted to practice these virtues, should be told that happiness, fortune, and good repute will follow in their wake; adults around them should be living examples of these virtues; and children should be given daily opportunities to practice them" (31). Kohlberg finds this approach to moral education both ineffective and morally suspect. As an alternative to this "Aristotelian" approach, Kohlberg recommends a "Socratic" or "Platonic" approach. According to Kohlberg, unlike the Aristotelian approach, the Platonic does not offer a list of virtues but instead only insists on one virtue: namely, *justice*. Additionally, the Platonic approach dispenses with the need to practice doing virtuous acts and instead focuses on helping students develop their "knowledge of the good," which, when achieved, guarantees that they will "choose the good." In order for them to know

the good, Kohlberg claims that they need merely be asked questions about the good. “The teaching of virtue is the asking of questions and pointing the way, not the giving of answers.” Upon these foundations, Kohlberg built his field-transforming theory of moral development in which students proceed through six sequential levels that represent increasingly sophisticated knowledge of justice. This is all achieved by the asking of questions and “exposing the students to moral conflict situations for which their principles have no ready solution.” In Kohlberg’s model, in order to become virtuous and act accordingly, students do not need to be habituated in virtue; they need only to develop the “knowledge” of it.

Today, Kohlberg’s theory has lost much of its prestige. Nevertheless, with respect to his interpretation of Plato, Kohlberg’s influence seems as strong as ever. While Plato’s ideas concerning dialogue in education and the importance of Socratic questioning is still of considerable influence (Mintz, 2009; Rud, 1997; Pekarsky, 1994), his larger educational project, including his championing of *eudaimonia* and the cultivation of the virtues necessary to attain it, receives almost no attention in the philosophy of education literature.

Kohlberg’s interpretation of Plato is not the only factor that contributes to the lack of interests in Plato’s moral theory among educational theorists, however. Over the last century or so, a standard view of Plato’s moral theory has emerged, which, in its emphasis on the cognitive priority of virtue, shares the strong “intellectualist” flavor expressed by Kohlberg.

Problems with the Standard Interpretation of Plato’s Dialogues

The standard interpretation is intellectualist insofar as prioritizes the pursuit of knowledge in mostly intellectual terms. The orthodox doctrines of the dialogues that developed from this interpretive approach are the following.

(a) If someone knows what virtue is he or she will always act virtuously (Protagoras, 352b-e)

(b) If someone knows what virtue is he or she will be able to adequately define it. (Laches, 190b-c)

(c) Becoming good requires a cognitive apprehension of the good. This cognitive apprehension cannot, unfortunately, be taught. Nothing can be taught because nothing can be learned. How then can we make moral agents? Only by helping them "recollect" what the good is. (Meno, 81c-e)

(d) Knowledge of virtue is distinct from true belief about virtue and can only be attained by those who have access to a so-called "Realm of the Forms." (Republic 508a-509e, 537c-d)

Taken as doctrinal statements, these four claims make up the core of the intellectualist interpretation. What is important about these doctrines is that not only do none of them mention imitation or habituation, most of them implicitly deny the need for imitation and habituation by focusing exclusively on knowledge. The orthodox view of Plato's moral theory relies on a straightforwardly doctrinal hermeneutic in which interpreters assume that when Socrates makes a definitive statement that is neither obviously ironic nor refuted elsewhere in the dialogue, then it represents Plato's philosophical position.[2] After all the dialogues have been mined for such doctrinal statements, a coherent set of general doctrines based on each of the particulars begins to emerge. Once a coherent set of general doctrines are agreed upon a kind of orthodoxy develops, which begins to condition future readings.[3]

[2] For a defense of the doctrinal approach see Irwin (1995, 6).
[3] While the above interpretation of Plato's moral theory remains the received view, there have been many noteworthy exceptions over the last thirty years or so (Murdoch, 1992; Hadot, 1995,

Naturally, there is nothing necessarily out of order in this approach to interpreting Plato, and there are a number of passages that support the above doctrines. But two significant problems arise if we are to make the orthodox view of Plato's moral theory a contender for character education. The first is the fact that several of these "doctrines" fly in the face of common sense notions of virtue and virtuous actions. As interpreters have long pointed out, Plato's apparent ethical theory defies our deepest understandings of the moral life.

> Both Sokrates and Plato (in many of his dialogues) commit the error of which the above is one particular manifestation—that of dwelling exclusively on the intellectual conditions of human conduct, and omitting to give proper attention to the emotional and volitional, as essentially cooperating or preponderating in the complex meaning of ethical attributes" (Grote, 1875, 399-400).

> Socrates and Plato, […] great doubters and admirable innovators, were nonetheless innocently credulous in regard to that most fateful of prejudices, that profoundest of errors, that 'right knowledge *must be followed* by right actions…the opposite seemed crazy and unthinkable—and yet this opposite is precisely the naked reality demonstrated daily and hourly from time immemorial. (Nietzsche, 1997, 72)

> Socrates' intellectualism has proved to be a spur as well as a hurdle to our understanding of him. How could such a supremely intelligent man fail to realize that intelligence is not enough for being good and, as it followed for him, for being happy?...Socrates' refusal to look at concrete cases of action, and to learn about the virtues from them, it has been thought, is yet another instance of his "despotic" intellectualism (Nehamas, 1999, p. 27-28).

Grote, Nietzsche, and Nehamas articulate in different ways what most readers experience when they are confronted with the orthodox interpretation of Plato's ideas. It defies common sense to think that all that is required for virtuous action is knowledge; or that there is a literal Realm of the Forms that we must access to truly know what is virtuous; or that to know anything about virtue we must be able to offer an adequate definition of it; or that there is no such thing as

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McDowell, 1979; Lane, 2001; Weiss, 2001; Robjant, 2012; Rowe, 2007, to name a few). While not always focusing on the same aspects of Plato's thought, these interpreters raise significant doubts about the plausibility of certain aspects of the orthodox view. In this paper, I aim to join this chorus, focusing on the centrality of imitation and habituation in Plato's moral theory and the significance it has for contemporary moral education.

weakness of will. These theses seem incredible and thus the orthodox view loses some of its plausibility.

But there is a second, more significant issue with the orthodox interpretation: the problem of internal inconsistency. Because orthodox commentators interpret the dialogues primarily as treatise of doctrine they are at pains to explain the internal inconsistencies found therein. There are countless occasions throughout the dialogues where Plato offers what seems to be a definitive statement that is neither obviously ironic nor contradicted later in the dialogue, but is also inconsistent with the set of general doctrines that make up the standard view.

Take for instance, the following passages that run counter to the intellectualism of Plato's moral theory affirmed by the orthodox view:

> If they do imitate, *they must imitate from childhood what is appropriate for them*, namely, people who are courageous, self-controlled, pious, and free, and their actions. They mustn't be clever at doing or imitating slavish or shameful actions, lest from enjoying the imitation, they come to enjoy the reality. Or haven't you noticed that imitations practiced from youth become part of nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice, and thought? (*Republic*, 395c-d; italics added)

> Similarly if one of *us* aspires to live like a god, this is the state he must try to attain. He must refuse to go looking for pleasure on his own account, aware that this is not a way of avoiding pain; nor must he allow anyone else to behave like that, young or old, male or female—least of all newly-born children, if he can help it, because that's the age when habits, the seeds of the entire character, are most effectively planted. (*Laws*, 792d-e)

> Someone might say: "Are you not ashamed, Socrates, to have followed the kind of occupation that has led to your now being in danger of death?" However, I should be right to reply to him: "You are wrong, sir, if you think that a man who is any good at all should take into account the risk of life and death; he should look to this only in his *actions*, whether what he does is right or wrong, whether he is *acting like a good or bad man*. (*Apology*, 28b; italics added).

> For my part Callicles, I'm convinced by these accounts, and I think about how I'll reveal to the judge a soul that's as healthy as it can be…So let us use the account that has now been disclosed to us as our guide, one that indicates to us that this way of life is the best, to *practice* justice and the rest of excellence both in life and in death. Let us follow it, then, and call on others to do so, too, and let's not follow the one that you believe in and

call on me to follow. For that one is worthless, Callicles." (*Gorgias*, 526d-527e; italics added)

These are only a few of the passages that cast doubt on the intellectualist interpretation by emphasizing imitation, practice, and moral action. What is the standard view to do with passages like those listed above? The typical response has been to try to explain away the claims that are inconsistent with the orthodox interpretation. Over the last thirty years or so, a dominant general strategy has been to suggest a developmental interpretation of the dialogues in which inconsistencies are explained by arguing that Plato's thought developed between the early, middle and late dialogues. While this approach is a plausible way to explain many of the most obvious inconsistencies between the dialogues, there are many other inconsistencies that remain to which commentators must turn their attention. The results have been an astonishing array of erudite and sophisticated treatments of Plato's dialogues in which interpreters go back and forth about how best to reconcile not only the seeming inconsistencies but also the outright strangeness of Plato's supposed views. But this raises an interesting question: what if the existence of the internal inconsistencies, and the external inconsistencies with commonsense, are products of the orthodox interpreters tendency to misconstrue Plato's doctrines? What if statements like the ones above reflect Plato's actual position, while those that suggest otherwise do not reflect his position? In fact, imitation and habituation are central to Plato's ethical theory in and that if we take that hypothesis as a starting point, certain statements that have become staples of the orthodox view take on a very different light and may actually support imitation and habituation.

Imitation, Habituation and Reason in Plato's Works

There are many occasions where Plato explicitly affirms the necessity of imitation and habituation in his works. For example, we have a passage from the *Laws* where the Athenian claims that adults and children must perform the right actions and develop the correct habits if they are to become fully virtuous. “A man has to fight and conquer his feelings of cowardice before he can achieve perfect courage; if he has no experience and training in that kind of struggle, he will never more than half realize his potentialities for virtue” (647d). This passage clearly denies the standard view insofar as it explicitly claims that perfect virtue is not obtained through mere contemplation, as the intellectualist interpretation claims, but *requires* practice and habituation.

It is not only the *Laws* that emphasizes habituation and practice; in the *Republic* we find nearly identical passages. Take for instance the passage quoted above from Book III, where Socrates describes the education of the guardians who while being the best and brightest and most naturally virtuous citizens of the *kallipolis* are still in need of premeditated educational strictures with respect to assisting them to develop intellectually and ethically, strictures which are founded upon a regimen of imitation and habituation.

> If they do imitate, they must imitate from childhood what is appropriate for them, namely, people who are courageous, self-controlled, pious, and free, and their actions. They mustn’t be clever at doing or imitating slavish or shameful actions, lest from enjoying the imitation, they come to enjoy the reality. Or haven’t you noticed that imitations practiced from youth become part of nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice, and thought? (*Republic*, 395c-d)

Later in the *Republic* Socrates returns to the education of the guardians and the need for imitation and habituation in Book VII after giving his most famous educational speech, the allegory of the cave. He reminds Glaucon of the role music plays in the guardians’ educations: “But that, if you remember, is just the counterpart to physical training. It educated the guardians through habits. Its harmonies gave them a certain harmoniousness, not knowledge; its rhythms gave them a

certain rhythmical quality; and its stories, whether fictional or nearer the truth, cultivated other habits akin to these" (522a). A few pages earlier Socrates had said much the same thing about virtues beyond harmony, "Now, it looks as though the other so-called virtues of the soul are akin to those of the body, for they really aren't there before hand but are added later by habit and practice" (518d). The virtues to which he is referring are the four cardinal virtues of antiquity: wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice. These virtues can only come about through imitation and habit, and are contradistinguished from the one "virtue" of the soul that does not need imitation and habituation: the ability to apprehend the true, the good, and the beautiful.

> But our present discussion, on the other hand, shows that the power to learn is present in everyone's soul and that the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning round the whole body. This instrument cannot be turned around from that which is coming into being without turning the whole soul until it is able to study that which is and the brightest thing that is, namely what we call the good. (518c)

What is important to note about this "virtue" is that even though the ability to see is present in all people and does not require imitation and habituation in order to *be capable* of seeing,[4] the "turning around" and seeing *clearly* do in fact require habituation and perhaps even imitation.

The centrality of habituation in being able to see clearly is made evident in the allegory of the cave, where the recently released prisoner is "compelled" to turn around and face the light of the fire. He is then compelled to remain at the fire and attempt to depict what he is seeing. Of course, because his eyes cannot see clearly (being blinded by the light) his vision must grow accustomed to the new sights. He must, in other words, habituate himself to the light so that he can actually "see" what he is naturally seeing. The same applies when he is reluctantly dragged up the steep slope. Here he has to habituate his legs to the ability to walk and is in an important

[4] As we shall see, this position is consistent with Aristotle's moral theory insofar as Aristotle indicates that they ability to see and understand virtue is potential capability in all human beings, but whether we attain such virtue relies on habituation.

sense imitating what his liberator is doing. The freed captive must *follow* his liberator who acts as his *guide*. While this is not explicitly described as imitation and habituation, it functions as such. This becomes even more obvious when the liberated person reflects on his den mates and their habitation. He pities them and is returned to the cave where he is supposed to serve as a role model who can demonstrate the way of liberations to others. Thus, while Plato believes that the ability to "see" the good is a natural ability that exists in everyone, he also believes that perfecting the ability to see correctly requires imitation and habituation—imitation insofar as individuals must have role-models upon whom they can pattern their lives and habituation insofar as they must, under the guidance of a role-model, perform virtuous actions over and over again until they become second nature. Socrates admits as much when he says immediately following the allegory that "Education takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn't turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and tries to redirect it appropriately" (518c). Of course, as we see from the allegory, it is not just a matter of focusing it in the right direction through forced imitation, it is also insisting that students habituate themselves by remaining focused in the right direction until their sight becomes clearer. Socrates argues that in order to compel the student to remain focused on the good and not retreat back to the merely pleasurable he must be "hammered at from childhood and freed from the bonds of kinship with becoming, which have been fastened to it by feasting, greed, and other such pleasures and which like leaden weights, pull its vision downward" (519a-b). This type of hammering is none other than imitation and habituation. As Lane (2001) argues:

> Implicit in all these views is the final element in the aspirational Plato, one which is perhaps the least well known, but potentially the most significant for defending Platonism against the [standard view]. This is the idea that moral goodness requires serious, protracted, and sometimes painful effort. Although goodness is objective, becoming good or virtuous requires a lot of hard work with no guarantee….The notion of 'imitation' is deeply Platonic; it characterizes the education recommended in the *Republic* on all levels,

> from the imitation of benevolent gods and courageous heroes by children, to the imitation of the Form of Goodness in their souls by the initiate-philosophers.

Vasiliou (2008) argues similarly.

> The fourth principle that I argue runs through Plato, with varying degrees of explicitness, I label "the habituation principle." According to the habituation principle, engaging in actions of a certain ethical type contributes to the formation and maintenance of a character of the corresponding type….The habituation principle explains why the type of actions one engages in has such importance. Each action is not only the action that it is, but also, at the same time, contributes to making a person the type of person she is. There is no possibility of engaging in an action in such a way that it does not "mark" one's soul and does not contribute to the formation of one's character, either for better or worse….But the extent to which the habituation principle is present in Plato as well and the critical role it plays there have not been adequately recognized.

In summary, in the *Republic* we see a clear and explicit call for imitation and habituation in education, both with respect to the development of the cardinal virtues and the development of the ability to clearly apprehend the true, the good and the beautiful.

It might be argued by an orthodox interpreter however that Plato does not intend the above passages to be meant for average individuals since they are largely focused on the education of the guardians. The standard view is that it is only the philosopher-kings who are truly capable of the vision of the good and that the average individuals in the *kallipolis* cannot apprehend the good and cannot become fully virtuous; rather, the best that can be done is to be told what virtue is and then be compelled to behave according by the auxiliaries who force the average individuals to obey virtuous laws. Vasilliou (2008) makes this argument in the following.

> In the Kallipolis, all of the citizens will be committed to [virtue and moderation], as Socrates is. Furthermore all of the citizens, except for the philosopher-kings, will be in a condition of Socratic wisdom: they will be aware that they do not know what virtue is [in the sense of having knowledge of the Forms]. But they will also have the true belief that the philosophers know what virtue is. So the philosopher-kings in the Kallipolis play a role akin to that which Socrates' divine sign plays in the early dialogues. The citizens of the two lower classes of the Kallipolis do not know what virtue is, but neither do they think they know. They are ruled, however, by being properly convinced that the

> philosophers do know and that this is what entitles the philosophers to rule. The philosopher-kings then answer the outstanding determining question for the citizens using their knowledge of the Forms. The mass of citizens know that they ought to do the right thing above all, which is to do 'their own' and that this is the only way for them to have healthy, beautiful souls and to live in a healthy and beautiful polis. (214-215)

Thus, while Vasiliou explicitly claims the need for habituation in the formation of virtuous character, he affirms the orthodox opinion that a vision of the Forms is necessary for one to become truly virtuous. But like most orthodox interpreters, Vasiliou ignores the fact that the *kallipolis* is an allegory, in the same way that the allegory of the cave is meant to approximate how coming to see the good comes about, the *kallipolis* is meant to approximate the workings of a human soul.

To recall, the goal of creating the *kallipolis* was to "show what effect [justice and injustice] has because of itself on the person who has it—the one for the good the other for the bad" (367e). Glaucon and Adeimantus ask Socrates to illuminate the nature of justice not because they are interested in forming a political community based on it, but because they want to know whether it is in the *individual's* best interest to live a just life. There is no indication that Socrates' or Plato's primary goal in creating the *kallipolis* was to espouse a political theory.[5] Indeed, not only does Socrates embark on the creation of the just city as an attempt to answer questions about the human soul, but the *Republic* ends not with an emphasis on the justice of the *kallipolis*, but with an exclusive emphasis on the justice of the soul. If one were to read the beginning and the end of the *Republic* alone, it would seem implausible to claim that the text is primarily a political document, since the emphasis is entirely on justice in the individual. Framing her analysis in ethical terms Julia Annas (1999) argues that the goal of the *kallipolis* is to "grasp the *ideal* of virtue, which is presented via the picture of the ideal state. The message,

[5] For an extended analysis of the arguments *against* interpreting the *Republic* primarily as a political document, see Annas (1999, 72-83).

however, is not the simple-minded one that he should wait for some philosopher-kings to come along, or try to become one himself. Rather, he should internalize the ideal of virtue as a 'city of himself' (592A7)—that is he should internalize in his soul the structure pictured in the ideal city" (81). Although framed in pedagogical terms Jonas, Nakazawa, and Braun (2012) argue, similarly, that

> The Kallipolis serves an important purpose, but its purpose seems less political than pedagogical: it is primarily to help Glaucon see what justice is, and so too the superiority of the just life to the unjust life. The Kallipolis is a city that has been purged in order to become just, and thereby is instrumental in educating Socrates' interlocutors. The Kallipolis is not the *true* and *healthy* city, but one that has become a heavenly city in the course of a dialogue that has helped Glaucon find justice in his soul. (357)

The upshot of the ethical and pedagogical interpretations of the *kallipolis*, as opposed to the orthodox political interpretation, is that they underscore the allegorical nature of the philosopher-kings and their seemingly unique ability to develop into fully virtuous beings. The philosopher-kings are not actual beings but represent the ability of the human soul to apprehend the true, the good and the beautiful. As Socrates claims after outlining the allegory of the cave, "the power to learn is present in everyone's soul and that the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body. This instrument cannot be turned around…without turning the whole soul until it is able to study that which is and the brightest thing that is, namely, the one we call the good" (518c). Because the *kallipolis* is meant to approximate the individual soul, then the philosopher kings represent the faculty of reason and the ability to see, which is "present in everyone's soul."

This egalitarian reading is supported in texts beyond the *Republic* like in Plato's elaborate description of each individual's potential to apprehend the good in the *Phaedo*. In *Phaedo* Plato extends the image given in the allegory of the cave by offering a robust theory of recollection that includes the immortality of the soul. In that discussion he very clearly states that *every*

individual's soul is immortal and has the potential to recollect all knowledge (75d-77e). However, he equally clearly states that the passions and desires of the body have a corrosive effect on the soul's ability to apprehend the good (81b).[6] Here there is no distinction made between those individuals who have the ability to attain the knowledge of the good and those who cannot. All individuals' souls have equal potential to recollect the good, but the degree to which individuals can achieve recollection depends on the degree to which their souls have been habituated in line with the virtues of justice, temperance, courage and wisdom. As we saw in the *Republic*, the soul cannot find lightness in the dark without being "hammered at from childhood and freed from the bonds of kinship with becoming, which have been fastened to it by feasting, greed, and other such pleasures and which like leaden weights, pull its vision downward" (519a-b). Plato is clear that this hammering does not take place in the realm of abstract reflection on the good, which is what Kohlberg and certain other orthodox interpreters suggest, "but are added later by habit and practice" (518d). Thus, while Socrates' discussion with Phaedo may appear at first glance to advocate a kind of retreat and escape from the body in abstract ethical reflection in order to achieve recollection, Plato believes the opposite—one begins to attain a clear-eyed vision of the good only when one first practices the virtues which are developed through imitation and habituation.

At this point, Plato's position begins to look surprisingly Aristotelian. Aristotle also believes that all free individuals are born with the *capacity* to develop the virtues, but that *having* the virtues does not arise naturally in human beings: "Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the excellences [virtues] arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit" (1103a23-25). Furthermore, Aristotle similarly believes that

[6] This is echoed in a post-*kallipolis* section in Book X of the *Republic* when Socrates claims that the immortal soul is "altered" by the choices it makes in collaboration with the body. (618b).

knowledge of the good only comes about when individuals are habituated in virtues early in their life and the degree to which an individual will be able to apprehend the good is dependent on their prior habituation. It is only after individuals have been trained to recognize *that* something is virtuous and to desire to act accordingly, that they be capable of understanding *why* something is virtuous. This *why* represents the knowledge of virtue that cannot be articulated in a general set of principles, but can be "seen" nevertheless. Like Plato, Aristotle also frames ethical knowledge in terms of a kind of perception that he equates with seeing. As McDowell (1998) puts it: "the content of the conception a virtuous person acts out cannot be formulated, in such a way that its application can be expressed in the 'rule'-'case' form….In the absence of such an argument, it comes naturally to say 'You have to see it', with the perceptual concept marking a point at which discursive justifications have run out" (p. 28-29).[7] In a passage from the *Laws* that anticipates Aristotle, Plato offers an image of moral development that emphasizes the *that* and the *why*.

> I maintain that the earliest sensations that a child feels in infancy are of pleasure and pain, and this is the route by which virtue and vice first enter the soul….I call "education" the initial acquisition of virtue by the child, when the feelings of pleasure and affection, pain and hatred, that well up in his soul are channeled in the right courses before he can understand the reason why. Then we he does understand, his reason and emotions agree in telling him that he has properly trained by inculcation of appropriate habits. Virtue is the general concord of reason and emotion. (653a-b).

Like Aristotle, Plato believes that in the early stages of moral development, the capacity of an individual to recognize virtuous actions stems from their early association of those actions with pleasures or pains. The feelings help the student to identify virtuous acts even though at the time

[7] While correct on this point, McDowell (1998) problematically connects it with his belief in "Aristotle's skepticism about universal ethical truth" (p. 28). Aristotle's refusal to allow that virtuous acts can be codified does not necessarily mean that he is skeptical about universal ethical truths. One can believe that true virtue has a universal character and still be unable to express exactly what that character is. For a discussion of McDowell's "anti-foundationalist" reading of Aristotle, see Kristjánsson (2006, pp. 110-112).

they would not be able to say *why* those acts are virtuous. Later in their development however, assuming the proper habituation continues, they will eventually come to understand the *why*.

While the above analysis casts significant doubt on the sharp distinction between Plato and Aristotle, there is still the issue of Plato's strong sense of *knowledge* and its connection with the Forms. Unlike Aristotle, who rejects a strong, codifiable conception of knowledge, Plato, or so it seems, believes in just such a strong, codifiable conception of knowledge: the Forms. The question however is how we are to interpret the Forms. In particular, are the Forms a doctrine that is meant to be taken literally, expressing a metaphysical realm that certain individuals can somehow access, providing them with direct, absolute knowledge of the true, the good and the beautiful? Or are the forms a mythological construct that functions as regulative ideal to which individuals are supposed to strive? The standard view is that they represent a metaphysical reality, but there have been significant challenges to the standard view. Iris Murdoch argues, for example, that while truth is objective for Plato it is not objective in the strong metaphysical sense that the Forms seem to suggest.

> Plato pictures objects of thought at different levels of insight as possessing different degrees of reality. The contrast between states of illusion (selfish habits or egoistic fantasy) and honest clarified truthful serious thinking suggests a moral picture of the mind as in a continuous engagement with an independent reality. 'Truth' is not just a collection of facts. *Truthfulness*, the search for truth, for a closer connection between thought and reality, demands and effects an exercise of virtues and a purification of desires. The ability, for instance, to think justly about what is evil, or to love another person unselfishly, involves a discipline of intellect and emotion. Thought, goodness and reality are thus seen to be connected. The intensity of Plato's vision of this connection forces him (if one may put it thus) to *separate* an idea of goodness…from the imperfect hurly-burly of the human struggle….Good is unique, it is 'above being,' it fosters our sense of reality as the sun fosters life on earth. The virtues, the other moral Forms, are aspects of this central idea….It must be kept in mind that Plato is talking in metaphysical metaphors, myths, images; there is no Platonic 'elsewhere', similar to the Christian 'elsewhere.' (p. 398-399)

Does Murdoch have any exegetical ground to stand on? As it turns out she does. Not only, as we have seen, is the discussion of the philosopher-kings and their ability to escape their bodies and contemplate the Realm of the Forms explicitly offered as an allegory of the soul, so too is the separation of the body and soul in the soul's ability to contemplate the Realm of the Forms in the *Pheado*.

In the *Republic*, the function of the *kallipolis* is not to offer a blueprint for an actual society, but to help Glaucon develop a conception of justice in the soul and to inspire him to pattern his life upon that conception. Similarly, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates offers Phaedo and the other interlocutors an allegorical conception of the soul and its relationship to the Realm of the Forms that is intended to inspire Phaedo and the others to want to pattern their lives after it. His goal, in other words, is not to communicate absolute, indubitable metaphysical knowledge, as the standard view suggests, but to inspire others to pattern their lives after the metaphysical allegory that is offered. He explicitly says as much at the very end of the dialogue when he urges his interlocutors to follow his advice regarding the way they live their lives, even if "no sensible man would insist that these things are the way I have described them". While it would be impossible to know precisely what Socrates means by "these things," it is entirely possible, even plausible, that he means them to refer to his doctrine of the Forms. But that is not to say that the myth of the Forms is therefore not true; the Forms are true but not in the literal way that Socrates describes them. Like the myths of the cave and the *kallipolis*, they are meant to describe reality truly, albeit in a metaphorical way.

> But though Plato's Forms are a myth, they are not a consolation, a mere avoidance of vertigo; vision of them is portrayed as too difficult an attainment for that to be so….The point of the metaphor is the colossal difficulty of attaining a capacity to cope clear-sightedly with the ethical reality which *is* part of our world. Unlike other philosophical responses to uncodifiability, this one may actually work towards moral improvement;

> negatively, by inducing humility, and positively, by inspiring effect akin to that of a religious conversion. (McDowell, 1979, 347)

McDowell's claim seems on the mark especially when we consider that Socrates himself advocates the use of the myths as methods of "incantation." He argues that "it is fitting for a man to risk the belief [in his explanation about the soul and the afterlife]…that this, or something like this, is true about our souls and their dwelling places, since the soul is evidentially immortal, and a man should repeat this to himself as if it were an incantation, which is why I have been prolonging my tale" (Phaedo, 114d). Interestingly, the life that Socrates recommends is the same that he recommended in the *Republic*, namely that the eternal destination of all human souls "will conform to the way in which they have behaved….The happiest of these, who will also have the best destination, are those who practiced popular and social virtue, which they call moderation and justice and which was developed by habit and practice" (Phaedo, 82b). The emphasis on behavior is stark, especially in contrast to the received wisdom that focuses exclusively on knowledge. It is true that immediately following this passage Socrates goes on to affirm the need of "philosophy" and the "love of learning" to consummate the process of purification that habit and practice began, but nowhere does he indicate that philosophy and love of learning is alone sufficient to provide this purification.[8]

So far then we have seen that the orthodox intellectualist interpretation of Plato is doubtful. To be sure, Plato does place a premium on knowledge—a fact we will return to shortly—but it is equally clear that he places a premium on imitation, habituation and practice. Becoming virtuous is not merely an intellectual matter solved by an intellectual apprehension of

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[8] This combination of habituation and philosophy is echoed in the final lines of the *Republic* when Socrates argues that to be happy in life and in the afterlife, he and Glaucon must "always hold to the upward path, *practicing justice* with *reason* in every way" (621c). As will be discussed shortly, mere practice does not lead to virtuous actions. Ultimately, for a person to be virtuous (and thereby happy) they must combine practice and knowledge.

the knowledge of the true, the good and the beautiful, but is a rigorous practical activity that requires habituation and training for all individuals if they are to have any prospect of becoming good.

There is a more to be said about imitation in particular, however. It is clear that Plato believes in the centrality and practice and habituation, but a question remains about who should guide us in these activities. Plato emphasizes the need for wise and virtuous teachers throughout his dialogues. Take for example in the *Crito*, when Socrates advocates caring about the opinion of the wise man and following his example.

> One should value the good opinions, and not the bad one….The good opinions are those of wise men, the bad ones those of foolish men…..Certainly with actions just and unjust, shameful and beautiful, good and bad, about which we are now deliberating, should we follow the opinion of the many and fear it, or that of the one, if there is one who has knowledge of these things and before whom we feel fear and shame more than before all the others. If we do not follow his directions, we shall harm and corrupt that part of ourselves that is improved by just actions and destroyed by unjust actions. (47a-47d).

In its general precepts, this passage resembles Aristotle's arguments concerning the centrality of emulation and role modeling. Aristotle claims that to become virtuous, individuals must follow the guidance of those who are virtuous themselves. Under the direction of these virtuous role-models, students are required to act in virtuous ways. When they act in ways consistent with the actions and advice of the role models, they begin to conform their souls after the pattern of virtue. But conversely, if they emulate foolish and vicious role models, their souls will be conformed to the pattern of vice. Similarly, Socrates believes that our guides must be chosen well, because the people we let influence us will necessarily shape the kind of people we become. Importantly, Socrates frames his call to emulation not in intellectualist terms, where the pupil is told to focus on developing an *intellectual apprehension* of the good, but to receive

direction in how to *act*. Wise and virtuous guides lead us to wisdom and virtue; foolish and vicious guides lead us to folly and vice.

> Once again, education has proved to be a process of attraction, of leading children to accept right principles as enunciated by the law and endorsed as genuinely correct by men who have high moral standards and are full of years and experience. The soul of the child has to be prevented from getting into the habit of feeling pleasure and pain in ways not sanctioned by the law and those who have been persuaded to obey it; he should follow in their footsteps and find pleasure and pain in the same things as the old. (Laws, 659d).

In this passage we see a clear resemblance to Aristotle's discussion on the role habituation play in the formation of desires. Citing Plato, Aristotle famously claims that "moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of pleasure that we do bad things, and account of pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and be pained by the things that we ought" (1104b9-13).

The centrality of imitation and the need to find wise and virtuous guides after which one can pattern his or her soul is echoed in the *Protagoras*:

> Do you see what kind of danger you are about to put your soul in? If you had to entrust your body to someone and risk becoming healthy or ill, you would consider carefully whether you should entrust it or not, and you would confer with your family and friends for days on end. But when it comes to something you value more that your body, namely your soul, and when everything concerning whether you do well or ill in your life depends on whether it becomes worthy or worthless, I don't see you getting together with your father or brother or a single one of your friends to consider whether or not to entrust your soul to this recently arrived foreigner. (313a-b)

While this passage does not emphasize practice it does emphasize the importance of imitation, and the need to have only wise and virtuous guides if one hopes to become "worthy or worthless." Like Aristotle, Plato is deeply concerned with the influence of others on the state of one's soul. It therefore behooves individuals to choose their guides well, knowing something of the character of their guides before being led by them. It is for this reason that Socrates

encourages his interlocutors in the *Laches* to find adequate teachers of virtue. "Well, it would be a terrible thing, Lysimachus, to be unwilling to join in assisting any man to become as good as possible….What I say we ought to do, my friends…is to join in searching for the best possible teacher, first for ourselves—we really need one—and then for the young men, sparing neither money nor anything else. What I don't advise is the we remain as we are" (201a).

But this creates a general ethical dilemma: if one is not already virtuous how will one know which guide to follow? In the case of a young child, the decision is left up to the parents, who, if they are virtuous will be role-models themselves or employ other virtuous role-models for the child. Being virtuous themselves, they know what to look for in their child's teacher. Describing this process, in the *Alcibiades* Socrates praises the Persians royalty for successfully educating in ethics by providing the "royal tutors" "who have been selected as the best: the wisest, justest, and most self-controlled, and the bravest" (121e). Each of these of these tutors teaches guides his pupil in his specific virtue. This is not the situation Socrates' interlocutors find themselves when they are instructed by Socrates to find for themselves virtuous guides who can lead them in the pursuit of virtue. Socrates' interlocutors are told *they* must find their own guides if they are to become virtuous. But since they are not already virtuous how are they supposed to know a virtuous guide when they meet him? This is not a significant concern for Aristotle because he holds little hope that young people who have not been properly brought up in their early youth can ever attain virtue. Aristotle does not instruct young adults to find wise and virtuous teachers who can act as role-models and guide these adults in a re-habituation process. Rather, as we have seen, he instructs legislators to create laws that compel these non-virtuous

adults to behave in morally acceptable ways.[9] The habits improperly habituated youth develop in their childhoods are just too strong to be broken later in life and thus he seems to believe it is practically useless to adjure them to find virtuous role-models who can re-habituate them. Plato, it seems, thinks differently, as evidenced by the fact that all the interlocutors in his dialogues are past the most formative years of early childhood, many of whom are well into adulthood. This difference is essential and marks an important pedagogical contrast between the two thinkers. While they both share the belief that becoming fully virtuous requires imitation, habituation and practice, it is only Plato that provides insights into how to develop virtue in individuals who have missed the proper habituation in their youth.

To summarize, Plato's dialogues emphasize imitation, practice and habituation. Socrates claims that to be happy one must "live like a very good man" in which one's appetites and desires are properly moderated by the soul. Living in subjection to one's passions will ultimately corrupt the soul. In order to prevent such corruption the soul must discipline the passions by "practicing justice and the rest of excellence" and avoid "its appetites and not be permitted to do anything other than what will make it better." The emphasis is not on the disembodied intellectual pursuit of knowledge, but rather a process of habituation in which the individual learns "to avoid and pursue what he should." The result will be a virtuous life in which wisdom, truth and virtue is pursued first and foremost, knowing that these things "make wealth and everything else good for men." The pursuit of justice and the other virtues makes the

[9] This is not to say that Aristotle, or Plato for that matter (who also advocates for the importance of the social laws), consider laws to be merely stopgap measures against vicious behavior. In fact, they both believe that laws can have a shaping force on the moral character of the citizens. It seems clear, however, that they do not believe laws are sufficient to make someone fully virtuous.

"completely good man…[who] does well and admirably whatever he does, and…who does well is blessed and happy."

Socratic Questioning, Epiphany and Self-Habituation

As I indicate above, the fact that Plato emphasizes imitation, practice, and habituation does not mean that he considers knowledge unimportant. Indeed, he considers the intellectual apprehension of the good to be of profound significance in the early stages to jumpstart, as it were, the habituation process. To understand what I mean it will be helpful to revisit Aristotle.

Aristotle claims that arguments (and thereby teaching) have little effect on the formation of virtue in individuals who are predisposed by nature or by habituation to desire what is vicious.

> Now if arguments were in themselves enough to make men good, they would justly…have won very great rewards, and such rewards should have been provided; but as things are…they [arguments] are not able to encourage the many to nobility and goodness. For these do not by nature obey the sense of shame, but only fear, and do not abstain from bad acts because of their baseness but through fear of punishment; living by passion they pursue their own pleasures and the means to them, and avoid the opposite pains, and have not even a conception of what is noble and truly pleasant, since they have never tasted it. What argument would remold such people? It is hard, if not impossible, to remove by argument the traits that have long since been incorporated in the character….For he who lives as passion directs will not hear argument that dissuades him, nor understand it if he does; and how can we persuade in such a state to change his ways? And in general passion seems to yield not to argument but to force. (1179b1-15)

As a consequence, Aristotle recommends the use of laws to protect the majority (and minority[10]) from their passions. He does not hope to make them fully virtuous by the laws but at least to

[10] Aristotle admits that even those who are properly habituated in their youth will sometimes be tempted to succumb to vice and so they too are assisted by laws which prevent the most destructive vices. "It is surely not enough that when they are young they should get the right nurture and attention; since they must, even when they are grown up, practice and be habituated to them, we shall need laws for this as well, and generally speaking to cover the whole of life" (1180a1)

prevent them from obeying those passions that would have socially destructive tendencies if acted upon.

From the forgoing analysis, it would seem that Plato shares Aristotle's skepticism regarding the potential of reforming the vicious since he also believes that only those souls who have the proper habituation have the chance of being good. To recall, he claims that the soul must be "hammered" upon from childhood with the proper habits and practice. Be that as it may, Plato does offer the pedagogical hope found in the use of Socratic dialogue. Like Aristotle, he does not believe that arguments alone can reform the vicious; but he does believe that an individual can be so transformed through careful, premeditated dialogues in which they achieve a moment of insight that functions as a transformative catalyst that initiates a *desire* in the interlocutor to start a process of self-habituation.

The most obvious example of Socrates' faith in the ability for dialogue to initiate a desire for self-habituation is seen in the *Alcibiades*, where he leads Alcibiades to the recognition that he must begin a process of "self-cultivation" if Alcibiades is to become virtuous. After leading Alcibiades to this realization, he follows by explaining that Alcibiades must have a mentor who can guide him in his pursuit after virtue; Alcibiades must "be ruled by somebody superior" until he has acquired virtue himself. Alcibiades recognizes the need for this and suggests that Socrates become his mentor.

The example of Alcibiades is a remarkably clear one[11] but it leaves something to be desired insofar as the content of Alcibiades vision of the good is largely formal. He has had a vision of the true, the good and the beautiful—he has merely come to recognize that he is not virtuous and does not even know what virtue is. A more filled out picture is provided in the

[11] The example of Alcibiades is so clear that many have doubted the authorship of the *Alcibiades* and it is now generally considered not to be of Platonic authorship.

Republic, where Glaucon not only recognizes his need to for self-cultivation but also has a glimpse of what constitutes the virtuous that will result because of that self-cultivation.

Throughout the *Republic* Glaucon is led through dialogue, by almost imperceptible degrees, not only to a *cognitive understanding* of the virtue of justice but a *commitment to pattern his life after it*. Plato highlights the centrality and power of properly structured dialogue to seduce Glaucon's soul into transformation. Prior to this transformation, Glaucon was a paradigm of the type of hedonist that Aristotle describes above who "living by passion they pursue their own pleasures and the means to them, and avoid the opposite pains, and have not even a conception of what is noble and truly pleasant, since they have never tasted it." This accurately describes Glaucon at the beginning of the *Republic* when he objects to the life of moderation and justice that Socrates describes in his famous city fit for pigs in Book II. Glaucon cannot imagine living a fulfilled happy life in that city because it does not offer the luxuries and conveniences to which he has grown accustomed. As Bloom (1968) argues

> [Glaucon] pursues the same goals as do men in conventional societies but without the restraints those societies always impose on their members. He takes ruling to be merely a means to the acquisition of certain things which most men believe to be good and which all serve the body's desires….His passionate nature has been tutored by the common opinions about what is good and by the materialist philosophy of which he has heard. (345)

What is remarkable is that by the end of the book, Glaucon's desires have been completely transformed. He has been converted in the space of several hours of conversation from being a hedonist who could not imagine being happy without the ability to being a fulfill his bodily passions to proponent of moderation who cannot imagine being happy without practicing justice and the rest of virtue. How has this transformation taken place? It is not through arguments but through dialogue; and not through dialogue itself but through a certain type of dialogue. When Socrates recognizes that Glaucon cannot be converted through direct arguments like the kind

found in Socrates claims that the "city for pigs" was the "true" and "healthy" city (372e), he resorted to a more roundabout approach in which he slowly seduced Glaucon to a vision of the good. He uses the myth of the *kallipolis* to prepare and condition Glacon's soul and in so doing provides a kind of verbal habituation process. He does not subjecting him to the *elenchus* but involves Glaucon in the constructing a metaphorical image of the soul that, because it is only a metaphor does not threaten Glaucon or immediately give up what he holds most precious: his bodily desires. Rather, at the beginning the image the *kallipolis* is so incomplete that Glaucon does not suspect the trap he is falling into. He is taken off his guard and unsuspecting walks into cathedral so ornate and awe inspiring that his vision is dominated and his appetites are overcome. To quote McDowell again, Socrates has, through the dialogue inspired "an effect akin to a religious conversion." It is through the dramatic myth of the *kallipolis* that Glaucon is given an image of the good—an image which becomes temporarily stamped upon Glaucon's soul.

As impressive as this conversion (and Alcibiades') has been, it is incomplete. Socrates does not believe that now that Glaucon has attained a vision of the good that he will automatically become virtuous, as the orthodox view would maintain. In fact the opposite is true. Socrates makes it perfectly clear that having a vision of the good is only half the battle. Having come to *see* what virtue is, Glaucon must now continually *act* in ways consistent with that virtue, so that he has a prospect of living a life consistent with hi recently acquired vision of the good.

When Aristotle claims that arguments are not sufficient to overcome the bodily desires of the vicious, he was correct. Plato agrees. But what Aristotle does not sufficiently account for (in his *Ethics* at least) is the power of dialogical myth and its ability to temporarily transform the desires of the vicious. When myths are powerful enough, and especially when students are invited to participate in their construction, something can happen to a soul. It is true that these

myths are not enough to permanently overcome the continually nagging desires of the body—only imitation, habituation and practice can overcome those—but they inspire a *desire* to begin a process of self-habituation. After an epiphany of the good has been obtain, the student has, if provided with direction and with a virtuous guide, a chance to reenter childhood as it were and choose for themselves to be habituated under the guidance of their mentor(s).

And it is precisely here that Plato's ultimate project becomes clear. Plato intends Socrates to be such a mentor, and the dialogues themselves are spiritual practices in which the reader is put in a kind of myth-making dialogue which conditions his or her soul. Nehamas (1999) gestures this direction when he claims that one of Plato's goal in writing the dialogues was share the inspiration and guidance he received from Socrates could be transferred to others.

> Though [Socrates] seemed to have failed in his quest [to attain virtue], he still lived the life of someone who appeared to posses the virtues and who also, therefore, must in some way or another (if his view was at correct) have possessed the knowledge in question….[Plato sees in Socrates] a man who placed the pursuit of a knowledge or wisdom he thought he lacked at the very center of his life and who, in pursuing that wisdom, succeeded in living a virtuous life and, to that extent, in exhibiting the very knowledge he claimed not to have….Plato, who *was* a moral educator if anyone ever was, took it as his task to make sure that Socrates influence on him…would no longer be a matter of chance. (49-50)

The problem with the straightforward doctrinal reading of the dialogues is that it neglects the important fact that the dialogues are dramatic in character and seem in some ways more like plays than treatises of doctrine (Clay, 2000, 102-114). As such, the goal of them is to engage the reader in the dialogue itself, rather than merely communicate a set of ideas to the reader. As Christopher Rowe (2007) puts it, "Written dialogue (in Plato's case) is not the same thing as, and does not follow the rules of, ordinary philosophical dialectic….and his focus is—I suppose—on *our*, the readers' improvement, rather than that of Socrates' interlocutor" (22). The dialogical form invites, even demands, the reader to participate in the back and forth of the dialogue and as

such implicates him or her in ways that seem to go beyond the communication of doctrine. Thus, while Glaucon's transformation is profound, Plato's reason for illuminate is to guide *the reader* in his or her own transformation. The process of Glaucon's transformation become a mirror which is meant to reflect the transformation that Plato means to be simultaneously occurring in the reader.

Pierre Hadot (1995) argues that this effect is not accidental but is the point behind the Platonic dialogues. He claims that ancient texts, especially the dialogues, are "spiritual exercises" meant to transform the attitudes, behaviors and habits of mind in readers of the texts. According to Hadot (1995), the Platonic dialogues are not treatises of doctrine but are pedagogical devices aimed at producing human beings of a particular sort. They are models of the type of dialogue Plato hopes to promote in his readers, dialogues which are intended to lead to the readers' moral transformation.

> Platonic dialogues are model exercises. They are models, in that they are not transcriptions of real dialogues, but literary compositions which present an ideal dialogue….For the point is not to set forth a doctrine, but rather to guide the [readers] towards a determinate mental attitude. It is combat, amicable but real….To emerge victorious from this battle, it is not enough to disclose the truth. It is not even enough to demonstrate it. What is needed is *persuasion*, and for that one must psychagogy, the art of seducing souls. (91-92)

But we must not be confused about the power of this *persuasion*. The transformation of the reader is profound and is supposed to lead to him or her to an epiphany of the true, the good and the beautiful, an epiphany that is supposed to change the direction of his or her life; and in some ways it already has, as he or she has been habituated in and through the spiritual exercise of wrestling with the dialogues to desire a new, virtue guided life. But the reader is supposed to also see that the process has just begun; if he or she is to avoid the fate of the majority of Socrates' interlocutors, they must discipline their desires through a process of habituation. Still, merely

deciding to re-habituate oneself is this manner is doomed to fail if one does not have a guide who can direct one in that process. As Socrates claims, "imitations practiced from youth become part of nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice, and thought?" (*Republic*, 395c-d). Because the reader has been improperly habituated from youth they will have formed the wrong kind of habits and thus will fall back into them once the power of the moral vision is muted by time. The only option is that the reader must find a new guide, one whom can direct the reader in a re-habituation process. And now the reader is in a position to choose the guide well, because they have an initial vision of what in what the good life consists thanks to Plato's dialogues. Using the moral vision they have received as an initial guide, they can test the qualifications of any professor of wisdom to determine "whether or not to entrust [their] soul[s]" (*Protagoras*, 313b) to him or her.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this essay, it was suggested that Plato offers an account of moral development that improves on Aristotle's in important ways. Whereas Aristotle hold little hope for the ethical development of students who missed the proper habituation in their youth, Plato, by contrast, offers hope by emphasizing the profound role moral realizations can have as a motivation for moral growth. Both Plato and Aristotle focus on the importance of imitation and habituation, but only Plato believes that an individual can be so transformed by a vision of the good (incomplete as it may be) that he or she will actively seek out exemplars, teachers, or guides, who can provide direction for the newly motivated novitiate. The novitiate seeks out his or her exemplar not so that he or she can learn propositional facts about virtue, but so that he or she can be guided in right action. The exemplar or guide is supposed to function like a spiritual

director, as it were, not like a mere intellectual tutor. In this context, the novitiate can receive a process of habituation that they missed in their youth.

Contemporary secondary educators who seek to improve their students' ethical selves are given hope in Plato that they might not have found in Aristotle's extant writings. Even the most recalcitrant and poorly habituated students have the potential to change the moral direction of their lives. What is required is for the teacher to successfully lead these students through dialogue to a vision of the true, the good and the beautiful. Once these visions are achieved they can help their students to find guides who might be able to carry on the habituation process. Of course, all of this is easier said than done—and for that reason we ought to keep reading the Platonic dialogues for insights into *how* to best lead our students to transformative visions.

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