

University of Groningen

Plato on pleasure and illusion

van Zoonen, Derek

DOI:
[10.33612/diss.250286363](https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.250286363)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2022

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

van Zoonen, D. (2022). *Plato on pleasure and illusion*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. University of Groningen. <https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.250286363>

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

1. Cleansing the Doors of Perception: Plato's *Phaedo* on the Dangers of Bodily Pleasure

Even though the *Phaedo* contains one of Plato's most sustained treatments of the philosophical way of life, the theory of the good life it defends is hardly attractive. Plato's Socrates seemingly flirts with the anti-natalist idea that it is better never to have been,³⁵ the fact that we are embodied and affective beings is repeatedly excoriated as the root of all human evil, and the dialogue takes off with a zealous defence of the cultivation of death as the best possible way of life.

This practice of 'releasing one's soul ... from its communion with the body (ἀπολύων ... τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ σώματος κοινωνίας, 65a1–2)' boils down to detaching oneself from the unreliable, deceptive deliverances of sense-perception as well as the affective operations of the body. Indeed, later in the dialogue, bodily pleasure is harshly criticized as 'the greatest and most extreme evil (ὁ πάντων μέγιστόν τε κακῶν καὶ ἔσχατόν, 83c1–2).'³⁶ This is why

³⁵ In the opening gambits of the dialogue, Socrates toys with the idea that suicide might be the best available option, had it not been forbidden by the gods, later in the dialogue he points out that he does not consider his present situation a misfortune — like swans who sing when they die, Socrates actually *looks forward* to his imminent death—and his famous last words ('Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius') have often been taken to telegraph the message that life is a sickness from which death will heal us. Later sources are aware of this anti-natalist tendency in Plato: Cicero (*Tusculan Disputations* 1.84) records the story of a certain Cleombrotus of Ambracis 'who, having read Plato's book, threw himself from a wall to his death although nothing bad had happened to him.' Augustine (*City of God* 1.22) tells the same story while adding that Cleombrotus had been reading the *Phaedo*. Cf. Warren (2001: 93–94).

³⁶ Throughout this chapter, references are to the *Phaedo* (unless otherwise noted) and I more or less follow Gallop's (1975) translation of the Greek provided by Burnet (1900), with small modifications here and there.

philosophers are not ‘eagerly concerned (ἐσπουδακέναι)’ with the ‘so-called pleasures (τὰς ἡδονὰς καλουμένας)’ of food, drink, and sex that ‘come through the body (αἱ διὰ τοῦ σώματος εἰσιν)’ but instead ‘despise them—except in so far as they are absolutely compelled to take part in them (ἀτιμάζειν, καθ’ ὅσον μὴ πολλὴ ἀνάγκη μετέχειν αὐτῶν, 64d2–65a7).’

Traditionally, this plea for affective detachment—as I call the Platonic view that one should distance oneself from the body and its affective states—has been heard as a plea for asceticism, ‘the exercise,’ roughly, ‘of extremely rigorous self-discipline’ as the Oxford English Dictionary defines the term. On this received view, the *Phaedo* advocates a rigorous, thorough-going practice of self-denial and avoidance of the body and its pleasure and desires which somehow allows one to gain access to the unseen order of the Forms. The good life, in other words, involves some kind of ‘stripping naked of the self.’³⁷

Many readers struggle to see the appeal of this austere type of ethics, and perhaps rightly so. If asceticism is ‘a cultivation of ourselves that involves uprooting and drying up parts of ourselves,’ as Zena Hitz proposes,³⁸ then the *Phaedo* seemingly ask us to uproot and dry up those parts of ourselves that we typically take to contribute to a life worth living. Much worse, it requires us to uproot and dry up our humanity and mortality *themselves*—the things that make us who we are.

In this vein, Daniel Russell complains that, on the received view, it looks as if the *Phaedo* has ‘very little to tell us about how to live

³⁷ This framing of asceticism goes back to Plato himself who sometimes characterizes the body as a piece of clothing worn by the soul (e.g. *Cratylus* 403b5–6 and *Gorgias* 524d5). For an exploration of this gloss on asceticism, see Finn (2009: 9).

³⁸ Hitz (2021: 113).

a good human life.³⁹ Instead, the dialogue suggests that a life worth living is a life in which its owner struggles against his mortality and humanity, 'unable to be whole as he is,' eagerly waiting for the moment death will set him free from the human body in which all of us are trapped.⁴⁰ Likewise, John Cooper calls Socrates's disparaging attitude to life 'reprehensible'⁴¹ and going from Plato's urge to repress the body, Martha Nussbaum charges him with narcissism—a pathology characterized by the infantile wish to become omnipotent by closing off all sources of pain, lack of control, inadequacy, and fragility.⁴²

More recently, a number of authors—most notably Daniel Russell and Raphael Woolf—have advanced sophisticated alternative readings of these ethical passages in the *Phaedo*. These rival readings have two things in common: they are seemingly designed to soften the austere ethical programme allegedly advertised in the *Phaedo* and they reject the traditional ascetic readings in favour of what is sometimes called an evaluative interpretation.⁴³

On this more palatable, less otherworldly view, the *Phaedo* is not arguing that the philosopher should refrain in any far-reaching way from bodily experiences and activities that require association with the body. Plato's weaker claim, instead, is that the philosopher should adopt a negative 'evaluative stance' towards them.⁴⁴ This entails, more concretely speaking, that the good life involves adopting a disdainful evaluative stance which attaches little value to the body

³⁹ Russell (2005: 84).

⁴⁰ Russell (2005: 85).

⁴¹ Cooper (2012: 315).

⁴² Nussbaum (2001: 524). See Nussbaum (1986: 136–164) for a critical examination of such 'goodness without fragility' and Nussbaum (2022) for a more recent defence of the claim that 'the solace of Platonism comes at a large cost.'

⁴³ Russell (2005) and Woolf (2004).

⁴⁴ Woolf (2004: 99).

and its operations but instead views them as trivial or indifferent. On this picture, then, the good life merely involves psychological (rather than behavioural) detachment from the body and its pleasures.

It is against the backdrop of these two rival interpretations that the project of this chapter should be understood. I have two aims—the one exegetical, the other philosophical. To begin with the exegetical aim, I argue that the evaluative reading is problematic—first and foremost because it lacks the requisite textual support. As I will show below, a close reading of the text undeniably suggests that Socrates is advocating behavioural avoidance of bodily pleasure.⁴⁵ Still, the evaluative readings make it abundantly clear that Plato owes us an explanation of the philosophical appeal of thoroughgoing detachment from bodily pleasure. As things stand, it looks as if Plato's advocacy of this austere ethical ideal is rooted in resentment or prudishness rather than systematic and careful philosophizing.

This brings me to the second aim of this chapter: I want to develop and sharpen the traditional ascetic readings. Even though the ethics of the *Phaedo* is admittedly quite strange and rather austere, I contend that Plato's attack on bodily pleasure is philosophically motivated, rooted in a cogent, sophisticated, and interesting piece of

⁴⁵ I find myself in agreement, then, with T. Butler (2012-a) and Ebrey (2017) both of whom have pushed back against the evaluative view. There are two main differences between our readings. Firstly, whereas T. Butler and Ebrey mainly purport to show that the evaluative view breaks down on the later bits of the Affinity Argument, I show in addition that the evaluative view already clashes with Socrates's Second Defence and argue that it is philosophically problematic as well. Secondly, I offer a more careful and more sustained reading of the later bits of argumentation in which Socrates claims that bodily pleasure deceives us, and situate this line of thought in Plato's over-arching hedonic theorizing.

reasoning, and tied to his central views.⁴⁶ Although Socrates's initial discussion of the practice of death had explained why philosophers detach themselves from bodily cognition and its sense-perceptual input, this earlier passage merely *stipulated* that the life worth living involves detachment from bodily pleasure without offering much in the way of justification or explanation of this ethical ideal.

In an important yet often missed bit of text towards the end of the Affinity Argument (78b4–84b8), however, Socrates justifies the practice of affective detachment: the problem with bodily pleasure, he argues, is that it poses a 'great and extreme' problem for the life of philosophy (83c1–2). As elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, the key suggestion here turns out to be that pleasure is misleading and closely linked with illusion. This Deception Argument (83b5–e3), as I call it, suggests that whenever we experience bodily pleasure, we are unavoidably tricked into believing that the object or cause of our pleasure is more real and more clear or cognitively accessible than it actually is.

Put differently, bodily pleasure inflates the reality of the messy sensible world around us and makes it project its identity more forcefully than warranted, thus casting a veil between us and the manifestly clear and 'really real reality' of the Forms. That being the case, it directly sabotages the philosophical attempt to transcend the appearances around us and access the unseen order of the Forms. This, then, explains why the philosopher practices affective detachment.

This chapter is organized as follows. In section 1, I examine the Platonic proposal that the good life is structured around the practice of death, breaking it down into two sub-practices: the practice of cognitive detachment (distancing oneself from the deliverances of

⁴⁶ For a similar but more general point, see Moss (2006: 503–504). In a similar vein, Ebrey (2017: 23–25) argues that one of Plato's aims in the *Phaedo* is to try and provide Pythagorean and Orphic ideas with 'clearer meanings and better justifications.'

sense-perception) and the practice of affective detachment (distancing oneself from the affective states of the body, especially its pleasures).

With this preliminary discussion of the ethics of the *Phaedo* in place, I discuss in considerable detail the different ways in which rival interpretation have unpacked the notion that we should detach ourselves from bodily affect and I side with the traditional view (section 2). Even though the evaluative view is right that Socrates owes us an explanation of the appeal of radical avoidance of bodily pleasure, I claim that its central suggestion that the life of philosophy is merely characterized by metaphorical, psychological detachment from pleasure is both textually unfounded and philosophically problematic.

In section 3, I turn to the philosophical aim of this chapter and offer a careful reading of the Deception Argument in which Socrates spells out the need for the practice of affective detachment. I challenge a widespread view concerning Socrates's defence of affective detachment—the idea that bodily pleasure misleads us about *what matters*—and propose a new understanding of Socrates's thinking according to which bodily pleasure misleads us about *what is true or real*. Bodily pleasure causes ontological rather than evaluative confusion, in other words. Not only do I specify the nature of these false ontological beliefs foisted upon us by bodily pleasure, I also clarify the potential underlying mechanics of this shaky process of belief formation.

In the last section, section 4, I offer some concluding thoughts—the main one of which is that once we have developed a proper handle on Plato's defence of affective detachment, his radical and seemingly unfounded views about bodily pleasure and the dangers it poses to the good life turn out to be more interesting, more cogent, and more successful than usually appreciated.

1. Socrates's Second Defence

1.1. Philosophy as the Practice of Death

Moments before he is about to drink the hemlock, Socrates and his friends find themselves in a discussion about the permissibility of suicide which quickly segues into a discussion of Socrates's nonchalant attitude towards his very own imminent death. Because Simmias and Cebes jokingly accuse their teacher of not showing any negative emotion even though he is about to leave his friends behind, Socrates proposes to 'defend himself' a second time 'as if [he] were in a court of law (πρὸς ταῦτα ἀπολογήσασθαι ὥσπερ ἐν δικαστηρίῳ, 63b2).' In brief, the aim of this defence is to explain why 'for philosophers least of all men does being dead hold any terror (τεθνάναι ἥκιστα αὐτοῖς ἀνθρώπων φοβερόν, 67e4–6; cf. 63e8–64a1).'⁴⁷

The core argument of Socrates's Second Defence, as this stretch of argumentation is often called, moves in roughly three steps. Firstly, because philosophers practice nothing but 'dying and being dead (ἀποθνήσκειν τε καὶ τεθνάναι, 64a6),'⁴⁸ it would make no sense for a philosopher to fear death.⁴⁹ Philosophers practice death, secondly, because they practice the separation of body and soul which is

⁴⁷ Like Socrates's original defence speech, this second defence is a passionate plea for the examined life and the importance of 'the care of the soul.' Indeed, Hackforth (1972: 3) might be right that the care of the self is the unifying theme that weaves together the many disparate threads of the *Phaedo*.

⁴⁸ As we learn later in the dialogue (81a2), philosophy as such counts as a 'training for' or 'cultivation of death (μελέτη θανάτου).'

⁴⁹ The hidden premise is that it is 'weird (ἄτοπος),' 'inconsistent,' 'irrational,' or 'illogical (ἄλογος),' or simply 'absurd' or 'ridiculous (γέλοιος)' to fear what you voluntarily practice.

tantamount to practicing death since death is ‘the body’s having come to be separate, alone by itself, apart from the soul, and the soul’s being apart from the body, separated off, alone by itself (χωρίς μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπαλλαγέν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ τὸ σῶμα γεγονέναι, χωρίς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγεῖσαν αὐτὴν καθ’ αὐτὴν εἶναι, 64c5–8).’⁵⁰ As Socrates sums it up, ‘the practice of philosophers is just this—a release and parting of soul from body (τὸ μελέτημα αὐτὸ τοῦτό ἐστιν τῶν φιλοσόφων, λύσις καὶ χωρισμὸς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ σώματος, 67d4–5).’

Philosophers practice the separation of body and soul, thirdly and finally, because they practice what I call cognitive detachment and affective detachment: they detach themselves from sense-perception (the cognitive component of the body) (65a9–67b6) and they detach themselves from material possessions, bodily desire, and especially bodily pleasure (the affective component of the body) (64c10–65a8).⁵¹

It is in this third step that Socrates unfolds his ideas about the most worthwhile, rationally driven way of life and its relationship with affective states like appetitive desire and bodily pleasure. As the label ‘lover of wisdom’ or ‘lover of understanding’ suggests, philosophers organize their lives around the project of acquiring

⁵⁰ Lurking in the background of this definition is Plato’s ‘puritan dualism,’ as Dodds (1951: 212) has called it, which he shared with the Orphics, the Pythagoreans, and the mystery cults. Such puritan dualism treats our soul as an immortal spark of the divine, trapped in a body, and it attributes ‘all the sins and sufferings of the *psyche* to the pollution arising from contact with a mortal body.’ In the *Laws* (959a4–d6), for instance, our body—this ‘lump of flesh’ and εἶδωλον of our true self—is sharply contrasted with our soul: the latter being ‘our real self,’ it has ‘an absolute superiority over our body.’ Likewise, in the *Phaedrus* (250c4–6), Socrates suggests that we—our souls—are tainted ‘by this object we call a body and which we carry around us now, imprisoned like shellfish.’ And in the *Republic* (533d1–2), Socrates claims that, before exposure to philosophy, ‘the eye of the soul is buried in a sort of barbaric bog.’

⁵¹ This summary is deliberately vague: below, I will have to say more about what these practices of detachment from the body precisely involve.

knowledge and wisdom by getting ultimate reality in view. Unfortunately, though, human embodiment forms an obstacle to this enterprise. As Socrates crisply puts it:

[T1.1] It looks as if some sort of track is leading us ... astray in our inquiry: as long as we possess the body and our soul is contaminated by such an evil (ἔως ἂν τὸ σῶμα ἔχωμεν καὶ συμπεφουρμένη ἢ ἡμῶν ἢ ψυχὴ μετὰ τοιούτου κακοῦ), we will surely never adequately attain what we desire— and that is the truth (τὸ ἀληθές). (66b3–7)

Socrates argues, in brief, that human embodiment impairs both the quantity and the quality of our philosophical endeavours.⁵² One problem is that the body interrupts our inquiries. It, so to speak, hijacks our psychological energy: the time human beings necessarily have to spend on sleeping, eating, drinking, and personal hygiene, for instance, cannot be spent on contemplative activities and even if we come around to philosophizing, the body ‘sets up a clamour and disturbance (θόρυβον παρέχει καὶ ταραχὴν, 66d6)’ and distracts us from attending to the Forms.⁵³

Another, subtler problem with the body is that its cognitive operations are shaky. Sense-perception—‘using the body as a means to study a thing (τῷ σώματι προσχρητῆται εἰς τὸ σκοπεῖν τι, 79c2)’—is inaccurate and unclear and does not afford truth (65b1–8) and this is the case, it seems, because the objects of knowledge and wisdom (the Forms or ‘the things that are’) can only be grasped by ‘using the intellect alone by itself and unsullied (αὐτῇ καθ’ αὐτὴν εἰλικρινεῖ τῇ

⁵² Nussbaum (1986: 152).

⁵³ Cf. *Republic* 485d6–8 for the proto-Freudian claim that human beings only have a fixed amount of psychology energy to spend: ‘when someone’s desires incline strongly for one thing, they are thereby weakened for others—just like a stream that has been partly diverted into another channel.’

διανοία χρώμενος)’ without ‘dragging in any other sense (μήτε τινα ἄλλην αἴσθησιν ἐφέλκων, 65e8–9).’ In stark contrast, ‘whenever the soul sets about examining anything in company with the body, it gets completely deceived by it (μετὰ τοῦ σώματος ἐπιχειρή τι σκοπεῖν, δῆλον ὅτι τότε ἐξαπατᾶται ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ, 65b10–11; cf. 83a3–5).’ Thus, as Burnyeat has put it, one of Plato’s charges against perception in the *Phaedo* seems to be that sense-perception offers itself ‘as a dangerously seductive rival judgement-maker to reason.’⁵⁴

This sheds light on one aspect of the philosopher’s practice of death: in order to cognize the Forms, ‘each alone by itself and unsullied (αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ εἰλικρινές ἕκαστον ... τῶν ὄντων),’ the philosopher has to use his intellect, ‘alone by itself and unsullied (αὐτῇ καθ’ αὐτὴν εἰλικρινεῖ τῇ διανοίᾳ, 66a1–3),’ and this requires the practice of cognitive detachment. The philosopher ‘utterly disdains the body and flees from it (μάλιστα ἀτιμάζει τὸ σῶμα καὶ φεύγει ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, 65c11–d1),’ separating himself – that is, his soul – ‘as far as possible from his eyes and ears, and virtually from his whole body, on the ground that it confuses the soul and doesn’t allow his soul to gain truth and wisdom when in partnership with it (ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν σύμπαντος τοῦ σώματος, ὡς ταράττοντος καὶ οὐκ ἔωντος τὴν ψυχὴν κτήσασθαι ἀλήθειάν τε καὶ φρόνησιν ὅταν κοινωνῇ, 66a4–7).’

Unexpectedly, though, and without any trace of justification, Socrates describes another sense in which philosophers release their soul from its communion with the body. In the opening gambits of the second defence, he also argues that the philosophical way of life involves the practice of what I called affective detachment: philosophers are not ‘eagerly concerned ἐσπουδακέναι)’ with the ‘so-called pleasures (τὰς ἡδονὰς καλουμένας)’ of food, drink, and sex

⁵⁴ Burnyeat (1990: 61).

that ‘come through the body (αἰ διὰ τοῦ σώματός εἰσιν)’ but instead ‘despise them—except in so far as they are absolutely compelled to take part in them (ἀτιμάζειν, καθ’ ὅσον μὴ πολλὴ ἀνάγκη μετέχειν αὐτῶν, 64d2–65a7).’

This very idea is echoed in a later passage of the *Phaedo* where Socrates again notes that, throughout their lives, philosophers have ‘rejected the pleasures of the body (τὰς μὲν ἄλλας ἡδονὰς τὰς περὶ τὸ σῶμα) ... as alien, thinking they do more harm than good, and [have] instead seriously concerned [themselves] with the pleasures of understanding (τὰς δὲ περὶ τὸ μανθάνειν ἐσπούδασέ, 114e1–4).’⁵⁵

1.2. Making Sense of Affective Detachment

On a traditional interpretation of affective detachment, Plato presents us here with an austere and otherworldly ethical theory that advocates thoroughgoing behavioural avoidance of bodily pleasures and activities that give rise to such lowly pleasure. As Gallop summarizes the ethics of the *Phaedo*, ‘nowhere is Plato’s asceticism so uncompromisingly extolled.’⁵⁶ In a similar vein, D. Frede has argued that, in the *Phaedo*, we find Plato at his most ascetic, his most anti-hedonist, and his most otherworldly.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Like many other Platonic dialogues, the *Phaedo* is mainly concerned with the dangers posed by bodily pleasures: the hedonic experiences human beings have διὰ (e.g. 65a7), κατὰ (e.g. 82c3, 94b7), or περὶ (e.g. 114e1–2) the body, that is to say, in virtue of the fact that we are embodied creatures. The mental pleasures of reason, in stark contrast, are safe: they are neither harmful nor alienating.

⁵⁶ Gallop (1975: 88).

⁵⁷ D. Frede (1992: 435) (‘In no dialogue does Socrates show himself as much of an antihedonist as he does in the *Phaedo* (64d–69e)’) and D. Frede (1999-a: 173) (‘Der *Phaidon* is ... der asketischste Dialog Platons. In keinem der späteren Dialoge manifestiert sich die Ausrichtung auf das Jenseits mit einer vergleichbaren Rigorosität’). For other ascetic readings, see e.g. Appolini (1996), Bluck (1955), Bostock

When Socrates claims that the practice of death involves detachment from the affective operations of the body, this type of reading suggests that his claim is that the good life involves rigorous and austere behavioural abstention from ‘what is corporeal, that is to say, what can be touched and seen, drunk and eaten, or used for sexual enjoyment (τὸ σωματοειδές, οὐ τις ἄν ἄψαιτο καὶ ἴδοι καὶ πίοι καὶ φάγοι καὶ πρὸς τὰ ἀφροδίσια χρήσαιο, 81b5–6)’ and especially the bodily pleasures that are bound up with the material, sensible realm.

As already mentioned, a number of authors—most notably Daniel Russell and Raphael Woolf—have, more recently, advanced sophisticated alternative readings of these ethical passages in the *Phaedo*.⁵⁸ These rival readings reject the traditional ascetic readings in favour of what is sometimes called an evaluative interpretation. On this rival view, the *Phaedo* is not arguing that the philosopher should refrain in any far-reaching way from bodily experiences and activities that require association with the body; Plato’s weaker claim, instead, is that the philosopher should merely adopt a negative ‘evaluative stance’ towards them.⁵⁹

The evaluative reading suggests, to summarize, that the philosopher distances or detaches himself from his body in a looser, more metaphorical sense. Instead of literally avoiding what is bodily through austere abstemious behaviour, the philosopher merely adopts a disdainful, belittling evaluative stance towards the body and its operations which attaches little value to them but views them as trivial or indifferent. The philosopher’s detachment is merely psychological, then, and located in his attitudes towards the body—it does not spill

(1986), Hackforth (1972), the Neoplatonists Damascius and Olympiodorus, Nussbaum (1986), and Rowe (1993).

⁵⁸ Russell (2005) and Woolf (2004).

⁵⁹ Woolf (2004: 99).

over in abstemious or avoidant behaviour. As Raphael Woolf describes this interpretation:

On the evaluative reading, Socrates's talk of keeping oneself away, or freeing oneself, from one's body would be interpreted as the injunction to place no value on the body and its works, without this entailing, as an embodied human, that one not take part in the usual range of human activities.⁶⁰

If we apply this type of interpretation more specifically to the philosopher's detachment from bodily pleasure, Plato's point is not that the philosopher should actively shun the appetitive pleasures of food, drink, and sex—'that unholy Trinity of Platonic suspects,' as Woolf aptly calls them—his point is merely that the philosopher should adopt an attitude of psychological detachment towards them which regards such lowly material pleasure as indifferent and of little significance in one's life.

Daniel Russell—who is most explicit about the nature of this evaluative attitude—has gone further and suggested that Plato treats pleasure as a *conditional good*. As a conditional good, pleasure is in and of itself neither good nor bad: its value depends instead on how one incorporates it into one's life and one's concerns. The view Plato is trying to develop here, Russell suggests, is that 'the goodness of [pleasure] depends on, and is given by, the role that pleasure takes on in a virtuous character under the leadership of practical intelligence.'⁶¹ Thus,

... instead of asking, say, whether the pleasures of sex are themselves good or bad, Plato would ask whether or not the pleasure a particular person finds

⁶⁰ Woolf (2004: 100).

⁶¹ Russell (2005: 9).

in sex is underwritten by a skewed or a reasonable sense of what is important.⁶²

This rival interpretation has a couple of things going for it. What it gets right, firstly, is that it is undeniable that the philosophical way of life is to a large degree a matter of *having the correct concerns* or *caring about the right things*. In his discussion of affective detachment, for instance, Socrates maintains that the philosopher ‘is not eagerly concerned with’ bodily pleasures but actually ‘disvalues,’ ‘belittles,’ or ‘despises’ them. Indeed, he just ‘does not care about them.’ As Woolf rightly notes, Plato’s description of the best way of life is ‘peppered with evaluative terminology.’⁶³

And whatever the precise meaning of the infamous Right Exchange passage (69a6–c3) found towards the end of Socrates’s Second Defence, one of its central messages must be that there is an enormous gap in value between ordinary, pleasure-driven virtue—or what passes itself off as virtue—and the philosopher’s true virtue of φρόνησις (‘the only true currency’). Similarly, at a later stage in the *Phaedo* (83c2–7), Socrates links pleasure with ‘the greatest and most extreme evil’ there is, seemingly arguing—on some interpretations at least—that the trouble with pleasure is that it confuses us about what is worthy of our attention and pursuit.⁶⁴

Secondly, both Plato’s language and the way in which Socrates describes the philosophical way of life are characterized by a kind of indeterminacy that creates space for different readings. It is not enough, as Pakaluk has sharply observed, to summarize the philosophical way of life by simply repeating that this life involves the practice of death because such a description leaves it entirely unclear

⁶² Russell (2005: 78).

⁶³ Woolf (2004: 99).

⁶⁴ See e.g. T. Butler (2012-a: 106).

what it *means* to practice death.⁶⁵ This is an important observation which ties in nicely with the fact that much of Plato's talk of 'separating,' 'releasing,' 'freeing,' or 'turning [oneself] towards' the soul and 'disregarding,' 'escaping,' 'withdrawing', 'turning [oneself]' or 'staying away from' the body admits of wildly different, less or more literal interpretations.

Those in the evaluative camp are right, then, that it is not immediately obvious that Socrates's advocacy of affective detachment should be heard *literally* rather than *metaphorically*. What might precisely be at stake, exegetically speaking, is whether one should detach oneself psychologically or metaphorically or behaviourally or literally from the body and its affective operations.⁶⁶ Accordingly, Russell claims that a close reading of Socrates's Second Defence in fact shows that there is no smoking gun textual evidence to support the idea that the philosophical way of life involves rigorous behavioural abstention from bodily pleasure. 'On closer inspection,' he claims, 'we shall find that ... what the philosopher avoids and disdains is not *pleasure*—not even bodily pleasure—full stop, but only *unhealthy ways* of partaking of pleasure.'⁶⁷

Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, considerations of interpretative charity seem to favour these softer evaluative readings. One glaring problem with traditional readings of the *Phaedo*, I believe,

⁶⁵ Pakaluk (2003: 98–99) (who refers to Burnet, Gallop, and Hackforth among others). The same problem arises for Holmes's (2017: 46) suggestion that Socrates is defending 'aspirational disembodiment' in the *Phaedo* which leaves it entirely unclear what it *means* to be disembodied while alive. This problem depends, in its turn, on what we make of the dualism underlying the *Phaedo* (whether it counts as a weak or strong (Cartesian) type of dualism). For discussion, see Pakaluk (2003), Broadie (2001), and Johansen (2017).

⁶⁶ As Woolf (2004: 100) frame this point: 'One should not beg the question in advance. How to interpret this central idea is precisely the point at issue.'

⁶⁷ Russell (2005: 88, emphasis in original).

is that the majority of scholars simply content themselves with labelling the Platonic way of life as an ‘ascetic’ way of life without offering much in the way of further elaboration or explanation. Assuming for the moment that we can get clear on what asceticism precisely entails, this approach is problematic because it leaves unclear what the philosophical appeal of such a radical and seemingly off-putting ethical position is supposed to be.⁶⁸

Note that Socrates himself is partially responsible for this. Although his examination of the practice of death provides an explanation of why the philosopher detaches himself from the cognitive dimension of the body—sense-perception is misleading and cannot bring us in contact with ultimate, intelligible reality—he merely *indicates* that the philosopher detaches himself from bodily pleasure without explaining or justifying how affective detachment is connected with the philosopher’s central project of cognizing the Forms.⁶⁹ It remains obscure, then, why those who strive to see ultimate reality face to face should avoid bodily pleasure, unless the pursuit of bodily pleasure would somehow impede or sabotage their basic project of cognizing the Forms—as sense-perception does.

Taking all this together, it looks as if Plato’s advocacy of a thoroughgoing detachment from bodily pleasure is rooted in resentment or prudishness rather than systematic and careful

⁶⁸ A similar point is made by Ebrey (2017: 2).

⁶⁹ At first blush, the observation that philosophers practice affective detachment just serves as a powerful indication that they do in fact practice the separation of body and soul: having explained that philosophers distance themselves from bodily pleasures and material paraphernalia, Socrates draws on this bit of information to conclude that ‘it is obvious (δηλός ἐστιν) that the philosopher differs from other men in releasing his soul from its communion with the body (ἀπολύων ... τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ σώματος κοινωνίας διαφερόντως τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων, 64e8–65a2).’

philosophizing.⁷⁰ Up to this point, Socrates has given us no reason to accept that the philosopher should detach himself from the affective dimension of his body as long as he detaches himself from the cognitive dimension of his body. This, I argue, must be one of the main reasons why Woolf concludes that Plato ‘has more important things to do than make an idol or fetish out of withdrawal from bodily activity’⁷¹ and why Russell similarly rejects this stronger reading of the *Phaedo* on the grounds that it creates an unattractive Plato who has ‘very little to tell about how to live a good human life’ but instead asks us to ‘actively fight against [our] humanity and mortality’ and ‘to get by with the rubbish we’re stuck with until we can leave our humanity behind.’⁷²

One of the prime merits of the evaluative reading, in stark contrast, is that it provides an elegant account of the philosophical appeal of affective detachment which at the same time allows us to mitigate the otherworldliness of the *Phaedo*. In the hands of Russell,

⁷⁰ This point is well made by Moss (2006: 503–504) and applies more generally to Plato’s hedonic theorizing.

⁷¹ Woolf (2004: 104).

⁷² Woolf (2004: 85). In an important methodological sidenote, he argues that this is such a ‘strange and startling view’ that the burden of proof lies on those who claim that the *Phaedo* advertizes active behavioural avoidance of bodily pleasures. There are at least three additional problems with (Platonic) asceticism. Firstly, asceticism—the attempt to extirpate or excise our affective states—looks like an unnecessarily strong and less than admirable solution to the ethical problem posed by pleasure. As Nietzsche nicely puts it, ‘we no longer admire dentists who ‘pluck out’ teeth so that they will not hurt anymore.’ For Nietzsche’s, and a Nietzschean, criticism of Platonic asceticism, see Nehamas (1998: 139). Secondly, Weiss (1987: 64n15) argues that asceticism is not just ‘inferior than indifference,’ it actually signals—paradoxically enough—‘a preoccupation with pleasure.’ Thirdly, Nussbaum (1986: 154–155) claims that Plato’s argument for asceticism is circular: the Platonic philosopher rejects the body and its needs from the standpoint of someone who no longer sees the body and its needs as genuine parts of himself.

Socrates's take on the good life is no longer 'strange and startling' but gets transformed into a comfortable expression of contemporary axiology: pleasure is a conditional good that requires rational guidance rather than repression to manifest itself as something truly valuable.⁷³ Likewise, Woolf's Plato can be credited with the invention of a decidedly modern and philosophically appealing notion: what characterizes the good life, on this account, is the exercise of 'maximal psychological detachment' from bodily pleasure by attaching little value to the body and its affective states.⁷⁴

1.3. The Ascetic View Redux

The project of the rest of this chapter is to resist these attempts to water down Plato's defence of affective detachment. Even though the *Phaedo* presents a strange and radical picture of the good life and the place it reserves for pleasure—it does, indeed, defend a literal construal of affective detachment—Plato's thinking about this topic is nevertheless cogent, philosophically substantive, and tied to his central views.⁷⁵ The main problem Plato identifies with bodily pleasure, I submit, is

⁷³ It is not a coincidence, I take it, that Russell is heavily indebted to Korsgaard (1983).

⁷⁴ Woolf (2004: 109): the philosopher's attitude is one of 'maximal *psychological* detachment. This notion, mundane enough for us, is one that Socrates is trying to formulate in the *Phaedo* for perhaps the first time.'

⁷⁵ *Pace* Russell, Plato's eerie ideas about the good life as some kind of embodied death arguably deserve to be taken seriously *precisely because* they look so strange and startling to us. As Williams (2000: 478) has argued, the main philosophical point of reading Plato—and other historical figures for that matter—is the point of 'making the familiar look strange, and conversely.' It is not obvious, Williams continues, that we should read something written by Plato "as though it had come out in *Mind* last month'—an idea which, if it means anything at all, means something that destroys the main philosophical point of reading Plato at all.'

that it leads us astray with irresistibly deceptive appearances: the experience of bodily pleasure makes the material world appear to be real and clear, although it is not—thus directly undermining the philosopher’s attempt to move beyond the world of appearances.

Before we get there, though, I want to establish that the philosophical way of life is not just a matter of caring about the right things but that it also involves active abstention from bodily affect. Most basically, it strikes me that the mere fact that Socrates’s description of the philosophical way of life is framed in evaluative terms does not entail that behavioural avoidance of pleasure is excluded from playing a role in the good life. Indeed, I will argue that there are good reasons to resist the all too rigid suggestion that the philosophical way of life is either a matter of properly evaluating bodily pleasure or of actively avoiding it.

It could be the case, for instance, that each of these aspects—correct evaluation and actual behavioural avoidance of pleasure—highlights a different important ingredient of the good life. Depending on individual differences—how far you are on the philosophical path, for instance, or the specific problem a certain pleasure poses—it might be necessary to either actually avoid it or merely keep it at psychological distance by attaching no value to it.⁷⁶ Thus, if we try to adopt a new evaluative perspective (adopting a healthy lifestyle), we might need to reject the pleasures of eating chocolate cookies that were characteristic of our old evaluative perspective. Once the transformation is complete, though, we might reintegrate the pleasures we had to reject to get this new evaluative picture in view.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ For such a reading, see e.g. Marechal and Jones (2018). Remarkably enough, Woolf himself opts for such ‘interpretive multivalence’ (as he calls it) as well: unlike Russell—with whom he agrees that the second defence is best read evaluatively—he holds that the later bits of the *Phaedo* make more sense in light of an ascetic reading.

⁷⁷ This point is well made by Callard (2018: 169).

In addition, there seems to be an inexorable connection between valuation and action, that is to say, between having certain evaluative attitudes and behaving in a certain way.⁷⁸ As even Woolf admits, ‘Plato is too acute a psychologist to countenance that ... there is no linkage at all between behaviour and attitude.’⁷⁹ One very obvious reason for abstaining from bodily pleasures would of course be that one does not value—or actively disvalues—them and, conversely, it seems plausible that negative valuation of bodily pleasure is going to spill over into avoidant behaviour of the activities that give rise to such pleasure—especially in light of certain background theories.⁸⁰

I conclude, then, that even though it is undeniable that the philosophical way of life involves *negative evaluation* of the material world, it remains an open question whether it *also* includes *behavioural abstention* from bodily affective states. This is precisely what is at stake, exegetically speaking. To see whether this is the case, we can begin by having a closer look at what Socrates’s Second Defence has to say

⁷⁸ The distinction between the two is sometimes even straddled within Plato’s terms themselves. When the verb σπουδάζω is used at 64d2–3 (ἐσπουδακέναι), Fowler (1914: *ad loc.*) takes it evaluatively and translates it correctly as ‘to care much about something,’ but when the same verb appears at 114e4 (ἐσπούδασε), he—again correctly—translates it behaviourally as ‘to seek eagerly.’

⁷⁹ Woolf (2004: 103).

⁸⁰ I am thinking here in particular of Socratic and Platonic intellectualism, so-called hybrid theories of valuing—defended, for instance, by Scheffler (2001) who holds that valuing some x is not just a matter of having the evaluative belief that x is valuable but that it also involves (*inter alia*) ‘a disposition to treat certain kinds of considerations pertaining to [x] as reasons for action’—and dispositional accounts of belief as put forward by Ryle (1949) and Schwitzgebel (2002) and (2020) (on which someone believes that p if they tend to act and react in the way we would expect of someone who thinks p is true).

about affective detachment:

[T1.2] [a] [Socrates] Do you think it is the part of a philosopher to be eager about such so-called pleasures⁸¹ like the pleasures of food and drink (ἐσπουδακέναι περὶ τὰς ἡδονὰς καλουμένας τὰς τοιάσδε, οἷον σιτίων τε καὶ ποτῶν)?

[Simmias] By no means.

[Soc.] What about the pleasures of sex (τὰς τῶν ἀφροδισίων)?

[Sim.] Not at all.

[Soc.] What of the other services of the body (τὰς ἄλλας τὰς περὶ τὸ σῶμα θεραπείας)?⁸² Do you think such a man considers them valuable (ἐντίμους ἡγεῖσθαι), the acquisition of distinguished clothes and shoes and the other bodily ornaments? Do you think he values these or despises them (πότερον τιμᾶν δοκεῖ σοι ἢ ἀτιμάζειν), except in so far as he is absolutely compelled to take part in them (καθ' ὅσον μὴ πολλὴ ἀνάγκη μετέχειν αὐτῶν)?

[Sim.] I think the true philosopher despises them (ἀτιμάζειν).

[Soc.] Taking all things together, don't you think that such a man's practice is not concerned with the body (ἢ τοῦ τοιούτου πραγματεία οὐ περὶ τὸ σῶμα εἶναι) but that he aims to be withdrawn from the body, as far as he can, and to be turned towards his soul (καθ' ὅσον δύναται ἀφεστάναι αὐτοῦ, πρὸς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν τετραφθαι)?⁸³

[Sim.] I do.

[Soc.] So ... such things show clearly that the philosopher more than other men releases his soul from association with the body as much as possible (ἀπολύων ὅτι μάλιστα τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ σώματος κοινωνίας)?

[Sim.] Apparently.

[b] [Soc.] A man for whom none of these things are pleasant (ᾧ μηδὲν ἡδὺ τῶν τοιούτων) and who has no part in them (μηδὲ μετέχει αὐτῶν) is thought by the majority not to deserve to live; instead, they will think that

⁸¹ Cf. Jowett's (1930: *ad loc.*) stronger translation: 'the pleasures—if they are to be called pleasures—of the body.'

⁸² Cf. Grube's (1977: *ad loc.*) attractive alternative translation (which seemingly takes θεραπείας as a genitive and construes τὸ σῶμα as an accusative of respect): 'what of the other pleasures concerned with the service of the body?'

⁸³ As Rowe (1993:139) puts it, the philosopher's basic aim is 'to be concerned with the mind.'

someone who does not care for bodily pleasures (ὁ μηδὲν φροντίζων τῶν ἡδονῶν αἰ διὰ τοῦ σώματος εἶσιν) runs pretty close to being dead.

[Sim.] What you say is certainly true. (64d2–65a8)

One thing that immediately stands out from this bit of text is that the philosopher does not *care* about the material realm and its pleasures. Importantly, though, it looks as if lack of care, this negative evaluation, manifests itself in abstemious behaviour — as one would expect given Socrates’s belief that there is an inexorable connection between our evaluative beliefs and our actions.⁸⁴ The philosopher ‘regards [bodily pleasures] with little respect’ and indeed ‘disdains’ or ‘despises them’ — ‘*except in so far as he is absolutely compelled to take part in them (μετέχειν).*’ (my emphasis)

This does not just show that evaluation and action go hand in hand in (Socrates’s thinking about) the life of philosophy, it also indicates that behavioural abstention is an essential part of this way of life. Because the philosopher disvalues bodily pleasures and other externals, he generally avoids them as far as possible and only takes part in them when there is no way around it.⁸⁵

In part [b] of this passage, Socrates again speaks of behavioural avoidance and again this goes hand in hand with evaluative

⁸⁴ When expressing his dissatisfaction with Anaxagoras’ natural philosophy (95e8–102a3), Socrates betrays his intellectualist commitments: human action and choice is best explained by reference to the evaluative scheme we operate from. In a word, he seemingly believes that our evaluative judgment of what is best is the true αἰτία of our behaviour. For good discussion, see T. Butler (2012-b), T. Butler (2019), and Kamtekar (2017: 190–197).

⁸⁵ Note how strong this qualification is: the philosopher only engages with externals and physical pleasures when this is absolutely unavoidable. Cf. Rowe’s (1993: 138) gloss on καθ’ ὅσον μὴ πολλὴ ἀνάγκη μετέχειν αὐτῶν: ‘to the extent [whatever it may be] to which there is not great necessity for him to partake in them,’ i.e. ‘except in so far as it is absolutely necessary for him to concern himself with them.’

terminology: the things people usually enjoy ‘do not strike [the wisdom-lover] as pleasant’ and he ‘does not take part in them’ which is to say, in a word, that he just ‘does not care’ about these things. Here is the text again:

[T1.3] According to the majority of people (τοις πολλοῖς ἀνθρώποις), a man for whom none of these things are pleasant (ὃ μηδὲν ἡδὺ τῶν τοιούτων) and who has no part in them (μηδὲ μετέχει αὐτῶν) does not deserve to live (οὐκ ἄξιον εἶναι ζῆν); instead, one who does not care for the pleasures of the body (ὁ μηδὲν φροντίζων τῶν ἡδονῶν αἰ διὰ τοῦ σώματός εἰσιν) runs pretty close to being dead (ἐγγύς τι τείνειν τοῦ τεθνάναι).
What you say is certainly true.

To explain these stronger claims about behavioural abstention away, those in the evaluative camp have suggested that it occurs ‘as part of Socrates’s report of what the *many* think is a life worth living,’⁸⁶ even though these non-philosophical people ‘do not share, or much understand, the philosopher’s values.’⁸⁷ This would entail that what ordinary people say about the practice of affective detachment—that it involves rigorous abstention from bodily pleasure, say—is likely to get things wrong and that it can be taken with a grain of salt. Because their values and priorities are so shockingly different from those of the philosopher, there is no need to take seriously what Socrates presents as *their* summary of the life of philosophy.⁸⁸

I disagree: I think it makes more sense to assume, instead, that this description of the philosophical way of life get things right because it is Socrates’s own, whereas ‘the many’ merely go wrong in

⁸⁶ Woolf (2004: 100)

⁸⁷ Russell (2005: 88). To back up this point, he refers to 82d3–4: ‘Philosophers do not walk on the same paths as those who, in their view, don’t know where they are going.’

⁸⁸ Russell (2005: 88–89) and Woolf (2004: 100).

their understanding of how someone who lives such a life ‘runs pretty close to being dead’ or ‘deserves death.’ Put more precisely, even though Socrates and the majority of people agree that the philosophical way of life involves affective detachment (construed literally or behaviourally)—not caring about bodily pleasure as well as abstaining from it as a far as possible—they have different ideas about the way in which such a life amounts to some kind of death and whether it makes for a life worth living.

Note that [T1.3] (part [b] of [T1.2]) clearly echoes Socrates’s description of the philosophical way of life as presented in part [a] and barely deviates from it.⁸⁹ This tells against the suggestion that ordinary people misunderstand what such a life, practically speaking, amounts to. What they misunderstand, instead, is whether such a way of life counts as worthwhile or whether it is a kind of living death (in the colloquial sense of the word of not being a life worth living).

This makes good sense in light of the fact that Socrates had already accused the many of precisely this error. Right before, he claimed that ordinary people ‘aren’t aware in what sense genuine philosophers are verging on death and deserving of it (τῶ ὄντι οἱ φιλοσοφοῦντες θανατῶσι, καὶ σφᾶς γε οὐ λελήθασιν ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν τοῦτο πάσχειν, 64b4–6).’ For the majority of people, abstaining from pleasures and passions is extremely unattractive—it is a kind of living death and those who practice such detachment are alive but not *alive*⁹⁰—and *this* is what Socrates and the majority of people disagree

⁸⁹ ‘For whom none of these things are pleasant’ must echo Socrates reference to the ‘so-called’ bodily pleasures (Plato arguably denies that these experiences strictly speaking count as pleasures), ‘takes no part in these things’ echoes ‘not taking part unless absolutely unavoidable,’ and ‘caring nothing for these pleasures’ echoes the earlier evaluative talk of ‘not deeming [bodily pleasures] valuable’ or ‘disdaining [them].’

⁹⁰ As Callicles captures this sentiment in the *Gorgias* (492e5–6 and 494a6–b1), the person who has reached a desireless state by ‘filling himself up’ is no longer able to

about, I suggest, not whether the life of philosophy involves abstention from bodily pleasure.

This gives us some reason to opt for a stronger reading of the second defence passage. But even if we believed that the evaluative view should not be ruled out of court too hastily—up to this point the textual evidence might simply be insufficient to ground our choice of interpretation—I want to argue that the issue gets decided later in the *Phaedo*, towards the end of the Affinity Argument (78b4–84b8), where Socrates offers another ethical reflection, very similar to the one we find in his second defence.⁹¹

It is undeniable that Plato wants us to connect the earlier and the later ethical material and indeed treat it as a unified strand of argumentation. For one, Socrates explicitly refers back to the earlier defence passage and its discussion of the practice of death: between 80e3 and 81a2, we learn that the type of immortality worth wanting—everlasting bodiless communion with the Forms rather than, say, reincarnation as an animal—is conditional on whether one has been successful at separating one’s soul from the body and gathering one’s soul ‘itself by itself (αὐτὴ εἰς ἑαυτήν)’ by means of ‘the right practice of philosophy(ὀρθῶς φιλοσοφοῦσα),’ that is to say, by actively

experience pleasure and ‘that’s like living like a stone or a corpse.’ I agree, then, with Warren’s reading of this argument (2001: 103) who claims that Socrates’s opponents have ‘a conception of true living quite opposed to that of the philosophers. For the majority, truly to live is to indulge in pleasure and passions.’

⁹¹ See Ebrey (2017) and especially T. Butler (2012-a) both of whom have forcefully argued that the evaluative interpretation breaks down on this later treatment of the philosophical way of life. Perhaps surprisingly, the same goes for Woolf (2004: 119), whose plea for interpretive ‘multivalence’ is driven by the conviction that, unlike the evaluative interpretation, the ascetic reading fits the Affinity Argument ‘with no rough edges.’

engaging in ‘the cultivation of death (μελέτη θανάτου, 80e5–81a2).’⁹²

More importantly, this later examination of the philosophical way of life is not just ‘renewing’ or ‘repeating’ what has been said before, loosely ‘connected’ with it, or an ‘eigentlich überflüssige Wiederholung der Ermahnung zu einer kathartischen Lebensführung von 64a–69e,’ as many commentators have claimed.⁹³ Instead, I contend that this bit of text is a pivotal passage in the economy of the *Phaedo* because it provides the key to unlocking the interpretive problem we are trying to untangle here. It does not just establish beyond any doubt that affective detachment involves behavioural abstention from bodily pleasure, it also explains something absolutely crucial Socrates’s earlier treatment had left unexplained—it tells us *why* the philosopher abstains from bodily pleasure. Indeed, without it, Socrates’s Second Defence makes no sense whatsoever and fails to give us a reason to accept the austere ethical theory it espouses.⁹⁴

The main problem with bodily pleasure, or so I will argue, is that it misleads us about the world. More precisely, Socrates claims that it is impossible to experience bodily pleasure without being tricked into taking the sensible realm for more real and more substantive than it actually is while simultaneously losing touch with

⁹² There are more places where Socrates harks back to this earlier discussion: in his critical treatment of sense-perception, Socrates mention his earlier critique of sense-perception (79c2–8), he reiterates his plea for affective detachment (82c2–c8 and 83b4–7), and he also returns to the difference between the virtue of the philosopher as opposed to the second-rate virtue of ‘lovers of power and prestige.’ (82a11–b3)

⁹³ Gallop (1975: 137), Rowe (1993: 181), D. Frede (1999-a: 69). With his defence of interpretive multivalence and the suggestion that Socrates’s Second Defence is concerned with the question of *life* while the later bits of the Affinity Argument are concerned with the question of *death*, Woolf (2004: 123) is vulnerable to the same line of criticism.

⁹⁴ Apollini (1996: 8) is one of the few who recognizes this crucial point: ‘Without the Affinity Argument, one of Socrates’s most important doctrines throughout the dialogue is given no support precisely where we would expect to find it.’

the ontologically superior intelligible realm. This ontological confusion makes us ‘wallow in utter ignorance (ἐν πάσῃ ἀμαθίᾳ κυλινδουμένην, 82e4–5)’ while alive and, what is even worse, it also bars us from ‘having part in communion with the divine and pure and uniform (τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ τε καὶ καθαροῦ καὶ μονοειδοῦς συνουσίας, 83e2–3) after death. This makes it obvious, then, why the philosopher must abstain from bodily affective states like material pleasure and appetitive desire.

Before we get there, let us see how this later ethical discussion decides in favour of a stronger reading of affective detachment. In it, Socrates argues that those who organize their life around the ‘cultivation of death (μελέτη θανάτου, 81a2)’ and who ‘care for their soul and do not live for the service of their body (ἐκεῖνοι οἷς τι μέλει τῆς ἑαυτῶν ψυχῆς ἀλλὰ μὴ σώματι πλάττοντες ζῶσι, 82d2–3)’ ‘stay away’ or ‘abstain from (ἀπέχονται; ἀπέχεται, 82c3, 82c8, 83b6)’ bodily desires and pleasures. Although those in the evaluative camp were still able to massage the looser language of the second defence into an expression of metaphorical or psychological detachment, it strikes me that the verb ἀπέχεσθαι used here is most naturally taken behaviourally and thus suggestive of asceticism and abstention from bodily pleasure.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Cf. T. Butler (2012-a: 108). It might be worth noting that verb ἀπέχεσθαι is a cognate (and seemingly the opposite) of the verb μετέχειν, the negation of which (μὴ πολλὴ ἀνάγκη μετέχειν and μὴδὲ μετέχει) is used twice in Socrates’s second defence (at 64e1 and 65a5) to describe the philosopher’s relation with bodily pleasure. If ἀπέχεσθαι carries strong behavioural overtones, as it seems to do, this indicates that we should construe μετέχειν along similar lines which strengthens my behavioural reading of that earlier passage. Even Woolf (2004: 103n9) is willing to concede something like this: although he toys with the suggestion that Plato’s talk of ‘staying away’ simply means that the philosopher ‘keeps [pleasures] at arm’s length by not giving in to them’, he ultimately grants that ‘if there is a whiff of asceticism about such language, it is a sign that an ascetic reading is not to be ruled out of court.’ Slightly

Relatedly, Socrates's later treatment of affective detachment makes trouble for Russell's proposal that Plato treats pleasure as a conditional good. At 81a7–8, fears and sexual passion—two affective experiences—are called 'evils of the human condition (τῶν ἄλλων κακῶν τῶν ἀνθρωπείων)' and a little later Socrates argues that the philosopher should 'secure rest (γαλήνην τούτων παρασκευάζουσα, 84a7–8)' from bodily pleasures, dismissing these—and other elements of the human condition—as 'human evils (τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων κακῶν, 84b3).'⁹⁶

These considerations already put some pressure on the evaluative reading, but the more detailed account of affective detachment Socrates develops in the later part of the *Phaedo* seems decisive against this type of interpretation.⁹⁷ Recall that the evaluative view more or less boils down to the proposal that the philosopher can freely experience bodily pleasures as long as he maintains the appropriate psychological distance from these affective experiences (Woolf) or undergoes them under the guidance of virtue and reason (Russell).

In this later stretch of argumentation, however, Socrates claims that the experience of bodily pleasure unavoidably or necessarily undermines the philosophical enterprise of trying to separate the soul

earlier, he admits that the expression μηδὲ μετέχει αὐτῶν is 'explicitly suggestive of asceticism.'

⁹⁶ At 66b6, the body as such is called an evil and when Cebes refers back to Socrates's critical treatment of sense-perception and bodily pleasure, he talks about 'those evils you were recounting just now.' (70a7–8) The same goes for his third and final reflection on the life of philosophy (114e1–115a3) in which Socrates again makes it explicit that bodily pleasure does 'more harm than good.' *Pace* Russell, there is strong textual evidence, then, that Plato treats bodily pleasure as something bad rather than something (conditionally) good.

⁹⁷ For this strike against the evaluative view, see T. Butler (2012-a), Ebrey (2017), and the second half of Woolf (2004).

from the body and the material realm. When we experience bodily pleasure, Socrates argues, a necessary and unavoidable result of this experience is that our soul gets materialized or corporealized: it gets ‘nailed,’ ‘welded,’ ‘bound,’ or ‘glued’ to the body.⁹⁸ As a result, such a soul starts sharing the same nature or character and the same upbringing or nurturing as the body—it becomes *ὁμότροπος* and *ὁμότροφος* (83d8–9)—in the sense that it takes the sensible realm for more real and substantive than it actually is. This bars it from ‘having ... a part in the company of the divine, the pure, and uniform (τῆς τοῦ θείου τε καὶ καθαρῶ καὶ μονοειδοῦς συνουσίας, 83e2–3).’ Note that this effectively rules out the suggestion driving the evaluative view: Socrates’s more detailed account of affective detachment describes the detrimental effects of bodily pleasure as ‘unavoidable’ or ‘necessary’ (*ἀναγκάζεται*, 83c5 and 83d8) in the soul of ‘every person (*παντὸς ἀνθρώπου*, 83c5)’—including the seasoned, psychologically detached philosopher.

2. Tricked by Pleasure: The Deception Argument

Having established that the philosophical way of life involves active avoidance of bodily pleasure, my next aim is to offer a more careful

⁹⁸ To be sure, there is an outright clash between Socrates’s talk of gluing, binding, nailing, or imprisoning the soul—making it *σωματοειδές*, in brief—and the central tenet of the Affinity Argument. Indeed, the very notion of a materialized soul looks like a *contradictio in terminis*. Most obviously, if the soul is like a body, it is *visible* (81c9), but according to the Affinity Argument, one of the defining features of souls is that they are essentially *invisible* (79a6–7). See Dorter (1976: 303); Russell (2005: 99n46); Gallop (1975: 143); and Hackforth (1972: 46) for this problem. Interpretive charity seemingly requires us to believe, then, as Dorter (1976: 303) also concludes, that Socrates must be talking metaphorically.

examination of the argument Socrates offers in defence of this position. The basic idea driving this argument is straightforward: the most serious problem with bodily pleasure is that it surreptitiously harms us. If we do not abstain from bodily pleasure and other affective experiences, we risk incurring ‘the greatest and most extreme of all evils’—even though people ‘do not take this into account.’ Here is Socrates’s argument:

[T1.4] [Socrates] It is just because it believes it should not oppose this release (τῆ λύσει) [of the soul from the body] that the soul of the true philosopher abstains, so far as it can, from pleasures and desires and pains (ἢ τοῦ ὡς ἀληθῶς φιλοσόφου ψυχῆ οὕτως ἀπέχεται τῶν ἡδονῶν τε καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ λυπῶν καθ’ ὅσον δύναται), reckoning that when one feels intense pleasure or fear, pain or desire (σφόδρα ἡσθη ἢ φοβηθῆ ἢ λυπηθῆ ἢ ἐπιθυμήσῃ), one incurs harm from them not merely to the extent that might be supposed—by being ill, for example, or spending money to satisfy one’s desires—but one incurs the greatest and most extreme of all evils (ὁ πάντων μέγιστόν τε κακῶν καὶ ἔσχατόν) and does not take it into account (οὐ λογίζεται αὐτό).

[Cebe] And what is that, Socrates?

[S.] It is that the soul of every man, when it feels intense pleasure or pain in connection with some object, inevitably believes at the same time that what causes such feelings must be most clear and most real,⁹⁹ even though it is not (ἡγεῖσθαι περὶ ὃ ἂν μάλιστα τοῦτο πάσχη, τοῦτο ἐναργέστατόν τε εἶναι καὶ ἀληθέστατον, οὐχ οὕτως ἔχον). Such objects are mostly visible (ταῦτα μάλιστα τὰ ὁρατά), are they not?

[C.] Certainly.

[S.] And isn’t it in such an experience that the soul is most completely imprisoned¹⁰⁰ by the body (ἐν τούτῳ τῷ πάθει μάλιστα καταδεῖται ψυχῆ

⁹⁹ Along with Hackforth (1972: *ad loc.*), we could equally take the superlatives as intensives: ‘transparently clear and utterly real.’ Cf. Gallop (1975:145).

¹⁰⁰ Like Fowler (1914: *ad loc.*), and unlike most translations, I opt for this stronger translation of καταδεῖται: this translation rhymes perfectly with the earlier claim that by gluing or binding the soul to the body, desire (arguably teaming up with pleasure)

ὑπὸ σώματος)?

[C.] How so?

[S.] Because every pleasure or pain rivets the soul, as if with a nail, to the body, welds them together, and makes it corporeal (ἐκάστη ἡδονὴ καὶ λύπη ὥσπερ ἦλον ἔχουσα προσηλοῖ αὐτὴν πρὸς τὸ σῶμα καὶ προσπερονᾷ καὶ ποιεῖ σωματοειδῆ), taking for real whatever the body declares to be real (δοξάζουσιν ταῦτα ἀληθῆ εἶναι ἅπερ ἂν καὶ τὸ σῶμα φῆ).¹⁰¹ As it shares the beliefs and delights of the body (τοῦ ὁμοδοξεῖν τῷ σώματι καὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς χαίρειν), I think it inevitably becomes of the same character and nurture as the body (ὁμότροπός τε καὶ ὁμότροφος) and is unable ever to reach Hades in a pure state (εἰς Αἴδου καθαρῶς ἀφικέσθαι). Instead, it is always full of body (τοῦ σώματος ἀναπλέα) when it departs, so that it soon falls back into another body (πίπτειν εἰς ἄλλο σῶμα) and grows with it as if it had been sewn into it (ὥσπερ σπειρομένη ἐμφύεσθαι). Because of this, it can have no part in the company of the divine, the pure and uniform (ἄμοιρος εἶναι τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ τε καὶ καθαρῆς καὶ μονοειδοῦς συνουσίας). (83b4–83e3)

This strand of argumentation picks up on two of Socrates's earlier remarks. When describing the fate of different souls after death—some purified by philosophy, others polluted by their interaction with the body—Socrates had already hinted at the idea that pleasure avails itself of deception to sabotage our grasp of reality:

creates a prison—the body, that is—through which the soul is forced to look at the world.

¹⁰¹ It strikes me that the participle clause *δοξάζουσιν ταῦτα ἀληθῆ εἶναι ἅπερ ἂν καὶ τὸ σῶμα φῆ* is most naturally taken explicatively, that is to say, it serves as an *explanation* of what the fusion of body and soul or the corporealization of the latter comes down to. What it means for a soul to have been corporealized, on this construal, is that such a materialized soul shares the mistaken, far too narrow sense of reality of the body. Cf. 81b1–c2. Others take the expression causally (sharing the body's beliefs *brings about* corporealization) or consecutively (sharing the body's beliefs is a *result of* corporealization).

[T1.5] [A polluted, impure soul] has always been with the body, has served and loved it, and has been so tricked by it and by its desires and pleasures that it thinks nothing else real save what is corporeal (γοητευομένη ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ὑπό τε τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ ἡδονῶν ὥστε μηδὲν ἄλλο δοκεῖν εἶναι ἀληθές ἀλλ' ἢ τὸ σωματοειδές)—what can be touched and seen, drunk and eaten, or used for sexual enjoyment (οὐ τις ἂν ἄψαιτο καὶ ἴδοι καὶ πίοι καὶ φάγοι καὶ πρὸς τὰ ἀφροδίσια χρῆσαιτο)—yet is has been accustomed to hate and shun and tremble before what is obscure to the eyes and invisible, but intelligible and grasped by philosophy (τὸ δὲ τοῖς ὄμμασι σκοτῶδες καὶ αἰδέεσ, νοητὸν καὶ φιλοσοφία ἀίρετόν). (81b1–c2)

The argument is also closely connected with the passage that comes right before. In it, Socrates describes the tragic predicament of most people—instead of seeing reality face to face, they are looking at the world ‘through a scanner darkly’ of their own making—but he also maintains that practicing death offers a way out:

[T1.6] When philosophy takes [our] soul in her hand, it has been entirely glued and bound to the body (ἀτεχνῶς διαδεδεμένην ἐν τῷ σώματι καὶ προσκεκολλημένην) and is forced to view the things that are through the body as if through a prison rather than alone by itself (ὥσπερ διὰ εἰργμοῦ διὰ τούτου σκοπεῖσθαι τὰ ὄντα ἀλλὰ μὴ αὐτὴν δι' αὐτῆς) and that is wallowing in utter ignorance. Now philosophy discerns the cunning of the prison, sees how it is effected through desire (δι' ἐπιθυμίας), so that the captive himself may co-operate most of all in his imprisonment. (82d9–e7)

The Deception Argument, as I will call it, has received surprisingly little attention in the recent literature on the *Phaedo*.¹⁰² Its importance

¹⁰² Clerk-Shaw (2005: 125n26) spends one brief footnote on it; Gosling and Taylor (1982: 85) briefly discuss the argument and rightly claim that Plato's use of the verb γοητεύειν suggests that bodily desire and pleasures ‘make one take as real what is in some sense or other unreal,’ although I will go on to disagree with how they unpack this proposal; Gallop (1975: 145) spends one sentence on it; Rowe (1993: 197–198)

is hard to overestimate, though. For starters, the argument drives some of Plato's harshest remarks about pleasure in the whole Platonic oeuvre and it promises to grant us some insight into the most alarming problem associated with pleasure. It also plays a crucial role in Socrates's defence of the immorality of the soul. These two aspects are intertwined: the problem with pleasure identified here seems to be that it corporealizes the soul and, as the Affinity Argument suggests, such a materialized soul cannot reach everlasting, bodiless communion with the unseen order of the Forms upon biological death.¹⁰³

Lastly and most importantly—at least for the purposes of this dissertation—it strikes me that Socrates adds a new type of deception to the Platonic taxonomy of hedonic illusions. As we learn in the *Republic* (413b4–c3), pleasure often 'deprives people of a true belief (ἀληθοῦς δόξης στειρίσκεισθαι)' and makes them change their mind by 'putting them under a spell ὑφ' ἡδονῆς κηληθέντες' or 'tricking them (γοητευθέντες).'¹⁰⁴ By connecting pleasure with trickery,

virtually ignores it; Moss (2006: 533) merely notes, albeit correctly, that Plato is suggesting here that 'when we devote ourselves to pleasure, we accept a counterfeit reality and fail to seek out the true world that lies beyond appearances'; Moss (2021: 168) adds that the point of this passage is that 'it is part of the embodied human condition to think that what we perceive is what is real; only philosophical investigation can break that trust' and that 'this tendency is exacerbated by our appetites and passions'; and Ebrey (2017) and especially T. Butler (2012-a), finally, discuss this bit of text in more detail—albeit instrumentally and with an eye to arguing that this stretch of text undermines the evaluative view.

¹⁰³ See Woolf (2004: 112–115) for a tentative defence of the plausible claim that the Affinity Argument introduces a richer kind of immortality—immortality as a kind of immunity from death rather than continuous life—which it makes conditional on the soul's relationship with the body before death. For a more elaborate defence of a similar claim, see Rowett (2021: 93–117).

¹⁰⁴ They are 'victims of trickery (τοὺς γοητευθέντας)' who are 'under the spell of pleasure (ὑφ' ἡδονῆς κηληθέντες).'

jugglery, or bewitchment (γοητεία)—as he does in [T1.4] and elsewhere in the corpus—Plato means to draw a link between pleasure and deception.¹⁰⁵

This makes sense: Plato's suspicion of pleasure stems—to a significant degree at least—from his conviction that pleasure is inexorably connected with illusion.¹⁰⁶ Plato typically complains that pleasure misleads us about what matters or about itself (its size or intensity, for instance, or its reality), but here we find a different type of hedonic illusion: pleasure deceives us about the reality of the visible, sensible, material world in which we find ourselves.¹⁰⁷

The gist of Socrates's line of thought in the Deception Argument is easy to grasp. Bodily affect is troublesome because it is cognitively harmful: desires, pains, and pleasures produce false and confused beliefs in our souls.¹⁰⁸ What is also fairly clear is that these false beliefs are the result of illusion: as [T1.4] has it, bodily pleasure is deceptive because it makes us lose contact with reality and tricks us into thinking 'nothing else is real save what is corporeal.'

This emphasis on deception jibes nicely with Plato's other complaints about the body and its affective states. In his second defence, Socrates claimed that when we engage in sense-perception,

¹⁰⁵ Pleasure deceives, Socrates points out in the *Republic*, and 'everything that deceives seems to bewitch (ἔοικε ... γοητεύειν πάντα ὅσα ἀπατᾶ, 413c4).' Although Ebrey (2017: 4) is surely right that the verb γοητεύειν suggests that bodily desires and pleasures 'make the soul a willing partner, but not for good reasons,' the crucial point here is that it does so by means of *deception* or *illusion*: it makes things look different than they really are. For some comments, see Gosling and Taylor (1982: 85) and Ebrey (2017: 4).

¹⁰⁶ See Clerk-Shaw (2015), Moss (2006), and, before them, Mooradian (1992).

¹⁰⁷ In her seminal paper, Moss (2006) briefly hints at this type of deception but her focus lies on evaluative illusion (instances where pleasure represents something as (all-things-considered) good, although it is bad or neutral).

¹⁰⁸ Following Fletcher (2018-a: 22).

our soul ‘gets completely deceived by the body (ἐξαπατᾶται ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ, 65b10–11) and this is so, as we discover later, because ‘inquiry through the eyes and ears and other sense is full of deceit (ἀπάτης ... μεστή ἢ ... σκέψις, 83a3–5).’¹⁰⁹

Back in the second defence, Socrates also complained that the body fills us up ‘with lusts, desires, fears, all sorts of deceptive images and cheat and illusion (ἐρώτων δὲ καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ φόβων καὶ εἰδώλων παντοδαπῶν καὶ φλυαρίας) so that in truth and in fact we are never able to know anything (66c3–4),’¹¹⁰ and the Right Exchange passage argued that the so-called virtue of implicitly hedonistic ‘body-lovers’ is ‘untrustworthy (οὐδὲν ὑγιές)’ and ‘like some sort of a *trompe l’oeil* painting (σκιαγραφία, 69b7–8).’ That is to say, it merely *looks* like virtue but does not really count as such.

What is more, according to some scholars at least, the *Phaedo* also seems to contain an inchoate and embryonic expression of the famous Platonic idea that (some) bodily pleasures are *themselves* deceptive.¹¹¹ Between 60b3 and 60c7, Socrates claims that there is something absurd about ‘what the majority of people call pleasure (τοῦτο ὃ καλοῦσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἡδύ).’ The mere removal or cessation

¹⁰⁹ For a radical interpretation of these claims, according to which perception is always deceptive or illusory, see Baltzley (1996).

¹¹⁰ Following Shorey’s (1935: 132) quite severe translation of φλυαρία as used in the Allegory of the Cave to describe the shadows on the wall; in the same context, Scott (2015: 92) translates φλυαρία as what is ‘superficial’ (in comparison with deeper reality). When the word occurs at *Symposium* 211e3, Nussbaum (2001: 497) opts for ‘(mortal) rubbish’ and explains that the word indicates ‘disdain for the pettiness of mortal pursuits.’

¹¹¹ See Clerk-Shaw (2005: 125n26); Gallop (1975: 76); Gosling and Taylor (1982: 85); Hackforth (1972: 33n2); Mouroutsou (2019: 571n19); and Rowe (1993: 118–119), all of whom are sympathetic to this reading although they refrain from developing it in any detail. For a deflationary reading of this passage, see Erginel (2019: 116–118). Gosling and Taylor (1982: 86) might be right, though, that ‘in view of its untheoretical context, it would be unwise to press it into a statement of a theoretical position.’

of pain does arguably not really count as pleasure: such ‘so-called pleasure,’¹¹² the thought goes, is not genuine but merely apparent. As Socrates’s own example has it, ‘my bonds caused pain in my leg, and now pleasure *seems* to be following (ἦκειν φαίνεται ἐπακολουθοῦν τὸ ἡδύ, 60c7)’ – the implication being that it is not *really* following.¹¹³

To say that the Deception Argument identifies a link between pleasure and illusion and that its basic proposal is that pleasure foists false and confused beliefs upon us is correct as far as it goes, but it does not go very far. It remains especially unclear what the nature of these false beliefs is and what the underlying mechanics behind this sketchy process of belief-formation looks like. According to a widespread take on this passage, bodily desire and pleasure¹¹⁴ mislead us by twisting our grasp of what matters. When we are in the grip of appetitive desire and bodily pleasure, the thought goes, we are lured into thinking that unimportant things are valuable and worth pursuing.

Thus, Nussbaum maintains that Socrates’s point here is that ‘the appetites provide us with a constant very strong incentive to make false judgments about value and worth.’ More specifically, ‘they ‘bewitch’ the soul into thinking bodily activities more important than

¹¹² For similar alienating uses of this adjective, which cast doubt on the noun they modify, see e.g. 64d3 (τὰς ἡδονὰς καλουμένας), 68c5 (ἡ ὀνομαζομένη ἀνδρεία), and 68c8–9 (ἡ σωφροσύνη, ἦν καὶ οἱ πολλοὶ ὀνομάζουσι σωφροσύνην). In all these instances, we are not dealing with *real* or *genuine* pleasure or virtue.

¹¹³ This can be confirmed on grammatical grounds: it is often held – as a rule of thumb at least – that φαίνεσθαι with an infinitive, as we are dealing with here, is reserved for a negative use of φαίνεσθαι (mere appearance rather than a manifestation of reality). For excellent discussion and some important qualifications, see Notomi (1999: 91–94).

¹¹⁴ Plato is usually quite careless in his use of these terms and he often mentions them in one and the same breath: taken together, they seem best understood as some kind of clinging, craving attraction to things in the material realm.

contemplation.¹¹⁵ In a similar vein, Ebrey argues that ‘pleasures change which things we think are good,’¹¹⁶ Russell holds that the problem with bodily pleasures is that they lure us into ‘identifying the concerns of such pleasures ... as the things that really matter,’¹¹⁷ Butler writes that the worst evil caused by pleasure is ‘a specific belief about which objects are most clear and true and, thus, ... most worthy of attention and pursuit,’¹¹⁸ and Gosling and Taylor—to give a final example—offer the following gloss on this argument: bodily pleasures ‘make one think that a certain experience is *really* good, when in fact it is only good to a limited extent [or] under certain conditions.’¹¹⁹

In sum, then, the typical reading of this argument suggests that Socrates is primarily worried about *evaluative mistakes*: bodily pleasure misleads us about what is valuable and what is not. It creates evaluative confusion, in other words. Even though this reading of the Deception Argument hints at the intuitive and plausible idea that there is a close tie between pleasure and the good—as Butler puts it, ‘it is difficult to imagine someone sincerely denying in thought while in the throes of ecstasy that the affecting object is good’¹²⁰—it lacks textual support. Just note what Socrates claims in [T1.4]: when our soul gets tricked by the body, ‘it thinks nothing else is real save what is corporeal (μηδὲν ἄλλο δοκεῖν εἶναι ἀληθὲς ἀλλ’ ἢ τὸ σωματοειδές)—what can be touched and seen, drunk and eaten, or used for sexual enjoyment.’

This earlier statement returns in the later passage ([T1.3]), but Socrates adds some sort of explanation of the underlying mechanism

¹¹⁵ Nussbaum (1986: 152).

¹¹⁶ Ebrey (2017: 8).

¹¹⁷ Russell (2005: 85).

¹¹⁸ T. Butler (2012-a: 106).

¹¹⁹ Gosling and Taylor (1982: 85).

¹²⁰ T. Butler (2019: 173). Cf. Millgram (1993: 404)

which assigns a central role to our affective experiences:

[T1.7] When it feels ... pleasure or pain in connection with some object [especially the things located in the visible, material realm], the soul of every human being is forced to believe at the very same time that the thing, concerning which it is so very much affected, must be transparently clear and utterly real, although it is not (ψυχὴ παντὸς ἀνθρώπου ἀναγκάζεται ἅμα τε ἡσθῆναι σφόδρα ἢ λυπηθῆναι ἐπὶ τῷ καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι περὶ ὃ ἂν μάλιστα τοῦτο πάσχη, τοῦτο ἐναργέστατόν τε εἶναι καὶ ἀληθέστατον, οὐχ οὕτως ἔχον). (83c5–8)

When this happens, Socrates continues, the soul ‘takes for real whatever the body declares to be so (δοξάζουσιν ταῦτα ἀληθῆ εἶναι ἅπερ ἂν καὶ τὸ σῶμα φῆ)’ and starts ‘sharing [its] beliefs (τοῦ ὁμοδοξεῖν τῷ σώματι, 83d6–7).’¹²¹

Whatever we make of this, Socrates is clearly not claiming that pleasure makes invaluable things seem valuable—even though this might be a corollary of the actual line of thought he is developing here. The problem is rather that bodily desire and pleasure make us take

¹²¹ This is not the only place in the Platonic corpus where Socrates mentions a connection between experiencing a lower type of pleasure and having a distorted view of ultimate reality. The same imagery of the body as a gravitational field pulling us down from the transcendent realm of the Forms is used a bit earlier in the *Phaedo* (81c4–10): the soul of those who get tricked by bodily desire and pleasure through ‘constant association and much training’ is ‘weighed down, and dragged back into the region of the seen’ thanks to a corporeal, ponderous, heavy, earthy, and visible element that gets interspersed with their soul. Most famously, the Allegory of the Cave (519a7–b5) depicts ‘feasting, greed, and other such pleasures’ as bonds that fasten our souls to the sensible world of ‘becoming’ and as ‘leaden weights’ that pull our vision downwards, away from the higher reality of the Forms. And book 10 of the *Republic* (612a1–3) similarly blames the incrustation of the soul on pleasure: ‘the many stones and shells have grown all over [the soul] in a wild, earthy, and stony profusion because it feasts at those so-called happy feastings on earth.’

visible, corporeal, or bodily things—the objects of our pleasures—for ‘most real and most clear,’ although they are not. One of the cornerstones of Platonism, after all, is that these labels only apply to the ‘really real reality’¹²² of the Forms. Socrates is not worried about evaluative mistakes, then, he is worried about *ontological mistakes*: the most pressing problem with bodily pleasure is that it creates ontological confusion.

Still, the argument leaves a lot open and rather vague. Socrates does not specify what notion of truth the argument is operating with nor does he clarify the underlying mechanics responsible for the ontological confusion brought about by bodily pleasure. Let me take these issues in turn. It is obviously beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a full discussion of Plato’s theory of truth.¹²³ What I want to do here, instead, is canvass two possible ways in which we might understand Socrates’s proposal that bodily pleasures inflate the reality of the underlying objects and make them project their identity more forcefully than is warranted.

When Plato speaks of genuineness or reality—attributive truth, that is—to mark the difference between the intelligible realm of the Forms and the perceptible, material, or sensible world, we find broadly two types of usage.¹²⁴ On a first type of usage, the Forms are called true in the sense that they are originals in contrast with mere εἰδωλα—images, sham imitations, simulacra, fakes, facsimiles, or deficient copies—we find around us in the physical, perceptible world. The relevant contrast here is the contrast between a perfect exemplar (the Form) and its imperfect, transitory instantiation in the

¹²² This idiomatic Platonic expression—literally ‘a being beingly being (οὐσία ὄντως οὐσα)’—is found in *Phaedrus* 247c7.

¹²³ For good discussion, see e.g. Vlastos (1965-a), Vlastos (1965-b), Moss (2021), Szaif (1996), Szaif (2018).

¹²⁴ Cf. Szaif (2018: 20).

sensible domain.

On this construal, Socrates's point would be that bodily pleasure somehow makes us lose touch with the fact that our hedonic object is an ontologically deficient semblance rather than the real deal. While in the cinema, to give an example, we might get so absorbed and pulled into the movie—being swept along by strong emotions such as aesthetic pleasure or downright horror—that we lose touch with the fact that we are actually looking at pixels of light projected on a screen and that the seamless, moving image is in fact just a series of distinct pictures following each other in rapid succession. What we thought was real, is not really real: we are merely looking at what is a fake or (at best) an imitation rather than what is genuine or authentic.

Similarly, to extrapolate this example to the *Phaedo*, bodily pleasure tricks us into mistaking a sham imitation for the truth: it makes us lose touch with the fact that our hedonic object—the thing we are enjoying—is just 'a shadowy sort of thing' (Cornford) or a 'dim adumbration' (Shorey), as Socrates puts it in *Republic* 10, 'by comparison with reality (ἀμυδρόν τι ... πρὸς ἀλήθειαν, 597a10).'

There is a second type of usage.¹²⁵ On this construal, the Forms are called true in the sense that they are pure and unmixed in contrast with the impure and mixed sensible instances we find around us and which are subject of mixture or what is often called the compresence of opposites.¹²⁶ The view here is that the Forms are vivid, clear, or lucid—cognitively reliable, dependable, or visible, as Vlastos calls this characteristic—whereas the perceptible instantiations are obscure or shadowy, unclear, and messy. In sharp contrast to the Forms, every

¹²⁵ I am leaning heavily on Szaif's (2018) excellent discussion here (especially section 1.2.2).

¹²⁶ Roughly speaking, something suffers from the compresence of opposites when two members of a pair of opposites or contraries are simultaneously (or successively) present in the thing at hand.

sensible particular that is *F* is, in some sense, also *G* (*F*'s contrary) or non-*F*. As a result, they are not cognitively reliable or dependable but *deceiving*: because they are not exclusively *F*—but *F* and non-*F* as well—they can only give us a confused and uncertain idea of what it means to be an unadulterated *F*.¹²⁷

On this construal, which ties in neatly with Socrates's claim that bodily pleasure makes its hedonic object look 'transparently clear (ἐναργέστατον),' Plato's point would be that bodily pleasure lures us into thinking that some hedonic object is genuinely, unqualifiedly, absolutely *F*, although this very object manifests itself in other contexts as *G* (the opposite of *F*) or at least non-*F* as well. Put differently, what we take to be *F* is adulterated by contrary characters and hence cognitively undependable.

An example might help. While in the throes of sexual ecstasy, for instance, we might be lured into thinking that our partner is unqualifiedly beautiful, although he or she is in fact merely qualifiedly beautiful. As Socrates puts it in the *Symposium*, the individual object of our erotic love is in fact just a shadowy adumbration of the 'unalloyed, pure, unmixed, unified' Form of Beauty itself 'trapped in a sea of human flesh and colors and lots of other mortal rubbish (αὐτὸ τὸ καλὸν ... εἰλικρινές, καθαρὸν, ἄμεικτον, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἀνάπλεων σαρκῶν τε ἀνθρωπίνων καὶ χρωμάτων καὶ ἄλλης πολλῆς

¹²⁷ Vlastos (1965-b: 63). Thus, according to the *Philebus*, the 'truest (ἀληθέστατον)' white is the 'purest' or 'most unmixed (τὸ ἀκρατέστατον, 53a5–b3)' white—the white least adulterated by other colours. Tellingly, the release from the Cave is described as turning from darkness to the light culminating in 'the brightest of realities (τοῦ ὄντος τὸ φανότατον, 518c9)'—the Form of the Good. Indeed, in the intelligible world, truth and reality 'shine forth (καταλάμπει)' whereas the sensible world is 'mixed with darkness (τὸ τῷ σκότῳ κεκραμένον, 508d2–6)'. For more Platonic examples, see Vlastos (1965-b: 62–63).

φλυαρίας θνητῆς, 211e1–3).'¹²⁸

To turn to the second issue, the argument also fails to shed light on the bridge between our hedonic experiences and these confused ontological beliefs about the reality of the sensible domain.¹²⁹ How exactly do our affective experiences infiltrate our view of reality and distort our perception of the world? Why is bodily pleasure precisely so irresistibly compelling that it, so to speak, grabs us by the hair and forces us into assent—to use a Stoic metaphor? *That* there is a link between our sense of reality and our affective reactions seems plausible. Whether or not pleasures shape our sense of reality, our sense of reality clearly shapes our pleasures. If someone points out to me, for instance, that the painting I am currently enjoying is not a genuine van Gogh but a forgery, this will dampen my pleasure.¹³⁰

Although this gives us *some* clue about a possible correlation between affect and our cognition of the world, note that Socrates is arguing that the correlation runs in the other direction. His view is that our affect confuses our cognition by inflating the reality and clarity of the sensible world around us, not the other way around. Unfortunately, the *Phaedo* does not give us a lot to work with. As regards the underlying causal mechanism, we can only speculate and offer educated guesses. In closing, I want to offer two possible ways in which we might bridge the gap between the experience of bodily

¹²⁸ For discussion, see e.g. Nussbaum (2001: 495). Note that this creates a backdoor through which the evaluative view can enter the picture again: the problem with pleasure is that it makes what is merely qualifiedly or derivatively good look good in some unqualified or absolute sense.

¹²⁹ Beere (2011: 269) is one of the few who notes that Plato owes us an explanation of the strong link between the pleasure and the belief.

¹³⁰ Williams (1959). Going from examples like these, the psychologist Paul Bloom (2010) has argued, quite Platonically, that the 'depth' of pleasure (as he calls it) is hidden from us: 'our pleasure is affected by deeper factors, including what the person thinks about *the true essence of what he or she is getting pleasure from.*' (my emphasis)

pleasure and the mistaken ontological beliefs they bring about.

One promising explanation might be that, like other strong *πάθη*, bodily pleasure cognitively impairs us.¹³¹ This idea is more elaborately developed by Aristotle who claims that our rational faculty is sometimes impaired or ‘covered over’ by a *πάθος* which makes us prone, or more prone, to deception. To put it in Aristotle’s own words, ‘we are easily deceived in our perceptions when we are undergoing *πάθη*.’ Indeed, ‘all people become more prone to deception when they are angry or undergoing any appetite, and the more so the more strongly they are undergoing the *πάθος*.’¹³²

The thought here seems to be that when a (strong) *πάθος* dislodges our rational faculty, our higher self is no longer able to perform its main function of noticing and contradicting false or misleading appearances.¹³³ When we are asleep, to use Aristotle’s own example, our rational faculty is no longer able to resist or contradict the deceptive, dreamlike appearances we are faced with. Sleep interferes with our ability to notice the difference between real and clear things and mere dreamlike appearances.

Similarly, while in the grip of anger, Ajax—whose mind and vision have been clouded by Athena—mistakes a flock of sheep for the Achaean leaders (including Agamemnon and Odysseus) and when struck by grief or lovesickness, people often mistake random strangers for their ex-partner or deceased loved one. Lastly, to give another Aristotelian example, ‘lines on the walls sometimes appear to feverish people to be animals from a slight similarity in how the lines are put

¹³¹ See Moss (2009) and Moss (2012: 100–133).

¹³² *On Dreams* 460b3–16 and *On the Soul* III.3, 429a5–8.

¹³³ Moss (2009: 135). The cognitive impairment might have to do with lack of attention or distraction, in which case pleasure would somehow bar the salient facts from entering our conscious awareness.

together.’¹³⁴ Precisely this mechanism is also at play in the example I provided above: strong emotional engagement—the experience of dread while watching a horror movie—impairs our ability to separate fabrication from truth and notice that we are dealing with a less than fully real imitation or simulacrum.

If we extrapolate this model to the *Phaedo*, the view driving the Deception Argument would turn out to be something like this. When we are in the grip of bodily pleasure and appetitive desire, our critical ability or rational cognition—our λογισμός as Plato calls this ability in the *Republic*¹³⁵—gets temporarily shut down. As a result, we are no longer able to deny the content of our experiences but get cheated into taking the misleading, ontologically defective appearance we are confronted with for what is real and clear.

This gives us one promising way to understand Socrates’s earlier claims that bodily pleasure ‘bothers (παραλυπῆ, 65c6)’ our intellect and ‘sets up a clamour and disturbance (θόρυβον παρέχει καὶ ταραχὴν, 66d6)’ when our higher self tries to cognize the truth. Socrates describes a similar process in *Republic* 9: there, in his discussion of defective and deceptive pleasure, he argues that the Trojans were unable to see the εἶδωλον of Helen for what it was because they were ‘ignorant of the truth’ thanks to being in the grip of ‘mad erotic passions.’ In all these cases, or so I suggest, brute affect clouds our minds, blurs our vision, and casts a veil between ourselves and what is actually going on outside our heads.

Another plausible explanation of the way in which bodily affect makes us lose touch with reality might be that bodily pleasure is more than a brute surge of affect. On this explanation, the belief that the hedonic object is ‘transparently clear and utterly real’ is, as it were,

¹³⁴ *On Dreams* 460b3–16.

¹³⁵ See Moss (2008).

built into the state of being pleased.¹³⁶ The thought would be that pleasure *just is* a way of taking the world to be a certain way similar to belief, perception, or other representational states. On this view, then, our bodily pleasures are—at least partially—constituted by the belief that their hedonic object is highly vivid and fully real: enjoying a piece of chocolate cake is neither more nor less than taking that piece of chocolate cake to be real and clear.

Even though this proposal lacks direct textual support,¹³⁷ it can provide a neat explanation of the close and bidirectional connection between experiencing bodily pleasure on the one hand and taking the world to be a certain way on the other. If being pleased in some sense *just is* taking the world to be a certain way, this explains quite neatly why our sense of reality shapes our pleasures and why our sense of reality shapes our pleasures.

It is important to note that these two explanations do not have to be mutually exclusive. If we take them together, Plato's claim is that, dangerously enough, pleasure is representational state which at the same time dislodges our ability to deny the false content of that very pleasure itself. This proposal would also be able to account for the fact that Plato seemingly draws a difference between sense-perception and bodily pleasure. Although the philosopher is able to detach himself psychologically from sense-perception by keeping its deliverances at

¹³⁶ Beere (2011: 269): 'The soul is not forced into such a belief just as a causal consequence of being pleased or pained; rather, such a belief partly constitutes the state of being pleased or pained.' More specifically, Beere claims that pleasure is partly constituted by the evaluative belief that something is good.

¹³⁷ Note, though, that Plato is generally sympathetic to the idea that pleasure constitutes some kind of openness to the world: pleasure is often associated with perception (e.g. at *Phaedo* 65c, *Theaetetus* 156b, and *Timaeus* 69c–d)—for discussion see Moss (2006) and (2008)—and, on the readings I will be defending in chapter 2 and 3 of this dissertation, the *Philebus* and the *Republic* claim that pleasure is a special way of taking certain states of affairs in the world to be the case.

arm's length and by denying the content of his perceptual experiences, this proposal is able to elucidate the Platonic conviction that bodily pleasure—the affective dimension of our embodiment—is highly problematic. Bodily affect is precisely so dangerous because a mistaken ontological belief is built into its very essence and because it short-circuits the rationality that might be able to question these mistaken ontological beliefs. Although the Platonic philosopher often questions the perceptual information he receives, bodily affect is irresistibly compelling: it silences the demand for justification and further inquiry.¹³⁸

4. Conclusion

Pleasure is an important theme in Plato's *Phaedo*. In the framework of the dialogue, Phaedo tells Echecrates that 'remembering Socrates is the greatest pleasure of all (πάντων ἥδιστον, 58d6)' and towards the end of the dialogue, Socrates points out that, despite appearances, philosophers do in fact care about pleasure: they 'seriously concern themselves with the pleasures of understanding (ἡδονὰς τὰς περὶ τὸ μανθάνειν, 114e1–4).' At the same time, though, the *Phaedo* also records some of Plato's harshest remarks about our predicament as bodily beings and the affective experiences that are bound up with this human condition. As Naphta succinctly captures the Phaedonic spirit

¹³⁸ This undermines Woolf's central claim that Plato treats sense-perception and pleasure parallelly: even though sense-perception is tricky and unreliable, bodily pleasure is even more dangerous because it short-circuits our rationality and is partially constituted by false ontological beliefs. It makes sense, then, that Plato nowhere says that we should actively 'stay away' or 'abstain from' sense-perception: even though perception presents us with false content, it does not force us into assent by knocking out our rational capabilities.

in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, Plato treats our body—'this mortal fabric'—as 'nothing more than a veil between us and eternity.'

This sentiment goes some way towards explaining why Plato's readers have been quick to label the ethics of the *Phaedo* as thoroughly anti-hedonist and indeed ascetic—often without offering much in the way of further commentary or explanation. 'In no dialogue,' D. Frede maintains, 'does Socrates show himself as much of an anti-hedonist as he does in the *Phaedo*.'¹³⁹

In sharp contrast to this received view, a recent group of interpreters have sought to skirt the otherworldly asceticism of the *Phaedo* by developing so-called evaluative views. On this interpretation, there is nothing otherworldly pessimistic or austere about the ethics of the *Phaedo*. When Socrates claims that the good life involves detachment from bodily pleasure, these commentators argue, he should be heard metaphorically: the key ethical proposal driving the *Phaedo* is that the good life merely involves not *caring too much* about bodily pleasure, although there is no need for active behavioural avoidance of hedonic experiences.

In the first half of this chapter, I have argued that, despite its ability to turn Socrates's Second Defence into an expression of more palatable and comfortably recognisable ethical positions, the popular evaluative view is philosophically problematic and textually ungrounded. Not only does it make little sense to pry valuation and behaviour as sharply apart as this reading does, a close reading of Socrates's Second Defence and its reprise in the later strands of the Affinity Argument—two bits of text that are inexorably connected with each other—shows beyond any reasonable doubt that the philosophical way of life involves behavioural abstention from bodily pleasure.

¹³⁹ Frede (1992: 435).

What Plato seemingly leaves unexplained, though, is why a good life should involve detachment from bodily pleasure. This, I submit, must be one of the main reasons why the rival evaluative views have been able to gain so much traction: the reprehensibility of affective detachment can to a large part be blamed on its unintelligibility. To remedy this situation, the second half of this chapter has sought to clarify Plato's defence of asceticism. To do so, I turned to an argumentative strand towards the end of the Affinity Argument I called the Deception Argument. This bit of argumentation claims that, like its evil twin sense-perception, bodily pleasure is cognitively harmful because it is intimately bound up with deception and illusion. It leads us astray with false appearances, thus foisting false beliefs upon us.

More precisely, the argument suggests that it is impossible to experience bodily pleasure without at the same time being cheated into believing that the ontologically deficient, messy, unstable, obscure, and imprecise world around us is clearer, truer, and realer than it actually is. Having clarified the nature of these mistaken ontological beliefs, I discussed different ways in which bodily pleasures might be taken to sabotage our grasp of what is 'really real' — two important issues Plato leaves virtually unexplained.

On top of its ability to elucidate Socrates's defence of affective detachment, something most scholars have left unexplained, my reading has at least three other benefits. Firstly, I believe it sheds light on the idea that bodily pleasure 'imprisons' and 'materializes' or 'corporealizes' the soul. An imprisoned, materialized soul, I argue, is an ontologically confused soul that has come to believe that things in the visible material realm (including the body) are more real than things in the invisible realm (including the soul). Bodily pleasure does not just sabotage our grasp of the reality 'out there', then, it also sabotages our sense of self 'in here': it makes us think our bodies are

more real than our souls—even though the body belongs to the less than fully real sensible realm and is nothing but a less than fully real ‘semblance (ἰνδαλλόμενον)’ or ‘image (εἶδωλον)’ of the soul—as the *Laws* 959a4–d6 has it.¹⁴⁰

Secondly, my reading does not just point to an important, usually overlooked connection between the *Phaedo* and Plato’s overarching critique of pleasure, it also unifies the disparate critical remarks about pleasure we find scattered throughout the *Phaedo*. I have suggested that—fully in line with Plato’s general mistrust of pleasure—the *Phaedo* criticizes pleasure on the grounds that it deceives us. In this dialogue, Plato does not just flirt with the idea that bodily pleasure is merely apparent rather than genuine, he also argues that an obsession with pleasure gives rise to second-rate, deceptive virtue comparable to those one-dimensional *trompe l’oeil* shadow-paintings that lack real depth.

More than that, the Deception Argument adds an important new type of hedonic deception to the existing Platonic taxonomy. As we learn elsewhere, affect makes neutral or bad things look good, future affective states often look smaller or larger than they really are, and there are cases where what passes itself off as a pleasure does not really count as the real thing. What we find here, though, is an original idea—the proposal that pleasure deceives us by inflating the reality and clarity of the sensible world around us. This type of hedonic illusion is not just interesting in and of itself, it also sheds light on an otherwise puzzling claim in the Allegory of the Cave (519a9–b3): the bonds and ‘leaden weights’ that keep people stuck in the cave are

¹⁴⁰ A similar Platonic argument can be found in Augustine’s *On the Trinity* 10.5.7. There, Augustine argues that the love of pleasure, or ‘the glue of care (*curae glutino*),’ makes the mind drag bodily things along with itself even after it returns to thinking about itself. When this happens, the mind begins to think of itself as a body—as something that is made like a body. See Nawar (2021).

(bodily) pleasures.

This brings me to the third and final advantage of my reading. On the view developed here, Plato's argument for asceticism is not just more complex and more subtle than usually appreciated, it is also philosophically motivated—rather than grabbed from thin air or developed *ad* or *post hoc*—and closely linked with several central themes of Platonic thought. Plato, I argue, thinks that the good life involves affective detachment—active avoidance of appetitive desire and especially bodily pleasure—because affect alienates us from our true nature as souls rather than bodies and because it sabotages our attempt to transcend the world of seeming and grasp the fully real world of being.¹⁴¹

Indeed, bodily pleasure clashes head-on with our existential task to struggle out of the depths of the Cave and transform ourselves and our grasp of world by 'turning [our] soul around, away from the world of becoming and towards truth and being (αὐτῆς τῆς ψυχῆς ῥαστώνης μεταστροφῆς ἀπὸ γενέσεως ἐπ' ἀλήθειάν τε καὶ οὐσίαν, 525c5–6)' 'towards the region in which lies the happiest part of reality or the things that are (εἰς ἐκεῖνον τὸν τόπον μεταστρέφεσθαι ἐν ᾧ ἐστι τὸ εὐδαιμονέστατον τοῦ ὄντος, 526e4–5).'¹⁴²

Just as sleep undermines our ability to resist the often absurd, obviously false appearances we encounter in our dreams, the *Phaedo* suggests—or so I have argued—that bodily pleasure keeps us trapped in the shadowy and messy sensible realm. It makes us 'dream and doze through [our] present life (τὸν νῦν βίον ὀνειροπολοῦντα καὶ ὑπνώττοντα, 534c6–7),' as Plato puts it in the *Republic*, 'thinking that

¹⁴¹ For completely different defences of asceticism, which stress the connection between detachment and virtue acquisition, see e.g. Besong (2019), Carey (2018), and Hitz (2021).

¹⁴² For the idea that we are dealing here—quite literally—with a kind of *conversion*, see e.g. Annas (1999: 49), Hadot (1981: 187), and Kahn (1999: 1996).

a likeness is not a likeness but rather the thing itself that it is like (τὸ ὅμοιον τῷ μὴ ὅμοιον ἀλλ' αὐτὸ ἡγῆται εἶναι ᾧ ἔοικεν, 476c4–5).'

It is only once we detach ourselves from the body and its affective states—'cutting loose everything else we wear around ourselves (περικόψαντα τὰ λοιπὰ ὅσα περικείμεθα),' to borrow a metaphor from Plotinus (*Enneads* 6.9.9, 50–55)—that we can snap out of this dream-like state, liberate ourselves from the alienation of sensible consciousness, and see reality face to face. For the more there is of our narrow material selves, as Aldous Huxley aptly describes the rationale behind renunciation or asceticism, the less there can be of ultimate reality.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Huxley (1944: 96). A polished and updated version of this chapter will appear (under a different title) in Aufderheide and Erginel (forthcoming).