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*Platonic Insights on the Cultivation of the
Virtues in a Digital Age*

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Introduction

In this paper, I turn to an unlikely source for insights into the cultivation of virtues in the digital age: Plato. Although they were written 2500 years before the digital age, Plato's dialogues offer contemporary philosophers and educators insights into the ethical perils of the digital age and how we might go about cultivating virtues to respond to those perils. Using the *Republic* and other dialogues, I argue that Plato anticipated the ways digital media can colonize our consciousnesses and make virtue formation more difficult than it might otherwise be. This is not to say that virtue formation is impossible in the digital age, but we must be aware of the special challenges that face us if we are to cultivate them.

Before I examine Plato's dialogues themselves, it will be helpful to state explicitly three assumptions I make in this paper. The first assumption I make concerns what people mean when they use the term "digital age". When a person refers to the digital age, they often seem to mean an era in which computers or handheld devices that function like a computer are relatively ubiquitous. Of course, there are digital cameras, digital alarm clocks, and so on, but these are mere appendages, to a much more totalizing core: in particular, the computers, the handheld devices, and the software that not only creates sights and sounds on the surface of these devices, but that we also use to conduct an enormous amount of our daily work and to spend our free time. The digital age is massively thoroughgoing, as most humans in the Western world carry these devices, and the software they contain, everywhere in their pockets and their bags—the digital age is always with us.

But the digital age is marked more than ever by its presence even when we do not have devices on our person, or when we are not looking at a screen. These days the "digital age" is only partially captured by the fact that hardware and software can be found on most people's person. The digital age is also characterized by the psychological impact emails, texts, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and so on, have on the users of these technologies. In other words, the digital age represents not only the hardware and software we use, but how that hardware and software has consumed our consciousness—how it infiltrates into our thoughts and identities. In summary, for the purposes of this paper, the "digital age" will refer to an era in which the relative ubiquity of technological devices used during much of our waking hours holds sway over our consciousness, even when we are not looking directly at them.

The second assumption I make has to do with how I interpret the *Republic*, which is going to be one of the central texts I examine in this paper. It is customary to believe the *Republic* to be Plato's great treatise of political philosophy, in which he outlines what he takes to be the perfect political arrangement. As I have argued at length elsewhere (Jonas, Nakazawa and Braun 2012; Jonas and Nakazawa 2019), the exegetical evidence within the *Republic* and across the rest of the dialogues, suggests that the *kallipolis*—the grand "city in speech" that stands at the center of the *Republic*—is not Plato's preferred political arrangement. Rather, the *kallipolis* is what Socrates says it is in the *Republic*—an image of the healthy and just soul. According to Socrates, the point of creating the *kallipolis* is not to outline a preferred political community, but to help Glaucon and Adeimantus see justice in the soul. He argues that since a city is "big" and the soul is "small", justice will be easier to see in an imaginary city (368e-369a). Throughout this paper it will be important to keep the metaphorical nature of the *kallipolis* in mind, as it will help us understand Plato's diagnosis of the impending "digital" age and his recommendations for how to cultivate the virtues within it.

The third assumption I make is connected to the second. In the *Republic*, I assume Plato is not primarily a political philosopher and epistemologist. He is, first and foremost, a moral educator who (1) writes his dialogues in an attempt to morally educate his readers, and (2) attempts to inspire his readers to want to continue growing morally even when they are not reading his dialogues, and (3) attempts to inspire his readers to want to support moral growth in others. Of course, Plato might also be interested in communicating important truths about epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics, and so on, but from my point of view these do not constitute the core of Plato's project in the *Republic*, or the rest of his dialogues taken together. I take the central aim of Plato's project to be indicated by a comment spoken by the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws*, a comment which might plausibly be construed as a kind of autobiographical summary of Plato's philosophical-literary project. "As a rule, men with a correct education become good, and nowhere in the world should education be despised, for when combined with great virtue, it is an asset of incalculable value. If it ever becomes corrupt, but can be put right again, this is a lifelong task which everyone should undertake to the limit of his strength" (*Laws*, 644a-644b). I assume that Plato believes these words and has written the *Republic* and the rest of the dialogues as part of his own "lifelong task" to combine education and virtue to try to "put [education] right again." Of course, this is an assumption I cannot prove in the short space of this paper. However, I hope to add credibility to this assumption throughout this paper.

This paper will be written with the three above assumptions in mind. I will try to make a plausible case that the digital age has insinuated itself into human beings' consciousness in a way that Plato would not have been surprised about, and that he can offer us insights into how we might cultivate virtues in our digital age.

The Two-dimensional vs. Three-dimensional world

One of the characteristics of the digital age, as I conceive it, is that its two-dimensional characteristics infiltrate our consciousness to such a degree that it takes on a seemingly three-dimensional quality. When we "look" at Facebook, technically we are looking at a two-dimensional screen which contains two-dimensional images that cannot be touched, smelled, or tasted. Of course, through the creative use of coloring and shading, the viewer may sometimes be given the illusion that they are seeing things in three dimensions, but this artifice is generally recognized as such. The far more important illusion—one that is so powerful that it is much less frequently recognized—is that these two-dimensional images seem more important than our three-dimensional lives. Though, on some level, they only represent life, they begin to encroach upon life in myriad ways, and even to replace it. In this way, the two-dimensional life takes on a psychological significance that belies its two-dimensional character—it has the psychological feel of three dimensions and affects our consciousnesses so significantly that the actual three-dimensional world we live in can seem less emotionally real than the two-dimensional world. When this happens, the three-dimensional world loses its luster, making it seem a little less captivating and vital than the two-dimensional world.

The overtaking of the three-dimensional world by the two-dimensional world in our consciousness is sometimes made starkly manifest when we hear stories of people who supposedly identify more fully with their "virtual identities" than they do with their fully embodied ones; or when we hear of people who consider the number of "likes" they receive on their social networking accounts more important than the approval of respected friends and mentors in their external lives; or when we hear of kids who spend vastly more time playing—and prefer playing—a multiplayer online video

game than they spend with friends in person. These phenomena are extreme versions of the way that our digital lives can command our attention and allegiance more than our three-dimensional lives. But, of course, it is not just these “pathological” experiences that demonstrate the power of the two-dimensional to integrate into our consciousness. It seems innocuous on the surface, but it is the same infiltration of the digital age that motivates us to check our emails dozens of times a day; or watch a Netflix series religiously; or risk our own and other people’s lives to read or send texts while driving an automobile. These habits have become so commonplace that they do not seem especially problematic, or even problematic at all. Nevertheless, they betray the same infiltration of our consciousness that we witness in the supposedly pathological examples above. The only difference is that these innocuous activities have become so common to all our lives that they seem perfectly normal—a facet of life in the digital age that does not need special attention.

To be clear, so far, in citing the above examples—whether they be extreme or commonplace—I have not yet indicated whether I think the technologies of the digital age are problematic in themselves. In fact, I am not going to suggest anywhere in this paper that there is anything *intrinsically* wrong with using technologies in the digital age. It may actually be the case that some use of technologies that rely on a two-dimensional interface may improve our lives. The mere fact that digital tools are two-dimensional does not mean they are fundamentally corrosive. However, what I am going to argue, using Plato as my spokesperson, is that when these two-dimensional technologies infiltrate our consciousness to such a degree that they make it impossible to *fully experience* three-dimensional reality, then there is a problem. Put differently, the problem is not that two-dimensional technology is inherently damaging, or even that when it infiltrates our consciousness it becomes damaging *in itself*, but that when it so consumes our attention (consciously or subconsciously) it can necessarily crowd out experiences that are central to human flourishing, and even if it does not completely crowd out such experiences, it can degrade our ability to appreciate the experiences as essential to our flourishing. It is, then, the absence of these flourishing experiences, or our lack of appreciation of the experiences, that are the problem, not the technology in itself. I argue that Plato can help illuminate the components of human flourishing and show how these components can only be developed in a medium where consciousnesses have not been commandeered by the technologies of the digital age.

Plato’s Conceptual Prophecy of the Digital Age

It need hardly be said that Plato, living 2500 years ago, was *not* living in the digital age. Yet, it is my contention that he predicted it, in a sense. He had a theory about what human beings would be like if they were attached to a two-dimensional reality for most of their waking hours. Put differently, he prophetically understood what would happen to people who had become so attached to a two-dimensional world that it utterly infiltrated and dominated their consciousness. I am, of course, referring to the *allegory of the cave* in Plato’s *Republic*. In the allegory, Socrates describes three individuals who have been chained in the back of a cave their entire lives. They are unable to move their heads or bodies and are not aware of their own physical existence or the broader world. The prisoners spend their days watching and listening to two-dimensional figures on a “screen” in front of them, which are cast by a fire from behind, and their “voices” are heard issuing from their shadows because of an echo in the cave. Because they have been chained for their entire lives, Socrates claims that, for them, the truth is nothing but shadows.

Socrates relates what would happen if one of the prisoners is freed and “compelled to stand up, turn his head, walk, and look up toward the light” (515c). He claims that the prisoner will be pained and dazzled by the bright light of the fire, unable to see anything since he will shut his eyes to avoid the searing pain. As such, he will believe that the shadows he used to see are truer than what he sees now, because what he sees now is obscured by the bright light and/or his closed eyes. Socrates’ point is that when the prisoner is blinded by the fire and believes that the two-dimensional world at the back of the cave is more real than the three-dimensional world he is now encountering, the prisoner is wrong and suffering only a temporary illusion. The three-dimensional world is more real, and more desirable, even if the prisoner’s consciousness cannot access that reality.

In the allegory we are confronted with three “strange” prisoners who have spent so much time in front of a screen that they not only cannot conceive of a life beyond the screen, but when they encounter the three-dimensional world, they long (at first) to go back to their two-dimensional world, believing it to be the real one. Their longing stems from both their incapacity to see and feel the reality of the three-dimensional world and the pain they experience in that world. This kind of reaction, given the prisoners’ prior experience, is quite understandable. The two dimensional world is, after all, usually much safer than the three-dimensional world.¹ The inability to touch, taste and smell protects one from the pains that come through those senses. Naturally, those of us who have felt the enjoyment of those senses might demur, arguing that in spite of the potential for pain, there is an equally great potential for pleasure. But if our senses have become so attuned to the pleasures of the two-dimensional world, we may not be able to appreciate the pleasures of the three-dimensional world—they will be either painful or at least seem unreal and incapable of being felt. Put differently, at first the three-dimensional world is full of pain and absent of pleasure, and naturally this makes the pleasures of the two-dimensional world seem all the more appealing. When we are in pain, the memory of the pleasures we used to experience come back to us even stronger and are more appealing.

Additionally, the two-dimensional worlds we cultivate and exist in are far more capable of being controlled, where undesirable elements are largely within our capacity to remove them--we can just turn our computer off, or we can unfriend or unfollow people involved in our virtual lives. It is different in the three-dimensional world. Of course, we have some agency to control how and where we spend our time, but the three-dimensional world imposes itself on us much more forcefully, as a general rule. The disappointments and struggles of the three-dimensional world keep encroaching on us from all sides, but the disappointments and struggles of the two-dimensional world can often be “turned off”².

It could be argued that using the allegory of the cave as an analogy to the contemporary digital age is not apt because the cave dwellers’ two-dimensional world is rudimentary compared with our two-dimensional technologies. After all, when Socrates describes these pleasures later in the allegory,

¹ Naturally, if a person spends a great deal of time in their two-dimensional world and becomes *emotionally* attached to that world, they can experience *psychic* pain as great as that in the three-dimensional world. However, I think a strong case could be made—at least it can be made about my life—that many people prefer two dimensional worlds because they can escape the psychic pain of their three-dimensional world. And, even if they cannot escape all of the psychological pain, they can at least be spared the physical pain found in the three-dimensional world, which is, by definition, absent in the two-dimensional world. Perhaps someday technology will reach a point that we can feel pain in virtual space, but that time is still a way off.

² Of course, this is not always the case as in the case of virtual bullying, stalking, etc., but the range of struggles and disappointments that can be controlled through digital media exceeds those in the three-dimensional world.

they do not sound very appealing. The cave dwellers sit passively watching a parade of characters pass before their eyes uttering a variety of sounds and words, and the prisoners talk to each other while they watch and have contests with one another concerning the images flashing before them. It does not sound terribly desirable, nor even pleasurable, until, that is, we consider that it is eerily similar to the parade we experience when we devotedly watch our favorite sports team compete on the television, or when we play video games, or browse the internet. These prisoners are emotionally invested just like we are. We may congratulate ourselves that we would not want to live in their “miserable manner,”—as Glaucon claims about the prisoners in the back of the cave—but should we be so quick to assume that our two-dimensional parades are any less miserable? Plato’s prisoners *feel* their two-dimensional world to matter a great deal and they experience pleasure in watching it pass before them; and this is just what we *feel* in our two-dimensional worlds.

In the end, the released prisoner comes to discover that the pleasures he felt living in his two-dimensional world did not compare to the pleasures of his new three-dimensional world, but he would never have been able to see the superiority of the three-dimensional pleasures unless he had actually left the two-dimensional world, enduring the pain of doing so until the pleasures that he formerly could not even conceive of slowly come to be felt. Indeed, when he tries to explain this to his denmates who are still absorbed in their two-dimensional worlds, they do not--indeed, cannot--understand him. Instead, they slander him and attempt to discredit his arguments. Because our digital age is so pervasive, so intoxicating, so relevant, and so useful, it is nearly as difficult to persuade contemporary individuals to question the two-dimensional quality of the digital age---to lay down our smartphones for a few hours---as it was for Plato’s released prisoner to persuade his denmates. Naturally, we might argue that the difference is that our two-dimensional world is so much more complex and nuanced than Plato’s, but that is, of course, what any cave-dweller would say.

I am conscious that I have covered a lot of conceptual and psychological ground here rather quickly, but I hope the general thrust of my argument is somewhat plausible. When I read the allegory of the cave and consider my own sprawling two-dimensional world of email, texting, television sports, etc., and when I consider the anxiety I feel when I am thrust into the three-dimensional world without being able to continually access the two-dimensional world, I begin to think that Plato’s cave dwellers are not so different from me. Indeed, in very significant respects, I behave just as they do.

But now the question is why living like a cave dweller is so undesirable. If we are satisfied with our two-dimensional worlds—they bring us pleasure and help us avoid pain—then why should we change? Plato has an answer which is found later in the allegory and throughout his whole corpus. The reason living in a two-dimensional world is undesirable is not because it lacks pleasure or increases pain, but because human flourishing (*eudaimonia*) is not possible in a two-dimensional world. For Plato, *eudaimonia* is inextricably connected to virtue. There is much scholarly debate about whether virtue is merely *necessary* for *eudaimonia*, or whether it is *sufficient* for *eudaimonia*, or whether it is *identical* to *eudaimonia* (Irwin, 1995, pp. 116-121; Brickhouse and Smith, 2000, pp. 147-153; Bobonich, 2011, 314-324; Vlastos, 1991, pp. 200-232) but what is not debated is the fact that for Plato it is not possible for humans to experience *eudaimonia* without being virtuous. According to Plato, the problem with living in a two-dimensional world is simply that it is not possible to fully cultivate virtues in that world. Again, it is not that the two-dimensional world is inherently damaging, but that it prevents us from sufficiently focusing on acquiring virtue, either because we are distracted by our digital technologies that are always calling to us, or because we cannot imagine the struggle to achieve virtue to be worth the effort when we have countless

innocuous pleasures available to us every second of the day. When satisfying our desire comes so quickly and easily, it takes additional effort to forego those pleasures to struggle to attain virtue.

In order to see why, from a Platonic perspective, it will not be possible to become fully virtuous and thereby achieve *eudaimonia* in an overly two-dimensional existence, we need to engage with Plato's theory of moral education more broadly, as well as the particular path by which Plato thinks his prisoners can cultivate the virtues and gain access to *eudaimonia*. Before diving into this project, however, we must first briefly address a common misconception of the allegory of the cave. It is customary to interpret the allegory of the cave to be about the ascent of philosopher-kings from the realm of appearance to the Realm of the Forms (Smith, 2019, 125-129--Summoning knowledge; Irwin, 2019, pp. 277-279; Reeve, 1988, p. 57; Bobonich, 2002, p. 47)³. The Realm of the Forms is a realm that is apprehended through intellection and contemplation. It is supposedly a "separate" realm that is accessed through reason alone that culminates in a kind of beatific vision of ultimate reality. It is assumed that the *eudaimonia* the released prisoner experiences is found in his final intellectual arrival into the Realm of the Forms outside of the cave. One of the main reasons for this interpretation is that the allegory of the cave is directly preceded by a discussion of the distinction between the "visible" world and the "intelligible" world which is described in the famous "divided line" image (509c-511e). As Smith (2019) correctly argues, "most scholars have agreed that the cave image offers four distinct stages that are supposed to represent the four subsegments of the divided line" (p. 123). The intelligible world is not experienced with our senses, but only with our reason. The language of the divided line is strictly epistemological and does not directly discuss the virtues. Since the allegory immediately follows the divided line in the text of the *Republic*, it is easy to assume that we should interpret the entire ascent of the prisoner through the cave to be the ascent of knowledge in philosopher-kings from the visible to the intelligible, ending with the experience of true Being in the Realm of the Forms, represented in the allegory by the world outside the cave. However, when we consider the role of the philosopher-kings in the *Republic* and their supposed ability to achieve the contemplation of ultimate reality of the Forms, we come to recognize that the traditional interpretation of the allegory of the cave cannot be correct, that it in fact yields insight into how any individual might achieve virtue in spite of a dependency on the two-dimensional world. Because this reading may seem at first glance to be unorthodox at best and indefensible at worst, I will spend the next section providing evidence for seeing the allegory of the cave as a tale of moral inspiration. In particular, we need to revisit (1) the point of creating a city in speech at the beginning of the *Republic* and (2) the conclusion of the *Republic* in Book 10.

Excursus: The Kallipolis as an Allegory for the Soul

The *Republic* famously opens with a discussion of what justice is and whether the just person is happier than the unjust person. There are several false starts to the question in Book 1, the most famous being the confrontation with an angry Thrasymachus. After Thrasymachus and the rest of the onlookers leave, Glaucon and Adeimantus remain, and they ask Socrates to convince them that the just person is happier than the unjust person, even if the unjust person has wealth and power, and the unjust person is persecuted. They claim that no one "has adequately described what each

³ An important exception to this interpretation is Julia Annas (1981, pp. 242-271) who argues that leaving the cave cannot be straightforwardly assumed to represent human beings who have escaped the world of experience and who only contemplate the Form of the Good.

itself [injustice or justice] does of its own power by its presence in the soul of the person who possesses it" (366e). And they want more than a "theoretical argument"—they want him to "show" them that it is better to be just than unjust. They go on to say:

You agree that justice is one of the greatest goods, the ones that are worth getting for the sake of what comes from them, but much more so for their own sake, such as seeing, hearing, knowing, being healthy, and all other goods that are fruitful by their own nature and not simply because of reputation. Therefore, praise justice as a good of that kind, explaining how—because of its very self—it benefits its possessors and how injustice harms them....Don't, then, give us only a theoretical argument that justice is stronger than injustice, but show what effect each has because of itself on the person who has it. (367c-e)

Socrates responds by saying that making such an argument will be difficult, especially since human beings and the souls they contain are small things. He then suggests that they look for justice in a city which is a larger thing. "Perhaps, then, there is more justice in the larger thing, and it will be easier to learn what it is. So, if you're willing, let's first find out what sort of thing justice is in a city and afterwards look for it in the individual" (368e-369a).

It is important to note here that Socrates is not proposing that they create a perfectly just city, but rather a *city with justice in it*. This means that, in fact, the city itself could be significantly unjust as a whole, and yet still meet the criterion they are investigating. Indeed, what is often ignored by commentators is that the *kallipolis* is founded on several serious injustices that are never purged from it. When Socrates acquiesces to Glaucon's desire to create a "luxurious" city at 372d, Socrates directly claims that what Glaucon wants is a city with a "fever"—one that is not "healthy" and "true" like the first city that Socrates outlines. What is the fever the city has? Socrates says:

Then we must enlarge our city, for the healthy one is no longer adequate. We must increase it in size and fill it with a multitude of things that go beyond what is necessary for a city....Then we'll have to seize some of our neighbors' land if we're to have enough pasture and ploughland. And won't our neighbors want to seize part of ours as well, if they too have surrendered themselves to the endless acquisition of money and have overstepped the limit of their necessities. (373b-d)

The fact that Socrates claims the luxurious city they are creating steals other people's land and "has surrendered themselves to the endless acquisition of money" is obviously antithetical to nearly everything we read in all of the dialogues concerning health and virtue. It is clear that Socrates must not be attempting to create an ideal city, but attempting to create *a* city—just like he said he would do—that can serve as a metaphor for a soul. Had he wanted to create an ideal city, he would not have let Glaucon insist on creating a city with immoderation and feverishness at its root. In fact, Socrates says that the reason he is happy to create a city with a fever in it is because through it justice and injustice might be seen more clearly (372e). Of course, it might be claimed that although the *kallipolis* was founded on acquisitive war and the endless pursuit of money, the city is eventually purged of all injustice. But this is simply not the case—injustice continues to thrive in the *kallipolis*. For example, the auxiliaries still go to war to protect and acquire wealth (537a), the class of producers are still encouraged to give in to their appetitive desires (465b-466c), to sue one another in court (464d-e; 405a-b), and to eat unhealthy meals (404e-405b)—to name just a few behaviors that Plato believes are vicious and conducive of unhappiness. Moreover, the vast majority of the population are never given an education that would help them develop the virtues to overcome these vices. They are given laws that prevent them from indulging in these vices to extreme degrees (465b), but they are given opportunities and even encouraged to live lives rooted in the satisfaction

of unnecessary desires. We now see why Socrates never calls the *kallipolis* “true” and “healthy” like he did after constructing the first city.

But the question becomes: With so much injustice allowed to exist in the city, where is justice to be found in it? The answer is found at the very beginning of the construction of the first city and is then recreated in the *kallipolis*. At the very beginning of creating a city with justice in it, so they could better see justice in the soul, Socrates points to their foundational understanding of justice, which is found at 443b-c long after the *kallipolis* has been created:

Then the dream we had has been completely fulfilled—our suspicion that...we had hit upon the origin and pattern of justice right at the beginning of the founding of our city....Indeed, Glaucon, the principle that it is right for someone who is by nature a cobbler to practice cobblery and nothing else, for the carpenter to practice carpentry, and the same for the others is a sort of image of justice—that’s why it’s beneficial.

Where then does justice lie in the *kallipolis*? It comes into the city through the invention of the three classes of citizens—the producers, the auxiliaries, and the philosopher-kings. The justice they contain is not that any of them are just in themselves—indeed they cannot be just because the three parts of their souls are not in harmony. The producers are ruled by their appetitive desires and cannot rule themselves, but must be ruled by the guardians; the auxiliaries are ruled by their spirited part and cannot rule themselves, but must be ruled by the philosopher-kings. And even the philosopher-kings cannot rule themselves because they must be *forced* to rule the city—because left to their own desires they would do nothing but contemplate the Forms all day long. Socrates makes it clear that their immoderate desire for the contemplation of the Forms is ultimately selfish and does not serve others, which means they do not embody wisdom, moderation or justice. Annas (1981) argues that “The Guardians’ [forced] return to the cave has always been recognized as a major problem in the *Republic*” (p. 269). She ultimately argues that this inconsistency cannot be resolved⁴. But it is only an inconsistency if we imagine, as we should not, that Plato meant for the philosopher-kings to be *real* people who embody full justice. They were never meant to be that since they are meant to be symbolic representations of the reasoning part of the soul, which is not just in itself. In other words, his point is that justice is found *not* in the citizens of the *kallipolis*, but rather is found in the three classes’ symbolic *relationship to one another*--where each part performs only their own tasks. Each of the three classes are exaggerations of human beings—each one lacking in virtue in their own specific ways—yet, when they each do their part, justice as a whole comes into being, which conforms to the definition of justice articulated earlier.

The distorted and exaggerated picture of the three different classes of people drives the point home clearly to Glaucon and Adeimantus: justice is none other than the harmonious working of the three parts of the soul—the appetitive, the spirited, and the rational. While it is an exaggeration to make a purely appetitive, or purely spirited, or purely rational class of people—because it is not possible for people to be exclusively one aspect of themselves—it is not an exaggeration to see these as distinct parts of the soul. When we are desiring something, we feel the appetitive part of us urging us to give into our appetites. We *want* to give in to them. But there is another part of us, so it seems, urging us not to give into our appetites. This is a normal experience we have, but Glaucon and Adeimantus do not understand that if people give into their appetitive desires, then justice is not possible for them. By creating an exaggerated city with exaggerated classes, Glaucon and Adeimantus can begin to see

⁴ Not surprisingly, there have been several commentators who have tried to resolve this inconsistency, like, for example, Smith (2019, pp. 144-158), Irwin (1995, p. 299), Kraut (1992, pp. 327-329), Reeve (1988, p. 203)

the danger of letting appetites get out of control, for example. They can begin to see how injustice is bad for human beings and justice good for them. He needs them to see this because this is what they asked him to help them see. To recall, they said:

Therefore, praise justice as a good of that kind, explaining how—because of its very self—it benefits its possessors and how injustice harms them....Don't, then, give us only a theoretical argument that justice is stronger than injustice, but show what effect each has because of itself on the person who has it" (367c-e).

Socrates has provided them exactly what they asked for: he was able to "show what effect [justice] has on the person who has it. Rather than giving them a "theoretical argument" he was able to show the effects of justice and injustice by painting a picture of a strange, exaggerated city, with strange exaggerated classes.

And this leads us back to the allegory of the cave. As I indicated above, if we think Plato really wants to create philosopher-kings who learn to access the Realm of the Forms, then the allegory of the cave appears to be an allegory of the ascent of the philosopher-kings to that Realm, and therefore is inapplicable to ordinary people. But, if the philosopher-kings were not meant to represent real people, then it makes more sense for the person in the back of the cave to represent a real person and not a philosopher-king. Interestingly, that is exactly who Socrates says they are. When he introduces the allegory and paints the pictures of human beings stuck in the back of a cave, Glaucon says: "It is a strange image you're describing, and strange prisoners" (515a). To which Socrates replies: "They're like us" (ibid). And then later, when Socrates summarizes the allegory he says: "But our present discussion, on the other hand, shows that the power to learn is present in *everyone's* soul" (518c, italics added). In these places, Socrates is making it clear that the prisoners are not future philosopher-kings—who are a special, unique class of people who alone can escape the cave and apprehend the form of the Good—but representations of "everyone's soul", just like his and Glaucon's soul. This has important implications, because now it appears that living a life of *eudaimonia* requires that, as humans, *we* must ascend out of the cave.

However, it is not just the metaphorical nature of the division of the classes in the *kallipolis* that tells us that Plato does not actually believe that the ultimate goal in life is the acquisition of pure knowledge through the contemplation of the Forms. In the *Phaedo*, he explicitly tells us that such knowledge is not possible for human beings until after death. Plato claims that it is impossible to obtain pure knowledge while we remain embodied beings, and therefore just like non-philosophers, philosophers or philosopher-kings (even if they could exist) will never be able to escape their bodies and achieve a beatific vision of the Forms.

It really has been shown to us that, if we are ever to have pure knowledge, we must escape from the body and observe things in themselves with the soul by itself....For if it is impossible to attain any pure knowledge with the body, then one of two things is true:
either we can never attain knowledge or we can do so after death. (Phaedo 66e)

It is true that Plato recommends avoiding the unnecessary desires of the body to the degree that it is possible, but he does not believe that such avoidance will ever lead to a vision of pure virtue--rather,

“a true philosopher [must be] firmly convinced that he will not find pure knowledge anywhere except [after death]” (Phaedo 68a).

From this, we learn that unless Socrates is comparing escaping the cave to dying (which he clearly is not), then escaping the cave cannot be achieving a vision of the Forms, for this is not possible while we live. But now the question is what does it mean to be outside the cave? If it is not contemplating the Form of the Good, then what is it? It is clear that it is the goal for all humans—but we must discover the content of that goal. As we shall, being outside the cave, which represents ultimate *eudaimonia*, is living virtuously.

Virtue and Eudaimonia

Now that we know that the cave-dwellers represent people like us, we must answer the question of what it looks like to escape the cave and the two dimensionalism it embodies. At the very end of the *Republic*, Plato gives us the answer when Socrates returns to the question at which he and Glaucon and Adeimantus began: What is the value of a just life and is it better to be just or unjust? He gives a clear and unequivocal answer. He says:

And haven't we cleared away the various other objections to our argument without having to invoke the rewards and reputations of justice....And haven't we found that justice itself is the best thing for the soul itself....Then can there now be any objection, Glaucon, if in addition we return to justice and the rest of virtue both the kind and quantity of wages that they obtain for the soul?" (612a-b).

Socrates then describes the state of the virtuous soul and how it alone will be happiest in this life and the life to come.

But if we are persuaded by me, we'll believe that the soul is immortal and able to endure every evil and every good, and we'll always hold to the upward path, practicing justice with reason in every way. That way we'll be friends both to ourselves and to the gods while we remain here on earth and afterwards—like victors in the games who go around collecting their prizes—we'll receive our rewards. Hence, both in this life and on the thousand-year journey we've described, we'll do well and be happy. (621c-d)

The highest goal in a human being's life is not contemplating the Forms, which is not possible until after death, but it is achieving virtue and justice in the soul. This is the *summum bonum* for Plato and since being outside of the cave is the *summum bonum* of the prisoner's life, we can assume being outside of the cave represents becoming fully just and virtuous. And, not coincidentally, the last words of the *Republic* strikingly recall the allegory of the cave, which requires prisoners to “hold to the upward path” if they are to escape their two-dimensional worlds and experience *eudaimonia*. We now see what is at the end of the upward path is—it is virtue, which includes desire, character and knowledge. The process out of the cave is the process of cultivating full virtue.

Virtue and Knowledge

Now that we know that the *eudaimonia* at the end of the prisoners' path out of the cave is found in living a just and virtuous life, we need to figure out what it takes to become just and virtuous. In the *Meno* and the *Protagoras*, Socrates makes it clear that he thinks virtue is a kind of knowledge and anytime we do the wrong thing, it is simply because we lack knowledge of what the right thing to do is. At first glance, the theory seems wildly implausible, because all human beings have had experiences in which they "knew" what the right thing to do was, but because of weakness of will, or laziness, or some greater temptation, we did not do the right thing. Thus, it seems clear that Socrates must not be correct about virtue being knowledge. However, the reason we think this is because we have not sufficiently understood what Socrates or Plato means by "knowledge". It is customary for modern people in the West, at least, to believe that I have knowledge if I am completely certain of the truth of some statement, such as "the sky is blue". This kind of knowledge is sometimes called propositional knowledge which means that I utter a certain proposition, or even merely have that proposition in my mind, and what I utter or what I have in my mind corresponds to reality. For example, I have propositional knowledge of a moral nature that innocent children should be protected from abusive adults. I am certain of this knowledge, and my certainty corresponds to the moral reality of the world. It is not that I mistakenly *believe* that child abuse is wrong, it is in fact wrong and I am indubitably certain of its wrongness. This is propositional knowledge.

For Socrates and Plato, however, propositional knowledge is not virtue. Simply having certainty about a genuinely moral fact is not full knowledge. Our propositional knowledge (whether verbally expressed or internally affirmed) of some moral fact may genuinely correspond to reality, but if we act in ways contrary to that knowledge, then we do not have knowledge in the relevant sense. One might have *intellectual* knowledge of the moral fact, but not *full* knowledge. When Socrates and Plato claim that virtue is knowledge, they are claiming that virtue is *full* knowledge.

What then characterizes full knowledge? We have already discussed the intellectual (propositional) dimension, but there are two other dimensions of knowledge that are essential for full knowledge. The first is the *affective* dimension of knowledge. We can be utterly convinced that it is a virtuous thing to help the elderly cross a dangerous road, and we can be so convinced that we encourage our children and students to help the elderly crossroads, and yet, in any given moment, we can for a variety of reasons not *want* to help a particular person cross the road. When this happens, we simply keep on walking or keep on driving. We may experience some guilt, because we really do know (in an intellectual way) that we should help them across the road. But unfortunately, while our intellect had been sufficiently trained to know the virtue of helping someone across the road, our affections had not been sufficiently trained. The disconnect between our intellectual knowledge and our affective knowledge is much more common than we would like to believe. Of course, there are other actions that we sometimes commit daily that have moral import and that we know are vicious and yet do them anyway. We know we should be patient with our children; we know that we should be polite in a crowded grocery store; we know we should reach out to a friend in need; we know we should volunteer at a local charity; the list goes on and on, and yet in spite of all this knowledge, we consistently simply do not want to do those things when push comes to shove. This can be changed however, as Plato will argue, if you habituate young people (or even older people in certain circumstances) to desire the virtues. He was one of the first philosophers to articulate what we all learn as humans in our lives—that we have a tendency to want to do something the more we practice it. When we first start to play a musical instrument there is a certain novelty which encourages us to want to learn the instrument. But soon we discover that learning the instrument can be very frustrating and in many (if not most) cases, it is very easy to want to give up, even if we know that learning the instrument will be "good for us". It is the same with learning to share one's

belongings. We know that generosity is a virtue, and our neighbor is in need, yet, without consistently acting generously, we will not likely enjoy the prospect of giving our possessions. And yet in the case of the musical instrument or in the case of our possessions, as we continue to practice the activity, something in our motivational structures changes and we start to *enjoy* doing the thing we previously did not enjoy. At this point we are beginning to increase our *knowledge* of virtue, according to Plato.

But even while our knowledge increases as our affections change, we do not yet have *full* knowledge until we have also developed the *conative* dimension of moral knowledge. “Conative” is a word philosophers sometimes use to explain what happens when we have propositional knowledge of what we ought to do, and we even genuinely want to follow through on that desire, but something in us prevents us from following through on that knowledge and desire. This is also a very familiar human experience. After we have developed the intellectual knowledge that some action is the right one to perform, and after we have practiced it enough that we begin to enjoy the activity and want to do it more, there are still many, many times when countervailing desires beset us and threaten to undermine our commitment to perform the activity. When this happens once in a while, this may not be a problem, but sometimes even a single instance of doing what we know we should not do can lead to a chain reaction in our motivational structure. This is especially the case when the thing we know we should not do is an activity that formerly exercised significant attraction for us. This is where the conative dimension of virtue knowledge becomes so important. When we have *conative* knowledge, we are no longer tempted by countervailing desires.

Take for instance the example of making my family breakfast in the mornings. When I first realized that making them breakfast and lunch was something that should be done, I was slightly depressed. I was intimidated by the kitchen; I found myself out of my element and did not enjoy even making food for myself. Nevertheless, I had intellectual knowledge that, in my role as a parent, the virtuous thing to do was make them breakfast. Naturally, because I had no desire to make them breakfast, I found ways to get around this virtue. Perhaps I could convince my wife to do it? Perhaps I could teach them to do it, even though they were just toddlers? Perhaps I could just take them through the drive through? But eventually, I realized that I must “just suck it up” and do the right thing. But within a few weeks, something began to change in me; I hardly noticed the feeling at first, but it steadily grew stronger and stronger, and that feeling was that I was starting to enjoy making them breakfast. I was actually looking forward to it. This was all to the good, for it increased my certainty that making breakfast for my children was virtuous, and it also made me start to enjoy both my children and the mornings more. I was starting to be convinced that perhaps Plato was right and that when I first “knew” that making breakfast was virtuous, I did not “really know it.”

Unfortunately, my growth in knowledge did not last long. A few weeks into my newfound knowledge and ever-increasing enjoyment of the virtue of making breakfast, I had to start staying up late each night, so as to meet some deadlines for work. As I became sleep deprived, I discovered a new emotion in the mornings, namely a desire to *avoid* making breakfast. What was problematic was that within a few days, the desire I had to avoid breakfast was becoming stronger than my desire to make breakfast, and therefore I began to find ways to avoid making breakfast, even though I still knew at the intellectual and affective levels that making breakfast was virtuous and therefore enjoyable. But I did not *fully* know that it was virtuous, on Plato’s understanding, because I was failing to act according to that knowledge. Once people develop the *conative* dimension of knowledge to such a degree that they are no longer affected by countervailing desires of this nature, *akrasia* -- the weakness of will I was experiencing -- is no longer a factor. This is what Socrates claims happens when people have partial knowledge of virtue. Any time they fail to act virtuously, it is

simply because they do not have *full* knowledge—they are lacking either the intellectual dimension, the affective dimension or the *conative* dimension.

Now that we understand that Plato believes full knowledge is needed for people to be virtuous, the question becomes how he thinks people can develop this knowledge. The answer is through *habituation*. While Aristotle is the philosopher who immediately comes to mind when we discuss the role habituation plays in the development of virtue in human beings, Plato is no less committed to it than Aristotle is.

The principle of habituation is found across Plato's corpus. It is emphasized over and over again in the "early" dialogues (Jonas 2018; Jonas and Nakazawa, 2019, Chapter 1); it is a major component of the educational program in the *Republic* (Jonas, 2016; Vasiliou, 2008), which is among the so-called "middle" dialogues; but perhaps its most systematic treatment is found in the *Laws*, which is a "late" dialogue often considered to be the last Plato wrote (Jonas, 2019; Bobonich, 2002; Wilburn, 2012). In this text, Plato believes, just like Aristotle, that the most important method for cultivating the virtues is to require people to imitate virtuous exemplars and practice virtuous actions over and over again. Practicing the virtues under the guidance of a mentor cultivates the three dimensions of virtue knowledge. The first was that the habituation that came through imitation and practice would instill in them a desire to perform virtuous actions.

For the third and the fourth time, I think, our discussion has come full circle. Once again, education has proved to be a process of attraction, of leading children to accept the right principles as enunciated by the law and endorsed as genuinely correct by men who have high moral standards and are full of years and experience. The soul of the child has to be prevented from getting into the habit of feeling pleasure and pain in ways not sanctioned by the law and those who have been persuaded to obey it; he should follow in their footsteps and find pleasure and pain in the same things as the old. This is why we call songs, which are really 'charms' for the soul. These are in fact deadly serious devices for producing the concord we are talking about. (649d-e)

In this passage we see two of the three dimensions of full knowledge of virtue—the intellectual and the affective. Children must be told by a mentor or guide what virtuous actions are. Without this intellectual knowledge, they would never know the difference between virtue and vice, and they would be just as likely to pursue the latter instead of the former. This is the first crucial step towards gaining complete knowledge of virtue. But, as we see in the second half of this quotation, merely being told which actions are virtuous, does not mean people will perform those actions once they are on their own and are no longer being guided by the mentor. In order to help promote virtuous actions, the student must also develop a desire to act in light of their intellectual knowledge.

I insist that a man who intends to be good at a particular occupation must practice it from childhood: both at work and at play he must be surrounded by the special 'tools of the trade'...we should use the children's games to channel their pleasures and desires towards the activities which they will have to engage when they are adults. To sum up, we say that the correct way to bring up and educate a child is to use his playtime to imbue his soul with the greatest possible liking for the occupation in which he will have to be absolutely perfect when he grows up. (643b-c)

Plato describes this essential educational truth, not to explain how best to train a craftsman (although the method obviously works for craftsmen), but how best to train a child in virtue. Immediately following this passage, Plato continues with the passage quoted above about a “true” education, which is an education in virtue. “But I take it that for the purpose of the present discussion we are not going to treat this sort of thing as ‘education’; what we have in mind is education from childhood in *virtue*, a training which produces a keen desire to become a perfect citizen who knows how to rule and be ruled” (643e). Combined, these passages establish the importance of habituation in the development of the proper desires. If a person is to be a virtuous person, they must be habituated to desire virtue.

However, desire to perform virtuous actions—even when it is combined with intellectual knowledge—is not enough to make someone virtuous. The third quality that is cultivated through habituation is the conative—the ability to overcome countervailing to acting virtuously. As a person is required to practice the virtues over and over again, they develop an ability to persevere in times when it is difficult to act virtuously.

But what about our attempts to make a man *afraid*, in a way consistent with justice? Shouldn’t we see that he enters the list against impudence, and give him training to resist it, so as to make him conquer in the struggle with his pleasures? A man has to fight and conquer his feelings of cowardice before he can achieve perfect courage; if he has no experience and training in that kind of struggle, he will never more than half realize his potentialities for virtue. Isn’t the same true for self-control? (647c-d)

The emphasis on conquering one’s fears, pleasures and pains is connected to having the right feelings and the right thoughts, but it cannot be reduced to this. A person who is properly habituated will, under ideal circumstances, not need to conquer extreme feelings of fear, or pleasure, or pain, because their emotions and their reason will align, and they will be eager to act virtuously. However, this ideal is not always met—a person can know what the right thing to do is but may have the countervailing desire to act viciously. In those moments, something else is needed if the individual is to avoid falling into vice. They will need to have practiced overcoming their feelings of pleasure or pain and chosen to act on the principle of reason. These individuals are *enocratic*, which means that they do what virtue commands, but do so by dint of their will and not their immediate desires. Acting *enocratically* is not identical to acting virtuously, but it is a necessary precondition if a child hopes to remain on the path to virtue. A rigorous process of habituation inculcates the ability to choose to act rightly in spite of desires to do otherwise. Plato is a realist and knows that such an ability is essential to the development of virtue. The ultimate goal is to move beyond *enocrasia* and arrive at full virtue which, while requiring strength of character cultivated through habit, does not require the same “white-knuckling” found in people who want to do the right thing but are only able to do it by extraordinary self-overcoming. Most individuals—who were not habituated into virtue early in their lives—will have to pass through a protracted period of choosing to obey virtue, even though they desperately want to pursue other, non-virtuous pleasures. He says this in the *Gorgias* when Socrates claims: “Very well. Of two people, each of whom has something bad in either body or soul, which is the more miserable one, the one who is treated and gets rid of the bad thing or the one who doesn’t but keeps it.” Polus replies that “The one who isn’t treated, it seems to me,” to which Socrates claims: “The happiest man, then, is the one who doesn’t have any badness in his soul....And second, I suppose is the man who gets rid of it.” (Gorgias, 478d).

The upshot of Plato's ideas on habituation and virtue is that virtue comes only through a long process of habituation, where children and adults alike must endure certain pains if they are to become fully happy. If they endure them early enough and often enough, it will keep "badness" from their soul which will make them more likely to become fully happy. But even if they do not become fully happy, they will be much happier if they take steps through a rehabilitation process to get rid of the "badness" in their souls by having the self-discipline to stop performing non-virtuous actions that lead them away from happiness and start performing virtuous actions which will draw them closer to it. It will take a supreme effort for them to have the strength of will to take these steps, but Plato argues that it will be far worth it in the end. This is the effort we see in the prisoner as we return to the allegory of the cave.

Escaping the Cave

The concept of habituation and the need to be guided by a mentor in developing certain habits that provide the *intellectual*, *affective* and *conative* dimensions of knowledge find a ready complement in the allegory of the cave. In the cave, we find a mentor who "compels" people who are not living fulfilled lives (even though they think they are) to start living more fulfilled lives. At first, they resist and do not want to endure the pain, but eventually, through the encouragement of the mentor, they discover happiness does lie in virtue.

But the cave also helps to see just how painful the process of developing the virtues is. Except in the last quote from the laws above, the process of habituation seems relatively pain free. Students must "play games" and "sing songs", which will conform the souls to virtue. But, in fact, there is an element of pain that is seen in the last quote and is clearly depicted in the allegory of the cave. The cave dweller is released from his chains, but immediately he is "compelled to stand up, turn his head, walk, and look towards the light". Why must he be "compelled" to do this, when we would assume that he should be grateful to be released from his prison? The answer is, of course, that he does not know he is in a prison. He has been habituated to enjoy his lifestyle—it is all he has ever known. It is the same for the cultivation of the virtues. When I had only one child, almost nothing was denied to him. Any toy he wanted, he was generally allowed to have; he could use it for as long as he wanted and often he found a willing partner in myself to help him enjoy the toy even more. If he reached out and demanded a toy from me, I immediately gave it to him. If he wanted more food, I gladly gave it to him. If he was frightened by something, I immediately removed the object of fear.

However, this state of affairs inevitably changed, and that change came fairly dramatically when we had a second child. At first, our second child—a daughter—was only a slight nuisance to him because occasionally she rendered his playmate—me—less available than I had previously been. But other than that, he was still able to satisfy the vast majority of whims and fancies he had. But eventually his sister became the age where she had her own whims and fancies and they sometimes conflicted with his, especially concerning the use of certain toys. At this point, conflicts began and I believed it was time to start helping him become virtuous. I was excited about this new development. I had found that the road to becoming virtuous was exciting, and in the few ways that I had developed certain virtues, I found my life much more satisfying and richer. Nevertheless, I was not naïve—I had read my Plato after all—and I knew that the first many steps—thousands of them—would not be welcome to my son. I began to compel him to share his toys with his sister when she wanted them, trying to explain (1) that she was just a baby and she did not understand that toy was "his" toy, and

(2) that it was better to give than to take—indeed, it was more *pleasurable* to give than to take. While saying this, I required him to give his toy to his crying sister. At this moment, I had done two things: the first was that I had provided him with the first rudiments of the *intellectual* knowledge of virtue—the proposition that it is better to give than to take; the second was that I have provided him with the first opportunity to develop a *taste* for the virtue of generosity. I need hardly say that these beginnings were completely lost upon him. He looked at me with utter incredulity in his eyes, as if he were to say: “that proposition is the most ludicrous thing I have ever heard, because experience has told me that it is far preferable to have a toy than to not have it, therefore it cannot be better to give than to take; and moreover, Daddy, I am now going to express my lack of enjoyment by throwing a temper tantrum to prove just how ineffective your attempt to help me see that virtue is pleasurable.”.

This first attempt of habituating my son into the virtues is reflected in the fact that the guide in the allegory has to force his prisoner to turn, walk and look. And it is further reflected when the guide tries to point out to his prisoner the value and pleasure of his new situation. The prisoner not only expresses incredulity but is positively pained, just like my son was—both of them want to return to what they know and the pleasures of the prior experiences.

This is the first necessary fact about cultivating the virtues—they require pain; there is simply no way around it. The reality is that when we are habituated in any way, we develop a taste for that situation, even if that situation is not ideal. We come to experience comfort in the consistency of the life we live, even if that consistency includes what would otherwise be unpleasant experiences. We can see this in the allegory of the cave. The prisoners do not want to leave their lives in the back of the cave because they experience pleasure and consistency, and they cannot imagine any other life that could be better, because those lives would not have the same pleasures or consistency. But notice, once Plato’s prisoner is released from the cave and spends sufficient time outside of the cave—he develops new pleasures and new consistencies, and when he compares those pleasures and consistencies to those of the cave, he is aghast that he had ever enjoyed them. He sees them now for what they really are—a kind of slavery to ignorance, cold darkness, tepid two-dimensional games, and, importantly lacking in the vastly more full-bodied pleasures he experiences in the outside world.

Here we see the fundamental fact of cultivating the virtues in a digital age. If our use of digital technology is largely meant as a socially acceptable avoidance strategy of inconvenience or painful experiences—like it is for me—then every time I use technology for that purpose, I am necessarily not engaged in virtue formation. This is not yet to say that virtue formation cannot happen in a digital medium (that issue will be discussed in the concluding section of this paper), but it is to say that if my engagement in the two-dimensional world is mostly pain-avoidance, then I must recognize that, in those moments, I am not actively cultivating virtues. This is a problem, because, according to Plato, when I am not cultivating the virtues, I am not cultivating happiness, which is to say, *eudaimonia*. Naturally, in those moments when I am abdicating my growth in virtue, and instead watching my third Netflix episode of the evening, I feel a certain pleasure, which tells me that I am cultivating happiness. But according to the allegory, I am merely engaged in a much less fulfilling form of pleasure that keeps me from experiencing true happiness. Again, in the moment of watching the Netflix episode, it is incredibly hard for me instead to *want* to go through the pain of cultivating virtue, and that is why we need guides and friends who can “compel” us, or at least encourage us to remember that our desires are disordered when we think thus. Moreover, every moment we engage in the pain-avoidance strategies so immediately available through the digital medium, I am further corrupting my desire to want to cultivate virtue.

In order to change his desires, the released prisoner necessarily had to go through the pain, confusion and denial required by a rehabilitation process. The fact is that if we believe Plato when he says the virtuous life is the best and happiest life, a process of painful (and continual, as we shall see) process of rehabilitation will be necessary. I use the word “rehabilitation” intentionally, because it is what will be necessary for older people to go through to become virtuous, since they had already been habituated in a non-virtuous upbringing earlier in their lives.

Speaking of pain, the virtuous life—even after we have achieved full virtue—is not pain free. Virtue is the highest form of happiness, according to Plato, but that does not mean it is without pain. Pain is essential to virtue, because just like Aristotle, Plato believes that virtue must be directed by wisdom to avoid excess and deficiency of “qualities of the soul” like courage and moderation. Plato claims that “Let us now look at the qualities of the soul. There is something you call moderation, and justice, courage, intelligence, memory, munificence, and all such things...Courage, for example, when it is not wisdom...[is] like a kind of recklessness....If then virtue is something in the soul and it must be beneficial, it must be knowledge, since all the qualities of the soul are in themselves neither beneficial nor harmful, but accompanied by wisdom or folly they become harmful or beneficial” (Meno, 88a-d). If people are to be courageous, they must obviously not have *too much* fear (cowardice), but they must also not have *too little* fear (recklessness). The upshot of this is that the courageous person must have the *right amount* of fear relative to the situation. And it is wisdom that determines the right amount. The same goes for the other virtues, like being moderate which is not having too much desire for a certain pleasure, but also not having too little desire for that pleasure.

What is important about this fact is virtue necessarily involves pain. The pain of being courageous is fear. Fear is an undesirable emotion that causes us pain. It is all-too-tempting for many of us to try to create a world in which we eliminate fear altogether, and digital technologies often make it increasingly possible for us to avoid many fears. It is the same with moderation. Desiring pleasure and not gratifying our desires is painful because, well, unsatisfied desire is unpleasant. Like our desire to avoid fear, it is also all-too-tempting to create a world where easy and immediate access to pleasure is possible at all times, and digital technologies often make this possible. But to the degree that we are successful in minimizing fear or maximizing pleasure is the degree to which we become incapable of experiencing the virtues of courage and moderation--and if we cannot experience those virtues, then according to Plato we will never fully flourish.

But this is not to say that if we are to be virtuous, we must become ascetics and give up our pleasures by living in a world of self-induced pain. Plato, like Aristotle, argues that living virtuously is the most fulfilling life we can live. Just as mountain climbers experience tremendous pleasure as they struggle to the top of a mountain, courageous people experience tremendous pleasure of overcoming their fears. Climbing a mountain causes pain in one’s body and psyche, and being courageous causes pain in one’s body and psyche. But these pains are not inimical to the pleasure; they are part and parcel of it. If a mountain climber could take an escalator or elevator to the top of the mountain they would choose not to; if they did, they would not experience the pleasure of suffering on the mountain. If a courageous person could avoid having to help an injured friend on the battlefield but instead could simply ask another friend to help their friend, they would not enjoy the pleasure of courage. It is the same for a member of an orchestra, or the theoretical physicist, or the gardener. They all experience extreme satisfaction in their crafts in large measure because of the struggle they have to endure to be masters of their crafts. Of course, there is also the more obvious

pleasure of overcoming the struggles and completing or perfecting their activities, but the completion or perfection is significant only because of the suffering they needed to overcome. And it is the same for the virtuous person. The reality is that the *eudaimonia* that virtuous people experience is inextricably connected to the pain they will have to overcome. Without the pain, there is no overcoming, and if there is no overcoming there is no pleasure. This is one of the reasons that the pain avoidance strategies available to us through digital media are so dangerous; they make us less and less able to feel the pleasure of pain—or at least the right amount of pain.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that, according to Plato, the two-dimensional technologies that seem to define the digital age threaten to draw us so completely into them that we may very well not want to live in the three-dimensional world, or, at the very least, we are liable to prefer our two-dimensional lives to our three-dimensional one. The problem is that without a rigorous three-dimensional habituation into the virtues, no human being will ever be able to cultivate them. But the habituation process is necessarily painful as we must deny ourselves certain pleasures that our embodied selves want to indulge in and engage in actions in which our bodies do not want us to engage. And even after we have been habituated into the virtues, having successfully endured the pain involved therein, the virtues themselves require a continual willingness to endure, and even “enjoy”, as it were, the pain of being virtuous. Of course, it is not that we enjoy the pain *qua* pain, but that the pain is a sign of our virtue, a sign that we find satisfying precisely because it affirms our telos as virtuous people. Just as mountain climbers enjoy the pain of climbing the mountain because it is fused with the goal of reaching the summit by their own strength, virtuous people enjoy the pain of acting virtuously because that pain is fused with the goal of living virtuously. Being virtuous and the *eudaimonia* that comes from it requires that we experience the right amount of struggle and difficulty in our virtue-minded activities. The happiness of virtue only comes when we experience those “negative feelings,” and if we use two-dimensional pleasures to avoid those feelings, then we will only undermine our chance at happiness—and indeed we will only become more and more likely to do whatever we can to avoid them, thus further distancing ourselves from potential *eudaimonia*.

It might be argued however that my claims about our technology use in the digital age is overblown and the majority of digital technology use is not a pain-avoidance strategy, but simply a way to accomplish tasks, perform our responsibilities at work, stay in touch with friends, and so on. The problem is that these seemingly necessary and relatively innocuous tasks can serve as distractions from being present to opportunities to practice virtue—we are too busy accomplishing tasks to cultivate virtues. There are legitimate times when we must be engaged in digital technologies to accomplish tasks, it is true, but often our accomplishing of tasks, performing job responsibilities, or staying in touch with friends are often unconscious addictive tendencies to continually distract ourselves from what really matters in life—the cultivation of virtues and the *eudaimonia* that comes from them.

One last question remains: is it impossible to use two-dimensional technologies to habituate ourselves into virtue. If we need to be habituated to act with the right amount of fear in order to have the virtue of courage, for example, might not we use technology to help us experience the right amount of fear? After all, we sometimes do experience fear in our two-dimensional lives. And it could be said for the other virtues like moderation and generosity. Might we not learn moderation by discovering the right amount of pleasure by moderating the amount of Netflix we watch? I think a plausible case could be made that it is possible to support the cultivation of virtues in a two-

dimensional medium, in spite of Plato's pessimism about them. For example, it is possible to connect with needed mentors and role models over video conference technology. However, we should remember that these kinds of actions -- though of central moral importance -- occur in a medium that is otherwise riddled with moral pitfalls and hazards. In my view, Plato's perspective helps us to see these hazards more clearly.

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