

## Chapter 1

# Interpreting Asceticism in Plato

### 1.1 Loving Wisdom and Living in a Body

Many commentators have assumed that Plato is responsible for originating the view that loving wisdom is incongruous with being embodied. For instance, many feminists are critical of what they call Plato's "somatophobia" and take his dualistic metaphysical worldview to be incompatible with feminism.<sup>1</sup> And at the opposite end of the political spectrum, Strauss also accuses Plato of ignoring the body, *erôs*, and nature.<sup>2</sup> However, we are missing something about his dialogues when we accuse Plato of beginning the tradition that suppresses the importance of the physical in the life of the philosopher or any human being. My primary aim in this project is to offer insight into Plato's nuanced attitude toward the physical universe in general, and human bodies in particular, because this pertains to his understanding of what philosophy is and what philosophers do. As Plato developed what we now call philosophy, he set a framework that involves analytical thought in addition to a particular kind of lifestyle. Yet, on account of a caricature of his views concerning the physical, Plato is often named as the originator of an embarrassing view of embodied life.

One of Plato's main goals is to use his character Socrates<sup>3</sup> as an exemplar of the philosopher's special and rare nature. He has Socrates call himself a philosopher (*Ap.* 29d, *Phd.* 61a); and in most of his dialogues, Plato demonstrates that by observing Socrates we can learn about the lifestyle that is conducive to inquiry. But Plato's Socrates is not a simple character; his peculiar words and deeds are not always easy to interpret. Among the many complex aspects of Plato's Socrates is his remarkable self-discipline, what the Greeks would call *askesis* (practice; training). His

self-discipline is highlighted in the dialogues, dovetailing with his desire to pursue knowledge and do what he thinks is best. Socrates's conversations with his interlocutors sometimes tempt us to believe that doing the right thing is easy when one has knowledge of what is best. However, Plato's Socrates usually claims not to have any substantial knowledge (*Ap.* 21b-d). This leaves Plato's readers at a bit of a loss with respect to the exact nature of Socrates's self-discipline. Many Platonic dialogues aim at the vindication of Socrates and philosophy, both of which can be difficult to understand. My project focuses on cultivating a more refined conception of the ascetic lifestyle epitomized by Plato's Socrates in the *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, *Gorgias*, and *Republic*.<sup>4</sup>

Who is Plato's Socrates? This book will remind us that he is a philosopher deeply engaged in worldly matters, who uses his body to enjoy eating (*Smp.* 220a) and drinking (*Smp.* 220a), to sleep peacefully (*Crt.* 44a; *Prt.* 310b-c; *Smp.* 223d), to have sexual intercourse, to create a family (*Ap.* 34d; *Crt.* 60a), to participate in democracy, serving his community as a gadfly, a soldier (*Smp.* 219e; *Chrm.* 153b-d), and a member of the Council (*Ap.* 32b-c), to stand up to tyranny (*Ap.* 32d-e), to look after his circle of friends, to walk daily to the agora, to stroll the outskirts of Athens and observe the beauty of nature (*Phdr.* 229a-b), to travel to Piraeus for a religious festival (*R.* 327a), to adore beautiful people (*Smp.* 212c, 216d, 218e; *Prt.* 309a-b, 316a; *Chrm.* 153d-154d, 155d), to flirt (*Phdr.* 234d, 237a-b, *Smp.* 213d, *Chrm.* 156a), to be in love with Alcibiades (*Grg.* 481d), to follow his erotic passion for ideas and virtues. Is this down-to-earth life consistent with his asceticism?

For the sake of uncovering Plato's vision of how human beings who want to be wise and good should be disposed toward the physical world and the human body, we must understand Plato's answers to the following questions: What attitudes and dispositions do wisdom lovers have? How exactly do philosophers care for the soul, and what treatment of the body does that psychic care<sup>5</sup> dictate? In what sorts of activities do philosophers participate? What do they value, and why? Or, to put it generally, what sort of lifestyle is entailed by the *askesis* of which Socrates is an exemplar? Plato's answers to these kinds of questions reflect his sense of the standards of philosophy. Here I will try to clarify Plato's account of these matters without being constrained by the need to conform to the interpretation of Platonism that became conventional, which is linked especially to the *Phaedo*. As Roochnik writes, "This dialogue gives voice to what is surely the most familiar characterization of Platonic philosophy: it is a quest for an 'otherworldly' wisdom, for a realm far above, and superior to, the

earthly and mortal.”<sup>6</sup> Like Roochnik, I challenge some of the fundamental assumptions about Plato made by those who espouse the most traditional interpretation of Platonic philosophy as otherworldly.<sup>7</sup>

In this introductory chapter, I will compare and contrast two interpretations of asceticism; briefly examine some consequences of misinterpreting Socratic asceticism, especially for women, people of color, the other animals, and nature itself; examine the analogical reasoning Plato relies on to advance innovative claims; consider the transformation of vernacular that arises out of Plato’s use of analogical reasoning; call attention to Plato’s use of pedagogical irony; and lay out the plan for the other chapters.

## 1.2 Two Interpretations of Socratic Asceticism

Conceiving of the soul as what animates the material stuff of the body causes Plato to consider the soul a human being’s true self.<sup>8</sup> As a result, he is deeply concerned with how one ought to think of and treat the soul. Nevertheless, throughout the dialogues Plato makes clear that the question of how one should be disposed toward the soul is very much intertwined with the question of how one ought to handle the body, especially given that Plato’s dialogues indicate that the largest aspect of the soul, the appetite, is charged with wanting what the human body needs to survive. Some of the appetite’s pleasures come from restoration in the body, and although appetite belongs to the soul, the appetite in particular, and soul in general, could not be more essentially connected with the body. It is misguided to think the soul can be properly cared for while the body is renounced, and I will demonstrate that Plato does not make this mistake as some critics have thought.

A widespread and popular characterization of Plato assumes that his dualistic metaphysics requires the renunciation of all things physical, including the desires and needs of the human body. Plato variously describes the relation between the soul and the body as a prisoner in a cage (*Phd.* 82e3; *Cra.* 400c), a tomb (*Cra.* 400b; *Grg.* 493a), an oyster in its shell (*Phdr.* 250c6), a barnacle-covered sea-soaked creature (*R.* 611d–612a), an orbit shaken by a commotion (*Ti.* 43c-d), a person dressed in a costume to be stripped off (*Grg.* 524d), and the victim of a bad influence, maimed by the association (*R.* 611b). These metaphors vary in the degree to which they denounce the body, but they hold up the soul as more authentic than and superior to the body. However, I believe that a misinterpretation of the nature of Socrates’s asceticism and his attitude toward the physical

took hold when Neoplatonists such as Plotinus interpreted the Platonic dialogues with their own philosophical positions in mind, including the conviction that ethical-philosophical aspirations require treating matter as evil.<sup>9</sup> The view that matter is evil precipitates the austere treatment of the body and abhorrence of the physical world. These thinkers take the physical endeavors of life, such as sleeping, eating, being sexual, to be unimportant, detrimental in fact, to one who loves wisdom and goodness, and as a result, they roundly condemn the body. From this point of view, the way to contend with physically oriented desires in the soul is by attempting to eliminate them. According to Plotinus, the only situation better than not having to consider one's embodiment at all is that one experiences just enough physical illness to remind one why the body is the sort of despicable thing one is right to neglect.<sup>10</sup>

Neoplatonists regard the obliteration of the passions as the self-discipline appropriate for a philosopher. Plotinus held up "as an example to all who practised philosophy" a friend who ate only every other day, whose "renunciation and indifference to the needs of life" caused him to be "so gouty that he had to be carried in a chair," in addition to not being able to stretch out his hands.<sup>11</sup> Such injurious consequences of living an austere life do not disturb Plotinus at all; to him, all that matters is thought. Of Plotinus himself, Porphyry writes, "Even sleep he reduced by taking very little food, often not even a piece of bread, and by his continuous turning in contemplation to his intellect."<sup>12</sup> Conveying the view that it is a misfortune to be born into a body, Plotinus refused to have his likeness created by artists<sup>13</sup> and even rejected the notion of celebrating his own birthday (though he enthusiastically celebrated Plato's and Socrates's birthdays).<sup>14</sup> When Porphyry tells us that Plotinus refused medical treatments,<sup>15</sup> repudiated meat eating,<sup>16</sup> and slept and ate very little,<sup>17</sup> we might be tempted to think of Plotinus as a stern person, impervious to the needs and desires of the body. But when we learn that Plotinus was sickly,<sup>18</sup> with bad eyesight,<sup>19</sup> and had at age eight been shamed for his continuing desire to breastfeed,<sup>20</sup> it is no wonder that Porphyry begins *On the Life of Plotinus* with the following opening line: "Plotinus, the philosopher of our times, seemed ashamed of being in the body."<sup>21</sup> If the shame Porphyry discusses plays a role in Plotinus's thought, it is crucial not to assume automatically that Plato takes the human body as the epicenter of shame as well.

Given that Plotinus claims to be nothing more than an interpreter and continuator of Plato,<sup>22</sup> the important differences between Plato's views of embodiment and those of Plotinus were glossed over. Plotinus set the tone for subsequent readings of Plato by interpreting Plato in a way that was

more in line with his own views, and thus began the legacy of interpreting Plato as a philosopher for whom the body is a source of shame. While the Neoplatonists were tempted to see their austere version of asceticism in Plato, in fact, careful consideration of the dialogues reveals a much more sophisticated conception of asceticism associated with Plato's Socrates.<sup>23</sup>

Before we explore whether or not Plato is the kind of ascetic his Neoplatonic and medieval Christian inheritors make him out to be, we must delve further into the meaning of asceticism. The Greek term *askesis* typically referred to athletic exercise. It is characteristic of Plato to make analogies between the body and the soul, and with respect to the issue of training, he was the first Western thinker to assert that human beings should pursue both the discipline that brings physical health as well as the kind that brings psychic health. Although some Indian and Chinese views of holistic medicine predate him by roughly 2,500 years, in the West Plato is the first proponent of holistic medicine despite merely sketching his view. We see this commitment to holistic medicine when he has Socrates say that, just as one part of the body cannot be treated successfully without treating the entire body, "one should not attempt to cure the body apart from the soul" (*Chrm.* 156c-e).<sup>24</sup>

This position is echoed also by Timaeus when he asserts the importance of not exercising the soul without the body or the body without the soul "so that each may be balanced by the other and so be sound" (*Ti.* 88b-c).<sup>25</sup> *Republic* 403d also comments on the relation between body and soul, suggesting that "a fit body doesn't by its own virtue make the soul good, but instead the opposite is true—a good soul by its own virtue makes the body as good as possible."<sup>26</sup> Yet, later in the *Republic*, Plato has Socrates say, "It's clear that [a person of understanding] will always cultivate the harmony of the body for the sake of the consonance of his soul" (591c-d). If we combine these notions, we arrive at Plato's theory of holistic medicine: a healthy soul facilitates physical health, and a healthy body reinforces the health of the soul.

It was common in Plato's time for individuals to employ physical trainers to assist them in their physical exercise. Having had his own psychic trainer (the historical Socrates), Plato wrote dialogues that exhort readers to engage in *askesis* that improves the condition of the soul, and Plato believes the care of the soul is not disconnected from the embodied life. As Peterson explains, "Care for the soul is a very practical matter of figuring out how you will conduct your life day to day. It is care for your dispositions and beliefs, your mental and emotional equipment out of which you act everyday. (Socrates does not mean that care for the soul is

concern for some separable item stuck in the body, the tending of which is separate from concern for the activities of daily life.)”<sup>27</sup>

Unfortunately, the term *askesis* became increasingly identified with the austere view of psychic training maintained by the Neoplatonists and some medieval Christians. When the Christian version of *askesis* became primary, the Socratic/Platonic notion of *askesis*, a practice that is not linked to the austere rejection of pleasure and the physical, became secondary. As the original understanding of the term took a backseat to the Christian conception, discussing asceticism became a tricky business because of the potential for equivocation between these two dramatically different approaches to self-discipline.

Here I will contrast two interpretations of Plato’s conception of *askesis*, which I refer to as “austere dualism” and “normative dualism.”<sup>28</sup> Austere dualism denotes the interpretation of Plato that construes him as a strict metaphysical dualist whose contention that the physical world is not real leads him to renounce all things physical, especially the human body and its needs and the related desires in the soul’s appetite. Having largely ignored the important role that the physical endeavors of daily life play in loving wisdom, austere dualist commentators interpret Plato’s call for loving wisdom as a recommendation that one ought to renounce the physical entirely and withdraw from it as much as possible. This interpretation contends that Plato promotes the exclusively contemplative life as the philosophical ideal, while loathing the physical world and the human body.

At one end of the continuum of commentators who read Plato this way stands Plotinus, esteeming austere asceticism, and at the other end is Nietzsche, despising austere asceticism.<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche traces Christianity’s self-denial back to Plato and loathes the “theoretical optimism” he thinks he sees in Plato, what he thinks of as a life-denying philosophy.<sup>30</sup> While I disagree with Nietzsche’s interpretation of Plato as hostile to life, I concur with his appraisal that this austere strategy should not be venerated. Nevertheless, the austere dualist interpretation of Plato has long been conventional. Scholars who defend the traditional view include not only the Neoplatonist commentators, such as Plotinus, Olympiodorus, and Damascius, and Christian inheritors,<sup>31</sup> such as Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzen, and his disciple Evagrius Ponticus, but also more recent commentators, including Nietzsche, Jowett, Archer-Hind, Stewart, Zeller, Grube, Collingwood, Hackforth, Bluck, A. E. Taylor, Dodds, Friedländer, Gosling, Guthrie, Gallop, Elshtain, C. C. W. Taylor, Hartsock, Dover, Bostock, Vernant, Rowe, Plumwood, Frede, Kahn, Nehamas, Lear, Robinson, Hadot, Griswold, Pakaluk, and Barney.<sup>32</sup> Part of my project will be to note

misleading translation choices that operate on the presumption of austere dualism and, in turn, reinforce that interpretation.

In Roochnik's criticism of these interpreters, he says, "Such commentators take Plato to be a 'Platonist' who hates the sensible realm, and longs for the day when the soul will depart to 'the other place,' unencumbered by the nuisance of having a body."<sup>33</sup> Quite representative of the austere dualist interpretation, Pakaluk writes:

Thinking is not something encouraged in the corporeal world, supported by it or aimed at by it. Rather, a true philosopher will engage in thinking *in spite of* the body, with its cares and distractions, and *in spite of* the corporeal world as a whole, with its business, wars, and absence of leisure. Thinking, then, is something alien to the world, and therefore its complete fulfillment is to be found, if at all, outside the world.<sup>34</sup>

And Griswold's view is arguably the most extreme illustration of the austere dualist interpretation. He writes:

This leaves the world we actually inhabit an unlovable, even hateful, place. There would seem to be neither political nor philosophical reconciliation with the world (no scheme that explains the rationality of the world in a way that allows us to accept it as, perhaps forgive it for, being what it is). It is a tribute to Plato's artistry that so desperate a picture of the human condition could nonetheless have inspired so many for so long.<sup>35</sup>

I contest this austere interpretation, contending instead that in Plato's view philosophy was not "dangerously otherworldly,"<sup>36</sup> as austere dualist interpreters regularly posit.

Instead, I will demonstrate ample evidence that Plato should be read as a "normative dualist," to borrow Alison Jaggar's term.<sup>37</sup> The normative dualist version of asceticism prioritizes the soul over the body, but Plato does not loath the physical world and the human body just because he places the greatest value on the Forms and the soul. Jaggar uses this phrase in the course of critiquing thinkers who assume the physical basis of rationality is unimportant. As a normative dualist, Plato does hold the soul and its care as more dear than the body and its care, and feminists like Jaggar find this disappointing because they value the human body inherently. Platonism

and feminism diverge here. Plato ranks Form over thing and soul before flesh, but he does so *without* denigrating the human body or nature itself, and this distinction is extremely important. On this view, philosophical asceticism is a practice that is *not* predicated upon disdain for the body in particular and the physical world in general.

It seems at times that Plato wishes the effort to be wise and good could be facilitated by never having been born in a human embodied state, but we should not assume that position entails fear of and loathing for the physical world or the human body. He is not satisfied by the finite realm of the physical, but he does not maintain that the physical is abhorrent or irrelevant. A philosopher loves the Forms, such as Beauty and Goodness, and will love the world to the extent that it has a share in and imitates the Forms. Indeed, Plato's philosophers have reason to love and be curious about the world, while they prioritize making their souls as wise and good as possible. Nehamas recognizes this when he writes that "beauty is not the exclusive property of the Forms. It is a feature of the world around us. . . . In a very serious sense, as the philosopher gains a vision of the Form of Beauty, he falls in love with the world itself."<sup>38</sup> As I will show, on account of this love Plato's philosophers use the flesh as a vehicle to embody the divine Forms in the physical world to the greatest extent possible.

### 1.3 A Brief Look at Some Consequences of Misinterpreting Socratic Asceticism

Some might suggest that misinterpreting Socratic asceticism is simply a scholarly problem with historical value but without consequence on the way human beings actually live their lives today. I disagree. How we interpret the asceticism Plato admires in his Socrates has been influential in shaping Western consideration of the human body. Getting this aspect of Platonic interpretation wrong is not just a scholarly problem. Through the Neoplatonic influence upon Christian thought, their austere account of asceticism steered the early Christian attitude toward embodiment, and as an outcome of Christianity's prominence, Western civilization has suffered from a very problematic relationship with embodiment. A host of problems have ensued. When we devalue the physical, we lessen concern for all that is linked with it—women, people of color, the other animals, and nature itself.

In this book I will uncover how carefully worked out Plato's views about the body and the soul are. His corpus contains an extensive number of substantial passages that discuss important issues about the body and



the soul, and once we liberate our reading of those passages from the misleading approach that has been brought to them, we are able to use Plato's views as a resource on a variety of relevant issues. Let me comment briefly in this section on some examples of how Plato's view of the physical could be a resource for those working on assorted contemporary problems. As we shall see in this section, sundry concerns have been at stake while Plato's interpreters have been shaping civilization.

First, interpreting Plato's metaphysics has consequences for how we treat the natural world.<sup>39</sup> The austere dualist interpretation contends that Plato denounces all physical things, including nature itself. For instance, Plumwood claims that "Plato strongly devalues nature in virtually all its forms."<sup>40</sup> If Plumwood were correct, then Plato's way of thinking would be responsible for a tradition that has permitted the neglect and/or destruction of the physical environment and the other life forms in it. However, there is no evidence that Plato's metaphysical commitments preclude him from venerating the natural world in his dialogues. Instead, in Plato's dialogues we find interlocutors honoring nature.

For example, at *Timaeus* 77a-c Plato has Timaeus explain that without trees, plants, and seeds to protect and nourish us our bodies would "waste away and be depleted, and so to perish." And the beginning of the *Laws* is set with elderly gentlemen from Athens, Crete, and Sparta appreciating the trees and meadows that will refresh them along the route of their very long Cretan path (625b-c). The Athenian also praises pottery and weaving (both the skills and the natural materials they require, such as clay and wool) as "a gift from God to men" that protects people from being "intolerably poor" (*L.* 679a-b). More than once in the *Laws* Plato has the Athenian give a nod to the duty human beings have to take care of the natural world. First, in Book V, speaking of land distribution, he writes: "Each man who receives a portion of land should regard it as the common possession of the entire state. The land is his ancestral home and he must cherish it even more than children cherish their mother; furthermore, Earth is a goddess, and mistress of mortal men" (*L.* 740a; see also *L.* 923a-b).<sup>41</sup> Then again, near the conclusion, the Athenian indicates that "the earth and every household hearth are already sacred to all the gods" (*L.* 955e).<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, Carone notes the example in the *Phaedrus* of Plato's exaltation of the natural beauty surrounding Socrates and Phaedrus as an example of Plato and his Socrates *not* loathing the natural environment.<sup>43</sup> She also refers to the *Critias* where Plato has Critias mention deforestation and soil erosion (*Criti.* 111b-c).<sup>44</sup> These examples verify that Plato's metaphysical dualism does not require ignoring or hating the natural world.

These passages about the natural world and natural beauty are part of a *very highly developed* set of conceptions of nature, beauty, and *kosmos* that we find in Plato. But reading Plato as an austere dualist obscures what a resource Plato's dialogues are for those working on issues pertaining to the natural environment.<sup>45</sup> If early commentators had paid proper attention to Plato revering nature, then Plato's influence on Western civilization might have kept us from the current global environmental crisis and the massive reduction in biodiversity.

Second, we should consider those who have been particularly associated with the body and nature. When austere dualist thinkers have encouraged human beings to renounce nature and to treat the physical with disdain, they license the disregard, disrespect, and devastation of whoever is associated with the body. I am in agreement with those who contend that women as well as non-Western, nonwhite people are oppressed insofar as they are subsumed into nature.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, I imagine much more could be said by way of making connections between the condemnation of nature and various other forms of oppression too, if it were not beyond the scope of this book to study such connections in detail. For instance, other commentators have argued that the poor and working class are also associated with animals and the body in a classist hierarchy.<sup>47</sup> Here I cannot give a thorough account of these forms of oppression, but consider, for instance, the racist convention of associating people of color, especially African American women, with wild animals.<sup>48</sup> As Bordo writes, "[T]he racist ideology and imagery that construct non-European 'races' as 'primitive,' 'savage,' sexually animalistic, and indeed more *bodily* than the white 'races' extends to black women as well as to black men."<sup>49</sup> This exemplifies how the abhorrence of the physical world and nature can also translate into racist disdain and disregard. Consequently, women who live at the intersection of racism and sexism are doubly oppressed by this association between women and nature.

Misreading Plato as a philosopher who ignores or demeans the physical results in failing to see Plato as a resource for those working on a wide variety of women's issues. Let's consider several dimensions. Women have borne the brunt of the austere dualist interpretation's influence<sup>50</sup> in part because the austere account of asceticism became pervasive throughout Western culture as the epitome of purity and goodness.<sup>51</sup> The prevalence of this interpretation in effect established a standard for sexual morality. Yet, living up to the austere standard of chastity has historically been imposed upon women rather than men.<sup>52</sup> Even when the expectation of chastity is imposed more universally, many feminists have observed the "impossible monsters" that arise from sexual repression and the particular toll they

have taken on women in various forms of violence.<sup>53</sup> Maybe we would not live in a culture of rape, violence, and female disempowerment if austere dualism had not appeared to condone the degradation of anything associated with the physical. Now that we can push aside that misguided view, scholars and others working on contemporary problems surrounding sexual morality would benefit from utilizing Plato as a resource.

Another example of Plato's contemporary relevance pertains to the feminine association with reproduction. Thinkers looking to emphasize a positive connotation between women and nature should turn to Plato as a very special resource. Historically human beings have experienced women as the caretakers of their infant bodies. Despite the fact that men are also embodied and also have a biological role in the process of creating new life (and, like women, can learn to raise children), men have been traditionally linked to culture and rationality, while women have been traditionally linked to nature (as well as emotion).<sup>54</sup> These connections have shaped society's attitude toward and treatment of women. According to Karen J. Warren, nature is construed as feminized, and women are seen as naturalized, with women called "cows, foxes, chicks, serpents, bitches, beavers, old bats, pussycats, cats, bird-brains, hare-brains."<sup>55</sup>

However, Plato goes to great lengths to indicate how foolish it is to reduce women to their biological function (*R.* 454d-e). Nonetheless, he associates nature with women when he has Socrates refer to the Earth as our "nurturer" or wet nurse (*trophon*) (*Ti.* 40b) and "mother" (*mêtêr*) (*R.* 414e, *Mx.* 237e-238a). He also links the body with Earth when he has Socrates refer to the bodily as "earthy" (*geôdes*) (*Phd.* 81c)<sup>56</sup> and to the soul becoming covered in "wild, earthy, and stony profusion" because of its association with the body (*R.* 612a). And in the *Timaeus's* reincarnation scheme Plato has Timaeus align women with other animals (*Ti.* 42b-d, 90e-92c).<sup>57</sup> Tong captures the problem at hand well when she writes, "If man is the lord of nature, if he has been given dominion over it, then he has control not only over nature but also over nature's human analog, woman. Whatever man may do to nature, he may also do to women."<sup>58</sup> We have already determined that Plato does *not* reduce women merely to their capacity to give birth and nurse and his dialogues do *not* in fact sanction contempt for nature. Yet, the problem with the association of women with nature arises in the reception of Plato's thought. Reading him as disdainful of the body has assisted in the subsequent aspersing of whatever is commonly associated with the physical, particularly women.

In addition to connecting the feminine with nature, Plato also aligns philosophy with the feminine. Plato makes a robust connection between

philosophy and the feminine when he includes in the dialogues notions that philosophers are all pregnant (*Smp.* 206c), that Socrates helps philosophers deliver their ideas much like his mother who was a midwife (*Tht.* 149a–151d), and that Socrates learned everything he knew from a woman—a priestess named Diotima (*Smp.* 208c, 201d). Plato even uses the term *kuma* (wave) in laying out the *Republic's* paradoxes, which comes from “*kuô*” meaning to swell which is used in the context of pregnant women’s swelling bellies.<sup>59</sup> The commentators who think Plato ignores the physical or that he dishonors nature and women are missing some powerful moments of Plato paying tribute to the body, especially women’s bodies.

Furthermore, Plato also connects the feminine with the political, as we shall see in chapter 4’s examination of the *Republic's* First City where Plato has Socrates emphasize physical survival and an admiration for the cooperative community effort to achieve it in a peaceful, sustainable fashion. The tendency of those who interpret Plato as an austere dualist is to ignore the *Republic's* commanding warnings about poverty as well as the description of the poverty-free First City. Consequently, the influence of the austere dualist interpretation has had an impact on our notion of what constitutes the political. Establishing a focus on these neglected aspects of Plato’s work gives us a lot to think about in terms of the contemporary applications of Plato’s political philosophy. Scholars working on wealth inequality, food justice, diplomacy, peace and nonviolence, and the like would be aided by studying the aspects of Plato I will emphasize in chapter 4. But listening to an austere dualist interpreter, one would never recognize Plato’s relevance for our contemporary problems. Although it is not my primary task in this project to examine the details of Plato’s views in their applicability to contemporary issues, my project makes it unmistakable that Plato’s conceptions would be a tremendous resource for people working on these sorts of issues.

#### 1.4 Strange Claims and the Analogy Strategy

Plato’s influence on Western culture, especially religious thought, makes it difficult for us to appreciate how strange some of his ideas have seemed to his audiences. In Annas’s words, Plato was a “revolutionary” with “radical ideas.”<sup>60</sup> While many Platonic notions may seem relatively familiar now, Plato recognizes the innovative nature of his worldview, which includes having his Socrates claim both that the soul is one’s most valuable posses-

sion and that the soul's healthy state is preferable to its diseased state. Plato is aware that one might respond to this type of worldview by declaring it outlandish to suggest something nonphysical could possibly be more real and more valuable than the physical body. As I will show here, Plato then uses analogies with the physical to help interlocutors and readers alike make sense of unfamiliar claims and help them aspire to virtue.

Throughout the corpus, those whom Socrates considers "body-lovers" (*Phd.* 68b-c) are said to be plagued by impediments to living justly, such as the fear of death and the desire for pleasure, because they prioritize the physical body, advocate hedonism, and lack concern for the health of the soul. Body-lovers do not fathom that their lifestyle causes disharmony. For example, when body-lovers consider the potential negative consequences of their actions, they envision consequences that are physical in nature, such as being imprisoned or put to death. Think, for instance, in the *Crito* of Crito initially thinking of harm only in terms of physical harm, while Socrates tries to get him to imagine the serious harm is to the soul.

This body-loving worldview is what makes it difficult for interlocutors such as Callicles and Thrasymachus to accept the claim that living unjustly is inherently unchoice-worthy. For such a person justice is "a mug's game,"<sup>61</sup> the silly business of serving the weaker; it is nothing serious that would require substantial reflection and practice. Often, Plato has Socrates deal with interlocutors who have a difficult time thinking about justice and injustice as anything more than "crowd-pleasing vulgarities" (*Grg.* 482e).<sup>62</sup> For example, Callicles is candid about his belief that being a "just" person is not an admirable character trait. He thinks that "justice" as it is conventionally construed is not real (*Grg.* 483b-484b). And in the *Republic*, Socrates also faces challenging questions put forth by Glaucon and Adeimantus concerning why one should be moral and why one should care about anything other than the rewards and punishments offered up by society. Despite claiming to convey popular opinion rather than his own (*R.* 358c-d), Glaucon represents the position that no one is willingly just, that people are just only for fear of punishment (*R.* 359c-360d). Adeimantus reinforces Glaucon's position, claiming that one need not be just so long as one learns how to use persuasion to convince others that one is just (*R.* 365b-d). When Glaucon and Adeimantus solicit from Socrates an account of what justice or injustice "does of its own power by its presence in the soul of the person who possesses it, even if it remains hidden from gods and humans," Plato has Adeimantus say that no one "has adequately argued that injustice is the worst thing a soul can have in it and that justice is the greatest good" (*R.* 366e). Having already failed to convince Thrasymachus in

Book I of the *Republic* that justice is better than injustice, Socrates worries that, on its own, his view of justice is not compelling.

Even though Glaucon and Adeimantus insist they are already sympathetic to Socrates's contention that being just is better for an individual than being unjust, they excel at playing the devil's advocate such that they both appear not to accept completely the truth of Socrates's position (R. 365b–367e). As Socrates says, "For you must indeed be affected by the divine if you're not convinced that injustice is better than justice and yet can speak on its behalf as you have done. And I believe that you really are unconvinced by your own words. I infer this from the way you live, for if I had only your words to go on, I wouldn't trust you" (R. 368a-b). Thus, Socrates needs a way to help his interlocutors experience justice as something real, not merely a crowd-pleasing idea, something that demands reflection on one's own character, and to see that moderation is indispensable for justice.

Given, then, that Plato recognizes the controversial nature of his worldview, it should not surprise us that he devises an overarching strategy to put the interlocutors and readers of his dialogues in a position to grant the importance of living the just life. What could help Socrates demonstrate that the way one lives has consequences on both one's soul as well as one's political community regardless of who else knows about it? Plato focuses on health and disease in order to construct educational analogies about both individual justice and social justice. He frequently employs what cognitive scientists call analogical reasoning to make his strange, obscure views more conceivable.<sup>63</sup> An analogy is the systematic relationship between two analogs, a "target" analog and a "source" analog. The target analog represents the new situation that one is trying to figure out, and the source analog represents an old experience that is being adapted and applied to the target analog.<sup>64</sup> Analogical reasoning relies on the ease with which one can adapt and apply one's knowledge of the source analog to the target analog.<sup>65</sup> It is common to find Plato using source analogs that rely on knowledge of the embodied world of everyday life in order to pave the way for him to later introduce very abstract target analogs. Think, for example, of the *Phaedo* where Plato has Socrates use an analogy to prepare the interlocutors to be introduced to the abstract notion of recollecting Forms. He talks about how a beloved's lyre or cloak can bring the beloved to mind (*Phd.* 73d) because he can presume widespread familiarity with this erotic phenomenon, and it therefore makes a well-designed source analog.

Another example of Plato's use of analogical reasoning unfolds in the *Republic*. When the conversation hits some confusion about what justice

is in Book 2, Plato has Socrates employ an analogy concerning physical sight and rational inquiry, which is a body-soul analogy, in order to set up Plato's introduction of the city-soul analogy, which is his other central analogy that claims similarity between physical and nonphysical entities. Socrates says:

The investigation we're undertaking is not an easy one but requires keen eyesight. Therefore, since we aren't clever people, we should adopt the method of investigation that we'd use if, lacking keen eyesight, we were told to read small letters from a distance and then noticed that the same letters existed elsewhere in a larger size and on a larger surface. We'd consider it a godsend, I think, to be allowed to read the larger ones first and then to examine the smaller ones, to see whether they really are the same. (*R.* 368c-d)

As soon as Glaucon and Adeimantus challenge Socrates, Socrates immediately advances his case with them by utilizing analogical reasoning to set up further usage of analogical reasoning in hopes of making his claims more persuasive about what justice is and what its benefits are. In so doing, he is putting Glaucon and Adeimantus in a position to apply their understanding of the source analogs, eyesight and the city, to the target analogs, rational inquiry and the soul, respectively.

The main shared trait driving the city-soul analogy is that both souls and cities can be just or unjust (*R.* 368e). On this basis, Plato has Socrates assert isomorphism, namely, that the city and the soul have the same structure. Blössner critiques Plato for considering the analogy hypothetical at 368d–369a but assuming it as established in Book 4.<sup>66</sup> And he observes that Plato “is dramatically extending the boundaries of the analogy” when he concludes not just that cities and souls are both entities that can be just or unjust but that they both also have the same number of component parts and that justice for both consists in the proper compartment of the components.<sup>67</sup> These fallacious extensions lead directly to claiming at 441c-d that if the virtues associated with the city are wisdom (*R.* 428b–429a), courage (*R.* 429a–430c), moderation (*R.* 430e–432b), and justice (*R.* 432b–434d), then the virtues of the soul must also be wisdom (*R.* 442c), courage (*R.* 442b-c), moderation (*R.* 442c-d), and justice (*R.* 441d–442a, 442d). As Ferrari observes, Plato makes this choice and has his reasons for doing so, which he does not reveal.<sup>68</sup> So we must consider why he extends the analogy in the direction of proportional structure.

The other examples are legion of Plato operating through metaphors and analogies that try to teach us something about the nonphysical by relying upon our understanding and values in the physical realm. Cooper points out that Socrates focuses on “how to conceive and appreciate the value of the various highly rated traditional virtues (justice, courage, temperance, etc.), in comparison with other things apparently also of value (such as bodily health, physical strength, wealth, bodily or other pleasures, and so on).”<sup>69</sup> Plato’s messages about justice and the care of soul are driven by a particular kind of reasoning that analogizes the physical and the nonphysical, specifically the body and the soul.

On one hand, Plato relies on the physical body as a source analog in hopes of Socrates seeming clearer and more credible when expounding his claims about souls, which is his main target analog. To make his strange claims about the soul and its proper care realistic and true to life, Socrates appeals to that with which his interlocutors are well acquainted, the human body, its skills, its needs, its health and disease, and so on. For instance, at *Gorgias* 521a Plato has Socrates suggest that the political craft is the quest to make citizens “as good as possible, *like a doctor*” (emphasis added). This is a promising strategy because interlocutors and readers are literally at home with the physical and the crafts that attend to the physical, and consequently it is typically easy to adapt and apply knowledge of health and disease. Plato has Socrates explicitly compare justice to health because he knows that human beings usually value physical health as inherently good.<sup>70</sup> No one should be confused as to why someone prefers physical health over sickness. Given this function, medicine is a powerful analogy. Knowing how intuitive the concepts of physical health and disease are to his audience, Plato uses the continuum between health and disease to describe the condition of souls, even though they are not physical. In this way, Plato is using familiarity with the physical as a pedagogical tool and renovating vocabulary that typically pertains to the physical.

In particular, Plato employs health and disease to explain the consequences of just and unjust ways because health plays out in internal rather than external consequences.<sup>71</sup> It does not matter if other people (or the divine) ever discover one’s just or unjust character because justice and injustice have an immediate effect on one’s soul, just as it does not matter whether one’s neighbor or doctor ever discovers one’s healthy or unhealthy lifestyle, for health and disease are authentic states occurring in one’s body even if they remain concealed from other people.

On the other hand, however, Plato is ultimately making the case that virtue and the care of the soul are of greater value than such valuable



things as bodily health and physical strength.<sup>72</sup> Here Plato assumes that his readers may be ignorant or even resistant to claims about the soul, but that drawing an analogy to the physical will make the claims about the soul more intelligible and less outlandish. Plato is a normative dualist, and thus he values the soul over the body, but he still uses the body to educate others about the value of health in the soul. In so doing, Plato is transforming the vernacular of physical health to apply to something nonphysical.

Plato often has Socrates analogize the body (the source analog) to the soul (the target analog) in order to persuade interlocutors and readers of the following: (1) the health of the soul is inherently good just as the health of the body is inherently good; (2) living unjustly results in a diseased soul; and (3) one should pursue the health of the soul by living justly. In crafting this particular analogy, Socrates intends to make more plausible his message that when one does not take proper care of the soul, say, by living immoderately, there are real consequences regardless of who knows it. He aims to demonstrate to his interlocutors that the negative consequences of living unjustly are not even limited to the ill health of one's own soul. Not properly caring for the soul also affects one's *polis* and the other souls in the *polis*. In fact, Plato does not only have Socrates say that what health is to the body justice is to the soul (*Grg.* 464b-c, *R.* 444c), but in the *Republic* he also signals that justice is to the city what health is to the body (*R.* 372e-373a).

There are a variety of additional ways that Plato uses physical vocabulary to illustrate new concepts about philosophy and philosophers.<sup>73</sup> He frequently makes use of all sorts of imagery in service to various philosophical lessons. In his account of the nonphysical soul and the nonphysical Forms, Plato often employs either erotic vocabulary<sup>74</sup> or the language of food and nourishment.<sup>75</sup> For instance, let's look at *Republic* 490a-b, where Socrates claims that the philosopher is driven by erotic love of the Forms and has intercourse with the Forms, while the Forms provide nourishment for the person who is truly a philosopher by nature. He says:

Then, won't it be reasonable for us to plead in [the philosopher's] defense that it is the nature of the real lover of learning to struggle toward what is, not to remain with any of the many things that are believed to be, that, as he moves on, he neither loses nor lessens his erotic love until he grasps the being of each nature itself with the part of his soul that is fitted to grasp it, because of its kinship with it, and that, once getting

near what really is and having intercourse with it (*kai migeis*) and having begotten understanding and truth, he knows, truly lives, is nourished (*kai trephoito*), and—at that point, but not before—is relieved from the pains of giving birth? (R. 490a-b)

When Plato utilizes such analogies, does he mean to import something significant from the source analog to illuminate something about the target analog (Forms and the soul), or is he turning the original connotation of the source analog's vernacular entirely on its head?

Plato intends to refashion the meaning of the physical vocabulary he employs in nonphysical contexts, such as souls being nourished or philosophers having intercourse with the Forms. He had to adapt existing vernacular in order to create a lexicon for concepts for which the Greek language had no words.<sup>76</sup> The metaphorical usage relies upon the literal meanings but modifies the terms' original connotations, such as feeding a physical body with physical food or physical bodies having sexual intercourse, into something new and nonphysical, such as “feeding” a soul with contact with nonphysical Forms or a soul “having intercourse with” Forms. Furthermore, despite his project to transform certain physical vocabulary, Plato still also regularly uses food vocabulary with its original, literal physical connotation. So, Plato can continue to use erotic vocabulary with its original sexual meaning alongside strategic use of transformed erotic vocabulary.<sup>77</sup> The central question here is how much weight Plato gives to the literal meanings of this physical vernacular after he transforms the original connotation by pointing beyond it.

Some scholars reject out of hand the possibility that Plato chooses this language while conserving the original connotations.<sup>78</sup> However, I argue that, while it is obvious that there is a semantic shift happening, Plato must import something significant from the original connotation in order for the original vocabulary to function as a source analog that sheds light on the target analog. I urge that we bear in mind the rich dynamic involved in Plato making use of the original meanings as source analogs. As Classen explains, even though these metaphors are initially intended to serve as illustrative comparisons, they also provide important suggestions into the relationships under examination.<sup>79</sup> Even if we remember how Plato makes use of concepts such as physical nourishment or erotic attraction as source analogs, that is not mutually exclusive of his also playing with those original connotations as they are refashioned for the target analogs.<sup>80</sup>

## 1.5 Pedagogical Irony

This project will demonstrate, for the first time in the scholarly literature, that Plato does value the body and the role it plays in the philosophical life. He values the body because rational inquiry includes particular physical and erotic experiences that facilitate the understanding of true reality (eternal, nonphysical Forms), and, as I just explained, because the physical regularly functions so well as a source analog to facilitate learning about the abstract and invisible. Certain positive roles for embodied experience are a persistent feature of Plato's thought, not just referenced in a stray passage here or there. Plato does say some disparaging things about the body, but I argue that these vilifying remarks operate in a provocative, ironic way for the sake of a pedagogical aim.<sup>81</sup> Although I will underscore the evidence for his normative dualism, I contend that Plato intends to speak to two different categories of readership.<sup>82</sup> His audience is heterogeneous, and being aware of this, he imbues his texts with multiple layers of meaning. In this regard, his message is not unlike the enigmatic oracular prophesies people received at Delphi. His dialogues offer much that is directed toward those who are not yet philosophers or caretakers of the soul, and simultaneously they are geared toward those who have already made the transition to prioritizing the care of the soul and loving wisdom. On one level he addresses those who are already more philosophically inclined in order to encourage them to discern a positive role for the physical within the philosophical life; on another level he speaks to those who are less philosophically inclined in order to warn them off overindulging the physical through an excessive appetite.

Plato warns us about the danger of being a slave to the body, what he calls a "body-lover" (*philosômatos*) (*Phd.* 68b-c). Body-lovers are characterized by the fear of death as well as by slavishness with respect to such things as wealth and the pleasures of food, wine, sex, and sleep. Body-lovers use sense perception of "visibles" without also engaging in philosophical reasoning about what Plato calls "intelligibles" (*R.* 509d). The aim of a body-lover is pleasure alone, even if it comes at the expense of one's psychic or physical health. Plato's Socrates's main pursuit in the dialogues is encouraging his interlocutors to put soul before flesh so that they may flourish as human beings. For instance, in the *Apology*, he says, "For I go around doing nothing but persuading both young and old among you not to care for your body or your wealth *in preference to or as strongly as for the best possible state of your soul*" (30a-b; emphasis added).<sup>83</sup> While Plato's

Socrates refrains from utilizing disingenuous devices, such as apologizing, crying, or parading his family in front of the jury, to save his own life in the *Apology*, he is quite willing to use rhetorical tools in order to prompt his interlocutors to accept that, even though the body plays some positive roles in inquiry, the body's value pales in comparison to that of the soul. So, sometimes Plato has Socrates make use of unsympathetic claims about the body in order to jar the body-loving members of his audience away from their conventional attitude of being solely or chiefly concerned with the state of one's body.

My contention is that, according to Plato, one flourishes as an individual human being when one learns how to care for the soul *without* disregarding the body's needs and desires, rather than by learning how to deny the body's needs and desires. The dialogues make clear that the antidote to body-love is loving wisdom rather than loving only pleasure, wealth, and/or power. However, one must learn how to be properly disposed toward the body before one can love wisdom and flourish as a human being. Ultimately, Plato hopes that the interlocutors and readers will learn to esteem the soul sufficiently to be able to coordinate its needs with those of the body so that body and soul can live in harmony with each other. This enables one to include moderate physical pleasures in one's contemplative life without becoming a slave to the body. However, if Plato were explicitly to convey that there is room for enjoying physical pleasure within a contemplative life, body-lovers would likely latch on to the familiar concern for pleasing the body and ignore (or reject) the idea that one should prioritize the care of the soul. Thus, for pedagogical reasons his messages about the importance of the body must be embedded within his call for all human beings to abandon body-love.

This pedagogical strategy invites interlocutors and readers to initiate a transformation that involves making two transitions. First, one needs to make a transition to loving the soul instead of the body. In the second transition, one moves away from the extreme of caring *only* for the soul to caring for both the soul and the body in a way that prioritizes the soul without renouncing the body. These transitions do not necessarily happen in discrete instants; instead, making these transitions is an ongoing process that moves at different speeds for different individuals, depending on their individual predispositions. For example, someone who has made the transition to loving the soul instead of the body may still be vulnerable to a relapse into body-love. So, what might seem like mixed messages about the body's value are actually Plato's attempt to write different prescriptions for two different audiences. The body-lovers need the dialogues' more