This paper examines the problems arising from Plato’s conceptualization of *sophia* in moral terms. In particular, it focuses on the problematic relationship between intelligence and vice embodied by the figure of the ‘bad’ *sophos* and his ability to do wrong. The main question is whether the bad but smart intellectual, e.g. the crafty liar, is to be considered as simply an ignorant person or as a person possessing a kind of knowledge or intelligence that makes him ‘bad’. If *sophia* is an ability and a skill essentially attached to truth and goodness, how should we understand the intelligence or capacity to deceive and tell lies? Although there is enough evidence in Plato’s dialogues consistently pointing to an intellectualism whereby virtue is equated with knowledge and vice with ignorance, there are some significant passages suggesting that it is especially by means of intellectual capacity that the vicious man acts.

In general, intellectual categories can be coloured either negatively or positively by connotative association. Depending on the context, calling someone “clever” might be meant as a compliment, but then “too clever” might be considered offensive. Being smart is good, but being a “smart guy”… not so much. Importantly, the evaluative dimension associated to intellectual categories can be morally relevant or morally neutral. Intellectual shrewdness—“cleverness”—can be attributed to a cook as well as to a liar, a thief or a murderer. The evaluation, in all of these cases, is morally neutral. In as much as they successfully perform their activities, they qualify as intelligent.

Among the many intellectual labels relevant in the ancient tradition, *sophia* stands as a special case due to its long-standing importance and its wide range of uses: i) in a rather specialized use, it serves as a title, a label indicating status and authority, both in the archaic tradition of poetry and the model of new learning; ii) in a more generalized use, it functions as an intellectual capacity designating comprehensive knowledge as well as particular crafts. Importantly, both of these uses can be attached to a positive or a negative value, so they move throughout the evaluative spectrum. *Sophia*, as an intellectual capacity or ability can be said of a person who is:
“Capable of anything”: the one who uses his skills without inhibition, in which case the meaning becomes closer to “cleverness” or “cunning”, which is related to Greek deinotes, dexiotes, metis, panourgia, etc.

- Capable within the constraints of a value-system, in which case the meaning becomes closer to “good sense” or “wisdom”, which relates to Greek agathos, arete.

As a result, under the concept of sophos/sophia there are two evaluative levels operating, not necessarily connected: i) that assessing skill and intelligence, and ii) that assessing moral character.

The present investigation is intended to examine how these two levels are reconciled in Plato’s conceptualization of sophia, and how, in being so reconciled, problems arise. In particular, I wish to focus on the problematic relationship between intelligence and vice embodied by the figure of the “bad” sophos in his ability to do wrong. If sophia is an ability and a skill essentially attached to truth, how should we understand the intelligence or capacity to deceive and tell lies? If “sophos” only qualifies the successful performance of a person’s rational and moral capacity, how do we identify the rational competence of the one that successfully performs evil?

The identification of virtue with techne or sophia with the ability to do good carries many problems. The most obvious difficulty—and the main focus of criticism—is that, whereas the practice of a techne, i.e. carpentry or running, does not guarantee right use and its purpose can be rejected, virtue prescribes the means, and its purpose cannot be rejected.¹ But there are other two further implications I would like to discuss. The first is that, provided that knowledge is essentially attached to virtue, truth, and goodness, then there is not such knowledge, not such intelligence, as that oriented to do wrong. Ultimately, the ability to do wrong is not ability, it is a weakness; the knowledge used to deceive is not knowledge, it is ignorance. In connection with this, the second difficulty arises as to how the value attached to words of intellectual force can restrict the spectrum

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¹ IRWIN makes the point by arguing that the possession of a techne, being essentially instrumental, does not guarantee good use. “A craft is a rational procedure for producing a certain product when a craftsman wants to, but does not prescribe when he will want to, or how will use the product” (IRWIN 1977: 137). O’BRIEN analyses the same phenomenon from the point of view of the ends: “It [virtue] is like a craft or skill, which is also knowledge and ability. But it differs from a craft or a skill, because a craftsman can sometimes reject the purpose of his craft, but a man can never reject the good” (O’BRIEN 1967: 106).
of the evaluative meaning. Plato’s notion of *sophia*, and other related notions such as *techne, phronesis, episteme*, when morally qualified, cannot conceptualize that aspect of *sophia* that aims to evaluate intellectual competence alone.\(^2\) Strictly speaking, an expert thief, murderer, liar cannot be a *sophos*. Thus *sophia* gets closer to *agathos, arete*, while dissociated from *deinotes, dseiotes, panourgia, polutropia*.

In what follows, I would like to address some of the problematic issues that arise from a conceptualization of *sophia* in these terms. For it seems that Plato is alleging that experts schemers and deceivers, such as are Odysseus or Medea, or some of Socrates’ fellow thinkers, the sophists, are not to be counted among the *sophoi*, but rather among the *amatheis*. I claim that this move should be understood within the scope of Plato’s philosophical project in which the attempt to redefine intellectual categories is intended to exclude other competitive models in the tradition.

The first question is whether the bad but smart intellectual, e.g. the crafty liar, is to be considered just as an ignorant or as possessing a kind of knowledge that makes him “bad”. Is the intelligent, the wily, clever and cunning an ignorant, an *amathes*? Throughout the Platonic corpus, from the *Apology* to the *Laws*, the answer seems to be almost unequivocally the same. Although the approach varies, the principle of what is called the “Socratic paradox” remains consistent: no one does wrong willingly because, ultimately, virtue is knowledge and vice is ignorance. In the *Meno*, those supposedly evil are really *agnoountes* (77e); in the *Protagoras*, the will to do good things is wisdom (*sophia*), whereas the opposite is *amathia* (358c); in *Republic* IV (444e), vice is equivalent to disease (*nosos*), disgrace (*aiskos*), and incapability (*astheneia*), and in the *Timaeus* (86e), the wickedness of the wicked man (*kakos*) is explained by some evil disposition of the body (*poneran exin tina*) and an uneducated nurture (*apaideuton trophe*). The argumentative thread seems to be articulated by the principle that no one rationally desires evil as such, and therefore a disposition to do wrong is the result of a defective cognitive state adequately explained as a sort of wickedness, ignorance, or even sickness. Interestingly, the state of ignorance (*amathia*) conceptualizes both lack of knowledge and conceit of knowledge. There is, as such, no rational capacity for evil.

The problems that arise from the Socratic ethical paradoxes relative to the questions of intellectualism and the rejection of incontinence have

\(^2\) So it is the case of the artisans in Plato’s *Apology* (22d). They are said to possess a *techne* and as being more *sophoi* with respect to their craft, but as they do not know “the most important things” and yet they claim to know them, they do not qualify as *sophoi*. 
been largely discussed in the scholarly tradition and they still constitute a
critical point in the study of the Platonic thought. However, I would like to
go beyond that point to explore the problem that this question poses in the
literary tradition where there are other competing intellectual models.
More particularly, I would like to examine the conditions under which the
ability to deceive, the art of cunning, all prominent forms of intelligence in
the tradition of poetry, politics and oratory, are marginalized from Plato’s
intellectual ideal.

The figure of the cunning and the crafty has a prominent place in the
ancient literary tradition, from Homer to Euripides. Among the epic
heroes, polutropos Odysseus stands as a conspicuous example: an expert
liar, full of ingenious resources, he gets his own way by deceiving
unscrupulously.  
While it is true that some post-Homeric accounts show
Odysseus’ intelligence in a rather negative light, in Homer this is a quality
that deserves divine admiration. In Odyssey (13,291) Athene praises
Odysseus on the basis of being “crafty in counsel [ποικιλομήτα]”,
“insatiate in deceit [δόλων ἄατος]”, and describes him as someone who
deeply loves lying.  
Importantly, the passage reveals both that he deceives
by way of skills and that he does it willingly. In the sixth century, the
Elegiac poet Theognis embraces Odysseus’ trait as sophia, a quality that is
worth more than arete, when he advises Cynus to train his faculty to
adapt, change and imitate others. Then he asserts: “surely skill is a better
thing even than great virtue [κρεῖσσόν τοι σοφίη καὶ μεγάλης ἀρετῆς].”.
To be clear, sophia overlaps here with polutropia, a competence that
proves to be effective by the multiplicity and variety of its resources. A
man that commits his intellectual ability and disposition only to truth
might be agathos, but not polutropos.

To fully understand Plato’s position it is helpful to consider the
peculiar intellectual climate of the second half of the fifth century BCE. The
growing phenomenon of literacy, against the political backdrop of an
egalitarian ideology, gives impulse to the democratization of education
and the emergence of a new intellectual class. Marked by a critical and
analytical approach, the model of new learning is introduced in tension
with the old traditional value-system. “In Greek thought the acceptance of
tradition is generally opposed to cleverness, to the critical intellect”.  
As a result, intellectual shrewdness is commonly associated with a subversion

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3 For a complete survey on the reception of the figure of Odysseus in the
philosophical tradition see MONTIGLIO (2011).
4 Trans. by W. R. M. LAMB.
5 Trans. by J. M. EDMONDS.
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of moral and conventional standards. This cultural phenomenon has an effect on the evaluative meaning of a wide range of the intellectual lexica; consequently, *techne, sophia, dexiotes*, acquire negative overtones. In such a scenario, it is only natural that the cunning intelligence characteristic of Odysseus is exposed at its worst. In Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* (1015), once Philoctetes realizes that Neoptolemus has deceived him by following Odysseus’ instructions, he accuses the latter of training the former “to be a *sophos* in evil [ἔν κακοῖς εἶναι σοφόν]”. Similarly, in Euripides’ *Medea* (285), Creon recognizes Medea’s intelligence as a threat and describes her as being a “natural *sophe*” [σοφὴ πέφυκας!] and as “knowing many evils [καὶ κακῶν πολλῶν ἴδρις!]”. Medea, on her part, regrets the reputation of *sophia* in a society where it is condemned by the ignorant and the envious. In *Clouds*, Aristophanes derides the madness and idleness of the intellectual class. In this context “*sophos*” is far from being complimentary; it aims to disparage the overcritical attitude characteristic of sophists and philosophers.

This is not irrelevant for Plato’s philosophical agenda, where *sophia* and *philosophia* are at the centre of a good and a virtuous life. To be sure, Plato is redefining intellectual notions as morally relevant in a context where the reputation of the intellectual is the object of negative criticism. Precisely because of this, concepts such as *sophia* and *techne* need to be introduced with qualification. If there is some identifiable aspect of *sophia* that is questionable or regrettable, then that aspect is to be rejected. The attempt of dissociating philosophical wisdom from other traditional paradigms is successfully accomplished in *Apology*, where “real” *sophia*, the highest form of *sophia*, is attached to virtue, truth and goodness while any other form of *sophia* is said to be merely “apparent”, conceit of *sophia*. Admittedly, Plato’s project of *sophia* is neither identified with the old tradition nor with the new sophistic trend. The attempt of reserving *sophia* only for the good, however, proves to raise some conceptual difficulties. The tension is concentrated on the fact that, as an intellectual ability, *sophia* either reaches all its potentiality and then it has no limits, or it is restricted to a certain class of object and then is limited. Plato seeks to include both: he is after the highest form of *sophia* (divine, “real” *sophia*) but qualified, attached to truth and good. This move has a significant consequence; the aspect associated to intelligence and knowledge closer to the Greek concepts of *polumathia, metis, deinotes, dexiotes*, that is, cleverness, shrewdness, cunning, is marginalized from the intellectual sphere relevant for virtue. Under the Platonic model, the intelligence of cunning cannot be properly conceptualized, at least not by “real *Sophia*”. Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant refer to this in their study *Cunning intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, and claim that it is
precisely the concept of Platonic truth that “overshadowed a whole area of intelligence with its own kinds of understanding”.

To avoid any unwanted association, in most of Plato’s dialogues, the relevant terminology is qualified. Just as in Apology “real” sophia is the knowledge of virtue, in the Phaedrus real techne (260e) is attached to the truthful speech, and in the Gorgias real dunamis to goodness (466b), thus preventing the sophist from having a techne and the tyrant from being powerful (dunatos).

The only dialogue in which the intellectual lexica are systematically unqualified is the Lesser Hippias. Considered for some time as an immoral display of Socrates’ playful sophistry, the dialogue arrives at two conclusions: i) that the truthful and false individual are the same; ii) that the one who commits injustice voluntarily is better than the one who does it involuntarily. Particularly relevant is the line of argument that allows Socrates to conclude the first. The logic and central reasoning is reached through a treatment that opens the semantic range of intellectual categories by neutralizing their connotative meaning and by making them morally indifferent. Most significantly, in this context, sophia is equivalent to panourgia, polumathia and polutropia; on the other hand, dunamis, techne, phronesis, episteme, sophia are devoid of any moral significance.

Socrates begins the conversation by asking Hippias who is better, Achilles or Odysseus, and in respect to what (364b). Hippias’ answer is elusive: he says that Achilles is the bravest and Odysseus the most resourceful, polutropos. The invocation of Odysseus leads to discuss the quality of polutropia. Even when the meaning of polutropos is never explicitly established, its evaluative dimension, at least for Hippias, is straightforwardly negative: as he puts it, whereas Achilles is alethes and haplous, Odysseus is pseudos and polutropos. To make the contrast sharp, Hippias couples truth and simplicity against resourcefulness and falsity. For Socrates, however, this is not an obvious association. Ultimately,
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Socrates embodies a model that is not among Hippias’ alternatives, i.e. a model that couples intelligence and truthfulness: smart as Odysseus, truthful as Achilles.

As the conversation unfolds (Plat. Hipp. Min. 365d sqq), it is admitted that: i) the false, in his ability to tell lies, is capable of doing something (δύνατος τι ποιεῖν) by reason of shrewdness (πανουργίας) and a sort of intelligence (φρονήσεως τινος); ii) being intelligent (φρόνιμοι δὲ ὄντες), the false know what they are doing (ἐπίστανται ὅ τι ποιοῦσιν), that is why they do harm (κακουργοῦσιν); iii) knowing these things, they are wise (σοφοὶ) in deception (ἐξαπατᾶν). Consequently, the false are those who are wise and powerful in uttering falsehoods (οἱ σοφοὶ τε καὶ δυνατοὶ ψεύδεσθαι). A man, then, who has not the power to utter falsehoods (ἀδύνατος ψεύδεσθαι) and is ignorant (ἀμαθής) would not be false (ψευδής).

The reasoning allows Socrates, not without Hippias’ approval, to conclude that the false, in his power to tell lies, is different from the ignorant. Contrary to the general Socratic thesis, the false is to be counted among the sophoi and phronimoi. It is worth remarking, however, that this is, as Socrates asserts, a “sort” of intelligence. As Hippias is keen to observe, the false are sophoi, phronimoi and dunatoi only in respect to lying. Thus far, the argument is consented without any relevant objection. What triggers Hippias’ resistance is the further consequence that the same man is both false and true, and, more particularly, that the true man is in no way better (ameinon) than the false (367c).

What lies at the core of the argument is the apparent ambiguity between the two evaluative levels: one aiming at the successful performance of an activity and the other at moral character. As it seems, the false, being “good at” lying cannot be “worse” than the one telling the truth. Hence most critics see this move as a deliberate use of equivocation, a fallacious use of “good” in its relative sense, “good at”, as “good” in an absolute sense. Others reject equivocation and suggest that is only one word. Hence, JOWETT’S and FOWLER’S ‘wily’ is a suitable translation of πολύτροπος when Hippias says it. […] For Socrates, on the other hand, it seems that πολύτροπος, at least initially, designates a neutral ability, probably meaning something like MULHERN’S ‘resourceful’.” HADE claims that it is precisely this double-value of the word polutropia that allows Socrates to problematize the discussion. “Socrates takes the precise tack he does, rather than addressing himself to Hippias speech, for an excellent reason: he has seized on the word polytropos because it is in fact ambiguous.” (HADE 1997: 147)

10 Trans. by H. N FOWLER.
11 Particularly SPRAGUE (1962) and MULHERN (1968).
sense, the relative one, that prevails throughout and then the paradox for the argumentative purposes is dissolved. The “goodness” of the false is only restricted to his capacity to lie; it says nothing about his state of character. Nonetheless, the case still proves to be perplexing. Socrates and Hippias, by the logic of the argument, are driven to consistently accept the premises, but not the conclusions. Why is this? I think that the problem ultimately lies, to a greater or lesser degree, on Plato’s conception of virtue as craft. If the craft per excellence is virtue, if the knowledge per excellence is truth, then being “good at” overlaps with being “good”. In this light, the expression “good at being bad” presents a paradox. A theory that attaches virtue and techne needs to completely dissociate vice from techne and sophia. It seems, indeed, reasonable to question the extent to which virtue can be identified with knowledge if knowledge can be oriented to perform wrongness.

To a certain extent, the point that Lesser Hippias raises is that, if virtue is a craft, as any other craft, the false is not better than the truthful man. But the point to show is precisely that virtue is not as any other craft. It is “the” craft. Far from being “unsocratic” or an immoral dialogue, Lesser Hippias establishes the difficulties and the necessity of the correlation between virtue and techne: Plato’s philosophical project needs knowledge and craft to be at the centre of a good life, all of which is problematic enough as to suggest that a good life might need more than knowledge and craft. Hence the importance of qualifying and redefining what is “craft”, what is “knowledge”, what is “capacity”, etc.

The question is elusive. Intellectual capacity, when is unqualified, results in paradox for it would include the admission that the bad are good (at being bad); intellectual capacity, when qualified, also results in paradox for it would imply that intelligent people are stupid or ignorant (amathes).

I would like to conclude with one passage of the Republic in which Socrates openly recognizes that is not by ignorance that the bad are bad, but by knowledge and skill. In book VII (518e–519a), after the allegory of the cave, Socrates reflects on the nature of education. As he asserts, this is not a process by which a soul lacking knowledge comes to possess knowledge. Just as the eye has the power to see the light, the soul possesses the power to know the truth and to contemplate the good. Education, paideia, is rather an art, a techne, by which the souls are turned into the right direction. Unlike other virtues that can be acquired by power of exercise:

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[...] the excellence of thought [*τὸ φρονῆσαι*], it seems, is certainly of a more divine quality, a thing that never loses its potency [*δύναμιν*], but, according to the direction of its conversion [*περιαγωγῆς*], becomes useful and beneficent, or, again, useless and harmful [*ἄχρηστον αὖ καὶ βλαβερὸν*]. Have you never observed in those who are popularly spoken of as bad [*πονηρῶν*], but smart men [*σοφῶν*] how keen [*δριμὺ*] is the vision [*βλέπει*] of the little soul [*ψυχάριον*], how quick [*ὀξέως (ὀξύς)*] it is to discern [*διορᾷ*] the things that interest it [*ταῦτα ἐφ' ἃ τέτραπται*], a proof that is not a poor vision [*φαύλην τὴν ὄψιν*] which it has, but one forcibly enlisted in the service of evil [*κακία*], so that the sharper its sight [*ὀξύτερον βλέπῃ*] the more mischief [*πλείω κακὰ*] it accomplishes [*ἐργαζόμενον*]?13

Just like in *Lesser Hippias*, the intelligence for evil is seen as *dunamis*; it is not by ignorance that they achieve their purposes, but by ability. *Techne* does not give the power to think—that power is inherent to the intellect; it gives the power to *think rightly*. A central point here is that intelligence, by itself, does not guarantee good use. Good memory, quickness or concentration must be informed by certain content and trained under certain direction; hence the importance of education. It is suggestive that Socrates should raise the question at this point of the discussion, when reflecting on the importance of education and the role of the philosopher, for he seems to be granting the influence of other rival educative models. As already shown, essential to Plato’s task is to dissociate the intellectual pursuit of *philosophia* from that of the sophists, a difficult task considering that both are recognized under the same name of *sophia* (cf. Rep. VI 493a ff). Socrates acknowledges these are reputed smart (*sophoi*), not ignorant, not without admitting first that reputation of *sophia* and real *sophia* are different.

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13 Trans. by. P. SHOREY.
Trinidad Silva


This paper examines Plato’s analogy of justice and health in *Republic* 4. By drawing upon an analogy with bodily health, Plato defines justice as a healthy psychological condition. Thus, in order to truly grasp Plato’s definition of justice understood as a healthy psychological condition, we need to review the different accounts of health that were widely accepted in Plato’s time. The analysis will finally show that Plato’s analogy of justice and health does not hold true since the medical definition of health is incompatible with his account of justice.

At the core of Plato’s definition of justice (*Rep.* 4, 443c9–444e5) we encounter a novel and somehow odd analogy between justice and bodily health. Plato first introduces this analogy alongside his earlier line of reasoning throughout Books 2-4, after both a lengthy philosophical examination, which must withstand criticisms from both Socrates’ interlocutors and modern scholarship, and a careful treatment of their objections. The argument to be addressed here, however, is the analogy of justice and health brought out by Socrates towards the end of Book 4. Since Plato’s analogy hinges upon key aspects of the *Republic’s* psychological model, they will be taken for granted for the sake of argument. Oceans of ink have been spilt on them and, compared to the number of papers and books concerned with both Plato’s psychology and the analogy of the city and the soul, it is actually surprising that modern scholars have drawn much less attention to the analogy of justice and health. To be sure, the analogy seems to give us, for the first time in the dialogue, a *prima facie* motivating reason to choose justice over injustice.\(^1\) In the recent past, however, it has been too easily supposed that the analogy of health and justice is just self-explanatory. Such an omission, however, provides me with a good excuse to further explore

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\(^1\) As A. Kenny rightly summarises it: “Everyone wants to be healthy, so if justice is health, everyone must *really* want to be just. If some do not want to behave justly, this can only be because they do not understand the nature of justice and injustice and lack insight into their own condition” (1973: 23, italics are mine)
both the philosophical assumptions underlying the analogy and the historical influence of Hippocratic medicine on Plato’s ethical model.²

In section one, I shall deal with that stage of the argument where the definition of justice as a healthy psychological condition is first advanced (this is what I call “Plato’s medicalisation of justice”). Section two focuses on the medical background, mostly overlooked, which underlies Plato’s theory of justice. As I shall show, the vocabulary employed by Plato when drawing the analogy strongly suggests that he resorts to a definition of health that was widely accepted within the medical tradition. If so, we must first examine their views on health in order to assess the soundness of Plato’s account of justice. Hence the historical research turns out to be very useful, perhaps indispensable, for philosophical purposes. Finally, throughout section three I shall point to the main inconsistency that jeopardise Plato’s account of justice understood as a healthy psychical condition.

I

At Rep. 4, 444c Plato introduces for the first time in the Republic an explicit comparison between justice and health.³ The main idea underlying this comparison goes as follows: just as there is a distinctive order of the different bodily constituents called “health” (ὑγίεια), there also exists a proper order of the elements (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν, ὁ θῡμός, τὸ λογιστικόν) in the human psyche which Plato terms “justice” (δικαιοσύνη) (444d1–e5):

(A) Bodily health: “To produce health is to establish the elements in the body according to a natural order of dominating and being dominated by one another, and to produce disease is to establish a relation of ruling and being ruled by one another contrary to nature” (Ἔστι δὲ τὸ μὲν υγίειαν

² However, some few critics have drawn their attention to this key argument. For further discussion of the analogy in modern scholarship, see: KENNY (1973); STALLEY (1981) CAMBIANO (1982); LIDZ (1995); VEGETTI, (1998: 102); FERRARI, (2003: 64); BERGES (2012).
³ It is worth pointing out, however, that there are clear traces of this association earlier on in Book 2. When Glaucon introduces his famous triadic classification of goods at the outset of Book 2, he encourages Socrates to support his view that justice belongs to the highest goods, namely, those that are welcomed both for their own sake and for their consequences, like “being healthy” (τὸ υγιαίνειν, 357c3). Further on, Adeimantus restates Glaucon’s challenge by making the very same point: he wants to be shown that justice resembles health in that even though it does have an instrumental value, it is still worth pursuing aside from its consequences (367c–d).
Plato’s medicalisation of justice in Republic IV

ποιεῖν τὰ ἐν τῷ σώματι κατὰ φύσιν καθιστάναι κρατεῖν τε καὶ κρατεῖσθαι ὑπ’ ἀλλήλων, τὸ δὲ νόσον παρὰ φύσιν ἄρχειν τε καὶ ἄρχεσθαι ἄλλο ὑπ’ ἀλλοῦ (444d2–6).

(B) Justice: “To produce justice is to establish the elements in the soul according to a natural order of dominating and being dominated by one another, and to produce injustice is to establish a relation of ruling and being ruled by one another contrary to nature” (Οὐκοῦν αὖ, ἔφην, τὸ δικαιοσύνην ἐμποιεῖν τὰ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ κατὰ φύσιν καθιστάναι κρατεῖν τε καὶ κρατεῖσθαι, τὸ δὲ ἀδικίαν παρὰ φύσιν ἄρχειν τε καὶ ἄρχεσθαι ἄλλο ὑπ’ ἀλλοῦ, 444d8–11).

The symmetry behind both explanantia is noticeably: they seem to convey the same idea, and each word is carefully repeated in each of them by keeping the same syntax. I have stressed some words in bold so as to emphasise that they are indeed the only terms at variance. Consider: we could easily replace each of those terms (“health” for “justice”; “in the body” for “in the soul”, etc.) and then apply them to its counterpart. The reasoning would remain exactly the same. It seems, then, that Plato conceives of the analogy in a demanding way—rather than as a mere metaphor, as some critics have suggested—which is consistently supported by the textual evidence found elsewhere. In an earlier line, for instance, Socrates himself claimed that when it comes to the way healthy and unhealthy things affect the body, “there is no difference” (οὐδὲν διαφέροντα) between the corporeal pair healthful/diseaseful and the psychical pair just/unjust (444c5–6). Additionally, after introducing the analogy, he plainly identifies virtue (here unqualified) with certain kind of health: Ἀρετὴ...ὑγίειά τέ τις, 444d13. Further on, Socrates goes so far as

4 A similar line of reasoning can be found in the Gorgias (504b2–504d2).
5 Socrates’ use of τις in connection with υγίεια is problematic for at least two reasons. The claim that virtue is υγίεια τέ τις insinuates that there are also other ways we could think of health. Unfortunately, no other meaning is attested by the passage. Secondly, the claim is not consistent with Socrates’s earlier view that ‘there is no difference’ between health and justice (virtue, previously identified with justice (433b) without further ado, is now displayed as a kind of health, which presumes a difference genus-species after all). I venture to say that Plato has in mind something like this: in so far as ‘health’ can be said of both the body and the soul, there is indeed no difference between them (‘health’ as a univocal genus does not change its meaning in each case); however, since body and soul are different entities in Plato’s overall ontology, both embody different sub-kinds of health: psychic and physical, respectively. A really important remark must be made at this point. When Socrates treats psychic health as a ‘kind of health’, he is also thinking in terms of priority. As evidenced by several passages of the Republic, psychic
to apply the Greek εὐεξία (444e1) (“good condition”, “healthy condition”) to the just human psyche. This commonly unnoticed move is particularly interesting because this is probably the second time in Antiquity that the word is employed to refer to the psychological dimension of men (the first one can be traced to Socrates’ speech at Gorgias 464a2–4). Aside from one single fragment of Democritus (Fr. 184), whose authenticity was called into question by Guthrie in the last century, the oldest report of the word comes from the Hippocratic Corpus, where it exclusively denotes the bodily condition of patients (see Acut. 3, 28, Aph., 2, 34). Hence, a Greek of the fourth century must have found the concept of justice as the εὐεξία of the psyche rather surprising. Now if justice is thought of as a healthy psychological state, we are clearly in need of a definition of health.

Before taking up a more careful examination of the analogy, I call the reader’s attention to four main points of Plato’s moral psychology that I shall keep in view to support my conclusions in the last section of this paper. First the human soul is a complex entity containing three different motivational sources (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν, ὁ θῡμός, τὸ λογιστικόν, 437b–441c). Secondly, even though justice is a political virtue, it is primarily a psychological ἓξις (443c9–d1). Thirdly, in either case, political and psychological, justice consists of a natural order according to which each part of the city/soul performs its own function (τὸ τὰ αὑτοῦ πράττειν, 435b1–c6; 443b1–2). Finally, and most importantly: such distribution of functions gives rise to justice understood as a hierarchical order of virtue, of which reason rules over the remaining parts (441d11–e6).

health is much more worth choosing than bodily health (445b–c). Sometimes the latter is merely seen as a means contributing to the attainment of the former (591b–c).

6 The word can also be found in Protagoras (354b3), but here it denotes a physical state of the body (see also BRANWOOD’s Index ad. loc. (1976: 405)).

7 Cf. GUTHRIE (1965: 491).

8 I am indebted to LLOYD for this remark (1968: 73).

9 To talk about parts is certainly not the most felicitous expression. ROBINSON complains that this is only accurate on the basis of the identification of some spatial region (1971: 45). Since the Platonic soul is not material, ‘part’ can only have an allegorical meaning. The Greek text makes things no easier by intermingling three different terms: γένε, εἴδος, and μέρη (e.g., 428e7, 429b2, 429a1; 434b9; 434b2). A great deal of the modern debate on Plato’s psychology has to do with this problem. Adopting LORENZ’ reading (2003: 35–52), I shall keep the language of “parts”.

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As we have seen, both justice and health are defined based on a natural interaction between elements. Despite the fact that Plato is deliberately unclear when describing those elements—restricting himself to a rather vague utterance: τὰ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ/ τὰ ἐν τῷ σώματι—we find two main features concerning the interaction between those elements:

1. Health and justice are κατὰ φύσιν, whereas injustice and disease are παρὰ φύσιν.
2. Both justice and health entail a hierarchical order: καθιστάναι κρατεῖν τε καὶ κρατεῖσθαι ὑπ' ἀλλήλων. Accordingly, injustice and disease take place when this order is reversed, and the order is reversed when it is not a natural one (παρὰ φύσιν ἄρχειν τε καὶ ἄρχεσθαι ἄλλο ὑπ' ἄλλου.

Justice and health are alike in that both can be defined as the resulting conjunction of (1) and (2). Upon further examination, however, this analogy turns out to be quite problematic. To be sure, if we stick to (1) only, we can keep the analogy but only in abstract terms: both Plato and Greek physicians would happily agree that health is κατὰ φύσιν and disease παρὰ φύσιν. We could go even further and assert that both would agree that health is the distinctive order (i.e., well-functioning) of the body. But such an agreement is largely superficial and does not speak much to the soundness of the analogy. The reason, I take it, is that we do not yet have any information on the nature of the corresponding order within each domain (so far, Plato has only provided us with a description of the psychical order, namely, justice). On this rather formal level, the analogy still holds true—though this depends on how abstract we want the comparison to be. But when it comes to defining what this “distinctive” order is meant to be in each domain, however, problems immediately arise. Since one pole of the analogy appeals to bodily health, we need to take a short glance at the different accounts of health that were circulating within the medical tradition of the fifth and fourth centuries BC in order to see why the analogy of justice and health does not finally succeed.

It is widely accepted that the Hippocratic and the Sicilian theory of health goes back up to Alcmaeon of Croton (ca. sixth century BC). Thanks to the testimony of Aëtius, we know that Alcmaeon is the author of the first reported rational account of health in ancient Greece, which

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10 For this “formal” reading of the passage, see SANTAS (2001: 87).
11 Alcmaeon was a physician who was wrongly associated with Pythagoreans (Diog. VIII. 83) and representative of the medical tradition that took place in Magna Graecia. Cf. RAVEN (1964: 232).
partly explains why some authors have named him the "Father of Medicine". On this showing, bodily health is seen as the equality (ἰσονομία) of an indefinite number of physical powers (δυνάμεις) in the human body (wet, hot, dry, cold, sour, sweet, and others) which stand in opposite pairs with each other. If any of them increases and gains supremacy (μοναρχία) over the remaining elements, then men get sick and feel pain (cf. Aëtius, V.30; DK 24b4). Due to the lack of textual evidence, this supremacy over the remaining powers in the body can be construed in two different ways: either (a) as a supremacy of one element over its corresponding opposite, or (b) as a supremacy tout court of one element over all others. Either way, health is a matter of “equality” among these bodily elements (Alcmaeon’s definition of health is thus phrased in negative terms: health is defined as the absence of supremacy of one physical element over any other). The notion of κρᾶσις, apparently persistent throughout his medical writings, required each bodily element to be capable both of ruling its opposite and being ruled by it too, thus eliciting a certain balance (σύμμετρος κρᾶσις).

The Hippocratic Corpus attests to three definitions of health in three different treatises. On Ancient Medicine depicts a similar account to that of Alcmaeon: since the human body is composed of many things, including “the sweet, the bitter, the acid, and other such δυνάμεις”, men experience illness when one of these elements is separated from the others. On the contrary, when they are properly mixed with each other, they cause no harm on the human body and cannot even be distinguished from each other (cf. VM. 14, 35–39). It is worth asking whether Alcmaeon’s definition of disease as “monarchy” is tantamount to the isolation (ἀπόκρισις) of one single element in this treatise. At first sight, I think there is no need to assume this association: as the ancient practice of ostracism reveals, an isolated element does not necessarily rule over the others. However, two remarks have been made in favour of a possible equation between μοναρχία and ἀπόκρισις. Firstly, we are told that the isolated element becomes more powerful – having a stronger δυνάμις, as occurs in any monarchical regimen – than the remaining ones. This is subject to the significant proviso, however, that a complete isolation from the κοινωνεῖν of powers is not possible, as each element is naturally mixed with one another. Secondly, we do find in the imagery of the fifth century BC the association between “isolation” and “domination”: according to Anaxagoras, for instance, the divine Νοῦς overpowers the entire universe.

12 See LONGRIGG (1993: 4). By “rational account” I mean that the doxography on Alcmaeon provides us with the first reported aetiology of diseases which does not appeal to divine causation, as it was usually conceived in Greek mythology.
Plato’s medicalisation of justice in Republic IV

precisely because it is not mixed with it, and any kind of blending would affect its cosmic power (DK B3, B8, B12).¹³

On Regimen 3 uses the same terminology employed by Plato in Book 4 of The Republic: the due proportion between diet and exercise is what preserves health. When one of them is overpowered by the other, human beings suffer from diseases: πότερον τὸ σιτίον κρατεῖ τοὺς πόνους, ἢ οἱ πόνοι τὰ σιτία, ἢ μετρίως ἔχει πρὸς ἄλληλα· ἀπὸ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ κρατέσθαι ὀκτερονοῦν νοῦσοι ἐγγίνονται. Health is a matter of balancing (ἰσάζειν, μετρίως ἔχει πρὸς ἄλληλα) between physical activity and food intake (De Diaeta 3. 69, 1–15). This account resembles that of Alcmaeon, in that the relation οἱ πόνοι /τὰ σιτία is also thought of as the opposition between different dynamics that contribute to keeping the body in a healthy state by a permanent compensation of losing and gaining power between each other. Again, if one stands out and dominates over the other, the latter necessarily loses its own power, which promotes diseases. It is remarkable that this last definition differs from the other two in that the balance at play does not rest upon the bodily constituents of man but upon the equilibrium between diet and exercise.¹⁴ It is nevertheless noteworthy that this equilibrium aims at restoring the due balance between fire and water—the two elements that constitute everything in the universe, including, of course, the human body (De Diaeta 1, 3). A complete overpowering of one single element over the other is not possible in nature: each one rules and is ruled by the other (ἐν μέρε δὲ ἑκάτερον κρατεῖ καὶ κρατεῖται), as determined by the physical conditions of the environment. This interaction is cyclical: the partial overpowering of one single element varies according to seasons. Disease, then, arise when this dynamic equilibrium between these two opposite elements is broken. Thus, although this account does not appeal to “monarchy” in order to describe how diseases are produced in the human body, the fact that there is a continuous oscillation within the antagonism κρατεῖ/κρατεῖται fits well with a “democratisation of the body”: the power of each element rotates according to natural cycles, just as citizen do in the Assembly.¹⁵

Finally, On the Nature of Man (Cap. 4) heavily emphasizes the equation between health and κρᾶσις. Health is here depicted as the natural

¹³ On this comparison, see CAMBIANO (1982: 219–223)
¹⁴ Plato knows of this account too. At 441e7–8 he employs the Greek κρᾶσις to describe the due proportion of gymnastics and music within his educational curricula so as to correctly shape the soul of the future philosophers.
¹⁵ So just as one can speak of the “medicalisation of justice” in Plato, some scholars describe the origin of Western medicine in terms of a “politisisation of the body”; LLOYD (2003: 156).
κρᾶσις of different humours. There are two ways in which this physical blending can be spoilt: either when one of the humours is severed (χωρισθῇ), or by the excess or deficiency of one of them (ἔλασσον ἢ πλέον). When a humour is severed from the others, it leaves its natural place within the body and, as a result, that place becomes hollow and hence diseased (τοῦτο τὸ χωρίον ... ἐπίνοσον γίνεσθαι). Similarly, the Timaeus (82a) appears to retain the same etiology when asserting that disease might be produced by two possible causes: (1) a non-natural excess or deficiency (ἡ παρὰ φύσιν πλεονεξία καὶ ἔνδεια) of any of physical elements; or (2) the change of one of them from its natural place (τῆς χώρας μετάστασις ἐξ οἰκείας). Unlike the Hippocratic treatise, however, the dialogue refers not only to Hippocrates’s four humours but also to Empedocles’ four elements.

Despite the subtleties and nuances involved in each of these accounts of health, we do find a recurrent pattern in Greek medicine: each passage under consideration states that, whereas health is a matter of equality or balance among bodily elements, disease is basically the opposite (monarchy, isolation, overpowering, etc.). Taking into account this conceptual background, let us now turn to the analogy of justice and health in the Republic.

III

Plato’s move is extremely subtle: he manages to keep the main ideas and even the same terminology employed by Greek physicians as premises of an argument that winds up drawing the opposite conclusion. Before we get to the end of Book IV, Plato has already adopted the medical model of health in an almost literal sense: at 442a6 we are told that the appetitive element is usually excessively present in our soul (πλεῖστον τῆς ψυχῆ). If we now consider that according to the medical tradition the excess of one physical element was regarded as a cause of disease, Plato’s earlier claim that appetites, and hence the unjust life, are the cause of many sufferings and diseases (παθημάτων τε καὶ νοσημάτων, 439d2) is hardly surprising.

16 The influence of the Sicilian and the Hippocratic medical tradition on the Timaeus has been well documented by Jones (1946: 16–23) and Longrigg (1993: 104–148).

17 As Galen later noticed, it seems that although later Greek physicians tended to disagree on the nature and number of the bodily constituents, all of them agreed on taking health as a balance or due mixing of them (San. Tu. 1. 4).

18 Compare this statement with the above quoted passage in the Timaeus (82a) where bodily disease is described as a form of πλεονεξία.
Plato’s medicalisation of justice in *Republic* IV

At the end of Book IV, when the analogy of justice and health is first advanced, Plato’s terminology suggests that he is still resorting to tradition: health is a natural state (κατὰ φύσιν) in which different elements of the body dominate and are dominated (καθιστάναι κρατεῖν τε και κρατεῖσθαι ὑπ᾽ ἀλλήλων). So stated, notice that the expression is entirely compatible with any of the medical accounts we have seen, as the claim “κρατεῖν τε και κρατεῖσθαι ὑπ᾽ ἀλλήλων” need not point to any kind of hierarchy. As shown above, the imagery of “domination” and “ruling” was widely disseminated among ancient physicians, and it is not unusual at all to find some treatises formulating this opposition in the same terms. Thus, for instance, *On Regimen* appeals twice to the same vocabulary: σιτίον κρατέει τοὺς πόνους, ἢ οἱ πόνοι τὰ σιτία, ἢ μετρίως ἔχει πρὸς ἄλληλα· ἀπὸ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ κρατέεσθαι ὁκοτερονοῦν νοῦσοι ἐγγίνονται (69. 12–14)/ ἐν μέρει δὲ ἑκάτερον κρατεῖ καὶ κρατεῖται (referring here to fire and water). This view was also implied in Alcmaeon’s account of health, understood as a σύμμετρος κρᾶσις, in which each opposite dominates and is dominated by the other.

Thus far it looks as though Plato were still adhering to the medical model, as he not only keeps the same vocabulary employed by Greek physicians but also a similar syntax (note the emphasis on the active and passive forms of κρατεῖν). This is only apparently so. Whereas the medical antithesis κρατεῖ/κρατεῖται results in the equality of powers among bodily elements, the Platonic opposition κρατεῖ/κρατεῖται relies on a hierarchical order in which one element dominates without being dominated. Let us remember that in Plato’s account of justice the dominating part cannot be any psychic element, since he states that the order must be κατὰ φύσιν and only τὸ λογιστικόν can fulfil this function under this restriction (Cf. p. 36 above).

Thus, Plato sees tyranny as a “political disease” (πόλεως νόσημα 544c7): even though one elements rules, as it occurs in a monarchical regimen, the natural order is not respected when the lowest part, eager to satisfy its numberless desires, takes control of both the whole soul and the political community. Nonetheless, the point is that the overpowering of one psychic element does not prompt a pathological state by itself, as it was usually thought in the medical tradition. Rather, it becomes pathology only when the hierarchical order of nature is reversed, namely, when reason in the soul—and hence philosophers in the polis—does not rule. In an unexpected turn, then, Alcmaeon’s σύμμετρος κρᾶσις, as well as the Hippocratic ἰσάζειν, are rejected, and monarchy surprisingly becomes the healthy condition of the soul. Alcmaeon’s definition of health as ἰσονομία, as equality of powers, thus gives way to a new conception of health understood as a natural and harmonic hierarchy of faculties. As Ferrari...
Jorge Torres

rightly notices, Socrates takes the traditional definition of health and ‘turns the politics of the metaphor upside-down’. Further evidence for this view is found at 561e1, where the word ἰσονομικόν, a cognate term of Alcameon’s ἰσονομία, is uttered by Adeimantas to portray the democratic soul with manifest contempt – that Socrates does agree with this scornful view of democracy is well known (559dff). Additionally, Socrates himself describes his ideal form of government either as a monarchy (βασίλεια, 444d5) or as an aristocracy (ἀριστοκρατία), depending on how many philosophers hold power.

So far, therefore, Plato’s move consists in keeping the medical relation κρατεῖ καὶ κρατεῖται, though he does so on a purely formal level and casts upon it an entirely new meaning. How could he do this? Recall that justice and health are described on the account of two tenets, namely, (1) and (2) (above). It seems to me that if the mere use of the opposition κρατεῖ καὶ κρατεῖται (= 2) does not make any difference with the medical model (physicians were happy to employ the very same formula to describe the healthy condition of the body), it is because the antinomy κατὰ φύσιν/παρὰ φύσιν (= 1) is doing the trick at this point. The following problem then arises: despite the suggestive terminology in support of a parallelism between body and soul, what Plato takes to be κρατεῖ καὶ κρατεῖται κατὰ φύσιν in the soul has no parallel in the human body. On the contrary, whereas supremacy is a healthy condition of the psyche, it is plainly disease on a physical level. Instead of picking up a biological/bodily conception of health and then going on to apply it to the soul, Plato departs from a previous equation between justice and psychic health, which leads him to introduce an absolutely new conception of health that, upon reflection, cannot univocally be applied to the human body. The argument does not start with a biological conception of health; the line of reasoning does not go from the body to the soul, but from the soul to the body, and this is precisely the reason why the analogy does not stand up. In a healthy body there is no room for hierarchy, but only equality. In a nutshell, Plato is not exactly assimilating justice into health but rather health into justice. And this move has disastrous consequences for his overall ethical model: the two definitions cannot be analogous because they plainly exclude each other.

It has pointed out that if Plato had adhered to his characterisation of justice as a healthy psychical condition, he would have come to the opposite political view—that the democratic man and, accordingly, the

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19 Ferrari (2003: 64).
20 For the close connection between ἰσονομία and δημοκρατία in the Republic, see Vlastos (1981: 193–201).
Plato’s medicalisation of justice in *Republic* IV

democratic state are the truly healthy and just ones.\(^{21}\) Stalley, however, overlooks the fact that a further conclusion can be drawn from the medical side of the analogy: had Socrates rightly deduced the logical consequences from the assimilation of justice into health, he would have realised that the overpowering of reason in human life resembles disease rather than health.\(^{22}\) If so, this represents a serious objection to both Socrates’ answer to Glaucon’s challenge and the effectiveness of Plato’s ethics. In effect, why would anyone want to be just if justice is some kind of disease? Furthermore: why would anyone want to be healed by a doctor who gets sick in virtue of his own treatment?

Sources


References


\(^{22}\) This was in fact the conclusion drew by Socrates’ main rival in the history of philosophy, a German philologist who, unlike Glaucon, was not so easily persuaded by Socrates’ argument. Let us recall section this rival’s exact (and opportune) words: “Rationality at any price (…) was merely a disease, another kind of disease, and by no means a return to “virtue”, to “health”, to happiness (…). Socrates is no physician. Socrates himself has been ill long ago” (Nietzsche, *GD: Das Problem des Sokrates*, 11–12)