

## CHAPTER I

*Introduction*  
*Platonism and Moral Realism*

## 1.1 The Metaphysical Foundation of Ethics

Plato tells us in *Republic* that the Idea of the Good is the “unhypothetical first principle of all.”<sup>1</sup> He also says that it is the Good that makes just things and other useful things actually become useful (χρήσιμα) or beneficial (ὠφέλιμα).<sup>2</sup> Further, he says that the knowledge of this Good is the means to human happiness and the explanation (αἰτία) for everything right and beautiful (ὁρθῶν τε καὶ καλῶν).<sup>3</sup> Finally, he says that no one can act wisely (ἐμφρόνως), either in private or in public, without seeing the Good.<sup>4</sup> It seems reasonable to suggest that an innocent or unbiased perusal of these

<sup>1</sup> See *Rep.* 6.510B6–7, 511B5–6; 7.533C8–D4, 534B8–10. See my 2020, 120–127, for a fuller discussion of the “unhypothetical first principle of all” and why it is most plausibly identified with the Idea of the Good. See 122, n. 11, for some discussion of the relatively rare view of some scholars that this is not the case. Most recently, Brodie 2021, 34–39, has added her voice to those who identify the two. The words ἀνυπόθετον (“unhypothetical”) and ἀρχή (“first principle”) have both an ontological and an epistemological connotation. Within a scientific explanatory framework, where explanations for various phenomena are “hypothesized,” to reach an hypothetical first principle is to achieve explanatory adequacy. As I shall argue below, for Plato the denial of such an explanatory stopping-point amounts to the denial of the possibility of genuine explanation altogether. The Good for Plato is not philosophical filigree. What is most noteworthy and perhaps surprising is that for Plato the terminus of scientific explanation is a patently axiological principle. That is, for Plato normativity is not an excrescence on the scientific enterprise but an integral part of it.

<sup>2</sup> *Rep.* 6.505A2–4, 7.517C1, echoing 2.379B11. At the end of Bk. 1, 354A–B, Socrates bullies Thrasymachus into accepting his claim that a just person is happy and an unjust unhappy. He adds that being unjust is therefore never more profitable (λυσίτελεστερον) than being just. Socrates concludes that since he does not know what justice is, he is actually in no position to know its properties, including whether being just is more or less beneficial than being unjust. Clearly, after the definition of justice in Bk. 4, the Idea of the Good is introduced to answer the question about the profitability or usefulness of justice. Cf. *Alc.* 1 113D1–8, where Alcibiades insists that the just and the beneficial are not identical; it is a real question whether or not something just benefits us. The conclusion of Socrates’ argument, 116D3, that the just is beneficial depends on showing that just things are good and because they are good, they are beneficial. It seems that the Idea of the Good serves to provide the metaphysical foundation for Socrates’ conclusion.

<sup>3</sup> *Rep.* 7.517C1. Cf. *Th.* 186A9: καλὸν καὶ αἰσχρὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν (noble and shameful and good and bad), a loose gathering of basic normative terms. Thanks to Justin Brookes for pointing out this passage.

<sup>4</sup> *Rep.* 7.517C3–4.

passages and many others should lead one to conclude that a study of Plato's ethics ought to try to take account of the Idea of the Good. Of course, "good" is a key term used in all accounts of Plato's ethics. But the Idea of the Good is manifestly more than a word or a concept; it is, as Plato says, both the starting-point of everything and the goal at which everything aims. And in calling it "the Idea of the Good," he is saying more than that there is a first principle of all, something too remote or unattainable to bother with when trying to understand how to live or how to interact with other human beings. Rather, in calling the first principle of all "the Idea of the Good," Plato seems clearly to be setting his ethics within a radically original metaphysical framework.

Anyone who finds this claim obvious should be astonished, or at least deeply puzzled, to discover that most contemporary scholarship on Plato's ethics studiously avoids any suggestion that Plato believes that there is a metaphysical foundation for his ethics.<sup>5</sup> This is a charge that is all too easy to substantiate, and I shall do so in the following pages. But for the moment, I simply want to point out the apparent discordance between the presence of a metaphysical principle found in *Republic* and named "the Idea of the Good" and an approach to Plato's ethics that eschews or ignores any appeal to metaphysics altogether.

There are at least three possible explanations for this discordance. First, Aristotle presents us with a perspicuous example of how ethics can be detached from metaphysics, namely, the distinction between practical and theoretical science.<sup>6</sup> The principles of the former are distinct from those of

<sup>5</sup> I shall here set aside the idiosyncratic view of Martin Heidegger to the effect that the Idea of the Good has nothing to do with Plato's ethics. See El Murr 2019, 30–31. Shorey 1903, 9–26, recognizes the importance of the Idea of the Good, but he thinks it has no *ontological importance* (my emphasis). It is, he says, 16, a "regulative conception," not "a practical possibility," evidently assuming that these are exclusive alternatives. Cf. Shorey 1895, 23; Trabattoni 2000; 2022, 86, n. 3. Davidson 1993, 192–193, thinks that "[in] the late dialogues, [Plato] found more and more reasons to be dissatisfied with his earlier doctrine about the forms, and no aspect of this dissatisfaction is more evident than the abandonment of any close connection between the forms and value." Davidson is followed by Rowe 2005 and many others. By contrast, Eler 2007, 430–431, in his magisterial survey of Plato's philosophy and the scholarship on Plato, takes it as obvious. Cooper 1999, 142–149, acknowledges the centrality of metaphysics in Plato's moral realism, and even its ultimately mathematical dimension. In his relatively brief remarks, however, he makes several claims that cannot, I think, be substantiated in the text. He says, 143, that the Good is a good thing, and, 145, that "a just person is a devotee of *the* Good, not *his own* good; and these are very different things." As we shall see, the Good cannot be a good thing and it is essential to Plato's moral realism that *the* Good and *one's own* good are identical.

<sup>6</sup> The idea that Aristotle's ethics can be detached from his metaphysics has been disputed by, among others, Höffe 1996; Horn 2016; Baker 2017; Herzberg 2017. Herzberg argues that Aristotle's ethics is rooted in metaphysics in the sense that the life of the Unmoved Mover is the primary analogue of the meaning of "good." See for example, Aristotle, *Meta.* Λ 7, 1072a27–b3. Even if this is true, Aristotle

the latter, even if the latter science in some sense embraces the former owing to its complete generality. It is no doubt tempting to retroject Aristotle's definitional clarity into an account of Plato's ethics, particularly if Plato's metaphysics is thought to be obscure or bizarrely implausible.<sup>7</sup>

This explanation leads us to the second. How in the world can a superordinate Good, that which is “beyond essence (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας),”<sup>8</sup> have any relevance whatsoever to the existential dilemmas and urgent real-life problems that we find so marvelously canvassed in, say, *Gorgias* and *Protagoras* and, indeed, even in *Republic* itself?<sup>9</sup> Is it not precisely because the Idea of the Good is not or does not itself have an essence that it is irrelevant to answering the deep personal questions that Socrates and his interlocutors are habitually wrestling with? So, the second explanation for the absence of attention to the Idea of the Good in studies of Plato's ethics is found in the difficulty – many would say impossibility – of integrating the Idea of the Good into an account of Plato's ethics, including or even especially what he has to say about what is good (and bad or evil) in human life and human action.<sup>10</sup>

A third reason for the diffidence of most scholars to Plato's metaphysics when discussing his ethics rests upon an assumption that the core of Plato's ethics is, in fact, Socratic, and that Socratic ethics is rather clearly innocent of all metaphysical doctrine. Unquestionably, the work of Gregory Vlastos has had a major impact in this regard in the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> The followers of Vlastos are divided according to whether they

has at the same time laid out a schema for the independence of ethical science, a schema embraced by those who disdain metaphysics altogether in trying to formulate or defend what has become known as “virtue ethics.” In fact, for Aristotle, if the Unmoved Mover did not exist, metaphysics would not be possible even though practical science would presumably continue to be possible. Kant, for example, presents us with another way to detach moral absoluteness from metaphysics. See for example, Korsgaard 1983.

<sup>7</sup> It is possible that the division of philosophy into three (ethics, logic, and physics) by Xenocrates, the “head” of the Academy after Speusippus, has some role to play here, too. See Dillon 2003, 136–150. Cicero, *Acad.* I 19, and Sextus Empiricus, *M.* VII 16, apparently rely on this division, which is employed by Alcinoüs, *Didaskalikos*, and others. Note that in Xenocrates' division, only logic could conceivably attain to the universality that Plato seeks in his foundation for ethics.

<sup>8</sup> See *Rep.* 6.509B9–10.

<sup>9</sup> Along these lines, many antimoral realists have argued that it is only possible to justify morality from *inside* morality. See for example, Hayward 2019. The initial plausibility of this view indicates why we should pay careful attention to Plato's assumption that metaphysics and axiology must converge in an absolutely first principle of all that is the Good itself. See Annas 1997, 147, “Plato holds not only that facts and values are not radically different kinds of thing, known in different ways, but that values are fundamental to explaining facts.”

<sup>10</sup> Penner 2007a indirectly makes this point by his (in my view) unsupportable reduction of the superordinate Good to the “Form of Advantage,” that is, to personal happiness.

<sup>11</sup> See Vlastos esp. 1973; 1991; 1994.

see Plato as adding nothing worthwhile to Socratic ethics and those who see him as adding quite a bit, but nothing of a metaphysical import.<sup>12</sup> My own view is diametrically opposed to that of Vlastos and others. There is no distinctive Socratic philosophy in the dialogues and Plato's metaphysics underlies everything he says about ethics even in the so-called early dialogues.<sup>13</sup> In the fourth chapter, I shall present the case for rejecting any meaningful distinction between "Socratic" ethics and Platonic ethics and for maintaining that the identical metaphysical principles underlie both.

My aim in the present work is to try to situate Plato's ethics firmly within the metaphysical framework seemingly demanded by the text. But as I shall also try to show, there are multiple indications in the text that the Idea of the Good is not, as it were, an utterly contentless or merely formal principle of normativity.<sup>14</sup> There is, in fact, quite a lot that can be said about the Good that illuminates and supports the ethical claims made in the dialogues. Indeed, without the integration of the first principle of all into the ethics, the claims that are made in the dialogues are, as I shall argue, plainly unsupportable. That is, they amount to nothing more than rhetoric, prejudice, and pious hope. Plato believes that these claims are supportable because he never considered ethics as autonomous. This is in sharp contrast to most modern scholars, who take these claims to be possibly supportable *only* if they are autonomous, that is, detached from metaphysics. I shall not here contend that a deracinated Platonic ethics has no attractions. Obviously, what has come to be called by some Plato scholars "prudentialism" is not a crazy position to defend.<sup>15</sup> Old saws like

<sup>12</sup> Former: Penner, Rowe, Brickhouse and Smith, Rudebusch, Benson. Latter: Irwin 2007; Trabattoni 2020.

<sup>13</sup> See Rist 2012; Gerson 2014a; 2020.

<sup>14</sup> See Cross and Woollsey 1964, 260, who say about the Idea of the Good, "it is very difficult indeed to form any clear idea of what was in Plato's mind." See Eklund 2017, ch. 6, who argues that normative concepts describe properties that are themselves not normative. Therefore, there is no normativity in the world, only in our thoughts and concepts. Plato's firm rejection of this view is an application of his general argument in *Parm.* 132B3–C11 against the claim that Forms are concepts. Normativity is rooted in the Idea of the Good, just as the concept of circularity is rooted in the Form of Circularity.

<sup>15</sup> Penner 2007a calls it "pure prudentialism." By this he means that there is no moral dimension to this theory. See also 2005, 186, where he calls it "psychological egoism." White 1985 calls it "rational prudence." Irwin 1995, 53, calls it "eudaimonism." He defines it thus: "(1) In all our rational actions we pursue our own happiness. (2) We pursue happiness only for its own sake, never for the sake of anything else. (3) Whatever else we rationally pursue, we pursue it for the sake of happiness." Also, Stemmer 1988, 554; Taylor 1998, 50; Annas 1999, ch. 2; Berman 2003; Annas 2015; Timmermann 2019, 140. Shorey 1895, 213–214, firmly rejects prudentialism, arguing that Plato thought that there was a necessary connection between virtue and happiness. But Shorey is committed to the view that there is no ontological foundation for this, certainly not the Idea of the Good. Sidgwick 1907 [1874],

“always keep your promises,” “better safe than sorry,” “look before you leap,” “virtue is its own reward,” and “waste not, want not” are old saws for a perfectly understandable reason. They are sound guides to action, especially for those who need practical heuristics. But the prudentialism that generates these saws could never attain to the exceptionless or unconditional universality of ethics as articulated by Plato. For Plato, just as there is a metaphysical basis for the exceptionless universality of mathematics, so, too, is there one for ethics.<sup>16</sup>

Although I shall be contrasting my interpretation of Plato's ethics with many others throughout this book, it will perhaps be useful to explain upfront what I take to be the core idea that separates my account from others. Many interpreters and even proponents of Platonic ethics wish to stress the objectivity of Plato's ethical claims. This objectivity – contrasted with subjectivity – consists in the fact that a subject *S* is not an infallible judge of what is good for *S*. This is the case even if *S*'s view of what is good for *S* is not irrelevant to whether it is or not. What is good for *S* is objective if and only if there is no necessary entailment from “*S* thinks that *g* is good for himself” to “*g* is good for him.” I certainly do not wish to argue that Plato denies this.<sup>17</sup> After all, even *S* may, not infrequently, come to see that what he thought was good for himself is in fact not so. Of course, it should be added that if *S* comes to see this, it is still the case that “*S* thinks that *g* is good (or bad) for himself” does not entail that “*g* is good (or bad) for himself.” Objectivity should not be touted as a bit of Platonic triumphalism. For objectivity is cheaply bought, just as cheaply bought as the doubtlessly justified assertion of objectivity in the determination of, say, physical health.<sup>18</sup>

Objectivity, however, may fall short of universality since what is objectively good for *S* may not be, for all we know, objectively good for *R*.<sup>19</sup>

has, it seems to me, had an enormous effect in the English-speaking world in his prudentialist reading of Plato.

<sup>16</sup> See Murdoch 1970, 29, 42, on Good as a “concrete universal” which captures the virtuality of the Good in relation to the entire array of Forms, as we shall see in the next chapter. See Burnyeat 2000, 19–22, who takes the metaphysical primacy of the Good as obvious and in need of no argument.

<sup>17</sup> See Vogt 2017, ch. 4, on “Measure Realism,” an understanding of “good-for” that tries to accommodate the truth in Protagorean relativism. But Vogt holds that Measure Realism is primarily relative to the human species, not to any individual human being. In that, the question of universality remains open, for what might be good for one or many might at the same time be bad for someone else.

<sup>18</sup> Putnam 2005, 77–78, argues for ethics which contains “objectivity without ontology” or “objectivity without objects.” It is not clear how his objectivity goes beyond relativism. Indeed, his “conceptual relativism” seems very much in line with his *de facto* ethical relativism.

<sup>19</sup> See Barney 2010b, 56, who glimpses the distinction between objectivity and universality when she concedes that the objectivity of the good does not defeat the self-seeking person. But universality requires the introduction of metaphysics, which Barney does not countenance.

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A mere hope or assumption that objectivity can be elided with universality is, I maintain, the indefensible burden shared by all those who reject a metaphysical foundation for Plato's ethics. The pious belief that one can never profit from wrongdoing is logically available only to one who sees this as resting on that metaphysical foundation. Prudentialists, who draw the plausibility of their view from the unjustifiable elision of objectivity and universality, want to insist that the wicked can never prosper. They can never prosper even if they believe, wrongly, that they can do so. Plato surely believes this, too. What, though, makes the prudentialists so confident that this is in fact the case? As we shall see, the answer that is usually given is that it is something like a law of nature that there is no profit in wrongdoing. Laws of nature, however, as they pertain to changeable or mutable things, are not exceptionless. One could hardly suppose otherwise, given a Platonic account of the sensible world. It is, though, the mantra of the tyrant that *he* is the exception, perhaps the sole exception to, say, the laws of a decent society.<sup>20</sup> Even if he does run afoul of these laws, and even if he is punished according to these laws, he might well continue to maintain that the benefits he derived from his tyranny outweighed the subsequent risk of downfall. There may well be objectivity here, but there is no universality. We should not dismiss out of hand the defiant cry of the tyrant brought low that, despite everything, it was all worth it.

Universality requires that it is not possible that “g is good for S” if S having or doing g is bad for R.<sup>21</sup> This is, as we shall see, a very substantial

<sup>20</sup> See Nill 1985, ch. 3, who shows that Antiphon clearly recognized the practical limitations of prudentialism, since it does indeed sometimes occur that self-regarding behavior is harmful to oneself. In the 1956 novel, *The Last Hurrah*, by Edwin O'Connor, the corrupt politician Frank Skeffington is on his deathbed, lapsing into and out of unconsciousness. His parish priest, who has been called in to administer the last rites, says to the family, “I bet if he had it to do all over again, he would have lived a different life.” Just then, Skeffington opens an eye and growls, “the hell I would.” What does the “prudentialist” Socrates say to a Frank Skeffington?

<sup>21</sup> Prichard, in his now famous inaugural lecture in 1928, “Duty and Interest,” argued that Platonic ethics does not actually rise to the level of morality because for Plato the Good is inseparable from one's own good. According to Prichard 2003 [1928], 26–27, Plato provides no argument for the view that morality can be independent of one's own interests and even counter to them. In effect, he denies that Plato can establish the universality of his ethical claims. As he goes on to say, 29, “We are therefore forced to allow that in order to maintain that for an action to be right [or good], it must be advantageous, we have to maintain that advantageousness is what renders an action right [or good]. But this is obviously something that no one is going to maintain if he considers it seriously.” Prichard has no conception of how the Idea of the Good might provide the requisite universality nor, indeed, how one's own personal interest might coincide with the interests of everyone else. There is undoubtedly a political aspect underlying the contention that morality and self-interest often do conflict, even if they do not always conflict. I shall return to this in ch. 7. Mabbott 1971, indirectly replying to Prichard, argues that Plato is not a utilitarian, though it is not clear what Mabbott thinks is the correct interpretation of Plato's view. Annas 2008 rebuts the charge that virtue

requirement.<sup>22</sup> For example, it appears to rule out any version of utilitarianism that allows that if *g* is good for *S* as well as being good for everyone else, with one exception, then *g* ought to be pursued. The Platonic principle cannot compromise universality as must perforce be done when one countenances actions that are “good for most if not for all” or “for the common good, with but a few ‘minor’ exceptions.”

If we focus on exceptionless universality, we can see that Plato’s moral theory does not comport with any form of utilitarianism which focuses on a net sum of good results (however conceived), allowing that the good of some might be sacrificed for the good of the whole. If the utilitarian abandons generality or “for-the-most-part” for true universality, then as I understand this position, he or she has abandoned utilitarianism. And if the universal value is just the good, then I fail to see how it differs from Plato’s theory unless it can be shown that that theory can be maintained without a transcendent Good.

Of course, exceptionless universality still requires a nuanced understanding of “must” and “should.” After all, the absolutist prohibition on wrongdoing expressed by Socrates in *Crito* is not an assertion of a physical impossibility. This prohibition, just like a positive law, is always accompanied by a sanction. So, “one must never do wrong” is elliptical for “one must never do wrong, and if one does wrong, then compensation must be paid to the one who suffered the wrong.” It is a nice question – a metaphysical question, as a matter of fact – as to whether universality requires that the compensation not paid in this life will necessarily be paid in the next and if not, whether universality in ethics can still be defended.<sup>23</sup>

One might raise the following objection. There is in fact a distinction without a difference between what is objectively good for *A* and an instance of the universal Good as it pertains to *A*. In that case, universality does not

ethics is egoistic. Insofar as Plato’s ethics can be categorized as “virtue ethics,” her rebuttal would apply to Plato.

<sup>22</sup> Suppose that *S*’s acting virtuously provokes *R* to act viciously. I owe this example to Anthony Price in personal correspondence. If this were possible, it would seem not to be the case that the good brought about by *S* is also good for *R*. I think Plato is committed to saying that it is not possible that the instantiation of a good by *S* could be both good and bad for *R*. So, *R*’s acting viciously cannot possibly be caused by *S* acting virtuously, even if *S*’s virtuous behavior may be said to be the occasion for *R* reacting viciously. If, say, *A*’s heroic behavior makes *B* kill herself in shame and in despair of ever being able to duplicate such behavior, it is surely not *A*’s fault. Nor would it change the fact that it is good for *B* that *A* behaves that way.

<sup>23</sup> The absoluteness of Plato’s moral realism should be distinguished from a Kantian categorical imperative, since the latter, unlike the former, is consciously detached from personal interest. See Chapter 4, Section 4.4. Thus, rejection of a categorical imperative is not necessarily a rejection of Platonic absolutism. See Joyce 2001, 176–177, who takes the rejection of the cogency of a categorical imperative to imply the shipwreck of all moral discourse.

add anything to objectivity; in fact, universality can be reduced to mere generality. The correct reply to this objection is this. If an instance of the universal Good as it pertains to A is not distinct from what is objectively good for A, then it is possible that what is objectively good for A or B or C is radically equivocal. That is, what may be good for the tyrant may be not good for his victims and vice versa. Universality is required to ensure that this is not so. But since the Good does not have a defined nature, universality does not entail univocity in predication. The Good can be variously instantiated or manifested. But in each case, what is good is universally good. This could hardly be the case if the Good had a substantial nature. If it did, it would be child's play to generate counterexamples showing that participation in the substantive nature said to be good for A is in fact not good for B on this or another occasion.

For universality, a supernatural law is required, supernatural in the sense that this law is rooted in the immutable and eternal intelligible world.<sup>24</sup> It is my contention that Plato believes in universality, not merely objectivity, and that he sees clearly that universality requires a metaphysical foundation. That is what the superordinate Idea of the Good provides. It is the task of this book to show exactly how this works.

### 1.2 How Should We Classify Plato's Ethics?

The modern lack of interest in the metaphysical foundation of Plato's ethics is reflected in something like diffidence in classifying the type of ethical theory that Platonism proposes. Although one could make a case that there are elements of consequentialism and of deontology in Plato's ethics, neither of these categories even begins to get at the strongly metaphysical foundation. Most typically, surveys of Plato's ethics in collections on Plato or ancient ethics begin with the rather loosely defined so-called Socratic paradoxes and then go on to try to construct a moral psychology that makes these paradoxes plausible or defensible.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> See Rist 2002, 28, "Plato's fundamental thesis is that there is a transcendental aspect to morality or morality is somehow man-made."

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, O'Brien 1967, 16, "The basic ethical doctrines of Plato . . . are paradoxes." See also Kraut 1992, wherein the treatment of Plato's ethics is dispersed over four papers with the titles, "Socrates and the Early Dialogues," "Platonic Love," "The Defense of Justice in Plato's *Republic*," and "Disintegration and Restoration: Pleasure and Pain in Plato's *Philebus*." Taylor 1998, 76, understands Plato's ethics as an attempt to ground morality in "an adequate theory of human nature." Although Taylor, 67, does in passing mention the Idea of the Good, what he takes to be the objective foundation of morality for Plato is the coincidence of individual and *social* good. How this amazing coincidence occurs Taylor does not say. In Fine 2011, we do find a separate chapter on



Sometimes, the vague term “intellectualism” is used to express what is taken to be a focus of the ethics, namely, that the attainment of virtue is somehow related to knowledge, although the metaphysical implications of the possibility of such knowledge are usually passed over in silence.<sup>26</sup> One gets the impression that the word “knowledge” in these accounts is taken to be unproblematic and to be more or less equivalent to the standard modern analysis of knowledge as justified true belief.

Clearly enough, we should begin by classifying Plato's ethics as a form of moral realism, generally the philosophical position that holds that normative or prescriptive propositions have real truth-makers in the world.<sup>27</sup>

Plato's ethics (Annas), set apart from a chapter on Socrates' ethics and moral psychology (Devereux). Annas' chapter does explicitly focus on Plato's “ethical theory,” which she argues, 269, is “structured by a broad eudaimonistic assumption.” Annas adds, “The main lines of Plato's ethics are thus best followed by doing the following: looking at his theoretical answer to the question about virtue and happiness, then examining the way he discusses virtue, and then exploring his positions on pleasure.” Annas, 284, does conclude her chapter by briefly mentioning the “metaphysical background” of Plato's ethics. She says, “As with the political background, there is a sense in which [the metaphysics] does not make a profound difference to the ethical ideas that have already been developed in other contexts.” In Bobonich 2017, Plato's ethics is parceled out in three chapters: “Virtue and Happiness in Plato (Devereux), “Plato's Ethical Psychology” (Kamtekar), and “Plato on Love and Friendship” (Sheffield). In Crisp 2013, White, 25, acknowledges the centrality of the concept of goodness in Plato's ethics, but he does not take there to be any metaphysical issues surrounding this concept. Rather, he takes Plato's moral theory generally to be an account of human psychology intended to support “Socratic” ethics. So, too, Warren 2017. In Hardy and Rudebusch 2014, the section on Plato contains seven papers, six of which focus on various features of “Socratic” ethics, while the one paper on Plato, although it mentions the Idea of the Good in passing, focuses on the structure of the Divided Line. Irwin 1977; 1995; 2007, follows the well-trodden path of ignoring the metaphysical foundations altogether. Among other puzzling omissions, Irwin makes no mention of the famous passage at *Thr.* 176B1–2 where Socrates exhorts his interlocutor to “assimilation to god (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ).” Throughout antiquity this exhortation was taken to be the principal emblem of Platonic ethics much as one might say that “the Golden Rule” is an emblem of Christian ethics. Socrates adds that the way this assimilation occurs is by becoming “just and pious with wisdom (δικαίον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως).” As we shall see, the words “with wisdom” indicate the indispensable role of philosophy in Plato's ethics, where “philosophy” is explicitly rooted in knowledge of the unhypothetical first principle of all. Penner 2011 argues that the simple belief/desire psychology of action is the key to Socratic ethics as opposed to Platonic ethics. The Idea of the Good has no part to play in Socratic ethics and enters Platonic ethics only as a sort of excrescence on Socratic ethics. By way of contrast, see Boys-Stones 2014 for some illuminating observations on how the so-called Middle Platonists assumed the metaphysical foundation of Platonic ethics in their opposition to Stoicism.

<sup>26</sup> On the so-called Socratic intellectualism see O'Brien 1967, esp. ch. 3; Irwin 1977, 76–96; Penner, 1991; 1996; 1997; 2005, 175–186; Brickhouse and Smith 1994; 2000; 2010; Kahn 1996, 224–233; Nehemas 1999; Šegvić 2000; Rowe 2007; Evans 2010; Hardy 2014; Monteils-Laeng 2014, 29–38; Blackson 2015; Callard 2017; Butler 2019.

<sup>27</sup> The opposite of moral realism – moral antirealism – is conveniently divisible into (a) subjectivism or constructivism, holding that moral claims have meaning but no objective foundations; (b) non-cognitivism, which denies that claims in morality are either true or false or, alternatively, that there is no such thing as moral knowledge; and (c) moral error theory, which holds that claims in morality are uniformly false, though still containing some meaning, usually pragmatic in nature.

An informal list of the sorts of topics that the Platonic moral realist is concerned with is found, for example, in *Gorgias*:

Is it the case that the orator is in the position with regard to what is just and unjust, shameful and noble, good and evil as he is with respect to what is healthy and the subjects of the other crafts?<sup>28</sup>

Broadly speaking, “just and unjust,” “shameful and noble,” “good and evil” are the terms that appear in the propositions that will belong to the fabric of Plato’s moral realism. Also to be noted here is the assumption that because the propositions in which these terms appear do indeed have truth-makers in the world, it is plausible that there is a craft concerned with determining whether or not a give moral proposition is true or false, a craft that is analogous to that of healthcare. In this dialogue, Socrates goes on to show Gorgias that rhetoric is not that craft.

Graham Oddie developed a useful schema of grades of moral realism, ranging from weak to extremely strong according to the answers to five questions: (1) Does the moral theory claim propositional content? (2) Does the moral theory claim that objective presuppositions of the truth of propositions are met? (3) Does the moral theory claim that these objective presuppositions are mind-independent? (4) Does the moral theory claim that these are irreducible to nonmoral truths or facts? (5) Are the objective presuppositions causally networked?<sup>29</sup> The theory that answers all questions in the affirmative is called by Oddie “robust realism.” Oddie’s schema sharply distinguishes Plato’s robust moral realism from other types of realism, especially naturalism and idealism, the first of which answers “no” to the question about irreducibility and the second of which answers “no” to the question about mind-independence. This schema, however, does not clearly distinguish Plato’s theory from a theologically based type of moral realism according to which moral truths are equivalent, say, to divine commands or are reflective somehow of a personal God.<sup>30</sup> So, I am

<sup>28</sup> *Gorg.* 459C8–D3: ἄρα τυγχάνει περὶ τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὸ ἀδίκον καὶ τὸ αἰσχρὸν καὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν οὕτως ἔχων ὁ ῥητορικός ὡς περὶ τὸ ὑγιεινὸν καὶ περὶ τὰ ἄλλα ὧν αἱ ἄλλαι τέχναι.

<sup>29</sup> See Oddie 2005, 22ff. Timmermann 2019, 94–99, provides another similar sketch of forms of moral realism, contrasting these with various antirealist accounts. M. Smith 2004 classifies moral realism as either nonnaturalistic or naturalistic, and under the former heading, externalist or internalist, and under the latter heading, relativistic or nonrelativistic. Whether there can be a coherent naturalistic moral realism is a question that I address in the next section. A somewhat different taxonomy is provided by Railton 2003, 4–5.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Adams 1999; Rea 2006; Brenner 2018 for versions of such theories.