

# Kinds of Self-Knowledge in Ancient Thought

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## 1. Introduction

However one construes ancient philosophical interest in the topic of self-knowledge, it is clear that it cannot straightforwardly be identified with the area in contemporary philosophy falling under that heading.<sup>1</sup> The problems and concerns that tend to occupy contemporary philosophers working on self-knowledge—investigating, for example, the warrant for first-personal epistemic authority, or first-personal reference in light of standard models of reference, or self-perception relative to perception proper<sup>2</sup>—do not, on the whole, exercise ancient thinkers. Their works, nonetheless,

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<sup>2</sup> Among contemporary philosophers who ask such questions in relation to self-knowledge, see e.g. S. Shoemaker 'Self-Reference and Self-Awareness', *Journal of Philosophy* (1968) 65(19): 555–67; 'Self Knowledge and "Inner Sense", I–III, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (1994) 54: 249–314; G. Evans, 'Self-Identification', in J.

plainly exhibit concerns that fall under the topic of self-knowledge, in the sense that they are to do with having knowledge about oneself that is essential for one's own life, or for correctly ascertaining the content of one's own thought.

So, in the attempt to understand ancient philosophical thought on self-knowledge—what the ancient concept (or concepts) of knowing oneself amounts to, and the questions and problems to which it gives rise—we might ask what to make of this clear difference between ancient and contemporary work on self-knowledge. Perhaps there is a radical divide between the two, a more or less complete discontinuity in the fundamental assumptions and conceptual frameworks within which the writings and debates of ancients and moderns respectively reside. Or perhaps ancient work on self-knowledge reveals some continuity between ancient thought and contemporary interests, as well as deep differences. It is this question, that of the continuity and discontinuity between ancient and contemporary treatments of self-knowledge, that will be the overarching concern of this chapter.

One source of discontinuity is obvious. For, one element distinctive of ancient thought on self-knowledge is the central role that knowing oneself—for instance, knowing the state of one's moral character, or one's status as a knower—plays in the good life. As I argue below, the state of flourishing, for most ancient thinkers

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McDowell (ed.) *The Varieties of Reference* (OUP: 1982), 205–66; G. Ryle, 'Self-Knowledge' in his *The Concept of Mind* (Hutchinson: 1949), 160–89; G. E. M. Anscombe 'The First Person', in Guttenplan (ed.) *Mind and Language* (OUP: 1975); P. Boghossian, 'Content and Self-Knowledge', *Philosophical Topics* 17 (1989), 5–26; Q. Cassam, 'Introduction', to his (ed.) *Self-Knowledge* (OUP: 1994), 1–19; L. O'Brien, *Self-Knowing Agents* (OUP: 2007); B. Gertler, 'Self-Knowledge' entry, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2003, rev. 2015) <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/self-knowledge/>.

consisting in possession of a virtuous disposition (moral or intellectual),<sup>3</sup> is entwined with correctly grasping one's own moral or intellectual status—and, for some thinkers, the process of acquiring that state. For ease of reference, I shall refer to this way or mode of knowing oneself as 'dispositional' or 'character' self-knowledge, and intend it to range over dispositions or character states that belong to an individual, broadly construed, so as to incorporate both intellectual and moral states of soul. Thus, one mark of discontinuity between ancient and contemporary work on self-knowledge is a persistent focus on dispositional self-knowledge, which occupies the role of moral and intellectual imperative, and so carries with it a certain normative force.

Potential lines of continuity, by contrast, emerge from the question of the subject's accurate grasp of the contents of her own discrete mental or psychological states, such as her states of having appearances, beliefs, knowledge, desires, and other motivating states. Tracing such lines and their contours of agreement with and departure from contemporary concerns is, however, a complex task. On the one hand, it seems clear (as I set out later) that ancient philosophers, unlike Cartesian and post-Cartesian thinkers, did not accord psychological or mental states a privileged epistemic status as a special source of truth. But on the other, ancient thinkers nonetheless displayed some interest in correctly ascertaining the content of such states, and so in a manner or mode of knowing oneself that I shall refer to as 'cognitive self-knowledge'. As regards this kind of self-knowledge, I will argue, both

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<sup>3</sup> Or, for the Epicureans, consisting in a properly developed character (as I discuss in §5.1 below).

discontinuity and continuity between ancient and contemporary views can be identified.

I begin in §2 by addressing the more complex issue of cognitive self-knowledge in ancient philosophy by way of the central points of departure from modern views on the topic in ancient thought argued for by Myles Burnyeat in his classic paper, ‘Idealism in Ancient Thought: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley missed’. We will then be in a position to investigate the various contributions of Plato (§3), Aristotle (§4), Hellenistic philosophers (§5) and Plotinus (§6) to the topic of cognitive self-knowledge alongside their work on dispositional self-knowledge. As we move from the discussion of the texts from one philosophical thinker or school to the next, and the relevant scholarship, we will also briefly canvass the ways the chapters in the rest of this volume seek to engage with some of the problems or issues that have emerged. I will conclude by drawing together considerations that suggest that the two kinds of self-knowledge delineated, cognitive self-knowledge of one’s individual mental states and dispositional self-knowledge of one’s moral or intellectual character, though conceptually distinct, ought to be understood as closely related, such that the former is a condition on the latter.

## 2. Self-Knowledge and the Subjective in Greek Thought

In the course of demonstrating the alien nature of Berkeleian idealism to ancient thought, Burnyeat argued that Greek and Roman thinkers did not regard what he described as ‘subjective states’ (distinct from the pedestrian notion of individual

mental states, as I explain below) as themselves possible items of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> The first plank of Burnyeat's argument is that all Greek thinkers assumed the existence of an objective world that our minds were in contact with. Even the fictional personification of extreme relativism, the character Protagoras in Plato's *Theaetetus* does not doubt that the world exists for each perceiver and knower, but contends, Burnyeat claimed, that the particular way the world is for each perceiver is something that comes to be in a mutually dependent relation between thinker and the world.<sup>5</sup> One upshot is the commitment, on the part of Greek thinkers, to the real existence of the object of thought.

The second plank centres on the claim that Greek thinkers in general had a particular notion of the concept of truth. A statement is true, Burnyeat suggests, insofar as its content contains some reference to the objective world, existing independently from the thought that concerns it. He writes: "“True” in these discussions always means “true of a real objective world” and that is how the word

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<sup>4</sup> 'Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed' ['Idealism'], *Philosophical Review* (1982) 41: 3–40. As I argue below, Burnyeat employs the term 'subjective state' to refer not to the general class of individual mental or psychological states, with which we are all pre-theoretically familiar, as it were, but to a theorized conception of mental states—as having the special character of being immune to hyperbolic doubt precisely because of their psychological nature, i.e. as being subjectively true.

<sup>5</sup> *Tht.* 151e–152c, 156a–157c; Burnyeat, 'Idealism', 8–14. He writes that for the Greeks, 'there is a reality of some sort confronting us' and any idealist reduction of reality to mind would have been 'repellent to Greek thought, for it would seem to deprive the mind of the objects it must have' (19–20).

“true” had been used since Protagoras and before.<sup>6</sup> Consider the Pyrrhonian skeptic, who, like other Greek thinkers, does not doubt the existence of reality. What sets him apart is that, while other philosophers felt free to assert the truth of some of their thoughts (e.g. appearances or beliefs) as corresponding to some way the objective world is, he suspends judgement and merely assents to his appearances, being unable to find an unassailable basis for preferring one over another, incompatible appearance. In this way, the strong realist commitment in Greek thought prevents even the Pyrrhonian skeptic from conceiving the question whether the content of his experience at any moment truly is what it is in a manner utterly independent from the existence and nature of the object of thought.<sup>7</sup> Hence, Sextus, when experiencing the honey as sweet did not entertain the further possibility of having the identical experience, i.e. with the same content, in the case of the non-existence of the object of experience. So, the idea that the statement expressing that content was true about that content in a manner invulnerable to extreme or hyperbolic doubt could not occur to him. Similarly, the statement that ‘I am a being who perceives many things, as if by

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<sup>6</sup> Burnyeat, ‘Idealism’, 26.

<sup>7</sup> Sextus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I.100–13 = LS 72E; Of Sextus and Greek thinkers generally, Burnyeat writes: ‘in the skeptic’s book to say that an appearance, or the statement expressing it, is true is to say that external things really are as they (are said to) appear to be. “True” in these discussions always means “true of a real objective world” and that is how the word “true” had been used since Protagoras and before . . . The Greek use of the predicates “true” and “false” embodies the assumption of realism on which I have been insisting all along.’ ‘Idealism’, 26.

the intervention of the bodily organs', cannot be articulated.<sup>8</sup> The conception of truth to which immunity from radical doubt was central was not in play.

Burnyeat argues that it is not until Augustine that particular kinds of mental states, appearances, are conceived of as objects of truth claims that are certain irrespective of objective reality (though others have more recently argued for the idea's presence in medieval thought).<sup>9</sup> Augustine explicitly suspends belief about the objective existence of the referent of 'this' in 'this appears white', and deliberately confines the object of his inquiry to the mental state (the appearance of 'this as white') considered independently from any relation it might bear to an objective world. So conceived the mental state, the appearance, strikes him as something the existence and content of which is assured. Augustine has thus isolated the notion of 'the subjective': By observing that he is the subject of his experiences and concluding that the way things appear to him from his viewpoint can be discerned with certainty, irrespective of the existence of things outside that viewpoint, he has isolated an inner, distinctively 'subjective' realm of appearances, divided in its existence and content from an objective realm. In this sense one kind of mental states, appearances, are identified as distinctively subjective states, and subjective truth emerges as precisely this certainty, namely the certainty that attaches to statements expressing subjective states. But, Burnyeat maintains, it is not until Descartes, that certainty occupies a

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<sup>8</sup> Burnyeat, 'Idealism', 38. The statement quoted is Burnyeat's summary paraphrase of a passage from Descartes' second *Meditation* (CSM II, 19).

<sup>9</sup> Burnyeat, 'Idealism', 28–9. See Peter Adamson and Fedor Benevich, 'The Thought Experimental Method: Avicenna's Flying Man Argument', *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 2018, 1–18.

privileged epistemological position, and the application of the truth predicate becomes restricted to statements invulnerable to hyperbolic doubt.<sup>10</sup> The subjective realm, the existence of which Descartes is certain, is the source of his clear and distinct perception that he is a thinking thing, which will in turn serve as a principle for his further claims to truth and knowledge. Subjective truth and the first-personal perspective in this way take centre stage, and subjective states are accorded a privileged position, as special objects about which we can lay claim to truth free from radical doubt, and so to knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

Burnyeat's influential argument<sup>12</sup> has shown that an abiding assumption of realism led ancient thinkers to a conception of thought as inextricably linked, in its

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<sup>10</sup> Burnyeat, 'Idealism', 33–9.

<sup>11</sup> So Burnyeat's question 'when and why philosophers first laid claim to knowledge of subjective states?' ('Idealism', 27, cf. 32.) is not fully answered until his discussion of Descartes.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance John McDowell, 'Singular Thought and Inner Space', in P. Pettit and J. McDowell (eds.) *Subject, Thought, and Context* (OUP: 1986), 137–68; Stephen Everson, 'The Objective Appearance of Pyrrhonism' ['Objective Appearance'], in Everson (ed.) *Companions to Ancient Thought 2: Psychology*, (CUP: 1991), 121–47; Stephen Gaukroger, 'The Ten Modes of Aenesidemus and the Myth of Ancient Scepticism', *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* (1995) 3(2): 371–87; Sara Rappe, 'Self-Knowledge and Subjectivity in the Enneads' ['Self-Knowledge'], in L. Gerson (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (CUP: 1998); Gail Fine, 'Subjectivity, Ancient and Modern' ['Subjectivity'], in J. Miller and B. Inwood (eds) *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy* (CUP: 2003), 192–231; Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (OUP: 2006), 44.

being and its content, to objective reality, which, for them, exists. As a result, there were no states or activities of the mind or soul that were regarded as ‘subjective’ in the sense outlined above, i.e. regarded as having an existence and content independent from the nature and existence of the object of thought. Statements regarding the content of appearances (or any other mental state) were not therefore regarded as rare and valuable sources of unimpeachable truth simply because they were purely subjective, or beyond radical doubt. There was no subjective truth in this sense to be had about the content of thought—as Sara Rappe, following Burnyeat, observed in relation to Cartesian and post-Cartesian thought: ‘along with this privileging of the subjective point of view, coincides the invention of subjective truth.’<sup>13</sup>

From the claim that subjective truth in the sense outlined was off the table for Greek thinking, however, it does not follow that truth in the more pedestrian sense of correspondence to objective reality was likewise unavailable concerning the content of thought. That is, it does not follow from the inapplicability of the notion of subjective truth to statements about the content of mental states—and Burnyeat did not argue that it did follow—that truth predicates could not be applied to such statements, or, equivalently for our purposes, that statements could not be regarded as correctly identifying the content of those states. Statements about one kind of mental state, appearances, are significant for this question, not in virtue of invulnerability to radical doubt, but because appearances were routinely regarded as states consisting of how things seem to the subject, where the way things are could in fact be otherwise. So, a statement that claims to get it right about some appearance qua appearance,

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<sup>13</sup> Rappe, ‘Self-Knowledge’, 251.

asserts that it has correctly identified, and to that extent expressed the truth about, the content of that appearance.

We find such statements in Plato and Aristotle, for example. In the *Sophist*, the Stranger and Theaetetus find themselves facing a bewildering array of appearances of the sophist at 231b–c. The dialectical situation is complex, but the overall problem is clear: since the appearances are multiple and distinct, Theaetetus is confused as to which, if any, of them could capture the truth about the (objective) reality of sophistry (231b9–c2). The Stranger articulates the content of the six appearances of the sophist presented to them by their investigation thus far, to which Theaetetus agrees (231d2–231e6).<sup>14</sup> In each case the content is available to them via memory and reflection, and picks up on an appearance that arose through their successive applications of the method of division. The truth-value of the successive statements asserting the content of each appearance is presented independently of the truth-value of the appearances vis-à-vis sophistry. Indeed, part of the point is that Theaetetus doesn't know which appearance to believe, if any, about sophistry. And later, in the closing moments of the dialogue, Theaetetus urges the Stranger to reflect upon or 'look at' (*hora su*, 268a11) the details of the final appearance they have of the sophist, the description of which he says the Stranger articulates 'most correctly' (*orthotata*, 268b6), and which they affirm of him. Aristotle, too, takes it that people can routinely correctly identify and articulate the content of appearances as a matter separate from the truth value of that content in relation to the objective realm. In *De Anima* III.3, he points out that though the sun appears about a foot across, we don't believe it (428b2–4), and in

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<sup>14</sup> Note that the Stranger enjoins Theaetetus to list the number of ways the sophist has appeared to them (*hêmin*, 231d2).

Book II of the *Rhetoric* he provides detailed analyses of the content of the various appearances that give rise to, or are perhaps constitutive elements of, various core emotions (*pathê*).<sup>15</sup> Like Plato, Aristotle seems to assume that people are able accurately to report on the contents of their appearances. Neither presents or treats this ability as arising from immunity to radical doubt, or the nature of thought as such, or as part of what it is to be conscious, but rather as the result of reflective higher-order thought (and in Plato's case, discussion), as well as introspection and memory. The truth expressible by statements concerning the contents of these particular mental states, appearances, was therefore not regarded as a special kind of truth ground in the realm of the subjective: rather the availability of the truth about appearances, given some effort and upon reflection, seems to have been taken for granted.

One possible exception to the claim that the Greeks did not recognize subjective states (in the sense outlined above) or a special kind of truth, subjective truth, that characterised their content, and which, therefore, would seem to constitute an objection to Burnyeat, is found in Cyrenaic thought. For, the Cyrenaics not only regarded statements concerning the affections –sensations that are generally pleasant or painful, (*pathê*)—as true as a matter separate from the affections' truth in relation to the objective world, as other Greeks did in relation to appearances, but they asserted them to be infallibly true (and, moreover, they identified the affections with appearances). As Gail Fine has shown, Sextus reports the Cyrenaics' view that we can

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<sup>15</sup> *Rhet.* II.1–11. I take it that Jessica Moss in her *Aristotle on the Apparent Good* (OUP: 2012, 69–92) has shown that talk of appearances in *Rhet.* II by way of *phantasma* and *phainesthai* (and cognates) cannot, as some have suggested be read as talk of beliefs (e.g. Dow 'Feeling Fantastic? Emotions and Appearances in Aristotle', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (2009) 37: 143–75).

‘assert infallibly (*adiapseustôs*) and truly (*alêthôs*) and certainly (*bebaiôs*) and incorrigibly (*anexelenktôs*) that we are whitened or sweetened’, though not about what causes the affections;<sup>16</sup> that in their view it is true (*alêthes*) that people are affected in a certain way; and that the *pathê* are true (*alêthê*) and what is apparent to us in experience (*ta phainomena*).<sup>17</sup> Plutarch too reports their view that when judgements confine themselves to the affections they are free from error.<sup>18</sup> Thus, there appear to be resonances between the use of ‘infallible’ here and the Cartesian notion of subjective truth, and the identification of the affections with what is apparent is suggestive of the division between the inner, subjective realm and an ‘external’ realm marked off by Augustine and then Descartes. Indeed, Fine has argued that they do regard the affections as subjective states, and so assert their contents as true as such.<sup>19</sup>

Against this view, however, as Burnyeat noted it seems doubtful that, in speaking of e.g. ‘being sweetened’ or ‘being whitened’, the Cyrenaics are singling out a state about which they can make an infallibly true assertion because it belongs to a special kind of experience, namely, one whose existence and nature alone is immune from radical doubt. For, like other Greeks, they appeared to be realists (of the kind discussed above) and so were not exercised by the notion of radical doubt or the

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<sup>16</sup> Sextus, *M VII*, 191, as cited in Fine, ‘Subjectivity’, 202.

<sup>17</sup> Sextus, *M VII* 191, 193, 194, in Fine, ‘Subjectivity’, 202–3. (In relation to 191, although the adverb ‘truly’ is not attested in all manuscripts, Fine argues (convincingly to my mind) for the greater likelihood of its authenticity, 202).

<sup>18</sup> Plutarch, *Adv. Col.* 1120F.

<sup>19</sup> Fine ‘Subjectivity’, 201–9. This is a central part of her argument against Burnyeat, the overarching aim of her paper.

possibility of an independent subjective realm and truth immune from such doubt.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Burnyeat raised doubts about the extent to which the relevant experiences were, according to the Cyrenaics, purely psychological experiences (which we might call mental states) as opposed to experiences of the soul and body together. Indeed, the latter seems especially plausible in the case of the Cyrenaics, who, as hedonists, focused on sensual experiences generally taken in Greek thought to be experiences of the soul—*pathê* and *phainomena*—but which also, according to the Cyrenaics, involved somatic pleasure and pain.<sup>21</sup> If this is right, it is unclear that ‘being sweetened’ is an experience of a kind the Cyrenaics conceived of as belonging to thought alone, as opposed to being an experience that involves corporeal elements as well. As such, the awareness of the experience and the statement expressing it cannot concern subjective states in the sense isolated by Augustine and Descartes.

Alternatively, these considerations perhaps suggest the following interpretation: it seemed certain to the Cyrenaic that his own experience—that involving his organs of taste, say, and his soul—was of himself being sweetened, although the particulars of the external cause remained uncertain. And since the object of experience is himself, his body and soul, his evidence is not just first-hand but personal, and therefore constitutes extremely strong evidence, in his view. Indeed, the Cyrenaics

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<sup>20</sup> Sextus, *M VII*, 193–4. For discussion see R. J. Hankinson, *The Sceptics* (OUP: 1995), 58.

<sup>21</sup> The case of ‘being whitened’ in seeing may seem less obviously corporeal. However, as Fine acknowledged, the Cyrenaics regarded sight as an activity or function that was corporeal partly or wholly, and argued that the person who sees yellow, or ‘is yellowed’ does so as a result of jaundice (‘Subjectivity’, 202. See also Stephen Everson, ‘The Objective Appearance of Pyrrhonism’. In *Companions to Ancient Thought 2: Psychology* edited by S. Everson (CUP: 1991), 121–47.)

regarded it as such strong evidence, we may conjecture, that although error is not ruled out as a logical impossibility or conceptual absurdity, it is ruled out as a matter of fact for such cases. The subject's experiences of being affected (*pathê* and *phainomena*) are compelling enough to unfailingly establish the truth of the corresponding statement and the self-aware thought that accompanies it, e.g. 'I am sweetened'.<sup>22</sup> If an interpretation along these lines is right, the Cyrenaics asserted the infallibility of the subject's experience because it happens to him, because he himself is the object of the experience. In that sense they asserted the infallibility of the subject's personal experience (we might even call it a 'subjective' experience), but not, however in a manner compatible with the sense of 'subjective' that Burnyeat

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<sup>22</sup> A remark from Plutarch provides some support for this reading. He writes in *Against Colotes* that the Cyrenaics understood the affections that arise from sensations, e.g. being sweetened, as having intrinsic and irrefutable evidence within themselves. He adds that when belief (*doxa*) restricts itself to these, it is (in the Cyrenaic's view) infallible (*anharmartêton*), but when it is directed towards states of affairs in the external world, e.g. whether honey is sweet, it becomes disturbed (*Adv. Col.* 1120E–F, as in Fine, 205)). The remark highlights a criterion of truth in play for the Cyrenaics, as with Greek thinkers generally—the presence and strength of evidence in favour of a claim, together with lack of evidence against it. If, however, they had forged an ontological distinction between an inner subjective realm from an outer 'objective' realm in the manner of Cartesian thought, we would expect to find them insisting that evidence was no longer required.

highlighted, restricted to the mind and its contents, conceived of as radically distinct in existence and content from what was external to it, including one's own body.<sup>23</sup>

In relation to Greek thought on self-knowledge, then, it seems that with other Greek thinkers, the Cyrenaics assumed the existence of an objective world and the mind's contact with it, but in contrast to other Greeks, identified appearances (*ta phainomena*) with the affections (*pathê*),<sup>24</sup> and took these to be bodily experiences, at least in part. As we have seen, the assumption of realism is inimical to the Cartesian conception of subjective states and subjective truth. So, too, clearly, is the incorporation of the corporeal into the subject's most personal experience of herself, since my body appearing to be affected a certain way is not beyond radical doubt.

I have adduced reason to conclude, then, that for Greek thinkers truth predicates were applicable to statements articulated by the subject about the content of her own appearances, equivalent for our purposes to statements asserting the content of an appearance, where the notion of truth in play is that of correspondence (if somewhat roughly and vaguely conceived) between the content of the statement and the way that whatever the statement is about is, in reality. Absent from Greek thought, along with the absence of the notion of the subjective and of subjective truth, is the conception of first-personal epistemic authority as applied to one's own thought. The inner realm of the subjective—the site of my experience of myself as a thinking thing—is not marked off as that which alone indubitably exists and so is uniquely able to furnish

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<sup>23</sup> In this they also depart from Plato and Aristotle, who seemed implicitly to take it that the subject could correctly ascertain the content of her appearances, and also regarded the having of appearances as an experience of the soul alone (*Sph.* 263d–264b, *DA* III.3).

<sup>24</sup> Sextus, *M* VII, 191–4.

the subject with statements immune to the threat of external world skepticism. To be sure, as noted above, both Plato and Aristotle seemed to regard it as obvious (indeed unremarkable) that the subject is able to report on the content of her appearances, as how things seem to her. And the Cyrenaics explicitly claimed the truth of statements that report sensory affections. But this was not on the grounds that the subjective is a distinctive ontological category, of and within which the subject has a special view that confers on her, and her alone, epistemic authority. Nor is the (first-personal) ability to ascertain correctly the content of appearances regarded as an expression of a more general kind of self-consciousness that was later to be considered by some to be a condition of consciousness.

To return to the question of continuity between ancient and contemporary thought as regards cognitive self-knowledge, then, the radical departure from ancient ways of thinking that began with Augustine (or perhaps medieval thinkers) and culminated in Descartes, saw a move from the pedestrian notion of truth to that of subjective truth concerning mental states, and also ushered in the Cartesian conception of first-personal epistemic authority. But although we have seen that Greek thinkers considered it possible and important to correctly identify the content of appearances—and so, for our purposes, to arrive at cognitive self-knowledge in this case—it remains an open question whether they extended this kind of self-knowledge to other cognitive states. It is to this question, as well as that of dispositional or character self-knowledge in Greek philosophy, we now turn.

## 3. Plato

### 3.1 Cognitive Self-Knowledge in Plato

Scholars have noted that Plato presents Socrates as possessing a kind of self-knowledge of his own epistemic or doxastic mental states and conditions, in particular the state or condition of being ignorant about some object of inquiry.<sup>25</sup> For instance, Socrates proclaims that he does not know what, e.g. courage, or piety, or justice is in a number of dialogues, generally thought to be ‘Socratic’ or written early in Plato’s career (e.g. *Laches*, *Euthyphro*, *Alcibiades I*, *Gorgias*). However, one commentator, Raphael Woolf, has recently suggested that Plato’s depiction of Socratic self-knowledge is in fact in tension with his (Plato’s) general endorsement of third-personal, as opposed to first-personal, epistemic authority, and is potentially undermined by it.<sup>26</sup> Woolf argues for a clear conception of, and commitment to, third-personal epistemic authority in a number of Socratic dialogues whereby the interlocutor, who takes himself to know something, is regularly revealed to be ignorant about that very thing by Socrates’ questioning. Moreover, Socrates is thereby able to demonstrate that his interlocutor cannot authoritatively claim to know the content of his own beliefs, while he, Socrates, does know them.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For example, see Gabriela Roxana Carone, ‘Socrates’ Human Wisdom and *Sophrosune* in the *Charmides*’, *Ancient Philosophy* (1998) 18: 267–86; Raphael Woolf, ‘Socratic Authority’, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (2008) 90: 1–38; Hugh Benson, *Socratic Wisdom: The Model of Knowledge in Plato’s Early Dialogues* (OUP, 2000: though Benson does not refer to Socrates’ awareness of his own ignorance, or ‘Socratic wisdom’, as a kind or instance of self-knowledge).

<sup>26</sup> Raphael Woolf, ‘Socratic Authority’. Examples of third-personal epistemic authority are found in *Charmides* (158e–159a), and the *Gorgias* (474c–475e.) (Broad agreement with Burnyeat is noted at nn. 38, 20.)

<sup>27</sup> Woolf adduces examples from the *Apology* (21c–d; 22c; 23c–d).

For example, in the *Gorgias*, after Polus affirms that he believes it is better to commit than suffer injustice, Socrates' declares that everyone, including Polus, thinks it better to suffer injustice than to perpetrate it (474b). Polus is outraged, but not, Woolf points out, because he takes himself to possess the kind of first-personal authority with respect to knowledge of the content of his own thoughts familiar to us as inheritors of Cartesian thought. Rather, Polus is outraged because in his opinion nobody, himself and Socrates included, thinks or believes it (474b–c). Each of Socrates and Polus claims to know the other's beliefs better than they do themselves: both claim third-personal epistemic authority. Moreover, in this regard they are not unique: Plato depicts third personal authority as a general phenomenon—in the *Apology* others are said to follow Socrates' *elenctic* method.<sup>28</sup> However Woolf also argues that, with the sole exception of Socrates, Plato's characters lack self-knowledge: they are unable correctly to identify their own states of mind.<sup>29</sup> Socrates' interlocutors are left confused and frustrated, and not, says Woolf, enlightened about their claims to know, or their beliefs. What sets Socrates apart from his interlocutors is simply that he alone among the Athenians can be said to know his own mental states—it is Socrates' self-knowledge of his own ignorance that gives him his edge.<sup>30</sup> But although he depicts Socrates as knowing his own ignorance, and so as possessing this negative kind of self-knowledge, Woolf claims that Plato found himself unable to

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<sup>28</sup> *Apol.* 23c–d; Woolf, 'Socratic Authority', 12.

<sup>29</sup> Woolf, 'Socratic Authority', throughout, but see especially 2–3, 6–9, 26–7.

<sup>30</sup> Woolf, 'Socratic Authority', 2–11.

account philosophically for self-knowledge.<sup>31</sup> The underlying reason for this is logical: if one seriously questions one of her beliefs, it is, from the moment she doubts it no longer something she believes, since one cannot believe and simultaneously doubt the truth of some claim. Hence the subject of belief disappears under cross-examination: it is not *self*-cross-examination. By contrast it is possible to doubt somebody else's beliefs, or a free-floating proposition.<sup>32</sup> So Plato should not after all be read as endorsing first-personal epistemic authority, or (what I have called) cognitive self-knowledge, even in cases as rare as Socrates.

For very different reasons, then Woolf concurs with the claim argued for in §2, that Greek thinkers did not propose first-personal epistemic authority, even if some presupposed a first-personal view from which to report accurately on the contents of appearances.<sup>33</sup> But his analysis is at variance with the conclusion of that section, i.e. that Greek thinkers including Plato regarded a certain kind of (what we call) self-knowledge, cognitive self-knowledge, possible. Against Woolf, however, I suggest that while it may be impossible to simultaneously adopt propositional attitudes of assertion and denial towards some proposition, it is possible to learn or realize that the

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<sup>31</sup> Woolf argues that depictions of self-examination are not found in the corpus ('Socratic Authority').

<sup>32</sup> Woolf, 'Socratic Authority', 34–7.

<sup>33</sup> Woolf too claims that Plato depicts his characters as unproblematically able to report on the content of their thoughts, in the sense of being able to say how things strike them or articulate what they take themselves to believe, for instance. His analysis aims to show that they are nonetheless depicted as frequently mistaken about the content of their beliefs, despite their initial report resulting from their ability to say what they think they believe, or what they appear to themselves to believe.

beliefs one holds entail further claims that jointly provide grounds for a further belief, which therefore, in some sense, one was committed to all along (albeit unwittingly). Where this further belief also contradicts a belief one holds and has previously avowed, the agent is then in a position to know both that she has the further belief that arose through questioning, and that, being in a state of holding contradictory beliefs, cannot be knowledgeable on the topic in question. In this way, self-knowledge of one's beliefs—the beliefs which, in being all along committed to, one didn't know oneself to possess—as well as of one's ignorance, seems both possible and a matter of some importance to Plato in the *Apology* and the *Gorgias*.<sup>34</sup> So too in the *Alcibiades*, Alcibiades admits that he does after all believe that just things are advantageous, having previously denied it (116d–e, cf. 114e).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Rachana Kamtekar rejects Woolf's interpretation of Plato's position on self-knowledge on similar grounds ('Self-Knowledge in Plato' ['Self-Knowledge'], in U. Renz, *Self-Knowledge: A History* (OUP: 2017), 25–33. She writes that it is possible to 'believe quite strongly both p as well as the q, r, s, t that (escaping our notice) entail not-p; once we notice this, however, even if we weren't previously open-minded, our new awareness of our ignorance can open our mind' (38). But whereas Kamtekar concludes that the process produces self-knowledge of ignorance and an open-mindedness, I am arguing that for Plato it produces self-knowledge of beliefs all along held, as well as self-knowledge of ignorance.

<sup>35</sup> As we have seen, Woolf explicitly denies cognitive self-knowledge for all Socrates' interlocutors in the early dialogues ('Socratic Authority', 2–3, 6–9, 26–7). Annas, on the other hand, implies that Alcibiades becomes aware of his ignorance in the *Alcibiades* at 124b ('Self-Knowledge in Early Plato', in *Platonic Investigations*, D. J. O'Meara (ed.) (Catholic University of America Press: 1985) 117–18). A similar concession seems to

One dialogue that raises the question of cognitive self-knowledge of a different kind of cognitive or mental state, that of knowledge, is the *Charmides*. Having defined temperance (*sôphrosunê*) as self-knowledge (or knowing oneself) (164d–165b), Critias undergoes extensive questioning by Socrates. Together they articulate and explore a conception of self-knowledge as both knowledge that one knows and knowledge of what one knows (167a ff.). This raises the possibility that it is on the one hand knowledge the agent has about herself, as a knower—and so a kind of dispositional or character self-knowledge—and on the other, higher-order knowledge of the contents of one’s knowledge at the first-order level of some matter or topic—and so amounting to a kind of cognitive self-knowledge (perhaps as a condition on the former).<sup>36</sup> As we have seen, however, the prominent case of self-knowledge on

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come from Alcibiades at 117a–b, 118a–e, and 127d, and in the *Laches* from Nicias at 200a–b. Even Laches himself, though he remains convinced that he knows what courage is, becomes aware that it escapes him so that he cannot put it into words (194a–b).

<sup>36</sup> M. M. McCabe reads Plato in the *Charmides* (169d–172a) as distinguishing between what she calls ‘subject-related’ self-knowledge, in which the subject knows something about herself, i.e. that she is a knower, and ‘object-related’ self-knowledge, in which the subject is aware of herself as having a particular item of knowledge (McCabe, ‘It goes deep with me: *Charmides* on Knowledge, Self-Knowledge and Integrity’, in *Philosophy, Ethics, and a Common Humanity: Essays in Honour of Raimond Gaita*, ed. C. Cordner (Routledge: 2011), *passim*, but especially sections 3–5). In a different paper McCabe argues that the *Charmides* can also be read as presenting arguments for a conception of perception as well as belief and knowledge as being higher-order and transitive in relation to its contents: the content of the first-order belief or perception or knowing is embedded in its higher-order counterpart, arrived at via introspection and reflection (‘Looking inside *Charmides*’ Cloak:

display (in the *Charmides* and elsewhere) is Socrates' knowledge of his own ignorance. This in turn raises the question of how he is able to know, at the higher-order level, his own or another's ignorance concerning the definition in question without possessing knowledge at the first-order level on at least some related matters, if not on the definition in question.<sup>37</sup> The discussion of the conception of temperance as self-knowledge in the *Charmides*, however, ends negatively, with Socrates and Critias agreeing that they cannot clearly identify exactly what self-knowledge is knowledge of, or whether it is possible or beneficial, in turn casting doubt on whether any of the claims or arguments in the dialogue about self-knowledge ultimately ought to be attributed to Plato. However, it has been argued by M. M. McCabe that two other dialogues, the *Meno* and *Euthydemus*, can be read as further evidence that Plato endorsed this particular kind of cognitive self-knowledge, knowledge of one's own knowledge. The formulation and reformulation of the paradox in the *Meno*, McCabe

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Seeing Others and Oneself in Plato's *Charmides*', in *Platonic Conversations* (OUP: 2015), 180–7).

<sup>37</sup> Charles Kahn argues that the *Charmides* gives us reason to think that in the early dialogues Socrates' ability to know others' ignorance should be understood as in fact grounded in his possession of the relevant knowledge at the first-order level, and so that his claim to be ignorant—which Kahn refers to as 'Socratic self-knowledge'—is revealed as ultimately ironical and insincere ('Plato's *Charmides* and the Proleptic Reading of Socratic Dialogues', *Journal of Philosophy* (1988) 85: 547–8). By contrast, Hugh Benson takes Socrates' profession of ignorance as genuine, and argues that he is only capable of recognition, not knowledge, of ignorance, in his own case and that of his interlocutors ('A Note on Socratic Self-Knowledge in the *Charmides*', *Ancient Philosophy* (2003) 23: 31–47). For further discussion, see Kamtekar, 'Self-Knowledge', 28–33.

suggests, is intended to draw attention to the way that knowing that one does or doesn't know, as well as knowing what it is that one does or doesn't know, is a condition on knowledge. In the *Euthydemus*, she points out, Socrates' claim that knowledge and wisdom alone are good for its possessor, itself by itself, coupled with the suggestion that knowledge about something must be coupled with knowledge of how to use that knowledge (280e–282a), implies self-knowledge—knowing that one knows and of what, precisely, one knows.<sup>38</sup>

Plato's endorsement of the possibility of cognitive self-knowledge of a very different kind of cognitive state, desiderative states, is suggested by passages from the so-called middle period that treat of the tripartite soul, the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*. Within this account of human moral psychology, as we will see, awareness or knowledge of the content of one's own occurrent desires and emotions is intertwined with knowing the moral status of one's soul. At least in the virtuous person, it seems that in Plato's view the agent comes to have true beliefs and knowledge about her own patterns of desires, feelings, and pleasures—what we might term her standing desires, emotional responsiveness, and characteristic pleasures—by way of correctly grasping the nature or content of her individual states of desiring, feeling, and taking pleasure. In this way, correctly grasping individual states is a necessary condition for knowing one's moral state to be that of virtue. (So although I will present some of the

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<sup>38</sup> McCabe, 'Escaping One's Own Notice Knowing: Meno's Paradox Again' (*Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 2009) 251–5; McCabe, 'Waving or Drowning? Socrates and the Sophists on Self-Knowledge in the *Euthydemus*' in *The Platonic Art of Philosophy: Festschrift for Christopher Rowe*, G. Boys-Stones, C. Gill, and D. el Murr (eds.) (CUP: 2013), 130–49. There McCabe argues that for Plato 'it is a failing of any account of knowledge . . . that we might be unaware that we know, when we know' (148).

central passages indicative of Platonic cognitive self-knowledge of desiderative states here, and those pointing to Platonic character self-knowledge of moral states in the next section, with a view to the overarching purpose of this chapter—to track continuity and discontinuity between ancient and contemporary conceptions of self-knowledge—their interconnected nature ought to be kept in mind.)

In Book IV of the *Republic*, Socrates suggests that the virtuous person is aware (herself, or in virtue of her rational element or part's being aware) of occurrent and standing desiderative and passionate states of the other two parts, and communicates with and regulates them over time. In the just person, the spirited part or element of the soul is said to refuse to rise up against unjust hardships and to willingly endure just ones (440c), in obedience to reason (441e). During individual events of hardship, the virtuous agent will suffer physical and psychological pain, and will be desirous of its ending.<sup>39</sup> But she will also be aware of the potential for anger in herself, should the

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<sup>39</sup> Socrates sometimes speaks as if it is the person as opposed to one of the parts that is the subject of cognitive states, and other times as if the soul parts themselves are subjects of such states. For example, 440c–d where Socrates describes the case of the person who believes someone inflicts hardships on him justly, and whose spirit refuses to become aroused, in contrast with the person who believes himself to have been wronged unjustly, in whom spirit is angry and ready to fight for what he, the person, believes is right. However, at 442c–d, Socrates says that the parts that rule and are ruled believe in common that reason ought to rule. For my purposes, however, it is not necessary to decide between the two: whether it is in virtue of the soul parts correctly grasping or knowing the contents of cognitive (including desiderative) states that belong to other parts, or through the activity of the rational part that the agent grasps individual cognitive (or desiderative) states belonging to her, and which arise from each of the soul's three irreducible sources of

suffering and pain seem unfair, so any perception of injustice is submitted to the authority of reason. This kind of coordination requires awareness of individual or discrete cognitive states of how things appear (just or unjust), but also of feelings (of rising anger) and desires (to lash out at the perceived injustice or demand its end). Similarly, reason and spirit are said in the virtuous person to watch over the appetitive part, and control its pursuit and satisfaction of individual pleasures to ensure its proper development within the whole (442a–b). This implies that the virtuous person will have an awareness of each (or most) of her various desires at the time they occur and choose to permit satisfaction of only those that promote or maintain (or do not impede) virtue.<sup>40</sup> Similarly in the *Phaedrus* awareness and regulation of individual desiderative states are attributed to the person who loves properly. The rational and spirited parts or elements of the soul, symbolized by the figures of the charioteer and the white horse respectively, are made completely aware of the strong physical desire for the beloved of the appetitive part, represented by the black horse, at the time of

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desire, the agent comes to have self-knowledge of these cognitive (and desiderative) states. For the view that in the *Republic* Plato ascribes belief to each of the three parts as subjects, see Hendrick Lorenz, *The Brute Within* (OUP: 2006), 56ff., 75ff.

<sup>40</sup> See Terrence Irwin, who reads Plato here as according reason the power of impartially weighing desires in light of overall benefit for the agent, so that the ends determined by practical reason ‘result from consideration of what is better, all things considered, for the whole soul, not from one’s strongest occurrent desires’ (*Plato’s Ethics*, OUP: 1995, 216). Irwin writes: ‘[the] desires of the rational part, in contrast to those of the spirited part, rest on deliberation about what would be best, all things considered, for myself as a whole . . . these desires are optimizing desires . . . Plato implies that [the rational part] is guided by a conception of the agent’s overall happiness or welfare’ (215).

having it, as Socrates' narration of the story of attraction and love in the present tense makes clear. These better elements of the soul respond by actively resisting the desire, and when the desire presents itself again at a later time, they resist again—a pattern of reaction and control in the present that is coordinated by reason together with spirit (253d–256b). In both dialogues' account of moral progress within the framework of the tripartite soul, the person who makes substantial progress comes to a correct estimation of the content of her occurrent spirited and appetitive desiderative states, and so achieves cognitive self-knowledge of this kind of mental state, as well as self-conscious mastery over individual occurrent desires of this sort.

### 3.2 Dispositional Self-Knowledge in Plato

The idea of knowing one's own character by grasping one's dispositions or capacities, either those shared in common with others, or those specific to oneself as an individual, is not unique to ancient philosophy. But the further idea, that acquiring this kind of self-knowledge is crucial for one's happiness or flourishing, and so counts as a moral imperative is, I have suggested, distinctive of ancient thought. The *Republic* perhaps provides the richest illustration of character or dispositional self-knowledge in Plato's thought, in the account of virtues in the tripartite soul in Book IV, and the discussion of pleasure in Books VIII and IX.

We have just seen that in Book IV the rational part of the soul discerns the contents of occurrent desires, issuing from both the spirited and appetitive elements of the psyche. At 441e, having described the obedience of spirit to reason in cases of just suffering, Socrates says that in the just person, spirit will be an ally to reason (441e). He is here describing a settled disposition (which will turn out to be a crucial component of courage) that follows upon a pattern of distinct acts of awareness of and

complex interaction between individual desiring or motivating states and the rational beliefs of the agent: cognitive self-knowledge is in this way necessary for virtue, and we will see, for dispositional self-knowledge. Since each act culminated in self-conscious obedience to reason, the pattern of actions that arises from repeated instances of obedience and which results in the settled state of allegiance between spirit and reason similarly ought to be understood as a self-conscious state. At 442a–b, once again with reference to the just person, Socrates’ description of the joint surveillance of the appetitive element by reason and spirit, over the long term, to ensure it develops in a manner conducive to the benefit of the whole soul, is a description of an ongoing state characterized by self-awareness and careful regulation. The implication that this settled state should itself be understood as one the agent is aware of herself being in is confirmed a little later, when Socrates says that the temperate person’s soul enjoys friendly and harmonious relations between the parts, with ruler and ruled believing in common (*homodoxein*) that the rational part should rule (442c10–d1): The agent knows herself to possess the settled disposition of temperance, in believing in an unconflicted way that the reasoning element in her ought to rule her spirited and appetitive elements. Socrates also says in this passage that a person is called wise when the rational part rules, and has knowledge (*epistêmê*) of what is beneficial to each part and to the whole (442c5–8). The agent, then, has knowledge of what is best for her whole soul, and knowingly places reason in charge, guiding her decisions and actions in view of her conception of the good. It seems that the possession of wisdom, as with the other virtues, ought to be understood as a self-conscious state.

The implication that the virtuous agent possesses character self-knowledge in Book IV receives confirmation in Book IX. There, amidst a long and complex

argument concerning the nature and kinds of pleasure (the merits of which need not concern us here), the person in whom reason rules is said to have a ‘philosophical’ kind of soul, as opposed to the ‘victory-loving’ soul or the ‘money-loving’ soul of those in whom spirit and appetite, respectively, rule (581b–c). While each character type champions his own proprietary pleasure, only the philosophical character has tasted the pleasures belonging to the non-ruling soul parts within him (582a–d), and his high valuation of pleasures of reason is based on reason and argument as well as experience. The pleasures enjoyed by each of his parts are approved by the rational part, having been critically evaluated and endorsed (586d–587a). Hence, the philosophical person’s belief that these pleasures are best is true (582e), and the person with knowledge (*ho phronimos*) speaks with authority when he praises his own life (583a4–5). He has attained self-knowledge in relation not only to his own settled configuration of desires, pleasures, and set of values, but in relation to the evaluation of the unifying goal of his life, which makes it the most praiseworthy of the lives under discussion. Socrates concludes the discussion with an exhortation to virtue and self-knowledge, declaring that a person ‘of understanding’ (*nous*, 591c1) will strive to attain virtue. He will honour the studies that produce it and despise those that don’t, looking to the constitution within himself and guarding against its disturbance by money, and will similarly look within in relation to honours, only sharing in those that he believes will make him better (591b–592a).

At this point in the dialogue, Socrates’ exhortation to character or dispositional self-knowledge and virtue is directed squarely at his interlocutors, as opposed to the inhabitants of *Kallipolis*. The discussion of the three character types comes after the discussion of the successive degeneration of kinds of city and of soul, and proceeds only on the basis of tripartite division (580d). This suggests that the postulation of the

three character types should be understood as a topic separate from the nature and possibility of the ideal state. The introduction of the image of the soul as a three-part creature comprising a little man, a lion, and a many-headed beast in the discussion with the anonymous ‘someone’ (who claims that injustice profits the apparently just, but really unjust, person at 588b), closely mirrors the account of the tripartite soul and the relations between its parts from Book IV. If this is right, it suggests that Plato in the *Republic* endorsed and straightforwardly recommended to his readers, who have not had the privilege of an upbringing in *Kallipolis*, character self-knowledge as tightly bound up with development and maintenance of the virtues, and so as a moral imperative.<sup>41</sup>

This rich, developmental account of dispositional or character self-knowledge is not, however, the only kind of dispositional self-knowledge that can be read into the dialogues. In the *Alcibiades*,<sup>42</sup> the reference to the Delphic Oracle’s command to ‘know yourself’ is ultimately interpreted by Socrates as knowing the best and most divine part of the soul, that with which one has knowledge and becomes wise (132d–133c). An intermediary step in Socrates’ account is secured by his claim that what a person truly is, as opposed to what belongs to him, is his soul as opposed to his body (129e–130e). Looking forward to the later passage, this can be taken to imply that a

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<sup>41</sup> Of course, as Socrates makes plain at 587aff., the philosopher kings and queens of *Kallipolis* will know the pleasures of all three soul parts, prefer those of reason, approve only a select number of pleasures of the other parts, and so on. It does not follow, however, that they are the only souls fitting the description of the philosophical character type.

<sup>42</sup> I take it that Nicholas Denyer has shown, in his *Plato: Alcibiades* that the arguments against taking the *Alcibiades* (or *Alcibiades I* as it is sometimes known) as a genuine dialogue of Plato’s are less than persuasive (CUP: 2001, 14–26).

person is, strictly speaking, the rational element of his soul (or, perhaps, a distinctively rational soul), and this is the object of self-knowledge. The fundamental identification of oneself with soul and the analysis of self-knowledge as knowing one's capacity for reason, shared universally with other human beings, can be—and indeed has been—read as a general or impersonal account of dispositional self-knowledge, in contrast to self-knowledge concerning one's individual character or disposition, where that bears the marks of one's unique experiences and development, or individual desires, capacities, and aptitudes.<sup>43</sup>

From the brief account sketched above of Plato's interest in cognitive and character or dispositional self-knowledge, a host of questions present themselves. One

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<sup>43</sup> Julia Annas, 'Self-Knowledge in Early Plato', in D. J. O'Meara, *Platonic Investigations* (Catholic University of America Press: 1985), 111–38. Annas argues that Plato begins from a common conception of temperance (*sôphrosunê*) as self-knowledge, which focuses on objective features of oneself such as social position and rank, and extends this notion of self-knowledge to knowledge of one's universal psychic capacity for reason. Christopher Gill, in his *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought* (OUP: 2006), signals agreement with Annas' interpretation of self-knowledge in the *Alcibiades*. He suggests that the reflexive (in *auto to auto* or in *auto hekaston*) in the dialogue should not be read as a linguistic equivalent of the subjective and post-Cartesian term, 'the self', but as drawing attention to the essence of what a human being is, to what an 'itself' is, in objective and impersonal terms (344). A more recent view that concurs with Annas' reading insofar as it restricts the self in Plato to non-individualistic features is Richard Sorabji's *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (Clarendon Press: 2006); see also Pauliina Remes, 'Reasons to Care: The Object and Structure of Self-Knowledge in the *Alcibiades I*, *Apeiron* (2013) 46: 270–301.

is whether it is right to understand cognitive self-knowledge in Plato as a reflexive higher-order state, as I have suggested above. Another is how we should understand the internalist implication for Plato's epistemology of self-knowledge as a condition on knowledge.<sup>44</sup> Another question concerns motivation. On the complex, individualistic picture of character self-knowledge in the *Republic*, self-knowledge will be both authoritative and motivating: as well as knowing her values, goals, and patterns of desires, and what is best for the whole soul, the virtuous person knows herself to be virtuous. So she will unfailingly act as the virtuous person ought to act. We might think there is something peculiar, however, about construing self-knowledge as motivating. A further question arises about the possibility and role of dispositional self-knowledge for the student of virtue. Is self-knowledge only acquired by the virtuous, or, as I suggested above, does the process of moral improvement also demand correct discernment of one's own, deficient, moral status (and with it, the content of her cognitive and desiderative states)? More detail is needed for an account of the transformation of one's emotions, values, and desires, i.e. about the particular kinds of experiences that over time will cause an individual to make moral progress, and the role of self-awareness or self-knowledge in that progress. This in turn leads to the further question whether self-knowledge—cognitive or dispositional—contributes to the preservation of virtue in the subject, once acquired. There remains, too, the important issue of the relation between the account of dispositional self-knowledge in

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<sup>44</sup> One response to this question (amongst others) is given in McCabe, 'Escaping One's Own Notice: Meno's Paradox Again', in which she suggests that Plato invites the reader to consider that in a correct epistemological account both internalist constraints—knowing that one knows (or does not)—and externalist constraints—the knower standing in the right causal relations—apply.

the *Alcibiades*, which as we saw can be read as non-individualistic, and the individualist account of this kind of self-knowledge in the *Republic*. Are they compatible, and if so, how? If not, did Plato overturn one conception of character self-knowledge in favour of another?<sup>45</sup>

### 3.3 Lane, Kosman, Brennan, and McCabe in This Volume

The chapters in this volume on self-knowledge in Plato pick up and in various ways address a range of the issues and questions sketched above, in relation to either cognitive self-knowledge or dispositional self-knowledge, or in some cases, both.

In her contribution, ‘Self-Knowledge in Plato? Recognizing the Limits and Aspirations of the Self as a Knower’, Melissa Lane offers an account of (what I have called) cognitive self-knowledge in Plato, and discusses the broad question of knowledge as motivating. Lane reads Plato in the *Apology* and the *Protagoras* as focused on a higher-order cognitive condition that with qualification she refers to as self-knowledge, explicitly in order to distinguish it from its post-Cartesian counterpart. Possessed by Socrates in the *Apology* and elsewhere in being aware of his own ignorance, and arrived at via Socratic questioning, this kind of self-knowledge ought not be understood as a reflexive higher-order state, Lane argues. That is, it is not in her view a state standing in a direct, unmediated relation to a first-order state, but is, rather, mediated by the Socratic method of interpersonal discussion

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<sup>45</sup> See Kamtekar, ‘Self-Knowledge in Plato’, who attributes two, not incompatible conceptions of self-knowledge to Plato, the non-individualist kind and a kind of self-knowledge similar to but more narrow than the account of character self-knowledge sketched above.

which, when deployed correctly, allows one to achieve self-knowledge of the extent to which one is a knower, or possesses ‘human wisdom’.

A dramatic illustration of this wisdom ‘in the breach’ is found, Lane argues, in the *Protagoras*, in which the sophists are depicted as failing to gain awareness of the limits of their knowledge, despite being brought to the brink of grasping their own ignorance by Socrates. The positive counterpart to awareness of ignorance is found in Socrates’ espousal of what Lane calls the ‘Rule of Knowledge’: the view that knowledge is sufficient to motivate action, and never ‘dragged about’ by pleasure. Grasping the ruling nature of knowledge is to know about oneself how she would act, were she to be a knower (and is, moreover, explanatory of Socrates’ rejection of *akrasia* in the dialogue).

In his chapter, ‘Self-Knowledge and Self-Control in Plato’s *Charmides*’, Aryeh Kosman reads Plato as investigating the nature of cognitive self-knowledge. He argues that Critias’ proposal that temperance (*sôphrosunê*) is self-knowledge, and its subsequent examination by Socrates, initially offers the reader a picture of self-knowledge as a reflexive self-awareness of the content of mental states (cognitive and affective). Kosman suggests that this self-knowledge, is, however, importantly ‘non-objective’. The initial discussion between Socrates and Critias at 165d–166c, he argues, presents the reader with a tension between the dual demands placed on self-knowledge in that dialogue. On the one hand, since self-knowledge as Critias describes it is directed inward, towards one’s conscious states in acting temperately (as well as towards a ‘self’ as subject and condition of those states), it appears to be

presented as reflexive.<sup>46</sup> On the other, since, as a kind of knowledge, self-knowledge must be about something, and so dependent on the object it is directed towards, it is presented as exhibiting the characteristic of ‘objective intentionality’.

A clue to the tension’s resolution can be found, Kosman suggests, in Charmides’ characterization of temperance as a kind of ‘quietude’ (159b), particularly in the context of what is missing from the dialogue’s treatment of temperance, namely the notion of mere self-control or *enkrateia*, as Aristotle calls it. As Aristotle makes plain in the *Nicomachean Ethics*—and, Kosman claims, as does Plato in the *Republic*—the virtue of temperance is not to be confused with self-control. For the former, in contrast to the latter, is distinguished by lack of internal conflict, characterizing a unified subject who is the unhesitating master of her actions. On Kosman’s reading, the kind of self-knowledge Plato is drawing the reader’s attention to in the *Charmides* is not a higher-order cognitive state directed towards a first-order state or reified self. Rather, in a continuation of his earlier work on Aristotle on perceiving that we perceive in the *De Anima*, and on *nous* thinking itself in the *Metaphysics*, Kosman understands self-knowledge in the *Charmides* as a mode of self-awareness characteristic of first-order thought.<sup>47</sup> Self-knowledge is thus revealed to be non-

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<sup>46</sup> On the question of reflexivity, then, the chapters of Lane and Kosman in this volume argue for distinct conceptions of self-knowledge in the *Apology* and *Protagoras* on the one hand, and the *Charmides* on the other.

<sup>47</sup> A. Kosman, ‘Perceiving That We Perceive: *On the Soul* III, 2’, *Philosophical Review* (1975) 84: 499–515; A. Kosman, ‘*Metaphysics* Λ, 9: Divine Thought’, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics Lambda, Symposium Aristotelicum*, M. Frede and D. Charles (eds.) (OUP: 2000), 307–27. Kosman’s reading also picks up and further develops his reading of *sophrosune* in his ‘*Charmides*’ First Definition: *Sophrosyne* as Quietness’, in *Essays in*

objective insofar as it does not consist in the subject putting some state or element of herself before herself as an object of thought, but is rather the awareness of the subject who knows her action to be temperate. Self-knowledge retains intentionality, but is reflexive only in this qualified, non-objective sense.

Tad Brennan's chapter, 'Reading Plato's Mind' takes up a number of the issues canvassed above. On the question of the relation between the non-individual self-knowledge that scholars have found in the *Alcibiades* and the individualistic dispositional self-knowledge in the *Republic*, Brennan suggests that both can be accommodated in Plato's texts. Following Damascius, he distinguishes multiple kinds of self-knowledge in Plato, and articulates two: a 'thin' kind, consisting in knowing that one is in some essential sense a rational soul, and a 'thick' kind, 'political' self-knowledge of oneself as a soul with a psychology made complex in its desires and irrationality by its embodied state—a description of what I have called dispositional self-knowledge. Political self-knowledge, the focus of Brennan's chapter, is built up from the subject correctly grasping her individual desires, values, beliefs, etc., the irrational nature of some of these, and their historical causes in the individual's life story (and so is partly constituted by what I have called cognitive self-knowledge).

Brennan adduces passages from the *Republic* and the *Seventh Letter* that speak to political self-knowledge. In one passage, the lower classes of *Kallipolis* are firmly ordered never to lie to the rulers (389b–d). Within the context of political allegory, the upshot is that in the just, virtuous soul the rational element actively scrutinizes, and comes to know, the irrational parts' desires and states. In another passage detailing the

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*Ancient Greek Philosophy, Vol. II*, J. Anton and A. Preuss (eds) (SUNY Press, 1983), 203–

degenerate soul types in Books VIII–IX, Brennan argues that the processes of corruption of young souls generates a psychological vocabulary and framework for understanding the aetiology of their various conditions, charting patterns of irrationality and the way that political forces shape the individual’s values, beliefs, and desires. Brennan’s chapter thereby also offers insight into the question of the role of dispositional self-knowledge in the moral development of the soul of the student of virtue, in reading Plato as illustrating the moral consequences of its absence. In the *Seventh Letter*, Brennan argues, an explanation of the development of Plato’s own moral and political values and beliefs up until his arrival in Sicily is presented, either by Plato himself as author, or one of his close associates. The autobiographical narrative of his own interest and non-involvement in Athenian politics at 324b–326b exhibits striking parallels with the explanatory features of degeneration of soul types and the account of Socrates ‘quietism’ at 496a–e in the *Republic*, in turn suggesting that the method of political (or character) self-knowledge is grounded in explanation based on the psychological theory of that dialogue.

In her ‘From the Cradle to the Cave: What Happened to Self-Knowledge in the *Republic*?’ M. M. McCabe offers a new reading of Plato’s cave allegory in the *Republic* in terms of a focus on the question of self-knowledge via self-perception. In the allegory, the prisoners, whose view is physically fixed by head and body restraints, in a sense correctly identify themselves with their shadows (at least when they say ‘this is me’ of their own shadow). But they also—and obviously—go wrong in self-identifying, since they are not their shadows. Like the prisoners, Socrates’ interlocutors (and we, Plato’s readers), get it right in saying ‘this is me’ (when we self-refer) for the same reason, but we too go wrong in identifying ourselves with the ‘projection’ of ourselves in the discussion of psychology, epistemology, and

metaphysics in the dialogue. For, in an effort to understand oneself, the subject of understanding remains the agent of understanding, and paradoxically risks escaping her own grasp.

The key to correct understanding of ourselves for Plato, of who we are, McCabe suggests, lies in understanding the view we have of ourselves, since, as active knowing subjects we always retain a view of ourselves, not as a condition of being a conscious, thinking thing, but in virtue of the relation of active knower to the thing that is known. For Plato, in the vastly improved human condition of the philosopher, educated in *Kallipolis*, the possibility of such self-understanding opens up. Through dialectic, the philosopher gains what McCabe describes as stereoscopic vision or ‘a view in the round’, by taking up different points of view. This in turn makes it evident how she knows what she knows—she understands, i.e. has a body of interconnected claims that together and individually are correct, generates explanations and accurate predictions, traces causal chains and so on, about the object. Since she has understanding, when it comes to knowing herself, she has a similarly deep understanding of what it is to know—to have stereoscopic vision—and thereby knows herself as a knower in this sense. This delivers self-knowledge not only of herself as possessor of the virtue of wisdom, but of her self—of who she is—as an enquiring subject, someone to be known ‘in the round’, stereoscopically.

This self-knowledge, which is a kind of (what I have called) dispositional self-knowledge of oneself as wise, is achieved via reflective and reflexive thought on one’s cognitive states of knowing, as well as on the question of one’s character or disposition as a knower. Such reflection, however, is not immediate, and is neither piecemeal nor episodic, but is developed from an indirect view of oneself as the active

subject of the various mental states, as well as the subject who takes a view of herself, and seeks to understand herself, over time.

## 4. Aristotle

### 4.1 Cognitive Self-Knowledge in Aristotle

In a brief and extremely difficult passage in *Met.* XII (Λ) chapter 9, in the context of a discussion of divine thought, Aristotle seems to discuss one case of cognitive self-knowledge canvassed above, that of understanding or knowledge (*noêsis*) cognizing itself (1074b34–35). He then goes on to argue that thinking is one with the object of thought on the basis of considerations of the object of thought in both the productive sciences (conceived in abstraction from matter) and the theoretical sciences, considerations clearly not restricted to divine thinking. Similarly in *de Anima* III.4 in a general discussion of the capacity of intellection or understanding (*to noein*) in human beings, Aristotle asks whether *nous* is an object of itself. His answer is that *nous* is an object of intellection or understanding just as the other objects of intellect are (430a1–2), reasoning once more that in cases of things without matter, what understands or thinks (*to nooun*) is the same as what it understands or thinks, and again draws on theoretical science (430a3–9). The claim that *nous* understands itself is consistent with Aristotle's claim, earlier in III.4, that it must be completely without any qualities or properties itself, in order to cognize all things—including,

presumably, itself (429a13ff.). But if it is not characterized by features of its own, how, we might ask, can it constitute an object of thought?<sup>48</sup>

Divergent interpretations of these claims concerning *nous* understanding itself are possible. With respect to our topic of self-knowledge the important question is whether, for Aristotle, understanding understands itself in such a way that the person who understands is able to understand that she understands, or perhaps thereby understands that she understands. A promising starting point could be the claim that understanding is identical with its object, which can be understood as suggesting that understanding and its object are in some sense alike in respect of the relevant (non-material) property of the object, so that the object of thought determines the content of understanding. One scholar, taking this approach, and with reference to the complex (and equally controversial) discussion of friendship and perception at *EE* VII.12 (1245a2–10), attributed to Aristotle the further claim that in becoming like its object, intellection also takes on the very intelligibility of the object of first-order intellection. *Nous* therefore knows itself through reflexive awareness, but in an indirect fashion, by first understanding something at the first-order level and taking on its intelligibility.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> For a fuller formulation of this interpretive puzzle, and its resemblance to Gilbert Ryle's puzzle of self-knowledge (in his *The Concept of Mind* (University of Chicago Press: 1949), 187), see Christopher Shields, 'Aristotle's Requisite of Self-Knowledge', in *Self-Knowledge: A History*, U. Renz (ed.) (OUP: 2017) 44–60, at 44–8. For further discussion of *DA* III.4 see his *Aristotle: De Anima* (Clarendon Aristotle Series, OUP: 2016), 292–311.

<sup>49</sup> Frank Lewis, 'Self-Knowledge in Aristotle', *Topoi* (1996) 15: 39–58, at 48–52. It is worth noting that Lewis is critical of the reasoning he attributes to Aristotle, on the grounds that it is unclear intelligibility can be 'taken on' in the same way that the form of an object of understanding can become one with its object, considered apart from its matter. Compare,

By contrast, Aristotle could be taken as advocating a kind of self-awareness that accompanies all understanding, but which is not a higher-order state. Kosman has proposed one such reading, arguing against interpretations that suggest a reflective self-awareness. On his reading, the self-awareness that comes with understanding ought to be distinguished from intentional thought, typically of the objective world, in which thought, in the act of thinking, places some object before itself. Rather, understanding or intellection that knows itself is, for Aristotle, a kind of non-objective and non-reflexive ‘self-presence’ of the subject to herself at the first-order level.<sup>50</sup> Insofar as Kosman argues that understanding’s understanding of itself in this way also serves as the condition of the subject’s consciousness, this interpretation can be seen as a rival to the view that *nous* cognizes itself at a higher level of thought by way of first-order understanding. We turn now to dispositional self-knowledge in Aristotle.

## 4.2 Dispositional Self-Knowledge and Friendship in Aristotle

That there is, in Aristotle’s view, a kind of knowledge about oneself that is relevant to the acquisition and maintenance of virtue is, I submit, suggested by the criteria of being virtuous set out in *EN* II.4. The virtuous person not only performs the right action, but does it virtuously, by which, Aristotle explains, he has in mind that the

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too, Leo Elders, who takes Aristotle in *Met.* Λ.9 to be asserting that sometimes understanding takes itself as its direct object of thought, at a higher-order level (*Aristotle’s Theology: A Commentary on Book L of the Metaphysics* (Van Gorcum: 1972), 262).

<sup>50</sup> Aryeh Kosman, *The Activity of Being* (Harvard University Press: 2013), 224–32. Cf.

Kosman’s ‘*Metaphysics* Λ: Divine Thought’ in *Aristotle’s Metaphysics Lambda*, M. Frede and D. Charles (eds) (OUP: 2000), 307–26.

virtuous person knows that it is the right thing to do, chooses it for its own sake, and performs it from a stable and unchanging disposition (1105a31–33). This suggests that the virtuous person acts in full awareness not only of the rightness or fineness of the action, but also, it seems likely, of her own motivational state, and its being a settled, or permanent, character. It seems likely, that is, that someone who unfailingly acts in this way is aware, in general, of her motive for so acting, and of its unconflicted nature, even if, on some occasions, it escapes the virtuous person's notice that she acts for the sake of the right action itself (or the fine), and that her decision and motive issues from a settled character state. Moreover, the fact that this unchanging character state develops over time from habituation strongly suggests self-knowledge at a more general level.<sup>51</sup> For, given the scholarly consensus that habituation is not mindless repetition,<sup>52</sup> Aristotle's account suggests the development in the agent of a pattern of awareness of, and critical reflection upon, not only the actions chosen, but also the motivational basis of choice, either as a result of her own deliberative efforts or instruction, as well as praise and blame.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, in aiming

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<sup>51</sup> Aristotle emphasizes that the last two conditions of virtue, that the action is done for its own sake, and from a firm and unchanging state, are achieved by the frequent doing of (e.g.) just and temperance actions (*EN* II.4, 1105b3–5).

<sup>52</sup> See Sorabji 1973–74, 107, 126; Cooper 1986, 8; Hursthouse 1988, 211; Broadie 1991, 109; McDowell 1996, 28; Vasiliou 2007, 42; Jimenez 2016, 5.

<sup>53</sup> For further discussion of habituation see Myles Burnyeat, 'Aristotle on Learning to be Good' in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, Rorty (ed.) (1980), 69–92, and Sarah Broadie, ch. 2 of her *Ethics with Aristotle*. Recent contributions to the (difficult) question of the development of the character state of the student of virtue during habituation, include

for the mean, the agent is likely to develop a critical attitude towards the adoption of certain kinds of character and motivational states—feelings, responses, desires, and beliefs, as well as of her own natural tendencies as revealed by her experiences of pleasures and pains (*EN* II.9, 1109b1–13). The account of moral habituation with reference to determining the mean in action and feeling, then, is envisaged by Aristotle to be a self-conscious process conducted over the long term, requiring reflective self-awareness and self-evaluation. As such, it seems plausible to understand dispositional self-knowledge as a constitutive element of virtue that develops alongside our moral and intellectual characters. If this is right, it further suggests that the development and maintenance of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) in the mature virtuous adult will begin to occur at a certain point of maturity alongside habituation, accounting for this pattern of reflection and the reflective knowledge of one’s own moral character.<sup>54</sup> Note also that, as we saw in Plato’s *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, cognitive self-knowledge—correctly discerning the content of one’s cognitive states (where that includes one’s desiderative states)—seems to be a necessary element in the process of acquiring character self-knowledge, and so entwined with it. Moreover, since, it appears that Aristotle thinks we are each of us

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Marta Jimenez, ‘Aristotle on Becoming Virtuous by Doing Virtuous Actions’, *Phronesis* (2016) 61: 3–32, and Margaret Hampson, ‘Imitating Virtue’, *Phronesis* (2019) 64(3).

<sup>54</sup> Nancy Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue* (CUP: 1997), 211–12.

responsible for our own moral character (1113b3–1114a10), acquiring dispositional self-knowledge in the sense described would appear to be a moral requirement.<sup>55</sup>

The explicit claim that the virtuous person knows that he is virtuous, from which we can conclude that he possesses character self-knowledge, is found in Aristotle's treatment of the magnanimous person in *EN* IV.3. Aristotle writes that the person who truly has magnanimity (*megalopsuchia*), also possesses all the other virtues (1123b29–1124a9; 1124a26–29). Aristotle says this person correctly thinks himself worthy of great things (1123b2–14), and describes *megalopsuchia* as a crown or adornment (*kosmos*, 1124a2) of the virtues. The great-souled person is contrasted with other people whose judgement about their own worth is incorrect: on the one hand, the person who thinks himself of greater worth than he is—the boasting fool, or the well-born and wealthy who lack excellence (1123b3–4; 1124a29–b5)—and on the other, the small-souled person who thinks himself of less worth than he in fact is. The person who overestimates his worth is described by Aristotle as patently ignorant about himself (1125a27–28), while the one who underestimates it is said to not know himself (1125a22). This small-souled person is also criticized by Aristotle for refraining from performing fine actions and seeking external goods, on the grounds that they mistakenly think themselves unworthy of them (1125a26–27).

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. 1114a15–22, and *Cat.* 13a23–31; Cf. William Bondeson 'Aristotle on Responsibility for one's Character and the Possibility of Character Change', *Phronesis* (1974) 19: 59–65; Sarah Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle* (OUP: 1991), 160 ff; Jean Roberts, 'Aristotle on Responsibility for Action and Character', *Ancient Philosophy* (1989) 9: 23–36; Susan Sauvé Meyer, 'Aristotle on the Voluntary', in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, R. Kraut (ed.) (Blackwell: 2006), 137–57.

With this sketch we can see that the possession of self-knowledge is not simply a condition of the self-conscious and reflective process of habituation and aiming for the mean in action and feeling: the perfected state resulting from this process, character self-knowledge, just is the virtuous person's correct evaluation of herself, and so underpins her self-perception as able virtuously to perform those actions she (correctly) perceives are the right actions, at the right time, etc., and of it being fitting and praiseworthy for her to do so. Having undergone the process of moral development correctly, the virtuous person gets it just right in her self-estimation regarding her moral state and moral status, in the case of each virtue. Therefore, although this kind of self-knowledge has instrumental value for the student of virtue, eventually getting it right for all the virtues is an achievement of its own. Thus, self-knowledge partially constitutes an excellence praiseworthy for its own sake, which in turn furnishes (at least the beginnings of) an explanation of why magnanimity is a distinct virtue for Aristotle. Character self-knowledge has deeper implications too, since it also guides and grounds the magnanimous person's expectations of the way others should treat her.

Understanding magnanimity in terms of character self-knowledge may also prove promising in relation to puzzles arising from Aristotle's portrait of the virtue. One puzzle is what the virtue consists in, such that it is a separate virtue in its own right, and such as to be an adornment of the virtues. Another concerns the small-souled person: She is good, and so virtuous in some sense, and yet her underestimation of her worth means she lacks magnanimity. But this appears to contradict Aristotle's

commitment to the unity or reciprocity of the virtues noted above.<sup>56</sup> In relation to the first puzzle, Aristotle says that the magnanimous person, who correctly accords limited value to external goods, especially honour, and correctly expects others to honour her, will be (moderately) pleased in being honoured for great things, by good people (1123b1–1124a20). The award of such honours, and the pleasure she justifiably experiences from them, serves to amplify the virtues and is an addition of further (although relatively minor) value to the life of virtue. In this sense, magnanimity can be said to ‘make the virtues greater’ and can be thought of as an adornment to them (1124a1–2). In relation to the second puzzle, the role of self-knowledge argued for in moral development implies, though it does not establish, that the pusillanimous person worthy of great things is not virtuous. Her lack of self-awareness suggests that although at least some of her actions have been morally fine, they were not performed alongside a proper grasp of the correctness of her response to the situation at hand. Where such agents aim for the mean, perhaps they do not know that they hit it when they do. If so, then the pusillanimous person lacks in respect of both cognitive and character self-knowledge. It plausibly follows, moreover, that their lack of self-knowledge prevents the development of a firm and unchanging virtuous disposition.

Aristotle also connects his account of friendship with coming to know oneself, and commentators have taken him to regard friendship as having instrumental value

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<sup>56</sup> *EN* VI.13, 1144b17ff. For further discussion, see Roger Crisp’s, ‘Aristotle on Greatness of Soul’, in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, R. Kraut (ed.) (Blackwell: 2006), 158–78; Paula Gottlieb, *The Virtue of Aristotle’s Ethics* (CUP: 2009), 29–30.

for self-knowledge of one's moral character.<sup>57</sup> In the *Magna Moralia*, friendship is very clearly said to facilitate self-knowledge (1212b8–24; cf. *Rhet.* 1381b18–31), with suggestions of the same claim at *EN* IX.9 (1169b33–1170a4) in the context of the question why the happy person needs friends. Exactly how Aristotle understands the instrumental value of friendship for character self-knowledge, however, is unclear. One scholar, Nancy Sherman, has argued that it facilitates self-knowledge in two ways. First, virtue friends engage in practical reflection, as an exercise of *phronēsis*, concerning their response to particular matters of ethical significance, though not as subjects of immediate deliberation about action. In this discursive activity, friends honestly assess themselves, and whether their actions and feelings are good and fine. Character friends in this way reflect back to the virtuous their true attitudes and feelings, and in revealing these to themselves in respect of cognitive and dispositional self-knowledge, help to guard against self-deception. The second function of friendship is to stimulate new interests and help shape new goals or ends. By taking part in shared activities, perceiving and doing things together, learning and discovering things about the activity and about one's abilities, likes, dislikes,

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<sup>57</sup> See, for instance, John Cooper, 'Aristotle on Friendship', in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, A. O. Rorty (ed.) (University of California Press: 1980), 301–40. This interpretation is not, however, ubiquitous: e.g. Shields in his 'Aristotle's Requisite' rejects the idea that friendship is for Aristotle instrumental for self-knowledge in this way. For further discussion of Aristotle on friendship, the friend as another 'I', self-knowledge, and self-perception, see Jennifer Whiting 'The Pleasure of Thinking Together: Prolegomenon to a Complete Reading of *EE* VII.12', 77–154, and M. M. McCabe, 'With Mirrors or Without? Self-Perception in *EE* VII.12', 43–76, in *The Eudemian Ethics on Friendship, the Voluntary, and Luck*, Fiona Leigh (ed.) (Brill, Leiden: 2012).

attitudes, and feelings, Sherman claims that on Aristotle's view, friends 'actualize' one another. So even though friendship is of instrumental value for self-knowledge and happiness, it also plays a constitutive role in the good life, according to Sherman.<sup>58</sup>

Many questions remain for those interested in self-knowledge in Aristotle. In respect of Aristotle's claim that *nous* cognizes itself, the debate concerning whether such cognition is an achievement brought about by reflection, or itself a condition on thought or on intellection, or whether it is a higher-order state or not, has not been settled. In relation to character self-knowledge, in what sense the pusillanimous person lacks self-knowledge and fails—if it is right to suppose they do fail—to be virtuous remains unclear. It also remains to ask whether Aristotle thought character self-knowledge was restricted to the virtuous, or also applicable to those with settled states less than virtuous—*akratic*, and vicious people—and if so, why. Finally, we may ask, if friendship is instrumental in the virtuous person's gaining self-knowledge, is it right to view it as an antidote to self-deception, or does it facilitate self-knowledge in some other way?

### 4.3 Nielsen and Gottlieb (and Kosman) in This Volume

The chapters by Paula Gottlieb and Karen Nielsen in this volume respond to a number of the questions and issues concerning dispositional self-knowledge raised in §4.2, and we will turn to them shortly. Before doing so, however, I want briefly to note that, in relation to the difficult interpretive question of how to understand Aristotle on self-knowledge of the state of knowing, Aryeh Kosman's chapter, 'Self-Knowledge

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<sup>58</sup> Nancy Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue*, 210–14.

and Self-Control in Plato's *Charmides*', can be read as making a further contribution to that debate. For, in that chapter, as we saw above, Kosman presents an interpretation of self-knowledge in Plato's *Charmides* as reflexive in a very qualified sense: it is reflexive since it is directed inward, to the subject's own states, but it is non-objective in the sense that it does not involve taking lower-order states as objects placed before thought, being instead a mode of self-awareness or self-presence. Self-knowledge in the *Charmides* is, in other words, interpreted as a close cousin of the understanding that understands itself in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, but on independent textual grounds. If correct, it suggests that there was a conception of self-knowledge already in Plato for Aristotle to adopt and develop or modify for his own purposes, and to that extent offers further support for Kosman's earlier interpretation of Aristotle's claim that *nous* knows itself.

In relation to the question of dispositional self-knowledge, Paula Gottlieb in 'Aristotle on Self-Knowledge', focuses on the place and function of knowledge of one's own character and abilities in Aristotle's ethics. Building on recent work,<sup>59</sup> she argues that what is required of the virtuous person in action, understood as what lies in the mean, is sometimes relative to the abilities of the virtuous agent. Combining this with the thought that right action is also relative to situations, Gottlieb claims that acting virtuously demands that the agent choose to deploy or not deploy certain capacities or skills, and so requires that she knows what her relevant capacities and skills are, ethical or non-ethical. Support is found in the description of truthful people in *EN IV.7*, who, in contrast to boasters, give true, unexaggerated reports of their own qualities.

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<sup>59</sup> Paula Gottlieb, *The Virtue of Aristotle's Ethics*, 25–32.

Further elaboration is provided by the account of magnanimity, in which, as we saw above, the agent knows her own worth, while the vain overvalue it and the pusillanimous undervalue it. Generalizing from this point, Gottlieb proposes a tripartite structure of ethical profiles determined by (dispositional) self-knowledge or its lack. The rash and intemperate overestimate their situation, capacities, or needs, just as boasters overestimate their worth, while cowards and insensible people underestimate their position, just as the small-souled underestimate their worth. Gottlieb suggests that self-knowledge is necessary for virtue, and addresses the problem of the small-souled agent by suggesting that she lacks *phronēsis*, and in this way fails to be self-knowing.<sup>60</sup> The question to what extent the *akratic* and *enkratic* person has or lacks (dispositional) self-knowledge is also addressed with the proposal that each makes use of a false statement, e.g. ‘I am a temperate person’ in their practical reasoning. Gottlieb distinguishes this kind of self-knowledge from a more Cartesian version of that conception, gained solely by introspection into one’s subjective states and based on an assumption of first-personal epistemic authority: A person finds her beliefs about herself confirmed or challenged in the success or otherwise of her behaviour and in the responses of those around her.

Last, Gottlieb turns to Aristotle’s account of friendship, and, reading its role as instrumental for self-knowledge, asks how it makes self-knowledge possible. She argues that Aristotle’s notion of the shared life of friends in *EE* VII.12, who seek to

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<sup>60</sup> Compare H. Curzer, ‘A Great Philosopher’s Not-So-Great Account of Great Virtue: Aristotle’s Treatment of Greatness of Soul’, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* (1990) 20: 520. For an alternative view, that the pusillanimous person possesses neither the natural virtues nor perfect virtue, but instead possesses a degree of virtue within a range, see Crisp, ‘Aristotle on Greatness of Soul’, p. 168.

perceive and know together, is both outward-looking, so that friends look out on the world together in their shared activities, and also directed inward, being premised on the desire to know that one is good. As they perceive the good character of one another they come to perceive and know their own good character. On this reading, friendship functions less as an antidote to self-deception than as a platform for engaging in a specific kind of activity, centred around shared outward-looking projects, in which one is able to perceive and know that one is of good character.

Karen Nielsen, in her ‘Aristotle on Knowing One’s Own Acts and Motives: Why Self-Knowledge Matters for Virtue’, directly confronts the question of the nature of the relation between self-knowledge and virtue, suggesting that it is necessary for, and restricted to, virtue. She begins by suggesting that the third condition articulated by Aristotle for acting virtuously—acting from a firm and unchanging disposition (*EN* II.4)—is achieved on condition of self-knowledge. The self-knowing agent enjoys full understanding of and commitment to her actions and motivations, and thereby possesses a settled and unwavering moral disposition. This interpretation in turn allows Nielsen to explain magnanimity as characteristic of the virtuous person (who, in light of the reciprocity of virtue thesis, has all the virtues), without reading it as a mysterious sort of ‘bonus’ virtue, acquired upon realizing that one is virtuous. For, the person who has all the other moral virtues has knowledge of her acts and motives, and so, as well as having a settled character state, has knowledge of herself as being virtuous, and worthy of great things. In terms of the distinction between kinds or modes of self-knowledge delineated in the present essay, the virtuous have both cognitive and dispositional self-knowledge, where the former is necessary for the latter, on Nielsen’s view. The small-souled person is also explained by the relation between self-knowledge and virtue: this person is good, insofar as she performs the

right actions and does them for their own sake, but lacks full knowledge of her acts and motives.

Moreover, self-knowledge is confined to the virtuous. The virtuous person knows her own decision for action (her *prohairesis*), while the *akratic* becomes temporarily ignorant of her decision, in failing to attend to it and its affirming function, and so fails to have (what I have called) cognitive self-knowledge, whether or not she correctly appraises her own character as less than virtuous. The vicious, by contrast, do not come to the right decision but neither do they cease to pay attention to their decisions for action. The possible implication, however, that the vicious possess (dispositional) self-knowledge ought to be rejected. For, the vicious person does not perceive or know the true quality of her actions or motives, being in error about their value. Ultimately she is at odds with herself, and her own life does not bring her true pleasure.

## 5. Epicureans and Stoics

### 5.1 Cognitive and Dispositional Self-Knowledge in

#### Epicureanism

For the Epicureans (and as we will see in §5.2 below, perhaps for the Stoics too), the question of cognitive self-knowledge bears an obvious and close connection to the question of dispositional self-knowledge, and, relatedly, to that of its normative value. For, the methodology of Epicurean philosophy requires study of one's own psychological states in order to rid oneself of those that are unwanted—fears, anxieties, intense passions, problematic desires, and the false beliefs they are founded

upon—and instill in their place those that are acceptable—correct or true beliefs and the ensuing feelings and desires. So a person of good character, who will achieve *eudaimonia*, is someone who as a result of reflective effort comes self-consciously to possess beliefs, feelings, and desires that are neither incorrect, excessive, or unnatural, as well as correct perceptions and true beliefs. As these two modes of ancient self-knowledge are so interrelated in Epicurean thought, we will discuss them in tandem.

The Epicurean sets her sights on the attainment of *ataraxia* and *aponia*, freedom from disturbance of the soul and from pain, as the route to happiness.<sup>61</sup> Disturbance of the soul, in the form of fear, anxiety, unwanted *pathê*, unnatural desires, or desires that are natural but excessive, is rooted in ignorance and false opinion. But as James Warren has pointed out, the Epicurean does not aim at blissful ignorance as if humans were beasts, incapable of forming beliefs. Since we are rational beings, the aim is to possess explanations of the phenomena we tend to experience as fearful or desirous, that are not grounded in false beliefs or ignorance.<sup>62</sup> Irrational fears and problematic desires take many forms, for the Epicureans, the two most prominent being fear of the

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<sup>61</sup> Epicurus *Ep. Men.* 127, 131; Lucretius *DRN*, 2.1–61 (=LS21 W), Philodemus *De oec.*; XII. 45–XIII. 1–3).

<sup>62</sup> Warren, *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics: An Archeology of Ataraxia* (CUP: 2002), 136–42; cf. Warren, ‘Removing Fear’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*, J. Warren (ed.) (CUP: 2009), 235–6.

Gods and fear of death.<sup>63</sup> One excessive passion singled out for criticism is anger.<sup>64</sup> Desires that lead to the soul's dissonance in Epicurean writings are various, e.g. desires for excessive or fine food or drink, for wealth, sex, and honours.<sup>65</sup> The goal of extirpating these problematic mental states presupposes that the agent can and ought to identify the contents of her fears, anxieties, and desires, and reflect on their basis either in reason or in empty (false) belief. Thus, the goal of Epicurean philosophy requires that these psychological states themselves become the objects of higher-order thought and reflection, in order to determine their suitability or otherwise for promoting *ataraxia*.

The different therapeutic strategies and practices recorded by Epicureans illustrate various methods for arriving at cognitive self-knowledge. Some target a troublesome desire by urging reflection on its underlying false belief. 'This question', Epicurus writes, 'should be applied to all desires: what will happen to me if the object

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<sup>63</sup> Epicurus, *Ep. Men* 123–4; *Ep. Hdt.* 81, *KD* 81, Usener 548. For recent discussion of these fears, see David Konstan, 'Epicurean "Passions" and the Good Life', in *The Virtuous Life in Greek Ethics*, B. Reis (ed.) (CUP: 2006), 194–205; J. Warren, *Facing Death: Epicurus and his Critics* (OUP: 2004); J. Warren, 'Removing Fear' in *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*, J. Warren (ed.) (CUP: 2009), 234–48.

<sup>64</sup> Philodemus *On Anger*, VIII. 16 – XXXI. 23.

<sup>65</sup> Epicurus *Ep. Men.* 127–32; Epicurus *KD* 29 (=LS21 I). For further discussion of the Epicurean taxonomy of desires, see Julia Annas, 'Epicurean Emotions', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* (1989) 30: 145–64; See also her *The Morality of Happiness* (OUP: 1993), 189–98.

of my desire is achieved and what if it is not?’<sup>66</sup> Sufficiently critical reflection reveals that in fact nothing serious—no pain—comes from not satisfying problematic desires. It is, rather, the empty or false belief (*kenodoxia*) of the agent, that is pointed to as the cause of its existence and persistence. The content of the false belief is not given, but in many cases it is presumably, as Julia Annas has suggested, something that attaches excessive importance to the particular object of desire as a specification of a more general natural desire—e.g. the desire to eat lobster tonight, as opposed to something merely comestible.<sup>67</sup> Alternatively, the underlying belief could attach importance to something of a kind of no real value at all according to the Epicureans, such as honour or wealth.<sup>68</sup>

Other strategies target the false beliefs directly, by way of argument. Against the fear of death, Lucretius advanced the so-called Symmetry Argument, maintaining that we should be no more troubled by our non-existence after death than we are by the fact of our non-existence before being born.<sup>69</sup> Although the interpretation of the Symmetry Argument has been debated, Lucretius’ presumption that people can readily identify as their own the fear of death, and the argument’s purpose in providing reasoned grounds for overturning the concomitant belief that death is

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<sup>66</sup> *KD* 71 = LS 21H(2), tr. LS. See too *KD* 30 = LS 21E(3): ‘Whenever intense passion is present in natural desires which do not lead to pain if they are unfulfilled, these have their origin in empty opinion; and the reason for their persistence is not their own nature but the empty opinion of the person’ (tr. LS).

<sup>67</sup> Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 193–8.

<sup>68</sup> *VS* 81 = LS 21H(4); Scholion *KD* 29 = LS 21I.

<sup>69</sup> Lucretius, *de Rerum Natura*, 3.832–42, 972–5.

fearful, is (relatively) uncontroversial.<sup>70</sup> In addition, Voula Tsouna has described the strategy, internal to the Epicurean school and reported by Philodemus, of directly challenging the false beliefs of a student by way of argument couched in frank speech (*parrhêsia*). The frank speech used may be mild or harsh depending on the strength of the student's character and focuses on the error—the false belief—and not on the character of the student.<sup>71</sup>

Coming to then possess the correct beliefs, and the ensuing feelings and desires, likewise appears to be the result of reflective, effortful consideration of the content of one's own mental states, but also of a meditative effort to undermine the affective causes of potential obstacles and strengthen those conducive to the correct states. So Epicurus in the Letter to Menoeceus: 'Accustom yourself to the belief that death is nothing to us.'<sup>72</sup> He goes on to provide reasons in favour of the true belief, but it is also worth noting that the use of the verb (*sunethizô*, accustom), implies a role for practice and repetition over time, either of the true beliefs themselves, or the arguments for them, or both. He later writes: 'Practice these things and all that belongs with them in relation to yourself by day and by night . . . and you will never

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<sup>70</sup> Whether the Symmetry Argument is directed against the (false) belief that the fact of being mortal is fearful, or the (false) belief that the state of being dead is fearful, is at the core of the interpretive difficulties. For a thorough recent discussion of the relevant issues, see Warren, *Facing Death: Epicurus and his Critics* (OUP: 2004), 58–68.

<sup>71</sup> Tsouna points out that once the lesson is learned, the error is forgotten: 'Epicurean Therapeutic Strategies', in *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*, J. Warren (ed.) (CUP: 2009), 252–4.

<sup>72</sup> Epicurus, *Ep. Men.*, 124 = LS 24A(1).

be disquieted, awake or in your dreams, but will live like a god among men.’<sup>73</sup> This suggests that arriving at a correct belief by argument alone is not sufficient to bring about the right feelings and desires, but that their transformation takes time and repetition.<sup>74</sup> However, in tandem with these meditative or repeated therapeutic practices, sustained and systematic identification and reflective, evaluative scrutiny of the content of the agent’s psychological states—and so cognitive self-knowledge—is demanded by Epicurean thought.

We turn now to knowledge of one’s character in Epicureanism. In the extant remains of *On Nature*, Epicurus makes some suggestive remarks about our individual ‘natures’. He speaks of our ‘original constitution’ or ‘nature’, and suggests that the development of our characters is in some sense ‘up to us’ and dependent upon our beliefs.<sup>75</sup> These fragmentary statements have been much disputed, but the prevailing orthodoxy has it that Epicurus means to contrast our undeveloped atomic nature with our developed character or state, itself ultimately comprehensible in physical, atomic

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<sup>73</sup> Epicurus, *Ep. Men.*, 135 = LS 23J. As Tsouna points out, Lucretius also stressed the importance of practice, repetition, and memorization (‘Epicurean Therapeutic Strategies’, 256–9).

<sup>74</sup> Perhaps the Epicureans thought the affective components of *pathê* and desires take time to undergo change, or that repetition promotes associations among impressions that lead to the right action, or that memorization of central principles itself causes them to be causally efficacious in belief formation. Or perhaps repetition and accustoming oneself to what is true is necessary, somehow, to counter opposing fears and desires. For further discussion, see Tsouna, ‘Epicurean Therapeutic Strategies’, 254–5.

<sup>75</sup> Epicurus, *On Nature*, 34.21–1=LS 20B; 34.26–30=LS 20C.

terms, and claims that we are ourselves responsible for this development over time.<sup>76</sup> Lucretius too writes that people, like animals, have natural character types, but that their development falls under the power of reason, so that if we rid ourselves of false beliefs we are able to live lives comparable to the gods.<sup>77</sup> It seems clear that the sorts of therapeutic practices discussed above, and the cognitive self-knowledge that I argued it involves, will be crucial to correct and self-conscious development of character and so for dispositional self-knowledge and the attainment of *eudaimonia*. However, as Tsouna has pointed out, Philodemus connects the Epicurean theme of responsibility for character development with the absence of knowledge of one's current character, good or bad, and so with the absence of dispositional self-knowledge. In 'On Frank Speech', he writes that people affected by vices are like those who desire pleasure and shrink from pain too much in being irrational and in not

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<sup>76</sup> Proponents of the orthodox view include Julia Annas, 'Epicurus on Agency', in *Passions and Perceptions: Studies in Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind, Proceedings of the 5th Symposium Hellenisticum*, J. Brunschwig and M. Nussbaum (eds) (CUP: 1993), 53–71; Susanne Bobzein, 'Did Epicurus Discover the Problem of Free Will?', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (2000) 19: 287–337; Timothy O'Keefe, 'The Reductionist and Compatibilist Argument of Epicurus' *On Nature*, Book 25', *Phronesis* (2002) 47: 153–86. The chief proponent of the dissenting 'emergentist' view is David Sedley, in his 'Epicurean Anti-Reductionism', in *Matter and Metaphysics*, J. Barnes and M. Mignucci (eds) (Naples: 1988), 295–327. For a neat recent summary of the main positions in the debate see Christopher Gill, 'Psychology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*, J. Warren (ed.) (CUP: 2009), 134–8.

<sup>77</sup> Lucretius, *de Rerum Naturum*, 3.307–22; cf. Timothy O'Keefe, *Epicurus on Freedom* (CUP: 2005).

knowing themselves. In another, ‘On Arrogance’, arrogant people are also said to lack knowledge of themselves. For if they did possess it, Tsouna writes, they would, according to Philodemus ‘register negative reactions towards themselves, would grieve about their own condition, and would seek to improve themselves’.<sup>78</sup>

Given the significance and high value Epicurus places on friendship, as something both useful and good in itself,<sup>79</sup> the texts surveyed so far may lead us to wonder what role, if any, friends play in acquiring dispositional self-knowledge. The prominence Philodemus accords to the person in the role of teacher strongly suggests that the process of proper development of one’s character is not a solo pursuit. Other questions concern the process of therapy sometimes employed by the Epicureans, of repetitive meditations on the truth or falsehood of certain beliefs—why is such therapy necessary? Why, that is, is it not enough to accept the truth or falsehood of the relevant belief for the agent to come to possess the correct emotional or desiderative or motivational state?

## 5.2 Cognitive and Dispositional Self-Knowledge in Stoicism

The Stoics, like the Epicureans, adopted a therapeutic method of philosophy and were greatly exercised by the problem of how to rid oneself of false beliefs, in both moral and purely epistemic contexts. It is not as obvious, however, that in the Stoic case, moral improvement or flourishing depended upon accurately discerning the content of one’s false beliefs or that the adoption of true beliefs was a self-conscious matter. As

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<sup>78</sup> Tsouna, ‘Epicurean Therapeutic Strategies’, 261.

<sup>79</sup> Epicurus, *VS*23 = LS 22F(1); *VS*78 = LS 22F(7); *KD*27–28 = LS 22E(1–2); cf. Seneca, *Letters* 19.10 = Usener 542 = LS 22I.

we will see, it is a more open interpretive question whether the Stoics countenanced cognitive self-knowledge, even, as we will see, in the case of the Sage. By contrast it seems clear that the Stoic sage would possess dispositional self-knowledge, although again matters are uncertain in the case of the student of virtue. Finally, Hierocles' claim that we perceive ourselves may be understood to involve or consist in either cognitive or dispositional self-knowledge.

Although a great deal of Stoic thought instructs the student to direct her gaze inward, in order to extirpate the emotions—reducible for the Stoics to false beliefs—or to adopt the correct attitude of indifference to matters such as health or wealth, Stoicism can be read as not demanding the reflective or introspective realization on behalf of the agent that she has some particular false impression with a determinate content. Stoic intellectualism involves the claim that all impulses (emotions, good feelings, preferences, and dispreferences) are cognitive, consisting entirely of beliefs, or, for the Sage, episodes of knowing.<sup>80</sup> One plausible consequence of this intellectualism is that it is enough to come to the realization that, e.g. the impression that 'food is good' is false for one to no longer have the impression, let alone assent to it, and so to no longer have the relevant opinion and concomitant desire for food. There will be no false impulse of which she ought to become aware and rid herself, only the true belief that food is on the whole to be preferred and something to go for, even though as something in itself neither good nor bad, it is something to which she is ultimately indifferent. The lack of importance accorded to habit or habituation by many of the Stoics, in contrast to the Epicureans, can be taken as further evidence that for the Stoics generally the transformation of assent (or belief), and so of the

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<sup>80</sup> For further discussion, see Tad Brennan, *The Stoic Life* (OUP: 2005) 82–113.

emotional states, is instantaneous (as one could be lead to expect on a purely cognitive view of *pathê*).<sup>81</sup>

Similarly, but for different reasons, one might think that the Stoics did not countenance self-knowledge of *katalêptic* impressions (those arising from and stamped in accordance with what is, and which could not arise from what is not)<sup>82</sup> for the virtuous person who assents to such. Michael Frede argued that the mark of the *katalêptic* is not, for the Stoics, such as to be available to introspection by the agent, but is a causal feature of the impression that has special motivational force.<sup>83</sup> Some support is found in Sextus: ‘impressions are *katalêptic* to the extent to which they draw us on to assent and to adjoin to them the corresponding action’ (*M.* 7.405, tr. Hankinson).<sup>84</sup> If this interpretation is right, assent to the *katalêptic*, and so virtue, does not require cognitive self-knowledge.

There is, however, textual evidence to suggest that nonetheless the Stoic Sage would reflect upon and so know the content of the impressions she assents to, as a result of her general awareness of the role of impressions in thought, action, and *eudaimonia*, and of the Stoic claim that the *katalêptic* impression is the criterion of

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<sup>81</sup> Note that Galen’s reference to habits in *On Hippocrates’ and Plato’s Doctrines*, 4.7.24–41 (=LS 65P) is intended to underline the role of habituation in establishing the emotions (false and morally troublesome), rather than in bringing about moral progress.

<sup>82</sup> Also called a ‘cognitive’ impression in Long and Sedley. Cicero, *Acad.* 2.77–8 = LS 40D; Sextus Empiricus, *M* 7.247–52 = LS 40E; DL 7.46 = LS 40C.

<sup>83</sup> Frede, ‘Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions’, in *The Skeptical Tradition*, M. Burnyeat (ed.) (Berkeley: 1983), 85.

<sup>84</sup> R. J. Hankinson, ‘Stoic Epistemology’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, B. Inwood (ed.) (CUP: 2003), 72. For Hankinson’s discussion of Frede, see 73.

truth. As Hankinson observed, if the *katalêptic* is criterial, then since assent (or the withholding of assent) is voluntary, we might think that the Sage and, perhaps, the student of virtue, ought to be able to discern the *katalêptic* from the *non-katalêptic* by grasping and reflecting upon the content of her impressions.<sup>85</sup> Just how the *katalêptic* could be discerned is a topic of debate, since it is unclear what internal mark the impression could bear that would serve to distinguish it from its opposite in all conceivable cases. Nonetheless some fragments suggest a reflective effort directed towards impressions, such that the agent has a clear view of their content, and in certain cases withholds assent. In the ‘Anonymous Stoic Treatise’, the author says that ‘one who is non-precipitate should not be pulled by an incognitive [non-*katalêptic*] impression . . . and keeps control over his assents’, and that ‘wise men . . . also give greater attention to ensuring that their assents do not occur randomly, but only in company with cognition’.<sup>86</sup> And Diogenes Laertius describes non-precipitancy as ‘the science of when one should and should not assent’.<sup>87</sup> It is significant that these texts are not inconsistent with the quote above from Sextus. Therefore, absent textual support to the contrary, I suggest that it seems likely the Stoics considered the Sage able to discern the *katalêptic* by attentive introspection, though how they are able to

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<sup>85</sup> Hankinson, ‘Stoic Epistemology’, 65–75.

<sup>86</sup> LS 41D(1); (3), tr. LS.

<sup>87</sup> DL 7.46–7 = LS 31B(2). See also Plutarch, *On Stoic Contradictions* 1056E–F = LS 41E; Sextus, *M* 7.151–7 = LS 41C; Anonymous Stoic treatise (Herculaneum papyrus 1020) = LS 41D.

do this remains a question for further research. In this case, then, the Stoics can be said to have countenanced cognitive self-knowledge.<sup>88</sup>

Perhaps, in addition, Hierocles' claim that all animals perceive themselves from birth—their own bodily parts and their function, e.g. hearing for ears, piercing for horns<sup>89</sup>—can be read as further support for this view. As Long has shown, in these passages Hierocles isolated the phenomenon now known as proprioception.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, animals perceive themselves continuously, due to the thorough mixing of (material) soul or breath (pneuma) and body, in which the soul and body exert mutual pressure on one another, giving rise to an impression in the soul.<sup>91</sup> If, in humans, self-perception gives rise to a *katalêptic* impression, self-perception would appear to amount to self-knowledge: assenting to the impression 'this is me' would be an instance of knowing (for the Sage) and an instance of *katalêptic* (for the Sage and the student of virtue alike). Long argued that the referent of self-referring terms such as 'I', and so the self, for the Stoics was the *hêgemonikon*—or, for Epictetus, *prohairesis*—and that it was constituted by a continuous, unified series of

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<sup>88</sup> See also Marcel van Ackeren, 'Self-Knowledge in Later Stoicism', in *Self-Knowledge: A History*, U. Renz (ed.) (OUP: 2017), 61–77; and A. A. Long 'Representation and the Self in Stoicism', in *Companions to ancient thought 2: Psychology*, S. Everson (ed.) (CUP: 1991), 102–20, discussed below, this section.

<sup>89</sup> Hierocles, *Elements of Ethics*, 1.34–9, 51–7, 2.1–9 = LS 57 C.

<sup>90</sup> That is, perception of one's bodily parts and their location. A. A. Long, 'Hierocles on Oikeiosis and Self-Perception', in *Stoic Studies* (CUP: 1996), 250–63.

<sup>91</sup> Hierocles, *Elements of Ethics*, 4.38–53 = LS 53 B (4–9).

impressions.<sup>92</sup> Self-perception is the impression of oneself as the subject of one's own unique experiences, individual and particular, which is in addition the interpreter of the impressions it receives, capable of giving or withholding assent. But this idea of the grasp of oneself as the subject of experiences, able to determine and reflect upon its own impressions via introspection—and so achieve what I have called cognitive self-knowledge—should not be confused, Long maintains, with the notion of a transcendent 'I' or ego, to whom these experiences belong but is not itself identical with them. Self-perception, together with the notion of a unitary consciousness or *hêgemonikon* that perceives itself, is no precursor to that later development in philosophy.

In relation to dispositional self-knowledge, it seems right to suppose that the Sage knows herself to be virtuous. For, the Sage assents only to *katêleptic* impressions, has knowledge concerning the right thing to do on any occasion, and also appears to act in full awareness of her actions being virtuous.<sup>93</sup> Thus the Sage, who would be aware of

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<sup>92</sup> Among the innovations of Stoic philosophy, writes Long, ought to be included the conception of a unitary consciousness in just this sense. A. A. Long, 'Representation and the Self in Stoicism', in *Companions to Ancient Thought 2: Psychology*, S. Everson (ed.) (CUP: 1991), 106–7.

<sup>93</sup> Only the Sage possesses knowledge according to the Stoics, as a result of giving strong assent to a *katêleptic* impression, while non-ignorant students of virtue possess apprehension. Impulses that are true are those experienced by the Sage, and are assents to *katêleptic* impressions about what it is good to do or refrain from doing. These are not emotions but 'good feelings' (*eupatheiai*): they are milder experiences, and include joy, watchfulness, and wishing or volition (Cicero, *Acad.* 1.42 = LS 41B (2–4); Sextus Empiricus, *M* 7.150–2; = LS 41 C (1–5) Stobaeus 2.73,16–74.3 = LS41H; DL 7.116 = LS

the Stoic tenet that only actions performed from a virtuous disposition are truly virtuous, would know her own actions as virtuous, and likewise her own character to be virtuous.<sup>94</sup> Whether the student of virtue on the Stoic picture ought to be regarded as possessing dispositional self-knowledge, however, is less clear. If she has some correct beliefs about Stoic thought, she might believe, e.g. that the emotions are not had by the virtuous. And so, experiencing emotions, she would be in a position to correctly assess herself as not virtuous. But equally she may lack the beliefs that would result in a correct moral appraisal of herself. And given that the student would not undergo a process of habituation, that path to discerning and correcting false beliefs (via cognitive self-knowledge) and so to discerning and correcting one's moral character, would not be available. It seems that the path to virtue and *eudaimonia* for the student of virtue lies not in grasping the truth about her character but discerning those impressions that deserve her assent.<sup>95</sup>

### 5.3 Warren and Gourinat in This Volume

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65F). See Tad Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, 62–81; R. J. Hankinson 'Stoic Epistemology', 59–84, Julia Annas, 'Stoic Epistemology' in *Companions to Ancient Thought 1: Epistemology*, S. Everson (ed.) (CUP 1990), 184–203.

<sup>94</sup> Sextus, *M* II.201 = LS 59G(3): 'Consequently [the virtuous man] also has expertise in his way of life, the peculiar function of which is to do everything on the basis of the best character.'

<sup>95</sup> Possible exceptions are the later Stoics Epictetus and Seneca, who appear to endorse moral progress over time, and a kind of habituation insofar as they urge their readers to scrutinize and reflect on their impressions, and aim for consistency in their impulses (Seneca, *Letters* 89.14 = LS 56B; Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.2.1–5 = LS 56 C(7)).

The chapters by James Warren and Jean-Baptiste Gourinat in this volume address some of the issues around self-knowledge discussed above. Warren, in his ‘Epicureans on Hidden Beliefs’, offers one solution to the question why Epicureans sometimes found it necessary to employ the repetitive meditation-like therapy noted above. Warren argues that Epicurean thinkers marked off a class of (false) beliefs that are hidden from the agent, being those she is neither aware of holding, nor can readily come to see herself as holding, and so are particularly difficult to combat. By adducing two passages—one from Philodemus’s *On the Gods*, the other from Diogenes of Oinoander—he argues that this kind of belief can lurk far below the surface of awareness, while simultaneously causing irrational behaviour or giving rise to further false beliefs (or both). Being unnoticed, it is difficult to uproot. If the agent’s thinking is directed elsewhere, she may even be unaware that she feels the relevant fear or desire, and so be unaware what the object of those affections are, and why she is afraid or desirous. Warren distinguishes Epicurean hidden beliefs from other kinds of mental states, particularly ‘unconscious’ states (those, according to psychoanalytic theory, that belong to a part of the mind not accessible to the agent).<sup>96</sup> Moreover, he offers a critical qualification of the claim in Gladman and Mitsis that Epicurean therapy, aimed at eliminating the empty or false beliefs that give rise to irrational fears, does not involve uncovering new fears or becoming aware of

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<sup>96</sup> Gladman and Mitsis, ‘Lucretius and the Unconscious’, in *Lucretius and his Intellectual Background*, K. Algra, M. H. Koenen, and P. H. Schrijvers (eds) (Royal Academy of Arts and Science: 1997), 215–24, and J. Jope, ‘Lucretius’ Psychoanalytic Insight: His Notion of Unconscious Motivation’, *Phoenix* (1983) 37: 224–38.

repressed emotions or desiderative states.<sup>97</sup> For, since the Epicureans conceive of emotions as identifiable with beliefs (in part), the uncovering of the previously hidden belief and the understanding of why it is false will result in the discovery of the emotion or desire of which the agent was previously unaware, and so an increase in cognitive self-knowledge.

Warren's reading explains why there is no conflict between true and false beliefs experienced by the irrational agent, since she lacks cognitive self-knowledge in relation to the false belief in question. In time, via Epicurean therapeutic strategies, she can come to know that she does in fact believe, e.g. that her soul will be tormented in the afterlife, as well as understand that it is false. Cognitive self-knowledge, then, allows the student of Epicureanism to extirpate the empty belief, and free herself from the pain of the fear of which it forms an element. Although it does not address the question directly, Warren's chapter can also be seen as supplying the resources for a response to the question of the role of friendship in gaining self-knowledge, both cognitive and dispositional. That is, Warren's analysis of these beliefs as constituents of *pathê* and desires, and causes of further beliefs and behaviours points to the way that reflective conversation between Epicurean friends may facilitate cognitive self-knowledge, and in turn, the proper character development, dispositional self-knowledge, and tranquillity that characterizes *eudaimonia* in their view.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Gladman and Mitsis, 'Lucretius and the Unconscious', 221.

<sup>98</sup> Warren also points to Diogenes of Oinoanda's contention that false opinions spread amongst people like a plague, transmitted from one to another purely in virtue of their association with one another. But if this is the case, then if one were to live instead in a community characterized by Epicurean friendship (amongst good people with correct

Jean-Baptiste Gourinat, in his ‘Self-Knowledge, Self-Perception and Perception of One’s Body in Stoicism’ questions whether self-perception and self-knowledge for the Stoics ought to be understood as perception of the command-centre of the soul, the *hêgemonikon*. Gourinat rehearses the Stoic identification of the *hêgemonikon* with oneself, and notes that it constitutes a strong *prima facie* basis for reading Stoic self-perception as perception of the *hêgemonikon*, and so self-knowledge in that sense. He then points out the lack of direct textual evidence for the *hêgemonikon* as the object of self-perception in Stoic writings, and indeed that Chrysippus asserts that there is no clear perception of where in the body the command-centre is situated.

Turning to Hierocles, Gourinat then argues that self-perception must be of the body as well as the soul. Before Hierocles, Chrysippus had claimed that all animals are aware of (or conscious of, *suneidêsis*) their constitution (*sustasis*), which Gourinat understands as proprioception.<sup>99</sup> To this, Hierocles adds the assertion that all animals perceive themselves, continuously from birth, and have perception of all the parts of the body and soul. For the Stoics, then, the soul is not perceived independently from the body in self-perception. But if there is a notion of ‘self’ in Stoicism it applies to the *egô* or *hêgemonikon*, so self-perception is not perception of a ‘self’. Nor is it perception of the body apart from the soul: Gourinat suggests that awareness of one’s own constitution in Chrysippus and Hierocles, in light of Seneca’s account of constitution, amounts to awareness of the soul as standing in a certain relation to the

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opinions), perhaps from a young age, the result of this association will likewise inculcate the right beliefs.

<sup>99</sup> DL 7.85–6 = LS 57A.

body. Self-perception of one's body parts, then, is perception of parts of an ensouled body, and self-perception generally is of the animal as a discrete and unified entity.

Gourinat concludes that according to the Stoics, although I am my command centre, I do not perceive myself, but instead 'the whole of my animated body . . . perceives itself'.<sup>100</sup> In relation to the distinction between the kinds of self-knowledge distinguished in this chapter, Gourinat's conclusion is compatible with understanding self-perception in Hierocles as continuous with a kind of dispositional self-knowledge. In self-perception the subject is aware of herself as a rational yet embodied individual, and is able to come to know herself as a potential knower, capable of becoming wise. On this view, in contrast to the notion of Platonic self-knowledge Annas has argued can be found in the *Alcibiades*, where the object of knowledge is a general, non-individual human rationality, the Stoics can be understood as conceiving of self-perception, and in this sense, dispositional self-knowledge, as directed towards the individual's own potential as a knower and possessor of wisdom.

## 6. Plotinus on Self-Knowledge

### 6.1 Cognitive and Dispositional Self-Knowledge in Plotinus

In *Ennead* V.3.1 ff., Plotinus addresses the question of self-knowledge. Against the Skeptics he argues for the possibility of self-knowledge as knowledge of self, where

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<sup>100</sup> Gourinat, 'Self-Knowledge, Self-Perception, and Perception of One's Body in Stoicism', this volume, p. XX.

‘self’ is understood as the subject of knowing. In our normal everyday way of thinking, characterized by ‘discursive thought’ (*dianoia*), we arrive at knowledge through sense-perception and application of universal concepts (or Forms). Plotinus emphasizes that in discursive thought the object of thought is distinct from the thinking subject, and thereby implies that such cases of knowledge cannot be self-knowledge, strictly speaking.<sup>101</sup> But we are able to recognize that the source of concepts is the divine intellect, and in this sense by way of discursive thought to acquire, as one scholar puts it, ‘a secondary, derivative awareness of ourselves’.<sup>102</sup>

Self-knowledge proper, by contrast, occurs in the act of intellect thinking itself, in which it is identical to its objects, the Forms. This purely intellectual mode of thought (*nous*), unlike discursive thought, is not mediated by images or representations, but is characterized by an immediacy in the activity of intellect. Drawing on *Ennead II*, Pauliina Remes has described this immediacy as an activity occurring at one and the same level of thought, as opposed to a higher-level act or activity of thinking comprehending a lower-order act or activity.<sup>103</sup> And Dominic O’Meara has argued that in *Ennead V.9.5* Plotinus follows Aristotle in *Metaphysics XII.9* in conceiving of the divine intellect as pure actuality and so as continuously thinking itself as its object of thought. He further suggests that for us, human souls,

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<sup>101</sup> *Enn.* V.3.2–4. See Sara Rappe, ‘Self-Knowledge’, 255–8; Dominic O’Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (OUP: 1993), 40–3.

<sup>102</sup> O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 41.

<sup>103</sup> Pauliina Remes, ‘Self-Knowledge in Plotinus’, in *Self-Knowledge: A History*, U. Renz (ed.) (OUP: 2017), 84–5.

‘to know ourselves fully is to become one with the divine intellect’.<sup>104</sup> This process entails engaging in contemplation as far as possible, eschewing the domination of our lives by things in the sensible, material world, and is described by Plotinus as ‘assimilation to God’.<sup>105</sup>

Plotinus made use of, and invited his reader to join him in, introspective thought experiments. Rappe has read these ‘as a means of illustrating his recommended method for cultivating self-knowledge’, whereby the mind can ‘become self-transparent by concentration upon itself’. On this interpretation self-knowledge ‘involves the realization that the mind or self is not an object of any kind’.<sup>106</sup> These thought experiments or meditations are imaginative exercises that demand practice and effort, and are aimed at changes in habitual ways of thinking, involving self-awareness. The reader is asked to focus upon, e.g., a cosmic sphere or a geometrical shape, and to add contents and detail as Plotinus directs. ‘The purpose’, Rappe claims, ‘of this interior visualization is to call attention to the quality of interior vision itself, and in particular its capacity to be at once unitary and multifaceted in a way that exterior vision is not’. Perhaps it is in this way preparatory for the soul’s activity as intellect, in which intellect thinks the many Forms with which it forms a unity, being identical to its objects, but which nonetheless remain a multiplicity of distinct things, each one different from the other.

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<sup>104</sup> O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 41. For discussion of the role of Aristotle’s *DA* III.4–6 in Plotinus’ understanding of divine intellect in *Enn.* V.4 and V.6, see 49–50.

<sup>105</sup> *Enn.* I.2.1.4; 1.4.16.10–13; O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 97, 100–2.

<sup>106</sup> Rappe, ‘Self-Knowledge’, 258.

The work of Remes suggests that there is a direct connection between cognitive self-knowledge and knowledge of one's ethical and practical self in relation to the virtues, or dispositional self-knowledge in Plotinus. Following Gwenaëlle Aubry, Remes observes that in asking after the true self, Plotinus asks 'who are we (*hêmeis*)?' and answers that we are most properly our intellect, although we are also in an important sense the everyday discursively reasoning self.<sup>107</sup> Remes writes '[t]he self is thereby closer to our everyday reasoning subject that makes use of both perceptual and intellectual abilities. This capacity is both derived from and empowered by the innate intellect, which already makes it understandable why the intellect can, in a qualified sense, be said to be our true or original self.'<sup>108</sup> For Plotinus, Remes suggests, self-knowledge both of mental states and of one's status in relation to virtue results from effortful, self-directed introspection and reflection. In *Ennead I*, Plotinus contrasts two kinds of 'seeing', one outward, to the world of bodies and sensible objects generally, the other an inner kind of seeing accomplished by the soul. Inner seeing amounts to a process by which the subject seeks to improve herself with regard to virtue by way of self-knowledge (*Enn.* I.6.9.1). As Remes interprets the passage, Plotinus urges the reader to look first to beautiful actions and works in the world, then to turn within and examine that part of her soul that thinks by way of discursive reasoning. If introspection does not find beauty, she is counselled to improve herself

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<sup>107</sup> *Enn.* V.3.3.32–33, 35–40, 45–6. As cited in Remes, 'Self-Knowledge in Plotinus', 81–2; cf. Gwenaëlle Aubry, 'Metaphysics of Soul and Self in Plotinus', in *Handbook of Neoplatonism*, Pauliina Remes and Svetla Slaveva-Griffin (eds.) (Routledge: 2002), and Aubry, 'Un moi sans identité? Le *hêmeis* plotinien', in *Le moi et l'intériorité*, G. Aubry and F. Ildéfonse (eds) (Vrin: 2008), 107–25.

<sup>108</sup> Remes, 'Self-Knowledge in Plotinus', 82.

by way of metaphor—making the crooked bent, and the dark light, likening the soul’s development to a statue being worked on by a sculptor. The process terminates, ideally, in the person seeing herself and knowing herself as virtuous, but this ‘inner vision would reveal not only the states of our soul, but the core self, the intellect, and its objects of knowledge, the Forms’.<sup>109</sup> The process of coming to know oneself thus requires deep and sustained reflection and philosophical thought, involving cognitive self-knowledge and ending in dispositional self-knowledge. To the extent that this facilitates assimilation to God, and becoming one with the divine intellect, the kind of dispositional self-knowledge arrived at is distinctive in being both perfect and impersonal.<sup>110</sup>

## 6.2 Aubry in This Volume

In her chapter for this volume, ‘An Alternative to Cartesianism? Plotinus’s Self and its Posterity in Ralph Cudworth’, Gwenaëlle Aubry takes up the question of identifying the subject of self-knowledge in Plotinus. She notes the resonance with the Cartesian turn towards an immediate reflexivity, and seeks to explore the points of intersection with, and departure from, the Cartesian conception of self-knowledge.

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<sup>109</sup> Remes, ‘Self-Knowledge in Plotinus’, 91. For Remes’ full discussion of the passage, see 87–92.

<sup>110</sup> As Peter Adamson has pointed out to me, Aristotle’s notion of god and divine intellect (discussed briefly in §4.1), ought to be seen as a precursor to the parallel notion in Plotinus, and therefore potentially the forerunner of this impersonal kind of dispositional self-knowledge (perhaps with Plato as author of the *Alcibiades*, depending on its interpretation, as discussed in §3.2).

Plotinus enquires into what it is that knows itself in self-knowledge. If it is the self, the ‘we’ (the *hêmeis*), then is the subject of self-knowledge always the intellect? In answer, Aubry first traces the inherent duality of the self, the *hêmeis*, in Plotinus, which he speaks of in *Ennead* VI.4.14.16–31 as being two men—one, which is pure and divine, associated with the power or capacity of intellect, and a second man, with the power of sensation and memory. The self or *hêmeis*, she suggests, ought not be identified as being identical with either ‘man’, between which it alternates, but instead as being itself ‘a power of choice or identification’.<sup>111</sup> Consciousness governs the use of one or the other power of thought or sensation, and this in turn grounds the explanation of how, for Plotinus, the self or ‘we’, through actualization, becomes either power. We are, in a sense, what we are conscious of, in the activity of being so conscious. But as in her previous work, Aubry stresses the practical element of choice involved: the *hêmeis* is the author of its own orientation towards one or the other, and of the kind of life lived. The higher power of intellection must be inhabited, made use of, and identified with through choice. There are, thus, two kinds of self-knowledge, the one belonging to awareness of the nature of discursive reasoning, and the other to the individual who identifies, as a result of choice, with intellect. In Plotinus, Aubry argues, the Delphic injunction becomes practical, ‘Become who you are’.

The reflexivity characteristic of intellectual thought, in contrast to that of discursive thought, does not exhibit the structure of subject and object. Aubry argues that the objects of intellect for Plotinus are always already interior to it, since the

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<sup>111</sup> In this respect, Aubry’s reading represents a divergence from that of Remes, noted in §6.1, in which she reads the self in Plotinus as closer to the subject of discursive thought and sensation, *dianoia*.

intellect is pure activity of intellection of the intelligibles (Forms). The intellect therefore knows itself by way of a kind of self-presence, and knows that it knows the intelligibles. Finally, Aubry shows how a scholar from the modern era, the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth, took up Plotinian ideas in constructing an anti-Cartesian account of thought and consciousness, and evinces, like Plotinus, a practical revision of the Delphic injunction to ‘know thyself’. In relation to the modes of self-knowledge discussed throughout this chapter, Aubry’s account of the self becoming aware of itself through reflexive self-awareness either in the act of discursive thought or intellection implies cognitive self-knowledge, though it is not the focus of her chapter. In Plotinus, in contrast with Descartes, Aubry writes that the reflexivity of consciousness in discursive thought is ‘not equivalent to self-knowledge’, since in Plotinus’ hands, reflexivity does not result in the discovery of an interior realm of subjectivity, identifiable with the subject as essentially a thinking thing, but rather with two subjects, with which it identifies in turn. In the reflexivity of *dianoia*, moreover, consciousness takes individual acts of belief, appearance, and sensation for its object. Similarly, the self-knowledge of intellect involves intellect knowing that it knows the intelligibles. To the extent that what is known in these kinds of self-knowledge for Plotinus are the contents of mental states or activities, they can be regarded as kinds of cognitive self-knowledge, with the qualification that the self-knowledge of the intellect is a case of self-presence, rather than knowledge of a state separate from, and put before, the subject that knows.

## 7. Conclusion

At the outset of this chapter I argued that a certain continuity between contemporary and ancient philosophical thought on the topic of self-knowledge can be traced insofar as the subject's accurate grasp of the contents of (at least some kinds of) her psychological or mental states—which I have dubbed cognitive self-knowledge—is regarded as possible and important in both traditions. I suggested that although the Cartesian conception of the purely subjective and subjective truth was alien to ancient thought, Plato and Aristotle took it for granted that the subject could unproblematically identify the contents of her appearances, and we saw reason to take the Cyrenaics as claiming that statements describing the content of certain experiences of one's own body and the soul—*pathê*—were infallibly true. At the same time an obvious discontinuity between ancient and contemporary interest in self-knowledge is found, I claimed, in the focus in the ancient tradition on coming to know one's own individual moral or intellectual character—or dispositional self-knowledge, as I have called it—as an integral part of becoming virtuous or flourishing.

In the course of the survey of ancient texts we have found a wealth of evidence that Greek and Roman thinkers were interested in the nature or conditions of knowing or correctly ascertaining the contents of various individual mental states. In contrast to knowing or correctly ascertaining appearances, however, one theme that emerged in relation to accurately grasping the contents of other kinds of cognitive states, such as belief, ignorance, and knowledge, was that it arises, according to ancient thinkers, as the result of considerable effort and reflection. It appeared that for ancient philosophers these kinds of cognitive self-knowledge were not a function of the soul's or mind's self-transparency as an immediately available feature or condition of thought. Less surprisingly, perhaps, from a contemporary perspective, dispositional

self-knowledge also emerged as an achievement, the result of critical reflection, and appeared on the whole to be limited to the virtuous in ancient thought (or those enjoying tranquillity, for the Epicureans). We have also seen that discussion of some of the key issues surrounding both kinds of self-knowledge in ancient thought are in various ways taken forward by the remaining contributions to this volume. In concluding this chapter, I want to emphasize that the convergence between the two kinds of self-knowledge as regards time and effort is not accidental: cognitive self-knowledge is plausibly taken as a necessary condition for dispositional self-knowledge which is to a significant extent, though not exclusively, built up out of it.

We canvassed reasons to think that, in a number of dialogues from the so-called early or transitional periods, Plato regarded cognitive self-knowledge of the existence and content of one's belief and knowledge states as possible and yet not a product of (Cartesian) first-personal epistemic authority. Rather, enquiry, effortful reflection, and (it seems) philosophical conversation are what make first-personal knowledge of belief and knowledge states, i.e. cognitive self-knowledge possible. This in turn strongly suggests that the virtuous person will know herself as a knower and possessor of wisdom, and to that extent will know her character, i.e. have dispositional self-knowledge. We also found evidence in the *Republic* of cognitive self-knowledge of desiderative states in the virtuous person (and perhaps the student of virtue), through which, it was implied, the virtuous person was also self-knowing in the dispositional mode.

The connection between the cognitive and dispositional modes of self-knowledge was also suggested by the discussion of Aristotle. The conditions on virtue from Book II of the *EN* and the account of habituation in II–III suggested that cognitive self-knowledge was implicated in the attainment of dispositional self-knowledge and

virtue for Aristotle. His sketch of the magnanimous person further supported this view. We also saw the suggestion that friendship was instrumentally valuable for cognitive and dispositional self-knowledge, at least for virtue friends, on Aristotle's account of friendship. For, since friendship provides a forum for observation and reflective, evaluative discussion of actions, feeling and behaviour, as well as, plausibly, the impetus for the development of goals and values, it facilitates grasp of individual states and self-conscious moral development.

In Epicurean and Stoic writings, the link between cognitive and dispositional modes of self-knowledge were strongly suggested by the therapeutic focus of each. A core element of the aim of both, in attaining *eudaimonia*, is to rid oneself of false beliefs and unwanted emotions, and substitute them with cognitions that truly reflect the way the world is for human beings. Hence, for the Epicureans, scrutiny of the existence and content of one's mental states—cognitive self-knowledge—with a view to attaining freedom from disturbance, and so *eudaimonia*, was central. The extant remains also appeared to claim that a person's character development was dependent upon her beliefs, and was to a significant extent her own responsibility. This strongly suggests that cognitive self-knowledge is necessary for dispositional self-knowledge, and that the process of correct character development is self-conscious and lengthy. For Stoicism, the picture was more complex, but it seemed that on balance the evidence of the fragments and testimony suggested that the Stoics regarded the Sage as able to ascertain correctly the contents of her impressions, and so to ensure she assented only to those that were *katêleptic*. The Sage, in being aware of the moral value of her actions, as well as (presumably, in her wisdom,) of the Stoic truth that only the virtuous perform truly virtuous actions, would also know her actions and her character to be virtuous: she would have dispositional self-knowledge. But for the

non-virtuous, including the student of virtue, self-knowledge in either mode seemed doubtful.

Finally, the theoretical and practical focus, in Plotinus, on the two kinds of thought the soul can engage in, discursive reasoning (*dianoia*) and intellection (*nous*), was seen as facilitating both cognitive and dispositional self-knowledge. The process of deliberately engaging in self-reflective thought at the level of *dianoia* enabled the subject to come to grasp and know the contents of various mental states, and, when applied to the practical and ethical context, thereby to grasp whether her soul was beautiful or in need of moral improvement. At the same time, it was suggested, Plotinus regarded the soul as able to become transparent to itself in intellection, by choosing to turn away from the sensible realm, either by directly engaging in contemplation of the intelligibles (Forms), or by way of meditative thought experiments. In contrast to discursive reasoning, this cognitive self-knowledge in intellection did not involve taking a higher-order view of a first-order contemplative or meditative state, but consisted in thought becoming one with its object. In both cases, however, cognitive self-knowledge together with the dispositional self-knowledge that can arise from it was the result of effort and choice.

Ancient philosophers can be seen as responding in different ways, then, to Socrates' insistence on the significance of the Delphic injunction, 'know oneself'. But as the commanding nature of the injunction implies, the inscription instructs its reader to undertake a task that takes time, requires our attention and energy, is directed towards something we might go wrong about, the successful completion of which is to be regarded as an achievement. It is this aspect of ancient contributions to the topic of self-knowledge that, more than anything else, gives it its distinctive character and sets it apart from its contemporary counterparts. In this, I have argued, the cognitive

and dispositional modes of self-knowledge, while distinct, are crucially linked, the latter being built up in large part from the former. But this does not entail, and nor do I mean it to imply, that the latter ought to be considered reducible to the former, to an aggregate of myriad instances of coming to know the contents of one's individual thoughts, or mental states. For, knowing oneself as wise, or as possessing one or all of the character virtues, or—in the case of Epicurean thought—to have developed the seeds of one's character correctly, would seem to require a diachronic, if not synoptic, critical view of oneself.

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