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### Belief and Persuasion in the Socratic Elenchus

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## Belief and Persuasion in the Socratic Elenchus

Dylan Futter, Fordham University

### I

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of Socrates' philosophical method is how unsuccessful it is. One problem is that elenchus seems able only to destroy common belief without generating anything substantive in its place.<sup>1</sup> Another is that it seems incapable of getting anyone to relinquish his unsupported beliefs. Indeed, it is striking how very few of Socrates interlocutors give up their original beliefs even after being driven into contradiction. Euthyphro runs away, Thrasymachus tries to run away, and Callicles appears to be entirely unmoved by reason.

Plato is acutely aware of these problems. In the *Meno*, he undertakes to show that Socrates' method of inquiry is capable of generating substantive results.<sup>2</sup> In the *Gorgias*, he reveals why some people are not moved by reasoned argument. And in the *Republic* he proposes a complex model of moral belief-formation, which explains the possibility of breakdown in Socratic method, and shows the way to a resolution.

### II

Socrates sees the moral improvement of himself and his interlocutors as the purpose of philosophical argument. Moral improvement involves the cultivation of virtue, which is closely bound up with the proper structuring of a person's soul. What are the constituents of an orderly soul? In the *Gorgias*, Socrates warns that unless Callicles is able to show that wrongdoing "is *not* absolutely the worst thing that can happen", this belief will cause him "friction" and "discord" within his entire life (482b5-10). He will be in conflict with himself: there will be friction between Callicles and Callicles (482b6). This is a very clear indication that Socrates thinks that incorrect moral beliefs are a source of internal discord and of inner division. Moreover, Raphael Woolf has argued persuasively that Socrates is here referring to self-inconsistency: the person with *inconsistent* beliefs is someone whose soul is discordant.<sup>3</sup> Insofar as Callicles' moral outlook contains contradictions, he will not achieve the unity necessary for virtue. He will not achieve virtue until these contradictions in belief are resolved. It is only a short step from this theory of the good soul, and Socrates' self-conception as the only true statesman of Athens (521d), to the conclusion that elenchus is meant to bring about good souls by bringing about consistency of belief.

### III

The structure of elenchus is fairly determinate. One of Socrates' interlocutors asserts a thesis, p, with which Socrates disagrees, and tries to refute.<sup>4</sup> Socrates next gains the interlocutors agreement to a further set of premises, q, r, and s, etc. These premises remain un-argued: the interlocutor agrees to the premises but Socrates does not provide any support for them. Socrates then proceeds to 'show' that q, r, and s lead to a consequence incompatible with p, ~p.<sup>5</sup> The interlocutor is then driven to a position in which he recognizes that his beliefs are contradictory. At this point Socrates apparently expects his interlocutor to abandon the initial belief.

There is some disagreement in the scholarly literature as to whether the Socratic elenchus is essentially destructive and limited to ridding an interlocutor of false conceit,<sup>6</sup> or whether it is also capable of generating substantive philosophical knowledge. One part of this question depends on what Socrates takes himself to be doing. If the structure of elenchus is as just presented, how could he reasonably think that he has done more than expose inconsistencies in belief set? Why should an inconsistency between an initial thesis (p) generated by means of several other (un-argued) claims to which an interlocutor has agreed, entitle Socrates to claim to have proved ~p? Gregory Vlastos has dubbed this "*the problem of the Socratic elenchus*".<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., *Republic* I (336c3) for Thrasymachus' formulation of this concern.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Gail Fine, "Inquiry in the *Meno*", in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (New York: Cambridge, 1992) pp. 200-226.

<sup>3</sup> Raphael. Woolf, "Callicles and Socrates: Psychic (Dis)harmony in the *Gorgias*" *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 18 (2000) pp. 1-40.

<sup>4</sup> This analysis follows Gregory Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 1 (1983) pp. 27-58.

<sup>5</sup> Persuasion does not require that Socrates arguments be sound, but only that his interlocutors believe that they are.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Hugh Benson, "*Meno*, the Slave-boy, and the Elenchus", *Phronesis*, 35 (1990) pp. 128-158.

<sup>7</sup> Vlastos, op. cit., p. 49. Italics in the original.

Elenchus may to some extent bring about moral development even if it can do no more than eliminate beliefs. Insofar as the interlocutor who comes to see that his belief set is inconsistent suspends belief, he will tend toward a state of greater psychic harmony. Maintaining a consistent belief set need not require that one replace one's false beliefs with true beliefs for suspending judgment is one way of bringing about consistency. Therefore, even if the elenchus is ultimately incapable of proving anything, it may still be an important tool in *homologia*. Admittedly it is hard to understand how someone who suspended belief in their entire set of basic moral beliefs could come to possess virtue.

A more basic problem than 'the problem of the elenchus' remains. This is that Socrates doesn't seem to be able to get his interlocutors to suspend judgment in their beliefs, let alone accept the negation of their original theses. His interlocutors tend to remain unconvinced by his arguments. In this respect even if elenchus were capable of generating truth, it would not be capable of *persuading* interlocutors of these truths. But how then could elenchus promote psychic harmony if belief does not respond to rational disputation? It may seem that Socrates' method is ultimately ill suited to bringing about the moral development that he aims to bring about.

#### IV

Why does elenchus fail to persuade? In answering this question, we should ask what sort of model of belief formation it presupposes. What conditions must be met if elenchus is to persuade?<sup>8</sup>

Firstly, successful elenchus requires that the interlocutor genuinely believe the thesis he asserts: his assertion that *p* must be sincere. Vlastos has labeled this as the "say what you believe rule".<sup>9</sup> Socrates' insistence on sincere assertion is explained by the importance of consistency in a harmonious soul. The interlocutor will be improved morally only if his beliefs become (more) consistent. So his beliefs must be the ones laid out for discussion and evaluation.

A second condition for a successful elenchus is that the interlocutor regards Socrates' reasoning as logically compelling. The soundness of Socrates' arguments is not at issue if the interlocutor answers sincerely because then his own moral beliefs form the premises of the argument.

A third condition is that the interlocutor who judges that he has sufficient justificatory reasons for  $\sim p$  ( $\sim q$ ,  $\sim r$ , etc) accepts the belief that he judges to be well grounded. This condition presupposes a distinction between psychological and logical force. It seems possible that someone can at the same time judge an argument sound, and yet disbelieve its conclusion: the un-answerability and un-believability of skeptical arguments illustrates this point. In Hume's characteristically pithy language, skeptical arguments "admit of no answer and produce no conviction".<sup>10</sup> "Philosophy would render us entirely Pyrrhonian, were not nature too strong for it".<sup>11</sup> Hume thinks that his skeptical arguments for (e.g.) the rational illegitimacy of inductive inference are logically compelling. But he cannot believe their conclusions. A successful elenchus requires that the interlocutor not respond to Socrates' reasoning as Hume does to his own. It must not occur that he believes the premises, finds the argument logically compelling, but be unable to be convinced of its conclusion. In this respect, elenchus presupposes a good measure of rational self-control.

The fourth condition is closely related to the third. It concerns how the law of non-contradiction figures in everyday thought.<sup>12</sup> In a successful elenchus, the interlocutor would believe that *p*, *q*, *r*, etc, and that *q*, *r*, etc entail  $\sim p$ . At this point he would come to see that he is committed to *p* and  $\sim p$ —a logically impossible state of affairs. Even though coming to see that one maintains contradictory beliefs does not undermine the evidential commitment to the beliefs taken individually, successful elenchus requires that one be psychologically moved by the logical impossibility of the contradictory proposition. This presupposes that believing in full consciousness, at the same time, both *p* and  $\sim p$ , is in some sense psychologically unstable.

#### V

Corresponding to the conditions identified above, failures of elenchus may be divided into two types: (1) remediable and (2) irremediable failures. Remediable failures occur as a result of breakdowns of condition 2 *alone*. These are failures that further elenchus, by itself, could overcome. Somewhat imprecisely, one could say that the

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<sup>8</sup> There are plainly other conditions that are also necessary for successful elenchus, such as, e.g., speaking Greek. See *Meno* 82b3.

<sup>9</sup> Vlastos, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975) p. 155.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* p. 156.

<sup>12</sup> This qualification is to avoid esoteric contexts generated by (say) a theory of the logical paradoxes.

interlocutor is ‘open to the argument’, currently unconvinced, but capable of being convinced without significantly altering his belief formation mechanisms.

Remediable failures include problems following Socrates’ reasoning, genuine doubts about the cogency of an argument, or a lack of confidence in one’s reasoning ability. In this regard, consider Adeimantus’ protest in *Republic VI*:

No one would be able to contradict the things you’ve said, Socrates, but on each occasion that you say them, your hearers are affected in some such way as this. They think that, because they’re inexperienced in asking and answering questions, they’re led astray a little bit by the argument at every question, and that when these little bits are added together at the end of the discussion, great is their fall, as the opposite of what they’ve said at the outset comes to light (487 b-c).<sup>13</sup>

Adeimantus describes a situation in which an interlocutor believes that there’s something wrong with the argument although he can’t quite in the moment put his finger on the problem. This is quite different from the disbelief in skeptical arguments described above: here the agent does *not* think that the argument is sound, whereas in the skeptical argument he does.

The failure of a remediable condition is not necessarily a serious impediment to elenchus so long as the interlocutor is willing to continue the investigation, to think through the arguments again, and to scrutinize his beliefs. Those inexperienced in argument may gain experience by considering the reasoning in various ways. Here we see part of the point behind the theory of recollection. One way of ensuring that a person understands an inference is to require that he draw it himself. Another may require that he engage in repeated demonstrations. This last point is explicitly made in the *Meno*: “Now these opinions have been newly aroused in this boy as if in a dream; but if someone asks him these same things many times and in many ways, you can be sure that in the end he will come to have exact knowledge of these things as well as anyone else does” (85c9-d1).<sup>14</sup>

Irremediable failures of elenchus occur as a result of dispositions of belief formation that are unresponsive to elenchus. It seems to me that failures of the “say-what-you-believe rule” are irremediable failures. However, a breakdown in sincere assertion operates at a “meta-level” since it effectively blocks elenchus by undermining condition 2. The interlocutor does not believe that the reasoning is cogent although he says that he does. The violation of the say-what-you-believe rule is sufficient for the elenchus to fail because it is sufficient to undermine condition 2. It is not however necessary for elenctic breakdown. A second class of irremediable failures are those that are due to failures in conditions 3, and possibly 4.<sup>15</sup> These are cases in which someone is psychologically unresponsive to logical force of reason.

In *Republic I* Thrasyachus fails to be moved by elenchus because he violates the “say-what-you-believe rule”.<sup>16</sup> This undermines condition 2. When Thrasyachus senses he is losing the battle he grows reluctant to answer Socrates questions, and even tries to run off. This may be understood as an attempt to avoid following the argument. By refusing to engage with Socrates in the argument he avoids *thinking* the entailments. He avoids saying what he believes in order to avoid following the argument to its conclusion.

Thrasyachus is unwilling to follow elenchus all the way through because of his pride. Consequently he feels shame at being outwitted by Socrates. Plato indicates this quite clearly: “And then I saw something that I’d never seen before—Thrasyachus blushing” (350d3). Moreover, Thrasyachus’ protest “You disgust me Socrates. Your trick is to take hold of the argument at the point where you can do it the most harm” (338d) smacks of sour grapes. This sort of failure is irremediable because the change of attitude necessary for elenchus to operate properly is not something that argument can bring about.

Failures in condition 3 pick out another limit of elenchus. Socrates’ encounter with Polus in *Gorgias* provides an example of a (near) breakdown of this sort. Socrates engages Polus on the question of whether doing injustice is worse than suffering it. Polus thinks that it is better to do injustice than to suffer it, but concedes that it is also more shameful. Socrates exploits this concession to drive him into contradiction.

There is disagreement amongst commentators on how to understand Polus’ attitude at the end of this encounter with Socrates.<sup>17</sup> In the end, I suspect that Polus does genuinely concede a conclusion that he does not

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<sup>13</sup> All translations of *Republic* are by Grube, rev. by Reeve (Hackett, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> All translations of *Meno* are by Grube, from *Five Dialogues* (Hackett, 1981).

<sup>15</sup> Adherence to the “say what you believe” rule is necessary for failures in 3 and 4.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. 349b.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g., Jessica Moss, “Shame, Pleasure and the Divided Soul” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 29 (2005), p. 149; Raphael Woolf, *op. cit.*, p. 23; Dominic Scott, “Socratic Optimism and Platonic Pessimism” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 17 (1999) p. 18.

want to concede, although with great reluctance. This is not exactly a failure in elenchus; but pushed a bit more, it would be. Polus psychologically acknowledges what he believes to be the logical force of Socrates reasoning, but he finds it very hard to do so. Were the explanation for this difficulty in acknowledging the power of Socrates' reasoning further amplified, elenchus would fail. This is what happens with Callicles at one point in his conversation with Socrates.

Callicles enters the fray with angry aplomb. He says that Polus was refuted only because he was ashamed to admit his true belief: that doing wrong is not more shameful than suffering it. However, despite his bravado, Callicles also gets "tied up" and "muzzled" (482e1),<sup>18</sup> although, crucially, without relinquishing commitment to the beliefs with which he began. One explanation for Callicles' intransigence is his regular violation of the say-what-you-believe rule.<sup>19</sup> But in addition to this tactic, Plato uses Callicles to highlight another sort of fundamental breakdown in elenchus. In an apparently uncharacteristic moment of candor, he has Callicles say: "I can't explain it, Socrates, but I do think you're making your points well. All the same, I'm feeling what people inevitably feel with you: I'm not entirely convinced" (513c). So Callicles thinks that Socrates is reasoning well, but confesses to being psychologically unmoved by reasoning that appears to him to be good. He is in the same position as Hume with respect to his own skeptical arguments. Here is a second limit of elenchus: someone can be completely unmoved by the logical force of an argument even when he believes that it is a good argument. The logical force of reason is psychologically ineffective. This responsiveness is presupposed by elenchus; and elenchus cannot bring it about. One will be, as Hume, consistently pulled back to one's old beliefs—nature is too strong for philosophy.<sup>20</sup>

## VI

One irremediable sort of elenctic failure occurs when an interlocutor tends not to give sincere answers to Socrates' questions in order to avoid 'losing the argument'. This is an irremediable failure because elenchus, by itself, seems incapable of fostering a correct *attitude* to argument. A second irremediable limitation on elenchus occurs when an interlocutor struggles or fails to be psychologically moved by logical force that he genuinely perceives.

In an important recent paper, Raphael Woolf has advanced an interpretation of Socrates' failure to persuade Callicles significantly in conflict with the one I have presented above.<sup>21</sup> Woolf regards Callicles' failure to be convinced as due to a problem with condition 4 rather than condition 3. He argues that Socrates thinks it possible that someone be psychologically committed, in full awareness, to contradictory beliefs.<sup>22</sup> It follows from this, Woolf says, that reason does not by itself generate psychological conformity to its canons. Therefore, some other psychological force is necessary to bring about the conformity of belief to reason. On Woolf's reading, this role is performed by *eros*. The psychological force of reason depends on a prior orientation to its principles: if a person is not committed to logical principles then he will simply fail to be moved by argument. Commitment to logical principles is fundamentally about loving consistency. So *eros* determines the extent to which one's beliefs are governed by principles of consistency. This provides an explanation for Callicles' intransigence according to which it is due to his failing to *love reason*. On Woolf's reading, Callicles' inconsistency will not be dissolved until his "commitment to logical rules overrides his commitment to his individual beliefs".<sup>23</sup>

Woolf is correct in his view that Callicles is committed to inconsistent propositions.<sup>24</sup> He is also right that he is then logically committed to a contradiction. However, Woolf's next claim is much less certain:

... (If) Callicles cannot refute Socrates, then having heard (as he has) Socrates' reasoning with Polus, he will have a commitment to Socrates' belief, as well as the contradictory belief that he already holds. That is, he will, in full self-awareness, hold contradictory beliefs, and continue to do so ('in the whole of his life').<sup>25</sup>

<sup>18</sup> All translations from the *Gorgias* are by Robin Waterfield (Oxford, 1994).

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., 503d ff.

<sup>20</sup> Socrates recommends continuing the argument just after Callicles' admission (513c8-d1). Here it seems that Plato is suggesting that Socrates is not fully aware of the limitations of elenchus. "Socrates' apparent affirmation of elenchus at this point is an act of faith" (Woolf, op. cit., p. 31).

<sup>21</sup> Woolf, op. cit., pp. 25-32.

<sup>22</sup> Woolf, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> Woolf, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> The specific matter of disagreement whether doing wrong with impunity is the worst of possible evils. See Woolf, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

I don't think that Woolf has established this point. Although Callicles may be committed to propositions that are as a matter of fact inconsistent, it does not follow that he is (or will be) psychologically committed to a contradiction. This requires not only that he have inconsistent beliefs, but also that he believe that they are inconsistent. Only then would it follow that he holds contradictory beliefs in the *awareness that they are contradictory*. However, Callicles does not believe that his beliefs are contradictory precisely because he fails to be moved by the force of Socrates' reasoning. So although he does not manage to refute Socrates this does not entail that he *believes* that he believes contradictory beliefs. This requires something that does not occur: his being psychologically moved by the force of Socrates' reasoning.

The right way to describe Callicles' predicament is that he is committed to reason (the law of non-contradiction) *and* to the individual propositions that are in conflict. The discomfort he feels which gives rise to his desire to abandon the argument, and ultimate failure to be moved by it, is due to his desire to avoid commitment to an explicit contradiction. This avoidance is explained by the psychological instability of contradictory beliefs, which he feels. Resolving the disharmony in Callicles' soul, *contra* Woolf, does not require that he become *more committed* to consistency.<sup>26</sup> Everyone is committed to consistency. Rather he should become less committed to the propositions that generate the contradiction, or more particularly, should give up commitment to whatever proposition is false. The crucial significance of this encounter is that Plato is gesturing toward an explanation for why it is so difficult for him to relinquish these beliefs: they are basic features of his moral outlook. In the *Republic*, as we shall see, Plato is acutely aware of how difficult it is to eradicate basic moral intuitions from one's outlook, even when one believes that they are unreliable.

## VII

We may begin working towards an understanding of Plato's explanation for intransigent beliefs by considering his arguments for a divided soul. As is well known, in *Republic* IV Plato has Socrates argue for a tripartite division in the soul on the basis of motivational conflict. Later, in *Republic* X, he returns to the divided soul, advancing a structurally very similar argument for a bipartite division. The main distinguishing feature of this argument is that it appeals not to motivational conflict but *cognitive conflict* of the sort brought on by perceptual illusion. Examples of perceptual illusion include those cases in which "... something looks crooked when seen in water and straight when seen out of it, (and) something else looks both concave and convex because our eyes are deceived by its colors" (602c). One crucial feature of these cases is that the illusion persists even after the reasoning part of the soul has determined by measuring that the appearance is illusory.

A bit further on in book X, Plato applies his analysis of perceptual illusion to dramatic mimesis.<sup>27</sup> Mimetic painting and poetry both create characteristic types of illusions by appealing to a part that is far from reason.<sup>28</sup> They "create their own kinds of cognitive illusion, which are just like visual illusions in the way they persist and maintain their hold on us despite the opposition of our better judgment".<sup>29</sup> Although the immediate context of Socrates' discussion is the damaging effects of "dramatic mimesis", Plato's concerns with this type of cognitive illusion are to be understood as part of his larger account of how a person acquires and sustains a moral outlook. Book X's discussion of the illusions created by dramatic mimesis suggests that some perceptual appearances which are unresponsive to reason, are those in which certain actions, states, and objects, *appear as having value*. The illusions that poetry creates are distinctively *evaluative*.

Plato's concern with the evaluative illusions to which poetry renders us susceptible is part of a larger story of how one comes to perceive values in the world. Plato recognizes two modes of value apprehension, viz., the pleasurable and the fine (*kalon*), and their opposites, the painful, and the shameful (*aischron*). A judgment that an action is shameful is one way of judging it is bad. A judgment that an action is unpleasant is another way of judging that it is bad. In each case, evaluative properties, such as the good, bad, noble, shameful, and all the rest, are correlated with the descriptive properties of particular actions, states, or objects. Insofar as Leontius (439e-440a) derives sexual pleasure from looking upon the pale corpses outside the city walls, the descriptive property of being pale (and so on) is linked with an evaluative judgment of the good on account of the pleasure generated from the

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<sup>26</sup> Woolf, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>27</sup> Myles Burnyeat "Culture and Society in Plato's Republic", *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (Utah, 1998, p. 226.

<sup>28</sup> Burnyeat, op. cit., p. 226.

<sup>29</sup> Burnyeat, op. cit., p. 226.

experience of this descriptive content.<sup>30</sup> Conversely, when spirit judges his desire to look at the bodies outside the city wall as shameful, Leontius experiences another mode of value apprehension under which a certain descriptive content appears to him as bad (439e-440a). Spirit opposes the judgments of appetite in that it encapsulates a higher-order judgment that felt pleasure at the descriptive content of the experience is itself base and shameful.

This relationship between the descriptive contents of an experience and the modes of value apprehension is further defined in Plato's discussion of the dangers of tragedy in book X. Here Socrates is concerned that when somebody watches tragedy, he takes pleasure in seeing a hero indulging himself excessively in emotions even though he himself would prefer not to engage in this behavior (605c-d). In the theatre a person lets his guard down, so that some hero's behavior is not seen as inappropriate, even though it normally would be. The descriptive contents of the experiences may be relevantly similar, but the evaluative judgments different. When the audience's sense of shame is suspended, and they feel pleasure at (e.g.) actions of *this* descriptive content, they are in a condition in which they do not perceive the moral world aright. Tragedy fosters evaluative illusions by inducing a feeling of pleasure in relation to a set of descriptive properties without the counterbalancing assessment of shame. It is crucial that the approval and disapproval one feels when watching tragedy are *incorrect* attitudes, directed at things that do not possess the requisite value or disvalue.

## VIII

We may now return to elenchus and why it fails to persuade. We shall consider, first, those occasions in which an interlocutor holds both that the elenctic reasoning is sound, is in conflict with a view that he has sincerely espoused, and yet feels psychologically unmoved.

In everyday life, a person will often relinquish a belief when encountering contrary evidence. This is especially clear in cases where the belief in question is something trivially factual such as whether or not the Macedonian envoys have arrived in Athens. However, in the moral realm beliefs tend to move much less easily. Why is this the case? Jessica Moss suggests that beliefs formed by quasi-perceptual means are "not easily challenged or corrected by means of reasoning".<sup>31</sup> On her interpretation of the *Gorgias*, Socrates is depicted as using the power of shame to counter the enticing-ness of "the pleasant". Shame "can be a more effective tool of *persuasion* than reason", she says, for it is capable—where reason is not—of dislodging a person's 'intuitive' moral beliefs.

Why are quasi-perceptual evaluative beliefs so difficult to combat with reason? The deep explanation for this is that the evidential bases of the beliefs persist even when one judges that the appearance is misleading. It is not simply that quasi-perceptual moral beliefs are hard to dislodge. They are hard to dislodge because they may be accompanied by evaluative illusion. The intransigence of moral beliefs is explained by the fact that being driven into contradiction does not prevent the evidence for the individual propositions from *seeming* to be good evidence.

On Plato's account, value illusions are explained by supposing that the non-rational part of the soul is in some sense tempted by the appearance of something as possessing moral value even when it does not.<sup>32</sup> When something seems to be good because it is pleasurable, this is explained by the appetitive part's making a judgment that it is good. Something may *seem* good even if one does not believe it so with the rational part.<sup>33</sup> Plato's view on the failure of elenchus is essentially that elenchus cannot undo the power of things seeming to be good, and therefore cannot undo commitment to propositions involving evaluative content of that sort. It *seems* to Polus that it is better to commit injustice than to suffer injustice. Even after he concedes the contradiction in his position, it still seems to him to be so. The moral intuitions remain and make it difficult for him to concede the falsity of this claim. The depth of the difficulty is that this moral intuition presents itself as powerful evidence in support of the claim. This mechanism is quite similar to that which operates in non-evaluative perceptual illusions. The appearance of length is normally good evidence for an object's being a certain length. Even when one has, by calculation, come to the conclusion that the lines in a Müller-Lyer illusion are of the same length, the appearance of a discrepancy remains. Similarly, even after one is convinced that injustice is worse than justice, unjust actions may continue to seem good or desirable. These moral intuitions constitute evidence that remains in support of a proposition that is

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<sup>30</sup> In a footnote to his revision of Grube's translation of *Republic*, Reeve writes: "Leontius' desire to look at the corpses is sexual in nature for a fragment of contemporary comedy tells us that Leontius was known for his love of boys as pale as corpses"(Hackett, 1992), p. 115.

<sup>31</sup> Moss, op. cit., p. 145. The contrast is between quasi-perceptual moral beliefs, and those formed on the basis of argument.

<sup>32</sup> Burnyeat, op. cit., p. 319.

<sup>33</sup> The rational part in the domain of evaluative belief is that which exercises foresight, the moral equivalent of "measuring" in the domain of perspective.

judged to contradict something else one believes. The elenchus is powerless against this, for the evidence persists even after reason has had its say. Here we have the source of conflicting beliefs which elenctic reason cannot eliminate. The disharmonious soul is the soul whose value perception is incorrectly orientated. Plato's solution to this problem in elenchus is then the entire education program of the *Republic*, which attempts to educate people so that they are able to perceive the moral world as it truly is.

Finally, we may return to the first limitation in elenchus that occurs by violation of the "say-what-you-believe rule" because of incorrect dispositions toward Socrates and elenchus in general. This is not a matter of value perception, in a straightforward sense. It concerns one's attitude to argument and the pursuit of truth.

When elenchus is used in such a way that it is not disinterestedly concerned with truth, it becomes a game with a potential winner and loser. In *Republic VII*, Socrates explains that early exposure to dialectic is dangerous because young people tend to "misuse it by treating it as a game of contradiction" (539b).<sup>34</sup> "They imitate those who've refuted them by refuting others themselves, and, like puppies, they enjoy dragging and tearing those around them with their arguments" (539b). The mechanic of why some have the wrong attitudes to elenchus is again the *pleasure* and 'taste for argument' that young people experience and thereby construe as valuable. Plato's solution to this problem is a restriction on those who are permitted to engage in such discussions. Mature people with stable and orderly characters, whose values are correctly oriented, will be less likely to treat dialectic as sport, and more likely to employ it with serious and sincere intentions in the pursuit of truth.

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<sup>34</sup> I assume that the dialectic of *Republic VI-VII* is closely related to elenchus.