

1. Introduction

This chapter addresses Plato's deployment of a specific kind of image, the personal ideal. In various dialogues, Socrates offers up a picture of the sort of person one might emulate and thus become, as far as one's human and particular nature allows. The question 'who am I?' is answered with 'who are you striving to be?' The positing of an image of oneself is especially important for responding to the Delphic precept that occurs repeatedly in Plato: 'Know yourself'. What counts as 'yourself' cannot simply be found; it must be decided upon. Images help with this.

This paper argues for the importance of images of oneself for maturation as a good person. I do not know whether images are necessary to making oneself better. Perhaps unimaginative people work effectively on the individual traits they have isolated as important. But I do not think that images are a second-best solution, or suit only the non-philosopher, or have unfortunately imprecise resemblances to the truth. When it comes to self-improvement, a person must have an idea about the self to improve, and this idea will be a complex of values, skills, and characteristics, and the most efficient and coherent articulation of this idea is as an image of somebody one to be.¹

2. Prometheus

At the end of the *Protagoras*, Socrates claims to use the image of Prometheus—the one Protagoras set out in his opening lecture—somehow to motivate, guide, or underwrite his commitment to self-development. He mentions this image in the context of his wish to keep pursuing, with Protagoras, the nature of virtue. His interlocutor's and listeners' commitments to that pursuit have just undergone abuse that might cause them to recede, for good reason. In one respect, Socrates' conversational method has just triumphed, forcing Protagoras to admit that courage is a kind of knowledge (360e6), and thus that all the virtues are basically alike (cf. 349d4). Socrates had wanted to defend the unity of the virtues. But he had also wanted to defend the unteachability of virtue (319b3).² But presumably every kind of knowledge is teachable, and if all the virtues are like courage, which is a kind of knowledge, then all the virtues are knowledge, and are thus teachable. So Socrates' conversational method in fact failed, undermining the very thesis from which it began. It is no consolation that this reveals a problem in Protagoras' original position, that virtues are teachable but that not all of them are knowledge. In fact, it plays to Protagoras' advantage: he now accepts a consistent position.

This summary of the embarrassing reversal comes not in Socrates' own words but in a personification of the discussion itself, which Socrates says convicts and ridicules them.³ Socrates sketches this personification of a perceptive, articulate, and recapitulating critic elsewhere in the Socratic dialogues (*Charm.* 175d1-7, *Cr.* 50a7-54d1, *Phdr.* 260e2-261a6). Surely he attributes unpleasant diagnoses to imaginary and non-human characters in part to

¹ Velleman (2002) makes this argument in the idiom of contemporary moral psychology.

² This he argued from two social, not epistemological observations: that nobody expects experts in virtue to speak up in the assembly (319b5-e1), and that parents otherwise doting on their children do not succeed in making all of them virtuous (319e1-320b3).

³ ἡ ἄρτι ἐξοδος τῶν λόγων ὥσπερ ἄνθρωπος κατηγορεῖν τε καὶ καταγελάειν, 361a5-6.

soften the emotional effect on his interlocutor. But he also does so because his interlocutors know that justified and poignant charges from apparently thoughtful people deserve attention. They should therefore imagine themselves in conversation with suitably authoritative judges of their views, rather than complacently relying on their own assumptions, in thrall to their argumentative momentum. Better yet, they might imagine themselves as people in conversation with such judges. To take on the culture of the best sorts of conversations into oneself is the mark of mature thinking.

Yet Socrates does not stop with the image of the haughty but quick-witted and incisive discussion personified. If he had stopped there, he would have still effected some positive lesson for the audience. Protagoras and he would come off looking much less pedagogically authoritative than they may have begun, and their followers and admirers would have to learn to moderate their excitement and blind trust in them. Yet Socrates goes on. He may fear the onset of misology, despair, or smugness in his listeners, if they were to think that argument is worthless. So he agrees with the discussion's diagnosis of their conversational bind—'everything went upside down, and got terribly jumbled'—and then pushes forward.⁴ He says that he has a great desire to make everything clear, to go all the way through the issues again and sort out what virtue is, and then to try again to determine (*episkepsasthai*) whether it is teachable.⁵

It is the expression of his desire that occasions Socrates' more interesting image of himself. He introduces it with a counter-imagine, drawn also from Protagoras' opening lecture. The reason Socrates wants to reinvestigate the questions about virtue is

lest that earlier Epimetheus have a chance to deceive and overturn us in our investigation, just as he neglected us in his distribution, as you put it. The Prometheus in your story pleased me more than Epimetheus: it is the former I make use, and it is in exercising *promêtheia* over my whole life that I trouble myself with all these matters; and if you wish, just as I was saying from the beginning, I should most like to investigate this thoroughly with you.⁶

Before we can understand the role Prometheus plays in Socrates' self-description, we should attend to his use of the god's brother, Epimetheus.

Protagoras' opening lecture recounted the origins of species. The unnamed gods formed all mortal beings from earth and other elements. They left to Prometheus and Epimetheus the specific outfitting of the species before their initiation into the light of day. Epimetheus persuaded his brother to let him allocate the abilities; Prometheus would check his work (*episkepsai*, 320e1). Epimetheus proceeded to work methodically, balancing the gifts he distributed, contriving various provisions against dangers, and taking caution against extinction (321a1-2). His efforts were satisfactory and his wards well cared for (321c6). Anyway, all the animals were except one: the humans. He had either decided to save them for last, but ran out of protections just before he got there, or perhaps he simply forgot about them. In either case, he left them 'naked, shoeless, without a place to sleep, and unarmed' (321c7), soon to be exposed to the hazards of the world.

⁴ πάντα ταῦτα... ἄνω κάτω ταραπτόμενα δεινῶς, 361c4.

⁵ καταφανῆ... διεξελλόντας... ἐξελεθῆν... ἐπισκέψασθαι, 361c5-8.

⁶ μὴ πολλάκις ἡμᾶς ὁ Ἐπιμηθεὺς ἐκεῖνος καὶ ἐν τῇ σκέψει σφήλη ἐξαπατήσας, ὥσπερ καὶ ἐν τῇ διανομῇ ἠμέλησεν ἡμῶν, ὡς φῆς σύ. ἤρεσεν οὖν μοι καὶ ἐν τῷ μύθῳ ὁ Προμηθεὺς μᾶλλον τοῦ Ἐπιμηθέως· ᾧ χρώμενος ἐγὼ καὶ προμηθεύμενος ὑπὲρ τοῦ βίου τοῦ ἐμαυτοῦ παντὸς πάντα ταῦτα πραγματεύομαι, καὶ εἰ σὺ ἐθέλοις, ὅπερ καὶ κατ' ἀρχὰς ἔλεγον, μετὰ σοῦ ἂν ἥδιστα ταῦτα συνδιασκοπίην.

Socrates complains, at the end of the dialogue, that Epimetheus gave no care for the humans; he exhausted his care on the non-human animals. The meaning of this complaint is clear; but less clear is the meaning of his worry that Epimetheus might deceive them and bring them down in their investigation. Socrates is trying to explain why he wants to get clearer about the nature of virtue and to return eventually to the question of virtue's teachability. He and Protagoras have come to a tentative position that virtues are the same, that all virtues are knowledge, and that knowledge is teachable; but this position fits poorly with Socrates' social observations about virtue in Athens and with Protagoras' pedagogical observation that the virtues do differ in important respects. Perhaps then Socrates fears lest they press on and settle into a premature agreement about the nature of virtue. This agreement would foreclose closer analysis—thereby 'bringing the investigation down'—and sticking them on a thesis that they would not accept were they to canvass a broader set of considerations—thereby 'deceiving them.' This would explain Socrates' fear of deception and being brought down; it still does not explain the relevance of the figure of Epimetheus. The idea must be that Epimetheus, despite not being completely wise (321b9) certainly looks clever. He makes calculations, discriminations, compromises, and determinations, and does so repeatedly. From his concentrated action, it would seem that he would do a fine job. Just so, Socrates' conversation with Protagoras, taking more than forty-five pages to report, looks full of intelligent sallies, responses, developments, and decisions. But just as Epimetheus made a most crucial error, neglecting altogether the humans, Socrates and Prometheus made their most crucial error, neglecting altogether to define the central feature of the humans, their virtue. Epimetheus is the figure, even the ideal, of the eager, intellectually competent, caring, and hardworking person who, all the same, forgets what might matter most. He lacks the habit of standing back from his work and examining whether he gives priority to that which actually deserves the most priority, rather than whatever merely feels most urgent. Socrates is saying that the attendees at Callias' party risk the same attitude, taking pride in careful analysis without deploying the power of human rationality to assess what, in the final analysis, as we say, really matters.

Socrates goes on to say that Epimetheus does not please him as much as Prometheus does. This at first sounds strange. Protagoras did not originally set out to create appealing characters, but to tell an etiological tale. Epimetheus' imperfections played a narratively important role; it is obvious that Socrates, as well as anyone else, would disprefer the god whose name was glossed as 'Hindsight'. But we must remember that Protagoras' Prometheus had his own significant imperfections. He was at first perplexed by the humans' lack of outfitting (321c9), and he resorted to stealing (c10), and he could not procure for them political ability, leaving them vulnerable to civil strife (321d5, 322b1-c1). Thus it makes sense that Socrates would find it informative to rank his preferences. He prefers Prometheus' strengths, despite his weaknesses, to Epimetheus' strengths, given his weaknesses.

Rejecting the one brother for the other, Socrates says he 'makes use of' Prometheus.⁷ This means that he makes use of the image of Prometheus. As a human Socrates cannot put the actual Prometheus to use; even if he could, the humans already have the skills Prometheus once procured for them. Thus despite the absence of any language for 'picture', 'icon', or 'paradigm', Socrates can only be said to make use of the image of Prometheus. This is not difficult to see. Harder to see is to what purpose he puts the image of Prometheus. Protagoras deploys the mythic tale of Prometheus' provisioning of humans to contrast the differential dispersion of practical skills with Zeus' equal dispersion of justice and shame (322c7-d1). Socrates, by contrast, does

⁷ ὃ χρώμενος, 361d4.

not use the image to explain something historical or, at any rate, sociological. Only the immediate context can make clear what Socrates means to say.

Besides the comparison with Epimetheus and the admission that Socrates wants to reinvestigate the nature of virtue, Socrates gives only one piece of explanation about his remark that he puts (the image of) Prometheus to use: ‘it is in exercising *promêtheia* (*promêthoumenos*) over my whole life that I trouble myself with all these matters’ (361d5-6). The most obvious thing about this explanation is the pun on Prometheus and *promêthoumai* it deploys.⁸ With this pun Socrates sounds like he is saying that his acting as Prometheus (‘Prometheus-izing’) over, or with respect to, his own life explains his taking trouble to investigate virtue. It sounds like he takes Prometheus as the ideal personage to emulate when getting out of a tough argumentative bind. What this means, however, depends on what aspect of Protagoras’ Prometheus Socrates focuses on.

We know seven facts about Protagoras’ Prometheus. (i) The gods judge him and his brother suitable for the distribution of the animal features (320d5). (ii) Prometheus accedes to his brother’s request to be allowed to do the distribution (320e1). (iii) Prometheus examines his brothers’ distribution (320e1, 321c4). (iv) Prometheus wants to save the humans (321c9). (v) In his perplexity, Prometheus steals fire and technical prowess from Hephaestus and Athena (321d1). (vi) Prometheus cannot steal political wisdom, for Zeus guards it (321d5-9). (vii) Prometheus eventually stands trial for the theft he performed for the humans’ sake (322a3).

Socrates’ image of Prometheus depends on the Protagorean picture (*en tōi muthōi*, 361d3), and so his ideal must reflect one or more of the features adumbrated earlier in the dialogue. If we are to understand this ideal, we must determine which makes sense of or clarifies Socrates’ self-directed attitude, an attitude that prompts him to keep investigating virtue. The most obvious connection is the one made by the language of investigation (*episkopein*), (iii). Prometheus investigates the quality of his brother’s distribution, seeks out its inadequacies, and resolves to repair it. Socrates investigates the quality of his and Protagoras’ argument, seeks out its inadequacies, and again resolves to repair it. Of course, Prometheus must pursue this investigation because he has divided the labor with his brother (i-ii). Similarly Socrates, who enunciates his desire to share the pursuit of human virtue with Protagoras (*sundiaskopoiên*, 361d7, cf. 347c1-348b1). Socrates’ suspicion that the virtues cannot simply be procured and conveyed is suggested by Prometheus’ inability to steal justice and shame from Zeus (322c3), (vi). In this view he differs from Protagoras’ pedagogical optimism (318a6-319a7). Socrates’ continuous efforts for the good of the humans does eventually result in his standing trial (vii). There is one final element of Protagoras’ Prometheus, and it is the most famous one: Prometheus’ philanthropy (iv). Socrates’ concern for virtue looks to be a concern for humans, in this case Hippocrates and other potential students of Protagoras (cf. *Euthyphro* 3d7).

The use of Prometheus with respect to ‘his whole life’—the use that leads him to want to keep investigating virtue with Protagoras and before the audience of students—seems in fact to be a richly polyvalent use, and the image of Prometheus seems to be a richly polyvalent image. By saying he uses Prometheus, Socrates posits that at all points in his life he aims to check out the situation as presented to him, and endeavors to improve it as necessary; he prefers working in tandem, having each partner oversee the other’s contributions; he does not suppose he can teach virtue; he risks his life in his dogged commitment to communal self-education about the good; and he has a sensitivity to what makes life for humans worth living, namely talking about virtue

⁸ Other puns on Prometheus’ name: Epicharmus fr. 12 K-A; [Aesch.] *PB* 85-7 and perhaps 506; Aristophanes *Birds* 1511; Euripides *Ion* 448, 455; Plato Comicus fr. 136 K.

(cf. *Apol.* 38a3-8). Perhaps Socrates does not at every moment reach the divine status of a Prometheus; the ideal simply keeps him focused on this broad but coherent range of goals.

As it turns out, the participle *promêthoumenos* could account for some of these aspects, even without the pun. Usually translated as ‘having forethought,’ it means being conscientious, determining what has the most significance for some decision and reflecting on it, and dealing well with ignorance.⁹ Socrates does describe the kind of due deliberation he prefers with this verb or the related noun or adjective on occasions elsewhere in the corpus (REF). And Protagoras had earlier in their conversation said that Socrates exercises *promêtheia* on his behalf, letting him choose to speak before a broad audience (316c6). But clearly the verb, as morally complex as it may be, does not capture the many dimensions—investigative, restorative, cooperative, humbling, philanthropic, and altruistic—of the image of Prometheus. The verb therefore does not provide as compelling an image of the person one could be, the person that Socrates strives for, and the ideal that even Hippocrates, Alcibiades, and even Callias and Protagoras could themselves seek to emulate. It also does not provide as vivid a picture of the person Socrates aims to be. We think we know who Socrates is, since we see him depicted across thousands of pages of Plato’s dialogues, but this image treats us to the guidelines he himself strains to fill.

We have not yet broached one possibility suggested by Socrates’ claim that the image of Prometheus pleases him more than the image of Epimetheus. This comparative judgment hints at a more complicated role of images in a person’s life. Socrates may be admitting that, for all his weaknesses, Epimetheus still provides a certain positive image for him, that of the eager persuader, helper, and distributor. That Socrates is pleased less by that image than by the other may mean that he wishes it would have less motivating power over him than the other; but it may still have some power, desirable or not. After all, it is in part Socrates who got the conversation into the muddle he accuses Epimetheus of representing. Perhaps Socrates thinks that Epimetheus and Prometheus form a characteristic pair of images; perhaps he even thinks that Protagoras, clever man he is, apparently prefers Epimetheus over Prometheus. It does seem true that self-improvement comes not just from positing and committing oneself to a productive self-image, but from arbitrating between multiple active and enticing images.

In the *Protagoras* Socrates encourages self-knowledge.¹⁰ The language of exercising *promêtheia* over one’s whole life echoes the self-reflection essential to self-knowledge. The language of using the image of Prometheus enriches the notion of self-knowledge, as a choosing of the kind of person one would like to be.

3. Typhon

Early in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates again uses an image of a god—this one more familiar—to help him understand himself, by presenting two possible selves to himself. Socrates has just explained that he has no time to explain the source of the popular Athenian myths, having been yet unable to obey the Delphic inscription to know himself. Rather than giving more plausible explanations for Boreas and centaurs and so forth, he looks into himself. At first he says nothing about the content of the ‘himself’ (*emauton*, 229e6, 230a3) he wants to know except that it differs from ‘foreign things’ (*ta allotria*), that it is something that could, with effort, be known, that it is something the Delphic inscription would take pains to urge knowing, and that it is something more personal than the content of the usual objects of myth-explanation. At the end of

⁹ See Moore (forthcoming a).

¹⁰ See Moore (forthcoming b).

this exchange, however, he provides a little more information. He specifies that he wants to know

whether I happen to be some sort of beast more complicated and inflamed than Typhon, or whether I am a gentler and simpler animal, sharing by nature in some divine and unconceited portion. (*Phdr.* 230a3-6)¹¹

The image of the Typhon, the famous contestant to Zeus' ascendancy, does not provide Socrates with the image of what he might be, but a barrier between two other kinds of being he might be. Again Socrates is using an image, but unlike his use of the image of Prometheus, which he deploys as an ideal, his use of the image of Typhon provides, like Epimetheus, a counter-ideal.

Socrates used the image of Prometheus because it was handy, punned on *promêthoumai*, and evinced the very qualities he wanted to emphasize as ideal throughout his conversations in the *Protagoras*. As it turns out, Plato found the image of Prometheus fecund enough to use it in two other dialogues.¹² Socrates' reasons for using the image of Typhon in the *Phaedrus*, the only occurrence of the image in the dialogues, and specifically in this context of self-knowledge, are less apparent. It is often thought that Typhon indicates various facts about the human soul—the nature of its inner unity or disunity, the region if any that survives bodily death—but Socrates does not mention the soul here.¹³ His use of the Typhon image is complicated also by the fact that Socrates uses other imagery later in his conversation with Phaedrus, in particular the charioteer, car, and horses when describing the soul and the lover in the *Palinode*, but also the counter-image of the shepherds beneath the cicada-songs.

Plato's deployment of Typhon in the *Phaedrus* might have two specific points of literary-historical reference. In the Aeschylean *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus, bolted to the mountainside, chafes at the advice of the visiting Okeanus. Okeanus has been telling him to know himself, reconcile himself to Zeus' ascendancy, and stop yelling so much and so angrily (*PB* 309-327). Prometheus hears this but asks Oceanus to leave. It will be for his own good (330-344, 374); he risks disaster by placing himself so near a combustible conflict. Take as an example, Prometheus says, Typhon. This hundred-headed, hostile, monstrous being tried earlier to contest with divine tyranny, boasting loftily. He did not succeed, and he too got pinned to, or set under, a mountain. Zeus' punishment did not, however, convince Typhon to permanent silence; Mt. Etna would someday erupt with fiery and devastating effect (351-71). Prometheus' remarks in this play show that by the mid-fifth century, people could perceive a useful parallel between the stories of Prometheus and Typhon. Typhon raged against Zeus' power and he spoke with great self-regard and vituperation. This rage and conceit, both the author the *Prometheus Bound* and Hesiod suggest, was motivated by no more than a hunger for power. Even when Typhon was laid low, shown where the true cosmic force resides, he could not control himself; his anger kept seething, to the detriment of all around.¹⁴ Prometheus, by contrast, claims foresight and some degree of self-control.

¹¹ εἶτε τι θηρίον ὄν τυγχάνω Τυφῶνος πολυπλοκώτερον καὶ μᾶλλον ἐπιτεθυμμένον, εἶτε ἡμερώτερόν τε καὶ ἀπλούστερον ζῶον, θείας τινὸς καὶ ἀτύφου μοίρας φύσει μετέχον

¹² On its use in *Phlb.* 16c5-17a5, see Thomas (2006); it also appears in *Pol.* 274c6-e2.

¹³ For only the most recent assessments of Typhon in the *Phaedrus* see Yunis (2011), 94, Werner (2012), 36-43, Ryan (2012), 102, Bradley (2012), 38, 48-54, 95-6, Rapp (2014), 32-5.

¹⁴ Hesiod notes that Typhon is responsible not just for volcanic eruptions but for dangerous storms (*Theog.* 859-880).

Typhon—or the same monster under the similar guise of Typho—is also mentioned in our earliest extant piece of Socratic literature, Aristophanes’ *Clouds*. As Socrates introduces the Cloud chorus, Strepsiades provides a myth-rationalizing interpretation, calling them ‘mist and dew,’ but Socrates resists, saying that they serve as the muses of many intellectuals (323-334). Strepsiades finds this plausible on the grounds of famous lyrics that vivify storm-clouds, including ‘plaits of hundred-headed Typho’ (*plokamous th’ hekatogkephala Tüphō*, 336). This lyric quotation leaves ambiguous whether Strepsiades takes Typho as a natural storm force or as a divine agent. As it turns out, the *Clouds* chorus takes on the shape of the aspects most characteristic of their viewers; they provide a sort of reflection of one’s self (343-355).¹⁵ Typho(n) is not directly assimilated to this function of manifesting of someone’s self, but the proximity of discussion could readily lead an audience-member, or later reader, to draw the connection. There is considerable evidence that Plato knew the *Clouds*; the similarity between Aristophanes’ (quoted) adjective for Typho, ‘plaited’ (*plokamous*) and Plato’s for Typhon, ‘many plaited, complicated’ (*poluplokōteron*), is striking.

This literary background connects Typhon twice with self-knowledge, and in the earlier instance, with the possibility of change, and in the second instance, with the question of agency. To be more complicated and more fiery implies being more intractable, less able to change, stuck in one’s begrudging or power-hungry ways. It is a picture of a self, gnarled and reactive, that can never unravel or cool itself, that advances in time but not in maturity. It remains a sort of natural force, like a thunderhead, dynamic but not responsible, forceful but without any power of control.

The other side of Socrates’ disjunction offers a self that is a calmer, less complex, partially divine, and unprepossessed animal. A calmer person is more responsive and readier to change in accordance with conditions or criticism. Less complex suggests fewer obstacles to these changes. Partially divine implies, in light of the *Palinode*, participation in rationality and readjustment to, or recollection of, a better and more justified way to live. Being unprepossessed, aware of one’s failures and weakness, is for Socrates the most important ingredient for self-improvement.¹⁶

The image of Typhon represents a cut-off point in one’s projection of the kind of person to be. Typhon’s multiheadedness may represent the many ‘heads’ Socrates depicts for the soul, in the *Palinode*. So too his persistent polyvocality and critical snarl, his desire for power and his disappointment with Zeus. But any more convoluted and irrepressibly noisy, and hope for improvement vanishes. Any less convoluted and noisy, however, and there is some hope for improvement. To imagine oneself as unlike Typhon is aspirational; to imagine oneself worse than Typhon is fatalistic. Prometheus tells Okeanus that he occupies a spot not so far from Typhon, but he implies that it is far enough that he could change for the better.

Sextus Empiricus misquotes the *Phaedrus* in a telling way. ‘Socrates... said that he was ignorant about himself, what he was and how he related to the world: “for I do not know,” he said, “whether I am a human or whether some other beast more complicated than Typhon”’.¹⁷ Sextus treats anything less complicated than Typhon as a human, with all its attendant powers with respect to its surroundings. Here, then, Typhon is an image of an assertive and independent

¹⁵ See Moore (forthcoming c).

¹⁶ See Moore (2014)

¹⁷ Σωκράτης μὲν ἠπόρησε μείνας ἐν τῇ σκέψει καὶ εἰπὼν αὐτὸν ἀγνοεῖν τί τ’ ἔστι καὶ πῶς ἔχει πρὸς τὸ σύμπαν· ‘ἐγὼ γὰρ οὐκ οἶδα,’ φησὶν, ‘εἴτε ἄνθρωπός εἰμι εἴτε καὶ ἄλλο τι θηρίον Τυφῶνος πολυπλοκώτερον,’ *Against the Logicians*, 264.

self beyond which one ought not to go. Put from the other direction, it is the image of what it means to lose one's humanity.¹⁸

4. Self-images for self-knowledge

The two images discussed above, the image of Prometheus and the image of Typhon, allow Socrates to characterize himself in a way that motivates, and explains, his continued quest to become a better person. This characterization may have a self-improving function; should he forget himself, he may call these images to mind. It surely also has an other-benefiting function, recommending these images to others (Hippocrates and Protagoras, Phaedrus) for their own acceptance as an ideal. But it is not clear that Socrates absolutely requires these images, either for drawing himself toward discussions of virtue or for inspiring his friends to self-improvement. Presumably Socrates' commitments to virtue and conversation run so deep that he need not picture them. And presumably his own example could suffice as a model for his interlocutors.

Yet in one case an image of selfhood seems especially valuable. It is when responding to the Delphic precept, 'Know yourself.' It is difficult to know what this means, and specifically what this 'self' is that one is to know. Action needs a target. An image of the self helps pick out that target. It is not that the image gives a bigger target, or, conversely, that the original is a too-small target; this is the sort of issue we might see in the *Republic* in the soul and city analogy. The reason we need an image of the self for 'knowing yourself' is that the original is not by itself targetable. This is because, in some sense, it has no identity, or unity, or boundary, until an image of it carves it out. The image precedes the defining of the original. The original becomes conceivable by being what the image imagines.

We construct this image, and thereby the original, in response to some charge, some claim against us. In the case of the Delphic precept, at the moment of being told to know yourself, you wonder: what is this self I am to know? The grammar does not help me: reflexives swing back on their subject, but not in any complete or deterministic way.¹⁹ I wash myself by washing only my skin; I cite myself by citing only my articles. The only hint I have about the content of the reflexive comes from the verb. In washing, I must wash some of whatever is washable; in citing, I must cite some of whatever is citable. So in knowing myself, I must know whatever of me is knowable. But a lot about me is knowable. So unless the Delphic precept 'know yourself' is simply trying to assign a lot of busy-work, it charges you to know only a subset of the knowable things. But which ones? We need an image to pick out a region of the knowable things that will count as the knowable self. The image, as it were, creates—through a sort of partitioning—the self as a thing I might productively know.

This very rough idea of 'partitioning' is important. It is not the case that you create yourself at the moment you take the Delphic *gnôthi sauton* seriously. Plato may not argue for a merely conventional existence of a self.²⁰ You could just as much create your visible self at the moment you take someone's 'Just look at yourself' seriously, or take your visible self to be merely conventional. What you do instead is decide what counts as yourself. I might decide that the 'yourself' of 'just look at yourself' refers to my way of acting around other people—perhaps, on some occasion, too enthusiastically; after all, this way of being is one someone might want me to monitor and curtail. So too the 'yourself' of 'know yourself' depends on the sort of thing

¹⁸ Hunter, in this collection, speaks about the literary life of Typhon after Plato.

¹⁹ Jeremiah (2012) discusses the use Greek authors make of the reflexive pronouns in the classical period.

²⁰ Cairns, in this collection, shows however that Plato does not exactly argue for the opposite, either.

worth knowing. Once I posit an image of the sort of thing I could conceivably know, then I can proceed to try to know whatever it is that my image points to.

This is the argument that an image is important: it is important to obey the Delphic injunction, and an image allows one to come up with something to aid one's discharge of that obligation. One might think that we do not need an image, because people really do know, through context, what the knowable self is. Yet Plato's dialogues suggest otherwise. Alcibiades, in the *First Alcibiades*, says that he thought that the "self" must be something really easy to know, but also that it must be something really difficult to know (129a5-6). Since he gives no reason for supposing that he has two starkly different standards for knowing, a loose and an austere one, we must assume he has two ideas about the 'self.' On one image of the self, it is really easy to know it; this is probably an image of oneself as the most important differentiating characteristic, in Alcibiades' case, his desire and good position for world-domination (124a8-b6). On another picture, the self is something else—Alcibiades does not say what—something else that vindicates the pride of place the injunction has in Greek wisdom. In a parallel and contemporaneous case, Xenophon's Euthydemus (*Mem.* 4.2) assures Socrates that he did not think that knowing oneself means knowing his name (4.2.24); but this denial admits the possibility of thinking that one's self is one's name, or perhaps more plausibly, one's reputation or public appearance. In any case, Socrates suggests that the Delphic inscription must mean something other by 'self' than Euthydemus, even on reflection, supposes.

There is another way that this argument for the importance of an image for the self might seem counterintuitive: if one identifies the self with the soul, and one hears 'know yourself' as 'know your soul.'²¹ If we were to so hear it, knowing oneself would simply take knowing certain properties of the soul worth our attention. This might not require images. As far as the soul's immortality is concerned, for example, an image is not per se necessary, only some evidence or an argument (e.g., *Phdr.* 245c6-246a2 and throughout the *Phaedo*). As far as the rational and non-rational aspects of the soul are concerned, an image might be rhetorically convenient but not strictly essential, if we had some examples of human action explicable only in terms of several parts of the soul. What is remarkable, however, is that in the instances where Socrates talks about the *gnôthi sauton*, the soul is never the immediate or explicit object of discussion. There is no doubt that whatever language one ends up using in talk about self-knowledge, that language should be connected to language of the soul. But that is a subsequent, not immediate, task.

5. *Charmides*

To show the importance of an image of oneself to self-knowledge, I begin by showing the negative case, where the lack of an image causes difficulties in understanding self-knowledge. The *Charmides* provides the best negative case. It is the dialogue with the most direct talk about self-knowledge, and yet it concludes with the tentative but to Socrates unsatisfying result that it is probably impossible to know oneself, and were it possible, useless. My hypothesis is that these unsatisfying results come from Critias' and Socrates' decision not to use an image of the self in their arguments.

Not far into the dialogue, Socrates begins querying his interlocutors about the nature of sound-mindedness (*sôphrosunê*). Charmides, having already failed a few times, tries to support the definition of 'doing one's own things'. But he fails again, because he gives no useful picture of the scope of one's own things or, in our terms, the nature of this self as owner. When Critias takes over, he tries the definition 'doing good things', but under increasing pressure abandons

²¹ Gerson (2003) helpfully discusses the difference between self and soul in Plato.

this to a definition he seems immensely confident in and proud of: ‘knowing yourself’. He gives a strange account of this definition, by appeal to conventions of greeting. He says that the ‘Know yourself’ is a greeting to those entering the Delphic sanctuary; in this case, ‘yourself’ is one who seeks the wisdom of Apollo. But Critias says that the Temple addresses this to entrants to the sanctuary not as advice but merely as a greeting; and furthermore, the Temple uses not these actual words but ‘Be sound-minded’ (*sôphroneî*). Finally, Critias says nothing about the sort of ‘knowing’ he has in mind. To top it off, even were ‘self as religious pilgrim’ a productive image and the one evoked by Critias’ gloss on the inscription, neither Critias nor Socrates pursue it.

Their conversation takes a rather different direction. ‘Oneself’ is swapped out for ‘something’ (*ti* or *tinôs*, 165c5-6), and then for ‘itself’ (*heautês*, 166c3), that is, the knowing itself, and then with complex universal instances of knowing, for example all instances or types of knowledge themselves and the knowing itself, or knowing and ignorance. Socrates and Critias justify these transformations on the basis of the apparent identity between, for example, knowing knowledge and (therefore also) knowing ignorance. There are some respects in which the course of argument could be cogently reconstructed, especially by use of an epistemic view of the mind. But as a conversation itself, there are some major problems.

The first problem arises when Socrates presents some analogies that suggest that knowing oneself is impossible. Sight does not see itself; fear does not fear itself; the double does not double itself; and so on. Because there is no image of the perhaps multi-part self that knows some aspects of itself—no sense for the sort of thing it is, in comparison to the perceptions, attitudes, and comparatives—Critias cannot avoid assimilating self-knowing to these analogies. Socrates repeatedly prompts him to think whether self-knowing should not be so assimilated, but without a picture, Critias has no lever for doubt.

The second problem arises when Socrates presents some analogies that suggest that knowing oneself is useless. On the austere plain of argument theretofore presented, it looks like usefulness comes from knowing various discrete fields, like medicine, carpentry. But the self or the matrix of knowledge one knows is separate from all those discrete fields. So knowing oneself cannot be useful. Neither Socrates nor Critias ever bring up images of people or other beings who laud and explain the value of their self-knowledge as over and above the value of their particular pieces of knowledge. Without an image of the self that makes sense of the Delphic imperative, Critias again has no way to respond.

Many readers—but Socrates especially—acknowledge their skepticism at Socrates’ negative conclusions, that self-knowledge is impossible or useless. This is presumably because Socrates elsewhere, and even in the *Charmides* itself, treats the ‘know yourself’ as possible (*Charm.* 158e6-159a10, 160d6-e1), a pinnacle of wisdom (*Prot.* 343b1-4), and most worth pursuing (*Phdr.* 229e3-a3). What explains Critias’ failure to extricate himself from Socrates’ negative arguments appears to be Socrates’ decision not to give him an image of the feasibility and benefit of knowing oneself. Critias may lack the imagination to come up with images for himself.

6. *Alcibiades*

In another dialogue, however, Plato (or at any rate, a Platonic-minded person) has Socrates provide some images of self-knowledge. As we noted above about the *Alcibiades*, Alcibiades is uncertain whether self-knowledge is easy or difficult to attain. As I suggested, when he thinks that knowing himself is easy, he must think that his ‘self’ is his unique strengths and ambitions. Of course he has not articulated this implicit image of the self, and so he has not

justified his reliance on his implicit picture. But such an image of the self makes him respond complaisantly to the ‘know yourself’ directive. Given the intensity of his self-confidence, he thinks he has already satisfied it; but he is premature in so concluding. This image of the self—as one’s dominant desire and dominant strength—has the added disadvantage of limiting the way one might think to *improve* oneself. It treats the self as something given, possibly perfect, and worth acting on without revision.

Socrates goes on, late in the dialogue, to provide a contrasting and somewhat more explicit image for the self in the context of the Delphic precept.

I will tell you what I for one think that inscription means and advises. I hazard to suppose that there are not many models (*paradeigma*) of it, except for sight alone. ... If it advised one of our eyes, just as if it were advising a human, and said ‘See yourself,’ how would we understand what it recommends? (132d1-7)²²

Socrates goes on to say that an eye sees, in a reflective surface, itself (132d8), or, more properly, the face in which it is lodged (132e1, 133a1). In this model, paradigm, or image, the self is imagined as an eye, or just as probably, a face with an eye (or a pair of eyes). It gathers information, and can gather information about itself, but only indirectly, through another like itself. In particular, it learns about itself through its representation in its likeness if that likeness falls within, in some way, its focus. Just as an eye sees itself in the reflection of another eye, a self will learn about itself in its reflection—some sort of manifestation of its formal structure—in another self. This image of the self brings out several salutary features: that self-knowledge requires another person; that self-knowledge benefits from people who are very ‘reflective,’ able to re-present someone else’s character; and that self-knowledge may take some effort or an apt and lucky situation to attain.

Neither of these two images—Alcibiades’ implicit one, and Socrates’ explicit one—suggest a complete picture of the self. Socrates’, indeed, leaves a great deal undefined. We presume that the soul learns about itself in another soul when those souls converse, and perhaps converse about or with justice and virtue. But the image does not specify this, and it does not explain the way one changes oneself, or what it is to know rather than simply believe something about oneself. It does not immediately explain the way selfhood so imaged is the seat of *sôphrosunê*, knowledge of one’s possessions, and the ability to teach one’s citizens to become virtuous, all of which is later associated with coming to know oneself. All the same, Socrates’ image provides something important: the idea that selfhood is realized in social exchange, not in idiosyncratic self-reliance, and that it is about, at the most fundamental level, excellence, wisdom, knowing, and thinking (133b9-c2). It is an image that vaunts human potential.

7. Conclusion

Each of the images of the self so far recalled is radically incomplete. The ideas of self as Prometheus, in the *Protagoras*, as a creature gentler than Typhon, in the *Phaedrus*, and as an eye looking at itself in reflective material, in *Alcibiades*, prove aspirational in only small and discrete ways. The inadequacy of these images suggests looking for a more robust, comprehensive, even complete image.

²² ἐγὼ σοι φράσω, ὃ γε ὑποπτεύω λέγειν καὶ συμβουλεύειν ἡμῖν τοῦτο τὸ γράμμα. κινδυνεύει γὰρ οὐδὲ πολλαχοῦ εἶναι παράδειγμα αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν ὄψιν μόνον.... εἰ ἡμῶν τῷ ὄμματι ὥσπερ ἀνθρώπων συμβουλεύον εἶπεν “ἰδὲ σαυτόν,” πῶς ἂν ὑπελάβομεν τί παραινεῖν;

Wittgenstein wrote that ‘The human body is the best picture of the human soul’ (*PI* II §iv). He thought that in order to know about self-knowledge, we should know about the constellation of actions that answer to the sorts of things people want to know about themselves. How do people confront tough choices? How do they stay focused on long-term priorities in the face of short-term impulses? How do they assure to others their sincerity? How do they diagnose their own weaknesses? The unified “problem” of self-knowledge is a confusion, Wittgenstein thinks, because it conflates several modes of knowing and several forms of the self. But we *can* ask about self-knowledge when we ask about a person over the course of a long-term range of human experiences. It is in this way that a person—a body and its actions—provides the best image of the self.

From this perspective, we might wonder whether Socrates provides that image of the self-knower. He is surely the most well-developed image in Plato. We see him in actual human life. The image approaches that of reality, with such detail and diversity of action. It is the *living* that Socrates wants to see in the *Timaeus* (19b2-c1). Yet Socrates might not be such a good image. There is the perennial debate about the way Socrates investigates himself as he investigates others, if he even does do this. The debate might be insoluble, however, because Plato depicts Socrates in *only some situations*. We do not see Socrates doing *everything* he might do. Socrates must often act privately, outside the gaze of Plato and therefore the reader. He is mysterious. It is the mystery of Socrates that prompts Plato to depict even Socrates in terms of images.²³ These images are helpful; they simplify, focus, and allow us to model or counter-model ourselves, one element of life at a time.

I noted at the chapter’s beginning that I do not know whether an image is necessary for thinking about the self or self-knowledge. Now I note that I do not know whether we can avoid using images for thinking about the self or self-knowledge. The ideas of inventorying our desires, or perceiving our beliefs, or realizing that our soul is mortal, or immortal, or partially mortal and partially immortal—I suspect that all these ideas liken our self to something else: a warehouse, or a marionette, or an enduring object, or a mixture of parts. We might think that all these images have a problem. But this problem is not that they are partial; I think any image will be partial. Their problem is a moral one. They may not succeed in providing us an image—a necessary image—of the self we deserve to imagine, of the self we ought to imagine.

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²³ Belfiore, in this collection, identifies one of the ways Plato presents an image—or counter-image—of Socrates.

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