

WHAT IS *EIKASIA*?

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IN the *Republic*'s image of the Divided Line, Plato divides belief into two species: *pistis* and *eikasia*. *Pistis* is a direct grasp of sensible objects and *eikasia* is an indirect grasp of them through their 'images' or 'likenesses' (εἰκόνες), namely: 'shadows, then reflections, ... and everything of that kind' (τὰς σκιᾶς, ἔπειτα τὰ ἐν τοῖς ὕδασι φαντάσματα καὶ ... πᾶν τὸ τοιοῦτον; *Rep.* 6, 510 A 1–3). For what appears to be a fundamental epistemological distinction, this is puzzling: what is so significant about beliefs about shadows and reflections? While there is no consensus, something of a majority view has emerged, which I'll call the 'standard reading'. This reading makes two distinct claims. First, that *eikasia* with respect to shadows and reflections—sensory *eikasia*—is mistaking an image for that of which it is an image; for example, mistaking a shadow for the object that casts it. Second, it adds that what Plato is really interested in is an ethical kind of *eikasia*, and it offers a separate account of what this is: the error of unreflectively accepting popular or influential ethical opinions.

I am going to argue that the standard reading fails, primarily because there is no viable way to connect the two types of *eikasia* it introduces, sensory *eikasia* and ethical *eikasia*: the first says nothing about ethics; the second says nothing about images. I will argue for a more economical account of ethical *eikasia*: it is the same as *eikasia* with respect to sensible images like shadows and reflections; the only difference is that the relevant images include representations of value properties. This requires us to accept that the contents of perception extend as far as value properties, and that, I'll argue, is exactly Plato's view in the *Republic*. Once we take this step, we open the way for an account of *eikasia* that integrates far better with the *Republic* as a whole. The standard reading gives *eikasia* a comparatively minor role in the *Republic* and one that is largely detached from the dialogue's major theoretical themes. In contrast, I will argue that *eikasia* plays an essential role in explaining the origin and prevalence of ethical error—and, consequently,

in explaining why there is a pressing need for knowledge of the Forms and a society ruled by philosophers—and that it does so in a way that draws on the full range of explanatory tools developed in the *Republic*, from its metaphysics to its psychology.

1. *Eikasia* and the Cave allegory

Before attempting an account of *eikasia*, one needs to decide whether or not it is represented in Plato's Cave allegory. I believe that it is, and in this I stand with the standard reading against its main rival, which sees *eikasia* as a way of studying an original through its image.¹ Importantly, the disagreement here is only derivatively about *eikasia*: the real disagreement concerns how the two readings interpret the Line and Cave, and especially the relationship between them. This makes it impossible to compare critically the two readings without defending an interpretation of the Line and Cave, which is a task that would require its own paper. Here, then, I will simply explain the assumptions behind each reading.

Consider our most basic evidence. Plato first describes *eikasia* during his account of the two lower sections of his Line analogy:

¹ This reading was recently restated and defended by Y. H. Dominick, 'Seeing Through Images: The Bottom of Plato's Divided Line' ['Images'], *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 48 (2010), 1–13. Other explicit defenders include J. L. Stocks, 'The Divided Line of Plato *Rep.* VI', *Classical Quarterly*, 5 (1911), 73–88; A. S. Ferguson, 'Plato's Simile of Light. Part II: The Allegory of the Cave (Continued)', *Classical Quarterly*, 16 (1922), 15–28, and 'Plato's Simile of Light Again' ['Simile'], *Classical Quarterly*, 28 (1934), 190–210; and J. Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (Chapel Hill, 1965), 114, and the authors mentioned in n. 5 would have reason to be sympathetic. The remaining views of *eikasia*—those that cannot be identified with either rival—are more heterogeneous, but there is a rough third grouping, which includes the reading I'll defend. These readings assume, like the standard reading, that *eikasia* is represented in the Cave but they offer more phenomenal interpretations of 'images'. Some of its clearer members are H. J. Paton, 'Plato's Theory of EIKASIA' ['Eikasia'], *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 22 (1922), 69–104; J. R. S. Wilson, 'The Contents of the Cave', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, suppl. vol., 2 (1976), 117–27; J. S. Morrison, 'Two Unresolved Difficulties in the Line and Cave' ['Difficulties'], *Phronesis*, 22 (1977), 212–31; and most recently J. Moss, 'Plato's Appearance/Assent Account of Belief' ['Assent'], *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 114 (2014), 1–27, who in many ways revives and updates Paton's reading. Moss is an interesting contemporary contrast to my view. While we begin with substantial theoretical agreement, especially about images and their general role in cognition, we reach very different views about what *eikasia* is: see nn. 17, 32, and 52.

καὶ σοὶ ἔσται σαφηνεία καὶ ἀσαφεία πρὸς ἄλληλα ἐν μὲν τῷ ὀρωμένῳ τὸ μὲν ἕτερον τμήμα εἰκόνας, λέγω δὲ τὰς εἰκόνας πρῶτον μὲν τὰς σκιάς, ἔπειτα τὰ ἐν τοῖς ὕδασι φαντάσματα καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὅσα πυκνά τε καὶ λεία καὶ φανὰ συνέστηκεν, καὶ πᾶν τὸ τοιοῦτον, εἰ κατανοεῖς. . . τὸ τοῖνυν ἕτερον τίθει ᾧ τοῦτο ἔοικεν, τὰ τε περὶ ἡμᾶς ζῶα καὶ πᾶν τὸ φυτευτὸν καὶ τὸ σκευαστὸν ὅλον γένος. (*Rep.* 6, 509 D 9–510 A 6)

In terms now of relative clarity and obscurity, you will have as one section of the visible, images [εἰκόνας]. By images I mean, first, shadows, then reflections in bodies of water and in all close-packed, smooth, and shiny materials, and everything of that kind, if you understand. . . In the other section of the visible, put that which it [*sc.* an image] is like—that is, the animals around us, every plant, and the whole class of manufactured things.²

Visible objects³ have different degrees of ‘clarity’, depending on whether they are sensible ‘images’ or their originals. A few lines later, we learn that this is a division in the ‘opinionable’ (τὸ δοξαστόν, 6, 510 A 8–10), and it corresponds to a division between two kinds of belief, *eikasia* and *pistis*:⁴

καὶ μοι ἐπὶ τοῖς τέτταρσι τμήμασι τέτταρα ταῦτα παθήματα ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ γιγνόμενα λαβέ, νόησιν μὲν ἐπὶ τῷ ἀνωτάτῳ, διάνοιαν δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ δευτέρῳ, τῷ τρίτῳ δὲ πίστιν ἀπόδος, καὶ τῷ τελευταίῳ εἰκασίαν. . . (6, 511 D 6–E 2)

Join me, then, in taking these four conditions in the soul as corresponding to the four subsections of the line: *noēsis* for the highest, *dianoia* for the second, *pistis* for the third, and *eikasia* for the last.⁵

² Unless otherwise noted, the text of the *Republic* is the OCT edition of Slings (Oxford, 2003). Translations are adapted, at times significantly, from Reeve, *Plato: Republic* (Hackett, 2004). Translations of other texts of Plato are adapted from J. M. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works* (Hackett, 1997).

³ Standing for sensible objects generally. See *Rep.* 7, 524 c 13, in context, and J. T. Bedu-Addo, ‘Διάνοια and the Images of Forms in Plato’s *Republic* VI–VII’, *Platon*, 31 (1979), 89–110 at 93, for discussion.

⁴ Given the slight differences in their usages in English, I will sometimes use ‘opinion’ and sometimes ‘belief’ (and occasionally ‘judgement’), without intending to attribute any corresponding distinction to Plato. In all cases, they refer to that which *eikasia* and *pistis* are kinds of, which Plato usually calls *doxa*.

⁵ See also *Rep.* 7, 533 E 3–534 A 2, where *eikasia*’s status as a species of belief (δόξα) is more explicit. The description of *eikasia* as an affection or condition (πάθημα) has led some to argue that it is simply the *experience* of images, so that if one is aware of an image, one is *ipso facto* in a state of *eikasia*. Dominick, ‘Images’, 2, cites this as a reason to treat *eikasia* ‘as something that one experiences rather than exercises’. Similarly, we might think that the four conditions relate to the two powers (δυνάμεις) of belief and knowledge in Book 5 by being states of these powers (e.g. N. Smith, ‘Plato on Knowledge as a Power’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 38 (2000), 145–68 at 146 n. 3). But *dianoia* and *noēsis* are equally conditions, and Socrates describes these as ways of reasoning about their objects. Even if one

This is the basic textual evidence—and it is not much. All it allows us to say with certainty is that *eikasia* is set over images (*εἰκόνας*) and that these are likenesses of the sensible originals that are the object of *pistis*. What we say beyond this depends on how (if at all) we think this minimal description is developed in the Cave allegory.

There are two main views. Some commentators believe that the Line's distinction between *eikasia* and *pistis* is introduced in order to illustrate the relationship between *dianoia* and *noēsis* (which also involves an image–original relationship). If that is right, *eikasia* is principally a way of illustrating *dianoia*, and not a significant kind of cognition in its own right.⁶ From here, it is a small step to claim that *eikasia* has no place in the Cave allegory. The allegory represents 'the effect on our nature of education and lack of education' (*τὴν ἡμετέραν φύσιν παιδείας τε πέρι καὶ ἀπαιδευσίας*, 7, 514 A 1–2): if *eikasia* has little or no independent significance, it will hardly feature significantly in Plato's account of education. Other commentators, however, believe that the Line represents four *sui generis* kinds of cognition, each as literal as the other. After all, Socrates never says that *eikasia* or *pistis* have a special status—mere similes, expository tools, or the like—but simply calls them two kinds of belief (7, 533 E 3–534 A 2). Thus, they believe that Plato's account of all four kinds of cognition continues into the Cave allegory, where they feature as stages in the educational progression it represents. So understood, *eikasia* is represented by the first stage in

claimed that '*dianoia*' and '*noēsis*' only name states that are the *conclusions* of distinct ways of reasoning (though this would be hard to defend: e.g. 7, 533 D 4–7), this would make them cognitive states, but not passive ones, and the comparison would still suggest that *eikasia* is a cognitive attitude towards images that results from a particular way of thinking about them. See also G. Fine, 'Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V–VII' [*Republic* V–VII], in ead., *Plato on Knowledge and Forms: Selected Essays* (Oxford, 2003), 85–116 at 102–3.

⁶ See H. Jackson, 'On Plato's *Republic* VI 509 d sqq.', *Journal of Philology*, 10 (1881), 132–50; P. Shorey, 'The Idea of the Good in Plato's *Republic*', *Studies in Classical Philology*, 1 (1885), 188–239 at 229; A. S. Ferguson, 'Plato's Simile of Light. Part I', *Classical Quarterly*, 15 (1921), 131–52 and 'Simile'; R. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* [*Dialectic*] (Ithaca, 1941), 207; D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford, 1951), 77; J. E. Raven, 'Sun, Divided Line, and Cave' ['Sun, Line, Cave'], *Classical Quarterly*, 3 (1953), 22–32 at 25–6; C. Strang, 'Plato's Analogy of the Cave' ['Cave'], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 4 (1986), 19–34; and Dominick, 'Images'. For a critical assessment of this reading, see R. C. Cross and A. D. Woozely, *Plato's Republic: A Philosophical Commentary* [*Republic*] (London, 1964), 209–13.

the Cave allegory: the condition of the prisoners who mistake reality for the play of shadows on the cave wall.⁷

This disagreement separates the two principal schools of thought on *eikasia*. For those who deny that the Line and Cave are parallel—who deny ‘parallelism’—we learn most about *eikasia* by comparing it with *dianoia*. Since *dianoia* involves studying Forms through sensibles used as images, *eikasia* is understood to be studying sensible originals through images like shadows or reflections. For example, Yancy Dominick concludes that:

[*E*]ikasia is the state in which one can view an image [of a sensible] as an image—typically, it involves the attempt to learn about some object through consideration of an image of that object. This state, notably, does not usually involve any confusion of image and original.⁸

Parallelism, in contrast, leads us to the opposite conclusion. The prisoners *fail* to view the shadows as images and do indeed confuse image and original. It would also be at least misleading to say that the prisoners represent an ‘attempt to learn’ about sensibles. Thus, the standard reading, taking its cue from the condition of the prisoners, sees the essential feature of *eikasia* as mistaking image for original. This is combined with a view about the scope of the allegory: that by ‘education and the lack of education’, Socrates means the kind of upbringing that either succeeds or fails to make one a good person—one’s ethical education, broadly construed.⁹ This being so, the shadows on the cave wall do not represent any and all images, but images of the kind of value properties relevant to one’s ethical education; thus, in Socrates’ only direct reference to what they represent, he describes ‘shadows of justice’ (*αἱ τοῦ δικαίου σκιαί*, 7, 517 D 8–9).¹⁰ In short, the allegory tells us that just as the

⁷ This has been a popular reading since the turn of the twentieth century. See J. P. Hardie, ‘Plato’s Early Theory of Ideas’, *Mind*, 5 (1896), 167–85; R. L. Nettleship, *Lectures on Plato’s Republic* [*Lectures*] (London, 1897); and, most influentially, J. Adam, *The Republic of Plato* [*Republic*], vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1902).

⁸ Dominick, ‘Images’, 1.

⁹ Arguably, this is not a special subject of education, but what education (*παιδεία*) means for Plato. See *Rep.* 4, 425 c 4–5; *Leg.* 1, 643 d 6–644 b 4; and J. Wilberding, ‘Prisoners and Puppeteers in the Cave’ [‘Puppeteers’], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 27 (2004), 117–39 at 133.

¹⁰ There is an indirect reference at *Rep.* 7, 520 c 3–6. This form of parallelism has been influential since it was defended in the 1960s by J. Malcolm, ‘The Line and the Cave’, *Phronesis*, 7 (1962), 38–45, and shortly after by Cross and Woosley, *Republic*. Dominick challenges it, claiming that when he uses the phrase ‘shadows of justice’,

prisoners mistake shadows for real things, ordinary people mistake, for example, what appears good or just for what is good or just.

I am going to side with the standard reading insofar as I agree—and, for the purposes of this paper, simply assume—that the condition of the prisoners in the Cave allegory represents *eikasia* and that this is a specifically ethical form of *eikasia*. But I do not draw the same conclusions from the Cave allegory. In particular, I do not believe that *eikasia* is simply the error of mistaking image and original. To be sure, this is an error the prisoners make, but I will argue that it is not the best way to capture all the features, or even the essential features, of what is cognitively significant about their condition. A broader examination shows that *eikasia* is not merely a type of error, but rather a rudimentary form of cognition that we find (I argue) in many places in the *Republic*: the kind of appearance-sensitive, reason-insensitive cognition that seems to be crucially involved in Plato's explanation of both the cognition of the non-rational parts of the soul and ethical error.

2. The object of *eikasia*

The question 'What is *eikasia*?' can be divided into the questions 'What is the object of *eikasia*?' and 'What exactly is *eikasia* with respect to this object?'. Where possible, I will try to keep these questions separate, answering them in turn: the first in this section, the second in the following section. Here, then, my task is to offer an account of the 'likenesses' or 'images' (εἰκόνας) that are the object of *eikasia*. Socrates says that 'by images I mean, first, shadows, then reflections in bodies of water and in all close-packed,

'Socrates is not here describing the prisoners' contests, but rather the "evils of human life" . . . (517 D 5)' ('Images', 6–7). But Socrates is describing both: the prisoner's condition *represents* these evils of human life. Dominick fails to appreciate that the metaphor 'shadows of justice' has one foot in the allegory ('shadows . . .') and the other in what it represents ('. . . of justice'), as is common in Book 7. For example, the philosopher who turns to 'the evils of human life' is also said, in a clear reference to the cave, to be unaccustomed to the darkness around him (7, 517 D 6–7). The same mistake is behind Dominick's claim that the prisoners 'compete in identifying shadows not of justice, but of "people and other animals"': of course the prisoners do not see *literal* shadows of justice, whatever that would mean, but the shadows of people and animals that they do see are themselves metaphors that stand in need of interpretation, and the claim is that they *represent* ethical images, including those described (in a new metaphor) as 'shadows of justice'.

smooth, and shiny materials, and everything of that kind, if you understand' (6, 509 D 10–510 A 3). He goes on to tell us that ordinary sensibles—for example, 'the animals around us, every plant, and the whole class of manufactured things' (510 A 5–6, Greek text above)—are that of which they are images: ordinary sensibles are 'that which it [sc. an image] is like' (ὃ τοῦτο ἔοικεν, A 5), and images and originals are related as 'likeness to that which it is like' (τὸ ὁμοιωθὲν πρὸς τὸ ὃ ὁμοιώθη, A 10). So far, so clear: sensible 'images' are likenesses of ordinary sensibles (where 'ordinary' simply means sensibles that are not themselves images).

However, commentators have found it difficult to avoid introducing a further sense of 'image'. Specifically, they have found it difficult to accommodate the kind of 'shadows of justice' that seem to be the object of ethical *eikasia* without making the second of the two central claims of the standard reading, which by itself I'll label the 'second-hand belief reading': that the 'images' relevant to ethical *eikasia* are popular or influential ethical views that are taken over unreflectively. This has been the most popular view for over a century, a position helped by the fact that it has never received any direct critical assessment. But when so assessed, we find quite decisive reasons to reject it.

2.1. *The second-hand belief reading*

In one of the earliest and most influential accounts of *eikasia*, James Adam distinguished between two kinds of images: visible images and 'opinable' images.¹¹ The former are visible copies like shadows and reflections, and *eikasia* with respect to them would be, for example, mistaking a shadow of a man for the man himself. But these images, Adam thought, could not explain ethical errors. Thus, he introduced the second kind, opinable images, which includes what we grasp with our mind as well as what we grasp with our eyes. Among these images are 'popular canons or opinions' about what is good or just that are embodied in the works of culturally influential figures like sophists, poets, or politicians. Someone who suffers ethical *eikasia*, then, is someone who uncritically accepts these popular opinions and,

¹¹ Which Adam (*Republic*, 72, 157–8) calls ὄραται εἰκόνες and δοξασταὶ εἰκόνες.

thus, fails to see that they are mere ‘shadows’ of what really is good or just. Many commentators since Adam have defended views along these lines, taking ethical *eikasia* to be the acquisition of beliefs that are in some sense ‘second-hand’, derived either directly from other people’s beliefs or from ethical views embodied in more abstract cultural or political forces, like poems or laws.¹² This reading is seen as a solution to the putative problem posed by the move from sensory to evaluative images: from literal shadows to metaphorical ‘shadows of justice’. On the one hand, it is thought that evaluative images cannot be sensory, on the grounds that we don’t literally *see* value properties like goodness or justice. On the

¹² The following is by no means exhaustive, but it gives a sense of the range of readings that fall under this umbrella. Nettleship: ‘[when Plato speaks of] shadows and reflexions which are taken for realities we must think how many views there are which circulate in society and form a large part of what we call our knowledge, but which when we examine them are seen to be distorted, imperfect representations of fact, coming to us often through the media of several other men’s minds, and the media of our own fancies and prejudices’ (*Lectures*, 242–5). N. R. Murphy: visual *eikasia* illustrates how ordinary people ‘owing to the vicious cycle in current education . . . receive their own opinions back again . . . as if reflected in a mirror’ (‘The “Simile of Light” in Plato’s Republic’, *Classical Quarterly*, 26 (1932), 93–102 at 101). Raven: while *eikasia* in the Line concerns strictly visual images, the corresponding imagery in the Cave presents ‘a more comprehensive picture of second-hand impressions and opinions’ (‘Sun, Line, Cave’, 27–8). Cross and Woolzley: ‘second-hand opinions purveyed by the rhetorician and politician, who put shadows or semblances between men’s minds and the facts’ (*Republic*, 220–1). J. Malcolm: the ‘images’ that the shadows represent are false ethical beliefs that are copies of true ethical beliefs (the objects of *pistis*) (‘The Cave Revisited’ [‘Cave’], *Classical Quarterly*, 31 (1981), 60–8 at 61 and 68). J. Annas: ‘for Plato relying on experience covers more than just assuming in an unthinking way that the things we see, like trees, are what is real. It also covers taking over beliefs, some of them important like our beliefs about justice, which are second-hand, picked up from society in the way the prisoners see the shadow-pictures on the wall of the Cave’ (‘Plato, *Republic* V–VII’ [‘Rep. V–VII’], *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lecture Series*, 20 (1986), 3–18 at 15; see also ‘Understanding and the Good: Sun, Line, and Cave’, in R. Kraut (ed.), *Plato’s Republic: Critical Essays* (Lanham, Md, 1997), 143–68 at 155). T. H. Irwin: ethical *eikasia* occurs when we ‘accept, without question or criticism, the views we have been brought up with or have absorbed from our social environment’ (*Plato’s Ethics* (Oxford, 1995), 276; cf. *Plato’s Moral Theory* (Oxford, 1977), 221). Fine: ‘Plato speaks about contending “about the shadows of justice”—about, that is, ordinary, unreflective beliefs about justice’ (‘*Republic* V–VII’, 103). N. Pappas: ‘the prisoners who squint at and squabble over shadows represent all those citizens who believe what politicians and artists tell them’ (*Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Plato and the Republic [Republic]*, 2nd ed. (London, 2003), 110). Wilberding: the conjectures of sophists, poets, and politicians about what the many believe (the latter beliefs being *pistis*) (‘Puppeteers’, 129–32). M. Schofield: ‘the shadow in their minds left by the culture in which they have been raised’ (‘Metaspeleology’, in D. Scott (ed.), *Maieusis: Essays on Ancient Philosophy in Honour of Myles Burnyeat* (Oxford, 2007), 216–31 at 225).

other hand, Plato says elsewhere that people typically do unreflectively accept the prevailing opinion of what is good or just. The proposed solution, then, is to broaden our understanding of ‘image’ to include this latter phenomenon. Difficulties begin, however, as soon as we compare second-hand opinions with Plato’s actual examples of images: shadows, reflections, ‘and everything of that kind’ (καὶ πᾶν τὸ τοιοῦτον, 6, 510 A 3). Some commentators claim that shadows and reflections are just metaphors for the real objects of *eikasia*.¹³ But this is difficult to reconcile with the text. The Line itself is an analogy, but the four states it illustrates, and Socrates’ description of them, are literal. This is obviously true of *noēsis*, *dianoia*, and *pistis*, and it is unlikely that Socrates silently switches to symbolism only when he describes *eikasia*. For one thing, doing so would lead to highly convoluted imagery, with the lowest section of the Line representing (as Socrates tells us) shadows and reflections that in turn represent (as he fails to tell us) the real object of *eikasia*—a real object never explicitly identified in the dialogue. Notice also that Socrates defines the proposed metaphors, shadows and reflections, by their relationship to the entirely literal object of *pistis*, sensible originals. Finally and crucially: what is the metaphor? At least in a philosophical context, to warrant being called a ‘metaphor’, there should be some demonstrable analogical similarity between taking images for originals and unreflectively accepting popular opinions. As far as I’m aware, no one has spelt out how the metaphor is supposed to work, and no obvious answer suggests itself.¹⁴

¹³ See Wilberding, ‘Puppeteers’, 131–2; Pappas, *Republic*, 110; V. Karasmanis, ‘Plato’s *Republic*: The Line and the Cave’, *Apeiron*, 21 (1988), 147–71 at 159–60; and Morrison, ‘Difficulties’, 222; C. P. Sze, ‘*Eikasia* and *pistis* in Plato’s Allegory of the Cave’, *Classical Quarterly*, 27 (1977), 127–38; and Nettlehip, *Lectures*, 242–5.

¹⁴ On one side, a person bases (*a*) their belief on (*b*) a shadow or reflection that is a likeness of (*c*) some original. On the other, a person bases (1) their belief on (2) another influential belief. One suggestion is (*a*) : (*b*) :: (1) : (2). Perhaps the idea is that both beliefs are based on something ‘shadowy’ in the sense of unclear or less than true. But this drops the essential likeness relationship between (*b*) and (*c*). Alternatively, perhaps (*b*), the shadows, are analogous to (1), the unreflective beliefs, so: (*b*) : (*c*) :: (1) : (2). The idea might be: as shadows are passive copies of what casts them, ordinary ethical beliefs are passive copies of others’ beliefs. But images are supposed to *fall short* of their original, and these two beliefs seem equally inadequate. Moreover, if the shadows and reflections of the Line represent the *beliefs* of *eikasia*, do the statues of animals and plants represent the beliefs of *pistis*? Or in the Cave, are the prisoners’ beliefs represented not by their beliefs but by the shadows themselves?

The second-hand belief reading must, then, find a place for popular ethical opinions within the scope of ‘everything of that kind’, alongside shadows and reflections. To do so, these opinions need to meet two criteria. First, (a) they must actually be images (*εἰκόνας*) in some relevant sense. The word *εἰκών*, a cognate of *εἰκέναι*, ‘to be like’, refers to something that is an image or likeness of something else, and in this context we know that it refers to images of the object of *pistis*, ordinary sensibles. A shadow of a man is *like* a man, but not a man; an image of an *F* thing (a sensible original) is something that is like an *F* thing, but not really *F*. The relevant sense of ‘likeness’ here is not faithful resemblance but persuasive verisimilitude: it seems or appears *F*, without actually being so.¹⁵ Second, (b) they must, as images, play the right kind of explanatory role in *eikasia*. That is, their nature as images must explain why a person at the level of *eikasia* acquires the beliefs that they acquire. This should include explaining the prisoners’ basic error: believing that an image of an *F* thing is an *F* thing because, first, it appears to be an *F* thing and, second, they fail to recognize that it *merely* appears so. These criteria do little more than demand of any account of images that it describe something that is recognizably the same thing that Plato describes when he talks about images in Books 6 and 7.

The second-hand belief reading struggles with both criteria. With respect to criterion (a), how can popular beliefs (or prevalent cultural norms, folk wisdoms, or the like) *themselves* be images in the relevant sense? For example, if we believe that all pleasure is good, the idea would need to be not that all *pleasure* seems good, but that our *belief* itself is a likeness in some relevant sense. After all, if it is pleasure that seems good to me, what others believe about it is in this respect irrelevant: pleasure’s appearance would give me a reason to believe it is good whether or not the poets tell me so—it even gives me a reason to *disbelieve* them if they claimed the opposite.¹⁶ In fact, few defenders of the second-hand belief

¹⁵ See e.g. the context of Socrates’ reference to ‘shadows of justice’ at 7, 517 D 8–9, where it is clear that he means what appears just but does not in fact have any substantial resemblance to real justice.

¹⁶ There have been some attempts to make beliefs *bona fide* images. Malcolm, ‘Cave’, argues that the images are false beliefs that are copies of true beliefs with ‘distortions and misrepresentations’, though even he admits that ‘it is not obvious in what sense falsities are “copies” of truths’ (68). N. Smith, ‘How the Prisoners in

reading make a serious attempt to meet criterion (a). A little reflection makes it clear why: images are theoretically important only if the fact that they *are* images is playing an explanatory role. In fact, despite their prominence in Plato's own account, the second-hand belief reading makes no theoretical use of images at all.

Instead, it has its own independent account of why people adopt their ethical beliefs. The central claim of the second-hand belief reading is that ethical *eikasia* is an uncritical acceptance of the dominant ethical beliefs in one's society, beliefs that gain apparent credibility by being enshrined in laws, eulogized in poems, taught by supposedly wise sophists, or simply widely believed. The error is to trust implicitly the testimony of these apparent authorities, rather than examine their claims for oneself. This is the sense in which a person's belief is 'second-hand': they adopt it as their belief because it is a certain other's belief. Thus, insofar as a belief is genuinely second-hand, it is acquired not because of the content of the 'copied' belief, but because of the trust placed in the other believer. Whether the belief is ' ϕ -ing is just' or ' ϕ -ing is unjust', the person's reason for believing it will be the same: that it is, for example, what the poets say. So *even if* popular ethical beliefs were images of the right kind, somehow likenesses of the object of *pistis*, for the second-hand belief reading this would still not be *why* ordinary people uncritically accept them. Thus, against criterion (b), this reading suggests that there is no theoretical connection between images and *eikasia*.

We find, then, that the second-hand belief reading presents something that has very little relation (metaphorical or otherwise) to what Plato describes: it introduces both a new sense of 'image' and a new error for these images to cause, neither of which are present in the text. So what reason *do* people have to think that it is what Plato is talking about? I believe much of the explanation is the conviction (perhaps implicit) that value properties are just not the sort of things to be seen and, therefore, that we are forced to introduce *something* different from the sensory images that we find in the text. Consider, for example, Julia Annas's complaint that:

Plato's Cave are "Like Us", *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 13 (1997), 187–204, argues that the images are false accounts, like the definitions of justice found in Book 1, which approximate true definitions.

In these passages too much has got lumped together on the side of experience. Relying on the senses is taken to involve a passive and uncritical attitude, and accepting the reality of what the senses report is run together with accepting second-hand opinions about values. Plato is so eager to downgrade the senses because he has not bothered to analyse very carefully what ‘the senses’ covers.¹⁷

It is interesting that, despite attributing this view to Plato, Annas criticizes it for much the same reason that I do: second-hand beliefs do not have enough in common with the sensory images that Plato describes. Yet she still finds this interpretation unavoidable, presumably because she finds it difficult to imagine what evaluative images might be, if not second-hand beliefs. What I hope to show in the next few pages is that it is *we*, not Plato, who need ‘to analyse very carefully what “the senses” covers’. If we are to reconcile the *Republic*’s appeals to evaluative and sensory images, we need to ask: how narrow or broad are the contents of perception for Plato and, in particular, do they extend to value properties? Many commentators have simply assumed the answer is no. I will argue that the answer is yes.

2.2. *Evaluative images are sensory*

I will argue that the evaluative images that are the object of ethical *eikasia* are the same in kind as the shadows or reflections that are the object of perceptual *eikasia*. In other words, ethical *eikasia* is just a subset of perceptual *eikasia*, and there is no need to posit an additional non-perceptual kind of *eikasia*.¹⁸

¹⁷ J. Annas, ‘*Rep.* V–VII’, 16; see also ‘Good’, 155.

¹⁸ This should be distinguished from the claim that *all* perceptual experience is *eikasia*. Paton, ‘Eikasia’, argues that *eikasia* is perceptual experience as such (including imagination, memory, dreams, etc.), before its content has been affirmed or denied. Moss, ‘Assent’, defends a similar view. Consider Plato’s claim that perception is sufficient by itself to tell us what a finger is, without any help from understanding (7, 523 A 1–525 A 14, discussed further below). For Paton, since this is just perception—without reflection or active affirmation—it is *eikasia*. On my account, since it allows us to grasp an ordinary sensible—to grasp what a finger is—it is *pistis*. The accuracy of the perception matters: perception can adequately grasp some properties, like ‘being a finger’, but not others, like ‘being just’, so only perceptual experiences of the latter properties—insofar as they are misleading and, thus, prevent us from grasping a sensible original—are the object of *eikasia*. As H. W. B. Joseph, *Knowledge and the Good in Plato’s Republic* (London, 1948), 40, said in response to Paton: ‘it is surely strange that when Plato named as objects of

I think most people would agree that *if* other things were equal, we should treat all the examples of images in Books 6 and 7 as equally sensory. After all, images are sensory in Plato's explicit descriptions of them, and he never invites us to modify this description: instead, he moves seamlessly from images like shadows and reflections to images like 'shadows of justice', as if they are all, *qua* images, the same. But many commentators believe that other things are unequal, because they believe that the idea of sensible images of goodness or justice is intrinsically problematic and, thus, an idea from which Plato must be rescued. The usual rescue strategy is, as we saw, to interpolate a change in the meaning of 'image'. So understood, this reading is motivated almost entirely by a putative need for interpretive charity.

The problem is that, implicitly, this takes a dogmatic stance in a debate about the contents of perception, effectively failing to appreciate that it is a debate with *two* sides. On one side, it is sometimes argued that perception only has 'low level' content: simple and uncontroversially perceptible properties like colours, shapes, smells, or tones. From this perspective, the idea of sensory evaluative appearances is almost a category error. An alphabet of colours and smells could never spell something like 'good' or 'just'—after all, goodness and justice don't have a colour or smell. But on the other side, there are those who argue that perception can also have 'high level' content. A proponent of this view will believe, for example, that I can see the books on my shelf, and see them *as* books, even though 'being a book' is not a property that is reducible to colours and shapes. Similarly, they might believe that I can see that the books are on the shelf; that three lie horizontally; or that some are damaged. Arguably, this is closer to a commonsense view of perception, since it fits both ordinary language (we say 'I see books' not 'I see a mosaic of colours and shapes and infer there are books') and our experience (try looking at a bookshelf

eikasia the shadows and reflections of things, he meant to include the sensible appearances of things as we perceive them and not their shadows and reflections.' One source of the problem is an argument (10, 598 A 1–B 8) that is sometimes thought to imply that *veridical* perceptual experiences are included in the appearances that Plato is concerned with in Book 10 (see Paton, 85–6; Moss, 223–4); I think a closer reading of the passage shows that the argument's conclusion is that even in many ordinary perceptions there are properties that are *not* veridically represented.

and seeing shapes and colours rather than coloured books). Within such a theory, there is space for disagreement about exactly which properties can be represented in perception—can we see that something is fragile, dangerous, hot, disgusting, tasty, angry, or good?—but there is nothing in principle against including value properties.¹⁹

I will argue that Plato holds this second view of perception and includes value properties among its contents. Indeed, we already have one argument in favour of this: now that we have shown that the putative need for interpretive charity was misguided, the ‘problem’ that we started with—that Plato *seems* to treat evaluative images as another type of sensory image—becomes instead a *prima facie* reason to think that his view of perception includes value properties among its content. On investigation, the *Republic* gives us plenty of reasons to think this is right.

In the *Republic*, Plato says most about perception in the so-called ‘finger’ passage, where Socrates describes the different faculties the soul must use to understand different types of properties (7, 523 A 1–525 A 14). We learn that ‘the judgements of perception are themselves sufficient’ (*ικανῶς ὑπὸ τῆς αἰσθήσεως κρινόμενα*, 523 B 1–2) to tell us what a finger is, and it presents information, albeit less fully or reliably, about relational properties like thickness, lightness, and smallness. By ‘sufficient’, Plato means that the soul can use perception to grasp the property without help from another cognitive ability: ‘an ordinary soul isn’t compelled to ask the understanding what a finger is, since sight doesn’t indicate to it that a finger is at the same time the opposite of a finger’ (*οὐκ ἀναγκάζεται τῶν πολλῶν ἢ ψυχῇ τὴν νόησιν ἐπερέσθαι τί ποτ’ ἐστὶ δάκτυλος· οὐδαμοῦ γὰρ ἢ ὄψις*

¹⁹ For a modern discussion of these two positions, and a defence of the latter, see S. Siegel, *The Contents of Visual Experience* (Oxford, 2010). Among those who explicitly include value properties in perception’s high-level content, Plato would be a less controversial example. The view I attribute to him is that we can have a perceptual experience of something *as good* or *as just* where this requires no direct or even reliable link between a perceiver and actual instantiations of goodness or justice. This can be contrasted with those who appeal to ‘moral perception’ as a way to ground a realist moral epistemology (e.g. R. Audi, ‘Moral Perception Defended’, *Argumenta*, 1 (2015), 5–28). Such a view requires the possibility that we veridically perceive moral properties and do so in a way that is not grounded in, for example, prior moral judgements. It is hard to imagine anyone who could disagree with this view more than Plato. He believes that moral knowledge requires intelligible Forms of moral properties precisely because perception is insufficient. He is interested in the *misrepresentation* of value properties by perception, since this helps him to explain why perception *fails* to ground a realist moral epistemology.

αὐτῇ ἅμα ἐσήμηνεν τὸν δάκτυλον τοῦναντίον ἢ δάκτυλον εἶναι, 523 D 3–6). Thus, perception has a significant share of the work of representing the world and it represents high-level properties, like ‘being a finger’. Consonantly, in the same passage, perception is described as an interpretive faculty that is not limited to the role of passively recording what strikes the senses, but actively presents us with representations of the world: it ‘gives reports to the soul’ (*παραγγέλλειν τῇ ψυχῇ*, 524 A 2–3), ‘says’ (*λέγει*) something to us (524 A 7), and offers ‘interpretations’ (*ἐρμηνεῖαι*, 524 B 1). There is more than one way to flesh out this view of perception, but this is enough to show that it is a view that is highly amenable to the possibility of higher-level perceptual content.

Further evidence that this high-level content includes value properties comes from the role that images play in Plato’s tripartite psychology.²⁰ Consider the following argument:

1. The cognitive resources available to the non-rational parts of the soul are sensory.
2. The non-rational parts are able to cognize evaluative images.

Therefore:

3. Evaluative images are sensory.

The two premises here are substantial claims, but they are not especially controversial. Both have been discussed and defended at length elsewhere, and I will not add to their defence here.²¹ But in order to make clear the motivation behind them, it will be useful to outline briefly Book 10’s move from sensory to evaluative images, which is a striking parallel of the move from sensory to evaluative images in Books 6 and 7.²²

²⁰ We might also consider the discussion of belief in Book 5, where the ‘sight lovers’ (*φιλοθεάμονες*) have beliefs about the *sights* of not only beauty, but even justice (479 A 3–5 and D 10–E 4). This is certainly suggestive, although the passage does not make it easy to pin down exactly how the lovers of sights get from sensible instances (or putative instances) of beauty and justice to their beliefs about beauty and justice.

²¹ See e.g. H. Lorenz, *The Brute Within: Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle [Brute]* (Oxford, 2006), and J. Moss, ‘Appearances and Calculation: Plato’s Division of the Soul’ [‘Calculation’], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 34 (2008), 35–68. Note, however, that neither Lorenz nor Moss endorse (explicitly, at least) my conclusion (3).

²² The images discussed in Book 10 are the same as those that are the object of *eikasia*. Both are introduced as—very nearly defined as—sensory copies of ordinary

The first step is an argument that appeals to optical illusions to show that sensory images ‘exert their power’ on the non-rational parts of the soul (10, 602 c 4–603 A 8). It does so by arguing that even after our rational part has used reason to conclude that an optical illusion is false, there is still a non-rational part of us that continues to believe it. While the mechanics of the argument are tricky, it gives a clear picture of what the non-rational parts can and cannot do.²³ They are aware of sensory images and can form a belief²⁴ that assents to them. But they don’t have access to higher, non-sensory cognitive abilities: they cannot themselves use reason to figure out that an image is illusory (they are *alogiston*: non-rational or unreasoning) and they cannot correct their error in response to the conclusions reached by the rational part.

Plato then moves from these sensory images to evaluative images. The example of optical illusions is introduced simply to illustrate how the non-rational parts will be affected by the real object of Plato’s concern: the ‘images of virtue’ (εἰδωλα ἀρετῆς; 10, 600 E 5) that imitative poetry produces. He gives the example of a non-rational part’s inability to question, and thus automatic acceptance of, misleading theatrical appearances of how one ought to grieve. In short, the story seems to be that the non-rational parts’ sensory

sensibles, with reflections being illustrative examples in both cases. Many commentators over the years have made the connection between the Line and Cave and Book 10; recent examples are Moss, ‘Assent’, and Dominick, ‘Images’ (Dominick cites Book 10 as evidence *against* the idea that *eikasia* typically involves error, though he focuses exclusively on paintings and reflections, and does not discuss the images of imitative poetry that certainly are error-inducing, albeit in a complex psychological way: see Section 3.3 below). S. Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis* (Princeton, 2002), 57–8, denies there is a connection, citing, first, the fact that paintings lack a one-to-one relationship with their originals (unlike reflections and shadows)—though he does not explain why this is significant—and, second, a lack of shared vocabulary between the two passages. Yet the images of both passages are variously described as semblances (*φαντάσματα*), images (εἰδωλα), and even imitations (sensible originals are ‘that which was imitated’, *τοῖς μιμηθείσιν*, by images, 6, 510 B 4). And although the most common word for images in Books 6 and 7, *εἰκόνες*, is not used in Book 10, it had already been used to describe imitations in Book 3 (e.g. 401 B 2). Plato generally eschews the use of technical vocabulary, and various words can, as here, be used to describe the same thing. See also C. Belfiore, ‘A Theory of Imitation in Plato’s Republic’, *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 144 (1984), 121–46 at 129 n. 26.

²³ For a full reading of the argument, see my ‘Appearance, Perception, and Non-rational Belief: Republic 602 c–603 A’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 47 (2014), 81–118.

²⁴ The non-rational part of the soul believes (δοξάζει) something (10, 602 E 8–603 A 2) and the two parts form opposite beliefs (δόξαι, 603 D 1–2).

but non-rational access to the world explains their recalcitrant acceptance of sensory images, whether these are optical illusions or evaluative images.²⁵ This, then, is the second time in the *Republic* that Plato shifts from sensory to evaluative images without comment, as if there is no significant difference in kind between them. But this time we have two further reasons to think that there is indeed no significant difference. One is that the shift occurs within an explicit argument that would be invalidated by a change in the meaning of ‘images’.²⁶ The second is that this passage invites a version of the aforementioned argument: it argues that the non-rational parts are both (1) unable to reason yet able to grasp sensory information and (2) able to grasp evaluative images, which entails that (3) these evaluative images are sensory.

I conclude that in the *Republic* Plato recognizes, and makes significant theoretical use of, sensory evaluative images. Nonetheless, we might still wonder what exactly they are for Plato. For a range of simple value properties, like goodness or pleasure, the idea is simple, assuming we accept the tenability of high-level perceptible properties: just as a column of a certain sort can look like—i.e. be represented in perception as—a *doric* column, armour of a certain sort can look like *fine* armour. And if the armour *merely* appears fine—perhaps it is impressively ornate, but poorly constructed—then it is a fitting example of the kind of misleading evaluative images that are the object of *eikasia*.²⁷ It is more challenging to understand how Plato thinks perception represents the thick value properties that are mentioned in the *Republic*’s two key discussions of images: ‘shadows of *justice*’, ‘images of *virtue*’. One clue is that in Book 10 the normative force of ‘images of virtue’ comes from how they represent behaviour as pleasant or painful.²⁸ A plausible

²⁵ For a detailed defence of this reading, see Moss, ‘Calculation’.

²⁶ A number of key conclusions about sensory images are required in his account of evaluative images: that they are ‘third in relation to the truth’ (10, 595 c 8–597 e 10); that they are epistemically inferior (598 A 1–602 c 3); and that they affect the non-rational part of the soul (602 c 4–603 A 8).

²⁷ See J. Moss ‘What is Imitative Poetry and Why is it Bad?’, in G. R. F. Ferrari (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato’s Republic* (Cambridge, 2007), 415–44 for more discussion of the properties that might make something appear e.g. fine or excellent.

²⁸ Pleasure and pain constantly attend imitative poetry’s images of people and their actions (10, 603 c 5–9), and Socrates’ example of poetic images—apparently praiseworthy responses to grief—clearly compels its audience by the way various behaviour is represented as pleasant or painful.

proposal, then, is that for Plato representations of more complex value properties are grounded in representations of pleasure or pain, perhaps in a way that is, in turn, grounded in memories of and associations between previous perceptual experiences (the kind of empirical cognitive activity I will associate with *eikasia* in Section 3.2). According to this view, ‘images of virtue’ will be pleasure- and pain-tinted images of how one ought to behave or of what sort of person one ought to be. Since this does not require a direct grasp of concepts like ‘justice’ or ‘courage’, it is easier to see how they are accessible to the non-rational parts of the soul (which are the primary target of poetry’s ‘images of virtue’). At the same time, someone familiar with the relevant concepts could identify such an image of how we ought to behave as just behaviour, and in that sense perceive the behaviour as just.

2.3. *Eikasia as an explanation of ethical error*

Now that a view of *eikasia* is beginning to emerge, I want to take a step back and make some general observations about the role *eikasia* plays in the *Republic*. It is important to recognize that *eikasia* is introduced as a fundamental part of images that illustrate Plato’s basic epistemology and metaphysics and his account of the effect of education. Given this setting, we should expect *eikasia* to describe a fact about the human condition that is intimately related to Plato’s epistemology and metaphysics. We should also expect it to be something important: the elaborate imagery of the Cave allegory is designed primarily to represent the prisoners’ strange life and the surprising fact that they are, with respect to education, ‘like us’. With this in mind, the second-hand belief reading again looks out of place: that most people are content with second-hand ethical opinions is a fairly unremarkable psychological or sociological fact, with no particular relevance to Plato’s epistemology and metaphysics, and it does not seem to warrant the dismal appraisal implied by comparing us to the cave dwellers.

My proposal is that Plato is offering a general account of ethical error based on a view about value properties. Plato believes that evaluative facts are especially difficult to grasp accurately. This is a fundamental premise of the *Republic*’s project, since ordinary people’s failure to understand goodness or justice is what explains the need for philosophy and philosopher rulers. The point is not

simply that ethical knowledge requires grasping Forms, but that knowledge, rather than true belief, is necessary in ethics to a much greater extent than it is elsewhere. With respect to most properties, we have the less error-prone *pistis* (see Section 3.1), and even in other practical areas there doesn't seem to be the same need for knowledge: a farmer or carpenter, for example, can do just fine with a useful set of true beliefs. In contrast, people's beliefs about goodness or justice are often greatly mistaken and Plato is, consequently, pessimistic about our ability to live happy and virtuous lives: truly living well requires achieving, or being ruled by those who have already achieved, a formidable philosophical education that is well beyond most people's reach and confined to a very specific political setting. Plato goes so far as to say that 'there can be no happiness, either public or private, in any other city [than one ruled by philosophers]' (*χαλεπὸν γὰρ ἰδεῖν ὅτι οὐκ ἂν ἄλλη τις εὐδαιμονήσειεν οὔτε ἰδίᾳ οὔτε δημοσίᾳ*, 5, 473 E 3–4). Even allowing for hyperbole, this calls for explanation.

My point, in short, is that we will not find this explanation if we look only at the upper regions of Plato's metaphysics and epistemology, such as the austere requirements on the acquisition of knowledge. The essential other half of the explanation is his account of the sensible world, the two kinds of belief it produces, and why everyday ethical beliefs are of the lower kind, *eikasia*. By explaining why *eikasia* is not an adequate practical guide, Plato thereby justifies his pessimistic assessment of ordinary people's state of ethical education. Note that this pessimism is not about ordinary people per se, but about the world that ordinary people live in: the problem is not widespread foolishness, but the obscurity of evaluative facts. When it comes to value properties like goodness or justice, we don't have easy access to self-explanatory sensible examples and, thus, most of us rely on images or likenesses of goodness or justice.²⁹ Unfortunately, mere images of goodness or justice are usually false or misleading, so in the absence of knowledge, or a knowledgeable guide, we are likely to acquire false beliefs. Rather than the prisoners themselves—who are, after

²⁹ The implication is that not all properties are equal: e.g. we can identify large and small things accurately, yet not just and unjust things. See *Polit.* 285 D 9–286 A 4 and *Phaedr.* 250 B 1–5, which both N. Cooper, 'The Importance of *διάνοια* in Plato's Theory of Forms', *Classical Quarterly*, 16 (1966), 65–9, and Strang, 'Cave', 23–4, discuss in this context.

all, *prisoners*, compelled to face the shadows because their legs and necks are manacled (7, 514 A 5–B 1)—we should blame their imprisoned condition: the cave and the shadow-show that is the world they are compelled to live in, which represents the sensible world that we live in. The condition of the prisoners represents Plato's belief that when it comes to questions of value, we live in an inherently misleading world: what appears good or just is often not so, and what is good or just often doesn't appear so. That this misalignment of appearance and reality is an unalterable feature of the world is illustrated by the fact that the cave itself is not something that even philosopher rulers can change or truly escape, just as we cannot get rid of the sensible world and the faults inherent in it. Those who are made to return to the cave with knowledge of the outside world do not dismantle the shadow-show or lead the prisoners outside; the best they can do is recognize the shadows for what they are (520 C 1–5) and educate and rule the prisoners accordingly.³⁰

3. Eikastic cognition

The forgoing highlights the importance of understanding how *eikasia* is represented by the condition of the prisoners in the Cave allegory. Examining the prisoners' condition will allow me to address the second of the two basic questions about *eikasia*: I have so far concluded that *eikasia*'s object is sensory images, but what exactly is *eikasia* with respect to this object? I will begin by examining the prisoners' error of confusing shadows for real things, which is commonly identified with *eikasia*. I will argue that this identification is a mistake and that it has prevented commentators from noticing the more successful, if still rudimentary, features of the prisoners' thinking that allow them to function despite being confined to a stream of shadows.

³⁰ By blaming the limitations of the sensible world, not ordinary people, I am not suggesting that human nature has no role. It seems likely, for example, that misleading appearances are, for Plato, tied to how human motivation works, and in particular how we represent something as pleasant or painful. My claim is just that the conditions that explain *eikasia*'s prevalence are not a fault of a person or group of people, but a result of inescapable features of the human condition.

3.1. *The basic error*

Drawing on the Cave, it is common to identify *eikasia* with the error of mistaking an image for that of which it is an image, like mistaking a shadow for what casts it. Though I will argue that it is wrong to identify *eikasia* with this error, as if the word just labels a type of fallacy, I think it is indeed true that it is a kind of cognition in which something related to this error is fundamental. But a number of clarifications are necessary.

First, some formulations of the error associated with *eikasia* have a slight but significant difference. Gail Fine, for example, defines *eikasia* as a failure to ‘systematically discriminate between images and their objects’.³¹ Notice that this formulation remains neutral about whether *eikasia* is an encounter with images or with originals. This is because Fine believes that experiencing an image is not only insufficient (which I think is right) but also *unnecessary* for *eikasia*. As I understand it, her point is that if you have only experienced apparent justice, you will fail to recognize a genuinely just act when you see it; thus, you can have *eikasia* even while experiencing the original of something, not just its image. But in this example, is the relevant object of *eikasia* really the just act? The idea is that the person fails to recognize the action *as* a just action, so it will not *appear* like something just to them, but something, for example, unjust or foolish. Thus, since it is the appearance that matters in *eikasia*, the object of cognition is still an image, such as a mere image of injustice or foolishness.

The second clarification is subtle but important. The prisoners are introduced to explain the ethical mindset of ordinary people. This being so, they do not represent ethical *eikasia*, exactly, but ordinary people’s ethical *eikasia*, and this leaves open the possibility that there could be unordinary kinds of *eikasia*. In particular, while the prisoners’ ignorance represents something typical of *eikasia*, it is not obvious that it is essential. Consider the following (unlikely) possibility. Imagine I recognize ethical images as images, but have no experience of or information about their originals. I might (mistakenly) think: ‘Though these are just images, they’re probably pretty close to reality, and they’re all I have to go on, so

³¹ Fine, ‘*Republic* V–VII’, 102. A similar definition is given by Wilberding, ‘Puppeteers’, 129.

I'm going to base my beliefs on them.' Following this line of thinking, I would acquire all the same ethical beliefs as any ordinary person and *do so for the same reason*: I've based my beliefs on mere images. Is this still *eikasia*? How one answers depends on what one takes to be essential to *eikasia*: mistaking image for original or the cognitive condition that *results* from this mistake, namely, a condition in which a person derives their judgements entirely from sensible images, taken largely at face value. Since the Line primarily concerns kinds of cognition, not kinds of error, I take the latter to be what *eikasia* names, and the former to be its typical cause. So understood, *eikasia* is defined by what one in fact derives one's beliefs from—sensible images, rather than sensible originals or Forms—not what has led one to do so.³² Note that even though, strictly speaking, this entails that the standard view of *eikasia* as mistaking image and original is false, it remains a moderately benign falsehood. For the most part, it conveys a fairly accurate picture of *eikasia*, since it is true of most occurrences of *eikasia* and it entails what *is* the essential characteristic of all *eikasia*: that one forms one's judgements on the basis of mere images alone.³³

³² Thus, I agree with I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, vol. ii: Plato on Knowledge and Reality (London, 1963), 76, that '*eikasia* seems to mean "having only an image to go on"'. A parallel point can be made about Socrates' inference, in Book 5, from his claim that, with respect to sensible and intelligible beauty, the cognitive state of the lovers of sights and sounds is a result of their error of thinking 'that a likeness is not a likeness, but the thing itself that it is like' (τὸ ὁμοίον τῷ μὴ ὁμοίον ἀλλ' αὐτὸ ἡγήται εἶναι ὃ εὔκειν, 476 c 4–5)—i.e. mistaking sensibles for Forms—to the conclusion that they only have belief, not knowledge. While making this error is sufficient to restrict a person to belief, we should not assume that it is also a necessary condition of belief. Many would agree, for example, that although philosophers are immune to this mistake, at least some of their judgements about the sensible world are beliefs.

³³ This brings out the sharpest difference between my view and the view defended by Moss, 'Assent'. Rather than simply being limited to their respective objects, Moss makes certain internalist criteria essential to *pistis* and *eikasia*: *pistis* is active affirmation, typically after reflection, about how things are; *eikasia* is passive 'yielding to' appearances, without affirmation or denial. I think this misidentifies certain cases. For Moss, if one brings the apparent/real distinction to bear on a question, and affirms something as one or the other, this is, *ipso facto*, *pistis*. But ordinary people do, in general, grasp the difference between real and apparent, and if asked, they presumably would assert that (e.g.) pleasure really is, just as it appears, good. This leads to the strange result that *pistis* sometimes differs from *eikasia* simply by being a more brazen error: not just 'pleasure is good' (*eikasia*) but 'pleasure really is, as it appears, good' (*pistis*). A second problem is that Plato characterizes *pistis* solely by pointing us to its object: 'that which it is like—that is, the animals around us, every plant . . .' (6, 510 A 5–6). There is no suggestion that it requires a special

Two further clarifications are invited by the two occasions when Socrates explicitly describes the errors in the prisoners' attitude to the shadows. Notably, on neither occasion does he say that they are simply mistaking them for the statues that cast them. The first is the following:

οὐ ταῦτα ἡγεῖ ἂν τὰ παριόντα αὐτοὺς νομίζειν ὀνομάζειν ἅπερ ὄρων; (7, 515 B 4–5)

Don't you think they would assume that the names they used applied to the things [*sc.* the shadows] they see passing in front of them?³⁴

For example, if a puppeteer carries a statue of a wolf along the wall, and a prisoner points at its shadow and says 'a wolf is running past', he is misapplying the name 'wolf' to the shadow. But notice that the name 'wolf' most properly refers not to statues of wolves, but to the real wolves running around outside the cave, which represent Forms.³⁵ So we might think that they do not mistake images for *sensible* originals, but rather images for Forms. At this point, it is especially important to appreciate that *eikasia* is not any old error, but a fundamental epistemological concept defined in relation to Plato's ontology. It is one of the four measures in the Line and Cave of how well or badly we grasp the relevant Form, the principal determinant of which is whether we grasp the Form directly or indirectly through its instantiations. In this respect, *eikasia* is twice removed from the Form. The shadow of a wolf is

attitude to animals and plants, like reflection or affirmation. Yet for Moss, many beliefs about animals and plants will be *eikasia* rather than *pistis*, since for her *pistis* is a kind of *active* affirmation, which usually—she suspects always—follows explicit reflection (225–6). She recognizes that this means *pistis* will be rarer than we might think, but to make it so rare that it excludes many beliefs about sensible originals seems to contradict Socrates' explicit characterization of *pistis* (see n. 17 above).

³⁴ For a compelling discussion of the meaning and implications of this line, see V. Harte, 'Language in the Cave', in D. Scott (ed.), *Maieusis: Essays on Ancient Philosophy in Honour of Myles Burnyeat* (Oxford, 2007), 195–215. I follow Harte—and presumably Reeve in his translation—in using Adam's text over Slings's; nonetheless, I think much the same point results from Slings's text (cf. 515 B 7–9).

³⁵ Compare the second error (which I will discuss shortly) of thinking that 'reality is nothing other than the shadows'. Just like the prisoner's error about names, this is, so to speak, two errors deep. Their error is to suppose that, for example, sensible images of justice are the only candidates for what justice really is. But it would also be an error to suppose that just sensible *originals*—i.e. real sensible instances of justice—are what justice really is, since this fails to acknowledge properly the Form of justice (this latter error is the one that, in Book 5, the lovers of sights make about beauty).

an image of a statue of a wolf that is itself an image of a real wolf: *eikasia*'s object is a mere image of a sensible that is itself an image of a Form. As Plato will describe them in Book 10, such images are 'third place from the what is' (τριττὰ ἀπέχοντα τοῦ ὄντος, 599 A 2). What is unique to *eikasia* is still the last step, mistaking mere images for their sensible originals, so we are not wrong to associate it with this. But we need also to recognize that *eikasia* is a way of relating to the type of fundamental facts that can only be properly understood through knowledge of Forms: facts concerning the nature of things (like what piety is) and not, except perhaps derivatively, isolated empirical facts (like who mutilated the Hermai).

The second description of the error is the following:

παντάπασι δὴ, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, οἱ τοιοῦτοι οὐκ ἄν ἄλλο τι νομίζοιεν τὸ ἀληθὲς ἢ τὰς τῶν σκευαστῶν σκιὰς. (7, 515 C 1–2)

In every way, then, what the prisoners would take for reality is nothing other than the shadows of the artefacts.

Everyone will occasionally mistake image and original, perhaps mistaking someone for their reflection in a hall of mirrors. But even if these are brief episodes of *eikasia*, they bear little similarity to the prisoners' condition. If I confuse someone with their reflection, I still know the difference between a person and a reflection; it is not, then, a mistake that affects my basic understanding of the world. In contrast, the condition of the prisoners leads them to make a general ontological error over and above any individual errors: believing that 'reality is nothing other than the shadows'. Here the scope of the Cave allegory matters a great deal.³⁶ Since the prisoners' condition represents ordinary people's ethical *eikasia*, the lesson to draw is, adapting the sentence, that ordinary people 'in every way believe that *ethical* reality is nothing other than the mere appearances of sensible ethical properties'. Not *de dicto* of course: typically a person will not think that they are dealing with mere appearances any more than the prisoners think they are

³⁶ If there is no limit to the Cave's scope, then 515 c 1–2 would support D. W. Hamlyn's claim that *eikasia* is 'the state of mind of him who holds that sense-data or appearances are all that there is, who is unaware that or does not acknowledge that there are also material objects', '*Eikasia* in Plato's *Republic*' [*Eikasia*], *Philosophical Quarterly*, 8 (1958), 12–23 at 23.

dealing with shadows.³⁷ Rather, the implication is that, with respect to value properties, they do not recognize a distinction between what appears *F* and what is *F*. In other words, they assume that, as is indeed the case with many ordinary sensibles, what seems so is so: what seems good or just is good or just.

Finally, a note on error and truth. It is important not to confuse the distinction between *pistis* and *eikasia* with the distinction between true and false belief. Only some false beliefs result from the error of treating images as originals, and there is no reason to think that there are not some true beliefs about sensible images (whether recognized as such or not). Similarly, there are many false things that can be believed about sensible originals, even when recognizing them as such. The temptation to identify *eikasia* with false belief comes from its strong association with error. All belief—both *pistis* and *eikasia*—is open to error (only knowledge is infallible (*ἀναμαρτήτως*, 5, 477 E 7–8)). But *eikasia* makes a person especially prone to error, for at least two reasons. A general reason is that images of *F* things represent *F*-ness even less completely and accurately than sensible *F* things, which already have their flaws. A particular reason is that widespread ethical error is caused by the especially sharp disparity between appearance and reality in the evaluative domain (as I emphasized in Section 2.3), which makes *pistis* considerably more accurate in this domain.

3.2. *The shadow-spotting competition*

One lesson from the preceding is that the prisoners' error is not a departure from the norms that govern their everyday cognition, but an error that shapes those norms. This leads me to the second major claim of this paper: *eikasia* should not be identified with the isolated error of mistaking an image for an original, but with a kind of cognitive activity that someone is compelled to engage in when

³⁷ The exception would be the 'enlightened' *eikasia* mentioned earlier, where one recognizes that one is limited to images but trusts them anyway. Such a person could be compared to someone who knows that a reflection of a person is different from a person, yet who does not know *how* it differs, since they have only experienced people-reflections. Notice that even someone with enlightened *eikasia* would believe and act *as if* 'reality is nothing other than the shadows' and, crucially, since they assume images are accurate, they would make the same general error: they assume that when it comes to value properties, what seems so is so.

they only have a perceptual, image-confined access to the world. In particular, I propose that it is the kind of cognition that we get a glimpse of in the following passage, in which Socrates describes the returning philosopher's attitude to a sort of shadow-spotting competition that preoccupies the prisoners:

τιμαὶ δὲ καὶ ἔπαινοι εἴ τινες αὐτοῖς ἦσαν τότε παρ' ἀλλήλων καὶ γέρα, τῶ ὀξύτατα καθορῶντι τὰ παριόντα καὶ μνημονεύοντι μάλιστα ὅσα τε πρότερα αὐτῶν καὶ ὕστερα εἰώθει καὶ ἅμα πορεύεσθαι, καὶ ἐκ τούτων δὴ δυνατώτατα ἀπομαντευομένων τὸ μέλλον ἤξειν, δοκεῖς ἂν αὐτὸν ἐπιθυμητικῶς αὐτῶν ἔχειν καὶ ζηλοῦν τοὺς παρ' ἐκείνους τιμωμένους τε καὶ ἐνδυναστεύοντας . . . ; (7, 516 c 8–d 4)

If there had been any honours, praises, or prizes among them for the one who was sharpest at identifying the shadows as they passed by and who best remembered which usually came earlier, which later, and which simultaneously, and who could thus best divine what's going to happen, do you think that our man would desire these rewards or envy those among the prisoners who were honoured and held power?

My claim is that we should identify this cognitive activity with *eikasia*. An obvious and compelling reason to do so is that it is the cognitive activity of people in a condition that is typically thought to represent *eikasia*.³⁸ If that is right, then mistaking shadows for originals is only a small part of what is distinctive about the prisoners' cognition. This is, on reflection, unsurprising. The prisoners conduct their whole lives in the cave. Plato describes them holding court cases, debating justice, competing for positions of power, and condemning people to death—and doing all these ethical charged activities through the medium of shadows. This suggests a kind of ethical thinking that is comprehensively shaped by the fact that they are limited to images, and the shadow-spotting competition is our best insight into what this might be. However, while Plato is clearly describing something specific and distinctive, it is not obvious

³⁸ I assume that this is a cognitive activity practised by all prisoners. It might be objected that the reference to 'those among the prisoners who were honoured and held power' suggests a narrower application, perhaps to something unique to politicians and poets. I have two reasons for a broader application. First, the honours go to those among the whole group of prisoners (the subject is still the 'fellow-prisoners'; *συνδεδωμένοι*, 516 c 5) who are sharpest at shadow-spotting (*ὀξύτατα καθορῶν*, 516 c 9), which implies that the others engage in shadow-spotting, but with less laudable sharpness. Second, the skills described seem to be essential life skills for anyone confined to shadows: it is hard to imagine a prisoner functioning without *some* capacity for identifying, remembering, and anticipating the only objects they know.

what it is. We can see that it involves identifying and anticipating shadows by making guesses that are based on what we remember, and we can also see that it is analogous to some activity or activities for which people receive honours, rewards, and power. But where can we go from here?

Consider first the word itself, *eikasia*. In the Line analogy, Plato mostly uses existing words as placeholders for the new kinds of cognition he is describing: *pistis*, *dianoia*, and *noēsis*.³⁹ But *eikasia* is the exception, being much rarer and possibly a Platonic neologism.⁴⁰ So Plato presumably chose '*eikasia*' because he thought it was apt. A little reflection makes it clear why. The objects of the lowest section of the Line are *eikones*, 'images' or 'likenesses', and Plato wishes to name a kind of cognition relating to these. The natural place to look is the cognate verb, *eikazein*: if *eikones* are the object of cognition, *eikazein* is a good place to look for the manner in which they are cognized. *Eikazein* has a variety of related meanings: to represent by an image (thus, to paint: 2, 377 E 1); to compare or liken (as when Meno likens Socrates to a torpedo fish, *Meno* 80 C 4); or to infer, imagine, or guess something (*Meno* 89 E 2; *Sym.* 190 A 4). If there is an active side to *eikasia*—something it does with images—activities such as likening, imagining, and guessing are excellent candidates. They also do a good job of describing what is happening in the shadow-spotting competition: the prisoners identify passing shadows and make guesses or conjectures about what is or will be the case (they 'divine what's going to happen') by likening them with memories of previous correlations they've seen ('which usually came earlier, which later, and which simultaneously').⁴¹

³⁹ He even warns us against placing any weight on the specific words he has chosen: 7, 533 D 6–9.

⁴⁰ I find two near-contemporary uses, though neither is free from Plato's sphere of influence. In the spurious Platonic dialogue *Sisyphus*, it is used to describe a certain bad type of practical deliberation; Gallop translates 'guesswork' (390 C 7). In Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Socrates describes painting as 'representation of the visible' (*εἰκασία τῶν ὁραμένων*, 3. 10. 1. 5). An example of later uses is Plutarch's *Themistocles*, 29. 3, where it has a clear meaning of likeness or comparison and, consonantly, in Demetrius, *On Style*, a manual on rhetoric, it is used in an apparently technical sense for 'simile' (2. 80. 5).

⁴¹ For similar views of the connection between *eikasia* and *eikazein* (though not necessarily similar conclusions), see Nettleship, *Lectures*, 241; Robinson, *Dialectic*, 203; Hamlyn, '*Eikasia*', 19–20, who also connects it to the prisoners' shadow-spotting; and Wilberding, 'Puppeteers', 130. Adam, *Republic* (in contrast to his editor,

This is satisfying, but speculative. For firmer ground, we need to look at what the prisoners are actually doing. Clearly a central skill in the shadow-spotting is the ability to draw conjectural judgements from comparisons with previously experienced shadows: identifying present shadows and predicting future ones. A natural hypothesis, then, is that it represents a kind of cognition that draws conclusions about images by some purely empirical means, such as comparison and inductive conjecture. Though if it is a *bona fide* kind of reasoning, it must be one about which Plato has (like his returning prisoner) a low opinion: we are not thinking of reliable, scientific induction, but something more haphazard and conjectural.

I think that we can make best sense of this passage if we consider it alongside a number of other passages in which Plato draws a contrast between, on the one hand, reason and art, and, on the other, ‘mere experience’ (*ἐμπειρία*).⁴² The two most striking passages are in the *Gorgias* and *Philebus*. Although they appear in quite different philosophical contexts, from the *Republic* and each other, they have a relevance that speaks for itself, not least because all three appear to be attempts to describe the same thing: the lowest kind of cognitive activity in which humans typically engage.⁴³

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates describes a low class of activities—including rhetoric, sophistry, pastry baking, and cosmetics—that fall short of being genuine arts:

κομιδῆ ἀτέχνως ἐπ’ αὐτὴν ἔρχεται, οὔτε τι τὴν φύσιν σκεψαμένη τῆς ἡδονῆς οὔτε τὴν αἰτίαν, ἀλόγως τε παντάπασιν ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν οὐδὲν διαριθμησαμένη, τριβῆ

Rees: xxxvii) believes that ‘the translation “conjecture” is misleading, for conjecture implies conscious doubt or hesitation, and doubt is foreign to *eikasía* in Plato’s sense’. It is true that *eikasía* is closely related to a failure to doubt specifically that what appears to be the case is the case—but not to a failure to doubt *as such*.

⁴² The ‘mere’ is important: it is experience *on its own* that Plato is discussing here. It is easy to caricature Plato, especially if used as a foil to Aristotle, as an arch rationalist who hubristically ignored the role of experience in practical knowledge. But that is inaccurate. The importance of experience, as a supplement to reason and understanding, is a major theme in the *Republic*. A sufficient (though far from the only) example is the role experience plays at both ends of the Guardians’ education: their early education in music, poetry, and gymnastics and the fifteen years of practical experience—more than is devoted to either mathematics or dialectic—that they must do so that ‘they won’t be inferior with respect to *ἐμπειρία*’ (7, 539 E 3–6).

⁴³ The *Gorgias* and *Philebus* passages often come up in discussions of Plato’s view of *empeiria*, though not *Rep.* 7, 516 c 8–d 4. A notable exception is C. Balla, ‘Early Forerunners of Medical Empiricism’ [‘Medical Empiricism’], *Φιλοσοφία*, 48 (2018), 253–80, who draws on all three passages, though in the context of a reading very different from my own.

καὶ ἐμπειρία μνήμην μόνον σωζομένη τοῦ εἰωθότος γίνεσθαι, ᾧ δὲ καὶ πορίζεται τὰς ἡδονάς. (501 A 4–B 1)

It proceeds towards its object in an entirely artless way, without having at all examined either the nature or cause of pleasure. It does so completely non-rationally [*ἀλόγως*], with virtually no discrimination. Through habit and experience [*τριβῆ καὶ ἐμπειρία*] it merely preserves the memory of what usually happens and that is how it procures pleasures.

In the *Philebus*, Socrates presents a hierarchy remarkably reminiscent of the Divided Line (*Phileb.* 55 c–59 d): he ranks kinds of arts in order of purity (τὸ καθαρὸν) or clarity (τὸ σαφές), where the lowest includes rhetoric, music, and poetry; the highest is the philosophical art of dialectic; and mathematical arts lie in between. We are interested in his description of the lowest:

ΣΩ. Οἷον πασῶν που τεχνῶν ἂν τις ἀριθμητικὴν χωρίζῃ καὶ μετρητικὴν καὶ στατικὴν, ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν φαῦλον τὸ καταλειπόμενον ἐκάστης ἂν γίνοντο.

ΠΡΩ. Φαῦλον μὲν δῆ.

ΣΩ. Τὸ γοῦν μετὰ ταῦτ' εἰκάζειν λείποιτ' ἂν καὶ τὰς αἰσθήσεις καταμελετᾶν ἐμπειρία καὶ τινι τριβῆ, ταῖς τῆς στοχαστικῆς προσχρωμένους δυνάμεισι ὅς πολλοὶ τέχνας ἐπονομάζουσι, μελέτη καὶ πόνω τὴν βρώμην ἀπειρασμένας. (*Phileb.* 55 E 1–56 A 1)

SOC: If someone were to take away all counting, measuring, and weighing from the arts, the rest might be said to be worthless.

PHIL: Worthless, indeed!

SOC: All we would have left would be conjecture [*εἰκάζειν*] and the training of our perceptions through experience and habit [*ἐμπειρία καὶ τινι τριβῆ*]. We would have to rely on the ability to make guesses that many people call art, once it has acquired strength through exercise and toil.

All three passages describe a similar kind of cognition. First, it is empirical: at least at its most rudimentary, it seems to be the ability to repeat what is remembered, in particular a remembered pleasure. (While memory is not explicitly mentioned in the *Philebus* passage, it was earlier defined as the ‘preservation of perception’ (*σωτηρία αἰσθήσεως*, *Phileb.* 34 A 10–11), so it can reasonably be assumed to be involved in the ‘training of our perceptions’.) Second, it is ‘non-rational’ in the sense that it does not use reasoning (like ‘counting, measuring, and weighing’) or seek understanding (it doesn’t examine ‘the nature or cause of pleasure’). Thus, it appears to be a kind of empirical, non-rational ability we have when we rely solely on ‘habit’ and ‘experience’, *τριβή* and *ἐμπειρία*:

a combination that we find often in Plato, almost always as a contrast to a genuine *technē*.⁴⁴ If there is any difference between them, perhaps *τριβή*, ‘habit’, emphasizes repetition (literally it means rubbing) and *ἐμπειρία*, ‘experience’, emphasizes a previous acquaintance, both of which capture aspects of what we mean when we talk about ‘learning by experience’.

It is worth examining Plato’s view of memory more closely. Something that stands out in the passages from the *Republic* and *Gorgias* is that they talk about using a memory of what ‘usually’ or ‘typically’ happens. We can’t literally have a memory of what typically happens, since nothing is typical of a single occasion. So the relevant ‘memory’ must be either a series of memories or, more likely, some kind of synthesis of such memories: a series of memories of glass breaking, for example, seems to fall short of remembering that glass is fragile. (I take it that it is for reasons such as this that Aristotle introduces what he calls ‘experience’ as a separate kind of cognition in this role: ‘in human beings experience comes about from memory; for many memories of the same thing bring about the power of one experience.’)⁴⁵

But even if we say that he is describing a kind of cognition drawn from a series of memories, this still leaves open a wide range of possibilities. At its most sophisticated, it could be a judgement that is the conclusion of an explicit inductive inference, perhaps even with accurate estimates of the probabilities involved. At its most rudimentary, it might be a mere disposition to act in a certain way born from a habituated response to the repetition of similar experiences. So far, then, the possibilities range over everything from the work of an empirical scientist to a lion salivating when it sees a deer. Which of these is representative of Plato’s view?

I believe the answer is, in a way, both. We might think that the decisive evidence is Plato’s description of what he is referring to as something ‘non-rational’ (*ἄλογος*), and a result of mere habit and the ‘training of our perception’. This certainly seems to favour the salivating lion over the empirical scientist. But we need to be cautious here. We should not assume that Plato’s experience/reason

⁴⁴ E.g. *Gorg.* 463 B 3–4 (οὐκ ἔστιν τέχνη ἀλλ’ ἐμπειρία καὶ τριβή), *Phaedo* 270 B 6–7 (μὴ τριβῆ μόνον καὶ ἐμπειρία ἀλλὰ τέχνη), and *Leg.* 11, 936 A 4 (εἴτ’ οὖν τέχνη εἴτε ἄτεχνός ἐστίν τις ἐμπειρία καὶ τριβή).

⁴⁵ *Metaph.* 1. 1, 980 B 28–981 A 1: γίγνεται δ’ ἐκ τῆς μνήμης ἐμπειρία τοῖς ἀνθρώποις· αἱ γὰρ πολλὰ μνήμαι τοῦ αὐτοῦ πράγματος μιᾶς ἐμπειρίας δύναμιν ἀποτελοῦσιν. See also *Post. An.* 2. 19, 100 A 3–9.

dichotomy aligns with our own. In particular, his attitude to inductive reasoning seems very far from ours. It is not even clear that Plato recognized inductive inference as a *bona fide* kind of reasoning at all.⁴⁶ He might, then, consider mere experience to be non-rational and yet include in it activities that *we* would characterize as reasoning. Certainly judging on the basis of which things ‘usually came earlier, which later, and which simultaneously’ brings to mind something like inductive reasoning, and this impression is strengthened by the fact that it is said to be the experiential method of certain arts, especially if these include, as is claimed in the *Philebus*, arts like ‘medicine, agriculture, navigation, and strategy’ (56 B 1–2).

Medicine gives us some further clues. There was to be, and to a limited extent may already have been, a debate about whether medicine can rely on experience alone (as Plato implies in the *Philebus*) or also needs theoretical accounts that go beyond experience.⁴⁷ However, those who came to be called the ‘Empiricists’ (ἐμπειρικοί) in this debate describe a form of empirical thought very different from our own: not only do they embrace a description of medicine’s method centred on memorizing and associating experiences, but they combined it with a conception of reason that is as narrow as Plato’s seems to be, and crucially doesn’t leave space for any kind of inductive reasoning. Michael Frede, for example, describes them as follows:

They defend the view that we can account for our technical beliefs and even for our technical knowledge solely in terms of the senses and memory . . . To claim this seems to presuppose a particular conception of reason which is different from ours, a conception on which it is not true by definition that anything we would call ‘inference’ or ‘reasoning’ will be a function of

⁴⁶ The best candidate for a counter-example is the Socratic *epagōgē*, though many doubt that this involves inductive inference. M. L. McPherran, ‘Socratic *epagōgē* and Socratic Induction’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 45 (2007), 347–64, gives an excellent survey of the debate, himself concluding that many are indeed probabilistic inferences. Without suggesting that it addresses McPherran’s many careful arguments, I think it is important to recognize that the *epagōgē* can be persuasive (rather than purely explanatory) even if it is not an inductive inference. It strikes me that Socrates often appeals to sets of examples neither for empirical support nor purely for illustration. The aim is often to make a common property in a set of examples salient to an interlocutor, as a step towards persuading them of a general claim that involves this property (I think something like this is also going on in McPherran’s example of *Polit.* 277 c–278 c).

⁴⁷ The debate is Hellenistic, but for a discussion of its antecedents and how they might have interacted with Plato’s and Aristotle’s views, see Balla, ‘Medical Empiricism’.

reason. It rather seems to be a view which attributes some or all functions of reason, to the extent that it recognises them, to memory.⁴⁸

Frede sees the ancestors of this view in the fifth and fourth century BCE, where we find, on the one hand, a narrow and austere conception of the work of reason, and, on the other, a correspondingly broad conception of the work of perception, memory, and other perceptual abilities.⁴⁹ With respect to the latter, it might be thought that Plato is less generous to our perceptual abilities than this, since he clearly thinks of experience as a low kind of cognition, typical of lower or even pseudo-arts, and even as a source of error in ethical thought. But if we set aside his critical tone, we can see that he is also allowing experience considerable achievements: the pastry chef makes tasty pastries and the farmer's crops grow (sometimes ancient doctors even healed). This is more than the kind of mindless or animalistic activities that we might expect from pure memory and perception.

We find, then, that Plato has a consistent story to tell about the lowest kind of human cognition, one that makes it, from a modern perspective, a mixture of primitive and sophisticated: it relies only on the kind of perceptual abilities that we can imagine sharing with animals, and yet involves something that is at least a close cousin of inductive reasoning. With this in mind, it seems highly likely that when Plato describes the prisoners' identifying, remembering patterns between, and predicting shadows, he is representing the manner in which anyone confined to images forms more complex judgements, beyond simple assent to images. This makes it especially clear that *eikasia* represents not an isolated error, but a comprehensive way of cognitively engaging with images, just as *dianoia* and *noēsis* are comprehensive ways of reasoning about their objects.

3.3. *Eikasia without reason*

Eikasia has turned out to be a perceptual and—in a specific Platonic sense—unreasoning kind of cognition that plays a key role in explaining ethical error. It should not come as too much of a

⁴⁸ M. Frede, 'An Empiricist View of Knowledge: Memorism', in S. Everson (ed.), *Epistemology*, Companions to Ancient Thought, vol. i (Cambridge, 1990), 225–50 at 226.

⁴⁹ Lorenz presents his book *The Brute Within* as a study of the antecedents of the Hellenistic Empiricist/Rationalist debate in Plato and Aristotle, and in this respect it largely corroborates the distinction drawn here.

surprise, then, that my final claim is that *eikasia* is a kind of cognition available to (not exclusive to) the non-rational parts of the soul.⁵⁰ One reason to think that this is so, and possibly a sufficient reason, is simply that *eikasia* has turned out to be extremely similar to what we would expect non-rational cognition to look like for Plato, at least according to some recent interpretations of the latter.⁵¹ But we see a further and more direct reason when we look again at the passage described briefly earlier (Section 2.2) in which Socrates examines a putative opposition in the soul that arises when we use reasoning to see through an optical illusion.

As we saw earlier, there are close connections between the *Republic's* discussion of *eikasia* and its discussion of imitation in Book 10. Both are discussions of 'images' or 'appearances' that emphasize their low place in Plato's ontological hierarchy: they are mere images of sensibles that are, in turn, mere images of Forms. Equally, both emphasize how appearances are epistemologically unreliable in a way that has serious consequences in ethics: images give us incomplete and distorted views of the world, yet they are sufficiently persuasive to fool the ordinary person who assumes that what appears so, is so. Consequently, most people's ethical beliefs are deeply flawed. Unlike Books 6 and 7, however, Book 10 adds an explicit account of the psychological effect of images, beginning in the argument from optical illusions. The argument aims to show that images exert their power on the non-rational parts of our soul. Socrates asserts that when we reason our way out of an optical illusion, there remains a cognitive conflict in the soul: we have one belief agreeing with the sensory image (e.g. that a partially immersed stick is bent) and another belief that results from reasoning, which recognizes that the image is false (e.g. that in reality the stick is straight). Thus, the first belief confuses image for reality and the other reaches the real state of affairs behind the image—one is set over a sensible image, the other over a sensible original. If it were not for the unusual context, with both beliefs occurring at the same time in the same soul, we would hardly need

⁵⁰ Others who have made this claim include C. D. C. Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato's Republic* (Princeton, NJ, 1988), 139, and Moss, 'Assent' and 'Pleasure and Illusion in Plato', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 72 (2006), 503–35 at 522.

⁵¹ For example, Lorenz, *Brute*.

a second glance to see that the first is an example of *eikasia* and the second of *pistis*.⁵²

But this is surely the right reading. Notice that the belief attributed to a non-rational part doesn't obey the norms that usually govern beliefs, but is instead so firmly rooted in appearances that it fails to update even when the believer has decisive evidence that the appearance is false, and it persists even while being overtly contradicted by another belief that does follow this evidence. Plato is not simply pointing out two token beliefs, but marking a distinction between two kinds of belief, where the uniquely non-rational kind is defined by its inability to listen to reason and, thus, its reliance on, and implicit trust in, the evidence of images. So both this argument and the Line divide belief into two kinds, and they make essentially the same point: one kind of belief goes beyond mere images, but the other invariably takes them at face value, and is in this way trapped—imprisoned—by them. The only significant difference is that in Book 10, the lower kind of belief is held by a non-rational part of the soul.⁵³

While Books 6 and 7, in contrast, do not explicitly attempt to integrate the *Republic's* psychology, we do get a telling glimpse of Plato's position. During his commentary on the Cave allegory, Socrates tells us that education can turn the intellect in the right direction only if it turns it 'together with the whole soul' (σὺν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ, 7, 518 C 4–D 1)—that is, together with the non-rational parts of the soul. Thus, as a prerequisite for intellectual education, a person must possess the non-intellectual virtues that are acquired

⁵² There is also an interesting similarity to our *Philebus* passage, 55 E 1–56 A 1: there, the lowest cognition was what was left when we 'take away all counting, measuring, and weighing'; here it is what we get when a part of us is unable to use 'measuring, counting, and weighing' (τὸ μετρεῖν καὶ ἀριθμεῖν καὶ ἰστάναι; *Rep.* 10, 602 D 6).

⁵³ Moss, 'Assent', 222–7, uses this argument, 602 C 4–603 A 8, as the primary source in her account of *eikasia* and *pistis*. See also Paton, 'Eikasia', 86. My use of this passage differs in two ways. First, I do not take it to be paradigmatic. Plato's goal is not to describe *eikasia* or *pistis*, but to establish a conclusion about imitative art, so it is not always possible to generalize. For example, I think *pistis* is rarely either a result of explicit reasoning or a response to a problematic perception (see n. 32 above). Second, as I interpret it, 602 C–603 A does not support the conclusion that *eikasia* involves no affirmation or denial. Since this is not asserted in the passage, it would have to be implicit in the argument it makes. But in fact the argument appeals to beliefs that are strongly opposed to each other in the way required for the principle of opposites to apply (602 E 8–9), and as such we would expect them to be symmetrical: that is, not an active and a passive attitude, but opposing attitudes of the *same* kind, such as affirming (or denying) both *p* and not-*p*.

though ‘habit and practices’ (ἔθεισι καὶ ἀσκήσεσιν, 518 D 11).⁵⁴ A purely intellectual education would produce a character who is vicious, but clever (519 A 2), about whom Socrates tells us:

τοῦτο μέντοι, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, τὸ τῆς τοιαύτης φύσεως εἰ ἐκ παιδὸς εὐθὺς κοπτόμενον περιεκόπη τὰς τῆς γενέσεως συγγενεῖς ὥσπερ μολυβδίδας, αἱ δὲ ἐδωδαῖς τε καὶ τοιούτων ἡδοναῖς τε καὶ λιχνεῖαις προσφνεῖς γιγνόμεναι περικάτω στρέφουσι τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ὄψιν, ὣν εἰ ἀπαλλαγὴν περιστρέφετο εἰς τὰ ἀληθῆ, καὶ ἐκεῖνα ἂν τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο τῶν αὐτῶν ἀνθρώπων ὀξύτατα ἑώρα, ὥσπερ καὶ ἐφ’ ἃ νῦν τέτραπται. (7, 519 A 7–B 5)

If a nature of this sort had been hammered straight from childhood and freed from the leaden weights of kinship with becoming, *which have been fastened to it by feasting, greed, and other such pleasures* and which turn the soul’s vision downwards—if, being rid of these weights, it turned to look at the true things, then I say that the same soul of the same person would see these most sharply, just as it does the things it is now turned towards. (Emphasis mine)

This is a remarkable yet often unnoticed passage: it is the only place where Plato tells us what the prisoners’ chains symbolize, and it strongly suggests that they represent an intellectual constraint imposed by intemperate non-rational passions. It is well recognized that for Plato, undisciplined non-rational parts can distort a person’s rational cognition—for example, by inclining them towards false beliefs that conform with their intemperate passions.⁵⁵ Exactly how this should be spelt out is a complex interpretive question, but we can at least say that it makes sense to expect that what explains why the non-rational passions are themselves misled—they are passions of parts of the soul confined to *eikasia*, and, thus, to unreliable images—will help explain how they, in turn, cause a person to have false beliefs. A plausible explanation is that intemperate passions, guided by certain images, incline a person to take at face value those same images, and, correspondingly, make denying those images painful and difficult, since it entails denying the satisfaction of the passions. For example, the decent person in Book 10, after a loss, tries to resist his non-rational desire to grieve dramatically, since despite the fact that it appears satisfying

⁵⁴ I argue that this is the right way to read this difficult passage in my ‘The Soul-Turning Metaphor in *Republic* Book 7’ (in progress).

⁵⁵ See e.g. D. Scott, ‘Platonic Pessimism and Moral Education’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 17 (1999), 15–36.

and cathartic, he trusts the arguments that tell him it would do more harm than good; but if the passion is very strong, and resisting it requires great effort, this can cause him to give up his earlier arguments and assent to the false image of grief. Thus, his existing non-rational acceptance of the false image leads his rational part to endorse it. Or, in other words, the *eikasia* of the non-rational parts of his soul leads him to lapse into a more widespread *eikasia*. For most people who are, in contrast to the decent person, more fully ruled by one of their non-rational parts, this effect will be more comprehensive and will face less, if any, resistance. This gives us a way to interpret the prisoners' chains: their intemperate passions keep their cognition to the low level of *eikasia*, which accords with the passions' continued satisfaction.

Plato's account of *eikasia* has turned out to be thoroughly integrated into the connected theoretical concerns of the *Republic*, including its epistemology, metaphysics, and psychology. This is important not only because integration is intrinsically desirable, but also because it does justice to its presentation in the Line and the Cave, which are images that in all other respects present a remarkably comprehensive and unified vision of the *Republic's* project. This is especially clear when we look at the prisoners of the Cave allegory. It is true that ordinary people may lack ethical knowledge and often uncritically accept what they are told—claims hardly unique to Plato—but this does not explain the very specific situation of the prisoners or the deep pessimism it embodies. In contrast, the reading I've defended shows that the Cave allegory carries a concrete message that explains, as the allegory appears to promise it will, why it is necessary for some of us to 'leave the cave' and acquire knowledge: when it comes to ethical questions, ordinary people are constrained—in part, as we just saw, by non-rational pressures—to a rudimentary empirical kind of thought, called *eikasia*, that cannot reach beyond how things sensibly appear; since this leads to inadequate beliefs about such all-important things as goodness and justice, untutored ethical beliefs are insufficient, and ethical knowledge is necessary.⁵⁶

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