

The Virtue of Double Ignorance in Olympiodorus

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The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it hopes to elucidate the problem, symptoms and cause of double ignorance or the shameful ignorance of ignorance that leads to both intellectual and moral error as portrayed by Olympiodorus.¹ In analyzing this shame-worthy condition, particular attention will be paid to understanding its role in living a life of appearances and tending not to oneself but to one's reputation, body and/or belongings. Obviously drawing on Proclus' arguments that the doubly ignorant are attracted to material objects and qualities that resemble or remind them of the reasoning principles constituting the essence of the soul,² Olympiodorus draws attention to why the doubly ignorant believe their natural and habitual virtues constitute human excellence. This section of the essay will be followed by an examination of Socrates' unique mimetic form of purification which aims at transforming interlocutors who suffer from double ignorance via turning them away from the images of what they want and leading them toward the realities they actually desire.

Second, we shall tackle what seems to be, at first blush, a strange error in Olympiodorus as well as the anonymous *Prolegomena* insofar as they both associate a kind of double ignorance with one of the highest levels of philosophical excellence, the latter even identifying Socrates as an exemplar of double ignorance.³ Indeed, in his commentary on the *Phaedo* Olympiodorus repeatedly appeals to the philosopher of Plato's *Theaetetus* (173c6–174a2) as one who possesses 'a double ignorance that is superior to knowledge' (*in Phd* 6.3.14). While seemingly paradoxical, Olympiodorus argues that those who have reached the height of philosophical excellence are the inverse of those who depend upon their natural and habitual virtues in terms of the objects for

1 Insofar as the dialogue is concerned with self-knowledge, Olympiodorus, like Proclus before him, spends a considerable amount of time discussing the problem of double ignorance in his commentary on the *Alcibiades*. See 11.9; 98.10; 100.4; 103.25; 123.21–125.9; 128.19–22; 132.4–8; 134.16; 142.4–6; 145.19–146.20; 169.11–170.8; 190.13; 196.22. For double ignorance in Proclus, see Layne 2009, 2015 and 2018. For a comprehensive treatment of Olympiodorus' commentary see Tarrant and Renaud 2015.

2 For Proclus' arguments regarding this see Layne 2015. For parallel identifications in Olympiodorus see *In Alc.* 20.1–21.5, 34.3–8, 104.15–21; 150.19–23.

3 See *Proleg.* 16.19–29. Quoted in full below.

which they are ignorant. In other words, the doubly ignorant person does not know they are soul while the contemplative person ‘forgets’ they are embodied or part of this material world (see in *Phd* 1.2.14–16 and 1.4.15). They are ignorant of the body but are also ignorant of that ignorance, i.e. unlike a person of purgative virtue, they are no longer even aware of the world they seek to escape or the body that interrupts. In the end, what shall be seen is how Olympiodorus neither simply parroted Proclus’ conception of double ignorance and the process by which one is purified from it but, notably, expanded upon it, seeing how even double ignorance can become a virtue in the life of the philosopher.

1 The Problem of Double Ignorance

As most scholars of Olympiodorus are well aware, one of the recurring themes of his commentary on the *Alcibiades I* is the condition of double ignorance and, to be sure, much of his analysis on this subject can be directly traced to Proclus’ own commentary on the dialogue. Some of the common themes in their analysis include 1) the definition of this condition as ‘the ignorance of ignorance’ coupled with blind conceit; 2) the belief that a symptom of this condition is the failure to agree with oneself and others,⁴ and; 3) that it is the most shameful and reprehensible state insofar as it is the cause of moral error.⁵ Overall, both believe that double ignorance is the greatest obstacle in obtaining self-knowledge or the realization that we are neither body merely nor even body and soul, but a rational soul.⁶ The conceit of the doubly ignorant for both Proclus and Olympiodorus prevents self-knowledge or reversion

4 See in *Alc.* 92.3–4; 96.4; 98.5; 129.7; 225.1.

5 See in *Alc.* 124.4–12, where he contrasts the error of the doubly ignorant with the simply ignorant: ‘[...] since Socrates wants to free Alcibiades completely from double ignorance, he attacks it and condemns it with dramatic flair, claiming that it is the cause of our going astray, the cause of error, the most shameful and ugly thing of all. That’s because simple ignorance is ‘most shameful’, but [double ignorance] is the ‘most shameful thing of all’ and ‘most deserving of reproach’, since the person who knows the path doesn’t go astray, nor the person who while not knowing, recognizes ignorance (for this person does not even undertake the journey); but it’s the person who is ignorant, while at the same time supposing he knows, [who wanders astray]. And he is the cause of ethical mistakes as well: for this person tries to teach others what he doesn’t understand, and instills damaging beliefs in them.’

6 See in *Alc.* 4.8–9.20. Olympiodorus repeatedly attempts to synthesize Proclus and Damascius’ debates revolving around whether the ‘self’ and the ‘self itself’ are to be identified with the tripartite soul or civic life and the rational soul respectively or the rational soul and the intellectual or contemplative life. Olympiodorus concludes that self-knowledge is about all three levels of rational soul, e.g. civic, purificatory and contemplative. On the Neoplatonic levels of virtue see Brisson 2006 as well as Griffin 2016, 4–12.

and, as a consequence, makes it impossible for individuals to flourish and as such both believe the dialogue should be the first text for students of Plato to engage.⁷ Olympiodorus remarkably emphasizes how double ignorance is not merely an individual moral problem but is also a political, psychological and, even, metaphysical miscarriage, a falling short in the very terms of our life, being and good. As he writes:

And the person who is in this condition has fallen short of Soul and Intellect and God. First, due to his double lack of knowledge, he has fallen short of Soul, since understanding is congenial to the soul; and due to his being in a ‘most shameful’ condition, he has fallen short of Intellect, since he is unable to revert to himself, which is distinctive of mind, and also because the noble or beautiful is congenial to Intellect, and thus becoming ‘most shameful’ he has fallen short of it; and he has fallen short of God in ‘producing the most harm’ and ‘deserving of reproach’, since simplicity is congenial to God, and wellness also derives from simplicity.⁸

Particularly concerned with the psychology, i.e. the imagination and desires of individuals who suffer from double ignorance, Olympiodorus underscores the mania of this condition. For example, just after emphasizing that the cause of error is not simple but double ignorance,⁹ Olympiodorus likens Alcibiades to Ajax, decrying the precariousness of the young man’s state by describing it as a kind of moral lunacy that not only harms the young man but haphazardly threatens to injure others who may haplessly follow Alcibiades’ leadership:

For his case is analogous to Ajax in Sophocles, who supposed as he slew the flocks that they were the Greeks; likewise [Alcibiades] here supposes that he knows about justice, in spite of his ignorance, so he too brings those who take his advice to harm. And just as the presence of a teacher is useless in the face of double ignorance, for a teacher is no help

⁷ *In Alc* 9.9–12; 11.9.

⁸ *In Alc*. 125.9–13: καὶ ἐξέπεσεν ὁ ἔχων ταύτην καὶ ψυχῆς καὶ νοῦ καὶ θεοῦ. ὡς μὲν γὰρ διπλὴ ἀμαθαιῶν, ψυχῆς, ἥς οἰκεία ἡ γνώσις ἐστίν. ὡς δὲ αἰσχιστος, νοῦ ἐξέπεσεν, ὡς μὴ δυνάμενος ἐπιστρέψαι πρὸς ἑαυτόν, ὃ ἴδιον νοῦ, καὶ ὅτι οἰκεῖον τὸ καλὸν τῷ νῷ. ἐξέπεσεν οὖν αὐτοῦ ὡς αἰσχιστος· ὡς δὲ κακουργοτάτη καὶ ἐπονείδιστος ἐξέπεσε θεοῦ, ᾧ οἰκεία ἡ ἀπλότης, ἐξ οὗ ἐφήκει καὶ τὸ εὖ. τὸ γὰρ ‘εὖ’ πρόσρημά ἐστιν ἀπλότης, διὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀπλοὺς τοὺς τρόπους εὐήθεις φαμέν. See also at 103.9–21. All translations of the *in Alc*. derive from Griffin 2015 and 2016.

⁹ *In Alc*. 103.19–20: οὐ γὰρ ἀμαρτάδος αἰτία ἡ ἀπλὴ ἄγνοια, ἀλλ’ ἡ διπλὴ.

to the person who supposes he knows, it is the same way with the doctor and the madman: that's why [Socrates] calls [Alcibiades] 'mad'.¹⁰

Poignantly, Olympiodorus synthesizes the *Sophist* 227d–228d¹¹ with Plato's tripartite soul of the *Republic* and characterizes double ignorance as the deformity of the soul at all the levels from reason to spirit to appetite. In short, the person of double ignorance is one who fails to have reason at its helm and, as such, is either ruled by their spirit or their appetite. Consequently, one of the common symptoms of double ignorance is that these individuals pursue a life of images instead of reality, caring for their reputation instead of their true self. Like a good Socratic, Olympiodorus recognizes that when we are in this state we do not do as we truly want in pursuing and constructing images of the well-lived life. We are simply clinging to phantoms as our only hope for meaning while depending upon our faculty of imagination to rescue us from our ignorance. As Olympiodorus articulates:

And we should recognize that among our vital capacities, the reputation-loving affection is difficult to cast aside, while among our cognitive capacities it is imagination. For imagination is always available to our soul, as our soul is constantly fashioning impressions of what it does not know, and bestowing shapes, sizes, and bodies on the non-bodily, and confining [even] the god in terms of place.¹²

In short, double ignorance is the life that mistakes appearances for reality, desperately pursuing that which they do not want, i.e. the shame-worthy, the impotent, the meaningless, because our imagination allows us to see resemblances of the objects of our desire in the external world. Overall, Olympiodorus, like Proclus before him, believes that the doubly ignorant mire the divine content

¹⁰ *In Alc.* 103.21–26: καὶ ἔοικε τοῖς μαινομένοις ὁ Ἀλκιβιάδης· ὥσπερ γὰρ ὁ παρὰ τῷ Σοφοκλεῖ Αἴας ἐφόνευε τὰ πρόβατα οἰόμενος αὐτὰ τοὺς Ἑλλήνας εἶναι, οὕτως καὶ οὗτος μὴ εἰδὼς τὰ δίκαια οἶεται εἰδέναι, διὸ καὶ κακοῖς περιβάλλει τοὺς συμβουλευομένους. καὶ ὅτι ὥσπερ ἄχρηστός ἐστιν ὁ διδάσκαλος παρὼν πρὸς διπλῇ ἀγνοοῦντα, οὐδὲν γὰρ ὀνήσει αὐτὸν οἰόμενον εἰδέναι, οὕτω καὶ ἰατρός πρὸς μαινόμενον. διὸ καὶ 'μανικὸν' αὐτὸν ἀποκαλεῖ (referring to *Alc.* 113c5). See in *Gorg.* 15.5, 89.27–30W for a similar comparison to Ajax's madness in the context of involuntary wrongdoing. For another reference to the madness of double ignorance see 226.5–7.

¹¹ See in *Alc.* 197.1–5 and 124.4–125.1.

¹² *In Alc.* 51.10–16: ἰστέον δὲ ὅτι τὸ φιλότιμον πάθος ἐν ταῖς ζωτικαῖς [ῆ] ἡμῶν δυνάμεσιν ἐστὶν δυσανόβλητον, ἡ δὲ φαντασία ἐν ταῖς γνωστικαῖς. πάρεστι γὰρ αἰεὶ τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ ψυχῇ ἡ φαντασία, τύπους ἀναπλάττουσα ὧν ἀγνοεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τοῖς ἀσωμάτοις σχήματα καὶ μεγέθη καὶ σώματα περιπεῖσα καὶ τόπῳ περιορίζουσα τὸν θεόν. See also in *Alc.* 65.13.

of their souls by haphazardly looking outward at objects that are derivative, that appear like the contents of our soul. Consider Olympiodorus' remarks on the nature of the true and the false and how the confusions and errors of human beings are not detached from their pursuit of their authentic objects of desire.

But since every false belief takes its start from a true one (for the false, as a 'falling away' from the true, draws substance from it and depends upon it, lacking the power to exist in its own right: for the true through its abundance of power, influences even its contrary the false, and there is no such thing as a total darkening of the common concepts)—[for all these reasons] we need to articulate Alcibiades' grounds for thinking that what appeared to be good was [in fact] the greatest good, and then becoming proud about it.¹³

The madness of Alcibiades and his clinging to a life of double ignorance is therein transformed by Olympiodorus, as he shows how even the worst of us, despite our ignorant and shameful state, desire the good. As he writes in his commentary on the *Gorgias*:

God has sowed in us the seeds of the common notions (κοινὰς ἐννοίας), so that we should not be utterly lost. So however godless and unbridled a man may be, there is always some way in which he desires the good.¹⁴

This method for understanding the good even in the life of the doubly ignorant is explicitly appealed to in Olympiodorus' analysis of Alcibiades' vanities. In short, we are able to recognize that young man's pride in his physical beauty as a trace of his desire for intelligible beauty, but since he lacks self-movement, i.e. self-knowledge which is constituted by our inward turn or reversion to the self, the rational soul, Alcibiades depends upon imagination and has thusly been 'fighting over shadows', images (*phantasia*) of beauty that are perceived

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- 13 *In Alc.* 32.6–13: 'Ἄλλ' ἐπειδὴ πᾶσα ψευδὴς δόξα ἐξ ἀληθοῦς ἔχει τὴν ἀρχήν (ἀπόπτωσις γὰρ ὃν τὸ ψεῦδος τοῦ ἀληθοῦς παρυφίσταται αὐτῷ καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἡρτῆται μὴ δυνάμενον αὐθυπόστατον εἶναι. τὸ γὰρ ἀληθές διὰ περισυσίαν δυνάμεως καὶ τὸ ἀντικείμενον ψεῦδος ἑαυτῷ ἔχρωσεν καὶ οὐδὲ παντελῶς ἀμαύρωσις ἐγένετο τῶν κοινῶν ἐννοιῶν. ἵσχυρόν ποθεν ὁ Ἀλκιβιάδης τὸ φαινόμενον ἀγαθὸν μέγιστον ἐνόμιζεν εἶναι καὶ τούτῳ μεγάλα ἐφρόνει.
- 14 *In Gorg.* 39.6, 200.1–4W: ὁ θεὸς ἐγκατέσπειρεν ἡμῖν τὰς κοινὰς ἐννοίας, ἵνα μὴ τελῶς ἀπολλύμεθα. ὅπως οὖν ἂν τις εἴη ἄθεος καὶ ἀκόλαστος, ἐφίεται ὅπως σδήποτε τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ. All translations of the *in Gorg.* are from JLT.

and apparent rather than intelligible and original.¹⁵ In other words, coupling his lack of care for the rational element of his soul and his desire for beauty that derives from the contents of that part of the soul, he therein utilizes the faculty of reason available to him and *imagines* that real beauty is physical beauty. The same reasoning applies to his attachment to his familial legacy. His confidence that his esteemed lineage makes him a notable and powerful citizen of the *polis* reflects his inchoate and imaginative remembrance of the magnificence of the divine hierarchy that unifies and directs multitudes and connects even the last of things to the first.¹⁶ In other words, Alcibiades does not knowingly pursue objects of lesser worth. Rather, the condition of his soul is such that all a person can value are the objects of appearance. Whether it be our body or its possessions or our natural and habitual virtues, these are the imaginative garments that we don to cover over our confusion. In fact, Olympiodorus is keenly aware of how this perversion of the soul can be witnessed in one of the most mundane of human desires, i.e. the desire for luxurious clothing, an image that Olympiodorus employs to discredit those who mistakenly regard the body as an authentic image of the self.

But why on earth does the soul want to employ the costume that lies outside itself, its clothing? Really, it's after other, different things, and it's wrapped up in other things: for it holds a concept of its inward wrappings, the luminous, pneumatic, and shell-like [vehicles]; by means of this visible clothing, then, the soul demonstrates her desire to possess pure inward wrappings [...].¹⁷

In short, we desire costumes both literal and metaphorical, both the mundane clothes that we wear, their fashion, as well as the clothes of our image/reputation before others because they are traces of the *inward wrappings*, the ethereal vehicle, of the soul.¹⁸ The vanity of the doubly ignorant—those adrift in the sea of appearances, of posing, of pretending to be—is the haughty confidence laid in a residual image of the truly beautiful and our pursuit of such images is a perverted misstep, a desperate reaching out to be and to be good.

¹⁵ *In Alc.* 32.13–16 and 42.14–15. Cf. *Rep.* 520c–d.

¹⁶ *In Alc.* 32.20.

¹⁷ *In Alc.* 107.1–10: ἀλλὰ τί δήποτε ἐφίεται ἡ ψυχὴ τῆς σκευῆς τῆς ἔξωθεν τῶν ἱματίων; ἢ ἄλλων ἐφίεται καὶ περὶ ἄλλα ἐνειλεῖται. ἔννοιαν γὰρ ἔχουσα τῶν ἐνδοθεν χιτῶνων αὐτῆς, τοῦ αὐγοειδοῦς καὶ τοῦ πνευματικοῦ καὶ τοῦ ὁστρεῖνου, ἐφίεται διὰ τῆς φαινομένης στολῆς ταύτης καθαροῦς ἔχειν τοὺς ἐνδον χιτῶνας [...].

¹⁸ See Finamore 1985 for the now classical account of the vehicles of the soul in Neoplatonism.

For Olympiodorus, this desperation is most notably seen in Alcibiades' mad desire to secure a praise-worthy reputation that is dependent upon his natural and habitual virtues, e.g. his brash courage or oratorical skill. Olympiodorus never fails to remark on the young man's instrumentalization of these virtues alongside his persistent attachment to his reputation, i.e. the image of selfhood that is desired by the ambitious, by those ruled by their spirited element.¹⁹ As an example of this, Olympiodorus highlights Alcibiades' intuitive disdain of villains and cheaters 'grasped from his common concept alone'²⁰ and his natural oratorical talent to change the terms of an argument.²¹ In this, Olympiodorus hopes to underscore how Alcibiades' skill in oratory appeals to and reinforces his love of reputation and appearances. Highlighting the difficulty of Alcibiades coming to accept his ignorance of justice by emphasizing both Alcibiades' dependence upon his oratorical skills and his self-love, Olympiodorus writes:

Because Alcibiades has been proven doubly ignorant about justice [...] given his natural talent as an orator, [Alcibiades] replies, 'From what you say, it's plausible that I don't know about justice.' And when he uses the word 'plausible' and 'you', he displays his own character, one that cares for reputation. Now care for reputation is a difficult affection to discard, we have frequently pointed out, because whatever the soul puts on first, it casts off last.²²

Notice, first, how Olympiodorus transforms the love of reputation into a metaphysical phenomenon of all souls, of the descent into the world of appearance and, in so doing, shows how we, even the philosopher, may don this garment. As Olympiodorus charges in his commentary on the *Phaedo*:

19 See in *Alc.* 99.1–15 for Olympiodorus' explicit appeal to Alcibiades' use of his natural talent and love of reputation. See also in *Alc.* 91.1; 100.9; 101.1–3; 102.22–25; 114.12; 115.3–5 as well as passages quoted below. See also Griffin 2016, 12–16 for an introduction to Olympiodorus' analysis of how Socrates and the Iamblican curriculum use the natural virtues to turn one to civic virtue (and see Griffin in this volume).

20 In *Alc.* 90.6–7.

21 See again in *Alc.* 91.1; 98.13; 100.9; 108.18; 114.15; 137.19. To summarize, Olympiodorus believes Alcibiades' natural talents help him make well-aimed guesses that help him to respond and momentarily derail Socrates' refutations.

22 In *Alc.* 98.10–17: Δειχθεὶς ὁ Ἀλκιβιάδης διπλῇ ἀμαθαινῶν περὶ τὸ δίκαιον [...] ὥς εὐφυῆς καὶ ῥητορικὸς φησὶν ὅτι 'ὥς σὺ λέγεις, εἰκὸς με μὴ εἰδέναι τὸ δίκαιον'. φησὶν 'ἐκ μὲν ὧν σὺ λέγεις οὐκ εἰκὸς', διὰ τοῦ 'εἰκὸς' καὶ τοῦ 'σὺ' τὸ φιλότιμον ἦθος ἑαυτοῦ δεικνύς. δυσανόβλητον γὰρ πάθος, ὡς εἶρηται πολλάκις, τὸ φιλότιμον, διότι ἂν πρῶτον ἐνεδύσατο ἡ ψυχὴ, ταῦτα ὕστερον ἀποβάλλεται.

The first garment of the soul, where the vital faculties are concerned, is ambition, because it is the will to rule that decided the human soul to descend into genesis; even if we seem to have no ambition, ambition is the motive behind it, and we have again failed to escape from this passion.²³

In the *Alcibiades* commentary Olympiodorus explicitly analyses why the love of reputation is so difficult to cast aside, arguing that it might be metaphysical proximity and similarity to reason that leads us to cling so desperately to it. He writes:

We should investigate why the affection of caring for reputation is most difficult of all to wipe out. Consider: it is so [difficult] that even those who decide not to care for their reputation, do that out of care for their reputation, that is, in order not to appear to care about reputation. We assert, then, that the affection of caring for reputation is difficult to wipe out for the following reason: it is closer to reason than other affections are, and is sibling to it, and reason is not something we can cast aside; therefore what is close to reason is difficult to cast aside.²⁴

Ultimately, Olympiodorus believes that persons like Alcibiades ‘will not stop caring about [their] reputation [...] but will want ever more’ because ‘it is not the case that all human beings long for just the same affections (for these are unlimited), but they long for more, because they possess a concept of certain other things that they are unable to secure.’²⁵ In other words, the love of reputation is never sated but due to the veracity and the perfection of the concept of reality and knowledge residing in our souls, we are ever goaded into needing more and better promises of our worth—thus explaining Alcibiades’ inability

23 *In Phd* 6.2: πρώτος δὲ χιτῶν τῆς ψυχῆς ἐν ζωαῖς ἡ φιλοτιμία, ὡς γὰρ φίλαρχος ἡ ἡμετέρα ψυχὴ ἡρήσατο κατελθεῖν εἰς γένεσιν. εἰ γὰρ καὶ δοκοῦμεν μὴ εἶναι φιλότιμοι, ἀλλὰ δι’ αὐτὸ τοῦτο, διὰ φιλοτιμίαν, ὥστε πάλιν οὐκ ἐξεφύγομεν τὸ πάθος. All translations of *in Phd.* are from Westerink (1976).

24 *In Alc.* 50.25–51.5: ζητητέον δὲ διὰ τί τὸ φιλότιμον πάθος πλέον πάντων ἐστὶ δυσέκνιπτον. οὕτω γὰρ ἐστίν, ὅτι καὶ οἱ μὴ βουλόμενοι φιλότιμοι εἶναι διὰ φιλοτιμίαν ποιοῦσιν αὐτό, ὥστε δοκεῖν ὅτι οὐκ εἰσι φιλότιμοι. φαμέν οὖν ὅτι διὰ τοῦτο δυσαπόλυτον πάθος τὸ φιλότιμον, ὅτι μᾶλλον τῶν ἄλλων πλησιάζει τῷ λόγῳ καὶ συγγενές ἐστι τούτῳ· ὁ δὲ λόγος ἀναπόβλητός ἐστιν ἡμῶν· οὐκοῦν καὶ τὰ πλησιάζοντα αὐτῷ δυσαπόβλητα. See also 101.1–8.

25 *In Alc.* 50.20–24: ἐγὼ δὲ φημι ὅτι οὐτε ἐνταῦθα ἐλθὼν στήσεται τῆς φιλοτιμίας, ἀλλ’ ἔτι μειζρόν ἐπιθυμήσει, καὶ κατὰ τὸ κωμικόν. ‘κἂν ταῦτα ἀνύσῃ, τετταράκοντα βούλεται’. ὡς γὰρ εἴρηται, πάντες ἄνθρωποι οὐκ αὐτῶν τῶν παθῶν ὀρέγονται (ἅπειρα γὰρ ταῦτα), ἀλλ’ ἑτέρων τινῶν ἔχοντες ἔννοιαν καὶ οὐ δυνάμενοι τούτων τυχεῖν ἐφίενται τῶν πλείονων.

to cast off the admiration of the masses as they continuously feed his need for absolute value.²⁶

Returning to Alcibiades' dependence on his natural talent in oratory, the orator is one who can seduce and persuade easily. Put otherwise, they are ones who can naturally craft appearances and, most particularly, the appearance of being a self, of living the life well lived. As we have already highlighted, this indeed is an authentic desire but one unfortunately perverted by Alcibiades' thoughtless inability to know himself, to be self-moved rather than other-moved. In the end, Alcibiades' laziness and love for reputation prevent him from authentic self-care,²⁷ which due to his possession of such a strong nature is more dangerous than those with weaker constitutions. As such, Socrates, in Olympiodorus' estimation, recognizes the threat that Alcibiades' doubly ignorant life poses:

[...] great natures cause great harm when they go without cultivation, just as when they happen to be cultivated, they are the causes of great goods. As a matter of fact, this is analogous to the case of rich land that produces good fruit when it is cultivated and farmed, but when it is uncultivated, naturally produces thistles (for it knows only how to generate its produce, without distinguishing whether it is thorny or otherwise); this is just the situation with talented natures.²⁸

Talented natures, like Alcibiades, impulsively or hastily forge with the proper cultivation an image of themselves from an image of power, and so Olympiodorus decries Alcibiades as 'not only miserable, but a maker of misery....'²⁹ In other words, the 'greatness' that underscores Alcibiades' condition may actually lead to his own as well as others' self-destruction.³⁰

²⁶ Cf. *in Alc.* 134.15.

²⁷ *In Alc.* 143.4.

²⁸ *In Alc.* 173.3–9: διότι αἱ μεγάλαι φύσεις ἀμελούμεναι μεγάλων κακῶν αἰτίαι γίνονται, ὥσπερ ἐπιμελείας τυγχάνουσαι μεγάλων ἀγαθῶν. καὶ γὰρ ὥσπερ ἡ πείρα γῆ ἐπιμελουμένη μὲν καὶ γεωργουμένη ἀγαθοὺς καρποὺς ἐκδίδωσιν, ἀμελουμένη δὲ ἀκάνθας πέφυκεν ἀποτίκτειν (οὐδὲν γὰρ οἶδεν ἢ γεννᾶν μὴ προσλογισαμένη τὸ κάρπιμον, εἴτε ἀκανθῶδές ἐστιν εἴτε ἕτερον), οὕτω καὶ αἱ δεξιαὶ φύσεις διάκεινται. I would like to thank the external reviewer for their references to this problem of the "greatest nature" in both Plato, *Republic* VI, 491d–e and Proclus, *Ten questions*, § 56.

²⁹ *In Alc.* 224.5–15 see also 225.15–25.

³⁰ At *in Alc.* 226.3–13, Olympiodorus argues that 'the person who is ignorant of himself makes others more miserable if [they] should obtain power' is proven by Socrates insofar as such persons are, first, like the sick who refuse to listen to doctors and indulge in food that harms them. Second, they are like tyrants who are 'nothing but power deprived of

For it's just as badness leads to ruin, and likewise as if someone inexperienced in steering attempted to steer a ship: for he becomes a cause not only of his own destruction, but also of [the destruction] of his fellow sailors and those who voyage with him.³¹

2 The Purification from Double Ignorance

Since Alcibiades is ruled by his spirited element and as such is a lover of reputation, Olympiodorus highlights how Socrates gears his refutation of the boy toward shaming him—an act which chips away or questions the reality of his constructed self-image. As we shall now discuss, this is one of Socrates' tools for purifying the doubly ignorant from the madness and illusion of their lives.

For Olympiodorus, there are five forms of purification within the dialogue, all of which are utilized by Socrates or appealed to throughout the philosopher's refutation of Alcibiades.³² Olympiodorus identifies the method of 'escaping into sacred precincts' (ἀποφυγεῖν εἰς τεμένη) with a form of purification that leans on acquiring good teachers or studying insofar as such persons and texts direct us toward self-knowledge. A good teacher is not one who pours knowledge into a student. Rather, good teachers are those who invite us into the sacred precinct of our soul, stimulating us to discover knowledge. This is witnessed most clearly in Socrates' demands that Alcibiades name a teacher of justice as well as the philosopher's insistence that Alcibiades recognize that the refutation is not caused by Socrates but by Alcibiades' own internal inconsistency.

The second form of purification is 'forceful correction' (ἐπιπλήξω)³³ which reinforces the shame of double ignorance and the damage it does to one's current object of desire—in the case of Alcibiades, a praise-worthy reputation.³⁴

reason' and, finally, like such tyrants fail to realize they do not even have power, as power preserves persons but the doubly ignorant act in manners that are clearly self-destructive. Cf. *in Alc.* 124.12–14 where the person of double ignorance is 'the cause of ethical mistakes as well: for this person tries to teach others what he doesn't understand, and instills damaging beliefs in them.' See also 125.1–8 and 131.5. Cf. 117d–118a.

31 *In Alc.* 226.13–15: ὥς γὰρ κακία φθαρτικὴ ἐστὶ, καὶ ὅμοιον ὥς εἰ ἄπειρος κυβερνητικῆς ἐπιχειρήσοι κυβερνᾶν· αἴτιος γὰρ γίνεταί οὐ μόνον τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἀπωλείας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς τῶν συνναυτῶν καὶ τῶν συμπλεόντων. Cf. *Statesman* 302b.

32 *In Alc.* 145.13–146.13.

33 See also *in Alc.* 132.1.

34 See *in Alc.* 83.25–29; 115.4; 119.14. See further *in Alc.* 102.23–25: 'Notice again how his fondness for reputation makes it unbearable for him to fully acknowledge his ignorance but instead he says "it appears"'

In short, Socrates understands that in some cases a mere revelation of cognitive dissonance alone, i.e. the discovery of double ignorance through logical analysis, would not heal the person in the habit of caring about their reputation. Rather, his use of ‘tragic flair’ (ἐκτραγωδῆω)³⁵ shames individuals into wanting to distance themselves from their reputation as, under scrutiny, it becomes clear that their soul is in a reprehensible condition.³⁶ An example of this method can be observed when Olympiodorus describes how Alcibiades feels he is being tricked by Socrates’ questions. Olympiodorus explains that Socrates’ use of forceful correction depends upon reason insofar as it reveals the cognitive error Alcibiades is making but, further, insofar as the young man feels personally attacked, the method stimulates Alcibiades’ spirited element, his anger and courage, to defend himself as his reputation is suffering from being discredited as an illusion.

The third form of purification is the Pythagorean, that Olympiodorus describes as perilous insofar as it gives patients a taste of the passion from which they suffer: ‘for one could never heal the person who is aflame with the passions without some concession to them.’³⁷ Olympiodorus points to Socrates’ compliments of Alcibiades’ natural talents, which exalt rather than deflate the young man’s ego. Olympiodorus repeatedly warns that this method can often have the opposite effect on the doubly ignorant—rather than purification, it gives students, patients or interlocutors an opportunity to foolishly think they are not in need of assistance.

The fourth form of purification is characterized by a convergence of opposites, and is seen in a variety of philosophers including Aristotle and the Stoics as well as doctors like Hippocrates. Each of these traditions, in Olympiodorus’ eyes, prescribes opposites as cures for opposites. While there is some inconsistency about what exactly it means to bring opposites together, Olympiodorus suggests the mixed nature of refutation that brings compliments and exhortations together so as to both encourage and accuse.³⁸ He also suggests that this convergence of opposites is not necessarily the use of two opposing methods (compliments and refutations) but is opposing insofar as it applies or invokes the disease or mistake of the soul caused by double ignorance with an opposed inclination. Specifically referencing Aristotle, it is a procedure that checks spirit with appetite and appetite with spirit.

35 *In Alc.* 124.4–14, 132.5, 142.6 and 145.18.

36 *In Alc.* 132.1–8.

37 See also *in Alc.* 6.12–14.

38 See *in Alc.* 6.8–12 and 55.9–13.

Finally, the Neoplatonist characterizes Socrates' unique method as a procedure of transformation (μετάβασις). This method operates on the basis of drawing out the disease of the soul via similarities or, better, as showing how the object desired by Socrates' interlocutor is an image or likeness of what they truly desire. Olympiodorus writes:

[...] the Socratic method of purification converts like to likes: by saying to someone who loves possessions, 'learn what true self-sufficiency is' or to someone who loves pleasure, 'learn what divine repose is'...³⁹

Interestingly, in elucidating this form of purification, Olympiodorus offers a unique response to Socrates' use of praise, which at first blush appears to feed the boy's arrogance and therein possibly reduces Socrates to the role of flatterer (the threat described in the Pythagorean method of purification). In contrast, Olympiodorus argues that Socrates uses encouragement as a 'honey-drenched' form of purification that supports transformation versus other methods that result merely in pain and violence.⁴⁰ Insofar as Socrates' remedies begin with appealing to the current condition of the soul, the philosopher focuses on the chains of Alcibiades' current state of self-understanding, trying to release him and turn him around towards authentic self-knowledge, moving him away from the shadows on the wall to reality. For example, Socrates appeals to Alcibiades' pride and his political ambition in order to reveal the power of self-knowledge. As Olympiodorus declares:

So he is all but shouting aloud, 'Learn what is true power: knowledge!' (For as he says in the *Theaetetus*, there is nothing more powerful than knowledge existing in the soul', for this alone, and the good life, can't be seized by tyrants nor taken away.)⁴¹

In other words, instead of merely focusing on the ridiculousness of Alcibiades' double ignorance, Socrates' employment of irony emphasizes that there is a kind of truth to his praise. Indeed, Alcibiades acts, despite being led by his ambition, with a blind conceit drawing from the wellspring of the common

39 *In Alc.* 55.9–13: ὁ δὲ Σωκρατικός τρόπος τῆς καθάρσεως ἀπὸ τῶν ὁμοίων ἐπὶ τὰ ὅμοια μετὰγει. εἰ μὲν τις ἐστὶ φιλοχρήματος, λέγων 'μάθε τίς ἡ ὄντως αὐτάρκεια'. εἰ δὲ φιλήδονος, 'τίς ἡ θεία ῥασιώνη' [...]. See also *in Alc.* 146.7–10, 174.15.

40 *In Alc.* 30.1–4 and 86.27. Cf. Proclus *in Alc.* 228.21–4; 232.10–233.7.

41 *In Alc.* 36.14–16: διὰ γὰρ τούτου μόνον οὐ βοᾷ· 'μάθε τίς ἡ ὄντως δύναμις, ὅτι ἡ ἐπιστήμη'. ὡς γὰρ ἐν *Θεαιτήτῳ* φησὶν, 'ἐπιστήμης δ' ἐνούσης ἐν ψυχῇ δυνατώτερον οὐδέν'. μόνη γὰρ αὕτη καὶ ἡ εὐζωΐα οὕτε ἀλίσκεται ὑπὸ τυράννων οὕτε ἀφαιρεῖται.

notions in him and, as such, is drawn to a life lived with cause, purpose and, corresponding power. This is all despite the fact that he currently does not live as he wants and is wandering, in his state of double ignorance pursuing merely the appearance of these things. Consider Olympiodorus' comparison of Socratic method and the philosopher's appeal to the reason (*logos*) underlying Alcibiades' sense of superiority to other lovers:

Socrates uses these words to acclimate the young man to a life lived with purpose. Consider that Alcibiades might have scorned his other lovers, not due to pride and great-mindedness, but rather due to an empty conceit of the soul. But instead [Socrates] addresses him as someone who scorns them for a reason, not out of ignorance, but rather due to a kind of knowledge that can't be articulated, thus drawing him toward a life lived with cause [...].⁴²

Following Proclus, Olympiodorus sees Socrates as employing different methods of care for different individuals as each individual uniquely pollutes their knowledge, orienting themselves toward different appearances.⁴³ For Olympiodorus, Socrates attempts to reorient the lover of pleasure to see that they simply desire the ease or rest of the divine, while the desire for money derives from remembrance of divine self-sufficiency, and political ambition mirrors the power of the One. At *in Alc.* 42.10–20, Olympiodorus argues that reputation-lovers, pleasure-lovers and money-lovers appeal to a notion inherent in their souls, causing or promoting double ignorance, and so individuals like Alcibiades, as a lover of reputation, 'fight over shadows, reflections and expressions of this [higher idea]'.⁴⁴ All of them confuse higher ideas, e.g. divine

42 *In Alc.* 34.20–25: διὰ τούτων ἐθίζει τὸν νέον ὁ Σωκράτης κατ' αἰτίαν ζῆν. ἴσως γὰρ ὁ Ἀλκιβιάδης οὐ διὰ σεμνότητα καὶ μεγαλοφροσύνην κατεφρόνησεν τῶν ἄλλων ἐραστῶν, ἀλλὰ διὰ χαυνότητα ψυχῆς. ὁ δὲ ὡς ἐκείνου μετὰ αἰτίας καταφρόνησαντος αὐτῶν, οὕτω φησίν, οὐκ ἀγνοοῖ ἀλλὰ ἀπορρήτῳ μᾶλλον ἐπιστήμῃ, προσβιβάζων αὐτὸν κατ' αἰτίαν, ὡς εἴρηται, ζῆν.

43 As Olympiodorus succinctly writes at *in Alc.* 15.1.16–15.2.20: 'Each individual is not to be brought up in the same way, but he who has the natural aptitude to be a philosopher differently from the person inclined to love or music [*Phdr.* 248d]'. The distinction between true or philosophical rhetoric and false or base rhetoric will be concerned with the state of the soul of the interlocutor. Consider also *Herm.*, *in Phdr.* 224.1–3 where the commentator suggests that there is a kind of rhetoric which is soul-leading; and see further Bohle in this volume.

44 ἐφίεται καὶ ταύτῃ ἔννοιαν ἔχει. μὴ δυνάμενος δὲ τυχεῖν περὶ τὸ εἶδωλον καὶ τὴν ἀπόπτωσιν ἐκείνης σκιμαρχεῖ.

tranquility, fulfillment and self-sufficiency, with their shadows flickering on the wall of appearance.⁴⁵

Overall, the Socratic method of purification begins with a recognition of the needs of the interlocutor, adapting his methods so as to accord with the images that his interlocutor currently pursues so as to redirect them, to turn them inward toward themselves and toward the realities that constitute the doubly ignorant's desperate and vain pursuits for meaning. For Olympiodorus, this is the power of the Platonic dialogues, as texts like the *Republic* offer methods that 'put a stop to the Thrasymachus in us', the *Gorgias* shows how to transform Callicles' love of pleasure and Polus' love of reputation, the *Protagoras* guides those who simply love appearance, as it is an image of reality, and, finally, the *Alcibiades* assists in transforming individuals who love power, showing readers that the boy will need to paradoxically 'become a servant' of Socrates if he is ever to understand what it truly means to rule.⁴⁶

Interestingly, Olympiodorus connects this transformative/mimetic procedure of Socratic method to a typical Socratic enigma, i.e. the philosopher's claims to ignorance and his corresponding use of ambivalent language like 'I think'. Does this ambivalent language indicate ignorance on Socrates' part? Olympiodorus answers: 'Not at all, but instead [it indicates] the highest [level of] knowledge, to approach [different] personalities using a method that is appropriate [to each].'⁴⁷ Ultimately, Olympiodorus thinks that Socrates is

45 See also *in Alc.* 47.1–5 or 107.1–10.

46 *In Alc.* 61.7–15. It is interesting to note here that Olympiodorus is also stressing the value of dialogue form in his exegesis of why Socrates prefers question and answer, insofar as the dialogue form, like question and answer, demands that arguments be alive and wielded on a diversity of characters. For Olympiodorus this allows for us to learn about ourselves and our own tendencies toward pride, pleasure, power, etc. See also *in Alc.* 24.12–20 for his explicit defense of Socrates' methods as 'lively'. Of course this parallels the Neoplatonic insistence that dialogue as lived speech best resembles the living being that is the cosmos. He writes, '... just as this [world] serves as a meadow of diverse living beings, the speech should likewise be full of all kinds of characters.' For more on the lived nature of dialogue form and its goals, see Layne 2014 and 2017 and Mansfeld 1994.

47 *In Alc.* 24.13–16. Like Proclus, Olympiodorus defends Socratic ignorance by appealing to different forms of cognition and different grades of ignorance. Cf. *in Gorg.* 34.3, 175.21–176.6W: 'For he says "I do not speak as one who knows at all". It is worth debating why he says "I do not speak with knowledge." What? Is Socrates ignorant? We say, first, that he teaches modesty of character and that we should not praise ourselves. Second, that there are many degrees of cognition, as also of truth. How is it that there are many degrees of cognition? We must say that cognition by means of sensation is different from cognition by means of opinion (for the former is of particulars, while the latter is of universals), and different again is intellective, i.e. divine, cognition. It is this last that Socrates says he does not know. For who possesses cognition in the way that Intellect itself does? Hence, he invites criticism and calls a man who helps him his benefactor, since there is nothing

feigning ignorance and employing, once again, a kind of pedagogical irony that is not wholly false or dissembling but leans on the distinction between appearance and reality. While knowledgeable, Socrates can claim ignorance for a variety of reasons, e.g. he is ignorant of divine cognition as opposed to human cognition. As a Socratic lover who operates through the method of likeness, a method that exposes the connection between seemingly disparate things, the philosopher 'does not want to ascend alone, but along with his beloved' and so he employs pedagogical irony at one time, sincere praise at another or, indeed, forceful correction, refutation or dialectic at yet another. Indeed, Olympiodorus has Socrates take up the defining traits of the Neoplatonic category of the hero, who willingly descends for the sake of purifying and assisting other mortal souls.⁴⁸ In fact, Olympiodorus characterizes Socrates' heroic nature as deriving from his singular ability to discern the needs of his conversation companions.⁴⁹ Explicitly deemed a protector of humankind⁵⁰ and a 'safe guarantor',⁵¹ Olympiodorus defends the idea that the life of the philosopher is one concerned not merely with acquiring knowledge, but that knowledge leads the philosopher to descend, to return, in order to assist friends and fellow citizens in shaking off the coil of double ignorance, and in this way Socrates becomes a 'proximate cause of Alcibiades' salvation'.⁵²

greater than the truth.' See also *in Alc.* 175.7–10. For more on Socratic pedagogical irony see *in Alc.* 52.21–53.7 and 88.5–10. Cf. also *in Alc.* 140.12 where Olympiodorus praises Zeno's use of pretense.

48 See also *in Alc.* 40.16; 41.1; 59.24–60.12; 135.1; 156.7; 175.3–5. Cf. also *in Alc.* 171.8 for an explicit description of heroes like Perseus and Heracles as purifiers. They 'were born to purify [the world] of evils' and Heracles is a 'just destroyer' who 'slaughters for purification' while Perseus' wings and other symbols can also be associated with purification. For more on the Neoplatonic category of the hero see Layne 2017 as well as Tarrant and Renaud 2015, 199–201 and Griffin 2014 for accounts of the status of Socrates in Neoplatonic metaphysics and the hierarchy of virtues.

49 Cf. *in Gorg.* 0.3, 2.17–26W: 'Hence Socrates, seeing the people being led astray in this way, and because he grasped what was good for all the youth right across the spectrum, determines to save the souls of the Athenians and of Gorgias too. So he does not think it beneath him, but takes Chaerephon the philosopher along with him, the one who is also referred to in the comedy, and proceeds to the house of Callicles, it is there that the encounters and investigations occur. Socrates took Chaerephon rather than going by himself, so as to demonstrate how people acquire knowledge and engage in dialogue.'

50 *In Alc.* 135.1.

51 *In Alc.* 230.10.

52 *In Alc.* 171.8.

3 The Virtue of Double Ignorance

Before turning to Olympiodorus' unique account of the double ignorance of the contemplative philosopher, we should begin by sketching another compelling difference in Olympiodorus' account of double ignorance. Unlike Proclus, Olympiodorus argues for the existence of an intermediary position between double and simple ignorance, a position that marks the transition from natural virtue to the care of the self, a requisite turn of the soul prior to reaching the level of civic virtue. In short, Olympiodorus addresses the question of how Alcibiades can recognize his ignorance but not yet see the need for learning and inquiry constitutive of the philosophical life. Focusing on one of Alcibiades' premier admissions of ignorance, Olympiodorus does not yet think he has actually transitioned to simple ignorance but grants that Alcibiades is in a borderland (μεθόριος) state.

And this [state] lies between simple ignorance (namely, knowing that one does not know) and double ignorance (namely, firmly supposing that one knows), that is, supposing at one moment that one knows, and another not holding that supposition (just as opinion is a mean between double ignorance and knowledge. For a person holding an opinion who knows that it is so, but remains ignorant of why it is so, is so to speak 'in the borderlands' between those cases [i.e. double ignorance and knowledge] that are diametrically contrary to one another).⁵³

Indeed, for Olympiodorus, this intermediate position is one of the foundational moments in the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades, securing their friendship as, according to the Neoplatonist, Alcibiades 'climbed one rung [on the ladder of knowledge]: for he stepped from double ignorance into the intermediate condition between simple and double [ignorance].'⁵⁴ Despite not yet reaching the level of simple ignorance, Olympiodorus regards this mere distancing from double ignorance as a significant ascent, as in this stage he begins to truly see the value of Socrates and is therein drawn to a new image of the good life that Socrates offers.⁵⁵ Ultimately, the move to simple

53 *In Alc.* 123, 19–124, 1: μέσον δέ ἐστι τοῦτο ἀπλῆς ἀγνοίας (τούτέστι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὅτι οὐκ οἶδεν) καὶ διπλῆς (τούτέστι τοῦ οἴεσθαι βεβαίως ὅτι οἶδε), τὸ ποτὲ μὲν οἴεσθαι, ποτὲ δὲ μὴ οἴεσθαι, ὥσπερ ἡ δόξα μέση ἐστὶ διπλῆς ἀγνοίας καὶ ἐπιστήμης. ἐκείνων γὰρ ἐκ διαμέτρου ἀντικειμένων ἀλλήλοις ὁ δοξαστικός εἰδὼς μὲν τὸ ὅτι, ἀγνοῶν δὲ τὴν αἰτίαν, ἐν μεθορίῳ πῶς ἐστι.

54 *In Alc.* 129.1–6: καὶ διότι ἕνα βαθμὸν ἀνῆλθεν. ἀπὸ γὰρ διπλῆς ἀγνοίας εἰς μέσην ἔξιν ἀπλῆς καὶ διπλῆς ἐνέπεσεν.

55 *In Alc.* 130.15.

ignorance arises when Alcibiades agrees to deliberate and enter into joint inquiry as his need for knowledge becomes increasingly shameful, causing him to momentarily cast off his care for reputation. Then, and only, then, does Alcibiades enter into simple ignorance.⁵⁶ To be sure Alcibiades does not achieve civic virtue/knowledge by the end of the dialogue but rather remains at the level of natural virtues/knowledge; but, however momentarily, Alcibiades cares for himself rather than his image.⁵⁷

So, turning now to what seems, at first blush, a strange error in Olympiodorus as well as the anonymous *Prolegomena*, both authors associate a kind of double ignorance with one of the highest levels of philosophical excellence. In fact the anonymous author even identifies Socrates as an exemplar of double ignorance:

[...] we distinguish simple ignorance, double ignorance, supreme ignorance and sophisticated ignorance. Simple ignorance occurs when a man does not know a particular thing and knows that he does not know; double ignorance when he does not know a thing and is not aware that he does not know, as Socrates is when he says in the *Phaedrus*: 'I am yet unable, as the Delphic inscription advises us, to know myself'; supreme ignorance is when a man knows that he does not know, but owing to the emotional appeal of the opposite belief refuses to give up his ignorance; sophisticated ignorance is when a man does not know, but attempts to disguise his ignorance by specious reasoning.⁵⁸

Striking in its identification of Socrates with double ignorance, this is nevertheless complemented by Olympiodorus' repeated appeals to the philosopher of Plato's *Theaetetus* [173c6–174a2]⁵⁹ as one who possesses 'a double ignorance that is superior to knowledge' (*in Phd* 6.3.14). Seemingly paradoxically, Olympiodorus argues that those who have reached the height of philosophical excellence are the inverse of those like Alcibiades. In other words, the doubly

⁵⁶ *In Alc.* 146.20 and 190.14.

⁵⁷ For the care of the self as directed toward the rational soul rather than one's body or possessions, see *in Alc.* 171.17.

⁵⁸ *Proleg.* 16.19–29: καὶ ἀμαθὴ (ἡ) τὴν ἀπλήν ἀγνοίαν ἀγνοοῦντα ἢ τὴν διπλήν ἢ τὴν μεγίστην ἢ τὴν σοφιστικὴν. ἀπλή μὲν οὖν ἐστὶν ἀμαθία ὅταν τις ἀγνοῇ τόδε τι [εἶναι] καὶ οἶδεν ὅτι ἀγνοεῖ· διπλή ἐστὶν ὅταν καὶ ἀγνοῇ τόδε τι καὶ μὴ γινώσκει ὅτι ἀγνοεῖ, ὡς φησὶν ἐν Φαίδρῳ 'οὐ δύναμαι κατὰ τὸ Δελφικὸν γράμμα γνῶναι ἐμαυτόν'. μεγίστη δ' ἀγνοία ἐστὶν ὅταν καὶ ἀγνοῇ καὶ οἶδεν ὅτι ἀγνοεῖ, κρατούμενος δ' ὑπὸ τοῦ πάθους τοῦ ἐναντίου δόγματος οὐκ ἀφίσταται τῆς οἰκείας ἀγνοίας· σοφιστικὴ δ' ἐστὶν ἀγνοία ὅταν ἀγνοῇ μὲν τις, σπεύδῃ δὲ διὰ πιθανολογίας ἐπικαλύψαι τὴν οἰκείαν ἀγνοίαν.

⁵⁹ See Tarrant in this volume pp. 192–193##

ignorant person does not know they are soul while the contemplative person ‘forgets’ they are embodied or part of this material world (see in *Phd* 1.2.14–16 and 4.15.3–4). They are ignorant of the body but are also ignorant of that ignorance, i.e. unlike a person of purgative virtue, they are no longer even aware of the world they seek to escape or the body that interrupts. Olympiodorus alludes to the philosopher’s double ignorance when he discusses how Thales may appear to be foolish and suffer ridicule but, in all actuality, he is at the height of virtue and the good life.

[...] for indeed they will be laughed at by the foolish. So too Thales while walking about and with his mind on the heavens and astronomy fell into a well. And a Thracian woman said to him ‘This man does not know the things on earth and seeks to know the things of heaven’. We must not attend to such people, even if they box our ears, but direct ourselves up towards the divine.⁶⁰

The double ignorance of the contemplative person is best understood by recalling the differences between the Neoplatonic levels of virtue as understood by Olympiodorus. In his estimation the natural virtues arise through one’s personal temperament and can best be observed in animals insofar as there are inclinations that are natural for certain species, e.g. the lion is brave, the cattle temperate, etc. Ethical virtues revolve around habit and are linked with knowledge of the laws and rules of the deterministic world. One cultivates ethical virtue through the training that comes from experiencing the world as determined, so that even irrational forms of life can be governed by reason. While trying to offer a theological reading of the various virtues, Olympiodorus compares the natural virtues with the Titans and the ethical/habitual with Dionysus insofar as these virtues do not necessarily entail a complementary relationship. Rather, the natural virtues can destroy or upend the habitual, tearing them to pieces like the god.⁶¹ In this, we have a stunning description of the turmoil that would occur when someone like Alcibiades, because of his double ignorance, relies only on natural virtues and as such fails to care for the divine within, exposing it continuously to the carnivorous appetite of the Titanic aspect of his existence.

60 *In Gorg.* 26.16: καὶ γὰρ θέλουσιν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνοήτων καταγελάσθαι. οὕτω γοῦν καὶ ὁ Θαλῆς περιπατῶν καὶ τὸν νοῦν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἔχων καὶ ἀστρονομῶν εἰς τέλμα ἐνέπεσεν· καὶ φησιν αὐτῷ Θρηῖσσα γυνὴ ὅτι ‘οὗτος τὰ κατὰ γῆν οὐκ οἶδεν καὶ τὰ ἐν οὐρανοῖς θέλει εἰδέναι’. δεῖ τοίνυν τῶν τοιούτων ἀμελεῖν, καὶ κατὰ κόρρης πατάξωσιν ἡμᾶς, πρὸς δὲ τὸ θεῖον ἀνατείνειν ἑαυτούς.

61 *In Phd* 1.5.1–15. For more on the Orphic elements of this passage and Olympiodorus’ role in advancing the myth of Dionysus see Edmonds 2009.

Next, we have the rational virtues, beginning with the civic life that knows itself as a tripartite soul and so regards the body as an instrument. Such a person is godlike, imitating the divine in their concern for that which is below.⁶² Then we have purificatory virtue, which aims at freedom from passions and regards the body as a kind of ‘talkative neighbor’;⁶³ in the ascent to the divine the main aim is purification from the body. When the contemplative person is finally free from the body, as their life and being are always turned to the intellectual world, however, they take on a new form of double ignorance.⁶⁴ To quote in full the passage where Olympiodorus identifies the contemplative philosopher as possessing a kind of double ignorance:

[...] the man who has dedicated himself to purification or contemplation pays attention to the body as to a talkative neighbor, so as not to be disturbed in his thoughts; this is what Plato says about the perfect philosopher, that he does not know where in the world he is, and is unaware that he does not know [*Theaet.* 173c6–174a2]. Here we find a double ignorance that is superior to knowledge.⁶⁵

Contrasting the purificatory life with the contemplative in this respect, Olympiodorus writes:

When a man whose goal is purification shuns the body, this very act of fleeing the body is a relation to it, and he knows what he is fleeing. As for the contemplative philosopher, he neither flees nor knows the body; for he does not know where in the world he is, and he is unaware that he does not know.⁶⁶

62 See in *Alc.* 32.4 or 26.18: ‘... the philosopher both flees and does not flee. Not the theoretical [philosopher’s] gaze always flees toward the divine, whereas the [philosopher-] statesman’s, if he has worthy citizens, remains and shapes them. If they are not worthy, then in truth he retreats and makes a fortress for himself and sits there in flight from the boisterousness of the city. This is what Plato and Socrates did. In this way Socrates became so great that the Pythian Apollo testified to it.’

63 In *Phd* 4.3.1–16.

64 In *Phd* 8.1–18; see also 4.3.1–16.

65 In *Phd* 6.3.10–15: οἷον οὖν φλύαρον γείτονα τὸ σῶμα θεραπεύει ὁ καθαρτικὸς καὶ θεωρητικὸς, ἵνα ἐν ταῖς νοήσεσιν ἀκώλυτος ᾖ. ὥσπερ φησὶν περὶ τοῦ κορυφαίου φιλοσόφου ὅτι ἀγνοεῖ ὅποι γῆς ἐστίν, καὶ ἀγνοεῖ ὅτι ἀγνοεῖ. καὶ εὖρεν ὁ λόγος διπλὴν ἀμαθίαν ἐπιστήμης κρείττονα. ταῦτα ἔχει ἡ θεωρία.

66 In *Phd* 4.15.1–5: εἰ φεύγει ὁ καθαρτικὸς τὸ σῶμα, καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ φεύγειν σχέσιν ἔχει πρὸς αὐτὸ καὶ οἶδεν ὃ φεύγει. ὁ γὰρ θεωρητικὸς οὔτε φεύγει οὔτε οἶδεν τὸ σῶμα· ἀγνοεῖ γὰρ ὅποι γῆς ἐστίν, καὶ ὅτι ἀγνοεῖ ἀγνοεῖ.

And, again:

Plato in the *Theaetetus* [173c6–174a2] represents the perfect philosopher as not even knowing what kind of man he is himself, and moreover as ignorant of the fact that he does not know this, though he lives in a body.⁶⁷

To be sure, the key characteristic of the move from the purgative to the contemplative life revolves around the disparagement and forgetfulness of the body, as the body is what returns us to the realm of division and disillusionment.⁶⁸

In the end, given this identification of double ignorance with the philosophical life, we can, first, excuse the *Proleg.* of mistakenly identifying Socrates with double ignorance as commonly understood by the Neoplatonic tradition. The anonymous author may simply be appealing to the same understanding of the contemplative person as we find in Olympiodorus, as Socrates certainly and repeatedly, throughout both the *Prolegomena* and Olympiodorus' commentary, appeals to all three levels of the rational life. Second, Olympiodorus' novel transformation of the Procline concept of double ignorance allows even the greatest of obstacles for human souls to become a kind of excellence in the life of contemplation. In short, Olympiodorus has applied the Socratic mimetic method to double ignorance itself, appealing to it in the life of the philosopher so as to invert it, transform it into something higher than the life it is typically mired in.

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67 *In Phd* 1.2.10–16: οὕτω γὰρ καὶ ἐν τῷ Θεαιτήτῳ ὑποτίθεται τὸν κορυφαῖον φιλόσοφον μὴδὲ ὁποῖός ἐστιν εἰδῶτα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀγνοοῦντα ὅτι ἀγνοεῖ, καίτοι ἐν τῷ σώματι ὄντα.

68 Cf. *in Gorg.* 30.1. See also *in Gorg.* 38.1, 193.25–194.5W, where, discussing the Socratic dictum that death is not the greatest evil, Olympiodorus writes: '... whereas we derive our being principally from the soul. Hence we should attend to the soul in every case and not care if the body dies. For if our true being comes from the soul, then let us always be concerned for that. And so let us fasten upon the good. For the good has a wider range than existence and it is surely not the case that non-existence automatically belongs among evils. For it is possible, while we no longer exist in this life, for us still to be in a good situation through our soul's being well constituted. For we are not the body nor the combination [of body and soul] but a soul alone that employs the body as instrument.' [*Alc.* 129b–130c]

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Author Query

AQ 1 (p. 99 footnote 13) unpaired parenthesis, please check: (ἀπόπτωσις γὰρ
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