

Natural, Neutral, and Hedonic States in Plato

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Received February 2018 | Accepted June 2018

this is proof. The official edition is found in

<https://brill.com/abstract/journals/mnem/aop/article-10.1163-1568525X-12342560.xml>

Abstract

This paper aims to clarify Plato's notions of the natural and the neutral state in relation to hedonic properties. Contra two extreme trends among scholars—people either conflate one state with the other, or keep them apart as to establish an unsurmountable gap between both states, I argue that neither view accurately reflects Plato's position because the natural state is real and can coincide with the neutral state in part, whereas the latter, as an umbrella term, can also be realized in a non-natural condition. The clarification of the relation between the two states will shed light on the degree to which Plato admits and constrains the hedonic value for a good human life; further, this will call attention to some (not well explored) parallel thoughts in the medical tradition to which Plato is indebted.

Keywords

natural state – neutral state – pleasure – pain – ἡσυχία – Plato

1 Introduction

In Plato's accounts of pleasure, we repeatedly encounter two distinctive kinds of states. One is called the natural state (φύσις/τὸ κατὰ φύσιν), which, roughly speaking, refers to an everyday or set level of contentment that a healthy living organism has insofar as its nature is in a normal condition and functioning

well. The other—Plato does not have a fixed term for it¹—can be named the neutral state: a condition that involves no hedonic experience, neither pleasure nor pain. The natural state is a key definitional element in Plato's conception of pleasure, and as such it serves as the *goal* of the restorative process on which pleasure depends and to which it is directed.² In contrast, the neutral state refers to a condition that is not affected by hedonic disturbances; being calm and satisfied seems characteristic of such a state.

There is a long tradition of scholarship according to which Plato sees both states as numerically one and the same.³ In his restorative understanding of pleasure, while the natural state is realized when a deficiency in the body has been remedied, pain is caused by the motion of departing from the natural state. A fulfilled state is neutral in the sense of being devoid of any algedonic property because there is no motion during this stage on which the generation of hedonic properties rely. Conceived in this way, the natural state is the basis on which the baseline level of our overall feeling is formed—a default mood which seems to be hedonically neutral under normal conditions. A statement from the Middle Platonist Alcinous is representative of this view:

οἶεται δὲ κατὰ φύσιν κατάστασημα εἶναι τὸ μέσον ἀλγηδόνος τε καὶ ἡδονῆς, οὐθετέρῳ ἐκείνων ὄντὸ αὐτό, ἐν ᾧ καὶ τὸν πλείω χρόνον ὑπάρχομεν.⁴

He (sc. Plato) considers *the natural state* to be the one *intermediate between pain and pleasure*, being the same as *neither of them*, and it is the state in which we spend most of our time.⁵

1 δ μεταξύ (R. 583e4; 584e9), τὸ μέσον (584d4, cf. *Lg.* 792d2, 793a4; *Phlb.* 43e8: ὁ μέσος βίος), ὁ τρίτος βίος (*Phlb.* 55a6), τὸ μηδέτερον (R. 583e7; cf. *Phlb.* 43e3, e5) and τὸ μηδέτερον (*Lg.* 733b1, cf. Arist. *EN* 1154b6, 1173a8-11). I shall return to terminological problems below.

2 Understanding pleasure essentially as a perceived restoration is traditionally taken to be Plato's official doctrine, supported by many scholars, including Frede 1992, 1997; van Riel 2000, 7-43; Carpenter 2011; Obdrzalek 2012. Although this traditional view has been challenged by other scholars (e.g. Gosling and Taylor 1982, 136-140; 175-192; Carone 2000, 264-270; Fletcher 2017), few deny that the restorative model is a "core aspect" of Plato's theory of pleasure (I borrow this expression from Wolfsdorf 2013a, 101). It is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate on whether and how this account can account for *all* kinds of pleasure in Plato's eyes (also cf. section 2 below).

3 In her recent discussion of Plato's understanding of *aisthēsis*, for instance, Fletcher 2016 uses "the natural condition" (*passim*), the "original, god-like condition" (398), and "the mean state" (408) interchangeably to refer to the neutral state.

4 Alcin. 187.34-37 = 32.5.

5 Trans. Dillon 1993, modified.

In this presentation, Alcinoüs not only identifies the natural state with the neutral state, but he also believes that they are natural in a descriptive sense, i.e., a default state in which we humans live our ordinary life and to which we are inclined to return. This traditional view, however, has been recently questioned by van Riel and Arenson, who propose drawing a clear-cut boundary between the natural state and the state of our daily life. Both argue that the natural state differs from the neutral one such that there is no coincidence, even in part. As Arenson emphasizes, “what is ‘natural’ about this natural state has nothing to do with what normally occurs”; rather, it refers to “a completely balanced and harmonious condition of a living thing”.⁶ On this basis, the relation of the natural to the neutral state and their respective statuses in mortal life are radically redefined. Instead of regarding them as two names for one thing, van Riel and Arenson consider the natural state as the goal towards which the neutral state is directed, a divine or ideal goal which we humans qua mortals can at best approximate, but never achieve.⁷ As van Riel sums up, “the natural condition *per se* is inaccessible: our life is always in movement ..., and we will never attain a state in which all lack will be resolved.”⁸

Despite being sympathetic to their view that the neutral and the natural state are not identical, I think that the way in which van Riel and Arenson demarcate one state from the other is problematic. Their shared understanding of the φύσις is too ‘super-natural’, which can hardly gain support from Plato’s texts, whereas the neutral state, a concept which is often supposed to be a precursor of ‘the tranquillity of the soul’ in the tradition of Hellenistic ethics, is more complicated and ambiguous in Plato than they have thought. Instead of the ‘super-natural’ interpretation, I will provide a ‘realistic’ reading of the natural state, which will do more justice to Plato and to the medical tradition from which he derives his conception of pleasure and pain. Then, I explore the complexity of the neutral state, revealing that it covers a variety of conditions ranging from the divine to the non-ideal scenarios. With the clarification of the natural and the neutral state, I aim to elucidate the exact manner in which they differ: they are neither identical nor in a relation of endless approximation, but can overlap in part. This paper as a whole will illuminate the way in which Plato accommodates and constrains the hedonic value of mortal

6 Arenson 2011, 192.

7 Arenson 2011, 192-193, 201-204; Van Riel 2000, 26-29.

8 Van Riel 2000, 26.

activities and call attention to some (not well explored) parallel thoughts in the medical tradition to which he is indebted.⁹

2 The Natural State and Its Realization

It is worthwhile first to consider how Plato introduces the natural state as a definitional element in Socrates' discussion of the essence of pleasure and pain.

SOCRATES: But if the reverse happens, and harmony is regained (πάλιν δὲ ἀρμολογούμενης), what I claim is that when we find the harmony in living animals disrupted (τῆς ἀρμονίας μὲν λυομένης), there will at the same time be a disintegration of their *natural state* (λύσιν τῆς φύσεως) and a rise of pain.

PROTARCHUS: What you say is very plausible.

SO.: But if the reverse happens, and harmony is regained and *the former natural state* restored (εἰς τὴν αὐτῆς φύσιν ἀπιούσης), we have to say that pleasure arises, if we must pronounce only a few words on the weightiest matters in the shortest possible time.¹⁰

Socrates here describes pleasure and pain in terms of their particular relation to the natural state. No matter how one *defines* them in detail, pain is said to be generated by the disintegration of the natural state (λύσιν τῆς φύσεως) in living beings, while the restoration to the natural state (εἰς τὴν αὐτῆς φύσιν ἀπιούσης) gives rise to pleasure. The juxtapositions between τῆς ἀρμονίας λυομένης and λύσιν τῆς φύσεως and between πάλιν ἀρμολογούμενης and εἰς τὴν αὐτῆς φύσιν ἀπιούσης indicate that harmony—a proportioned and symmetrical blend—is characteristic of the natural state, which is resonant with the normative force implied in the term φύσις.¹¹ Nothing, however, suggests that the realization of this state is beyond the capacity of a mortal animal. On the contrary, its

9 The relationship between Plato and medicine has been much discussed, see e.g. Tracy 1969; Vegetti 1995; Levin 2014. For a recent overview see Saumell 2017, 148-154. Although it is well-known that his account of hedonic properties is considerably indebted to medical theories of his time (Frede 1997, 230), the research on this aspect remains relatively underdeveloped. Without unfolding a comprehensive study, here I am content with drawing attention to several (often ignored) parallel thoughts/expressions from medical texts insofar as they can illuminate the current discussion (see below).

10 Pl. *Phlb.* 31d4-10, trans. by Frede (in Cooper 2009), modified. All translations of Plato are based on the edition by Cooper 2009, with modifications when marked.

11 A good state for a living being must be well-proportioned (σύμμετρον, *Ti.* 87c5-6); cf. μέτρου καὶ τῆς συμμετροῦ φύσεως in *Phlb.* 64d9.

disintegration, the generation of pain, theoretically presupposes that the natural state was previously present.¹²

Sceptics may be hesitant to endorse this simple and realistic picture because it is based on a passage in the initial stage of Socrates' conversation with Protarchus on the genera and species of pleasure and pain. As a starting point of the inquiry, this account might represent nothing more than a common assumption about their nature intended to be revised afterwards or even rejected in the progress of the inquiry. Nevertheless, as Arenson and van Riel agree, Plato, who criticizes the naturalists for failing to take into consideration the role of the soul in shaping algedonic experiences, does not thus utterly dispel their medical model; rather, he refines and extends its application when unfolding his more sophisticated theory.¹³ The question is thus whether his revision abolishes a core feature of the initial picture offered by Socrates, namely the association of pleasure with a restoration to the natural state and the association of pain with the destruction of the pre-established state.

In fact, already in the *Republic* Socrates describes pleasure—albeit in an underdeveloped way—essentially as a process of filling (585b11), a particular kind of restoration.¹⁴ Intellectual pleasure and anticipatory pleasure are all grasped by virtue of the analogy from the process of filling in nutrition, although according to what is being filled (the container: the empty state of the body: the empty state of the soul) and what is filling (the filler: food: knowledge/memory) they differ from physical pleasures.¹⁵ In comparison,

12 For Plato's understanding of pain see Evans 2008; Wolfsdorf 2015.

13 Despite admitting the restoration model as paradigmatic for Plato, I leave open whether and to what extent this model can offer a *unified* understanding of pleasure, and whether the model is philosophically successful (cf. n. 2). Opposed to the suggestion of Frede 1992, 444 ("Plato's definition of pleasure as a perceived filling or restoration is designed to cover all kinds of pleasure"), Price has recently argued that the restoration model is not used by Plato to *unify* all types of pleasure, but as a starting point to help *reveal* and *link* the varieties of pleasure. However, Price 2017, 184 seems to acknowledge restoration as a core aspect of Plato's account, cf.: "Pleasure is distinct from the good since it comes to be for the sake of something else (54c6-7). This applies to all varieties of pleasure so far distinguished: anticipation of replenishment points ahead to an end to be achieved no less than replenishment itself; so do the pleasures that are thrown up by the contrasting pains that they serve to relieve; so, we may now add, do unmixed pleasures that are replenishments of unmet deficiencies. All pleasures turn out to be phenomena of transition—and it is this that Socrates is concerned to establish in order to infer that pleasure belongs 'in a class different from that of the good' (54d1-2)."

14 I cannot follow Gosling and Tylor 1982, 110-113, who hold that Plato confuses pleasure as a process with pleasure as a state in *Republic* 9. For criticism of this view see Erginel 2011a, 497; 2011b, 292; Warren 2011, 123.

15 Cf. Wolfsdorf 2013b, 118.

the *Philebus* enriches the psychology of pleasure by articulating how various psychical powers operate and interact under different circumstances when pleasures are generated. However, in this dialogue, as shown in his treatment of varieties of pure pleasures, Socrates does not seem to eliminate the restorative aspect of their generation as well.¹⁶ In the *Timaeus*, where the eponymous protagonist offers a detailed physiological account of how the restoration on which a pleasure hinges is realized, the same pattern remains.¹⁷

Linguistic evidence lends support to this picture. At different places, the generation of pleasure¹⁸ is described as ἀπόδοσις (*Phlb.* 32a3), ἡ κατὰ φύσιν ὁδός (32a8), ἀναχώρησις (32b4),¹⁹ πληροῦσθαι (*Phlb.* 35e2; cf. τὰς πληρώσεις *Ti.* 65a3, a4), ἀνασφύζεσθαι (*Phlb.* 32e2,3), σωτηρία (*Phlb.* 35e3) and κατάστασις (*Phlb.* 42d6, 46c6, cf. 42d5, καθιστάμενα, *Ti.* 64a1; 65b1), whereas pain is repeatedly coupled with φθορά,²⁰ διάκρισις (*Phlb.* 32a1, *Ti.* 64e1), διάλυσις (*Phlb.* 32a2), κενούσθαι (*Phlb.* 35e2, cf. κενώσεις *Ti.* 65a2, a3-4) and διαφθορά (*Phlb.* 42c9, 46c6). Such references are not only found in the incipient stage of Socrates' analysis of pleasure in the *Philebus*, they are also present in the second half of this dialogue as well as in the *Timaeus*. If we ask ourselves where pleasure ends and what is destroyed in the generation of pain in all of these accounts, the answer is sufficient to show that the natural state, the end of one process and the starting point of the other, is attainable and thus real for living beings.²¹ This conclusion finds further textual support in the following parallel expressions: pain is caused by the disruption of an animal's form (εἶδος, *Phlb.* 32b1-3) or, as Timaeus calls it, an animal's departure from itself (ἀποχωρήσεις ἑαυτῶν, *Ti.* 65a2); accordingly, the phrase εἰς φύσιν in Plato's accounts of pleasure is interchangeable with εἰς ταῦτὸν ὁδόν,²² εἰς τὴν αὐτῶν (sc. animals) οὐσίαν ὁδόν (*Phlb.* 32b3) or εἰς ταῦτὸν πάλιν ἑαυτοῖς (*Ti.* 65a7-b1). The phrase 'returning to the same state', which occurs once in the *Philebus*, seems even to become a quasi-standard formulation in the *Timaeus*.²³ The (near-)synonymous use of

16 Cf. Frede 1997, 296-302; Obdrzalek 2012.

17 For pleasure and pain in the *Timaeus* see Gosling and Taylor 1982, 178-183; Russell 2005, 229-237; Wolfsdorf 2014; Fletcher 2016, 401-403; McCready-Flora 2018, 140-144. For the medical background of this account see Taylor 1928, 448-449; Tracy 1969, 106-116, 119-156.

18 εἰς τὴν αὐτῆς φύσιν ἀπιούσης (cf. εἰς φύσιν ἀπιὸν πάλιν, *Ti.* 64d2; ἀπιούσης εἶδος, *Ti.* 64e1).

19 Cf. τὰς ἀποχωρήσεις, *Ti.* 65a2.

20 *Phlb.* 31e10, 32b2, 35e3, *Ti.* 65a7; cf. διαφθειρομένων, *Phlb.* 32e2.

21 Also εἰς δὲ γε τὴν αὐτῶν φύσιν ὅταν καθιστῆται at *Phlb.* 42d5. For a similar expression in Aristotle see *EE* 1239b34-35: ὑπερψυχθέντες γάρ, ἐὰν θερμανθῶσιν, εἰς τὸ μέσον καθίστανται.

22 *Phlb.* 32a7; *Ti.* 65a1: εἰς τὸ αὐτό.

23 πάλιν ἐπὶ ταῦτὸν ἀπιούσης, 64e1; καθιστάμενα δὲ εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ πάλιν, 65a1; εἰς ταῦτὸν πάλιν ἑαυτοῖς καθίσταται, 65a7-b1; cf. τὸ δ' εἰς φύσιν ἀπιὸν, 64d2. In the same dialogue, the process of nutrition, from which the restoration account derives the account of pleasure, is

φύσις, οὐσία, εἶδος and the animal itself supports the conclusion that the goal at which this restoration aims is *not* something transcendent, but a particular aspect of an animal's own essence whose realization is within its own power.²⁴

Historically considered, Plato is not the first to understand the φύσις, the goal of a restoration, in this way. The restorative model is essentially a legacy from the medical tradition on which he builds his own conception of pleasure.²⁵ In a medical context, the 'return to the φύσις' belongs to any process that moves from a deficient into a fulfilled condition such as from illness to health or from being hungry to being sated. It is noteworthy that in addition to the phrase 'return to the *nature*' (ἐς τὴν φύσιν),²⁶ medical theorists also characterize such a process as 'returning to the *original nature*' (cf. ἐς τὴν ἀρχαίην φύσιν καθίσταται, *Aer.* 8. 38 = 2.36 Li.),²⁷ 'to someone's *own nature*' (ἀπὴν πάλιν ἐς τὴν ἑωυτοῦ φύσιν, *Morb.* = 6.190 Li.), or to the *original way of life*.²⁸ These formulations, which are resonant with the interchangeable usage of φύσις, οὐσία, and the animal 'itself' in Plato, suggest that he is at least faithful to the tradition in this respect. In the medical texts, the natural state is normative in the sense that it embodies what a healthy state should be and is in principle the goal of medical art; it is real in the sense that it is what an effective treatment is supposed to, and does in fact, achieve. Otherwise medicine could hardly legitimize its existence as a profession. In fact, we do not know any physician in classical antiquity who so idealizes the φύσις that its legitimate use is only in the transcendent or divine

viewed as φέρεται πρὸς ἑαυτὸ (*Ti.* 81a4), whereas disease, as a deviation from the normal and healthy state, is taken to be a shift from *you own state* to an alien state (μετάστασις ἐξ οἰκείας ἐπ' ἀλλοτριαν γιγνομένη, *Ti.* 82a3-4). It is remarkable that Timaeus uses similar expressions to signify pain: ἀλλοτριούμενα (64e6) and ἀπαλλοτριούται (65a6-7).

24 Mannsperger 1969, 173, 199 has noticed the interchangeability of εἰς φύσιν and εἰς οὐσίαν in *Phlb.* 31d and interprets this as "ein Aspektwechsel".

25 Cf. Alcmaeon of Croton (DK24B4); *Nat. Hom.* 4 = 6.40 Li.; *Hebd.* 24 = 8.647.25-26 Li.; *Anon. Lond.* XIX, 18-33, XX, 1-14; 25-49; *Pl. Smp.* 186c-d, *Ti.* 82a; *Arist. Ph.* 246b4-6.

26 Cf. *Fract.* 15 = 3.472 Li.; 39-40 = 3.546 Li.; *Artic.* 6 = 4.88 Li.; 14 = 4.118 Li.; 16 = 4.128 Li.; 30 = 4.144 Li.; 33 = 4.154 Li.; 34 = 4.154 Li.; 38 = 4.168 Li.; 62 = 4.264 Li.; *Morb.* 1.10 = 6.158 Li.; *Mul.* 1.2 = 8.14 Li.; *Liqu.* 6. = 6.132 Li.

27 For the use of ἀρχαίη φύσις see *Epid.* 2.1.6 = 5.76 Li.; *Frac.* 44 = 3.556 Li.; *Artic.* 13 = 4.118 Li.; 16 = 4.128 Li.; 37 = 4.166 Li.; 70 = 4.292 Li.; 73 = 4.302 Li.; *Mul.* 1.17 = 8.56 Li.; *Steril.* 241 = 8.454 Li. This expression was first attested in *A. Ch.* 281. Plato—through the mouthpiece of Aristophanes—also describes the therapy of Eros, which alludes to sexual pleasure, as a restoration directed towards the original nature (τῆς ἀρχαίας φύσεως, *Smp.* 191d1-2). For its medical background see Craik 2001, 110-114.

28 ἐς τὴν ἀρχαίην διαίταν, *Vict.* 2.66 = 6.588 Li.; cf. ἐς τὴν κατὰ φύσιν σύστασιν *Vict.* 2.66 = 6.584 Li.

field.²⁹ Even the author of *De victu*, a Heraclitean, does not deviate from this fundamental image.³⁰

In addition to the linguistic evidence, the same point can be made from a theoretical point of view. According to van Riel, the natural state is unachievable simply because mortal bodies undergo constant motions making them unable to escape the flux of depletion and replenishment. Whether this characterization of a living body is endorsed by Plato depends on the controversial problem of Plato's Heracliteanism, which cannot be settled in the current study.³¹ Nevertheless, we should note, even if Plato understands the human body to be somehow in flux, this does not mean that we humans can *never* attain the natural state, for the flux itself does not pose a threat to the

29 Cf. the realistic use of the healthiest state in *Morb. Sacr.* 13.4, Jouanna = 6.638,15 Li.: 'healthiest head'. In fact, the idealization of the φύσις as an inaccessible goal resembles what is heavily criticized by Galen as the absolute concept of health, which cannot be found in classical medicine or Plato. For this topic see Lewis, Thumiger and van der Eijk 2017.

30 For the concept of φύσις in this work see Bartos 2015, 138-164.

31 I shall not go into the vexed question of Plato's Heracliteanism. For different discussions see Irwin 1977; Kahn 1986; McCabe 2000, 93-138. All of them distance Plato from the radical flux theory that Plato criticizes in many places. In the *Philebus* and *Timaeus*, Plato shows that the formation of pleasure and pain depends on two necessary conditions: the bodily and the cognitive condition. According to the former, pleasure and pain can be experienced only when a living body is undergoing restoration or disintegration that fulfil certain criteria with respect to quantity and quality (*Phlb.* 32d9-33a1; *Ti.* 64d1-2; *R.* 584c5-6); according to the latter, the bodily process should affect the soul as to give rise to corresponding *experience* (*Phlb.* 35b-d; 42e-43c; *Ti.* 64a-d). If either premise is not met, pleasure or pain cannot be generated. Socrates, in discussing the bodily condition, underlines that a body can be in a *third* state, neither in destruction nor in restoration (*Phlb.* 32d9-33a1). Then, he turns to the perceptive condition at 42c-43d and warns Protarchus that pleasure should not be confused with the freedom from pain. Arenson 2011, 196 reads Socrates' appeal to the perceptive condition—that the experience of pleasure needs the activity of the soul—as Plato's *palinode*, i.e., Plato repeals his early criticism of the Heraclitean flux and resorts to a *new* strategy in order to save the existence of the divine neutral state. This is incorrect because, from a theoretical point of view, Socrates' insistence on the cognitive condition of pleasure and pain reinforces his criticism of radical Heracliteanism rather than replaces or withdraws his criticism (Socrates mentions the bodily condition again at *Phlb.* 55a5-7). Here, Socrates just reminds Protarchus, who improperly raised the *same* question, that he does not want to talk about the bodily condition *again*, because he does not want to *repeat* what he has explained (Διότι τὴν ἐμὴν ἐρώτησιν οὐ καλώεις με διερέσθαι σε πάλιν, *Phlb.* 42e4-5, cf. εἴρηταιί που πολλάκις, 42c9; ταῦτα εἴρηται πολλάκις, 42d4). It is notable in this context that Socrates explicitly attributes the doctrine of everything flowing to anonymous *sophoi*, emphasizing 'they say' or 'they think' time and again (φασιν, 43a3; λέγουσι, δοκοῦσι, 43a4). He purports to be indifferent towards this doctrine (ταῦτα μὲν τοίνυν οὕτως ἔστω, 43a10) and expresses his intention to avoid mentioning the same argument he has invoked (ὑπεκστήναι, 43a6; φεύγειν, 43a8; σὺ μοι σύμφευγε, 43a8). Nothing suggests that Socrates here starts embracing the radical Heracliteanism he has criticized.

realization of this state. As the *Timaeus* shows, the body of a living animal, as a dynamic union of opposed elements, naturally involves constant motion and transformation; meanwhile, it can maintain its own equilibrium regulated by the principle of measure.³² It is not coincidental that Plato, following an early tradition of natural research, chooses the term φύσις to mark the end of the restoration, a dynamic balance of different powers or qualities, because φύσις, whose semantic field combines 'being' with 'becoming',³³ is an excellent term for expressing what a *living* body is supposed to be.³⁴

As for the unachievability of the natural state, one might suspect that we ought to distinguish between (a) *never* being able to reach the natural state and (b) *not being able to remain* in this state for any period of time.³⁵ My arguments up to this point give reasons to reject (a), but are not strong enough to exclude (b). We even have good reason to attribute (b) to Plato, since Diotima in the *Symposium* indicates that the destruction/disintegration begins immediately, once the restorative process arrives at its end (cf. *Smp.* 207d-e; cf. *Cra.* 439d-e). Despite a perceptual distinction, the existence of a continuous cycle of change, in my view, is not sufficient to prove that a living body cannot *remain* in the natural state for *any* period of time. Plato acknowledges, directly or indirectly, that a certain stability should be a necessary component of the φύσις of a living organism, particularly of a healthy human being. In the *Republic*, as Socrates emphasizes, the body would be deemed to be unhealthy if it is easily upset, i.e. losing its initial equilibrium under slight stimulation (556e). Accordingly, he indicates at the end of the *Philebus* that the best mixture and blend is also most stable (καλλίστην ... ἀστασιαστοτάτην μείξιν και κράσιν, 63e10-64a1), both in man and in the cosmos (ἐν τ' ἀνθρώπῳ και τῷ παντί, 64a1-2). The *Timaeus* accounts for the stability of the human φύσις from a physiological perspective, even including an account of the creation of a slow digestive system and complex circulatory system in humans, which frees them of the need to constantly switch between the activities of nutrition and excretion so that they are allowed to enjoy leisure in peace, a precondition for the activities of philosophy and art (*Ti.* 72e-73a).³⁶ Accordingly, one who cannot maintain the natural state, but

32 *Ti.* 69b, 73cd, 74d; *R.* 444d-e; cf. Tracy 1969, 105-107, 138-139, 142-156.

33 For the double aspects of this term see Beardslee 1918; Mannsperger 1969, 39-41; Buchheim 1999, 22-24.

34 It is worth noting that in the *Philebus* Socrates depicts the state of the unlimited (τὸ ἄπειρον) as 'in flux and never remaining' (προχωρεῖ ... και οὐ μένει, 24d4), whereas the state of a healthy body belongs to his category of the mixture of the limited and the unlimited (25e-26a).

35 I owe this distinction to an anonymous reader.

36 For the persistence of the human body in the *Timaeus* see Karfik 2012, 172-177.

undergoes depletion immediately after replenishment is mocked by Socrates as a stone curlew (χαραδριός, 494b6)³⁷ or a leaky jar (493b) in the *Gorgias*.

The stability, theoretically considered, is not at odds with the constant movement that a living body undergoes and requires, because the natural state in the sense of a dynamic balance is in fact elastic, permitting a change in motion with respect to direction, intensity and size as long as the established condition can be preserved. In other words, the emergence of depletion and replenishment does not necessarily lead to a deviation from the well-proportioned condition of the body. Slight motion, for instance, usually does not affect the nature of a given condition (unless one is not healthy or physiologically too sensitive). And if the elements in the body are too small, their movements can likewise *not* originate algedonic experience even if the movements themselves are fast and intense enough (cf. *Ti.* 64e4-65a1).³⁸ More importantly, we should note that the maintenance of the natural state essentially needs various motions, such as depletion and replenishment. The well-proportioned equilibrium that a healthy animal should maintain is not confined to the internal state; it also includes a balanced relation of the body to its environment. We as humans do not live alone, but exist *in the world*, “subject to inflow and outflow”.³⁹ In the interaction between a living being and the external world, according to the *Timaeus*, parts of external elements flow in and parts of internal, bodily elements leave and re-join the surroundings (*Ti.* 42c-43b). In this process, physical masses that surround a living body, in particular fire and air, constantly consume and deplete the body; at the same time the organism, in order to sustain the proportioned measure, requires a constant adjustment in response to the motion outside: a renewed replenishment by means of food, drink, or exercise.⁴⁰ Thus, only if one ‘constantly exercises and moves his body’ (κινῆ δὲ καὶ σεισμοὺς αἰεὶ τινας ἐμποιῶν αὐτῷ, *Ti.* 88d8), will he ‘keep in a natural equilibrium the internal and the external motions (τάς ἐντὸς καὶ ἐκτὸς ... κινήσεις)’ (88e1-3). This means that depletion and replenishment, under certain conditions, substantially *constitute* and *sustain* the stability that is dynamically regulated by measure and proportion.⁴¹

37 I follow the explanation by Dodd 1959, 306 of the word χαραδριός.

38 Cf. Fletch 2016, 407-8, 429-430.

39 Saumell 2017, 163.

40 *Ti.* 81a-b, cf. 72e, 74c, 88cd. For a detailed account about this see Karfik 2012; for similar thoughts in the Greek medical tradition see Tracy 1969, 114.

41 The capacity of restoring and maintaining the well-proportioned equilibrium is what a *healthy* body is supposed to achieve. Plato does admit that this capacity would be undermined by illness or by the natural process of senescence (*Ti.* 81b-82a; 89c).

It is of crucial importance that the natural state at which a restoration aims in the *Timaeus* predominantly refers to the optimal state of *an organ*, which is in charge of a *particular* function (e.g. taste or smell), rather than to the living body *as a whole*.⁴² The natural state of taste, for instance, is built by a certain balance of the particles that constitute the tongue. Pleasure will be elicited by the motions of foods when some of them lubricate the roughened parts of the organ while others relax those parts that have been contracted so that all parts of the organ eventually return to their natural condition (ἰδρὺν κατὰ φύσιν, 66c5). As a result, not only each individual, but also each organ has its own *nature* that is built on a particular mixture apt for its proper function. In view of their differences in function and in make-up, the multiple and diverse *natures* can hardly be reduced to an overarching, monolithic concept of φύσις as an unachievable paradigm. In point of fact, the failure to note the distinction between the global and the local restoration is another weakness in positing an impassable gulf between the natural and the neutral state for mortal life.⁴³ Van Riel, as mentioned, argues that the natural state cannot be achieved by humans simply because “we will never attain a state in which *all* lack will be resolved”.⁴⁴ Even if this description is true, a healthy animal does not need to resolve *all* lack in its body in order to gain and maintain a *particular* natural state. For although a well-proportioned blend may be hard to achieve *globally* for a mortal, there is no reason to reject the possibility of its robust realization within a certain bodily *part* for a certain time. The nutrition-analogy, frequently used by Plato in illuminating the nature of pleasure, already indicates that we can speak of an optimally full stomach as a solid example. It comes thus as no surprise that in the *Timaeus* each organ can and does achieve its natural state no matter what kind of state other organs simultaneously inhabit.

42 E.g. taste: μέχρι φύσεως, 60b1; smell: καὶ πάλιν ἥ πέφυκεν ἀγαπητῶς ἀποδιδόν, 67a6. The same use can be attested in the *corpus Hippocraticum*, cf. *Frac.* 44 = 3.556 Li.; *Artic.* 13 = 4.118 Li.; *Steril.* 241 = 8.454 Li. (returning to the original position of the bone).

43 It is noteworthy that this interpretation is compatible with Plato's claim in *Tim.* 45c-d that pleasure or pain will be felt only if the relevant motions go through the whole body until they reach the soul (cf. Flechter 2016). As mentioned, the crucial distinction between the global and the local restoration lies in whether the natural state of *a particular organ* or that of *the organism as a whole* is in question, which does not imply that the experience of the pleasure from a particular sense can be generated without the cooperation of the ensouled body as a whole.

44 Van Riel 2000, 26, emphasis mine.

3 The Neutral State

In comparison with the natural state, the neutral state seems to be a rather meagre concept. How should we understand it except as being neither pleasant nor painful? Yet, under closer scrutiny, its role and range in human life, particularly in relation to human good, is not easy to determine. If we attribute a strong normativity to this state, either natural, ideal, or divine, then we would need a *positive* account of the normative power of a concept that appears tenuous or even negative; if we take it to be a set-level contentment of our daily life, we should be able to clarify its relation to a well-blended algedonic state: are both the neutral and the natural states actually identical because a well-blended state amounts to being algedonically neutral? Or, should the two states not be confused with each other because a well-blended state is either mildly joyful or maintains a balance in the mixture of pleasure and pain?⁴⁵ Or, is the experience of the normal condition as algedonically neutral in fact illusory because we more often inhabit, and even have to be bound up with, the algedonic space as long as we are sentient?

Plato does not seem to provide an unequivocal answer to all of these questions. In several places, he credits the neutral state, or a particular version of this state, with a strong normativity, emphasizing it as the most divine (*θειότατος*, *Phlb.* 33b7)⁴⁶ and characteristic of those who voluntarily choose a rational way of living (*Phlb.* 55a5-8). In spite of its significance, however, Plato never devotes himself to the elaboration, or justification, of the role he ascribes to the neutral state in sustaining a good life. In his account, it is even unclear how the neutral state as a divine state is *phenomenologically* distinguished from the enjoyment of pure and moderate pleasure, which can be generated by a mild process of filling or replenishing a lack. Accordingly, one might wonder whether in contemplation a philosopher enjoys pure pleasure or a godlike neutral state.⁴⁷ Even worse, the lack of a distinct and fixed term for

45 Cf. an interesting observation from the contemporary philosopher Benatar 2013, 62: “[P]leasures and other goods can also be distributed too widely within a life, thereby making them so mild as to be barely distinguishable from neutral states.”

46 Plato attributes this state to the god, cf. *διάθεσιν καὶ θεοῦ*, *Lg.* 792d2-3; *θεῖον*, 792d5.

47 Urmson 1984, 213 insists, not without reason, that the neutral state is actually pleasant and Carone 2000 believes that for Plato the gods can also enjoy pleasure. Socrates’ myth in the *Phaedrus* even creates the impression that either the divine state looks pleasant or the distinction between the pleasant and the neutral states is merely verbal. Cf. *Phdr.* 247d1-5: ‘A god’s mind is nourished by intelligence and pure knowledge, as is the mind of any soul that is concerned to take in what is suitable to it, and so it is delighted (*ἀγαπᾷ*) at last to be seeing what is real and watching what is true, feeding on all this and feeling well (*εὐπαθεῖ*), until the circular motion brings it around to where it started.’

the neutral state separates Plato from those thinkers who appreciate this state as a central aim of their philosophy and thus usually have their own jargon for its privileged status. Plato's nephew and heir Speusippus, for example, is said to invent the term ἀοχλησία for his ultimate good,⁴⁸ and Democritus, by contrast, seems to opt for ἀθαμβία (DK68A169, B4, B215). In later generations, Nausiphanes picks out ἀκαταπληξία (DK75B3 = 68B4) and Epicurus chooses ἀταραξία, while the compound ἀπροσπρωσία seems to enjoy priority among some younger Academics (cf. Alexander, *Mantissa* 150. 35). Although on this issue the Stoics are not obsessed with great terminological precision, ἀπάθεια is surely often employed as their *Fachsprache*. In accordance with this tendency, περὶ ἀλυπίας has become a popular topic and treatise title since 2nd century BC, utilized by scholars such as Eratosthenes of Cyrene, Diogenes of Seleucia, Plutarch, the Peripatetic Aristophanes, and Galen.⁴⁹

Neither the substantive ἀπάθεια nor ἀλυπία, however, are attested in Plato's authentic works.⁵⁰ The adjective form ἀπαθής, which Plato occasionally uses, often has a broader semantic scope.⁵¹ Ἄλυπος and its cognates, likewise, are not always equivalent to the neutral state.⁵² Interestingly, they can also be correlated with the experience of pleasure, either as (near-)synonymous (cf. ἐπὶ τοῦ ἀλύπως ζῆν καὶ ἡδέως, *Prt.* 358b4) or as a key feature of pure pleasures (*Phlb.* 51b3-7; 66c4-5).

Why does Plato fail to provide a distinctive term for the neutral state? Asking this question reveals an inclination to anticipate in him the Hellenistic predilection for so-called inner tranquillity. Admittedly, the idealization of the neutral state is sporadically found in Plato's writings. The characterization of this state as the most divine in the *Philebus*, however, can hardly count as his final word. Even the *Philebus* itself is by no means an encomium to this state, as it primarily aims to show why pleasure—which is different both from the

48 It is uncertain whether the term ἀοχλησία goes back to Speusippus. Clement's *Stromata* (2.23.138.5) seems to suggest that Democritus already employed this term.

49 Cf. Kotzia 2012.

50 They occur in the *Definition* (412c5, 413a5), a collection which probably reflects some common properties of the Old Academy.

51 Its adjective means being unaffected by something or inexperienced in something. Only *Phlb.* 21e2 refers to the neutral state, whereas *Phlb.* 33d4 and 33e10 denote the soul being unaffected by the change in the body. In *Phdr.* 250c2, it is used to characterize the celebrated state of *Ideenschau*, a condition of being rid of all bad things (ἀπαθείς κακῶν), whereas in *Lg.* 647d7, it signifies the *lack* of all of the experiences (ἀπαθής ὡν πάντων τῶν τοιοῦτων) that are required for acquiring a virtue.

52 ἀλύπως, *Sph.* 217d1; *Phlb.* 43d8; *Prt.* 358b4; *Lg.* 685a8; ἀλυπῆτως, *Lg.* 958e2-3; ἄλυπος, *Plt.* 272a7, *Phlb.* 43c11, 51b6, 66c4; *R.* 585a4; *Lg.* 729a7; ἀλυπότερος, *R.* 582a1; *Ti.* 75b7; ἀλυπότατος, *Lg.* 848e10.

absence of pain (a state) and the release from pain (a process)—should be pursued by mortals in a good life guided by reason. And if we extend our scope to his entire *corpus*, Plato admits that the state of ‘a corpse or a stone’ (*Grg.* 494b) is also hedonically neutral.⁵³

What, then, does a neutral state mean for Plato? To answer this question, we ought to know what constitutes an algedonic space. Algedonic experiences, according to Plato, are essentially embodied experiences, the realization of which should meet a series of criteria with respect to the quality and quantity of bodily changes involved.⁵⁴ A neutral state is thus attained or maintained as long as such criterions are not fulfilled.⁵⁵ Things are in the neutral state not only when they do not undergo the change/motion required (the god is beyond any motions, whereas the inanimate cannot experience psychical change), but also when the motions involved are insufficient with respect to their size, duration or intensity. The latter scenario happens in various ways, including the good case where a keen sensation is easily (μετ’ εὐπετείας, *Ti.* 64d4) produced by a smooth perceptual process such as an optimal operation of sight (cf. *Ti.* 64de),⁵⁶ as well as value-neutral or harmful cases where a bodily change occurs too gently and gradually to affect the consciousness (cf. *Ti.* 64d2-3: ἡρέμα καὶ κατὰ σμικρόν; 65a7: κατὰ σμικρά).⁵⁷

Plato characterizes the neutral state as the most divine because only the god, the perfect being, realizes, and is permanently in, the non-hedonic condition without qualification, whereas human contemplation can be viewed as a close realization of the *homoiōsis theōi*,⁵⁸ a central goal of his philosophy, insofar as in this activity we isolate our intellect from the body and the changing world

53 In order to justify the ultimate value of pleasure, Callicles first dismisses the neutral state as the condition of a stone (ὥσπερ λίθον ζῆν, *Grg.* 494a8; cf. Arist. *EE* 1221a22-3: ἀπαθῆς ὥσπερ λίθος), contrasting it to what a good life for him should be. Socrates does not agree with this argument, but he does admit that a stone is in the neutral state because as a non-living being it is incapable of feeling pleasure or pain. He adduces corpse as another example (494b).

54 Cf. *Ti.* 64d1: βίαιον γιγνώμενον ἄθρόον; 65a3: πληρώσεις ἀθρόας καὶ κατὰ μεγάλα.

55 Drawing on Plato's account of sight in the *Timaeus*, Fletcher 2016, 402-405 offers a detailed reconstruction of how hedonically neutral *aisthēseis* comes about.

56 Plato reunderstands sensation, roughly speaking, as a process in which perceptible particles moves through the body until they reach the soul or the mind (*Ti.* 64c-65b). The particles involved in sight are the subtlest ones among the five senses so that seeing can often be easily realized in a mild process, i.e., undergoing restoration and depletion without being accompanied by pleasure and pain (*Ti.* 64e, cf. 45b-46a).

57 Tracy 1969, 108; Cornford 1937, 266-269.

58 For the motto of *homoiōsis theōi* cf. Annas 1999; Sedley 1999, 2017.

so as to suffer the least possible emotional disturbance.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, as we have seen, Plato does not exclude that the same state can be generated in many other conditions although they are neither natural nor ideal. He even permits a looser understanding of the neutral state, which covers states that only *seem* non-hedonic but are in fact algedonically colored in a mild or moderate way. In the *Laws*, for instance, the Athenian has no scruples about using the neutral state, the condition intermediate between pleasure and pain, to signify two conditions that, strictly speaking, are quite different.⁶⁰

[T]he right way of life (τὸν ὀρθὸν βίον) is neither a single-minded pursuit of pleasure nor an absolute avoidance of pain, but a genial (the word I used just now) contentment with the state between those extremes (τὸ μέσον)—precisely the state, in fact, which we always say is that of the god (θεοῦ).⁶¹

The Athenian introduces the right way of life as intermediate between two extremes, pleasure and pain. As the characterization—‘neither a single-minded pursuit of pleasure nor an absolute avoidance of pain’—implies, this life cannot be a life devoid of any pleasure or pain. In fact, according to *Lg.* 792a-d, such a life is realized either in a well-balanced state of pleasure and pain or in a more delightful way, namely under a condition where moderate pleasures somehow outweigh pains.⁶² In the same sentence, however, the Athenian goes on to claim—a bit surprisingly—that this intermediate state is just where the

59 For Plato, the *homoioōsis theōi* can be realized in various ways (for the ways of becoming godlike in Plato see Obdrzalek 2012, 10-12; Sedley 2017), but (philosophical) contemplation is indisputably a central aspect of this idea (cf. *Phd.* 80e-81a, 82b-c; *Tht.* 173e-174a; *Phlb.* 55a; *Ti.* 80e-81a; 90a-c). In the *Philebus*, we should note, pleasure is only associated with learning, the process of *gaining* knowledge, not with contemplation (cf. Frede 1992, 453; Obdrzalek 2012, 14).

60 My discussions of the *Laws* here and below will not be affected by the question of whether Plato in this dialogue turns to the hedonistic position he has criticized in many other dialogues. I do agree with White 2001, who draws a coherent picture about Plato's accounts of pleasure in the *Law* and other dialogues, although I cannot follow him in assimilating Plato's conception of pleasure to that of Aristotle as an end that supervenes upon a good activity. Bobonich 2002, 351-373 provides a different, yet equally non-hedonistic interpretation of Plato's view of pleasure in the *Laws*.

61 Pl. *Lg.* 792c8-d4, trans. by Saunders (in Cooper 2009), modified.

62 Cf. the expressions ἡλεως, 792a8; εὐθυμον μᾶλλον τε καὶ ἡλεων, 792b7. For their link with joy and delight, see Schöpsdau 2003, 515-516. Modern psychologists like Lotze, Lipps and Beebe-Center also notice that mixture of slight pleasures and pains or a hedonically balanced state are easy to conflate with the neutral state in its strict sense (cf. Massin 2014, 25-27).

God stays, although it is well-known that the Platonic god is conceptually only permitted to be in the strictly non-hedonic state.⁶³

In view of the varieties of the neutral state, it is understandable that not all of them are favored by Plato without qualification. In the *Laws*, with respect to the role of hedonic calculation in human life, the Athenian emphasizes that we as mortals, by nature, are prone to preferring pleasure to pain, and thus prefer a life in which pleasure outweighs pain (732e4-733d6).⁶⁴ At the same time, he reminds his partners that the neutral state is preferred only under the condition that we want to avoid pain; the neutral state is, however, not desirable at the expense of pleasure.⁶⁵ Even in the case of the well-balanced life (τὸν ἰσόρροπον βίον, 733c8), a form of life with modest quantities of mild pleasures and pains (σμικρὰ καὶ ἡρεμαῖα, 733c5), we likewise ponder whether pleasure or pain prevails or whether they are counterbalanced.⁶⁶ While the Athenian does not articulate how to achieve the neutral state, he explicitly acknowledges that this state can be realized both in the normal life and in a moderate life that involves mild algedonic experiences. Remarkably, the neutral state, whether a long-term solid condition or a short-lived fragile counterbalance, is here not ranked as the best option in the competition of value; it is rather average and mundane, something intermediate between good and bad.

This value assignment to the neutral state is not exceptional in Plato's entire *corpus*. In the *Republic*, close to the end of his justification of philosophical life, Socrates asked Glaucon about the hedonic states of different life-forms:

Do you believe that there is an up, a down and a middle in nature (τὸ δὲ μέσον)?

I do.

And do you think that someone who was brought from down below to the middle would have any other belief than that he was moving upward? And if he stood in the middle (ἐν μέσῳ) and saw where he had come from, would he believe that he was anywhere other than the upper region, since he hasn't seen the one that is truly upper?

63 This passage cannot be used to prove that Plato changes his mind or inconsistently holds that the god can enjoy moderate pleasure or pain (for Plato's non-hedonic god see Obdrzalek 2012), but rather suggests, as mentioned, that Plato has a more tolerant attitude towards the imperfect human realization of the *homoiōsis theōi* than traditionally thought (pace Carone 2000).

64 For a detailed discussion of the hedonic calculation here see Schöpsdau 2003, 269-277.

65 Cf. 733b1-3: τὸ δὲ μηδέτερον ἀντὶ μὲν ἡδονῆς οὐ βουλόμεθα, λύπης δὲ ἀλλάττεσθαι βουλόμεθα.

66 Following Schöpsdau 2003, 383-385, I think that two lifeforms are addressed here. For a proposal of tripartition of lives, see Saunders 1972, 25-27.

By god, I don't see how he could think anything else.

And if he was brought back, wouldn't he suppose that he was being brought down? And wouldn't he be right?

Of course.

Then wouldn't all this happen to him because he is inexperienced in what is really and truly up, down, and in the middle?⁶⁷

According to the schema of vertical space Socrates envisages, pure pleasure is located in the upper region, whereas illusionary pleasure (including its concomitant pain) takes over the territory of the underworld.⁶⁸ In the middle stands the neutral state as a boundary between the two areas, between the place where the philosophers enjoy pure pleasure by filling themselves with knowledge in contemplation and the other where the many are immersed in sensory pleasure that inevitably alternates with its correlated pain.⁶⁹ Those who identify pleasure with the cessation of pain or pain with the cessation of pleasure thus commit themselves to a hedonic mistake in the sense that they confuse the motions within the underworld with the upward motion starting from the neutral state. In this picture, motions take place either in the lower or in the upper field, so that there is no continuous process moving from the bottom through the neutral into the upper field. The neutral state, as a demarcation line, serves to cut two hedonic fields and correspondingly two opposite values apart. This model helps Plato to better account for the hedonic error from an epistemological point of view, but it also reveals his apparent disinterest in elaborating on the nature of the neutral state in its own right, perhaps on account of its intermediate value.

In light of the above reflection, the neutral state is surely not always divine. For it can be realized more than one way, beyond or below the threshold for experiencing an algedonic state. Some of the neutral states, as a balance of moderate algedonic qualities, are analogous to the temperature 0°C, which is still a temperature (e.g., a tranquil experience realized by a counterbalanced interplay between some moderate pleasures and pains), whereas others more resemble 0 kg, which is no weight (e.g., the states completely outside algedonic space, such as the state of the god or a stone).⁷⁰ Given that the neutral state, in Plato's view, admits gradation, variations, and relativity, the controversy over

67 *Pl. R.* 584d3-584e2.

68 For discussions of this passage, see Erginel 2006, 2011a, 2011b; Warren 2011; Wolfsdorf 2013b, 111-119.

69 Erginel 2011b, 302.

70 For this distinction in the contemporary debate over algedonic qualities see Massin 2014, 28.

the question of whether this state is preferable for mortals cannot be answered in a general way, as it depends on what kind of neutral state is at stake. This hybrid picture, from another point of view, explains why philosophers in later generations feel bound to classify, specify, or rename the neutral state in the debates over mental peace and human happiness.⁷¹

4 Epilogue

In the interpretation developed above, there is no unbridgeable gap between the neutral and the natural state. The neutral state qua the divine is outside the natural state in the sense of dynamic equilibrium, whereas a part of the neutral state can be taken to be natural insofar as it is used to describe a satisfied or replenished condition of the body or a bodily part. Yet, not all of the satisfied conditions deserve the name 'nature' or 'according to nature', and likewise not all of the realizations of the neutral state warrant the subject being in a natural condition. According to Arenson, a main difference between Plato and Aristotle is that for the former, the natural state is godlike and idealistic, having 'nothing to do with what normally occurs', whereas Aristotle, a realist who is said to show more respect for experience and common sense, associates the natural with what *normally or regularly* happens.⁷² As our discussion has implied, this characterization cannot be correct, for, according to Plato, the natural state is as real as many neutral states. Yet, it is the natural state, rather than the neutral state, that is reserved for mortal animals and cannot be applied to the gods. By contrast, although the neutral state can be divine, it can also be realized in multiple ways even if the subject is not in a natural state.

Since there is no unbridgeable gap these two states, we have no reason *a fortiori* to believe that an endless approximation between them exists. If there is any gulf, it exists only between the natural state, in the sense of an equilibrium of opposed powers and the neutral state of the god, because the medical understanding of the φύσις is conceptually at odds with Plato's

71 In addition to the philosophical tradition, noteworthy is a similar debate over the role and the meaning of the neutral state between health and illness, which is called τὸ οὐδέτερον by Herophilus, a Greek physician and medical theorist (335-280 BC). The οὐδέτερον, according to him, can mean (a) a condition which partakes equally in both extremes, (b) a condition which is in neither of the extremes, and (c) a condition which is sometimes in this, sometimes in that extreme (von Staden 1989, 94). For Galen's development of this thought in his conception of the intermediate state, see Lewis, Thumiger and van der Eijk 2017, 31-34.

72 Arenson 2011, 192.

determination of the god as being perfect in all respects and permanently unchanged. In general, however, the natural and neutral state can *partially* overlap with each other because the former, as a satisfied or fulfilled condition after restoration, is usually hedonically neutral according to Plato. Unlike the natural state, however, the neutral state cannot form a natural unit; it covers a wide spectrum made up of different and even heterogeneous conditions. In many cases, its realization is neither natural nor normative, but includes ordinary or even unnatural experiences. Someone feels calm probably because she is just indifferent or insensitive to what she has become accustomed to, a mundane experience caused by the effect of what current psychologists call the Pollyanna principle;⁷³ it can happen, too, if one is deceived by some state in which pleasure and pain is counterbalanced or only has a dim and indistinct appreciation of external or internal disturbance. In the latter situation, the neutral state is often harmful.

From this perspective, Plato is less revolutionary on this topic than we might be inclined to think. The characterization of the divine state as neutral seems to adopt the traditional notion about the gods being immune to pain and suffering, and his understanding of the natural state and its relation to hedonic qualities, in principle, follows the medical tradition. The normativity ascribed to the natural state does not lead him to elevate the natural state into a supernatural field, whereas the close link between the neutral and the divine state does not preclude him from acknowledging that non-ideal or even harmful states can be algedonically neutral. This suggests that in order to evaluate the state we are in, the hedonic criterion is far from sufficient. It is well-known that the concern over the ways to achieve and maintain the neutral state, an idealized condition, becomes characteristic of Hellenistic philosophy. Plato, however, does not belong to this tradition, even if the admirers of the natural state might find some of his thoughts congenial.

Appendix: ἡσυχία and the Neutral State

In *Republic IX*, Socrates repeatedly uses ἡσυχία either to denote or to characterize the neutral state (583c7, d8, d11, e2, 584a1, a8). If ἡσυχία is a concept with strong normative connotations, even taken by Gocer to be a metaphysical principle in Plato's moral psychology,⁷⁴ does this usage imply that the present

73 This principle is used to explain why we keep returning to the same default state. For a recent overview see Matlin 2017.

74 Gocer 1999.

study underestimates the ethical relevance of the neutral state? To answer this question, we need to clarify what kind of normativity is in question here, because *ἡσυχία*, as a popular term since classical antiquity, was used in different ways by different sources. In a political context, it often symbolizes the internal or external peace of a polis or a distanced attitude of an individual to political/public affairs,⁷⁵ which is opposed to what is called *πολυπραγμοσύνη*. By contrast, in the context of a symposium, *ἡσυχία* was frequently invoked by poets, denoting the peace and *εὐφροσύνη* enjoyed by the symposiasts who restrained the *hybris* that is often aroused by the music, wine and celebration at the feast.⁷⁶ Already Pindar masterfully depicts how the interplay between pleasure and its control enables us to maintain *ἡσυχία*, the peace from toils and troubles, either internal or external (Pi. *P.* 8.1, *O.* 4.16; *fr.* 109; cf. Ar. *Av.* 1321). This ethical message, originating from the symposiastic situation, is then expanded into a general reflection on human life occurring under various circumstances, so that *ἡσυχία* eventually becomes both “a virtue of the symposium and of life in general” insofar as it enables “men to live harmoniously with each other.”⁷⁷

In what way does Plato’s usage of the term agree with or deviate from the tradition? In the *Gorgias*, *ἡσυχία* is the state in which physical desire has been satisfied (cf. *Grg.* 493e4-5).⁷⁸ Similarly, in the *Laws* it refers to a sober state (*διαθέσεων ἕξις*, 791b1) to which someone eventually returns after having indulged in wine and music. In both cases, returning to one’s *ἡσυχία* appears equivalent to returning to one’s *φύσις*, the natural state, which verifies, once again, that the natural and the neutral state indeed can coincide if *ἡσυχία* here denotes a hedonically neutral condition. Two things are worth noting, however. First, although *ἡσυχία* can function as the goal of restoration for Plato, namely as a satisfied state brought back through a recovering process, this does not mean that the neutral state is necessarily natural. Leontius’ desire (*R.* 439e), for instance, can be satisfied and thus calmed, but it leads him to a neutral although still unnatural condition. Second, as we have seen in the symposiastic literature, the state of *ἡσυχία* traditionally does not exclude pleasures; rather, it can accommodate them in their moderate form through imposing order and constraint. Given this feature, it would be prudent not to immediately identify the hedonic value of *ἡσυχία* with being free from pleasure and pain. Hence, Plato’s association of *ἡσυχία* with the neutral state in *R.* 9 can be

75 With *ἄγειν*, e.g. Hdt. 1.66, 5.92; Isoc. 6.2, 10.49; D. 4.1; with *ἔχειν*, e.g. Hdt. 2.45, 7.150, X. *Cyr.* 1.4.18; Lys. 28.7; D. 58.60. For various meanings of this term in a political context see Ehrenberg 1947.

76 Dickie 1984.

77 Dickie 1984, 91.

78 Cf. *Grg.* 494a1; 494a6-b1.

explained by the common features shared by both states, e.g., being peaceful and not annoyed by emotional disturbances.⁷⁹ For the same reason, Plato's characterization of the activity of contemplation as *ἡσυχία* in *Tim.* 71a1-2 does not need to be read as if contemplation has been tacitly treated as hedonically neutral; the reason for this characterization might be that in such an activity the rational part of the soul is least disturbed by its appetitive part (70e-71a). In other words, solely being in *ἡσυχία* cannot tell us whether one is enjoying an intellectual pleasure that is pure and calm or whether one remains in the neutral state (i.e. being rid of any hedonic qualities).

Leaving aside the problem of how to grasp *ἡσυχία* hedonically, we should note that its value assignments are not always univocally positive in Plato. Sometimes, *ἡσυχία* just denotes a temporary cessation of the function of our sense organs, e.g. the state of a dreamless sleep.⁸⁰ Sometimes it signifies calmness based on endurance or self-control in the face of difficulties. On his last day, for instance, Socrates asked his followers to keep quiet and control themselves *in confronting his death* (*ἡσυχίαν τε ἄγετε καὶ καρτερεῖτε*, *Phd.* 117e2). The *ἡσυχία* of a philosopher in *R.* 496d6 is merely a *second-best* way of living a life he accepts in a corrupted city. Also in the *Republic*, *ἡσυχίαν ἄγειν* is juxtaposed with *καρτερεῖν* (605d8), which denotes the effort of self-control that emerges from a turbulent struggle of psychical powers within rather than a free play of cognitive faculties in contemplation. To use Aristotle's phrasing, this is not a state deriving from *phronēsis*, but from *enkrateia*, a Xenophonic virtue rather than a Platonic one.⁸¹ Even negative evaluation of *ἡσυχία* can be attested in Plato as well. In the *Apology*, Socrates repeatedly contrasts his philosophical life, characterized by the unremitting inquiry that inevitably irritates the city and other people, with the *ἡσυχία*, a calm life of ease he is not willing to live (*Ap.* 36b6, 37e3, 38a1).⁸² In *Prm.* 162e1-2, *ἡσυχία* is viewed as being unmoved (*ἀκίνητον*) and static (*ἑστάναι*), a feature opposed to what is essential to a living being. On account of this, Timaeus demands that the living body should

79 It is noteworthy that in *R.* 9 the independent use of *ἡσυχία* seems to be a shorthand for the dependent use of the *ἡσυχία* of x (x = pleasure, pain, and the like); cf. τὴν *ἡσυχίαν* τοῦ τοιοῦτου (τοῦ τοιοῦτου = painful things), 583d8; ἡ τῆς ἡδονῆς *ἡσυχία*, 583e1-2. The *Philebus* never employs the term *ἡσυχία* in referring to the neutral state. In this dialogue, *ἡρέμα*, the state of being in *ἡσυχία*, is contrasted with *σφόδρα* (24c1-5), denoting the feature of being mild and gentle.

80 *Ti.* 45d7-e4; cf. *Lg.* 791a6.

81 Dorion 2003.

82 *Pace* Gocer 1999, 20.

imitate the cosmos insofar as it is in a constant movement, opposed to an ἡσυχία that does harm to the body by subjecting it to external movement.⁸³

The hybrid picture of ἡσυχία in Plato has more in common with its uses in medical tradition than in the political or the symposiastic context.⁸⁴ Like in Plato, ἡσυχία in medical texts signifies a calm state, in particular the cessation of pain or a state of control (cf. ἡσυχίη as an antonym of *ponos*, ἢ πόνοισιν ἢ ἡσυχίῃ, *Art.* 5 = 6.8 Li.).⁸⁵ In close parallel to its use in the *Gorgias*, this word, in *On Ancient Medicine*, reflects a short-term equilibrium, the state of the body when food is completely blended and digested (*VM* 11= 1.594 Li.). It is associated with the concept of health only when it applies to a long-term equilibrium.⁸⁶ However, although ἡσυχία can be a key feature of those who are healthy or serve as an indicator of the healthy state, a conflation of both states cannot be attested in the *Corpus Hippocraticum*. It is also possible that ἡσυχία is experienced under a pathological condition in which a disease or harm is latent, one which has not yet come to awareness (cf. *Morb.* 4.45 = 7.568 Li.). Sometimes, keeping ἡσυχία is explicitly recommended as a method of treatment for the patients—antithetical to the treatment with strong medicine or intense physical training.⁸⁷ According to *Are.* 23 = 2.84 Li., ἡσυχία and ῥαθυμία can even foster cowardice. Thus, in the Hippocratic tradition, ἡσυχία is equally an umbrella term that covers a wide variety of phenomena as long as in them one is not specifically aware of the experience of pain or the symptom is below the threshold of consciousness. Consequently, the natural state is only one of its possible realizations.

83 ὅταν μὲν τις ἡσυχίαν ἄγων τὸ σῶμα παραδιδῶ ταῖς κινήσεσι, κρατηθὲν διώλετο, *Ti.* 88d4-5; cf. 89a4, e7; *Chrm.* 159b-160a.

84 Gocer 1999 is correct in pointing out that Plato's use of ἡσυχία goes beyond its political connotation and has much in common with the Hippocratic concept. However, she does not quote any Hippocratic passage to support this observation.

85 According to *De morbis* 3.13 (= 7.132 Li.), the patient will obtain ἡσυχία once the pain is removed (ὅταν δὲ ἀνῆ ἢ ὀδύνη, ἡσυχίην ἔχε). Physicians do not seem to be interested in the relationship between ἡσυχία and pleasure, probably because pain as a symptom plays a more important role for diagnosis and treatment.

86 *VM* 19 = 1.620 Li.: Πάντων δὲ ἄριστα διακείται ὠνθρωπος, ὅταν πέσσηται καὶ ἐν ἡσυχίῃ ἔη, μηδεμίην δύναμιν ἰδίην ἀποδεικνύμενος.

87 πολλῇ δ' ἡσυχίῃ, *Frac.* 11 = 3.454 Li.; ἀλλ' ἡσυχίη καὶ ἀτρεμίη ξυμφέρει μάλιστα, *Ulc.* 1.14 = 6.399 Li.; cf. *Artic.* 81.3 = 4.320 Li.; *Aff.* 12 = 6.220 Li.; *Aph.* 2. 29 = 4.478 Li.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Philip van der Eijk, Tianqin Ge, Jing Huang, and Paul Zipfel for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I am also indebted to two anonymous references of *Mnemosyne* for their illuminating criticisms and advices.

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