1. Introduction

From the late classical period, Greek ethical philosophers widely use the term "aretē" to refer to a condition of the psyche. Such usage occurs as early as Plato's so-called Socratic dialogues. For example, in the following passage of the *Meno*, Socrates explains to Meno how they must inquire into whether aretē is teachable:

"And so also in the case of aretē, since we do not know what it is or what sort of thing it is, we must inquire into whether or not it is teachable by laying down a hypothesis and saying the following: Among the things that pertain to the psyche what sort of thing must aretē be if it is to be teachable or not teachable?"\(^2\)

Compare the following passage from *Cratylus*, where Socrates offers accounts of the words "kakia" and "aretē":

"We must seek out the meaning of 'aretē' and 'kakia.' ... Inasmuch as all things are in motion, everything that moves badly (kakōs ion) would be kakia. And when this bad motion in relation to its environment exists in the soul (psychē), it receives the general name in the specific sense of badness (kakia) ... If these are the reasons for the name of kakia, aretē would be the opposite of this. It would signify first ease of motion, and secondly that the flow of the good soul is always unimpeded, which designates that which always flows (aei rheon) without hindrance. It is properly called 'aeireitēn' or perhaps 'hairesetē' indicating that this condition (hexeōs) is most choiceworthy (hairetōtatēs)."\(^3\)

While Socrates' accounts are obviously fancifully neo-Heraclitean, they depend on the non-fanciful assumptions that aretē and kakia are psychological entities.

Compare Aristotle, who at the beginning of book 2 of *Eudemian Ethics* writes:

"All goods (agatha) are either external or in the psyche (en psychēi); and of these, the goods in the psyche are more choiceworthy ... For wisdom (phronēsis) and aretē and pleasure are in the psyche ..."\(^4\)

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1 I will leave the word "aretē" untranslated until later in the paper when I focus on its meaning.
2 *Meno* 87b2-5. Cp. 88c5.
3 *Crat.* 415a-d.
4 *EE* 1218b32-35. Cp. *EE* 1219b26-27: "Next, we must contemplate the psyche. For aretē is of the psyche, not coincidentally."
Here, Aristotle uses "aretē" to refer to a condition of a particular part of the psyche, namely character (ēthos).

Compare Epicurus who, in the context of discussing the telos in the Letter to Menoeceus, characterizes phronēsis itself as an aretē and as the best of the aretai:

"Of all these things [that constitute the telos], the starting point (archē) and the greatest good is wisdom (phronēsis) … From it, all of the remaining (hai loipai pasai) aretai have their natural growth …"\(^5\)

I am assuming that Epicurus conceives of wisdom as a condition of the psyche. Granted this, in the passage, he does not clearly or exhaustively enumerate the remaining aretai; however, he does indicate justness (dikaiosynē) saliently among them. Compare the title of one of Epicurus' lost works: On Justness and the Other Aretai.\(^6\) It is reasonable, then, to think that Epicurus regards justness as well as wisdom among other unspecified aretai as conditions of the psyche.

The evidence from the Old Stoa is more explicit. For example, Plutarch attributes the following description of aretē to Zeno of Citium and Chrysippus:

"aretē is a certain condition (diathesis) and power (dynamis) of the ruling part (tou hēgemonikou) of the psyche, which has come into being through reason (logou)."\(^7\)

Granted then, the term "aretē" is standardly used in late classical and post-classical Greek ethical philosophy to refer to a condition of the psyche.\(^8\) It was not always standardly so used. As I have argued elsewhere,\(^9\) in ethical philosophical contexts before Plato, "aretē" was standardly used to denote a property of action or of a pattern of action, even a pattern of action constitutive of a mature life as a whole. The most succinct and direct evidence for this claim is the following line, which begins Gorgias' Helen:

"The adornment of a city is manly valor, of a body beauty, of a soul (psychē) wisdom, of an action (pragma) aretē."\(^10\)

Compare the following fragment from Democritus:

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\(^5\) Ep. Men. 132.  
\(^6\) DL 10.28.  
\(^7\) SVF 1.202.1-3 = Plut. de virt. mor. 441c.  
\(^8\) It is interesting to observe and would be well worth examining which specific psychological conditions the various classical and post-classical philosophers regard as aretai and why. But this will not be my focus here. Instead, I am concerned with a broader question.  
\(^10\) Gorgias, Helen 1.1.
"It is necessary to strive for deeds (erga) and actions (prêksias), not words, of aretê."\textsuperscript{11}

Accordingly, when, for example, in Prodicus' \textit{Choice of Heracles} the mythological hero is exhorted to pursue the path of Aretē, we should understand this exhortation as to way of life rather than more narrowly to the achievement of some condition of the psyche. Likewise, when in the \textit{Dissoi Logoi}, the author mentions the sophists as well as the Pythagoreans and Anaxagoreans as teachers of aretê,\textsuperscript{12} we should understand this claim as referring to their instruction in living well, not more narrowly to education whose aim is the cultivation of a certain condition of the psyche.

To be clear, I am not claiming that prior to Plato "aretē" could not be and so was never used to refer to a condition of the psyche; it could be and occasionally was so used. Rather, my claim is that it was not standardly so used. Again, it was standardly used to refer to a property of action or a pattern of action. Above all, in late fifth and early fourth century ethical philosophical, including sophistic, contexts, "aretē" was standardly used to refer to a pattern of action of civic success, beneficence, and approbation. This is how Prodicus used the term, and how it is used, for example, in the \textit{Anonymus Iamblichi}. Compare the following passage from Alcidamas' \textit{Odysseus}:

"The aretē of a man is to heed his commanders and do what is ordered and to be pleasing in all respects to the general public, and to see to it that he is in all respects a good man, doing good to his friends and harm to his enemies."\textsuperscript{13}

Given the earlier action-denoting usage of "aretē," my question here is exactly when and why "aretē" came to be standardly used among ethical philosophers to refer to a condition of the psyche. In other words, my question concerns what I will call the emergence and establishment of "psychological" "aretē." To be clear, by "psychological" "aretē," I mean use of the term "aretē" to refer to a condition, a trait or power, of the psyche. So, more precisely, my question concerns the emergence and establishment of the psychological use of "aretē"; but I will stick with my abbreviated formulation for convenience.

In pursuing this subject, I will begin by considering instances of "aretē" among Socrates other than Plato, in particular Aeschines, Antisthenes, and Xenophon. These are in fact the only other Socrates for whom we have fragments or works in which "aretē" occurs. My aim in considering "aretē" among these Socrates is to determine whether Plato's psychological use of "aretē" is unique among them. For instance, if it could be confirmed that among other Socrates "aretē" is standardly or in a studied way used to refer to a psychological condition, then there would be reason to doubt that Plato was responsible for at least the emergence of psychological "aretē." Moreover, if psychological "aretē" were prevalent among the Socrates, that would encourage the hypothesis that the historical Socrates was ultimately responsible for the emergence of psychological "aretē."

\textsuperscript{11} Democritus B55.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Dissoi Logoi} 6.7-8.
\textsuperscript{13} 28.
In fact, the evidence suggests that in Aeschines, Antisthenes, and Xenophon, "areté" is not standardly used to refer to a psychological condition. So, this conclusion encourages the thesis that Plato himself is responsible for the emergence of psychological "areté."

With respect to the establishment of psychological "areté," I will consider instances of "areté" among non-Platonic Old Academic philosophical works or fragments. These include works in the Platonic corpus widely regarded as composed in the fourth century, but not by Plato, as well as a fragment of Xenocrates. The relevant works in the Platonic corpus are limited to the Epinomis and Eryxias.

I will argue that in the Epinomis, "areté" is consistently used to refer a psychological trait; and in the Eryxias there is evidence of "areté" used to refer to a psychological trait. The evidence from Xenocrates, albeit very limited, is to a degree consistent with the preceding results. However, it encourages a more nuanced conclusion, which I suggest sheds light on the Old Academic and subsequent philosophical tradition of the use of "areté."

In the Old Academy "areté" was standardly used to refer to a psychological trait because "areté" was understood to denote a disposition (hexis), condition (diathesis), or power (dunamis) of its bearer— not necessarily the psyche— and because, among dispositions, conditions, or powers, those of the psyche were regarded as most valuable for eudaimonia, which is to say wellbeing, the goal of human existence.

This conception of areté is rooted in Plato, especially in a passage of Plato's Gorgias. It is enshrined in the Old Academic Definitions. And Aristotle, himself in one respect an Old Academic philosopher, accepts it. In short, through Plato's influence, psychological "areté" gets established within the Old Academy.

I will conclude to considering why Plato saliently uses "areté" to refer to a condition of the psyche.