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In this paper I argue for a set of distinct but interrelated theses; first, I argue that Plato’s notion of the care of the self is his remedy to the psychological malady he refers to as ‘wandering’. The wandering self requires care, and a close reading of the Platonic corpus indicates that self-cultivation means stabilizing the soul in accordance with its intelligent nature. I then argue that Plato appropriates the ethical injunction to care for the soul and draws from it an important epistemological consequence. Specifically, his view is that a wandering soul’s instability renders it incapable of philosophical cognition. The Platonic insight is that grasping formal reality is only possible for a soul that is in a condition similar to its object. To engender this condition, one must participate in dialectic.

In the first section, I articulate Plato’s conception of psychic wandering, and in the second section I demonstrate how understanding the soul’s convalescence follows from an analysis of its nature. In the third section, I take up the epistemic consequences of maintaining a healthy soul. In section four, I argue that dialectic cares for the soul. I conclude with some speculative remarks about the role of collection and division in caring for the soul. It is my hope that the paper articulates the intimate connection between Platonic psychology and epistemology.

I. PSYCHIC WANDERING

Just before referring to himself as a gadfly in the Apology, Socrates claims that his task is to chide those who care for anything other than their souls. He asks his fellow citizens:

Are you not ashamed of [how you care] [ἐπιμελούμενος ὅπως] to possess as much