In a famous passage in Plato’s *Protagoras* (352b3–358d2), Socrates takes up the question of whether ‘the many’ (hoi polloi), as Socrates calls them, are correct when they say that knowledge can be ‘dragged around like a slave’ by desire, pleasure, pain, love, and the like. Of course, Socrates makes quite clear at the outset where he stands: ‘If someone knows what is good and evil, then he could not be forced by anything to act contrary to what knowledge says; understanding (phronēsis) is sufficient to aid a person’ (352c4–7). As the investigation proceeds, it becomes clear why Socrates is convinced he is right about this. Things can appear to be better or worse than they really are and the ‘. . . power of appearance (dunamis tou phainomenou) can often make us wander all over the place in confusion, changing our minds about the same things and regretting our actions and choices . . .’ (356d4–7). Knowledge, however, Socrates says, is the metrêtikê technê, the craft of measurement that ‘can make the appearances lose their power by showing us the truth’ (356d7–e1). Later Socrates declares that no one ever does what he even believes to be evil, for ‘it is not in human nature. . . to go towards what one believes to be evil instead of good’ (358d1–2). If someone does what is evil, accordingly, it must be because at the time he acted, he was taken in by the power of appearance, which caused him to mistake what is in fact evil for a good. So goes Socrates’ explanation of why hoi polloi are mistaken and why there really is no such thing as akrasia, recognizing what is better for one and yet doing what is worse.

It seems clear in the *Protagoras* discussion that by the ‘power of appearance’ Socrates means the power of something that merely appears to be good to convince an agent that it is good. It also seems clear that
whenever the metrêtikê technê is present in someone he will not be defeated by the dunamis tou phainomenou. What is not clear in the Protagoras discussion is just why some things have the power of appearance at all. Nor is it clear in what way the metrêtikê technê ‘makes the appearances lose their power.’ In this paper we shall try to clarify both issues and in so doing criticize two different ways of understanding Socrates’ moral psychology. We shall argue, contrary to what is usually said, that, for Socrates, ‘the power of appearance’ is tied to the psychological agency of the appetites and passions. If what we shall argue is correct, Socrates believes that appetites and passions can be either strong or weak and that a strong appetite or passion is one that causes an agent to believe that the pleasure at which it aims is in fact a good. It is strong appetite or passion, then, that accounts for the object of the appetite or passion having the power of appearance. We shall then argue against the view recently advanced by Daniel Devereux that moral knowledge is never defeated by the ‘power of appearance’ because moral knowledge always generates a stronger desire for what is in fact good than any appetite or passion creates (Devereux 1995, 381–408). If we are correct, Socrates’ position is that moral knowledge is never defeated by the power of appearance because moral knowledge is incompatible with the possession of strong appetites or passions.

1. The Traditional Theory

Before we turn to the question of why some things have the power of appearance at all, perhaps we would do well first to consider several points about Socrates’ view of moral motivation, on which virtually all scholars agree. Few scholars, for instance, would contest the claim that Socrates is a eudaimonist both in the sense that the agent’s own conception of happiness provides the ultimate justification for anything other than happiness that an agent values but also in the sense that the agent’s conception of happiness provides the ultimate explanation for all that the agent undertakes. To say that Socrates is a eudaimonist in the first sense is to say that he takes something to be a good if and only if he believes that it contributes in some way, either instrumentally or constitutively, to happiness. To say that Socrates is a eudaimonist in

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3 See Morrison (2003) for an exception to this general rule.
4 It takes us beyond the issues with which we are here concerned to take up the difficult question of Socrates’ view of the content of eudaimonia.