

Socratic Ethics in the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Republic*

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## ABSTRACT

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This dissertation analyzes Socratic ethics in three Platonic dialogues: the *Protagoras*, the *Gorgias*, and the *Republic*. The purpose is twofold: 1) to question the standard view that what is the defining characteristic of Socratic ethics in the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* is its intellectualism and that the *Republic* represents a correction to, or deviation from, such intellectualism, and 2) to offer an alternative account of Socratic ethics in these dialogues. The alternative account this dissertation proposes is that what makes Socrates a compelling ethical figure is his unique understanding of what constitutes an agent's self-interest. Moreover, the contention will be that the uniqueness of Socrates' ethical views comes into focus when we consider them vis-à-vis the views and concerns of his interlocutors, particularly the sophists.

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In the memory of my father  
Manuel Martínez del Castro  
1924-1999

To Francisco and Sofia  
*sine quibus non*

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Plato's Two Socrateses and the Problem of Socratic Intellectualism

Much of modern Platonic studies has been dominated by the developmental views inaugurated by the German scholar Karl Friedrich Hermann. In his *Geschichte und System der Platonischen Philosophie* (published in 1839), Hermann distinguished for the first time a "Socratic period" in Plato's dialogues and proposed that Plato's thought could be systematized if one recognized its evolution throughout his lifetime. Since then, buttressed by Lewis Campbell's stylistic division between "early," "middle," and "late" dialogues and Aristotle's distinction between Socratic and Platonic concerns,<sup>1</sup> it has become almost an article of faith among a great number of scholars that the Platonic corpus expresses the views of *two* philosophers, Socrates and Plato.<sup>2</sup> According to this account, what distinguishes Socrates from Plato are the former's concern solely with ethical matters, his disavowal of knowledge, his pursuit of universal definitions, which nevertheless invariably results in *aporia*, his use of the elenchus and inductive/analogical arguments as methods of inquiry, and his notion that virtue is knowledge and that *akrasia* is impossible. By contrast, these scholars claim that Plato, in the truly Platonic dialogues, abandons both the Socratic methods and doctrines in favor of a more positive and

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<sup>1</sup> For a list of passages in the Aristotelian corpus where we find such distinctions, see Irwin 1995: 8-11. Some scholars, however, have questioned Aristotle's reliability as a historical source, most recently Kahn 1996: 79-87.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Guthrie 1975: 67, who, following Hermann, says that a set of dialogues is "generally recognized" as "Socratic, using the term not in the wide sense to denote all the dialogues in which Socrates takes the lead, but for the smaller, early group in which it may be claimed that Plato is imaginatively recalling, in form and substance, the conversations of his master without as yet adding to them any distinctive doctrines of his own." Scholars who have followed Guthrie include: Santas 1979; Vlastos 1991; Kraut 1992; Penner 1992; Irwin 1995.

constructive account that is characterized by his introduction of the theory of the Forms. More generally, however, the sharpest distinction scholars who subscribe to the developmental approach draw is between the Socratic intellectualist ethics of the early dialogues and the complex moral psychology of the middle period, particularly as represented in the *Republic*.<sup>3</sup>

According to the standard developmental account, Socrates' intellectual attitude to virtue in the early dialogues is evident in (1) his treating virtue as an expertise that can be acquired by possessing the correct intellectual understanding of what is good and bad, and (2) his belief that such understanding does not require training of the emotions or of the irrational desires. For Socrates, then, the difference between the virtuous and the vicious lies not in their motivations but in their intellects. By contrast, scholars of the developmental school contend that in the later dialogues, particularly the *Republic*, Plato's attitude to virtue has shifted significantly, since he believes that the emotional and the irrational constitute sources of motivation independent of the intellect and that these require training in order to lead to virtuous action.<sup>4</sup>

The developmental view of the dialogues and its concomitant notion that Socrates holds an intellectualist ethics has been widespread and has persisted in contemporary scholarship, if in more nuanced form. In the recent work of Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith, *Socratic Moral Psychology*, the authors argue that Socrates is a motivational intellectualist "because he is committed to the view that every ethical failure

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<sup>3</sup> See, particularly, Reeve 1988; and Cooper 1999a and 1999b.

<sup>4</sup> Penner 1992: 126-27. Terry Penner has long been the main advocate of this view, but others exhibit a similar outlook. See, for example, Reeve 1988: 134-5; Frede 1992a: xxix-xxx; Irwin 1995: 75-6; Cooper 1999a; Nehamas 1999: 27-58; Rowe 2003; Reshotko 2006.

involves some *cognitive* failure, for each ethical failure is the direct product of some false belief about what is good for the agent of the failure.”<sup>5</sup> Their version of Socratic intellectualism stands apart from the standard view in that they believe that Socrates does recognize the power of irrational desires. However, they argue that Socrates does not believe that irrational desires can motivate us to act, since for him every action is the result of some judgment the agent has made about what is good for him and not of some irrational force. So while irrational desires “influence judgment by the way in which they represent their aims to the soul,” they do not have the power to form beliefs that can motivate the agent to act. Therefore, on their reading, Socrates remains an intellectualist, even if he does acknowledge the influence of passions and emotions in ethical action.

To be sure, Brickhouse and Smith’s account of Socratic intellectualist ethics is more holistic and salutary than the one that has prevailed, primarily because they underscore Socrates’ recognition of the power of the irrational on the soul. Nevertheless, their account ultimately represents merely one more version of the standard notion that the mark of Socratic ethics is its intellectualism, without changing the argumentative stakes of this position. Moreover, from this perspective, it would seem that the question of Socratic ethics has been settled and that it is only a matter of understanding what kind of intellectualist Socrates is. But, as I will argue, there are important weaknesses in the account of Socratic intellectualist ethics that warrant a reconsideration of whether this is the best way to describe Socrates’ ethical outlook.

While there is no question that Socrates values rationality and deems it necessary for ethical action, the important question is whether this is what is primarily distinctive

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<sup>5</sup> Brickhouse and Smith 2010: 1

about him and his ethical outlook. In other words, is intellectualism definitive of Plato's Socrates? Is Socrates the only one, among Plato's many characters, who values reason, virtue, and knowledge? Is it his intellectualism that makes him a compelling ethical figure?

In this dissertation I will propose that what makes Socrates a compelling ethical figure is his unique understanding of what constitutes an agent's self interest. For Socrates, the agent's self interest is tied to the self interest of the other, such that care for one's soul entails not only caring for one's own well-being but also caring for the well-being of the other. In fact, the agent's capacity to care for the well-being of others measures his own ability to benefit himself. Socrates' emphasis on rationality, virtue, and knowledge must be understood as a function of this commitment. I will thus contend that Socratic ethics is distinguished neither by its intellectualism nor by the implausible view that having intellectual knowledge of what is good is enough for desiring it or for acting in one's best interest.<sup>6</sup> Rather, for Socrates rationality, virtue, and knowledge are valuable to the degree to which they preserve or advance the well-being of both the agent and the recipient of his actions. I will also contend that in order to understand the significance of Socrates' commitment to these values it is important to realize that such a commitment is both a response and an alternative to sophistic claims and concerns about these same matters, as Plato represents them in the dialogues. For rationality, virtue, and knowledge are also important to these other Platonic characters, not only Socrates. From

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<sup>6</sup> In this regard, consider what Nehamas (1999: 27) has to say about Socrates' intellectualism: "How could such a supremely intelligent man fail to realize that intelligence is not enough for being good, and, as it followed for him, for being happy?" Nehamas here implicitly admits how implausible this view of Socrates is, even if he does not question it.

this perspective, the uniqueness of Socratic ethics comes into focus when we consider it vis-à-vis the views and concerns of his interlocutors, rather than in isolation from them.

In order to examine Socratic ethics closely, I will look at two dialogues that are considered paradigmatic of Socratic intellectualism, the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*. In my discussion of these dialogues, I will focus not only on Socrates but also on his main interlocutors so as to bring into the foreground their views and attitudes as well. In addition, I will review the passages in the *Republic* that are normally considered a correction to Socrates' intellectualist ethics and propose an alternative interpretation that I believe is consonant with the overall purpose of this dialogue.

Before I elaborate further these ideas, I wish to explain why I believe there are important weaknesses in the standard account of Socrates' intellectualist ethics and why it does not represent the most adequate view of Socratic ethics.

## **2. Weaknesses in the Argument for Socratic Intellectualist Ethics**

I believe there are at least three important weaknesses in the story of Socratic intellectualist ethics. First, this understanding of Socratic ethics relies heavily on the assumption that the Socrates of the so-called early dialogues and the Socrates of the *Republic* represent two different philosophical incarnations of the same character. I say "assumption" because there is no conclusive evidence that Plato's thought developed or changed in this way. After all, the developmental schema that I briefly described before is the result of a particular interpretation of the dialogues that sees inconsistencies in them for which the reader must account. Hermann's solution to this problem was to reconstruct Plato's intellectual evolution so as to supply a biographical context that could

explain Socrates' different positions in the different dialogues.<sup>7</sup> In this way, he arrived at the notion that in the dialogues there is a historical Socrates and a Platonic Socrates, each of whom holds very different views. The problem with Hermann's solution is that it is circular, for it starts out with an interpretive assumption, viz., that there are inconsistencies or contradictions in the dialogues, which is solved with another interpretive assumption, viz., that Plato's thought evolved, which in turn is evident from the initial interpretive assumption, viz., that there are inconsistencies in the dialogues. Similarly, those who have supplied stylometric chronologies to buttress the developmental schema have done so in order to support a particular developmental view, thus also creating a circular argument: a particular chronology is invoked so as to support a particular developmental interpretation, while that particular developmental interpretation serves to support that particular chronological order.<sup>8</sup>

The account that Socrates holds an intellectualist ethics in some dialogues but not in others derives from the circular arguments of the developmental schema. Interpreting the views of Socrates in some dialogues as intellectualist supports the notion that Plato's thought evolved, while at the same time the notion that Plato's thought evolved is made evident by the Socratic intellectualism of the early dialogues, which Plato, after acquiring intellectual maturation, corrects in later dialogues. This hopeless circularity makes this account of Socratic ethics much less compelling.

The second weakness of the intellectualist story is that it is constructed by partitioning what Socrates says from the dramatic context of the dialogues. That is,

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Tigerstedt 1977: 28, who paraphrases Hermann.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Nails 1995: 70.

interpreters who subscribe to this account focus solely or primarily on Socrates' statements and disregard the dramatic elements in which they are embedded, thus treating the latter as perfunctory. The peril of disregarding the dramatic context is that a skewed view of Socrates the character follows and the many implicit communications between him and other characters in the dialogues are lost. Moreover, this interpretive methodology treats the other characters as mere props whose task is to help advance Socrates' views. As a result, Socrates appears to construct his arguments unfairly and at the expense of his interlocutors.<sup>9</sup> Or, alternatively, Socrates's statements are seen as compressed doctrine, which needs to be elaborated further in order to be properly understood, which then leads to all sorts of tortured and purely speculative interpretations that appeal to arguments that are completely external to the dialogues.<sup>10</sup> In the first case, we end up with a deceitful and rather foolish Socratic figure that can hardly be taken seriously; in the second case, we have a philosopher who adheres to complex doctrines of which he only gives us glimmers through paradoxical statements. The problem with both positions is that they require that we ignore much of what Plato has written and much of what he rhetorically implies. From this perspective, we can say that the story of Socrates' intellectualist ethics is the result of a narrow interpretation of the dialogues that does not do justice to the richness of the text.

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<sup>9</sup> This is the case, for example, with the notion that in the *Gorgias* Socrates "traps" Gorgias just so as to make a point. See, for example, Irwin 1979: 125-8; Fussi 2001: 123; and Stauffer 2006: 21.

<sup>10</sup> A good example of this is Penner and Rowe 1994. They first extract premises from what Socrates says in the *Gorgias* concerning desire for the good and then, in order to support their thesis that desire for the good in this dialogue refers to the real and not apparent good, they construct arguments and examples that have no basis on the text but prove their thesis. But, as McTighe (1984) has argued, in this dialogue Socrates equivocates between the apparent and the real good, and this equivocation must be understood in the context of what he is trying to achieve with Polus.



The third, and perhaps most important, weakness in the account regarding Socratic intellectualism is that it fails to acknowledge that such intellectualism was a staple of Greek culture. Other scholars have long recognized this point. For example, in *The Greeks and the Irrational* E. R. Dodds notes that since Homer the Greeks had “the habit of explaining character or behavior in terms of knowledge.” He then goes on to say,

This intellectualist approach to the explanation of behaviour set a lasting stamp on the Greek mind: the so-called Socratic paradoxes, that “virtue is knowledge,” and that “no one does wrong on purpose,” were not novelties, but an explicit generalized formulation of what had long been an ingrained habit of thought ... . If character is knowledge, what is not knowledge is not part of the character, but comes to a man from outside. When he acts in a manner contrary to the system of conscious dispositions which he is said to “know,” his action is not properly his own, but has been dictated to him. In other words, unsystematised, nonrational impulses, and the acts resulting from them, tend to be excluded from the self and ascribed to an alien origin.<sup>11</sup>

According to Dodds, Greeks in general displayed an intellectualist view of ethical action in that they believed that some kind of knowledge was necessary in order to act ethically, a view that dates back to Homer. This view, then, is not limited to Socrates.

Similarly, in *The Socratic Paradoxes and the Greek Mind* Michael O’Brien asserts,

Greek words which the dictionaries define as “wise” or “foolish,” with their synonyms and derivatives, are used with great frequency to mean or imply “morally good” or “morally bad.” The Greeks sometimes speak as if the knowledge of what one should do were the most important, if not the only, requisite of moral behavior.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Dodds 1951: 17.

<sup>12</sup> O’Brien 1967: 26. He goes on to give a number of examples from Homer, Hesiod, and Thucydides as evidence of this view.

The reason for this view, argues O'Brien, is "the ancient appeal to the motive of profit or happiness, or to the fear of punishment. The fool does not mark the consequences of his crimes and omissions; the wise man does, and so he is virtuous."<sup>13</sup> In other words, in Greek culture acting in accord with one's intelligent understanding of one's self-interest was a sign of virtue and moral goodness. The notion that virtue requires some kind of knowledge or wisdom, then, has a long history before Plato's Socrates, so this notion hardly qualifies as the distinctive marker of Socrates' ethical views.

Because the story concerning Socrates' intellectualist ethics and Plato's supposed correction of it relies on the circularity of the developmental schema, ignores much of what the dialogues communicate, and overlooks the intellectualism of Greek culture, it is important to revisit the question of what characterizes Socrates's ethical outlook.

### **3. Socratic and Sophistic Concerns in the Dialogues: The Uniqueness of Socrates'**

#### **Ethics of Self-interest**

As I noted earlier, it is my contention that what is distinctive about Plato's Socrates is his unique understanding of self-interest. Indeed, Plato presents Socrates as championing a novel notion of self-interest that stands in contrast both to the tradition and to his contemporaries, particularly the sophists, as Plato portrays them.<sup>14</sup> It is when we contrast Socrates' views with the views of his sophistic (and sophistically influenced)

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<sup>13</sup> O'Brien 1967: 26-27.

<sup>14</sup> In this dissertation I will not concern myself with the question of whether Plato purposefully mischaracterizes the sophists and what his motivation for this may be. Rather, I take the sophists in the dialogues as Plato's own literary constructions whose purpose is to highlight the uniqueness of the figure of Socrates. Thus my main concern is with how they function within the dialogues as dramatic figures; see section four below.

counterparts that we are in a better position to understand Socratic ethics. As I will argue, in the *Protagoras*, the *Gorgias*, and the *Republic* Plato represents the sophists and sophistically influenced characters as conceiving of self-interest as fundamentally egoistic. This is particularly evident in the speeches that Plato puts in the mouths of Protagoras in the *Protagoras*, Glaucon in the *Republic*, and Callicles in the *Gorgias*.<sup>15</sup> These speeches share the important argument that human relations are mainly agonistic; a consequent tension arises between the notions that personal survival depends on communal living and yet that being successful in the community depends on having power over others.<sup>16</sup> In this context, rationality, knowledge, and technical skill are deemed valuable as a means of learning how to attain and exhibit the virtues that will enable the individual to acquire power and enjoy prominence in the community. Two implications follow. The first is that Plato implicitly depicts sophistic ethical views as organized around a desire for power and the notion that one individual's success does not necessarily entail the success of another, and often comes at his expense. In this context, virtue is beneficial to the agent only to the extent that it provides him with an advantage over others or as a way to maintain personal safety. Similarly, rationality and knowledge have to do with discerning how best to secure this advantage and safety. The second implication is that, viewed from this perspective, it is the sophists, and those influenced by them, that Plato presents as claiming that possessing a certain kind of knowledge is sufficient for being successful. For example, in his Great Speech in the *Protagoras*

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<sup>15</sup> *Prot.* 320c8-328d2; *Rep.* 358e3-362c8; and *Gorg.* 482c4-486d1 and 491e5-492c8.

<sup>16</sup> Although the Great Speech of Protagoras seems to portray social relations as cooperative and peaceful, I will argue that it contains a covert *logos* in which Protagoras disdains the virtues of justice and moderation and emphasizes the desire for political power. He conveys this in the mythical portion of the speech, in particular.

Protagoras covertly suggests that by learning a certain virtue from him young Athenian aristocrats can acquire political power while at the same time avoiding punishment from the many for perceived transgressions (*Prot.* 325b-c). In the *Gorgias* Callicles too emphasizes the need for the virtue of manliness and the acquisition of a certain kind of knowledge in order to be successful in political life (*Gorg.* 485e-486c). For his part, in the *Republic* Glaucon, expanding on the views of the sophist Thrasymachus, portrays the individual who is able to commit injustice with impunity both as manly and as a clever craftsman who knows how to obtain a reputation for being just despite his injustice (*Rep.* 360e-361b).

In contrast to these views, Plato has Socrates present an alternative ethical stance that redefines self-interest, not as power over others or material success, but as care for the soul, both one's own and that of others, through virtue, and that emphasizes the need for self-rule, rather than rule over others. In this way, in these dialogues we consistently see Socrates in various ways shift the focus from the sophistic notion (as presented by Plato) that ruling others and self-aggrandizement are what is most valuable to the idea that true excellence is to rule oneself through proper care of the soul. Ultimately, proper care for one's soul will entail benefiting others rather than either being indifferent to their well-being or even harming them. This is the knowledge that matters and the one that entails true virtue. Yet, according to Socrates, it is this knowledge that is most difficult for people to achieve.

The main Socratic question, then, is not how reason enables one to desire virtue or how best to harmonize reason and appetite in the service of virtue. The Socratic question is how to realize that one's well-being, something everyone desires, cannot be achieved

at the expense of others since, ultimately, the harm one does to others will result in harm to oneself, despite appearances to the contrary. It is in this way that Plato sets Socrates apart from all his interlocutors in these dialogues. Whether it is the unity of virtue or the notion that everyone desires the good or the craft analogy or the idea that one must rule oneself before ruling others, in each instance the underlying notion is that one needs to benefit others in order to benefit oneself, and that, therefore, when one does harm one must be acting unwillingly and unknowingly since one desires nothing more than one's own benefit. This is the truly difficult realization to achieve.

I thus hope to show that the core of Socratic ethics is not intellectualism, but rather the idea that the individual's self-interest and benefit is tied to the self-interest and benefit of others. It remains now to respond to the claim that the tripartite psychology of the *Republic* represents a significant shift in Socratic ethics. In this regard, I will suggest that although part of the purpose of the tripartite division of the psyche is to acknowledge the force of appetite as a motivator—which Socrates does not deny in either the *Protagoras* or the *Gorgias*—its main purpose is to advance the larger argument of the *Republic* that justice is a good that is desirable in itself and for its effects on the soul. The argument about justice is, after all, the challenge Glaucon and Adeimantus pose to Socrates in Book II and the one Socrates is attempting to address. From this perspective, the construct of the tripartite psyche enables Socrates to present justice and the other virtues as attributes of the psyche that can produce order and harmony in the individual. Socrates' purpose, then, is not only to show that psychic conflict occurs but also how harmony and self-control are possible. The tripartite division also helps Socrates to dissociate justice and virtue from the instrumental value that is normally attached to them

and to present self-rule as desirable in itself. In this way, one can argue that the *Republic*, rather than representing a shift from the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*, is a further elaboration of their central themes of the unity of virtue, moderation, and care of the soul through self-rule.

But my contention that Socratic ethics only comes into focus in these dialogues when contrasted with sophistic views and concerns raises the important question of Plato's manner and motive in his depiction of the sophists. This is the question to which I now turn.

#### **4. The problem of Plato and his Sophists**

For some time the standard view among Plato scholars and commentators has been that, when it comes to his representation of the sophists, Plato is rather hostile and not altogether historically accurate. This has prompted various efforts to rehabilitate “the sophistic movement.” Generally speaking, these efforts have taken one of two approaches. On the one hand, there are those who have attempted to rehabilitate the sophists as philosophers in their own right. The modern impetus for this approach goes back to G. W. F. Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, delivered between 1805 and 1830. According to Michael McDonald, Hegel saw the sophists' skepticism as making a unique and important contribution to philosophy, ancient and modern, and vindicated them as coherent thinkers.<sup>17</sup> Others have subsequently attempted a similar

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<sup>17</sup> MacDonald 2006. But not everyone agrees that Hegel's rehabilitation of the sophists was a true rehabilitation. Kerferd (1981: 6) thinks that Hegel's restoration was such that it enabled his successors “to continue with only a partial modification of the previous profoundly hostile view of the sophistic movement.” For his part, Poulakos (1990) sees Hegel's rehabilitation as “normalizing” the sophists and

restoration, including, more recently, two distinguished English-language scholars: W. C. K. Guthrie and G. B. Kerferd. Guthrie to a great extent follows Hegel in viewing the sophists as rationalists, empiricists, and skeptics, and as the philosophical rivals of Plato's idealism.<sup>18</sup> He attempts to vindicate the sophists by situating them in their rightful place in the history of philosophy. According to Guthrie, the sophists, no less than the pre-Socratics, were interested in "the relation between reality and appearance," but, unlike them, they emphasized "the immediately practical" and had "a distrust of general and permanent rules and principles."<sup>19</sup> For Guthrie, the sophists constituted an intellectual movement that, far from representing a decline in Greek thought, heralded the beginning of great philosophies to come, particularly that of Plato.<sup>20</sup>

For his part, G. B. Kerferd believes that, despite the repeated efforts to rehabilitate the sophists, these philosophers "have suffered from being set in conflict with the idealist tradition" and as a result their thought has been distorted.<sup>21</sup> Thus his project is to free them from the "Hegelian framework" (no less than Plato's hostile representation) by conducting "a series of detailed studies of the actual evidence relating to individual sophists."<sup>22</sup> The result of this study, according to Kerferd, is that it is then possible to see that the sophistic movement was neither of minor importance nor a mere preparation for

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turning them into typical speculative philosophers, thus stripping them of their rhetorical power to "shape the public sphere." (p. 161).

<sup>18</sup> Guthrie 1971: 9.

<sup>19</sup> Guthrie 1971: 4.

<sup>20</sup> Guthrie 1971: 49-50.

<sup>21</sup> Kerferd 1981: 11-12; the quote is at 11.

<sup>22</sup> Kerferd 1981: 14.

the philosophy of Plato. On the contrary, Kerferd's contention is that "virtually every point in Plato's thought has its starting point in his reflection upon problems raised by the sophists . . . . Virtually all aspects of human activity, all the social sciences can be seen to have been the sustained subjects of sophistic debate, and in many cases for the first time in human history."<sup>23</sup> He then goes on to assert that the single most important characteristic of the sophistic movement was "the sustained attempt to apply reason to achieve an understanding of both rational and irrational processes."<sup>24</sup> On his view, then, the sophists were great innovators whose unique contributions were not only obscured by Plato but also appropriated by him. Moreover, Kerferd's thesis implies that the distinctions normally made between Plato and the sophists may not be so great and that, in fact, there are more similarities between them than is usually allowed.

It is important to note that both Guthrie and Kerferd rely heavily on Plato himself in order to establish the sophists' views. This begs the question: how is it possible to draw a historically accurate view of the sophists and their thought from a source that is hostile to them? Unfortunately, this is a question that neither of them posits or answers. Instead, they both assume that, for the most part, whatever words Plato puts in the mouth of his sophistic characters can be taken as representative of that sophist's views. For example, Guthrie assumes that Protagoras' Great Speech in the *Protagoras* is a substantial reproduction of the sophist's own views.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Kerferd takes Prodicus' speech on how to conduct a discussion in the *Protagoras* as representative of the

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<sup>23</sup> Kerferd 1981 173-74.

<sup>24</sup> Kerferd 1981: 174.

<sup>25</sup> Guthrie 1971: 64.



sophist's rhetorical technique.<sup>26</sup> In addition, both scholars take Callicles' speech in the *Gorgias* as a reliable source for sophistic views on the νόμος-φύσις antithesis.<sup>27</sup> There is, then, a certain circularity in these scholars' efforts to vindicate the sophists in view of Plato's central place in learning about their thought and contributions.

But not everyone has found Plato to be a reliable source for sophistic thought. For example, in "Protagoras—or Plato?" Joseph Maguire argues that Plato uses sophistic doctrines for his own purposes and that this maneuver makes it difficult to differentiate between authentic sophistic notions and Plato's own manipulation of them.<sup>28</sup> At best, then, we can argue about Plato's purpose for depicting his sophists as he does; a historical reconstruction of their thought is a bigger challenge.

Despite this argument, others have insisted that it is possible to reconstruct the thought of some fifth-century sophists. For example, in his *Protagoras and Logos: A Study in Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric* Edward Schiappa attempts to examine Protagoras' contribution to early Greek thought based on the sophist's *ipsissima verba*, that is, on fragments as they are directly quoted in the sources, including Plato. In the case of Plato as a source, Schiappa's method is to grant "primacy to Protagoras' actual words" and to consider "Plato's treatments as derivative and in some cases distortive."<sup>29</sup> However, it is difficult to know how reliable Schiappa's method is. As Catherine Osborne suggests in her *Rethinking Early Greek Philosophy*, direct quotations of

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<sup>26</sup> Kerferd 1981: 70.

<sup>27</sup> Guthrie 1971: 101 ff. and Kerferd 1981: 117 ff.

<sup>28</sup> Maguire 1973: 115-38.

<sup>29</sup> Schiappa 1991: 32.

fragments of pre-Socratic philosophers from ancient sources cannot necessarily be considered authentic, since they “are often paraphrases quoted from memory, and may be adapted to the context in which they are used; they may be given in reported speech, the terms are sometimes glossed or changed to a more familiar wording. In all these cases we read the text in the form in which it is presented by the ancient interpreter, and his presentation is governed by what he thought the text ought to say.”<sup>30</sup> Since these fragments are thus unreliable as actual accounts of the philosopher’s original words, Osborne proposes that they be interpreted in terms of what they mean to the writer who quotes them, that is, that they be interpreted in their proper context. Osborne’s exegetical caution and proposal for how to deal with fragments of pre-Socratic philosophers can also be applied to Plato when he is treated as a primary source for some sophists. In the case of Plato, her proposal would entail interpreting what the sophists say in terms of what they mean to Plato, rather than looking for genuine sophistic doctrine in the dialogues.

Whatever the merits and weaknesses of Osborne’s exegetical proposal, it seems clear that attempting to vindicate the sophists as philosophers in their own right by using Plato as an important source will produce unreliable results. As Eric Havelock remarks in *The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics*, “We can never pretend to know the precise form in which Protagoras cast his thought. We can only define that anti-Platonic position which in Plato’s pages Protagoras is used to represent.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, according to Havelock, Protagoras and the other sophistic or sophistically influenced characters that

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<sup>30</sup> Osborne 1987: 7.

<sup>31</sup> Havelock 1957: 157.

Plato represents in his dialogues are not meant to be historically accurate, but are there to serve a contrasting function: to be Plato's antithesis. More precisely, I would contend, they are there to be the anti-Socrates. From this perspective, they reveal more about the Socratic persona than about the historical figures of fifth-century Athens.

Vindicating the sophists as respectable and genuine philosophers has been only one path toward revitalizing them. Other scholars have taken a different approach. Rather than focus on their philosophical thought, they have sought to historicize the sophists and Plato by placing them in the context of the ancient Greek wisdom tradition. Andrea Nightingale has set the stage for this contextualization in her *Genres in Dialogue*, in which she argues that Plato's main aim in the dialogues was to distinguish his own discursive activity, "philosophy," from other activities.

In order to create the specialized discipline of philosophy, Plato had to distinguish what he was doing from all other discursive practices that laid claim to wisdom. It is for this reason that, in dialogue after dialogue, Plato deliberately set out to define and defend a new and quite peculiar mode of living and thinking. This alone, he claimed, deserved the title of "philosophy".<sup>32</sup>

According to Nightingale, then, Plato appropriated philosophy by defining it in opposition to poetry and other practices that laid claim to wisdom, and by designating those other practices as "anti-philosophical."<sup>33</sup> This oppositional stance is evident in his portrayal of the sophists. For, in the context of defining philosophy against non-philosophical practices, Plato's negative depiction of the sophists serves the purpose of establishing them as non-philosophers. For example, by stressing that the sophists sell

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<sup>32</sup> Nightingale 1995: 11.

<sup>33</sup> Nightingale 1995: 11.

wisdom for money, Plato places them in the category of merchants who in fact possess no wisdom and, in so doing, he not only defines them as non-philosophers but also establishes a privileged place for the philosopher and the practice of philosophy.<sup>34</sup>

From Nightingales' perspective, the importance of Plato's sophists lies in how he uses them for his own purposes, rather than as historical figures. Yet, building on her proposal that Plato is attempting to appropriate a discursive activity so as claim predominance over other forms of discourse, others have sought to contextualize the actual sophists within the wisdom tradition.

For example, in *Plato's Counterfeit Sophists* Hakan Tell suggests that Plato's portrayal of the sophists as a distinctive group of "practitioners of wisdom" who share a specific set of unflattering characteristics is the result of "a fierce debate about the meaning and successful appropriation of the term *philosophia* ... . In expressing his own view of philosophy, Plato simultaneously designates sophistry as philosophy's opposite ... ." <sup>35</sup> Tell's project is to strip the sophists of the unique status that Plato has given them by showing that some of the characteristics that are meant to mark their distinctiveness were in fact well within the Greek wisdom tradition. Such is the case, for example, with the very term σοφιστής. As Tell and others have remarked, this term had a wide application in antiquity, from the Seven Sages to poets, musicians, soothsayers, and even the pre-Socratic philosophers.<sup>36</sup> Tell's point is that Plato's assignation of the term to a particular group in a pejorative sense should not be taken at face value but as part of his

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<sup>34</sup> Nightingale 1995: 47-50 and 55.

<sup>35</sup> Tell 2011: 1.

<sup>36</sup> See Tell 2011: 23-25, but also Kerferd 1950 and 1976.

aim of excluding others from the practice of philosophy. In this way, Tell wishes to recover the sophists not by examining their philosophical views but by demonstrating that they were part of the Greek wisdom tradition and that it is Plato who wanted to sever them from it for his own purposes.

Leslie Kurke, in her recent book, *Aesopic Conversations*, also builds on Nightingale's main thesis but takes it even further by positing that, in his choice of genre and in his characterization of Socrates, Plato is appropriating a form of prose and a form of characterization that can be traced back to the figure of Aesop and to the prose of Aesopic fable, with its popular and lowly sociopolitical status. In treating Plato's prose writing in this way, Kurke hopes "to estrange and defamiliarize it" and "recover what is deeply odd or anomalous" in it.<sup>37</sup> To achieve this goal, Kurke situates Plato's writing in the context of the "battle over prose" that she contends was taking place in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, in particular as a reaction to the sophists' own prose writing. In her view, the sophists have not only "suffered under the burden of Plato's tendentious misrepresentation and opprobrium," but also their originality and innovation has been obscured by a scholarly tradition that has privileged Plato as the "solitary genius," while relegating the sophists to the realm of rhetoric.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, Kurke sees the sophists as "engaged in fairly wild generic and stylistic experimentation at the boundaries between poetry and prose, in a period when the nature and norms of the latter were still very much up for grabs."<sup>39</sup> In the fragmentary remains of their writings, she asserts that "we find the

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<sup>37</sup> Kurke 2011: 244.

<sup>38</sup> Kurke 2011: 265.

<sup>39</sup> Kurke 2011: 265-66.

mixture of different (even antithetical) genres of discourse within a single composition, as well as the transposition of traditionally low content to high style.”<sup>40</sup> On Kurke’s view, it is the sophists who first enact this appropriation of prose with their elaboration of lowly fables into a high style that could serve for performance and didactic pieces. As for Plato, Kurke argues that his use of prose is, in part, his means to compete both with the older Greek wisdom tradition as well as with the rival sophists: “It is this deadly serious contest of and over *sophia* that (at least) provokes Plato’s choice of mimetic prose and weird generic motley in the Socratic dialogues.”<sup>41</sup>

In this way, Kurke’s vindication of the sophists lies in underscoring their originality and innovative spirit, not as philosophers, but as prose writers. However, it is important to note, once again, that Kurke, like Guthrie, Kerferd, and others, relies heavily on Plato as a source for her reconstruction of how the sophists experimented with prose and poetry, and sometimes the line between the sophists as Platonic characters and as independent historical figures blurs in her treatment of them. A case in point is her analysis of Protagoras’ mythological tale in Plato’s *Protagoras*. Although she cautions that we cannot take Protagoras’ Great Speech as “an unmediated representation of his authentic discourse,”<sup>42</sup> Kurke nevertheless interprets the myth contained in it as the kind of literary adaptation of Aesopic fable that one would expect from the historical Protagoras. In this sense, Plato’s Protagorean myth becomes evidence of the historical sophist’s capacity to be creatively innovative. At the same time, she interprets

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<sup>40</sup> Kurke 2011: 267.

<sup>41</sup> Kurke 2011: 270.

<sup>42</sup> Kurke 2011: 284.

Protagoras' speech as a Platonic invention whose main purpose is to parody the sophist's attempts at high and low wisdom.<sup>43</sup>

The problem with this double interpretation of Protagoras' Great Speech is that it treats it at once as historical document and as Platonic parody. While there may be good reasons for the latter interpretation, the former is more problematic; it raises again the question: to what extent can we treat Plato as a reliable source for reconstructing the views and practices of the historical sophists, given that Plato has his own motives for representing them as he does? Like Guthrie and Kerferd, Kurke too neglects to address this important issue.

I hope it is clear, then, that there is an intrinsic difficulty in trying to reconstruct the legacy of the historical sophists given that one of our main sources for this reconstruction has to be Plato, whose dialogues are not meant to be historical records but fictitious philosophical dramas.

It is precisely as philosophical dramas that I intend to read Plato's dialogues in what follows. My principal concern is not with the historical sophists, but with Plato's dramatic representation of them vis-à-vis his dramatic representation of Socrates as a unique character with a compelling ethical outlook. My contention is that in their attempt to discern "Socratic moral doctrines," interpreters have tended to neglect the rhetorical aspects of the dialogues and thus to focus mostly on what Socrates says, without taking into account that often what he says is in response to his interlocutors' views and attitudes, whether these are explicit or implicit. As Eugenio Benitez argues in "Argument, Rhetoric, and Philosophic Method: Plato's *Protagoras*," Plato's dialogues

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<sup>43</sup> Kurke 2011: 308.

are an intricate web of argumentative and rhetorical themes. Argumentative themes are the explicit exchanges between the interlocutors “that constitute attempts to justify some assertion or other. This is the realm of premise and conclusion, of definition, refutation, syllogism, analogy, and induction.”<sup>44</sup> By contrast, rhetorical themes originate “with the characters, actions, and affections of those present in the dialogue.”<sup>45</sup> Unlike argumentative themes, rhetorical ones tend to be implicit and constitute the context for the arguments. Thus if the reader only pays attention to the explicit arguments and neglects to take into account their rhetorical context, the full thrust of Plato’s meaning will be lost to her. In the case of Socratic ethics, it is not enough to parse the arguments; we must also have a better understanding of how Plato has portrayed, in their views and attitudes, his characters in the dialogues. In attempting to do this, I am making no suppositions or inferences about Plato’s ulterior motives for depicting his characters as he does. I am restricting my examination to the dialogues themselves and to the characters in them. In other words, my main focus is the dialogues as philosophical dramas. Plato’s dialogues are philosophical dramas precisely because the arguments that his different characters use in favor of this or that view are not sufficient for defining who they are or what their views actually express. Instead, it is that character’s actions, attitudes, and implicit values that define him much more so than the ideas or arguments he expresses. Or, put differently, a character’s views need to be judged in the context of what his actions, attitudes, and values reveal about him. In this sense, with his dialogues Plato wishes to move the practice of philosophy beyond the ability to give coherent or even

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<sup>44</sup> Benitez 1992: 222-23.

<sup>45</sup> Benitez 1992: 223.



persuasive definitions about the nature of wisdom or justice. Rather, the practice of philosophy has to be rooted in a person's character; it is character, not intellectual knowledge or expertise that is the mark of the philosopher, and this is what the drama of the dialogues reveals.

## 5. Structure of the dissertation

In what follows I will advance my argument in four chapters. In the first chapter I will examine the Great Speech of Protagoras in the *Protagoras*, the speech of Glaucon in the *Republic*, and the speeches of Callicles in the *Gorgias*. As I explained above, it is my contention that these speeches contain the views to which Socrates responds and offers an alternative. Moreover, I will argue that these speeches share a common theme: human relations are primarily adversarial and it is best that the strong exercise power over the weak. To be sure, this view is more obvious in the speeches of Glaucon and Callicles. However, I will argue that although the speech of Protagoras seems to emphasize the virtues of justice and moderation, on close reading it becomes apparent that there is a covert message in his speech—particularly in the mythical section—in which he appeals to the elitist view of his audience that the strong should rule over the weak.

Once I have examined these speeches, I will turn to the dialogues *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*, so as to focus on how Socrates engages with each of his interlocutors and responds to his claims. Thus in the second chapter I will examine the *Protagoras* and argue that Socrates' questions to the sophist are an attempt to bring into focus and examine important claims Protagoras has embedded into his speeches, particularly his Great Speech, but that he has not explained and that he has even tried to occlude from

view. In this way, I will argue that the unity of virtue and the denial of *akrasia* are not isolated Socratic claims but are derived from claims that Protagoras himself has made. In making these claims, Socrates not only wishes to make clear the sophist's views but also turn Protagorean ethics into Socratic ethics.

In Chapter three I will examine the *Gorgias* and propose that Socrates' claims in this dialogue should not be interpreted as expressing an intellectualist ethics that commits him to the notion that it is sufficient to judge something to be good in order to desire it. Rather, I will argue that he wishes to undermine the claim that Gorgianic rhetoric is the greatest good because it grants its possessor power over others. He will do this through the craft analogy so as to show that the crafts seek to benefit their recipient, while Gorgianic rhetoric is indifferent to the well-being of others and can even cause harm. The discussion with Polus will also center on the notion that rhetors and tyrants cannot be powerful since they act irrationally and thus cannot secure their true self-interest. In the case of Callicles, Socrates will counteract his νόμος-φύσις antithesis by suggesting that νόμος is φύσις, and by emphasizing the need for harmony and moderation in order to establish friendships.

In Chapter four I will engage with those aspects of the *Republic* that have normally been considered to be correctives to the Socratic intellectualism of the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*, such as psychic tripartition, the notion that for the first time Socrates recognizes appetite as an independent good, and the story of Leontius in Book IV. As I explained above, I will suggest that the main purpose of psychic division is not to establish the possibility of psychic conflict but to underscore that psychic harmony and self-rule are necessary and that the value of justice and virtue in general is not

instrumental but necessary in themselves for psychic well-being. In this way, Socrates presents in the *Republic* the most thoroughgoing alternative to a sophistic ethics of power.

One final note on my usage of Greek words: In my arguments, I try to use most Greek words in their original forms rather than translating or transliterating them, with a few exceptions such as *polis*, *logos*, and *akrasia*; these are general terms that are not particular to Plato's dialogues and that are widely used by scholars in this form.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE ETHICS OF POWER IN THE SPEECHES OF PROTAGORAS, GLAUCON AND CALLICLES

### 1. Introduction

In this chapter I examine three Platonic speeches: Protagoras' Great Speech in the *Protagoras* (320c8-328d2), Glaucon's speech in Book II of the *Republic* (358e3-361d3), and Callicles' two speeches in the *Gorgias* (482c4-486d1 and 491e5-492c8). By examining these speeches I wish to propose two ideas: 1) that despite their differences, all three express an ethics of power, and 2) that this ethical view provides the background against which we can understand Socrates' own ethical outlook and the significance of his paradoxical views in these dialogues—in particular, the notions that virtue is knowledge, that no one does wrong willingly, and that everyone desires the good.

My grouping of these speeches together may strike the reader as strange. For, although interpreters have long recognized important thematic connections between the speeches of Glaucon and Callicles,<sup>1</sup> the speech of Protagoras has been cast in a different light. For the most part, interpreters have underlined the merits of Protagoras's Great Speech and portrayed it either as an eloquent defense of the superiority of *nóμος* over

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<sup>1</sup> See Adam 1963, at 359b ff. Weiss (2007b: 100) argues that the views Glaucon expresses in his speech have more in common with those of Callicles in the *Gorgias* than of Thrasymachus: "In Thrasymachus' eyes, as in Polus', nothing beats tyranny ... Yet Glaucon, like Callicles, regards (conventional) justice as an invention of the weak. And although it may appear as if Glaucon resists that aspect of Callicles' analysis that sees justice as having been created by the weak for the express purpose of domesticating the strong ... nevertheless ... what Callicles' weak do by design, Glaucon's weak accomplish by default." For Glaucon and Callicles at stake is the question of *seeming to be just* as opposed to *being just*. By contrast, for Thrasymachus the issue is how to act in whatever way one wants with impunity.

φύσις<sup>2</sup> or as a fine example of the theory of moral progress.<sup>3</sup> Some scholars have even seen in it affinities with Platonic views.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to these interpretations, I will propose that a careful and nuanced reading of the Great Speech reveals that Protagoras' views are much closer to those expressed by Glaucon and Callicles.<sup>5</sup> To demonstrate this, I will argue that there are three major points of connection between the speeches, each with important ethical implications.

First, all three speeches portray humans as naturally egoistic beings and conceive of human relations as adversarial, competitive, and organized around power struggles. On their view, νόμος, the virtues of justice and moderation, as well as the cooperative aims that result from the social compact, are necessary only as a means to secure personal survival and valuable only when they can further one's self-benefit.

Second, in these speeches self-benefit and success are understood in terms of maintaining physical safety, attaining power over others, and satisfying the desires for pleasure and wealth. This notion of self-benefit has two implications: (a) it privileges a notion of humans as fundamentally *physical beings*, thus identifying human nature primarily with physical traits, material needs, and bodily sensations and urges, and (b) by

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<sup>2</sup> See Adam and Adam 1905: xxii.

<sup>3</sup> See Guthrie 1971: 63 ff.

<sup>4</sup> See, in particular, Taylor 1991: 96. Other examples are Kahn 1988: 39, who sees the speech as offering a "solid defense" for the "cooperative virtues of justice and temperance," and Gagarin 1969:144, who says that Socrates' view of excellence "does not contradict Protagoras' arguments that it is teachable. Quite the contrary, it affirms them."

<sup>5</sup> Although commentators have increasingly begun to argue that in his speech Protagoras is at pains to conceal his true views or that at least there is a subtext to the views he does express (see, for example, Coby 1987: 70; Hemmenway 1996; McCoy 1998; and Weiss 2006: 31), to my knowledge there has been no sustained comparison between the speech of Protagoras and those of Callicles and Glaucon. The only instance I have found of a similar view is in Hemmenway 1996: 8 n. 16, where he sees in Protagoras' myth an important connection with the description of the origins of justice in Glaucon's speech and with Callicles' distinction between what is just by law and what is just by nature.

foregrounding the physical and material, it values the accumulation of material goods and thus reinforces competitive and adversarial aims.

Third, by conceiving of human history as divided into two consecutive periods, one in which *φύσις* prevails and another in which *νόμος* is established, these speeches in fact posit two types of virtue, one natural and one conventional.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, courage, in the form of boldness and physical strength, and wisdom, in the form of cleverness and technical know-how, have their origins in human *φύσις*; these are the virtues that only a select few possess. On the other, there are the conventional virtues of justice and moderation that stem from the social compact and that the majority are forced to observe in order to preserve their own safety. Accordingly, achieving personal success and happiness depends on learning how to exploit conventional virtues in the service of the natural virtues so as to exert one's natural right to have power over others, while at the same time appearing to be law-abiding and garnering respect and admiration. As I will argue, from this perspective some sort of wisdom is a necessary component for virtue.

By thus examining these three speeches, I hope to set the proper context for understanding Socrates' paradoxical views neither as an intellectualist ethics nor as rhetorical devices meant to mirror sophistic premises, but rather as expressing an alternative ethical view that does away with the contradictions entailed in an ethical outlook that legitimates the pursuit of power over others at all costs.

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<sup>6</sup> This is most evident in the speeches of Calicles and Glaucon, but I will argue that this notion is also present in the speech of Protagoras and is further alluded to in the rest of the dialogue, especially in his insistence that courage is a separate virtue. Also see Hemmenway 1996, who argues that for Protagoras there are two levels of virtue, one demotic and one elite.

## 2. The Great Speech of Protagoras

Interpreters of the Great Speech have variously read it as the expression of the historical Protagoras' views on the origins of civilization, human moral progress, and the teachability of virtue;<sup>7</sup> as merely an epideictic piece designed to showcase Protagoras' rhetorical skill;<sup>8</sup> as indicative of his moral relativism;<sup>9</sup> or as an account of the political nature of human beings and hence their need for "political aims and attachment."<sup>10</sup> More recently, however, other interpreters have argued that the speech dramatizes Protagoras' attempt to disguise what he truly believes and teaches. Larry Goldberg, for example, believes the speech contains both a covert and an overt *logos*. According to Goldberg, the purpose of the overt *logos* is both to show that virtue can indeed be taught and to flatter the Athenians, while the covert *logos* "expresses contempt for the many, both as to their intelligence and as to their readiness to follow."<sup>11</sup> Scott Hemmenway has followed suit by suggesting that the speech presents two levels of virtue, one demotic and one elite "that is meant to appeal to ambitious and powerful men."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Patrick Coby posits that in his speech "Protagoras endeavors to conceal himself and the kind of knowledge that is taught by sophistry, to pretend that both are in harmony with the city

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Adam and Adam 1905: xxi and 108; Vlastos 1956: ix, n.10; and Guthrie 1971: 63 ff., all of whom argue that the myth is an imitation of the historical Protagoras' theory of how human civilization came to be, as he expounded it in his *Περὶ τῆς ἐν ἀρχῇ καταστάσεως*.

<sup>8</sup> Many commentators tend to see the Great Speech as a separate piece within the dialogue. For example, Rutherford (1992: 141) sees it merely as an *epideixis* and fails to connect it to the discussion that ensues.

<sup>9</sup> See Taylor 1991:83.

<sup>10</sup> Nussbaum 1986:102. Levi (1940: 294) and Kerferd (1981: 42ff.) subscribe to a similar view.

<sup>11</sup> See Goldberg 1983: 51 ff.; the quotation is at p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> Hemmenway 1996: 7.

and with Athens' democratic institutions".<sup>13</sup> Most recently, Roslyn Weiss has echoed this view when she comments that with his speech Protagoras is at pains to conceal what he truly teaches so as to preserve his reputation and livelihood.<sup>14</sup>

In my own interpretation of the Great Speech, I build on some of these more recent views and propose that specific details both in the mythical account and in the discursive portion of Protagoras's speech alert us to his covert *logos*.<sup>15</sup> The function of the covert *logos* is to appeal to the sensibilities of his elite audience and to communicate the values with which they identify.<sup>16</sup> Protagoras is at pains to convey that he understands the burden that egalitarian values place on the elite, the dangers that they incur from the masses by venturing into politics, and their *natural* desire to be

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<sup>13</sup> Coby 1987: 70.

<sup>14</sup> Weiss 2006: 31-38. See also Roochnik 1990: 58: "Protagoras' long story is a deliberate, and brilliant, attempt to disguise his subject." It is important to remember that although Protagoras is delivering his speech to a small group of the Athenian elite, the speech is meant to be an example of one that could be delivered to the Athenian assembly. In this sense, it is meant for two audiences: the mass of Athenians represented in the imaginary Assembly and the elite group that is actually present at Callias' house. It is from the imaginary members of the Assembly that Protagoras conceals his true message.

<sup>15</sup> Although interpreters have recognized the double message embedded in Protagoras's speech, they have not identified the specific ways in which this message is conveyed or its particular content. Hemmenway (1996: 8) has perhaps come closest to doing this when he recognizes that the mythical description of pre-political man is meant to describe a state of nature from which important lessons can be learned about the natural virtues. However, his discussion is too general in this regard and he fails to see how there are important allusions in the myth to the power the many have to squash these competitive virtues.

<sup>16</sup> My interpretation of the Great Speech is in agreement with the analysis of Ober 1989 regarding the tension between egalitarian and elite values in democratic Athens. As he writes, "That the Athenian masses did accept members of various elites as leaders is undeniable, yet if the ideology of the democracy was fundamentally egalitarian, the existence of leaders who chose to identify themselves as elites must have led to considerable tension. And, since the educated and wealthy demagogues never evolved into a ruling elite, the frustration of their "natural" tendency and desire to rule must have been the source of further sociopolitical stress" (p. 17). Part of Ober's argument is that the purpose of Athenian egalitarian values was precisely to delegitimize the elites' desire for prominence. In his speech, however, Protagoras wishes to *legitimize* those desires, but covertly. The reason for this is that his own safety and reputation would be at risk if he were to do this openly. He does not wish to be seen as someone who openly sides with the views of the elite against those of the many.



acknowledged in their superiority.<sup>17</sup> He does this by implicitly portraying the traditional excellences of justice and moderation as the values of the masses, which they enforce through punishment and rebuke so as to quash the elite's natural desire for power and preeminence. This is what the gifts of Zeus of *αἰδώς* and *δίκη*, and the emphasis upon their universal distribution, symbolize: the power of the many to make everyone conform, at least in the public domain, to certain societal norms. From this perspective, the gifts of Zeus facilitate a social compact in which everyone agrees not to harm each other, not for the sake of harmony and cooperation, but as an equalizing tool that gives the masses the power to rebuke and punish others for failing to adhere to the social norms. In this way, in his covert *logos* Protagoras portrays the many as constituting a thoughtless tyranny that prohibits anyone from openly seeking political preeminence and power.

Further, in his covert *logos* Protagoras subtly underscores the attributes of intelligence, resourcefulness, and boldness, which he presents as the natural excellences of a select few who might, with proper instruction, exercise them and thus escape the tyranny of the majority and obtain political power without punishment. This second covert message is conveyed primarily in the mythical account, first, through the figure of Epimetheus and the description of the defenses he distributed to the animals and, second, through the figure of Zeus and an allusion to his own political power and abilities. In this

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<sup>17</sup> As Ober (1989: 86) notes, "By the third-quarter of the [fifth] century, however, the developing ideology of the Athenian masses was making the established road to a political career [for the elite] more problematic. The Athenians became increasingly suspicious of the old symbols of aristocratic and class power, and they began to look askance at elites who seemed to prefer the company of their social peers to that of ordinary citizens. As the Athenian demos took closer control of the organs of government, the masses were more willing and able to exert effective pressure upon the elites to conform to increasingly clear, popular notions of proper social and political behavior."

regard, I wish to suggest that the meaning of the figure of Zeus is twofold: he is both a representative of the tyrannical power of the many and of the political sagacity of the few.

But this aspect of Protagoras' covert *logos* extends over the discursive portion of his speech as well. In the first part, by emphasizing the recourse to punishment as a way to teach civic excellence, he vividly reveals the controlling power of the many. In the second part, the *logos* proper, Protagoras ingeniously constructs a long and complex conditional sentence (324e2-325b4) that implies there is a special *ἀρετή* that anyone who wants to acquire political power and safeguard his well-being must learn. This excellence he ambiguously calls *ἀνδρὸς ἀρετή* and covertly distinguishes it from *πολιτικὴ ἀρετή*. In this way, although on the surface the Great Speech seems to praise egalitarian and cooperative values, on close examination we see that Protagoras is delivering a sales pitch to his elite audience by appealing to their own desires and values.

I should note that Protagoras' double standard regarding the nature of excellence no doubt reflects that, by the fifth century, *ἀρετή* could be applied to a wide range of traits that reflected both the qualities necessary for personal and political success, as well as the democratic values of equality and cooperation; *ἀρετή* could mean different things in different situations. It is precisely this multi-valence of the term that Protagoras exploits in his speech.<sup>18</sup>

In the context of the dialogue, however, it is crucial to underscore Protagoras' disdain for the many and their *πολιτικὴ ἀρετή*, his allusion to the notion that the origins of

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<sup>18</sup>Adkins (1973) argues that Protagoras' Great Speech reflects the "turmoil of values" that prevailed in fifth- and fourth-century Athens, a turmoil that lent itself to "all kinds of verbal confusion and/or sleight of hand" (pp. 4-5). However, he also acknowledges that Protagoras' praise of egalitarian values is a *πρόσχημα* designed to "reassure the mass of the citizens that what he was doing was 'democratic'" (p. 11).

civic justice lie in a social compact between the strong and the weak, and his emphasis on natural ability—these three central ideas are also advanced in the speeches of Glaucon and Callicles.

### 3. Aims and Structure of the Great Speech

Protagoras launches his speech in response to Socrates' skepticism that *πολιτική τέχνη* (319a4) can be transmitted through teaching. Socrates had adduced two reasons for his doubts. The first is that he has observed that when it comes to construction or shipbuilding or any other such project, the citizens of Athens will only admit advice from expert craftsmen who have acquired their expertise through teaching and learning. But when it comes to the management of the city, they will accept advice from anyone, whatever his craft or expertise or background may be; they must, then, believe that expertise in civic affairs cannot be taught. The second reason for Socrates' skepticism about the teachability of excellence is that it is evident that privately (*ἰδίᾳ*) too the wisest and best of citizens (*οἱ σοφώτατοι καὶ ἄριστοι τῶν πολιτῶν*, 319e1-2), such as Pericles, are unable to transmit to their children the virtues that they possess, despite their ensuring that they obtain the best education.<sup>19</sup>

Protagoras responds to these two objections by means of a myth and a *logos*.

With the myth proper (320c7-322d5) he addresses why the Athenians are justified in

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<sup>19</sup> The point of Socrates' objection to Protagoras' initial claim that he can teach political virtue is that it is not possible to teach moral excellence in the same way as one teaches excellence in carpentry or architecture. The reason implied in his objection is that while carpentry and architecture partake of a body of knowledge that can be transmitted from one person to another, moral excellence does not partake of that kind of knowledge. For, if that were the case, then the Athenians would seek advice from the person who had expertise in this kind of knowledge and manage the city accordingly, rather than permitting all to opine.

accepting advice from anyone on matters of public policy by tracing the origin of justice and moderation to the gifts Zeus gives to mankind so they can live in cities. The rest of his speech is in discursive form (322d5-328d2) and is divided into three sections.<sup>20</sup> The first is an explanation of the myth (322d5-323a4), followed by a supporting proof (323a5-c4). The second section (323c4-324d1) builds on the first by providing a series of proofs that demonstrate that people do not consider excellence to be something natural or self-generated, but that they believe it is something that must be taught. These two sections are meant to show that, contrary to what Socrates says, people, and in particular the Athenians, do believe excellence can be taught. The third section is the *λόγος* proper (324d2-328d2) and addresses Socrates' question about why the sons of good men fail to possess the excellence of their fathers. The ostensible purpose of the speech, then, is to demonstrate to Socrates that excellence can be taught and that the Athenians also believe this to be true.

#### 4. The Central Story in the Myth

The central story in the mythical portion of Protagoras' speech relates the origins of justice through a progressive succession of events.<sup>21</sup> First, humans were given a physical body by subterranean gods (320c8-d3); then they were given the practical arts by Prometheus so that they could transform the material world around them and survive (321c7-d3); and then they were given the political art by Zeus so that they could live

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<sup>20</sup> I am roughly following the division suggested by Kerferd 1953, without adopting his interpretation of each section.

<sup>21</sup> This pattern is similar to that followed by Hesiod in the *Theogony*, as he traces the origins of the cosmos and the gods; see the introductory essay to the *Theogony* by Brown 1953: 15.

together in large communities (322c1-d5). This, however, is only a partial story. For this tale of human progress is framed by two other stories. The first is the story about how animals came to have their physical powers and abilities (320d3-321b6); the second is Protagoras' own retelling of the Zeus and Prometheus story (321d3-322a2). It is these framing stories that give specific contours to the central myth of human origins and progress and that, in their details, reveal what Protagoras actually means by *πολιτική ἀρετή*. For while the surface of his myth seems to present *πολιτική ἀρετή* as the acquisition of the attributes humans need to become social beings and just citizens in their community, the details of his story portray it as possessing the qualities and skills the few need in order to acquire power in the *polis* without incurring social or legal retribution. In this way, in his myth Protagoras exploits the ambiguities inherent in the notion of *πολιτική ἀρετή* in order to reflect two conceptions of *ἀρετή*: those that are commended in public, such as justice and moderation,<sup>22</sup> and those that the elite (or those aspiring to become part of the elite) deems necessary in order to be successful in the *polis*, such as boldness and cleverness.

It is important to note that one of the purposes of Socrates' later questions is precisely to reveal what Protagoras has only implied in the speech. Thus his focus on the question of the unity of virtue enables him to make explicit the two virtues that Protagoras has conspicuously excluded from his speech, courage and wisdom, and in this way to reveal the ethical shortcomings inherent in holding Protagoras' two-tiered system of virtue.

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<sup>22</sup> To be sure, *σωφροσύνη*, in the sense of cleverness, could also be considered the quality of the select few. However, throughout the speech Protagoras ascribes it to the masses.

## 5. The Gifts of Epimetheus

Protagoras begins his myth with an account of the autochthonous nature of all mortal races: the gods molded all mortal creatures, including humans, inside the earth from earth and fire and their compounds (320d2-3). Protagoras begins by putting humans and animals together with the subterranean gods. This initial part of his account not only foregrounds the physical nature of humans<sup>23</sup> but also suggests that humans share in the nature of both animals and gods. With animals they share their physicality, with gods their craftsmanship. Once mortal beings were molded, the Titan Epimetheus, sanctioned by his brother Prometheus, came to be in charge of assigning the appropriate powers and abilities to each species.

Here we have Protagoras' first allusion to the legend of Prometheus and his first innovation to it. Rather than give Prometheus the central role, as in the traditional account, Protagoras makes Epimetheus the main character in this part of his story. Moreover, Epimetheus, because of his ability to properly equip the animals for their self-defense, is portrayed as the more clever and resourceful of the two.<sup>24</sup>

Epimetheus, in his actions, is bold and resourceful and is credited with creating a natural world that is competitive but balanced. At the same time, in his description of the animals Protagoras subtly contrasts the big and slow predators with the smaller animals whose ingenious abilities enable them to escape danger (320d8-321a2). This description

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<sup>23</sup> See Roochnik 1990: 61 and McCoy 1998: 24.

<sup>24</sup> In fact, throughout the myth Protagoras presents the figure of Prometheus in a diminished, almost subservient, role. The implication seems to be that the intelligence and knowledge required for the arts (for which Prometheus is responsible) is of lesser value than both the intelligent order of the world of animals (for which Epimetheus is responsible) and the intelligence and knowledge required for politics (for which Zeus is responsible). See C. L. Miller 1978 for a different, but suggestive, analysis of the roles of Prometheus and Epimetheus in the *Protagoras*.

anticipates Protagoras' allusions to the overwhelming power of the many in the discursive section of his speech (see 323c3-324c9), as well as to the resourcefulness the few need in order to avoid being subdued and punished by them (see 324d7-325c6).

Protagoras pointedly narrates how Epimetheus went about carefully equipping the animals with the proper powers to ensure their survival. He provided them with two types of abilities and powers, the first as a means of defense against each other and the second as a way to live and adapt to the environment. To some he gave strength but not speed; others he made fast but weak (320d8-e1). To smaller animals he gave wings or other means of protection; for the larger animals, size itself was a safeguard (320e1-321a1). Epimetheus then devised the means—tough hides or hooves—by which the animals might cope with the changing seasons; and he provided each its proper food: some ate grass, others the fruits of trees or roots, while still others ate other animals (321a3-b4). Thus did Epimetheus carefully distribute all the powers that the animals would need to survive.

Protagoras' description of the animals conveys the essence of the natural world, unencumbered by νόμοι. Animals are naturally adversarial and antagonistic, and thus need defenses in order to avoid mutual destruction (*ἀλλήλοφθοριῶν διαφυγὰς*, 321a3). Unlike humans, however, animals do not need instruction or laws in order to learn how to protect or provide for themselves, but are born with all the appropriate capacities.<sup>25</sup> Without such physical traits, it is implied, animals would simply engage in a war of all against all, ensuring their mutual destruction. Instead, by being equipped with different powers and abilities, animals become competitive: some are predators and others prey.

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<sup>25</sup> See Weingartner 1973: 59.

In the animal world not every creature is the same; there is, rather, a hierarchy, within which the bigger and stronger prey on the smaller and weaker.

That is a first aspect of Protagoras' story of the animals; and it is, moreover, reminiscent of what Callicles expresses in his speech concerning natural justice: "But I believe that nature itself reveals that it's a just thing for the better and mightier man to have more than the worse and more powerless man" (*ἡ δὲ γε οἶμαι φύσις αὐτὴ ἀποφαίνει αὐτό, ὅτι δίκαιόν ἐστιν τὸν ἀμείνω τοῦ χειρόνος πλεον ἔχειν καὶ τὸν δυνατώτερον τοῦ ἀδυνατωτέρου*, *Gorg.* 483c8-d2). Here Callicles asserts a correspondence between the nature of animals and human nature: just as in the natural world relationships among animals are based on physical strength, with the result that the stronger preys on the weaker, so also it is in the nature of humans for the stronger to be entitled to more than the weaker, and this is justice by nature.

But there is another side to Protagoras' description of the defensive capabilities animals need to survive. For while Protagoras' detailed inventory of the defenses that animals acquired suggests a competitive environment, it also proposes that the weaker are resourceful and can elude the stronger. Let's consider the passage in question (320d7-321a1):

*νέμων δὲ τοῖς μὲν ἰσχὺν ἄνευ τάχους προσῆπτεν, τοὺς δ' ἀσθενεστέρους τάχει ἐκόσμει: τοὺς δὲ ὤπλιζε, τοῖς δ' ἄοπλον διδοὺς φύσιν ἄλλην τιν' αὐτοῖς ἐμηχανᾶτο δύναμιν εἰς σωτηρίαν. ἃ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν σμικρότητι ἡμπισχεν, πτηνὸν φυγὴν ἢ κατάγειον οἴκησιν ἔνεμεν: ἃ δὲ ἡῦξε μεγέθει, τῷδε αὐτῷ αὐτὰ ἔσφιν: καὶ τᾶλλα οὕτως ἐπανισῶν ἔνεμεν.*

And as he distributed [the abilities], to some [Epimetheus] granted strength without speed, while the weaker ones he equipped with speed. Some he armed, while to others he gave an unarmed nature but devised for them a different capacity for preservation. To those that he invested with smallness he assigned a winged flight or an underground dwelling, while those that he increased in size,



they preserved themselves with this very thing; and, balancing them in this way, he distributed all the other abilities.<sup>26</sup>

While this passage conveys “balance and variety” in its diction and content,<sup>27</sup> it also marks a significant contrast between the abilities of the stronger animals and those of the weaker, and it is the latter group that stands out. While the larger animals are described as simply strong or armed or big, the smaller and weaker ones are described in more detail, for they possess an additional capacity besides their size: speed, wings, or the ability to burrow. It is these abilities that express Epimetheus’ creativity, for he has equipped these animals with resourceful means of evasion, without which they would be unable to compete and survive in an otherwise hostile environment.<sup>28</sup>

This image of a competitive environment that necessitates special capacities to survive is not far from Protagoras’ description of the human political environment in the discursive part of his speech, which is meant to explain the myth (323a5-324d1).<sup>29</sup> There we see man, in his full citizen excellence, angrily rebuking, reproving, admonishing, and punishing others for failing to conform to societal norms, whether for playing the flute badly (323a8-9), or for openly admitting to wrongdoing (323b3-4), or for publicly opposing civic virtue in any other way (323d6 ff. and 324e ff.). Thus, in the political

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<sup>26</sup> All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>27</sup> See Adam and Adam 1905: 110.

<sup>28</sup> Thus Protagoras’ description of Epimetheus and the animals has a double meaning and function. It represents the natural hierarchy that exists in the world, where the stronger do rule over the weaker. But it also conveys how in the political world, which is no longer ruled by nature, it is not physical strength but cleverness and resourcefulness that are needed for survival. The story thus affirms the natural right of the select few to desire to have power over others, while it acknowledges the need for cleverness in order to survive politically.

<sup>29</sup> See Kerferd 1953 for the structure of the speech.

world of humans, rather than the realm of large, predatory animals, the power of the many ensures that everyone possesses the excellences of justice, self-restraint, and piety through punishment and humiliation.<sup>30</sup> These excellences might be seen as similar to the animal defenses that Epimetheus devised, in that their purpose is to prevent humans from destroying each other. However, unlike the animal defenses, these “human defenses” are oppressive and unpleasant, and are meant to make everyone equal.<sup>31</sup> While nature bestows a variety of powers and abilities so that some animals are strong and eat others, while some are weak but have means of escape, in the world of humans the majority demands that everyone conform to the same norms and have the same power. From this perspective, the majority can be seen as the equivalent of the large and strong animal that one wishes to elude so as to avoid punishment or even death.<sup>32</sup>

There is, however, one way to elude this tyrannical majority and to attain, instead, praise and power: to acquire special abilities. Just as the smaller animals, equipped with Epimetheus’ ingenious traits, can escape the larger ones, so also a select few men can acquire abilities to elude the many and even have power over them. But unlike animals whose abilities are inborn, humans need a combination of natural endowment and

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<sup>30</sup> This is similar to Callicles’ complaint that the weak and the many instituted the laws in order to be able to assign “praise and blame” and decide what is shameful and what is just (*Gorg.* 483b-c). In this part of his speech, Callicles represents the many as those in power.

<sup>31</sup> This, I believe, is the point of Protagoras’s insistence that everyone has a share in political virtue.

<sup>32</sup> Although it may seem odd to portray the many as the strong and big predator and the select few as the small animal trying to elude detection, it becomes less odd if we consider that by the later half of the fifth century the power of the masses in Athens was considerable and their distrust of the elites had grown. As Ober (1989: 81-82) remarks, with the post-Cleisthenic reforms that culminated in the 440s “the masses became the legal judges of all citizens’ behavior. Now the elite individual who fell afoul of the laws, or into a dispute of another citizen, would have to face a jury dominated by ordinary citizens. The upper-class litigant’s life, his conduct, his attitudes, would be the subject of close scrutiny by those whose property, social status, and education were much inferior to his own.” In this context, for the elite to rise to power safely, they would have to conceal their true motives and pander to the values of the masses.

instruction (see 327b ff.). And this is precisely what Protagoras does; he provides these abilities to a talented elite of men so that they can succeed in private and public.

Protagoras is, then, the Epimetheus of the Athenian elite.

## 6. The Gifts of Prometheus

The episode following the description of animals contains the description of how humans came to acquire technical skill. Protagoras relates how Epimetheus spent all the abilities and powers on animals and had none left to distribute to humans.<sup>33</sup> Thus humans were left “naked, unshod, unbedded and unarmed” (*γυμνόν τε καὶ ἀνυπόδητον καὶ ἄστρωτον καὶ ἄοπλον*, 321c5-6). Unlike animals, then, humans received neither natural defenses against mutual destruction nor the physical traits that might permit them to adapt to the environment. Prometheus then had to intervene and equip humans in a different way so they could emerge from the earth and survive. He thus gave humans “wisdom in the technical arts together with fire” (*ἐντεχνον σοφίαν σὺν πυρί*, 321d). Protagoras then remarks (321d3-322a2):

*τὴν μὲν οὖν περὶ τὸν βίον σοφίαν ἄνθρωπος ταύτη ἔσχευεν, τὴν δὲ πολιτικὴν οὐκ εἶχεν. ἦν γὰρ παρὰ τῷ Δίῳ. τῷ δὲ Προμηθεΐ εἰς μὲν τὴν ἀκρόπολιν τὴν τοῦ Διὸς οἴκησιν οὐκέτι ἐνεχώρει εἰσελθεῖν—πρὸς δὲ καὶ αἱ Διὸς φυλακαὶ φοβεραὶ ἦσαν—εἰς δὲ τὸ τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς καὶ Ἡφαίστου οἶκημα τὸ κοινόν, ἐν ᾧ ἐφιλοτεχνεῖτην, λαδῶν εἰσέρχεται, καὶ κλέψας τὴν τε ἔμπυρον τέχνην τὴν τοῦ Ἡφαίστου καὶ τὴν ἄλλην τὴν τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς δίδωσιν ἀνθρώπῳ, καὶ ἐκ τούτου εὐπορία μὲν ἀνθρώπῳ τοῦ βίου γίγνεται, Προμηθεῖα δὲ δι’ Ἐπιμηθεῖα ὕστερον, ἥπερ λέγεται, κλοπῆς δίκη μετέλθεν.*

In this way, humans acquired the skill for staying alive, but political skill they did not acquire, because this was in the keeping of Zeus. Prometheus was no longer allowed into the citadel of Zeus and, besides this, the guards there were terrifying.

<sup>33</sup> Epimetheus’ lack of foresight may seem to speak against the cleverness I earlier attributed to him. But I think his blunder says more about his lack of concern for humans than his lack of cleverness. By contrast, Prometheus is portrayed as caring for humans, even to his own risk.

But he did sneak into the house that Athena and Hephaestus shared and where they practiced their arts, and from Hephaestus he stole the art of fire and from Athena the other arts, and he gave them to humans. And it is from this origin that the resources that humans needed to stay alive came into being. But later, as it is said, on account of Epimetheus, Prometheus was charged with theft.

The arts Prometheus gives to humans are analogous to those physical attributes, such as hooves and hides, that Epimetheus gave to animals so they could adapt to the environment and stay alive (see 321b). At their birth from the earth, then, humans possess the technical skill and resourcefulness that permits them to transform the material world around them and stay alive. What they lack is the other ability that Epimetheus gave to animals, the capacity to defend themselves against each other—that is, the capacity to deal effectively with each other. This is the capacity that Protagoras has identified as *ἡ πολιτικὴ σοφία*; and the implication is that the primary purpose of *πολιτικὴ σοφία* is to serve as a *defense* against mutual destruction.<sup>34</sup>

This passage, however, does more than tell us how humans gained technical skill but not the art of citizenship. It contains Protagoras' most important allusions to, and innovations of, the traditional myth—allusions and innovations that are crucial to understanding both the meaning of Zeus's *ἡ πολιτικὴ σοφία* and his subsequent gifts of *αἰδώς* and *δίκη*.

In the myth of Prometheus, as told by Hesiod in the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*, and by Aeschylus in the *Prometheus Bound*, the Titan is the patron of humans and Zeus' rival. In Hesiod, Prometheus restores fire to humans by stealing it from Zeus,<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Note that there is nothing here about having the capacity to cooperate or live peacefully in community.

<sup>35</sup> *Theog.* 507-616 and *WD* 47-105. In the *Theogony* Zeus refuses to give fire to humans while in the *Works and Days* he takes it away as punishment for Prometheus' deceit.

while in Aeschylus he gives them the arts so they can have better lives.<sup>36</sup> It is for this patronage, as much as the threat that his wit and intelligence pose, that Zeus cruelly punishes both Prometheus and humans. In Hesiod, the main punishment goes to humans, who receive all sorts of ills and misery through Zeus' gift of Pandora, who is fashioned by Athena and Hephaestus (and whom Epimetheus foolishly accepts). In Aeschylus, the play focuses on Prometheus' suffering after Zeus has punished him by shackling him to the crags of Scythia.

From these traditional accounts, four basic elements are explicitly retained in the Protagorean myth: Epimetheus' "foolishness," Prometheus' responsibility for bringing fire and the arts to humans, his punishment, and Zeus' ambiguous "gift" to humans. In the passage quoted above, Protagoras innovates upon the traditional account in four explicit ways: 1) Prometheus steals fire from Hephaestus (rather than Zeus) and the arts from Athena (rather than being himself their source, as he is in the Aeschylean account [see *PV* 442-506]); 2) the insertion of *πολιτική σοφία*, which Zeus alone possesses and guards; 3) Prometheus' fear of stealing this wisdom from Zeus because of his terrifying guards; and 4) the charge of theft brought against Prometheus on account of Epimetheus.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *PV* 442-506.

<sup>37</sup> Protagoras also innovates in the rest of the myth, before and after the passage quoted. These innovations include: the gods' commission to Epimetheus and Prometheus to distribute powers to mortal creatures; Epimetheus' prominence and skill in distributing these powers; Prometheus' thoughtlessness in allowing Epimetheus to take charge; Prometheus' bestowal of the arts and fire to humans not as a gift, but as compensation for Epimetheus' mistake; Zeus' wish to save mankind and his gifts to them. No doubt each of these innovations is significant. For our purposes, however, it is the figure of Zeus that is most relevant. For the figures of Epimetheus and Prometheus and their significance in Protagoras' speech, see the insightful paper by C. L. Miller 1978.

With these innovations Protagoras has in effect stripped Zeus and Prometheus of their traditional attributes and transformed them. In his myth Prometheus is no longer the Aeschylean noble Titan who, unafraid of Zeus, championed humans, became their teacher, and improved their lives; nor is he the Hesiodic clever trickster who competes with the Olympian god in wit. Instead, he is a fearful and somewhat naive god who possesses no other skill than theft—and that only when there is no danger.<sup>38</sup> Zeus, for his part, is no longer the wrathful, fierce, and punitive tyrant that Aeschylus portrays, nor the resourceful conquerer of the Titans that we find in the *Theogony*, but an aloof ruler who, cryptically, possesses and guards his *πολιτική σοφία*. Yet, despite the differences in characterization, two details in Protagoras’ account recall Zeus’ and Prometheus’ poetic counterparts.

The first is the mention of Zeus’ terrifying guards (*φυλακαὶ φοβεραὶ*). These guards, as Adam and Adam point out,<sup>39</sup> refer to *Κράτος* and *Βία*. They appear both in the *Theogony* (at line 385) and in *Prometheus Bound* (1-87). In the latter work, *Κράτος* and *Βία* are the servants of Zeus who bring Prometheus to Scythia for Hephaestus to pin to the crags as punishment for stealing fire and teaching the arts to humans. *Κράτος* represents Zeus’ brute power, impervious to reason or pity. At the beginning of the play, he explains the purpose of Prometheus’ punishment (*PV* 9-11): *δεῖ θεοῖς δοῦναι δίκην, / ὥς ἂν διδασθῇ τὴν Διὸς τυραννίδα / στέργειν, φιλανθρώπου δὲ παύεσθαι τρόπου* (“that he may be taught to bear the sovereignty of Zeus and cease his man-loving ways”). Aeschylus’

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<sup>38</sup> McCoy (1998: 23) (following C. L. Miller 1978) characterizes the relationship between Zeus and Prometheus as “collaborators working for human survival.” This is too strong. Although the story implies that Zeus builds on the skills Prometheus gives to humans, nothing shows them actually collaborating.

<sup>39</sup> Adam and Adam 1905: 111.

Zeus is tyrannical in his power; he allows no dissent and the purpose of his punishment is retaliation and intimidation. We are reminded of this punitive Zeus both at the end of the passage from Protagoras' myth (cited earlier, 322a1-2), where we are told that Prometheus was charged with theft, and at the end of the myth when Zeus tells Hermes to establish it as a law that anyone who cannot partake of shame and justice should be killed (322d4-5). It is the spirit of this vengeful Zeus that permeates the discursive portion of the speech when Protagoras vividly describes how virtue is taught through punishment (323c3 ff.). In this sense, the figure of Zeus in the myth anticipates the power of the many in Protagoras' explanatory *logos* and their power to restrain others through force.

In the *Theogony*, *Κράτος* and *Βία* are the children of the goddess Styx, and the context in which they appear is worth recalling since it is relevant to understanding what Protagoras means when he says that Zeus alone possessed *πολιτικὴ σοφία*. Hesiod tells us that when Zeus called upon the gods to join him in his fight against the Titans, he promised to recognize the honors they held with Cronus or to grant new ones if they had none. Styx was the first of the Titans to join Zeus. She gave her children *Ζῆλος* (Rivalry), *Νίκη* (Victory), *Κράτος* (Strength), and *Βία* (Force) to him, and in return he made Styx the oath of the gods. Since then, says Hesiod, *Κράτος* and *Βία* have always accompanied Zeus wherever he goes and never leave his side (*Theog.* 383-403).

Both passages are important because they remind us that Zeus was able to establish himself as the ruler of the gods by power and force. In the *Theogony*, however, Zeus' power is more nuanced than in *Prometheus Bound*. Hesiod's Zeus accomplished his victory over the Titans not only by using force but also by establishing alliances with other gods, such as Styx, and by bestowing rewards upon them in return for their

loyalty.<sup>40</sup> In the *Theogony*, then, we see a *political* Zeus who is not only forceful but also clever; one who knows how to secure his self-interest by appealing to the other gods' own desire for honor and power.<sup>41</sup>

Keeping in mind the Hesiodic account of Zeus, we see that in Protagoras' myth Zeus represents the attributes that a man needs in order to succeed in the *polis* and attain political power: boldness and intelligence. These are not the attributes of the majority but of a select few. Protagoras captures this notion by contrasting the figure of Prometheus with that of Zeus when he says that Prometheus no longer had access to the citadel of Zeus and he implies that the reason was Prometheus' fear of his guards (τῷ δὲ Προμηθεΐ εἰς μὲν τὴν ἀκρόπολιν τὴν τοῦ Διὸς οἴκησιν οὐκέτι ἐνεχώρει εἰσελθεῖν—πρὸς δὲ καὶ αἱ Διὸς φυλακαὶ φοβεραὶ ἦσαν, 321d5-7). Prometheus lacks the boldness to go after ἡ πολιτικὴ σοφία because Zeus' power scares him. The wisdom to be found on Zeus' citadel can be attained only by those who are daring and ambitious. By contrast, the arts of Hephaestus and Athena are within easy reach; the common man readily gains them. Prometheus, then, represents the common man whose boldness is limited to activities that present no real danger, while he exercises self-restraint out of fear. Zeus represents the select few who not only have the boldness to compete for what they want, but the cleverness to know how to succeed.

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<sup>40</sup> This is mentioned in *Prometheus Bound* as well (lines 230 ff.). But Hesiod's Prometheus takes credit for the defeat of the Titans.

<sup>41</sup> See Brown 1953: 17-24 for the view that Zeus is a political figure in the *Theogony*: "It is also characteristic of Zeus' reign that his military power is not based on personal strength but on politics." He then goes on to say that Zeus's "distinctive attribute is not strength but statesmanship—the quality which Hesiod calls *metis*, "Cunning," or "Wisdom," though the word cannot be satisfactorily translated." (p. 20). It is this Zeus that we encounter in Protagoras' myth.



Finally, there is the reinsertion of the figure of Epimetheus at the end of this passage. Protagoras says that it was on account of Epimetheus that Prometheus was charged with theft. By putting the two brothers side by side in this way, Protagoras again creates a provocative contrast—between appearances and what they can disguise. Thus Epimetheus *appears* to be foolish and thoroughly lacking in resources, yet this disguises the boldness and cleverness of his actions: his request to be allowed to distribute the powers, his equipping of the animals, and his ultimate avoidance of the blame and the penalty. By contrast, Prometheus *appears* to be clever and resourceful by stealing the arts and fire for humans, but this disguises his lack of boldness in not stealing the art of politics and his foolishness in being unable to avoid the charge of theft. The moral is that appearances, when properly manipulated, can cover true motivations.

### 7. The Gifts of Zeus and the Social Compact

In the final part of his myth, Protagoras recounts how, thanks to their technical skill, humans could subsist in small, scattered clusters.<sup>42</sup> What they were not able to do, however, was to join forces and form cities so as to fight off beasts. For, when they did so, humans would wrong one another and, once again, scatter. When Zeus realized that, at this rate, the human race would be wiped out, he sent Hermes to distribute to each and every human *αἰδῶ τε καὶ δίκην, ἵν' εἴεν πόλεων κόσμοι τε καὶ δεσμοὶ φιλίας συναγωγοί* (“shame and justice so that there would be order in the cities and bonds of friendship to bring them together,” 322c2-3). He then enjoined them to *καὶ νόμον γε θεὸς παρ' ἐμοῦ τὸν μὴ δυνάμενον αἰδοῦς καὶ δίκης μετέχειν κτείνειν ὡς νόσον πόλεως* (“establish this law as

<sup>42</sup> See Taylor 1991: 84 and Nussbaum 1986: 101.

coming from me: to kill whoever is not able to partake of shame and justice as though he were a pestilence to the city,” 322d4-5).

Although Protagoras’ characterization of *αἰδώς* and *δίκη* as making cities orderly and as providing humans with bonds of friendship seems to say that these gifts are something positive, his description of how these gifts are put into practice reveals their actual meaning. Both Zeus’ order that anyone who does not partake of these gifts should be put to death and the pervasive emphasis on punishment as a means of teaching virtue in the discursive section of the speech draw attention to how these bonds and order are the product of coercion, not friendly affection or a cooperative spirit. It is fear of punishment and rebuke that forces humans to find a way to get along and organize into cities, rather than a desire to be amicable with each other and behave in an orderly fashion.

It is not this latter positive valuation that is significant about the gifts of Zeus but, rather, the equalizing effect they are meant to have. Indeed, although these “gifts” are the equivalent of the defenses that the animals received from Epimetheus, they are different in one important respect. While animals obtained various types of defensive capabilities, such as strength, wings, or speed, in the case of humans *everyone* has to partake of the *same* attributes, *αἰδώς* and *δίκη*. The reason for this is that the different physical traits and capacities given to animals were meant to make their power to harm each other *unequal* so that only some could harm others. In the natural world, animals are equipped to compete with one another. By contrast, in the case of humans, *αἰδώς* and *δίκη* are given to everyone in order to *equalize* power among individuals so that no one dare overpower another—at least, not with impunity. The central point is to blunt competitive aims by

instilling the fear of suffering shame and punishment, an argument that Protagoras will return to and vividly describe in the discursive portion of his speech.

But the equalizing power of the gifts of Zeus resembles the kind of *social compact* that Glaucon describes in Book II of the *Republic* (358e3-359b5) and that Callicles decries in the *Gorgias* (483b4-c6). Indeed, to the extent that the gifts of Zeus are meant to prevent humans from harming each other, they can be seen as the equivalent of a collective agreement not to do harm in order not to be harmed, the result of which are the social norms and conventions that the majority hold and impose. The most important aspect of this collective agreement is the power it grants to the majority to retaliate for failure to observe such norms. Zeus's injunction expresses precisely that when he says that anyone who does not partake of shame and justice will be put to death; it symbolizes the morality of the many, for whom adherence to certain behavioral standards out of dread of retaliation constitutes virtue.

In the discursive portion of his speech, Protagoras will identify the morality implied in the social compact with that of the many as he describes how the many adhere to the virtues of justice and moderation only in appearance and out of fear of retaliation.

## 8. The Virtues and Power of the Many

Zeus' injunction to Hermes marks the end of the myth proper; what then follows is Protagoras' exegesis of his own myth (322d5-324d1).<sup>43</sup> On the surface, the purpose of

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<sup>43</sup> I agree with Kerferd (1953: 42-43) that the *logos* proper only begins at 324d2. However, I disagree with him that the myth and the *logos* "are the same thing, the one expressed in mythical form, the other in rationalised form" (p. 44). As I will argue, the *logos* is a description of the education of the elite, within which Protagoras alludes to the proper virtue of a man and points to natural talent as the factor that enables powerful men to succeed in the *polis*.

this exegesis is to show that everyone believes that virtue can be taught and thus to counter Socrates' earlier claim to the contrary. However, closer reading reveals that this section serves another purpose as well: it enables Protagoras to describe popular morality and to suggest that it is geared toward suppressing the desire for political competition and preeminence by instilling fear of social and judicial retaliation. Indeed, anger, rebuke, and punishment are prominent in Protagoras' exegesis of the myth. From 323c8-324c2, he uses words that mean to be angry (*θυμοῦσθαι*, *θυμοί*), to rebuke (*νουθετεῖν*, *νουθετήσεις*), to punish (*κολάζειν*, *κολάσεις*), and to take vengeance (*τιμωρεῖσθαι*) eighteen times, and always as a way to prove that civic virtue is acquired through training and learning. Not only, it seems, do people have to be forced into possessing the qualities of justice, moderation, and piety, but more importantly, civic virtue expresses the morality of the many. For not only is it the case that a particular group of people gets angry and rebukes, while others submit and obey, but, according to Protagoras' description, society as a whole acts as a police agency. Consider the following passage (323d6-324a3):

*ὅσα δὲ ἐξ ἐπιμελείας καὶ ἀσκήσεως καὶ διδασκαλίας οἴονται γίνεσθαι ἀγαθὰ ἀνθρώποις, ἐάν τις ταῦτα μὴ ἔχῃ, ἀλλὰ τὰναντία τούτων κακά, ἐπὶ τούτοις που οἱ τε θυμοὶ γίνονται καὶ αἱ κολάσεις καὶ αἱ νουθετήσεις. ὣν ἐστὶν ἐν καὶ ἡ ἀδικία καὶ ἡ ἀσέβεια καὶ συλλήβδην πᾶν τὸ ἐναντίον τῆς πολιτικῆς ἀρετῆς. ἔνθα δὴ πᾶς παντὶ θυμοῦται καὶ νουθετεῖ, δῆλον ὅτι ὡς ἐξ ἐπιμελείας καὶ μαθήσεως κτητῆς οὕσης.*

But in the case of the good things that come to people through practice and training and teaching, if someone does not possess these goods but rather their corresponding evils, then people get angry, and punish and rebuke him. One of these qualities is injustice and impiety and in sum all that is the opposite of civic virtue. In this case, everyone gets angry and everyone reproves him, and the reason clearly is that this virtue is regarded as something acquired through practice and learning.

Uncivilized man's power to do wrong to others has been replaced by civilized man's power to get angry and rebuke others (*πᾶς παντὶ θυμοῦται καὶ νοουθετεῖ*). This anger and reproof are responsive not to actual injustices but to failures to exhibit the appropriate civic qualities. In a prior, uncivilized time, every man was looking out for himself, now they have all gathered forces to become a collective that shares in the power of *αἰδώς* and *δίκη*, shame, and retaliation.<sup>44</sup> The result is not that injustice has now given way to fairness and cooperation but that people have renounced injustice in order to avoid being shamed, rebuked, chastised, or punished—as long as they too have the ability to do the same to others. The social compact and its application is revealed most clearly: people agree not to harm others, not in return for their own security, but for the power to chastise and punish others.

Civic morality, then, is the morality of the common man and of the multitude, and it consists in the power to constrain the power of others through recrimination and punishment. This morality is not only in contrast to that of the select few, which Protagoras will address next, but also to that which the sophist himself teaches: how to become successful in private and in public not by exercising self-restraint or restraint of others but by good counsel—by *εὐβουλία*.<sup>45</sup> In this way, it is the power of the individual that Protagoras, implicitly, represents himself as able to advance.

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<sup>44</sup> See Coby 1987: 60. Hemmenway (1996) and McCoy (1998) also recognize the emphasis Protagoras places on punishment as a condition for political virtue.

<sup>45</sup> I will have more to say about *εὐβουλία* and its meaning for Protagoras in Chapter 2.

## 9. The Excellence of a Man

In the final section of his speech, Protagoras addresses Socrates' question as to why *οἱ ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες*—that is, politically successful men<sup>46</sup>—fail to produce virtuous sons. At this point, Protagoras introduces a new kind of virtue that is different from *ἡ πολιτικὴ ἀρετή* and that he calls *ἡ ἀνδρὸς ἀρετή*. On the surface, both seem to be the same, except that one is public and the other private.<sup>47</sup> On close examination, however, we see Protagoras aptly, eloquently, and surreptitiously making a sales pitch for the kind of teaching he offers. It is here that he appeals to prospective students by intimating that with his instruction they will be able to protect themselves and achieve what they want. To do this, Protagoras employs a long and complex conditional clause that enables him to move quietly from civic virtue to the dangers of lacking the proper virtue for political advancement.

Protagoras begins by asking *πότερον ἔστιν τι ἐν ᾧ οὐκ ἔστιν οὗ ἀναγκαῖον πάντας τοὺς πολίτας μετέχειν, εἴπερ μέλλει πόλις εἶναι;* (“Does there or does there not exist one single thing that all citizens must have if there is to be a city?” 324d7-e1). Notice that Protagoras does not use the word *ἀρετή* in connection to the existence of a *polis*, but more vaguely refers to that “single thing,” *ἓν*, that everyone needs. In this way, he connects his *logos* with the mythical account and exegesis that came before, while at the same time pointing the way to something new. And, indeed, his response consists of a long conditional sentence with three protases. With each protasis, Protagoras gets farther

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<sup>46</sup> See Coby 1987: 62.

<sup>47</sup> Recall that in his challenge to Protagoras to prove that excellence can be taught, Socrates said that the Athenians demonstrate that they do not believe excellence is teachable both in how they behave publicly in the Assembly and privately in their family life (see 319b-e).

away from the identification of civic virtue with the virtue of a man, so that soon, instead of speaking of ἀρετή, he obscurely refers to “this thing” that every man needs (325a5-b4):

*εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἔστιν, καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ ἐν οὐ τεκτονικὴ οὐδὲ χαλκεία οὐδὲ κεραμεία ἀλλὰ δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ τὸ ὅσιον εἶναι, καὶ συλλήβδην ἐν αὐτὸ προσαγορεύω εἶναι ἀνδρὸς ἀρετήν—εἰ τοῦτ' ἐστὶν οὗδεῖ πάντας μετέχειν καὶ μετὰ τούτου πάντ' ἄνδρα, ἕαν τι καὶ ἄλλο βούληται μανθάνειν ἢ πράττειν, οὕτω πράττειν, ἄνευ δὲ τούτου μή ἢ τὸν μή μετέχοντα καὶ διδάσκειν καὶ κολάζειν καὶ παῖδα καὶ ἄνδρα καὶ γυναῖκα, ἕωςπερ ἂν κολαζόμενος βελτίων γένηται, ὅς δ' ἂν μὴ ὑπακούῃ κολαζόμενος καὶ διδασκόμενος, ὥς ἀνίατον ὄντα τοῦτον ἐκβάλλειν ἐκ τῶν πόλεων ἢ ἀποκτείνειν—εἰ οὕτω μὲν ἔχει, οὕτω δ' αὐτοῦ πεφυκότος οἱ ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες εἰ τὰ μὲν ἄλλα διδάσκονται τοὺς ὑεῖς, τοῦτο δὲ μή, σκέψαι ὥς θαυμασίως γίγνονται οἱ ἀγαθοί.*

If there is [one thing that all citizens must share in], and this one thing is not the art of the carpenter or of the blacksmith or of the potter but justice and moderation and piety, and collectively this single thing itself I call the virtue of a man— if there is this thing of which everyone must partake and with which every man must act whenever he wishes to learn anything or do anything, but should not act without it, or if someone does not share in it, then it is necessary to instruct him and correct him, be it child, man, or woman, until he becomes better by being punished, and, whoever does not submit after being punished and instructed, it is necessary to exile him from our cities or execute him, since he is incurable; if this is the case, and such is the nature of this thing, and good men give their sons an education in everything but this, then we have to be amazed at how strangely our good men behave.

In this first protasis, Protagoras seems to say that the virtue of a man consists of

δικαιοσύνη, σωφροσύνη, and τὸ ὅσιον (324e2-325a2).<sup>48</sup>

*εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἔστιν, καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ ἐν οὐ τεκτονικὴ οὐδὲ χαλκεία οὐδὲ κεραμεία ἀλλὰ δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ τὸ ὅσιον εἶναι, καὶ συλλήβδην ἐν αὐτὸ προσαγορεύω εἶναι ἀνδρὸς ἀρετήν—*

If there is, and this one thing is not the art of the carpenter or of the blacksmith or of the potter but justice and moderation and piety, and collectively this single thing itself I call the virtue of a man—

<sup>48</sup> This is, in fact, the standard interpretation. See, for example, Coby 1987: 62. Commentators have strangely glossed over this passage. Adam and Adam (1905:117) say that “ἀνδρὸς is somewhat loftier and more impressive than ἀνθρώπου.” Denyer (2008:114) says: “Protagoras does not mean the most obvious virtue of a man, ἀνδρεία. For 325a5-6 shows that he means the cooperative virtue needed by all members of society regardless of age and sex.”

Three details, however, suggest that by *ἀνδρὸς ἀρετή* Protagoras may mean something else. First, the successive emphasis on *ἐν* indicates that there is a single quality that a man needs in order to be *ἀγαθός*; second, it is only here that Protagoras uses *ἀνὴρ* in direct connection to *ἀρετή*, where before he had spoken of *ἄνθρωποι* as those who possess *πολιτικὴ ἀρετή* (e.g., 323a5-7); and third, for the first and only time in the speech Protagoras emphatically asserts his own belief about virtue (before he had spoken of what “they,” meaning the Athenians and others, believe [see, e.g., 322d5-323a7]). These details suggest that when Protagoras speaks of *ἀνδρὸς ἀρετή* he is referring to something different and new from the kind of virtue he had described before. Further, what is new is not in the crafts and virtues he *does* mention, but in that quality that he purposefully avoids naming but that a true man should possess.<sup>49</sup> What that quality is seems to be implied in the next protasis (325a1-5):

*εἰ τοῦτ' ἐστὶν οὗ δέῃ πάντας μετέχειν καὶ μετὰ τούτου πάντ' ἄνδρα, εἴαν τι καὶ ἄλλο βούληται μάθάνειν ἢ πράττειν, οὕτω πράττειν, ἄνευ δὲ τούτου μή ...*

if there is this thing of which everyone must partake and with which every man must act whenever he wishes to learn anything or do anything, but should not act without it ...

In this protasis, Protagoras connects to his prior argument (since *οὗ δέῃ πάντας μετέχειν* points back to the initial question, thus seemingly referring to political virtue), while also adding something new with *μετὰ τούτου πάντ' ἄνδρα ... οὕτω πράττειν*. The quality every man should possess, then, is different from civic virtue. For the purpose of this quality is

<sup>49</sup> It would be easy to assume that he is referring to *ἀνδρεία*. The only problem with this conclusion is that this is not what Protagoras teaches. However, he may be implying that courage is necessary in order to undertake studies with him.



no longer to make life in the *polis* possible (recall εἴπερ μέλλει πόλις εἶναι, at 324e1), but to safeguard one's interests. Indeed, if a man wishes to learn anything or do anything (ἐάν τι καὶ ἄλλο βούληται μανθάνειν ἢ πράττειν), he must have this quality, and without it he should refrain from acting altogether (ἄνευ δὲ τούτου μή). There is an important, new emphasis here on what the person wishes to learn and how he wishes to act. In the prior argument, learning and training were compulsory and part of educating people in civic virtue. Now the notion of compulsion and force is absent. Instead, we have the verb *βούληται*, which suggests that this man is acting freely and not out of compulsion. (Protagoras uses *βούληται* only once more in his speech, in connection with the fee he charges, saying that a student has to pay the full price *only if he wishes*, ἐὰν μὲν βούληται [328b6-7]).

But the importance of this unique virtue goes further (325a5-b1):

ἢ τὸν μὴ μετέχοντα καὶ διδάσκειν καὶ κολάζειν καὶ παῖδα καὶ ἄνδρα καὶ γυναῖκα, ἕωςπερ ἂν κολαζόμενος βελτίων γένηται, ὅς δ' ἂν μὴ ὑπακούῃ κολαζόμενος καὶ διδασκόμενος, ὡς ἀνίατον ὄντα τοῦτον ἐκβάλλειν ἐκ τῶν πόλεων ἢ ἀποκτείνειν—

or if someone does not share in it, then it is necessary to instruct him and correct him, be it child, man, or woman, until he becomes better by being punished, and, whoever does not submit after being punished and instructed, it is necessary to exile him from our cities or execute him, since he is incurable.

Here Protagoras resumes the theme of teaching virtue through punishment that had prevailed in the myth and its exegesis, thus signaling that he is now referring to civic virtue and not ἀνδρὸς ἀρετή. But he also adds a paraphrase of Zeus' injunction to Hermes when he says that those who cannot be taught through punishment and instruction will be killed or exiled, since they are deemed incurable (cf. 322d4-5). The possibility of death and exile was not mentioned in connection to civic virtue in the first part of the

discourse. Protagoras, for the first time since Zeus' injunction, reinserts this possibility into his argument. This addition suggests that not possessing civic virtue means having to submit to rebuke and punishment, but that the consequence of not possessing *ἀνδρὸς ἀρετή* includes a graver risk—death or exile. Protagoras will repeat this threat a few lines later when he says that it is not possible to think that good men will not have their sons instructed in this virtue, since the consequences of their not having it include death, exile, and the confiscation of their property: *ὥς ἔπος εἶπεῖν συλλήβδην τῶν οἴκων ἀνατροπαί* (“in a word, the complete ruin of themselves and their families,” 325b7-c3). Protagoras predicted no such catastrophe for one lacking in civic virtue. So why would the sons of good men be at such risk without this virtue? Because, unlike the many, the sons of good men are ambitious and aspire to acquiring both prominence in the city and political power. Protagoras is, in effect, saying that without his teaching, young men like Hippocrates will not be able to pursue safely their political and social ambitions. And so he finally comes to the end of his conditional sentence (325b1-4):

*εἰ οὕτω μὲν ἔχει, οὕτω δ' αὐτοῦ πεφυκότος οἱ ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες εἰ τὰ μὲν ἄλλα διδάσκονται τοὺς υἱεῖς, τοῦτο δὲ μή, σκέψαι ὥς θαυμασίως γίνονται οἱ ἀγαθοί.*

if this is the case, and such is the nature of this thing, and if good men have their sons educated in other things, but not in this, then consider how strange these good men have turned out to be.

Protagoras restates the protasis of his condition one last time, but its content is now different. The question is no longer if there is such a thing as *δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ τὸ ὅσιον*, but *if this is how it is by its very nature* [*οὕτω δ' αὐτοῦ πεφυκότος*]. What Protagoras is now saying is very different from what he seemed to be saying at the beginning of this sentence: if political ambition is, by nature, a dangerous and

competitive affair, then it would be strange if good men were to refuse to have their sons instructed in the virtue that would enable them to be successful. In this way, Protagoras has deftly and covertly moved from civic virtue, as he formulated it at the beginning of his conditional sentence, to personal ambition and the virtue such ambition requires—all without missing a beat.

What this virtue is, however, Protagoras leaves unclear. It could very well be *εὐβουλία*, since this is the virtue that he tells Hippocrates he will teach him, and which will enable him to be successful in private and in public (see 318e5-319a2). But the specific virtue is not relevant; rather, what is relevant is what Protagoras intimates, in this complex passage and in the final section of his *logos*, that he can do for an ambitious young man.

Protagoras addresses the question of why the sons of good fathers never amount to anything through the metaphor of flute-playing. The successful flute-player requires both talent and instruction. The sons of good flute-players and of bad flute-players can become famous (*ἐλλόγιστοι*) flute-players if they have two things, natural talent and the right instruction (327b4-c1). This, then, is what Protagoras offers a prospective student: if a young man has talent (and money), Protagoras will instruct him so that he will be able to obtain the skills by which he will become *ἐλλόγιστος*, without the need for cumbersome and punitive instruction and without falling into danger.

It is in this way that Protagoras answers Socrates' challenge regarding the teachability of virtue. Although the ostensible purpose of his speech has been to respond to this challenge, Protagoras has also endeavored to achieve three other unstated goals: 1) to outdo Socrates in eloquence and sagacity; 2) to demonstrate to his audience his ability

to stay within the bounds of sanctioned morality while at the same time delivering his own message; and 3) to appeal to young men who desire political power and preeminence. From this perspective, the Great Speech is an *ἀγών* disguised as praise of cooperative virtue; its true aims are adversarial and competitive. In this sense, it is the counterpart to the *ἀγών* between Socrates and Protagoras concerning the poem of Simonides later in the dialogue. In both cases, Protagoras is revealed as motivated primarily by his desire for recognition and money (since, in effect, these speeches are akin to a “sales pitch” for prospective students), rather than for truth or wisdom. Recognition and money are, in the end, the goal of Protagoras’ virtue, while justice and moderation are the means to disguise that goal.

### 10. Glaucon’s Speech: The Preamble

A speech, such as that of Protagoras, that purports to defend the values and benefits of justice and moderation may seem to have little in common with a speech that explicitly praises the benefits of injustice and the unjust life, such as that of Glaucon. But the distinction between the two collapses when the praise of justice relies on the notions that to be just is a necessary burden and that it is *seeming* to be just that is valuable, not *being* just. From this perspective, praising injustice merely articulates what that praise of justice implies: the desire to escape the burdens that justice imposes on the individual so he can be free to pursue his self-interest. This is precisely what Glaucon’s speech

demonstrates: the popular view of justice and the immoralist view of justice are not really at odds, but can easily slip into each other.<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, when Glaucon expresses his dissatisfaction in Book II of the *Republic* with Socrates' previous defense of justice, the basis of his objection is that Socrates has failed to show how justice is *itself* in the interests of the individual—that is, desirable in itself because it improves the agent's life. He frames his objection by proposing a division of goods according to three categories: 1) things that are good in themselves, and have neither good nor bad consequences, like joy or harmless pleasures; 2) things that are good both in themselves and in their consequences, like thinking (τὸ φρονεῖν), seeing, and being healthy; and 3) things that are bad in themselves, but are good for their consequences (357b4-d2). Although Socrates places justice in the second group, Glaucon disagrees saying that most people place justice in the third category because they see it as something that is onerous (ἐπίπονον), burdensome (χαλεπόν), and to be avoided (φευκτέον), but that must be practiced for the sake of the rewards and good reputation that it brings (358a4-6). In other words, for most people justice is something bad in itself because it not only fails to advance their self-interest, but also harms them.<sup>51</sup> By placing justice in the third category of goods, Glaucon suggests that unless Socrates can demonstrate how justice is in one's self-interest, the path of injustice, for which Thrasymachus had so vehemently argued, will remain the one to be desired.

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<sup>50</sup> This is, in fact, what Thrasymachus' position is meant to demonstrate; for a full articulation of this view, see McCoy 2008.

<sup>51</sup> See Heinaman 2002, who gives an excellent and detailed account of Glaucon's division of goods and argues that the goods in the third category are "intrinsic evils" (at p. 311).

This view of justice as only good instrumentally concords with Protagoras' description of justice in his Great Speech. Recall that although Zeus, in the mythical portion of the speech, says that *αἰδώς* and *δίκη* are meant to bring order to cities and bonds of friendship between men (*Prot.* 322c2-3), this positive description is accompanied by his dark injunction that anyone who does not partake of these gifts will be punished by death (*Prot.* 322d4-5); the implication, of course, is that one will want to possess these attributes only so as to avoid harsh punishment. This is confirmed in the discursive section of the speech, for although Protagoras assigns to justice the positive attribute that it enables people to come together and to form cities (*Prot.* 323a2-4), his subsequent emphasis on punishment as a means to teach justice and civic virtue suggests that people do not adhere to it willingly but out of necessity and fear. Even in the *logos* proper he explicitly argues that, contrary to what Socrates has said, good men must certainly have their children instructed in virtue, for otherwise they would leave them vulnerable to having their property confiscated, and to exile or death (*Prot.* 325b5-c4); again, practicing justice is a way to avoid bad consequences for oneself.<sup>52</sup> All of this suggests that for Protagoras justice is an instrumental good that is in the service of maintaining one's safety but that does little else to further one's own interests.

But Glaucon's division of goods does more than point to the instrumental value of justice. In saying that justice is desirable only for its consequences, Glaucon asserts that what matters about justice is not *being* just but *seeming to be* just, for it is enough to seem to be just in order to benefit from it, while being just only entails pain. From this

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<sup>52</sup> This is what Protagoras suggests in his overt *logos*. Covertly, as I argued before, he seems to suggest that one needs a special virtue in order both to avoid punishment and successfully acquire political power.

perspective, the value of justice lies in its power to *conceal* an agent's true motivations. This is why Glaucon wants to know what the power of both justice and injustice is on the soul of the individual. He wants to know what might motivate an agent to be just apart from desire for material wealth and preeminence. A sufficient response requires that justice be stripped of all its *seeming* value and goodness.

It is this crucial aspect of justice that Glaucon believes Socrates has not addressed and that prompts him to imply twice that in his previous defense of justice Socrates acted like a sophist. The first time occurs when he asks Socrates whether he wants *to seem* to persuade them (*δοκεῖν πεπεικέναι*) that justice is better than injustice, rather than to *truly* convince them (*ὡς ἀληθῶς πείσαι*, 357a5-6), and the second when he accuses him of charming Thrasymachus like a snake (*ὥσπερ ὄφεις κηληθῆναι*, 358b3).<sup>53</sup> With his charge of sophism Glaucon implies 1) that Socrates defended only the *appearance* of justice, but not justice itself, and 2) that he was more concerned with refuting Thrasymachus than with exploring the merits of justice and injustice.<sup>54</sup> Such a defense of justice does little to address the question that truly interests Glaucon: how to know who is truly just and who unjust, and what distinguishes one from the other when, to the outside world, both can appear to be the same. Glaucon's renewed defense of injustice is meant to expose this

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<sup>53</sup> Glaucon's use of the verb *κηλεῖν* ("to charm") is particularly telling. This is the same verb Socrates uses three times with respect to Protagoras in that dialogue. The first two times are when he mentions how Protagoras enchants (*κηλῶν*) his listeners with his voice and how they follow him as in a trance (*κεκηλημένοι*, *Prot.* 315b). The third occurs after the sophist has concluded his speech and Socrates says, *καὶ ἐγὼ ἐπὶ μὲν πολλὸν χρόνον κεκηλημένος ἔτι πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔβλεπον ὡς ἐροῦντά τι* ("charmed for a long time, I looked at him as if he were going to say more," *Prot.* 328d).

<sup>54</sup> See McCoy 2008: 111 ff., who argues that in *Republic* I Socrates seems to act more like a sophist and Thrasymachus more like a philosopher on the grounds that the position of the latter is more solid and congruent, while some of Socrates' arguments are fallacious.

very paradox and thus challenge Socrates to address justice and injustice from the point of view of the agent's *motivation*, rather than the actions or their consequences.

But Glaucon's challenge to Socrates is important for another reason as well. His words reveal his own ambivalence toward justice and injustice.<sup>55</sup> Glaucon would like to believe that justice is better than injustice, but he cannot *truly* believe this and value justice for itself if the satisfaction of his longings and desires is made possible only by *seeming* to be just. Indeed, Glaucon's difficulty with the just life that Socrates encourages is that it does not offer the kinds of goods he himself desires, such as honor, luxury, and political power. Thus his speech in defense of injustice and the unjust life is in earnest, despite his claims to the contrary (see 358c6-d3). He wishes to lay bare what the conventional praise of justice conceals: what everyone truly desires is unlimited power, wealth, and erotic satisfaction.

## 11. The Social Contract

Glaucon begins his speech by stating what most people believe to be the origins of justice (*Rep.* 358e3-359c6):

Πεφυκέναι γὰρ δὴ φασιν τὸ μὲν ἀδικεῖν ἀγαθόν, τὸ δὲ ἀδικεῖσθαι κακόν, πλέوني δὲ κακῶ ὑπερβάλλειν τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι ἢ ἀγαθῶ τὸ ἀδικεῖν, ὥστ' ἐπειδὴν ἀλλήλους ἀδικῶσί τε καὶ ἀδικῶνται καὶ ἀμφοτέρων γεύονται, τοῖς μὴ δυναμένοις τὸ μὲν ἐκφεύγειν τὸ δὲ αἰρεῖν δοκεῖ λυσιτελεῖν συνθέσθαι ἀλλήλοις μήτ' ἀδικεῖν μήτ' ἀδικεῖσθαι· καὶ ἐντεῦθεν δὴ ἄρξασθαι νόμους τίθεσθαι καὶ συνθήκας αὐτῶν, καὶ ὀνομάσαι τὸ ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου ἐπίταγμα νόμιμόν τε καὶ δίκαιον· καὶ εἶναι δὴ ταύτην γένεσίν τε καὶ οὐσίαν δικαιοσύνης, μεταξὺ οὗσαν τοῦ μὲν ἀρίστου ὄντος, ἐὰν ἀδικῶν μὴ διδῶ δίκην, τοῦ δὲ κακίστου, ἐὰν ἀδικούμενος τιμωρεῖσθαι ἀδύνατος ᾖ· τὸ δὲ δίκαιον ἐν μέσῳ ὃν τούτων ἀμφοτέρων ἀγαπᾶσθαι οὐχ ὡς ἀγαθόν, ἀλλ' ὡς ἀρρωστίᾳ τοῦ ἀδικεῖν τιμώμενον· ἐπεὶ τὸν δυνάμενον

<sup>55</sup> Interpreters who have recognized Glaucon's ambivalence include Davis 2000 and Gallagher 2004. Gallagher's description of Glaucon's character, as it is revealed throughout the *Republic*, is particularly illuminating in this respect. He argues that Glaucon has a timocratic personality so that he values victory and honor, but also covets luxury, wealth, and erotic passion. On his reading, the purpose of the *Republic* is protreptic in that it aims to turn the soul of Glaucon toward philosophy.



αὐτὸ ποιεῖν καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἄνδρα οὐδ' ἂν ἐνί ποτε συνθέσθαι τὸ μήτε ἀδικεῖν μήτε ἀδικεῖσθαι· μαίνεσθαι γὰρ ἂν. ἢ μὲν οὖν δὴ φύσις δικαιοσύνης, ὧ Σώκρατες, αὕτη τε καὶ τοιαύτη, καὶ ἐξ ὧν πέφυκε τοιαῦτα, ὡς ὁ λόγος.

Ὡς δὲ καὶ οἱ ἐπιτηδεύοντες ἀδυναμία τοῦ ἀδικεῖν ἄκοντες αὐτὸ ἐπιτηδεύουσι, μάλιστα' ἂν αἰσθοίμεθα, εἰ τοιόνδε ποιήσασιν τῇ διανοίᾳ· δόντες ἐξουσίαν ἑκατέρῳ ποιεῖν ὅτι ἂν βούληται, τῷ τε δικαίῳ καὶ τῷ ἀδίκῳ, εἴπ' ἐπακολουθήσασιν δεώμενοι ποῖ ἢ ἐπιθυμία ἑκάτερον ἄξει. ἐπ' αὐτοφώρῳ οὖν λάβοιμεν ἂν τὸν δίκαιον τῷ ἀδίκῳ εἰς ταῦτον ἰόντα διὰ τὴν πλεονεξίαν, ὃ πᾶσα φύσις διώκειν πέφυκεν ὡς ἀγαθόν, νόμῳ δὲ βίᾳ παράγεται ἐπὶ τῇ τοῦ ἴσου τιμῇ.

They say that to do wrong is a good thing by nature and being wronged is bad, but that the badness of being wronged far exceeds the goodness of committing wrong. As a result, when people wrong one another and are wronged by one another and taste both, those who are unable to avoid being wronged and to achieve wrongdoing, decide that it is profitable to come to an agreement with each other neither to do wrong nor to be wronged. And from there, they begin to make laws and agreements, and what the law commands they call lawful and just. This, they say, is the origin and essence of justice. It is intermediate between the best, which is to do wrong without paying the penalty, and the worst, which is to be wronged without being able to take revenge. Justice, being the mean between these two extremes, is not prized as a good but is valued because of people's weakness to do wrong. Someone who has the power to do this and is a true man wouldn't make an agreement with anyone not to do wrong in order not to be wronged. For him, that would be madness. This, then, is the nature of justice, according to the argument, Socrates, and these are its natural origins.

As for those who practice justice unwillingly, because they lack the power to do injustice, we can see most clearly that this is the case if in our thoughts we grant something like this: if we give to each, the just and the unjust person, the power to do whatever they like. We can then follow both of them and see where their desires would lead. We would soon catch the just person in the act travelling the same road as the unjust. The reason for this is the desire to outdo others and get more and more. This is what everyone's nature naturally pursues as good, but nature is forced by law into valuing equality.

Glaucon begins his speech on the origins of justice by framing it in terms of the νόμος-φύσις antithesis. By nature, humans desire to commit injustice, but by nature they also wish not to suffer injustice. Those who are weak and are not able to commit injustice without suffering it decide on a compact neither to wrong nor be wronged. This is the origin of justice and the laws: it is a social compact in the service of guaranteeing self-protection. People, however, would choose injustice if they could commit it with

impunity, and, in fact, those who can, do so. That justice is not a natural human good but one that people practice out of the need for safety and survival becomes evident if we imagine that both the just and the unjust can act freely, without concern for retribution. Then we would see that the just person would do wrong in the same way as the unjust person. The reason for this is that by nature people seek as the good the *pleonectic* satisfaction of their desires and wish to acquire more and more of whatever they want. Laws and conventions, therefore, were created solely out of fear for personal safety and, as such, they are a burdensome, even if necessary, imposition on human natural tendencies.<sup>56</sup>

If we compare Glaucon's account of the origins of justice with Protagoras' myth in the *Protagoras*, it would initially seem that Glaucon's account presents the opposite view from that of Protagoras, that whereas Protagoras sees injustice as harmful to humans, Glaucon presents it as the natural good. But in both accounts the impetus for creating laws is the same: the inability of humans to live together without harming each other. On this point, both Glaucon and Protagoras have a similar view of human nature. The difference is that Glaucon emphasizes humans' *pleonectic* tendencies, along with a consequent propensity to harm each other. In both cases, however, laws, and the retributions they entail, are the only means of curbing humans' natural tendency to outdo one another; the law serves collective survival. Also, in both cases the individual must forego his self-interest (particularly his desire to have power over others) in favor of

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<sup>56</sup> See R. E. Allen 1987 for a good, succinct analysis of how Glaucon's speech expresses a view of human nature as "atomic and isolated" (p. 6).

preserving communal life. Finally, in both cases it is fear of retribution that motivates fealty to justice.

But the most important point of connection between these two accounts is the notion that the mark of a true man is his refusal to abide by the equality imposed by the social compact. Glaucon expresses this when he says that the powerful refuse agreements not to do injustice (see *Rep.* 359b), while Protagoras intimates it when he suggests that there is a particular excellence that aristocratic young men need in order to succeed in the *polis* (see *Prot.* 324e2-b4). Despite the differences in emphasis (Glaucon emphasizes injustice, Protagoras addresses the desire for political power), they share the same underlying notion that aristocratic men seek power and do not abide by the conventional values of justice and moderation.

But it is precisely in the desire for power that Protagorean pragmatic ethics can easily slip into an immoralist ethics, where injustice is seen as the true good. This slip is what Glaucon's story of the ring of Gyges describes.

## 12. The Ring of Gyges

Just as Protagoras conveyed his main message with his myth of origins, so also Glaucon illustrates the inclination to injustice that underlies the just man's claims with a story. Gyges, a shepherd in the service of the king of Lydia, happens to find a ring that gives him the power to become invisible. Upon realizing the ring's power, Gyges uses it to seduce the king's wife, kill the king with her help, and take over his kingdom (*Rep.* 360ab). The lesson of the story is that an ordinary person who has been conditioned by societal norms to act lawfully (as Gyges presumably acted before he found the ring) will

commit injustice when given the opportunity and when he can do so with impunity.<sup>57</sup>

Glaucon thus goes on to conclude (*Rep.* 360b3-c6):

*εἰ οὖν δύο τοιούτω δακτυλίῳ γενοίσθην, καὶ τὸν μὲν ὁ δίκαιος περιθεῖτο, τὸν δὲ ὁ ἄδικος, οὐδεὶς ἂν γένοιτο, ὡς δόξειεν, οὕτως ἀδαμάντινος, ὃς ἂν μείνειεν ἐν τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ τολμήσειεν ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλλοτρίων καὶ μὴ ἄπτεσθαι, ἐξὸν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἀγορᾶς ἀδεῶς ὅτι βούλοιτο λαμβάνειν, καὶ εἰσιόντι εἰς τὰς οἰκίας συγγίγνεσθαι ὅτῳ βούλοιτο, καὶ ἀποκτείνυναι καὶ ἐκ δεσμῶν λύειν οὔστινας βούλοιτο, καὶ τᾶλλα πράττειν ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἰσόθεον ὄντα. οὕτω δὲ θρῶν οὐδὲν ἂν διάφορον τοῦ ἑτέρου ποιοῖ, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ ταῦτ' ἂν ἴοιεν ἀμφοτέρω. καίτοι μέγα τοῦτο τεκμήριον ἂν φαίη τις ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἐκὼν δίκαιος ἀλλ' ἀναγκαζόμενος ...*

Then, if there were two such rings, one worn by a just and the other by an unjust person, no one, it seems, would be so incorruptible that he would stay on the path of justice or endure to keep his hands off other people's property and not touch them; not when it would be possible for him to take whatever he wanted from the marketplace with impunity, go into people's houses and have sex with anyone he wished, kill or release from prison anyone he wished, and do all other things that would make him like a god among humans. Rather his actions would be in no way different from those of an unjust person, and both would follow the same path. This, some would say, is a great proof that one is never just willingly but only when compelled to be.

Comparison of this passage with Protagoras' praise of justice in his Great Speech shows how easily his account can slip into that of Glaucon. If the just person could be guaranteed personal safety and in this way be freed to act in any way he wished, he would indulge in all sorts of crimes and injustices. Or, in the terms of Protagoras' myth, if Zeus' threat of punishment could be avoided and personal survival could be guaranteed, then *δίκη* and *αἰδώς* would cease to be compelling forces and humans would wrong one another to their hearts' content.

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<sup>57</sup> Scholars have offered a variety of interpretations of the significance and details of Glaucon's story. For a full list of references, see Dustin and Schaeffer 2006: 441 n. 4. A common view of many of these interpretations is that Glaucon's story reveals his deepest concerns about power and desire and crucially informs the rest of the *Republic*.

But Glaucon's story of the ring of Gyges also exposes how human desire—and, therefore, the human good—is defined solely in terms of physical pleasure and its associated material goods. The reason why people naturally want to wrong each other is because they are obeying the demands of their *physical* nature with its insatiable appetites. This is the second point of connection between Glaucon's speech and that of Protagoras. Both accounts take for granted the corporeality of human nature; and both assume, on the basis of this premise, that human action is always and ultimately motivated by the need for physical safety and by the desire for power. From this perspective, the human good cannot be conceived as anything other than the egoistic pursuit of physical pleasure and power.

Also, within this paradigm, reason can be construed as having a primarily instrumental function—that is, as being the necessary means for securing personal safety and physical pleasure. Although the capacity to reason is never explicitly mentioned in either speech (Protagoras mentions *λόγος* only in connection to speech, again implying its instrumental function, 322a), in both this capacity is represented as a *τέχνη*—that is, as a skill or “know how.” In the case of his Great Speech, Protagoras differentiates between practical skill, which is innate to human beings and enables them to transform the material world for the sake of sustenance and survival (321d-322b), and political skill, which humans acquired through the necessity of living in a *polis* (322c-323a). In both types of skill, the emphasis is on knowing how to transform or use something for one's own benefit. Thus justice and self-restraint are represented as the products of calculative skills that one must learn in order to live in society without incurring harm to oneself (323c ff.). The “know how” they entail is to learn how to avoid punishment, while at the

same time accruing the benefits of social living. The implication is that one must learn to calculate the amount of pleasure or benefit against the amount of pain or harm an action will involve so as to decide if that action is in one's best interests. Although Protagoras never explicitly formulates the issue in this way, he certainly suggests it at certain points of the dialogue (see, e.g., *Prot.* 334abc and 351d ff.). Glaucon's speech also emphasizes the need for "know how" in the case of the unjust person who wants to commit injustice with impunity (*Rep.* 360e6-361a4):

πρῶτον μὲν οὖν ὁ ἄδικος ὥσπερ οἱ δεινοὶ δημιουργοὶ ποιείτω--οἷον κυβερνήτης ἄκρος ἢ ἰατρὸς τὰ τε ἀδύνατα ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ καὶ τὰ δυνατὰ διαισθάνεται, καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἐπιχειρεῖ, τὰ δὲ ἔῃ· ἔτι δὲ εἰάν ἄρα πῃ σφαλῇ, ἱκανὸς ἐπανορθοῦσθαι--οὕτω καὶ ὁ ἄδικος ἐπιχειροῦν ὁρθῶς τοῖς ἀδικήμασιν λανθάνέτω, εἰ μέλλει σφόδρα ἄδικος εἶναι.

First, therefore, we must suppose that an unjust person will act as skilled craftsmen do: A first-rate captain or doctor, for example, knows the difference between what his craft can and cannot do. He attempts the first but lets the second go by, and if he happens to slip, he can put things right. In the same way, an unjust person's successful attempts at injustice must remain undetected, if he is to be fully unjust.

Like a craftsman who knows the possibilities and limits of his own skill, so the unjust person calculates the odds that his deeds will escape detection. His goal is not only to act unjustly with impunity but also to *seem* just in his actions. What is even more remarkable about this passage is that Glaucon, by likening the unjust person to a craftsman, implies, just as Protagoras does, that living in the *polis* requires some kind of training and knowledge that is akin to other types of technical knowledge, such as medicine or sailing.<sup>58</sup> This facet of his argument comes into the foreground when he

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<sup>58</sup> Here Glaucon seems to be looking back at Socrates' use of the craft analogy in his conversation with Polemarchus (cf. 332c ff.). There, however, Socrates used the analogy in order to separate practicing an art or an excellence from committing injustice.

compares the truly unjust person with the truly just one. While the truly unjust person is characterized as being *δεινὸς δημιουργός* (a clever or skillful craftsman), the truly just person is described as *ἀπλοῦς καὶ γενναῖος* (“simple and genuine,” 361b), which implies that he acts straightforwardly and without any ulterior motive or calculation. But such simplicity brings upon him all sorts of punishments. He is whipped, chained, blinded by fire, and impaled, so that at the end he realizes that “one shouldn’t want to be just but to be believed to be just” (361e). In other words, the truly just person lacks the cleverness and skill to know how to survive and thrive in a *polis*.<sup>59</sup>

From this perspective, Glaucon’s unjust person is not that far from the person Protagoras describes in his own speech (*Prot.* 323b2-c2):

ἐν δὲ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἐν τῇ ἄλλῃ πολιτικῇ ἀρετῇ, εἴαν τινα καὶ εἰδῶσιν ὅτι ἄδικός ἐστιν, εἴαν οὗτος αὐτὸς καθ’αὐτοῦ τάλῃθ’ ἑλέγῃ ἐναντίον πολλῶν, ὃ ἐκεῖ σωφροσύνην ἡγοῦντο εἶναι, τάλῃθ’ ἑλέγειν, ἐνταῦθα μανίαν, καὶ φασιν πάντας δεῖν φάναι εἶναι δικαίους, εἴαντε ὦσιν εἴαντε μὴ, ἢ μαίνεσθαι τὸν μὴ προσποιούμενον [δικαιοσύνην]· ὥς ἀναγκαῖον οὐδένα ὄντιν’ οὐχὶ ἀμῶς γέ πως μετέχειν αὐτῆς, ἢ μὴ εἶναι ἐν ἀνθρώποις.

But when it comes to justice or any other social virtue, even if they know someone is unjust, if that person publicly confesses the truth about himself, they will call this truthfulness madness, whereas in the previous case they would have called it good sense. They will say that everyone ought to claim to be just, whether they are or not, and that it is madness not to pretend to justice, since one must have some trace of it or not be human.<sup>60</sup>

In Protagoras’ account, justice and other social virtues, such as *σωφροσύνη* (which in this instance tellingly means “having good sense” rather than “self-restraint”), entail not a way of being or a knowledge of what is good and right, but a certain skill in knowing

<sup>59</sup> This idea was also stated by Thrasymachus in Book I (at 348d) and is likewise asserted by Callicles in the *Gorgias* (at 484c-e).

<sup>60</sup> Contrast this passage with Adeimantus’ assertion that only those of “godlike nature” can be truly just at 366c

what actions seem to be good and right. According to Protagoras, this is really what every normal human being has a share of, the capacity to learn *how to appear to be just*. The implication is that anyone who doesn't know how to do this and acknowledges his injustice (or, as in Glaucon's account, is truly just) must be crazy and abnormal, for, by risking harm to himself and by compromising his self-interest and well-being, he is going against the natural inclination to preserve his physical safety.

Thus Protagoras' description of the just person in his Great Speech, far from being the opposite of Glaucon's description of the truly unjust person, is simply its socially acceptable version. At their core, both accounts subscribe to an instrumental view of virtue and reduce the human capacity for reasoning and knowledge to a skill that masks the desire for power and wealth. On this view, laws and conventions may look like obstacles to satisfaction, but in the hands of someone who has the proper skill, they become part of the arsenal that helps him secure power and wealth.

### 13. The Speeches of Callicles

In Callicles' speeches in the *Gorgias*, Plato offers his audience the most rhetorically powerful account of the νόμος-φύσις antithesis. Callicles not only delineates the familiar opposition between human convention and human nature, but he presents an exalted description of man's natural strength tamed by the decorum of *logos*. In this respect, Callicles' speech can be seen as the counterpart to Protagoras' Great Speech. If Protagoras seems to praise the cultural benefits that *δίκη* and *αἰδώς* make possible, Callicles is here to tell us that such moral conventions are the invention of self-serving weaklings. Similarly, although his speech is reminiscent of Glaucon's praise of injustice,



Callicles now speaks on behalf of a primeval and incontestable order: the law of nature and its right to seek a greater share. Accordingly, Callicles will assert that the moral excellence of a man, his *ἀρετή*, does not reside in his capacity for self-restraint and moderation but in the courage and intelligence he exhibits as he dares to gratify his desires, both in public and private. It is only then that a man can be truly free and happy.

It is noteworthy, however, that what prompts Callicles to deliver his forceful antinomian speeches (*Gorg.* 482c4-486d1 and 491e5-492c8) is his shock at Socrates' own unconventional and paradoxical assertion in his discussion with Polus that to commit injustice is worse than to suffer it. Callicles directly expresses his bafflement to Socrates (*Gorg.* 481b10-c4):

*εἰπέ μοι, ὦ Σώκρατες, πότερόν σε θῶμεν νυνὶ σπουδάζοντα ἢ παίζοντα; εἰ μὲν γὰρ σπουδάζεις τε καὶ τυγχάνει ταῦτα ἀληθῆ ὄντα ἃ λέγεις, ἄλλο τι ἢ ἡμῶν ὁ βίος ἀνατετραμμένος ἂν εἴη τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐναντία πράττομεν, ὥς ἔοικεν, ἢ ἃ δεῖ;*

Tell me, Socrates, are we to take you as being in earnest now or joking? For if you are in earnest, and these things you're saying are really true, won't this human life of ours be turned upside down, and isn't everything we are doing evidently the opposite of what we should do?

Initially, Callicles cannot help but make a plea for conventionality. If Socrates is serious and right about the things he is saying, then we would all be compelled to reconsider our conventional ways of thinking and living. Socrates confirms Callicles' view obliquely through an analogy. Both he and Callicles, says Socrates, are lovers. He of Alcibiades and of philosophy; Callicles of the Athenian *demos* and of Demos the son of Pyrilampes. As lovers, both are bound to be unable to contradict their beloveds, but instead will repeat whatever they say. In the case of Callicles, he is unable to contradict the Athenian people

and, in fact, strives to shift his position so as to please them. Likewise, Socrates is unable to contradict philosophy. Unlike the Athenian *demos*, however, philosophy is steadfast and always selfsame in speech. So now, instead of being surprised at the things philosophy compels Socrates to say, Callicles should either refute her or, if he is unable to do that, forever be in disagreement with himself.

With his love analogy Socrates portrays Callicles not as the radical subversive that he would like to be, but as the mere voice of erotic passion and political ambition and, hence, as the mouthpiece of Athenian conventionality.<sup>61</sup> Further, with his analogy Socrates foreshadows the central theme of Callicles' speeches: the relations between master and slave, strong and weak, the truly free and the constrained. While the central question of Glaucon's speech was how to know the truly just man, Callicles wishes to distinguish the truly powerful and free man from the slavish and subservient. In his speeches, Callicles responds that he has freed himself from the constraints and conventions the many impose on the few and, in this way, has reclaimed his natural virtues of manliness and intelligence. By freeing himself from the dominion of the many,

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<sup>61</sup> Commentators have interpreted the figure of Callicles in numerous ways. Shorey (1933: 154) sees him as an immoralist; Dodds (1959: 267 and 389) calls him a "Nietzschean subversive" who perhaps voices Plato's own "will to power"; Irwin (1986: 63) views him as "a radical critic of conventional, other-regarding morality"; McKim (1988) argues that Socrates uses shame so as to bring out Callicles' deep belief in Socratic ethics; Bernardete (1991: 63) believes he is the mouthpiece of conventionalism. More recently, Newell (2000: 98) has argued that Callicles is more like Socrates than he would like to admit, since both "are united by their search for a natural convention" and Stauffer (2002, in a vein similar to that of McKim) believes Callicles is a closeted Socratic who behind his antinomian mask believes in Socratic justice. Prior scholars have also frequently emphasized that Callicles' encounter with Socrates demonstrates the inadequacies and limits of the Socratic method, since it fails to persuade the young politician; see, for example, Scott 1999, who believes that the educational program of the *Republic* is meant to correct this Socratic shortcoming; Woolf (2000) also believes that this encounter shows the limits of the Socratic method but believes that this is due to Callicles' own conflicting and disharmonious views rather than Socrates' method.

this man has endless power to gratify his appetites and to commit injustice if he so desires.

But with his love analogy Socrates already suggests that Callicles is not the man he wishes to be. Callicles is neither powerful nor free, for he is a slave to the whims and desires of others, be it his lover or the Athenian assembly. Thus Socrates points to the main paradox of Callicles' idealization of the free and powerful man: his power springs from the very people from whom he wants to be free, the many. By contrast, although Socrates too can be prey to the ever-changing passions of Alcibiades, he serves a more reliable master, philosophy, and he implies that only the philosophic way of life can free Callicles from the bondage he so fears. In his subsequent exchanges with Callicles, Socrates endeavors to show him that to free himself truly from the conventional morality he so despises, he must desire something other than the values of that morality.

But Callicles denies the charge of grandstanding and demagoguery and turns that charge against Socrates. He has tricked Polus as he did Gorgias. He has exploited their sense of shame, which inhibits them from speaking their minds openly and in a manner contrary to conventional morality. According to Callicles, Polus only agreed that committing injustice is more shameful than suffering it out of shame, not out of conviction. Callicles has to go beyond common opinion if he is to refute Socrates' claim that doing injustice is the most harmful thing for the agent. He has to offer a thesis that can set him apart both from conventional notions and from Socrates, and for this reason he focuses on the question of shame. Although he claims that Polus was only agreed that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it out of shame, the fact is that shame had nothing to do with it. If anything, Polus was unabashed in his claim that tyrants are the

happiest of men, precisely because they can do whatever they please, including committing all sorts of crimes with impunity—a claim he never took back. Polus, however, was unable to defend this claim. Moreover, in his eagerness to prove Socrates wrong, he went along with him without realizing that his admissions would contradict *himself* rather than Socrates.

Callicles' complaints regarding Polus' shame, then, are a rhetorical move on his part, intended to renew Polus' position but on different footing.<sup>62</sup> By accusing Socrates of exploiting Polus' and Gorgias' sense of shame, he can now claim that it is *Socrates* who is a mouthpiece for conventional morality and the one who is using rhetoric to please the audience (482e2-6; 483a7-8):

σὺ γὰρ τῷ ὄντι, ὦ Σώκρατες, εἰς τοιαῦτα ἄγεις φορτικά καὶ δημηγορικά, φάσκων τὴν ἀλήθειαν διώκειν, ἃ φύσει μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν καλὰ, νόμῳ δέ. ὥς τὰ πολλὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐναντί' ἀλλήλοις ἐστίν, ἥ τε φύσις καὶ ὁ νόμος: ἐὰν οὖν τις αἰσχύνηται [...]. φύσει μὲν γὰρ πᾶν αἰσχρόν ἐστιν ὅπερ καὶ κάκιον, τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι, νόμῳ δὲ τὸ ἀδικεῖν.

For in fact, Socrates, although you claim to be pursuing the truth, you're bringing the discussion around to the sort of crowd-pleasing vulgarities that are admirable only by convention and not by nature. And these, nature and convention, are for the most part opposed to each other ... For by nature all that is worse is also more shameful, like suffering what's unjust, whereas by law doing it is more shameful.

Callicles accomplishes two tasks by this argument. First, he can assign to Socrates the role of the rhetorician who only cares about pleasing his audience but not the truth and, thus turn Socrates' criticism of Gorgias upon Socrates himself. And second, by invoking the *νόμος-φύσις* antithesis, Callicles is able to avoid the opposition between the shameful and the harmful—the opposition that initiated Polus' troubles—and, instead, equate them

<sup>62</sup> For other views regarding the function of shame in the *Gorgias*, see Race 1979: 197-202 and McKim 1988: 34-48.

in the realm of *φύσις*: according to our nature, suffering injustice is both harmful and shameful. In this way, Callicles can set himself apart from Socrates, Gorgias, and Polus, and present himself as the only one who dares speak his mind and the truth—although, eventually, he too will feel ashamed.

By invoking the *νόμος-φύσις* antithesis, Callicles believes he has a foolproof argument that will enable him to avoid the trap into which Polus fell.<sup>63</sup> Unlike Polus, Callicles will not allow the semantic ambiguities of *καλόν* to obscure the argument; instead he will use *καλόν* in its moral (rather than aesthetic) connotation so as to make a sharp distinction between the morality of nature and the morality of convention. Or rather, he will use the *νόμος-φύσις* antithesis so as to redefine *καλόν* in terms of manliness and intelligence and, thus, to decouple it from the sense of justice to which Socrates had compelled Polus to assent. In this way, Callicles wishes to demonstrate to Socrates that there is a higher justice, the justice of nature, which even Socrates cannot deny.

#### 14. The *νόμος-φύσις* Antithesis: Human Physicality and Corporeality

The more interesting and important theme in Callicles' *νόμος-φύσις* antithesis is that what is valuable and worthwhile in human beings is their *physicality*, that is, their body, their strength, their physical pleasures, and the material possessions that enable them. This theme is already present at the outset of his first speech (*Gorg.* 483a7-d2):

φύσει μὲν γὰρ πᾶν αἰσχρόν ἐστιν ὅπερ καὶ κάκιον, τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι, νόμῳ δὲ τὸ ἀδικεῖν. οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀνδρὸς τοῦτο γ' ἐστὶν τὸ πάθημα, τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι, ἀλλ' ἀνδραπόδου τινὸς ᾧ κρεῖττον ἐστὶν τεθνάναι ἢ ζῆν, ὅστις ἀδικούμενος καὶ προσηλακίζόμενος μὴ οἷός τέ ἐστιν αὐτὸς αὐτῷ βοηθεῖν μηδὲ ἄλλῳ οὐ ἂν κήδηται. ἀλλ' οἶμαι οἱ τιθέμενοι τοὺς νόμους οἱ ἀσθενεῖς

<sup>63</sup> See Dodds (1959: 263), who remarks, “Callicles brings into the field a fresh weapon of formidable destructive power, the distinction between *νόμος* and *φύσις*.”

*ἄνθρωποι εἰσιν καὶ οἱ πολλοί. πρὸς αὐτοὺς οὖν καὶ τὸ αὐτοῖς συμφέρον τοὺς τε νόμους τίθενται καὶ τοὺς ἐπαίνους ἐπαινοῦσιν καὶ τοὺς ψόγους ψέγουσιν. ἐκφοβοῦντες τοὺς ἐρρωμενεστέρους τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ δυνατοὺς ὄντας πλεον ἔχειν, ἵνα μὴ αὐτῶν πλεον ἔχωσιν, λέγουσιν ὡς αἰσχρὸν καὶ ἄδικον τὸ πλεονεκτεῖν, καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ ἀδικεῖν, τὸ πλεον τῶν ἄλλων ζητεῖν ἔχειν. ἀγαπῶσι γὰρ οἶμαι αὐτοὶ ἂν τὸ ἴσον ἔχωσιν φαυλότεροι ὄντες.*

For by nature all that is worse is also more shameful, like suffering what's unjust, whereas by law doing it is more shameful. Indeed, no man would put up with suffering what's unjust; only a slave would do so, one who is better dead than alive, who when he's treated unjustly and abused can't protect himself or anyone else he cares about. I believe that the people who institute our laws are the weak and the many. They do this, and they assign praise and blame with themselves and their own advantage in mind. They're afraid of the more powerful among men, the ones who are capable of having a greater share, and so they say that getting a greater share is "shameful" and "unjust," and that doing what's unjust is trying to get more than one's share. They do this so that those people won't get a greater share than they. I think they are content if they have an equal share, since they are inferior.

From the start, Callicles suggests that injustice is related to suffering physical harm and connects the dignity and courage of a man to his ability to preserve his own physical well-being, as well as that of his family. By using the slave as a point of comparison, he reinforces this notion, since slaves have no claim over even their own bodies and hence are compelled to suffer injustice.<sup>64</sup> The physical component of suffering injustice is further stressed in Callicles' assertion that the laws were instituted by the weak so as to restrain the strong. The implication is that the weak are physically incapable of defending themselves against the physically more powerful and thus by nature would be compelled to suffer injustice without any means of retaliation. The passage also emphasizes that justice and injustice, whether from the point of view of convention or of nature, are connected to material possessions. The true man, the one who is strong, not

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<sup>64</sup> See Fussi 1996: 124

only defends himself and his family but also naturally seeks to have more possessions. Thus the stronger man has the “right” to outdo the weaker both physically and materially by the mere fact that he is stronger. In this context, Callicles seems to suggest, the only recourse the weaker has to restrain the stronger man’s capacity to harm and dispossess him is the use of language of praise and blame. The weaker ones, by virtue of being in the majority, have the power to decide what conduct is praiseworthy and what conduct is worthy of reproach, and thus they condemn the actions of the stronger, saying that it is shameful and unjust to have more than one’s share, and they praise their own contentment with an equal share. The stronger man has been made to feel shame for his strength and his capacity to acquire a greater share and, in this way, is subdued by the weaker and forced to forgo his natural inclinations toward aggression and greed. The weak have shrewdly turned the ignoble into the noble and perverted the order of nature (*Gorg.* 483c8-484b1):

ἡ δὲ γε οἶμαι φύσις αὐτὴ ἀποφαίνει αὐτό, ὅτι δίκαιόν ἐστιν τὸν ἀμείνω τοῦ χειρόνος πλεόν ἔχειν καὶ τὸν δυνατώτερον τοῦ ἀδυνατωτέρου. δηλοῖ δὲ ταῦτα πολλαχοῦ ὅτι οὕτως ἔχει, καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις ζώοις καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐν ὅλαις ταῖς πόλεσι καὶ τοῖς γένεσιν, ὅτι οὕτω τὸ δίκαιον κέκριται, τὸν κρείττω τοῦ ἥττονος ἄρχειν καὶ πλεόν ἔχειν. ἐπεὶ ποίῳ δικαίῳ χρώμενος Ξέρξης ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἐστράτευσεν ἢ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ Σκύδας; ἢ ἄλλα μυρία ἂν τις ἔχοι τοιαῦτα λέγειν. ἀλλ’ οἶμαι οὗτοι κατὰ φύσιν τὴν τοῦ δικαίου ταῦτα πράττουσιν, καὶ ναὶ μὰ Δία κατὰ νόμον γε τὸν τῆς φύσεως, οὐ μέντοι ἴσως κατὰ τοῦτον ὃν ἡμεῖς τιθέμεθα. πλάττοντες τοὺς βελτίστους καὶ ἐρρωμενεστάτους ἡμῶν αὐτῶν, ἐκ νέων λαμβάνοντες, ὥσπερ λέοντας, κατεπάδοντές τε καὶ γοητεύοντες καταδουλοῦμεθα λέγοντες ὡς τὸ ἴσον χρὴ ἔχειν καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ δίκαιον. εἰ δὲ γε οἶμαι φύσιν ἱκανὴν γένηται ἔχων ἀνὴρ, πάντα ταῦτα ἀποσεισάμενος καὶ διαρρήξας καὶ διαφυγὼν, καταπατήσας τὰ ἡμέτερα γράμματα καὶ μαργανεύματα καὶ ἐπώδᾳ καὶ νόμους τοὺς παρὰ φύσιν ἅπαντας, ἐπαναστὰς ἀνεφάνη δεσπότης ἡμέτερος ὁ δοῦλος, καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἐξέλαμψεν τὸ τῆς φύσεως δίκαιον.

But I believe that nature itself reveals that it’s a just thing for the better man to have more than the worse and so also for the more capable man to have a greater share than the less capable man. Nature shows that this is so in many places; both among the other animals and in whole cities and races of men, it shows that this is what justice has been determined to be: that the superior rule the inferior and have

a greater share than they. For what sort of justice did Xerxes rely on when he campaigned against Greece, or his father when he campaigned against the Scythians? Countless other such examples could be mentioned. I believe that these men do these things in accordance with the nature of what's just—yes, by Zeus, in accordance with the law of nature, and presumably not with the one we institute. We mold the best and the most powerful among us, taking them while they're still young, like lion cubs, and with charms and incantations we subdue them into slavery, telling them that one is supposed to get no more than his fair share, and that that's what's admirable and just. But, I believe, if a man whose nature is equal to it were to arise, one who had shaken off, torn apart, and escaped all this, who had trampled underfoot our paper prescriptions, our tricks and charms, and all our laws that violate nature, he, the slave, would rise up and be revealed as our master, and here the justice of nature would shine forth.

Rather than contrasting human nature with human convention, Callicles describes the natural order of *human relations*. Nature dictates that relations among humans ought to be no different from relations among animals: the strong are meant to prey on the weak and, in this way, demonstrate their natural superiority. But by comparing the nature of human and animal relations, Callicles once more casts superiority in *physical* terms, as physical strength and size, as well as by the force of aggression. The more physically powerful and aggressive man will naturally desire to overpower the weaker one and, hence, it will be his “right” to do so. Callicles underscores his point by alluding to the attacks launched by Xerxes and his father Darius on smaller cities. Although these examples may seem odd given that both kings were ultimately defeated,<sup>65</sup> they symbolize the natural right of the stronger both to attack and rule the weaker. Xerxes and Darius were entitled to campaign against Greece and Scythia precisely because of the size of their empire and of their army, and their campaigns represent their claim to their natural right (*ἀλλ' οἷμαι οὗτοι κατὰ φύσιν τὴν τοῦ δικαίου ταῦτα πράττουσιν*). But more importantly,

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<sup>65</sup> See Fussi 1996: 6 for an exploration of the oddity of the example Callicles has chosen.



these Persian kings remind us of tyrannical rulers who constantly seek a greater share of wealth and power, and do as they please. For this reason, they are a prime example of νόμος τῆς φύσεως (the law of nature).<sup>66</sup> That these figures also remind us that the weaker can defeat the stronger may anticipate the subsequent theme in the passage concerning the enslavement of the stronger by the weaker. Indeed, the phrase *ναὶ μὰ Δία κατὰ νόμον γε τὸν τῆς φύσεως*, which directly qualifies Xerxes and his father and which marks the rhetorical climax of the passage, is immediately contrasted with *οὐ μέντοι ἴσως κατὰ τοῦτον ὃν ἡμεῖς τιθέμεθα*, which signals the transition to the law of convention: but presumably the kings of Persia do not act according to the law that we Greeks establish. Unlike them, says Callicles, we Greeks mold the best and strongest among us with incantations and spells to subdue their naturally fierce spirits, telling them that it is admirable and just to have no more than one's fair share. Culture and education (as suggested by *πλάττοντες*), the vehicles of conventional morality, are responsible for dulling and taming the best natures and robbing them of their ambition to have a greater share.

But the full meaning of the contrast between the law of nature and the law of convention is only fully explicated at the end of the passage, when Callicles describes the man who is able to break free from the bonds of conventional morality. The succession of participles (*ἀποσεισάμενος καὶ διαρρήξας καὶ διαφυγών*), evoking the image of the untamable bestial nature of man tearing off and destroying the chains of convention, creates a powerful contrast with a similar succession of nouns (*γράμματα καὶ μαγγανεύματα καὶ ἐπωδὰς καὶ νόμους*) that allude to the culture of the *polis*, as it is expressed both in speech and in the written word. This contrast effectively captures the

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<sup>66</sup> See Dodds 1959: 268, who notes the novelty of Callicles' (that is, Plato's) phrase.

full meaning of the νόμος-φύσις antithesis: the charm of *logos* is opposed to the bodily desires and instinctual forces of man; but the contrast also underscores the other possibility, that the instinctual forces of man will rise against the norms of social and political convention and break the spell of *logos* so as to become its master. Relations between humans, then, will be as nature intended them: the man of instinct will overpower the man of speech; or rather, the man of speech will be at the service of the man of instinct. But this order of things, Callicles indicates, is not yet here, at least not for the Greeks.<sup>67</sup> The master still to come will trample on τὰ ἡμέτερα γράμματα καὶ μαγανεύματα καὶ ἐπωδὰς καὶ νόμους (“our paper prescriptions and spells and charms and laws”).<sup>68</sup> Until this new master comes, the Greeks will live under the spell of culture and convention and, hence, be ruled by *logos*. Nevertheless, as will be clear from the second part of Callicles’ speech, the lion cub<sup>69</sup> tamed by education and social norms has his own recourse to resist convention and rescue his manhood: the political life.

### 15. Reclaiming One’s Masculinity Through Νόμος

In the next section of his speech, Callicles turns his attention to philosophy and politics. His principal aim is to contrast the lives of the political man and the philosophical man, and to argue that the true man must know how to make use of culture, particularly

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<sup>67</sup> The contrast with the Persians is implied. The kings of Persia do not act in accordance with prescriptions and laws but with their own desires.

<sup>68</sup> Dodds’ translation; see Dodds 1959: 269 for his explanation.

<sup>69</sup> Perhaps, as Dodds (1959: 268) notes, this is an allusion to the fable of the Lion’s Whelp in Aeschylus *Ag.* 717 ff and Aristophanes *Frogs* 1431. However, in those instances the lion cub is not tamed, as in Callicles’ simile. Rather, because he is young and small, everyone cuddles him without realizing the destructive power he holds within. In Callicles’ speech, the lion cub symbolizes a nature that has been tamed through the incantations of speech so that he can no longer do harm. Thus Callicles’ ἀνῆρ would have to realize the power he holds within in order to shake the bonds of convention and realize his lion-like nature.

philosophy, so that, as he gains an outstanding reputation, he surmounts the restrictions imposed on him. Philosophy, says Callicles, can provide grace and elegance to a young man if he has moderate contact with it. Otherwise, it is of little use in practical life. For if a man takes philosophy too seriously, he risks losing his masculinity by being inexperienced in “human pleasures and appetites” and “in the ways of human beings altogether” (484d) so that he makes a fool of himself as he attempts to engage in political activity. The true man, the *ἀνὴρ*, must therefore make moderate use of philosophy. He must engage in it in his youth so as to become *καλός*, but he must stay away from it in adulthood lest he become *αἰσχρός*. For the man who philosophizes as an adult remains on the fringes of political life and thus has no way to become *ἀριπρεπής*, and by losing preeminence he becomes *ἄνανδρος*. Ironically, then, it is culture and convention that open up a path for a man to access and give expression to his instinctual life

Callicles has created a paradox. On the one hand, culture, social convention, and the law are originally the construct of weak men who through speech determine what *is* *αἰσχρόν* and *ἄδικον*. Indeed, through speech the weak condemned the strong and shamed them for their desire to have more than their share, thus depriving them of any assertion of their masculinity. Now, however, the strong have to reclaim their masculinity by participating in the culture of the weak and by *appearing* to be *καλοὶ καὶ ἀγαθοί*. The physical power of the strong has been replaced by a new kind of power: the power provided by political life through the use of speech. According to Callicles, then, the political life is the new way for the strong to reclaim their nature and to have more than their share without being deemed *αἰσχρός* or *ἄδικος*. At the conclusion of his speech, he

advises Socrates to give up his refutations by quoting (or adapting<sup>70</sup>) the words of Zethus to Amphion in Euripides *Antiope* (486c4-d1):

ἀλλ' ὦγαθέ, ἐμοὶ πείθου, παῦσαι δὲ ἐλέγχων, πραγμάτων δ' εὐμουσίαν  
ἄσκει, καὶ ἄσκει ὁπόθεν δόξεις φρονεῖν, ἄλλοις τὰ κομψὰ ταῦτα ἀφείς, εἴτε  
ληρημάτα χρεὴ φάναι εἶναι εἴτε φλυαρίας, ἐξ ὧν κενοῖσιν ἐγκατοικήσεις  
δόμοις· ζηλῶν οὐκ ἐλέγχοντας ἄνδρας τὰ μικρὰ ταῦτα, ἀλλ' οἷς ἔστιν καὶ βίος καὶ  
δόξα καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ ἀγαθὰ.

Listen to me, my good man, “stop this refuting, and practice the sweet music of an active life” and do it where you’ll get a reputation for wisdom. “Leave these subtleties to others”—whether we should call them silly talk or nonsense “from which you will live in empty houses.” Don’t admire those men who refute such trifles, but those who have means, and renown, and many other good things as well.

In this passage Callicles not only contrasts the political life with the life of reflection,<sup>71</sup> but implies that words, thought, and knowledge are worthless and unbecoming unless they can be used in the service of acquiring both a good reputation and material wealth (as implied by βίος). For Callicles, then, living well (as also conveyed by βίος) has to do with establishing honorable appearances, while simultaneously having more material possessions. The conclusion of Callicles’ first speech has thus shown the effective use that the new ἀνὴρ can make of λόγος: an active life in the *polis*. There he can not only appear to speak wisely and so gain a good reputation, but also be a man of means and enjoy many good material things.

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<sup>70</sup> See Dodds 1959: 275 ff.

<sup>71</sup> Nightingale (1995: 72) argues that Plato’s use of Euripides’ *Antiope* enables him “to set his own new hero in opposition to the tragic hero. This new hero, of course, is the philosopher. And just as Socrates is juxtaposed with the ‘hero’ of the *Antiope*, so also is true philosophy contrasted with the genre of tragedy as a whole.” For an interesting and thoughtful critique of Nightingale’s interpretation, see Trivigno 2009:73-105. He argues that Plato is not juxtaposing tragedy to philosophy but that he “uses tragedy *constructively* to constitute the terms of the central philosophical argument and to help articulate his understanding of philosophy” (p. 78).

With the first part of Callicles' speech in mind, we can see that the connection between the two parts lies in the contrast between the pre-political and the political lives: in the former, the strong man could overpower others (or defend himself from them) and attain material possessions through physical force, without having recourse to *logos*, while in the latter he must attain those goals by knowing how to use *logos*. Moreover, the double meaning of *φρονεῖν*, to be sensible and to be intelligent, implies the paradox created by the culture of the weak, for now the strong, through their intelligence, can appear to be wise and, hence, be respected, while at the same time they can have their fill of possessions through the intelligent use of speech and their participation in the political life. In this way, Callicles seems to suggest that speech, culture, and law are to be seen not as valuable for how they might make the individual better as such, but as an effective cover for the gratification of man's true nature—that is, for his natural desire to overpower others and to have more. On the other hand, if a man embraces philosophy for itself, he will spend his time engaged with the *logos* and will, therefore, lose touch both with his own desires and pleasures and those of other men, which is to risk placing himself at their mercy, without any recourses of defense. Manliness in political times requires intelligence and the courage of ambition: intelligence to acquire power in political life through renown and courage to desire and possess many good things. As it turns out, then, natural justice—the political and material rule of the strong over the weak—is possible even within the language, culture, and conventions of the weak, if only one knows how to use them to one's own advantage.

## 16. Human Nature and *pleonexia*

It is not until his second speech that Callicles really spells out his notion of what it means to be human.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, once Callicles has concluded his first speech, Socrates, through his questions, takes hold of its main idea so as to demonstrate what truly underlies it. Socrates' set of questions to Callicles can be summarized thus: If the better (*βελτίονες*) and superior men (*κρείττονες*) are those who are brave and wise about the affairs of the city and, therefore, better by nature, it is just (according to Callicles) that they rule over the weaker and have a greater share of goods; but does this also mean that they are superior and strong because they are able to rule themselves—that is, that they are masters over their own pleasures and appetites? By posing this set of questions, Socrates is able to use Callicles' own admissions about what he means by stronger and better (as moral, not physical, attributes), as well as his central notion that the stronger and better should rule the weak and worse, and to transfer those concessions from the realm of human relations to that of the individual. The reason for this shift, I believe, is that only then can Socrates have Callicles explicitly admit what truly underlies his grandiloquent rhetoric on convention and human nature: the gratification of bodily desires. These questions, then, are designed not to reveal Socrates' own thinking and, thus, contrast it with that of Callicles, but to prompt Callicles to reveal his own thought. This is the burden of Callicles's words in his second speech, which is a direct response to Socrates' suggestion (at 491d4-e1) that before someone can rule others, he should first rule his own appetites and pleasures (491e5-492a5):

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<sup>72</sup> It is noteworthy that in his second speech Callicles drops the word *ἀνὴρ* and uses the word *ἀνθρώπος* instead. Callicles is now not only speaking of the manliness and virtue of the select few, but of human nature in general. Humans, by nature, are *pleonectic*.

*ἐπεὶ πῶς ἂν εὐδαιμόνων γένοιτο ἄνθρωπος δουλεύων ὅτῳ; ἀλλὰ τοῦτ' ἐστὶν τὸ κατὰ φύσιν καλὸν καὶ δίκαιον, ὃ ἐγὼ σοι νῦν παρρησιαζόμενος λέγω, ὅτι δεῖ τὸν ὁρθῶς βιωσόμενον τὰς μὲν ἐπιθυμίας τὰς ἑαυτοῦ ἔαν ὡς μεγίστας εἶναι καὶ μὴ κολάζειν, ταύταις δὲ ὡς μεγίσταις οὕσαις ἱκανὸν εἶναι ὑπηρετεῖν δι' ἀνδρείαν καὶ φρόνησιν, καὶ ἀποπιμπλάναι ὧν ἂν αἰεὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία γίγνηται. ἀλλὰ τοῦτ' οἶμαι τοῖς πολλοῖς οὐ δυνατόν· ὅθεν ψέγουσιν τοὺς τοιούτους δι' αἰσχύνην, ἀποκρυπτόμενοι τὴν αὐτῶν ἀδυναμίαν ...*

How could a man prove to be happy if he's enslaved to anything at all? The fine and just according to nature is this, what I'm speaking freely of to you now—the man who is to live rightly should let his appetites grow as large as possible and not restrain them, and when these are as large as possible, he must have the power to serve them, because of his bravery and wisdom, and to fill them with whatever he has an appetite for at any time. But this isn't possible for the many, I believe; hence, they become detractors of people like this because of the shame they feel, while they conceal their own impotence ...

Once again Callicles' main concern is with what it means to be free and unencumbered and, once again, he conceives of this freedom in physical and bodily terms. Restraining one's appetites is just as slavish as subjecting oneself to the will of another. If a man is to be truly brave and strong, and prove himself to be better than others, then he must make sure not to curb his appetites, either in number or size, for only then can he be reassured that he is free of the tyranny of conventional virtue. The weak are lesser men precisely because they lack the courage to be true to their nature and, instead, resort to the language of praise and blame to conceal their powerlessness to fulfill their natural pleasures. Callicles then concludes his speech with a kind of tribute to the satisfaction of bodily pleasure, by making it the standard of virtue and happiness and opposing it to self-control (492c3-8):

*ἀλλὰ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἣν φῆς σὺ διώκειν, ὧδ' ἔχει· τρυφή καὶ ἀκολασία καὶ ἐλευθερία, εἰς ἐπικουρίαν ἔχῃ, τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἀρετὴ τε καὶ εὐδαιμονία, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα ταῦτ' ἐστὶν τὰ καλλωπίσματα, τὰ παρὰ φύσιν συνθήματα ἀνθρώπων, φλυαρία καὶ οὐδενὸς ἄξια.*

But the truth, Socrates—the thing you claim to pursue—is like this: luxury, lack of restraint, and freedom, if available in good supply, are excellence and

happiness; as for those other things, these fancy phrases, these contracts of men that go against nature, they're worthless nonsense!

It is not surprising that Callicles' unabashed praise of pleasure in this second speech has gained him the appellation of supreme hedonist and anti-moralist. To be sure, this is how Callicles wishes to be seen. But once again, Socrates manages to reveal how conventional Callicles really is. Indeed, when Callicles concludes his second speech, Socrates praises him for his candor and says he is now satisfied that Callicles has truly spoken his mind and has stated openly what others think but are unwilling to say (492d), implying that Callicles' view, far from being anything original or out of the ordinary, simply states, paradoxically and despite himself, conventional beliefs. The further implication is that Socrates believes Callicles is right in seeing self-control as a mere convention that serves as a cover for this kind of thinking. For Callicles has finally exposed what Gorgias and Polus only dared hint at: what everybody really desires is to gratify their own appetites and, in order to do so, they seek to overpower others either openly and by force, as in the case of the tyrant Archelaus, or secretly and through the blandishments of speech and rhetoric, as in the case of the rhetor whom Gorgias praised. Despite the apparent differences, it is appetite that rules in both cases; the only question is to what extent and how openly.

The relevance of Callicles' last speech, then, lies in its revelation of the simple premise that underlies his much touted *νόμος-φύσις* antithesis, as well as the positions espoused by Gorgias and Polus: the notion that pleasure is good and beneficial and pain bad and harmful. Indeed, if a person lives according to his nature, Callicles argues, he can avoid the pain of being wronged and can instead enjoy the constant fulfillment of



pleasure. Convention, on the other hand, to the extent that it promotes a notion of justice based on self-control, entails deprivation and pain, for one would have to endure the shame of being wronged, as well as the loss of satisfying one's desire for power and wealth. In this way, Callicles' second speech reveals that for him (as well as for Polus and Gorgias) there is no other point of reference for moral thought and action than attaining bodily pleasure and avoiding bodily pain: the former is not only a good thing, but it makes the person good, while the latter is both a bad thing and makes the person bad.

It is this equation of pleasure with good (and, therefore, with happiness) that leads Callicles to idealize and desire the power of the tyrant.<sup>73</sup> He sees the tyrant as the only man who, unencumbered by the laws and conventions of the many, need not exercise self-control but can enjoy endless appetitive gratification without any obstacles (see 492b1-8).

It is precisely Callicles' simplistic view of the good life and happiness that Socrates will attempt to question and complicate in the discussion that ensues. He wishes Callicles to see why appetitive gratification cannot be so easily equated with what is good and beneficial, and why the life of the tyrant may not be as satisfactory as he imagines. One of the ways by which Socrates tries to persuade Callicles is through the metaphor of the leaky jars.

In brief, with the metaphor of the leaky jars (493a5-c3) Socrates suggests that there are two kinds of people: those who are foolish and uninitiated because they have

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<sup>73</sup> This is, of course, also the case with Polus and his admiration for the Macedonian tyrant Archelaus (cf. 471a-d).

insatiable appetites and those who exercise self-control and content themselves with the reasonable satisfaction of their appetites.<sup>74</sup> The former group of people suffer extreme pain because they thoughtlessly keep trying to fill their leaky jars and can never experience true satisfaction, while the latter group, by contenting themselves with enough so as to satisfy their bodily desires, give no further thought to them and can be at ease. The implication of Socrates' metaphor is that Callicles' ideal man is bound to be unhappy because in seeking to enlarge his appetites he will find only further dissatisfaction. That freedom of the tyrant to do as he pleases, which Callicles so covets and admires, turns out to be a prison of misery. And the reason Callicles is unable to see this is that he is unable to consider the consequences of this "freedom," such as constant dissatisfaction, emptiness, and, most importantly, alienation.

To be sure, the unhappiness of the tyrant is not a topic Socrates addresses directly in the *Gorgias*; he only alludes to it here and later on, when he says that people who devote themselves to filling their appetites are unable to form friendships (see 507e-508a). However, the description of the tyrant in Book IX of the *Republic* presents a detailed articulation of this idea. There Socrates describes how the tyrant's appetitive desires multiply and become insatiable as he revels in all sorts of excess (see IX.573d ff.), until he commits unspeakable crimes in order to continue trying to satisfy his desires. Tyrants, says Socrates, "live their whole life without being friends with anyone, always being masters to one man or slaves to another, for the tyrannical nature never gets a taste of freedom and true friendship" (ἐν παντί ἄρα τῷ βίῳ ζῶσι φίλοι μὲν οὐδέποτε οὐδενί, ἀεὶ δέ

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<sup>74</sup> For a detailed analysis of this allegory, see Blank 1991.

του δεσπύζοντες ἢ δουλεύοντες ἄλλω, ἐλευθερίας δὲ καὶ φιλίας ἀληθοῦς τυραννικὴ φύσις ἀεὶ ἄγευστος, 576a4-6).

This is precisely what Callicles does not see: namely, that his understanding human relations in terms of a power struggle between master and slave is a trap that cannot lead to freedom. The master, in order to maintain his position, will inevitably become the slave, whether to a lover, or to the *demos*, or to his own appetites. Therefore, the freedom he seeks can only be found by desiring something other than power, wealth, and appetitive gratification. And Socrates, both in the *Gorgias* and in the *Republic*, will insist that such freedom is to be found only in the non-visible, non-tangible world of the intelligible, where *logos* is not the means to power but something two people, in partnership, can pursue and share.

Despite Socrates' efforts, however, Callicles remains unconvinced and continues to hold fast to his views throughout the rest of the dialogue. Socrates explains the young man's obstinacy by saying, "It's your love for the people, Callicles, existing in your soul, that stands against me" (ὁ δῆμου γὰρ ἔρωσ, ὦ Καλλίκλεις, ἐνὼν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τῇ σῇ ἀντιστατεῖ μοι, 513c7-8). In other words, it is not their differences in outlook that stand between Socrates and Callicles, but the latter's desire that the many approve of him. In the end, and despite his desire to be free and unencumbered, Callicles remains fettered to convention and public opinion.

## 17. Conclusion

Through the examination of these three speeches, I have made the argument that, despite their rhetorical differences, they are all premised on the same fundamental ethical notion:

because human relations are primarily adversarial and competitive, the goal of civic life is to acquire the proper skills to obtain political power and material success. In this context, knowledge is valued because it is the means for learning how to attain and exhibit the virtues that will enable the individual to acquire power and enjoy prominence in the community. It is this notion that knowledge—in the sense of technical know-how—is needed for excellence that Socrates will question in these dialogues and replace with a different one: it is not technical knowledge that is required in order to live well and be successful but the understanding that self-benefit requires benefiting others and not harming them. For the individual to arrive at such a recognition, he must see past material reality—which, by its very nature, can lead to competitive aims and power struggles—and value non-visible and non-tangible goods. As I will argue in the next chapters, Socrates attempts in these three dialogues to lead his interlocutors toward this view in different ways.

## CHAPTER 2

### VIRTUE, KNOWLEDGE, AND IGNORANCE: SOCRATIC ETHICS IN THE *PROTAGORAS*

#### 1. Introduction

In his Great Speech, Protagoras endeavored to present civic virtue as that which enabled humans to become social beings, capable of cooperation and obedience to the law, thus giving the appearance that there is no conflict in political life between the interests of the individual and the interests of the community. But, as I argued in the last chapter, Protagoras also covertly appealed to young aristocratic Athenians by implying that he could teach them the skills that would most make them able to achieve their personal aspirations for political power without incurring social rebuke or legal retribution. In this way, although Protagoras seemed to harmonize the interests of the individual and the community, and to present virtue as unitary (see 323d6-324a3 and 324e2-325a2), his appeal to the desire to rule over others polarized those interests and, by implication, virtue as well.<sup>1</sup>

In the rest of the dialogue, Plato will have Socrates respond to the Great Speech by 1) underscoring, through elenctic dialectic,<sup>2</sup> the ways in which Protagoras' teaching can be polarizing and, thus, undermines the very values he seems to praise, and 2)

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<sup>1</sup> In this regard, Plato's *Protagoras* surely reflects the Athenians' own ambivalent and contradictory views about virtue. Plato's portrait of Protagoras also, however, makes plain Protagoras' own ethical outlook and double standard of virtue—one that emphasizes power over others even as it praises justice and moderation.

<sup>2</sup> I borrow this term from Frede 1992b: 210 ff., who argues that the purpose of elenctic dialectic is to show "that the respondent, given his own beliefs, has reason to claim exactly the opposite of what he had claimed at the outset" (p. 211).

showing how his teaching is based, by default, on a hedonistic premise that the standard of value is appetitive pleasure.

However, Plato wants to go beyond having Socrates expose Protagoras' sophistry.<sup>3</sup> By setting the actions and attitudes of philosopher and sophist side by side, Plato draws a contrast between cooperative and competitive aims. Indeed, a central motive of Protagoras' responses and mode of argumentation is his desire to prevail in the discussion and outdo Socrates so as to gain the approval and awe of all (see 317c-d). By contrast, rather than simply make this into an eristic encounter,<sup>4</sup> Plato has Socrates challenge Protagoras' individualistic view of virtue and knowledge and offer his own account, which emphasizes unity and community. Philosopher and sophist embody different attitudes of self-interest towards the other. For Protagoras his self-interest lies in maintaining his reputation for wisdom by not being bested in "verbal contests" (*ἀγῶνα λόγων*, 335a); for Protagoras to be successful, other must not be. In contrast, Socrates' self-interest lies in examining things that "continually perplex" him (*ἀ ἀντὸς ἀπορῶν ἐκάστοτε*, 348c6), a task that is facilitated by enlisting the help of others in order to be successful. If indeed Socrates and his interlocutor can achieve a better understanding of virtue, this will benefit both, not one or the other.

I believe that this theme of competition and cooperation is fundamental to a clearer understanding of Socrates' paradoxical statements in this dialogue and an appreciation of the import of his ethical views. For, from this perspective, the notions of

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<sup>3</sup> This is the reading of Hemmenway 1996.

<sup>4</sup> However, many interpreters do see Socrates as simply engaging in eristic. See, for example, Klosko 1979: 129, Zeyl 1980, Coby 1987: 18; and Schofield 1992: 130. Others who view Socrates as cooperative rather than competitive include Goldberg 1983, Benitez 1992, and McCoy 2008: 72-75.

the unity of virtue, that everyone desires the good and no one does wrong willingly, and the denial of *akrasia* function to reframe Protagoras' view of virtue and knowledge and to replace it with one that emphasizes that these qualities must benefit both the agent and the receiver of the action. Thus, for example, by insisting on the unity of virtue, Socrates offers an account that emphasizes those qualities that Protagoras, in his Great Speech, seemed to praise and that the gifts of Zeus were meant to foster in cities and among human beings: order and bonds of friendship. With respect to the denial of *akrasia*, by insisting that ignorance is at the root of harming oneself or doing wrong, rather than either a desire to do wrong or being overcome by pleasure, Socrates interrogates Protagoras' view of knowledge in two ways. First, he challenges the position that knowledge should be acquired for the purpose of knowing how to rule others and replaces it with the notion that knowledge should be for ruling oneself through moderation (352b-c). Second, he underscores that ethical knowledge is a joint and communal effort (348c-d) for the purpose of improving oneself and the other. In this way, Socrates counters Protagoras' implied notion that knowledge is something that a wise teacher imparts to a pupil for the satisfaction of the personal desires of each. Finally, with the notion that no one pursues what he deems bad Socrates overturns one of the central themes of the Great Speech: namely, that the competitive nature of human beings leads to collective wrongdoing and that the acquisition of virtue is predicated upon the need for humans to restrain themselves and others from wrongdoing.

In this way, I will show that Socrates' paradoxical statements in the *Protagoras* go well beyond simply voicing or endorsing an intellectualist ethics that fails to recognize the power of irrational impulses. Rather, from the perspective of the reading that I am

suggesting, Socrates' apparent intellectualism can be seen as an attempt to reframe Protagoras' teaching—which is, in fact, geared toward personal and political ambition, not civic virtue—so that it is truer to the explicit claims it makes about virtue. Socrates' reframing of Protagoras' claims can also be read as a rhetorical move that reveals Protagoras' own simplistic and ordinary ethical outlook. Moreover, the fact that Socrates neither defines what virtue is nor what kind of knowledge is necessary for virtuous action (357b-c) and the fact that he believes that appetite has the power to obfuscate our aims<sup>5</sup> and, finally, insists on an openended inquiry into the nature of ethical action should alert us that he does not subscribe to a simple intellectualist ethics but possesses a more nuanced and complex view of human psychology and human action.

## 2. Caring for the Soul of Hippocrates

In the inner frame<sup>6</sup> of the *Protagoras*, Socrates warns the young and impetuous Hippocrates to be careful of entrusting the well-being of his soul—indeed, what is most dear to him—to the likes of a sophist like Protagoras. For, he says, like the merchants who peddle the foods they sell without knowing whether each is in fact beneficial or harmful to the body, so too sophists sell their teachings, claiming to know what they teach, when in fact they are ignorant of which teachings are beneficial and which

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<sup>5</sup> The discussion of the “art of measurement” (356a-357b), with its emphasis on the “the power of appearances” (356d-e), implies that it is appetite that can confound the agent and lead him to make bad choices for himself.

<sup>6</sup> I am following the division of the dialogue as suggested by Griswold 1999: 283: “Plato’s *Protagoras* is composed of three distinct frames. The outer frame consists in Socrates’ brief discussion with an unnamed companion. The rest of the *Protagoras* is willingly narrated by Socrates to the companion (and unnamed others), from memory of course, and apparently right after the main action. The inner frame consists in Socrates’ dialogue with Hippocrates...the bulk of the dialogue—call it the innermost frame—consists in Socrates’ exchanges with Protagoras.”



detrimental to the soul. Thus if one is not a knowledgeable consumer, one runs the risk of buying the sophists' teachings and taking them into one's soul, where one is quickly "helped or injured"; this stands in contrast to purchasing food, whose effects on the body can be investigated before consumption. For this reason, says Socrates, one can only safely buy teachings from the sophists if one is a physician of the soul and knows which of their products are beneficial and which detrimental.

This preface (to which interpreters tend to pay little attention) is crucial for understanding the philosophical themes of the entire dialogue.<sup>7</sup> Through the exchange between Socrates and Hippocrates, Plato is able to draw a sharp distinction between the concerns and motivations of Socrates and those of the sophists—as he represents them. Indeed, by likening them to peddlers of food, Plato implies that the sophists 1) see knowledge as a mere commodity that can bring them money; 2) only *appear*, like merchants, to know the efficacy of the goods they sell, even if, in fact, they do not; and 3) are effective not because of what they *know* but because of their ability to appeal to what is *pleasurable* (just as peddlers of food sell—and customers buy—products that are appetizing, but not necessarily healthy).<sup>8</sup> Sophists, then, and Protagoras in particular, are master hedonists: they know what brings pleasure and how to cater to it, even if they don't know what its effects on the soul are. By contrast, Plato portrays Socrates as solely interested in Hippocrates' well-being (rather than his money or adulation) and in the effect, whether good or bad, of the teaching he is seeking; this portrayal is nicely

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<sup>7</sup> Commentators who have recognized the importance of the exchange with Hippocrates for an understanding of the rest of the dialogue include Goldberg 1983: 73-85 and Griswold 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Socrates' warning that sophists appeal to what is pleasurable without knowing what is beneficial is similar to his likening rhetoric to pastry baking in the *Gorgias* (cf. *Gorg.* 464b-465c).

captured in the idea that what Hippocrates needs is a “physician of the soul”—that is, one who tends to his well-being.

In this way, while Socrates portrays himself as an expert in the soul, he seems to expose the sophists as experts in the pleasures of the soul, irrespective of whether those pleasures benefit or harm it. The sophist’s ignorance, then, refers to his lack of awareness of the effects of his teachings. It is precisely Protagoras’ unawareness that is dangerous because it betrays a lack of concern for the well-being of others. In the same way, Socrates’ knowledge refers not to his knowing the truth about these matters but his awareness that words and teachings have an effect on how people live. It is this awareness that prompts him to caution Hippocrates.

But there is another way in which the conversation between Hippocrates and Socrates is relevant for the rest of the dialogue. Hippocrates approaches Socrates not with the intention of seeking his advice but because he believes Socrates can do something useful for him—to get the sophist to become his teacher. Similarly, he wishes to become Protagoras’ student not because of who Protagoras is but because of what he can get from him—a special wisdom that he believes he needs (see 310d5-6). Hippocrates, then, is someone who engages with others on the basis of how he believes they can advance his interests, without any understanding of what consequences might follow. In contrast, by engaging Hippocrates in reflective conversation and by agreeing to go see Protagoras with him, Socrates demonstrates his interest in the young man’s well-being. In this way, the exchange between Hippocrates and Socrates captures Socrates’ other-regarding ethics and sets the contrast with Protagoras and his own concerns.

### 3. The Encounter Between Hippocrates and Protagoras

When Socrates introduces Hippocrates to Protagoras he tells the sophist all that makes the young man a desirable student. He is an Athenian from a wealthy family, comparable in nature to those of his age, and eager to become notable in his city (*ἐπιθυμεῖν δέ μοι δοκεῖ ἑλλόγιμος γενέσθαι ἐν τῇ πόλει*, 316b8-c1), which, on Socrates' account, Hippocrates believes is most likely to happen if he associates with Protagoras. Socrates then ends his introduction by asking Protagoras whether they should talk about this alone or in the company of others.

In his introduction Socrates not only makes explicit Hippocrates' political ambition and his willingness to hire Protagoras if he can help him realize it, but he also hints that the sophist might have good reason not to feel comfortable discussing the particulars of Hippocrates' instruction in the presence of others.

Protagoras responds to Socrates' question by boasting that he, unlike his predecessors, has no need to conceal his profession. He implies that he has outdone the likes of Homer, Hesiod, and Simonides, for while they failed to conceal from the ruling class their sophistic art with their poetry, he has succeeded in attaining a good reputation by being open about what he teaches. By intimating that he is not afraid of the ruling class, Protagoras exhibits his boldness. But he also makes clear his contempt for the many when he says that "they perceive nothing, but merely sing the tune their leaders announce" (*οὐδὲν αἰσθάνονται, ἀλλ' ἅττ' ἂν οὔτοι διαγγέλλωσι, ταῦτα ὑμνοῦσιν*, 317a5-6). Protagoras wishes to present himself as a free man who is subject to neither rulers nor tradition; he has no need to conceal himself. This, of course, is more of a boast than a reality, since his rhetoric serves as his weapon of concealment.

Once the other sophists and the rest of the company have gathered around, Socrates again poses his question to Protagoras: “If Hippocrates studies with Protagoras, exactly how will he go away a better man and in what will he make progress each and every day he spends with you?” (*Ἰπποκράτης ὅδε Πρωταγόρα συγγενόμενος, ἥ ἂν αὐτῷ ἡμέρα συγγένηται, βελτίων ἄπεισι γενόμενος καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἡμερῶν ἐκάστης οὕτως ἐπιδώσει εἰς τί, ὦ Πρωταγόρα, καὶ περὶ τοῦ*; 318d1-4).

With this question Socrates seems to have changed the terms of the discussion. For when he first introduced Hippocrates, he emphasized the young man’s desire to become *ἐλλόγιμος* in the city and to become Protagoras’ student so the sophist could help him achieve this. Now, however, he asks Protagoras how he can help Hippocrates, not to become *ἐλλόγιμος*, but *βελτίων*.<sup>9</sup> This shift, however, does not originate with Socrates but with Protagoras, who described his profession as that of a foreigner who goes into great cities to persuade “the best of the young men” (*τῶν νέων τοὺς βελτίστους*) to associate with him “on the grounds that they will become better” (*ὥς βελτίους ἐσομένους διὰ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ συνουσίαν*, 316c7-d1). It is Protagoras, then, who first claims that these young men can become better by associating with him. Now Socrates is simply asking him to clarify that claim. This is a pattern that will be repeated throughout the dialogue: Protagoras makes claims without explanation or elaboration; Socrates then picks these up in order to examine them in detail and to prod Protagoras to reveal more of his thinking. What Socrates wishes to emphasize with his questions is that Protagoras is used to making

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<sup>9</sup> Both Goldberg (1983: 83) and Coby (1987: 45) note this shift; neither, however, notices that Socrates is responding to what Protagoras himself claimed.

important claims without ever being questioned about them, and that this is how he has established his fame for wisdom.

When he finally answers Socrates' question, Protagoras asserts (318d7-319a2):

*Ἴπποκράτης γὰρ παρ' ἐμὲ ἀφικόμενος οὐ πείσεται ἄπερ ἂν ἔπαθεν ἄλλῳ τῷ  
συγγενόμενος τῶν σοφιστῶν. οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἄλλοι λωβῶνται τοὺς νέους· τὰς γὰρ τέχνας  
αὐτοὺς πεφευγότας ἄκοντας πάλιν αὖ ἄγοντες ἐμβάλλουσιν εἰς τέχνας, λογισμούς τε καὶ  
ἀστρονομίαν καὶ γεωμετρίαν καὶ μουσικὴν διδάσκοντες—καὶ ἅμα εἰς τὸν Ἱππίαν  
ἀπέβλεψεν—παρὰ δ' ἐμὲ ἀφικόμενος μαθήσεται οὐ περὶ ἄλλου τοῦ ἢ περὶ οὗ ἥκει. τὸ δὲ  
μάθημά ἐστιν εὐβουλία περὶ τῶν οἰκείων, ὅπως ἂν ἄριστα τὴν αὐτοῦ οἰκίαν διοικοῖ, καὶ  
περὶ τῶν τῆς πόλεως, ὅπως τὰ τῆς πόλεως δυνατώτατος ἂν εἴῃ καὶ πράττειν καὶ λέγειν.*

“If Hippocrates comes to me he will not experience what he would if he studied with some other sophist. The others abuse young men, steering them back again, against their will, into subjects the likes of which they have escaped from at school, teaching them arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, music and poetry”—at this point he gave Hippias a significant look—“but if he comes to me he will learn only what he has come for. This teaching is good judgment, both in domestic matters—how best to manage one’s household—and in public affairs—how to realize one’s maximum potential for success in political debate and action.”

Protagoras’s answer, like his Great Speech, obliquely appeals to Hippocrates’ ambitions by using an unobjectionable term: he will teach him *εὐβουλία*. But what exactly Protagoras means by *εὐβουλία* is a question that deserves more detailed attention. Before I attempt to undertake this task, it is important to take up two closely related topics: 1) the terms of engagement that Socrates sets after Protagoras finishes his Great Speech and 2) Socrates’ subsequent question about the unity or multiplicity of virtue.

#### 4. Long discourse versus Dialogic Engagement

After Protagoras concludes his Great Speech, Socrates says that often those who make long speeches are unable to answer questions about them and instead plunge into yet another long speech. Unlike these speakers, however, Protagoras is not only good at

making long speeches but “is also able to reply briefly when questioned, and to put a question and then wait for and accept the answer—something only a few have accomplished” (*ἰκανὸς δὲ καὶ ἐρωτηθεὶς ἀποκρίνασθαι κατὰ βραχὺ καὶ ἐρόμενος περιμεῖναι τε καὶ ἀποδέξασθαι τὴν ἀπόκρισιν, ἃ ὀλίγοις ἐστὶ παρεσκευασμένα*, 329b3-5).

Socrates’ request that Protagoras answer briefly goes beyond setting the formal terms of the discussion. It is a request that Protagoras engage in a back-and-forth that might enable both to participate in speaking and listening—that is, in a dialogic engagement. This format entails that the participants commit themselves to the exploration of the topic at hand. Its main purpose is not to best the interlocutor in rhetorical skill but to test his commitment to his claims. In contrast, engaging in long speeches whose main purpose is to exhibit the speaker’s acumen precludes the possibility of exploration. The maker of long speeches either doesn’t know what he is talking about, which prevents him from engaging in a dialogic exploration, or is concerned that he may be proven wrong, which he would reckon as a defeat. In both instances, his concern is to best the other and not to examine the question at hand.

Over the course of the rest of the dialogue, this will be a prominent, even if tacit, theme: Protagoras’ inability to engage on these terms when he feels uncomfortable or perceives defeat (most notably at 335a ff., before he introduces the Simonides poem). In contrast, as I will show, Socrates is willing to yield to Protagoras at difficult junctures and to argue from premises that the sophist can accept. On the other hand, Socrates will also avail himself of Protagoras’ competitive impulses in order to prod him to reveal more about himself. In this way, although he asks that Protagoras engage on equal terms, the sophist’s agonistic spirit works to Socrates’ advantage.

### 5. Protagoras on the Unity and Multiplicity of Virtue

Interpretations of the section of the dialogue that deals with the unity or multiplicity of virtue (329b5-334a) have largely concentrated on examining Socrates' arguments and evaluating their coherence and purpose. Two main interpretive approaches have emerged. On one hand, some argue that Socrates wishes to establish his doctrine of the unity of virtue. Accordingly, these analyses have centered on trying to clarify the meaning of such a doctrine.<sup>10</sup> The other interpretive trend treats Socrates' arguments as *ad hominem*. On this reading, Socrates' aim is not to establish a doctrine of the unity of virtue but to expose Protagoras' own views.<sup>11</sup> Apart from the particular merits and difficulties of each interpretive approach, they share a common feature: both see Protagoras' answers as either revealing his confusion or as simply being unproblematic.<sup>12</sup> As a result, neither approach has been able to clarify, and thus appreciate, the importance of Protagoras' position on virtue in this section of the dialogue. Moreover, both have skewed the evaluation of Socrates' questions and arguments by seeing him either as a cryptic doctrinaire or as the mere counterpart of Protagoras, intent on besting "the Sophist at his own game."<sup>13</sup> For my part, I believe that Protagoras is *not* confused and that his

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Vlastos 1972; Penner 1973; Irwin 1977: 86-90; Kraut 1984: 258-362; Taylor 1991: 103 ff.; Devereux 1992; and Brickhouse and Smith 1997.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Weiss 1985.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Brickhouse and Smith (1997: 312) write: "Where Protagoras stands on this issue [of the unity of virtue], then, is fairly clear from the outset, and as the argument develops, it becomes equally clear that he is confused." Similarly, Weiss (1985: 340), who views Socrates's form of argumentation as *ad hominem*, believes that in the course of the conversation he becomes "hopelessly confused." For his part, Vlastos (1972: 419) treats Protagoras' views on the disunity of virtue as wholly unproblematic and thus focuses only on Socrates. Two exceptions to this general approach are Coby 1987 and Hemmenway 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Klosko 1979: 129; see also Schofield 1992: 130, who attributes Socrates' "slick and shallow" arguments to his "gamesmanship."

views *are* problematic, and that this, at least in part, is what Socrates' questions are meant to reveal.

Let's examine the conversation between Socrates and Protagoras. After his preamble on the difference between long discourse and short answers, Socrates proceeds to ask Protagoras the following: When Protagoras referred to the virtues of justice, temperance, and holiness and called them "collectively a single thing" (*ὥς ἓν τι εἴη συλλήβδην*), did he mean that virtue is a single thing and that each is a part of it or that they are all names for a single entity? Note that here Socrates is simply referring back to Protagoras' Great Speech, when he referred to these virtues (and their vices) as some kind of unity (at 324a1 and, more explicitly, at 325a1-2), in both cases using the words *ἓν* and *συλλήβδην*, and thus seemed to present virtue as a homogeneous whole.<sup>14</sup> Thus Protagoras easily responds that virtue is a single entity and that these are its parts (329c6-d4). Now Socrates asks whether these parts are like the parts of a face or like the parts of gold, where there is no difference between the parts. Protagoras responds that they are like the parts of a face. At this point Socrates asks, "Do people share in these parts of virtue so that each person gets a different part, or is it necessary that if someone gets one he has them all?" (*πότερον οὖν, ἣν δ' ἐγώ, καὶ μεταλαμβάνουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τούτων τῶν τῆς ἀρετῆς μορίων οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι, οἱ δὲ ἄλλοι, ἢ ἀνάγκη, εἴανπερ τις ἐν λάβῃ, ἅπαντα ἔχειν*; 329e2-4). Protagoras responds emphatically: "By no means, since many are courageous but unjust, and many again are just but not wise" (*Οὐδαμῶς, ἐπεὶ πολλοὶ ἀνδρεῖοί εἰσιν, ἄδικοι δέ, καὶ δίκαιοι αὖ, σοφοὶ δὲ οὐκ*, 329e5-6).

<sup>14</sup> Most commentators fail to notice that the question of the unity of virtue was first introduced by Protagoras in his Great Speech, not by Socrates. Two exceptions are Coby 1987: 73 and Weiss 2006: 38-39.



Two things are remarkable about Protagoras' response. The first is his addition, without any prompting from Socrates, of the two virtues that were glaringly absent from his speech, courage and wisdom. On the face of it, there seems no need for him to do this. The second is the specificity of his response. Again, he could have simply said, as Socrates did, that some people have one virtue and some another, without being specific about which virtue; yet, he makes sure to include courage and wisdom and to distinguish them from justice and injustice. Why does Protagoras feel the need to do this?

First, we should notice that Socrates' question once more alludes to Protagoras' own speech. Recall that there he said that when Zeus sent justice and a sense of shame to humans he enjoined that everyone should partake (*μετέχειν*) of them under penalty of death; that is why, when the discussion has to do with *πολιτική ἀρετή*, which Protagoras claimed came *wholly* from justice (*δικαιοσύνη*) and moderation (*σωφροσύνη*), the Athenians accept advice from everyone (see 322d1-5). As I showed in my discussion of the Great Speech in the previous chapter,<sup>15</sup> however, by "everyone" Protagoras meant the many, not the elite. Thus when Socrates asks whether everyone partakes of these virtues and has only one or all of them, Protagoras' response suggests that he accepts the notion that *ἀρετή* for the elite differs from the *ἀρετή* of the common people. This division is implied by his introduction of the virtues of courage and wisdom, which are distinct from the virtue of the many, justice, which he had, in effect, reduced to merely abiding by the law. By setting courage and wisdom as contraries, Protagoras implies that these virtues are in a different category from justice.

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 1, section 8.

From the preceding, it is clear that the philosophical question of the unity or discreteness of the virtues is not one that concerns Protagoras. Rather, his concern is to convey to young aristocrats like Hippocrates that he understands the values to which they adhere and that his instruction concords with those values. His assertion that one can be courageous but unjust, and just but not wise, suggests precisely that.

But in order to better appreciate Protagoras' view of virtue, it will be helpful to return to his prior boast that he is not afraid of presenting himself as a sophist. In that earlier passage, he contrasted his attitude of openness with that of those other "sophists," like Homer, Simonides, and Musaeus, who concealed their true identity out of fear and adopted socially acceptable activities, like poetry, religion, music or athletics (see 316d-317a). Protagoras implies that these "sophists" lacked courage and adopted conventional activities that would shield them from possible charges of wrong-doing. In contrast, Protagoras is sufficiently confident in his own abilities to practice an unconventional activity that leaves him vulnerable to the accusations of jealous and hostile people. He further implies that his protection is his very reputation as a wise man who educates men (see 317b4-5). In this passage, then, Protagoras obliquely presents himself as a man who embodies the virtues of courage and wisdom. However, this passage also suggests that, given the profession he practices, the sophist might be liable to *unjust* accusations of injustice, intemperance, or impiety. From this perspective, Protagoras personifies how it is possible that someone might be seen as courageous but unjust.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The other pair of opposites, being just but not wise, may well be applied to Socrates.

If, indeed, we can take this passage as suggestive of Protagoras' views on the virtues, it would be fair to say that his privileging of the virtues of courage and wisdom is not only a reflection of the values of the Athenian elite, but also that such a notion is fundamental to his own worldview (as it is represented by Plato). Being a sophist requires boldness in addition to wisdom.

## 6. To be Temperate but Unjust

Following Protagoras' assertion of the multiplicity of virtue, Socrates goes on to examine the relationship between pairs of virtues in order to establish the identity or equivalency between them.<sup>17</sup> Socrates' intent is, I believe, to suggest 1) that wisdom and courage are virtues that are not in a different category, as Protagoras had implied, and 2) that a Protagorean view of virtue can easily slip into a Thrasymachean or Calliclean one. It is also significant that it is in this exchange that the many first become a virtual interlocutor and that Protagoras, even as he dissociates himself from them, becomes their representative.

As Socrates continues his prodding of Protagoras in his effort to demonstrate that wisdom and temperance are the same, and even as it seems that he has secured Protagoras' (grudging) agreement on this point, Socrates asks the sophist, "does someone who acts unjustly seem temperate to you in that he acts unjustly?" (*τίς σοι δοκεῖ ἀδικῶν ἄνθρωπος σωφρονεῖν, ὅτι ἀδικεῖ;*); Protagoras responds, "I would be ashamed to agree with

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<sup>17</sup> This is precisely the controversy among interpreters who believe Socrates holds a doctrine of the unity of virtue: are the virtues identical or equivalent to one another? For a succinct survey of the positions, see Brickhouse and Smith 1997.

this, Socrates, although many people do say it” (*Αἰσχυνοίμην ἂν ἔγωγ’, ἔφη, ὃ Σώκρατες, τοῦτο ὁμολογεῖν, ἐπεὶ πολλοί γέ φασιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων*, 333b8-c3).

Indeed, in the discursive section of his Great Speech, Protagoras had connected temperance and injustice by pointing to the “universal belief” (*ἡγοῦνται πάντες*) that an admission of guilt is considered madness, whereas concealing one’s injustice is considered an act of temperance (see 323a5-c2). It follows that it is sensible to hide one’s injustice so as to avoid public humiliation and punishment. Neither at that argumentative juncture nor in his responses to Socrates’ questions does Protagoras claim this as his view or as a part of his teaching, but rather he assigns it to the many. Yet, Socrates’ subsequent questions will imply that there is a connection between the view of the many and what Protagoras does claim to teach, *εὐβουλία*.

Once it has been settled that the many believe that there are people who seem temperate while acting unjustly, Socrates asks if Protagoras (now a spokesperson for the many) believes that some people are being sensible when they act unjustly (*δοκοῦσί τινές σοι σωφρονεῖν ἀδικοῦντες;*), a proposition Protagoras grants. Next, Socrates asks if being sensible (*σωφρονεῖν*) means having good sense (*εὖ φρονεῖν*). Again, Protagoras concedes this. Finally, Socrates asks, “And having good sense (*εὖ φρονεῖν*) means having good judgment (*εὖ βουλεύεσθαι*) in acting unjustly?” Protagoras once more allows this (333d4-6).

What is relevant about these questions is that, by playing on the etymological relation between *σωφροσύνη*, *σωφρονεῖν*, and *εὖ φρονεῖν*, and by then connecting *εὖ φρονεῖν* with *εὖ βουλεύεσθαι*, Socrates is deliberately emphasizing a particular meaning of *σωφροσύνη*. He is not referring to *σωφροσύνη* in the sense of temperance and self-control,

but in the sense of prudence, soundness of mind, and good deliberation. By emphasizing this meaning, he conveys the full import of the notion of virtue that Protagoras assigns to the many. When they act unjustly, they are not temperate or restrained (which would be a contradiction), but rather they show their intelligence, soundness of mind, and good deliberation. In other words, Socrates makes use of the semantic multi-valence inherent in these terms to show that they can be associated not only with justice and its concomitant moderation, but also with injustice and the lack of self-restraint it implies.

But the connection between *σωφρονεῖν*, in the sense of being sensible, and *εὖ βουλευέσθαι*, deliberating properly, also brings to mind Protagoras' own earlier claim that what he teaches his students is *εὐβουλία* so that they can manage their private affairs well and can acquire political influence and preeminence (see 318e4-319a2). At this point it is worth considering more carefully what Plato may have had in mind when he represented Protagoras as claiming to teach *εὐβουλία*.

### 7. Self-restraint and Good Deliberation: The Meanings of *εὐβουλία*

Plato uses the noun *εὐβουλία* only three times in the writings that are considered authentic: once here in the *Protagoras* and twice in the *Republic*, at 348d2 and 428b6. Commenting on this scarcity, Malcolm Schofield, in his “*Euboulia* in the *Iliad*,” states: “Having assimilated *euboulia* (which was equated with political skill in the *Protagoras* (319a)) to guardianship, Plato can abandon any further enquiry into the arts of good judgement and counsel and concentrate instead on guardianship. The ideal city is constructed as it is precisely to avoid the need for politics and its arts.” He then goes on to assert that while Plato may have had little interest in exploring the “qualities needed by a good politician

or king or counselor,” other Greek authors, such as Thucydides, the tragedians, and Homer, did find the task important.<sup>18</sup>

Although Schofield’s essay has been very influential for the reinterpretation and reevaluation of the Homeric code of values, it is less useful for appreciating the significance of Plato’s uses of *εὐβουλία*. This is partly because Schofield’s interest is not in illuminating the meaning of this concept, but in arguing against what he takes to be Moses Finley’s primitivist view of the Homeric hero. But another problem of argument is that, since the word *εὐβουλία* does not appear in the Homeric poems, they cannot offer us examples of its use, leaving us with a post-Homeric concept that is applied retrospectively to the Homeric hero. When it comes to Plato, Schofield’s characterization of *εὐβουλία* as “political skill” or “the art of good judgment” is broadly correct, but does not really illuminate the nuances of each of its Platonic uses. Before examining *εὐβουλία* in Plato, it will be useful to trace its implication in other authors of the classical period, particularly the tragedians and Thucydides.

A cursory survey of roughly contemporary occurrences of the word *εὐβουλία* shows that this noun was rare. Indeed, the three tragedians combined use it twelve times, Thucydides four times, and Aristophanes only twice.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Schofield 1986: 6. The force of Schofield’s essay, however, is not an elucidation of the uses and meanings of *εὐβουλία* (the noun does not appear in Homer) or even what it means for the hero to possess such a quality. Rather, Schofield’s interest is to argue that the Homeric code of values was not only about prowess in fighting but also about the hero’s ability to engage in rational discussion and debate.

<sup>19</sup> Aeschylus *Persians* 749 and *Prometheus Bound* 1035 and 1038; Aristophanes *Acharnians* 1008 and *Birds* 1539; Euripides *Helen* 757, *Heracleidae* 110, *Iphigenia in Aulis* 388, *Phoenician Women* 721 and 747, *Suppliant Women* 161 and 1062; Sophocles *Antigone* 1050 and 1097; Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* 1.78, 2.97, 3.42, and 3.44.

In its tragic instances, *εὐβουλία* is sometimes contrasted with rash or thoughtless action or even madness. For example, in Euripides' *Suppliants* Theseus chides the Argive king Adrastus, "You went after strength of spirit [*εὐψυχία*ν] instead of good counsel [*εὐβουλίας*]" (l. 161), referring to how that king was carried away by his own passion in his decision to support Polyneices against Eteocles, rather than listen to the advise of the seer.<sup>20</sup> In the *Phoenician Women*, Creon tries to moderate Eteocles' daring boasts that he will kill the Argive army by saying, *τὸ νικᾶν ἐστὶ πᾶν εὐβουλία* ("victory depends entirely on good counsel," 721). Rather than going to war in rash boldness, Eteocles should plan carefully so he can be victorious. In Aeschylus' *Persians*, Darius' ghost calls Xerxes' attempt to conquer men and gods *οὐκ εὐβουλία* (749)—that is, the product of unsound deliberation or madness.

But in tragedy *εὐβουλία* can also have the sense of being reasonable as opposed to being intransigent or stubborn. For example, in *Prometheus Bound*, Hermes entreats Prometheus to do as Zeus commands, listing all the ills that await him if he does not, finally advising, *σὺ δὲ πάπτεινε καὶ φρόντιζε, μὴδ' αὐθαδίαν εὐβουλίας ἀμείνον' ἡγήσῃ ποτέ* ("But do look around and reflect, and do not at all think that stubbornness is better than good counsel," 1033-35). Similarly, in Sophocles' *Antigone*, in his heated discussion with Creon, Teiresias asks whether anyone knows that the greatest possession for humans is *εὐβουλία* (1050-51)—that is, the capacity to reason soundly, suggesting that the king's rage and unreasonable intransigence impede him from seeing the proper course of action.

In Thucydides, *εὐβουλία* is also contrasted with rash action. In Book 1, the Athenian embassy tells the Spartans to deliberate carefully first rather than go rashly into

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<sup>20</sup> For an interesting analysis of *εὐβουλία* in this play, see Hesk 2011.

war because of the accusations brought against them by the Corinthians (1.78). But, *εὐβουλία* is also used in the sense of acting in accordance with one's best interests, a meaning that is only implied in the tragedians. In his speech asking the Athenians to reconsider their decision to put the Mytileneans to death, Diodotus says (3.44), *ἐγὼ δὲ παρῆλθον οὔτε ἀντεροῶν περὶ Μυτιληναίων οὔτε κατηγορήσων. οὐ γὰρ περὶ τῆς ἐκείνων ἀδικίας ἡμῖν ὁ ἀγὼν, εἰ σωφρονοῦμεν, ἀλλὰ περὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας εὐβουλίας* ("I have not come forward either as an advocate of the Mytileneans or as their accuser. For the question before us, if we consider it sensibly, is not what their crimes are but what our deliberating soundly and in our own interest is"<sup>21</sup>). Diodotus is, in effect, asking the Athenians to put aside their anger and desire for revenge against the Mytileneans for the sake of deliberating in their self-interest. Good deliberation and strong emotion are not compatible.

Thus in both the tragedians and Thucydides, *εὐβουλία* denotes deliberating with a view to acting in one's self-interest and/or that of the community<sup>22</sup> *in the face of strong emotion or passion*. Deliberating soundly often entails restraining or moderating those passions. Central to the meaning of *εὐβουλία*, then, is the notion of self-control, and thus *εὐβουλία* can be viewed as the opposite of *akrasia*—that is, acting against one's best interest due to lack of self-control.

I am arguing that, at least on the surface, this is the meaning of *εὐβουλία* that is central to Protagoras' teaching. In other words, he instructs his students in how to restrain or moderate their passions so that they can make decisions that preserve and advance their self-interest in private and public life. From this perspective, Protagoras'

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<sup>21</sup> My translation, based on Jowett.

<sup>22</sup> For a similar translation of the meaning of *εὐβουλία*, see Hesk 2011: 120. My addition is that good-deliberation entails some form of self-restraint.



teaching seems to be well within contemporary Greek usage, as exemplified in tragedy and Thucydides. However, the *Protagoras* also implies that this sound deliberation, and its concomitant self-restraint, are specifically in the service of political ambition. In this sense, *εὐβουλία* means to exercise self-control so as to acquire power over others without putting one's safety at risk. If this interpretation is correct, then Protagoras' use of *εὐβουλία* can easily slip into a more Thrasymachean sense.

In Book I of the *Republic*, Thrasymachus says that justice is not a virtue but *γενναία εὐήθεια* ("high-minded simplicity"), and when Socrates asks if he then calls being unjust *κακοήθεια* ("low-mindedness"), Thrasymachus responds, *οὐκ, ἀλλ' εὐβουλίαν* ("No, I call it good deliberation"). Socrates goes on to ask if he then considers unjust people to be *φρόνιμοι καὶ ἀγαθοί* to which Thrasymachus says, *οἱ γε τελέως, ἔφη, οἷοί τε ἀδικεῖν, πόλεις τε καὶ ἔθνη δυνάμενοι ἀνθρώπων ὑφ' ἑαυτοὺς ποιεῖσθαι* ("Yes, if they are capable of being completely unjust and can bring cities and whole communities under their power," 348c-d).

If we understand *εὐβουλία* in the sense that I have suggested, Thrasymachus' usage implies the ability to restrain oneself in the the service of deliberating well about how to acquire power over others. It means, paradoxically, exercising moderation for the sake of being able to be excessive with impunity. Under this definition, tyrants exhibit *εὐβουλία*, precisely in their being able to commit injustice with impunity so as to rule over others.

In contrast to Protagoras and Thrasymachus, Socrates confers upon *εὐβουλία* a significantly different meaning. Indeed, in Book IV of the *Republic*, after Socrates has finished the initial description of the completely good city, he says that this city is wise because it is *εὐβουλος*, and that *εὐβουλία* is some kind of knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη*), since it is

through knowledge, not ignorance, that people deliberate well (428a11-b13). This knowledge, he goes on to say, is the one the guardians must possess in order to manage the city properly and “maintain good relations, both within itself and with other cities” (*αὐτὴ τε πρὸς αὐτὴν καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἄλλας πόλεις ἄριστα ὁμιλοῖ*, 428d2-3).

Commentators, from Adam to Schofield,<sup>23</sup> have interpreted Socrates’ use of *εὐβουλία* as having a political meaning, as it refers to the administration of the *polis* as well as the relations amongst the citizens and with other cities. That much does seem to be clear. However, what is relevant about Socrates’ use of *εὐβουλία*, especially when compared to its other uses, both in Plato and other authors, is that it is not characterized by self-restraint or self-interest, but by the need for knowledge so as to preserve the interests of the community and maintain good relations with other cities. The guardians, then, exercise *εὐβουλία* on behalf of the *whole city*, not primarily themselves. By contrast, Thrasymachus’ use of *εὐβουλία* referred to the tyrant’s ability to deliberate in order to gain power over others for his own benefit, thus pitting the interests of the tyrant against those of the citizens or of other cities. Socrates, I argue, is deliberately contrasting *εὐβουλία* to Thrasymachus’s earlier usage: good deliberation should be with a view to benefiting oneself *and* others, rather than benefiting oneself *at the expense* of others.

Of the three uses of *εὐβουλία* in Plato, then, that of Protagoras seems to be closest to the traditional sense of exercising self-restraint so as to deliberate soundly and act in one’s best interests. However, Protagoras’ implied emphasis on competition and political gain and Socrates’ questions to him on the unity of virtue, particularly on the relationship between *εὖ φρονεῖν*, *εὖ βουλευέσθαι*, and acting unjustly (see 333d), expose the full

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<sup>23</sup> Schofield 1986: 6.

implication of his use of *εὐβουλία*. For although Protagoras claims to teach how to be judicious and moderate, he caters to the desire for political power and, in so doing, he appeals to excess. Protagoras' teaching ultimately founders upon a contradiction: he claims to know and teach what is good for someone, yet he is unable to give an account of what that is. Thus, in the rest of the dialogue, the themes of moderation and excess and knowledge and ignorance will dominate, beginning with the poem of Simonides.

### 8. No one Does Wrong Willingly: The Simonides Poem

Protagoras, in a reversal of roles, introduces the poem by Simonides. Just as Socrates challenged Protagoras earlier in their conversation to defend his claim on the teachability of virtue, so now Protagoras challenges Socrates to defend Simonides and, by extension, virtue.

Long treated as an entertaining digression of little philosophical value,<sup>24</sup> scholars and commentators have recently begun to recognize the importance of this section of the dialogue for its overall argument.<sup>25</sup> I will not go over the whole poem or even all of Socrates' exegesis, but will focus on two aspects: 1) the implicit connections between Simonides and Protagoras, and 2) an examination of the Socratic paradox, first inserted here, that no one errs willingly. Through the exploration of these two aspects I will contend that although Socrates appears to defend and praise Simonides, he implicitly

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<sup>24</sup> For example, Adam and Adam (1905: xxviii) conclude, "it will be vain to look for reasoned ethical teaching in the episode." Likewise, Shorey (1933: 128) comments, "It contains little or nothing that bears on the main argument"; and so, too, Guthrie (1975: 227), who says that Socrates "feels entitled to treat the subject with outrageous levity. Here at least there can be no doubt that Plato knew what he was doing, and it is splendid entertainment, but hardly philosophy."

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Weingartner 1973: 95-102; Goldberg 1983: 157-214; Coby 1987: 98-130; Carson 1992; and McCoy 1999.

likens Protagoras to the poet and criticizes both for their willingness to exchange praise of virtue for money. Yet, he also exonerates them with his maxim that no one does wrong willingly but due to ignorance. From this perspective, Socrates' exegesis of the poem is a true counterpart to Protagoras' Great Speech: on the surface, it appears to say one thing; covertly, it says another.<sup>26</sup>

Protagoras introduces the poem with a critique of Simonides: the poet appears to be contradicting himself when in the poem's first stanza he says that it is difficult to become truly good while in the second he criticizes Pittacus for saying the same thing. Protagoras' criticism seems to carry the implication that Simonides is not very good at what he does—that is, being a poet—a criticism that betrays Protagoras' own agonistic aims. This comes as no surprise. Simonides was on Protagoras' earlier list of "sophists," whom he faulted for unsuccessfully concealing their true profession from powerful men (316d7). Protagoras wishes to set himself apart from the Greek poetic tradition and to suggest that he is a better instructor for the Greeks. But is Protagoras so different from Simonides? By setting poet and sophist side by side, Plato invites the comparison. Moreover, Socrates's interpretation of the poem seems to draw subtle, but important, parallelisms between the two.

Plato's choice of Simonides as the central poet of the dialogue is telling. The Cean was credited with two important innovations: pioneering the epinician ode and professionalizing the art of poetry.<sup>27</sup> He was the first poet to formalize songs of praise

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<sup>26</sup> Others have also noted that Socrates' exegesis of the poem stands as the counterpart to Protagoras' Great Speech earlier in the dialogue; see, for example, Kahn 1988: 43 and Coby 1987: 128.

<sup>27</sup> See Thayer 1975: 4 and Carson 1992: 113.

and to demand money for their composition. From this perspective, Simonides, the first professional poet, stands as a worthy analogue to Protagoras, the first professional educator. But the parallelism goes further: both men make their living by exchanging money for praise. Protagoras praises all sorts of opinions, without regard for their truth, while Simonides praises all sorts of men, without regard for their the moral status. Both value money, not virtue.<sup>28</sup> Yet, both men are also ambitious for a reputation for wisdom, which they acquire by refuting others (see 343c).

These connections between Simonides and Protagoras are important because they enable us to see that Socrates' interpretation of the poem is a subtle and ironic rebuke of both,<sup>29</sup> even as it also stands as an explanation for their conduct. Socrates must first, however, change or "improve" the meaning of the poem.

As Hugh Parry has argued, Simonides' poem is well within the formulaic conventions of Greek poetry and does not contain any ethical innovations. The poet is simply using *topoi* familiar to his audience in order to console Scopas by praising him for his noble birth, his service to the polis, and his moderation, while also reminding him that moral perfection is impossible and that the ideal should be the mean.<sup>30</sup> It is this ideal of moderation that Simonides does, in fact, articulate (345d3-5):

πάντας δ' ἐπαίνημι καὶ φιλέω  
ἐκὼν ὅστις ἔρδῃ  
μηδὲν αἰσχρόν. ἀνάγκη δ' οὐδὲ θεοὶ μάχονται.

<sup>28</sup> On the famed greed of both sophist and poet, see Carson 1992: 114. On Simonides' proverbial love of money, see Goldberg 1983: 217 n. 12.

<sup>29</sup> Goldberg (1983: 176) also notes that even as Socrates sets out to defend Simonides with his interpretation of the poem he impugns him and makes him "closely resemble Protagoras."

<sup>30</sup> See H. Parry 1965, who contends that Simonides' poem is a *consolatio* and that the moral advice he gives is typical of this genre.

But all those who do nothing shameful  
willingly I praise and love.  
For against necessity not even the gods make war.

Simonides praises, not the man who is perfectly good and blameless, but the one who deliberately avoids wrongdoing within the confines of necessity. In this way, Simonides focuses on the mean that stands between perfection and acquiescence to hopelessness. As Parry notes, the contrast Simonides draws here between *ἐκών* and *ἀνάγκη* repeats a commonplace in Greek poetry that is as old as the *Odyssey*.<sup>31</sup> Necessity can render a man guiltless when he acts contrary to what is deemed right.

But Socrates gives these lines a different meaning: Simonides does not mean that “he praises and loves all those who willingly do no wrong,” but that “he willingly praises and loves all those who do no wrong”; that is, Socrates applies the adjective *ἐκών* to *ἐπαίνημι* and *φιλέω*, rather than to *ἔρδῃ*, which would be the more natural reading. By applying the adjective to Simonides himself, Socrates changes the intended meaning of the stanza and thus renders both *ἐκών* and *ἀνάγκη* in a different light. Thus Simonides does not praise and love those who *choose not to do wrong* but, rather, he willingly praises and loves those who simply *do no wrong*. The difference is not insignificant. In the former case, one may desire to do wrong but choose not to act that way, while in the latter one does not desire to do wrong. Socrates justifies his tortured interpretation by saying (345d5-e4):

ἐγὼ γὰρ σχεδὸν τι οἶμαι τοῦτο, ὅτι οὐδεὶς τῶν σοφῶν ἀνδρῶν ἡγεῖται οὐδένα ἀνθρώπων ἐκόντα ἐξαμαρτάνειν οὐδὲ αἰσχροῦ τε καὶ κακὰ ἐκόντα ἐργάζεσθαι, ἀλλ’ εὖ ἴσασιν ὅτι πάντες οἱ τὰ αἰσχροῦ καὶ τὰ κακὰ ποιοῦντες ἄκοντες ποιοῦσιν.

<sup>31</sup> I follow the interpretation of H. Parry 1965: 303.

I am pretty sure that none of the wise men thinks that any human being willingly makes a mistake or willingly does anything wrong or bad. They know very well that anyone who does anything wrong or bad does so involuntarily.

Socrates obliquely argues that everyone desires what he believes to be good—a notion that will be relevant later on when he discusses *akrasia*. For now, he focuses his attention on Simonides. According to Socrates, the importance of Simonides' saying that he “willingly praises and loves all who do no wrong” is that the poet is reflecting on himself and how on more than one occasion he has praised “some tyrant or other such person, not willingly [*οὐχ ἐκὼν*], but because he was compelled [*ἀναγκαζόμενος*]” (346b5-c1). The implication is twofold. First, if Simonides praises tyrants unwillingly it means that he praises men who may not be praiseworthy, and his praise cannot be trusted. Second, if the poet has done wrong by being indiscriminate in his praise, he must be exonerated of such wrong-doing, for he has acted under compulsion, not free choice. But this double implication must extend to Protagoras, as well: if Protagoras unwillingly praises all sorts of teachings, not all his teachings are worthwhile, and if he has done wrong by being indiscriminate, he too has been compelled to act this way. But even as Socrates exonerates poet and sophist of wrongdoing, that exoneration is also a subtle rebuke, for that which compels them to act as they do is nothing other than their ambition for honor and wealth.

As the dialogue progresses and Socrates again takes up the question of the unity of virtue and introduces the problem of *akrasia*, the relationship between knowledge and moderation and between ignorance and excess will become more prominent.

### 9. Courage, Boldness, and Knowledge

In his poem, Simonides denies that it is possible to be truly good and asserts, instead, that one should be content when one is free from compulsion and able to choose not to do wrong. The notion of *akrasia* is, thus, implicit in the poem: one is willing to act rightly when one is not compelled by forces beyond one's control to act wrongly. But, unlike Simonides, Protagoras has claimed not only that he is good and noble himself but also that he can make others noble and good by means of the knowledge he has and teaches. From this perspective, Protagoras, in effect, seems to deny that *akratic* action is possible, for with these claims he has implied that knowledge should be enough for concordant action. Indeed, his claim to teach *εὐβουλία* points in that direction, since—as I have argued—its necessary corollary is that he can teach his students to be moderate so as to deliberate well.

Nevertheless, Protagoras' insistence that the virtues are discrete entities seems to contradict his explicit claims concerning the teachability of virtue. This difficulty becomes particularly apparent as Socrates and Protagoras resume their discussion on the unity of virtue after their farewell to poetry. Protagoras concedes that wisdom, temperance, justice, and piety are all reasonably equal to each other—a concession that was forced on him by his sense of shame (see 333bc)—but insists that courage is entirely different from these other virtues because it is clear that many people can be “extremely unjust, impious, intemperate, and ignorant, and yet exceptionally courageous” (349d6-8). Socrates then proceeds to examine this claim by asking whether courage (*ἀνδρεία*) requires boldness (*θράσος*), then whether boldness requires knowledge, to which Protagoras assents. On the basis of these agreements, Socrates draws the following



conclusion: since the wisest are also the boldest and the boldest are the most courageous, then courage must be wisdom (349e-350c). Protagoras, however, vehemently resists this argument. Although he does believe that the courageous are bold and that knowledge increases boldness, he does not concede that the bold are courageous and, thus, that courage and wisdom are the same. He then goes on to explain how courage and boldness differ by drawing on another significant analogy that associates courage with strength and boldness with power: just as he would grant that the strong are powerful and that knowledge can make one more powerful, he would not agree that this demonstrates that strength is wisdom or that the powerful are strong. He then goes on to explain the difference between strength and power and between courage and boldness: courage and strength are alike in that both result from a mixture of natural endowment (*φύσις*) and proper cultivation (*εὐτροφία*), while boldness and power come from knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη*) and skill (*τέχνη*), in addition to madness or rage (351a1-b2).

According to Protagoras, then, someone who is already courageous, both by natural disposition and through proper acculturation, can acquire the specialized knowledge and skill so as to become bold. From this perspective, courage would be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for boldness. The other necessary condition would be knowledge of some sort. Courage, however, cannot be taught; either the individual possesses it or not. This is the crucial aspect of Protagoras' distinction between courage and boldness, and the reason why he has refused to equate the former with knowledge. Young men such as Hippocrates may possess courage (see 310d), but this will not enable them to undertake the actions that might fulfill their desire for political power without putting themselves at risk. To do this, they will need Protagoras'

know-how so that they will become, not courageous, but bold. Thus, with these distinctions Protagoras recapitulates the implicit message of his Great Speech—namely, that he imparts a specialized knowledge and skill that builds on the talent and education of affluent young men so that they can realize their personal and political ambitions.

But the more important consequence of Protagoras' views on courage is that they inadvertently set the stage for the subsequent discussion of pleasure, the good, and *akrasia*. In his short speech on courage and boldness, Protagoras has omitted discussing a crucial factor for courage to be possible: the necessity of overcoming fear in any confrontation with danger. What is missing from his account, then, is any notion of the individual's beliefs about what is valuable and choice-worthy, and how those beliefs might provide the motivation to overcome fear so as to act courageously.<sup>32</sup> This omission is true not only of courage, but of Protagoras' entire view of virtue. For although Protagoras has insisted that virtue, including courage, is something noble and good (see 349e), he has not been able to say what makes it so. That is, he has not been able to say why one might choose virtuous action other than because one has been conditioned by the prevailing culture, through shame and punishment, to act in that way. For this reason, Protagoras has no choice but to adhere to a notion of virtue as multiple,

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<sup>32</sup> It is notable that a version of this problem is already present in what Thucydides has Pericles say about Athenian courage in his Funeral Oration: "The great impediment to action is, in our opinion, not discussion, but the want of that knowledge which is gained by discussion preparatory to action. For we have a peculiar power of thinking before we act and of acting too, whereas other men are courageous from ignorance but hesitate upon reflection. And they are surely to be esteemed the bravest spirits who, having the clearest sense both of the pains and pleasures of life, do not on that account shrink from danger" (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.40, Jowett's translation). This passage asserts that Athenian courage, unlike that of others, is based on *knowledge* of pain and pleasure and that it is this knowledge that enables these soldiers to risk their lives. See Balot 2004 for an extended discussion of the rational basis of Athenian courage, its relationship to democracy, and how it differed (from the Athenians' perspective) from courage in a militaristic state such as Sparta.

for, in the absence of an overarching notion of what values constitute a good life, he can only recommend virtue as something that can be beneficial in a particular circumstance, but not beneficial, even harmful, in other circumstances.<sup>33</sup> The problem with this view is that it centers on what any individual considers good at any given moment so that it can easily pit the interests of one individual against those of another: what is good for me at this moment may not coincide with, and can even oppose, what is good for you.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, it is a view that undermines the possibility of acting courageously, since the willingness to confront danger entails the ability to value something beyond the immediacy of present circumstances. What is missing in Protagoras' view of courage, then, is an account of the good and beneficial that can transcend the immediate and, so, illuminate what it means to flourish, both in one's individual and communal life. It is such an account that Socrates provides in the last part of the dialogue by equating pleasure with the good and suggesting the art of measurement as that which can save one's life. He challenges and supplants Protagoras' relativistic and contradictory view of virtue with an argument in which the purpose of virtuous action is no longer to avoid shame or punishment—as is the case with the many—or acquire power over others—as in the case of the elite. Instead, Socrates will use hedonism—to which Protagoras and the many subscribe by default—to make the case for self-restraint and moderation as the proper center for any virtuous action. First, however, he turns to the question of *akrasia*.

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, his earlier speech on the relativity of what is good (334a-c). Although here Protagoras focuses on foods, drinks, and drugs, the same notion could easily be applied to the benefits of virtuous action: under some circumstances it is right to act justly, but under others it may not.

<sup>34</sup> For a similar view, see Benitez 1992: 233, who argues that what underlies Protagoras' views in this dialogue is the man-measure doctrine.

### 10. The Denial of *akrasia*

After Protagoras has once again made his veiled pitch to potential students with his speech on courage and boldness, Socrates drops this issue and turns instead to the question of the relationship between pleasure, the good, and knowledge. With this abrupt turn, the direction of the remainder of the dialogue is set: Socrates will try to have Protagoras join him in becoming the teachers of the many. In adopting this tack, Socrates will, in effect, replace Protagoras' notion of virtue as a means for political power and personal safety with a notion of virtue and knowledge that is about self-restraint and moderation.<sup>35</sup>

But in order to accomplish these goals Socrates first establishes the hedonistic thesis by identifying pleasure with the good (see 351b-d). Much has been made of this Socratic maneuver, and commentators have spent several decades debating whether Socrates intends this thesis as his own positive view or not. The prevailing interpretation is that Socrates' hedonism is rhetorical and dialectical and that its purpose is to reveal the latent hedonism of Protagoras (and the other sophists) and of the many.<sup>36</sup> Although I believe this is the case, another important function of the hedonistic thesis is that it enables Socrates to present a united front with Protagoras so that he can be effective in positing a new account of virtue. Indeed, a fundamental, even if unexpressed, premise of the sophist's account is that the individual's own desires and self-interest are in tension with the desires and interests of others. Protagoras points to this tension several times in

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<sup>35</sup> Socrates's abrupt shift in the *Protagoras* is much more subtle and nuanced but, nevertheless, similar to the one that occurs in the *Gorgias* when he abruptly asks Callicles whether those who he says are intelligent and brave enough to rule in the city also rule themselves (cf. *Gorg.* 491d-e). There, as here, Socrates makes his interlocutor turn from the politics of the *polis* to the individual's soul.

<sup>36</sup> The best argument in favor of this view is Zeyl 1980.

the course of the dialogue, most notably in his Great Speech, when he says that people would consider anyone who confesses his injustice mad, as doing so would go against his self interest (323a-c); and later, repeating the same idea, he acknowledges that many people would consider the person who is unjust to be sensible (333b-d). In contrast, by identifying pleasure with the good, Socrates can present a unified notion of virtue where pleasure, knowledge, and the good are an integrated whole.

When Socrates first tries to secure Protagoras' agreement that pleasure itself is good, the sophist demurs. He is uncomfortable with this identification and would rather they "inquire into this matter" (351e4). Instead, however, Socrates turns to the question of knowledge, and asks Protagoras (352b1-c7):

*πῶς ἔχεις πρὸς ἐπιστήμην; πότερον καὶ τοῦτό σοι δοκεῖ ὥσπερ τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἢ ἄλλως; δοκεῖ δὲ τοῖς πολλοῖς περὶ ἐπιστήμης τοιοῦτόν τι, οὐκ ἰσχυρόν οὐδ' ἡγεμονικόν οὐδ' ἀρχικόν εἶναι: οὐδὲ ὡς περὶ τοιούτου αὐτοῦ ὄντος διανοοῦνται, ἀλλ' ἐνούσης πολλάκις ἀνθρώπῳ ἐπιστήμης οὐ τὴν ἐπιστήμην αὐτοῦ ἄρχειν ἀλλ' ἄλλο τι, τοτὲ μὲν θυμόν, τοτὲ δὲ ἡδονήν, τοτὲ δὲ λύπην, ἐνίοτε δὲ ἔρωτα, πολλάκις δὲ φόβον, ἀτεχνῶς διανοοῦμενοι περὶ τῆς ἐπιστήμης ὥσπερ περὶ ἀνδραπόδου, περιελκομένης ὑπὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων. ἄρ' οὖν καὶ σοὶ τοιοῦτόν τι περὶ αὐτῆς δοκεῖ, ἢ καλόν τε εἶναι ἢ ἐπιστήμη καὶ οἶον ἄρχειν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, καὶ ἂν περὶ γινώσκῃ τις τὰ γαθὰ καὶ τὰ κακὰ, μὴ ἂν κρατηθῆναι ὑπὸ μηδενὸς ὥστε ἄλλ' ἅττα πράττειν ἢ ἂν ἐπιστήμη κελεύῃ, ἀλλ' ἱκανὴν εἶναι τὴν φρόνησιν βοηθεῖν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ;*

Where do you stand in regard to knowledge? Do you share the view that most people have of this, or do you hold some other? The majority of people believe that knowledge is something of this sort—that it is no strong or guiding or governing thing; they do not see it as anything of that kind, but think that, while a person often has knowledge in him, knowledge does not rule him, but something else—now passion, now pleasure, now pain, at times love, and often fear; they simply think of knowledge as if it were a slave, dragged around by all these other feelings. Now do you agree with this view of it, or do you consider that knowledge is something noble and able to rule man, and that whoever learns what is good and what is bad will never be swayed by anything to act otherwise than as knowledge commands, and that prudence is a sufficient aid for mankind?

With these questions, Socrates begins to replace Protagoras' notion that the value of knowledge is to acquire power over others with the argument that knowledge should be in the service of ruling oneself. Socrates, however, represents not only two views of knowledge but two *kinds* of knowledge. The first is weak, can be dragged about, and has no impact upon the agent's actual beliefs and behavior. Then there is another kind of knowledge that "is capable of ruling a person" (οἶον ἄρχειν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) so that he cannot be compelled to act in any way other than as knowledge dictates. The first recalls Protagoras' description in the Great Speech of how virtue is taught in the *polis*: under threat of punishment and through correction. In this case, what one *knows* are the laws of the city and the rules of proper conduct and behavior. This knowledge competes with the individual's desires, and the latter tend to win. The second is Socratic knowledge, in the sense of awareness and insight: one doesn't merely *know* the laws and conventions of the *polis*, but has an internal sense of right and wrong.

In order to understand Socrates' denial of *akrasia*, it is important to keep this distinction in mind. Indeed, this is what the many say about why a person is overcome by pleasure (352d6-e20):

πολλοὺς φασι γινώσκοντας τὰ βέλτιστα οὐκ ἐθέλειν πράττειν, ἐξὸν αὐτοῖς, ἀλλὰ ἄλλα πράττειν· καὶ ὅσους δὴ ἐγὼ ἠρόμην ὅτι ποτε αἰτίον ἐστι τούτου, ὑπὸ ἡδονῆς φασιν ἡττωμένους ἢ λύπης ἢ ὡν νυνδὴ ἐγὼ ἔλεγον ὑπὸ τίνος τούτων κρατουμένους ταῦτα ποιεῖν τοὺς ποιοῦντας.

They [the many] maintain that most people are unwilling to do what is best even though they know what it is and are able to do it. And when I have asked them the reason for this, they say that those who act that way do so because they are overcome by pleasure or pain or are being ruled by one of the things I referred to just now.

The position of the many states an observable behavioral phenomenon to which they then ascribe a particular explanation. The agent is well aware of what it is best to do in any given situation and yet, although able to do this, the agent *refuses* to undertake that action and acts otherwise. The explanation offered is that at the moment of making the choice the agent is overcome by pleasure or pain or some other affliction and thus chooses a different course of action from what is best. The many have set up a dichotomy between what is *known to be best* and the agent's *desire*; or, put differently, they believe that *what is known to be best is not desirable*. But as I have argued, this dichotomy articulates a tension between what is conventionally called good and what the agent actually deems to be good for himself; and it is for this reason that he refuses to act in accordance with the "known" good, because he does not see it as a good for himself.

This is the phenomenon the many observe: people refuse to act in accord with what is recognized as the best action, even when they are capable of it and, instead, decide to act otherwise. In brief, people refuse to conform to the *putative* good.

### **11. *Akrasia* as an Example that Everyone Desires the Good**

Socrates will endeavor to correct the view of the many by suggesting that when people act as the many say they do, they are acting in accord with what they *deem* good, not bad, and that, therefore, when they say they are overcome by pleasure they are, in effect, overcome by the good. But in order to make his argument work, Socrates has to change the terms of the premises put forth by the many, so that instead of explaining the conflict formulated by the many between "knowing what is best" and "being overcome by pleasure," he posits a different conflict, that between pleasure and pain. To this end, he

focuses only on the second premise in the position of the many, “being overcome by pleasure.”

Socrates argues that when people say they are overcome by pleasure they seem to mean that they are overcome by pleasant things, like food or drink or sex, and that they engage in these activities *knowing all the while that they are ruinous* (γινώσκοντες ὅτι πονηρά ἐστιν, 353c). They consider these activities bad, not because of the immediate pleasure they bring, but because later on they may bring bad things, such as sickness or poverty or other kinds of pain. Therefore, these pleasurable activities are deemed bad “on account of nothing other than the fact that they result in pain and deprive us of other pleasures” (354a).

From this perspective, concludes Socrates, the reason why the many believe that wrongdoing is due to *akrasia* is that their sole criterion for good and bad is pleasure and pain (354c-d):

τοῦτ' ἄρα ἡγεῖσθ' εἶναι κακόν, τὴν λύπην, καὶ ἀγαθόν τὴν ἡδονήν, ἐπεὶ καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ χαίρειν τότε λέγετε κακὸν εἶναι, ὅταν μείζονων ἡδονῶν ἀποστερῇ ἢ ὅσας αὐτὸ ἔχει, ἢ λύπας μείζους παρασκευάζῃ τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ ἡδονῶν. ἐπεὶ εἰ κατ' ἄλλο τι αὐτὸ τὸ χαίρειν κακὸν καλεῖτε καὶ εἰς ἄλλο τι τέλος ἀποβλέψαντες, ἔχοιτε ἂν καὶ ἡμῖν εἰπεῖν. ἀλλ' οὐχ ἔξετε.

So this, namely pain, you regard as bad, and pleasure you regard as good, since you call the very enjoying bad whenever it deprives us of greater pleasures than it itself provides, or brings about greater pains than the very pleasures inherent in it? But if you call the very enjoying bad for some other reason and with some other criterion in view than the one I have suggested, you could tell us what it is; but you won't be able to.

Because the many have no other criterion for good and bad than pleasure and pain, their view that one is overcome by pleasure, as though pleasure were something bad, becomes untenable. For they would have to say that a person, knowing bad things to be bad, does



them anyway, overcome by pleasure—which, on their account, is the good. Then, they would have to admit that someone does something bad overcome by the good, a conclusion that is clearly absurd. To illustrate: it would be better for the agent not to have more wine because of the possible hangover, but he chooses to have more wine because it is more pleasant to have it than not to have it. Thus, when the agent says that in his drinking more wine he was overcome by pleasure he would have to say that he was overcome by the good since he deems it good to have more wine.

Socrates has, in effect, reformulated the position of the many on *akrasia* from one that states that most people don't desire the good to its opposite: people do desire the good. He has achieved this reversal by eliminating the premise that people know what is good but are unwilling to act accordingly and by emphasizing, instead, that people engage in pleasurable activities because they deem them good for themselves but know that they will produce pain later and, therefore, that they are bad. This is, in the end, all the many *know*, that indulging in certain pleasures *now* produces pain *later*. *Akratic* action, then, is to desire immediate pleasure despite knowing there will be future pain. It is not, however, about being able to give an account of what is good for oneself. Socrates wishes to underscore that the individual who acts *akratically* is, in fact, attempting to look after what he deems to be his own good, even if he is confused about what that is. And this is the ignorance by which the *akratic* agent suffers: ignorance of his own good. As a corrective, Socrates suggests he must learn the art of measurement.

## 12. The Art of Measurement

Prima facie, the purpose of the argument on the art of measurement is to prove to the many that their poor choices result from miscalculating pleasures against pains—that is, from ignorance, not from being overcome by pleasure. On close examination, however, the argument seems to be a commentary on the type of “virtue” Protagoras and the other sophists can teach,<sup>37</sup> and, from this point of view, its purpose is rhetorical. Socrates argues that if, indeed, pleasure and pain are the good and the bad and that one wants actions that maximize pleasure and minimize pain, one needs to know how to calculate the amount of pleasure and pain each action will produce so as to choose properly and obtain the most pleasure and least pain possible on every occasion. The difficulty in calculating properly is that immediate pleasure appears greater than future pain or future pleasure, and it is this appearance that dictates the akratic person’s action. The mistake the *akratic* makes, then, is one of “miscalculation.” The cure for this kind of ignorance is to learn to weigh pleasant things against painful ones so as to determine if the latter outweigh the former in terms of future deprivation of pleasure and, thus, to decide which actions to take and which to abjure (356b-c). To cure *akrasia* a person must only learn the art of measurement, which is precisely what Protagoras and the sophists teach and how they promise to make one better (357e2-8):

*ὥστε τοῦτ’ ἐστὶν τὸ ἡδονῆς ἥττω εἶναι, ἀμαθία ἢ μεγίστη, ἣς Πρωταγόρας ὅδε φησὶν ἰατρὸς εἶναι καὶ Πρόδικος καὶ Ἱππίας· ὑμεῖς δὲ διὰ τὸ οἶεσθαι ἄλλο τι ἢ ἀμαθίαν εἶναι οὔτε αὐτοὶ οὔτε τοὺς ὑμετέρους παῖδας παρὰ τοὺς τούτων διδασκάλους τούσδε τοὺς σοφιστὰς πέμπετε, ὥς οὐ διδακτοῦ ὄντος, ἀλλὰ κηδόμενοι τοῦ ἀργυρίου καὶ οὐ διδόντες τούτοις κακῶς πράττετε καὶ ἰδίᾳ καὶ δημοσίᾳ.*

<sup>37</sup> It is also a witty reformulation of Protagoras’ relativistic dictum that “man is the measure of all things” (πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος, DK 80 B 1).

So this is what “being overcome by pleasure” is—ignorance in the highest degree, and it is this that Protagoras and Prodicus and Hippias claim to cure. But you, thinking it to be something other than ignorance, do not go to sophists yourselves, nor do you send your children to them for instruction, believing as you do that we are dealing with something unteachable. By worrying about your money and not giving it to them, you all do badly in both private and public life.

In this highly ironic passage, Socrates has turned Protagoras’ original claim to provide knowledge that can help achieve political ambition and social ascendancy, to one about providing knowledge that can help the *akratic* become self-controlled and moderate. But despite the irony, the art of measurement does contain an important Socratic idea: although people desire the good, they are easily misled about what that is because of the power of appearances and, therefore, if one errs, it is due to ignorance, not the power of pleasure. *Akrasia* is impossible because it assumes that the agent has a knowledge of good and bad when, in reality, the agent’s error is due to ignorance. But with the art of measurement Socrates has also shown that wisdom is having power over oneself rather than others (see 357c) and has thus provided a clear alternative to the teaching of Protagoras and his fellow sophists.

### 13. No One Willingly Pursues the Bad

After Socrates has duly flattered the group of sophists by recommending them as teachers of the many and, more importantly, after he has transformed their teaching into one about self-control and moderation, he is ready to secure their agreement to the following crucial statement (358c6-d2):

*ἐπὶ γε τὰ κακὰ οὐδεὶς ἐκὼν ἔρχεται οὐδὲ ἐπὶ ᾧ οἴεται κακὰ εἶναι, οὐδ’ ἔστι τοῦτο, ὥς  
ἔοικεν, ἐν ἀνθρώπου φύσει, ἐπὶ ᾧ οἴεται κακὰ εἶναι ἐθέλειν ἵεναι ἀντὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν: ὅταν*

*τε ἀναγκασθῇ δυοῖν κακοῖν τὸ ἕτερον αἰρεῖσθαι, οὐδεὶς τὸ μείζον αἰρήσεται ἔξόν τὸ ἔλαττον.*

No one goes willingly toward the bad or what he believes to be bad; nor is it in human nature, as it seems, to want to go toward what one believes to be bad instead of the good. And when he is forced to choose between one of two bad things, no one will choose the greater if he is able to choose the lesser.

This passage has provoked a great deal of debate among philosophers and interpreters of Plato. It is also on the basis of this passage that commentators have labeled Socrates an ethical intellectualist, as Socrates appears to explicitly endorse the notion that all desires are rational and, as such, will always adjust to the agent's beliefs about what is best.<sup>38</sup> Although some interpreters of Plato have arrived at a more nuanced view of Socrates' supposed intellectualism, the label has remained largely unaltered.<sup>39</sup> Of these accounts, perhaps the most persuasive with respect to the passage under consideration is that of Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith. They argue that when Socrates speaks of the power of appearances as the culprit for the agent's bad choices, he in fact refers to the power of the appetites and passions, and that it is on the basis of the strength of these irrational elements that the agent comes to believe that the pleasure he aims at is the good. Moreover, they argue that ethical knowledge cannot be defeated by the power of appearances because this kind of knowledge "is incompatible with the possession of strong appetites and passions."<sup>40</sup> On their reading, Socrates is indeed an intellectualist,

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<sup>38</sup> For this view, see Penner 1992: 128. Others who subscribe to a similar view include: Santas 1979: 83-94; Reeve 1988: 134-5; Frede 1992a: xxix-xxx; Irwin 1995: 75-76; Cooper 1999a; Nehamas 1999: 27-58; and Rowe 2007b. Another group of interpreters subscribe to a more nuanced view of Socratic intellectualism that holds that Socrates does recognize non-rational desires: Carone 2001; Moss 2008; and Brickhouse and Smith 2010.

<sup>39</sup> See previous note.

<sup>40</sup> Brickhouse and Smith 2010: 71.

but one who believes that irrational desires can motivate the agent to act in a way that is contrary to what is best for him, even as he seeks what is good. Thus this agent, in seeking pleasure, pursues what he deems to be good, but misses the mark due to his being overcome by the appearance of the good in the form of pleasure.

This interpretation seems quite plausible and in keeping with my prior argument on *akrasia* and the hedonic calculus. It has the additional advantage of arguing for the view that Socrates takes into account irrational motivation and, for that reason, is an improvement over other versions of Socratic intellectualism.

But Socrates' assertion about not desiring the bad is relevant for another reason. With this claim, Socrates implies that our actions reveal our deepest convictions about what is valuable and choice-worthy. He is thus able to reframe the question regarding courage, knowledge, and the good that was earlier left unfinished (358e2-4): "If what was said before is true, then would anyone be willing to go toward the things he dreads, when it is possible for him to go toward what he does not? Is this not impossible from what has been agreed?" (*εἰ ἀληθὴ τὰ ἔμπροσθεν ἔστιν, ἄρα τις ἀνθρώπων ἐθελήσει ἐπὶ ταῦτα ἵέναι ἃ δέδοικεν, ἐξὸν ἐπὶ ἃ μή; ἢ ἀδύνατον ἐκ τῶν ὡμολογημένων*; 358e2-4). In other words, on the basis of the hedonistic premise that pleasure is the good and that no one will go toward the bad—that is, the unpleasant—the necessary conclusion is that no one will go toward what he fears. The result of this conclusion is that the difference between the courageous and the cowardly cannot be that the latter avoid fearsome things and the former pursue them, as Protagoras had earlier maintained (see 349e ff.), since, on the basis of the notion that no one goes willingly toward the bad, both the courageous and the cowardly would avoid what is fearsome. Instead, says Socrates, they both go toward

those things about which they feel confident (359e). But Protagoras resists this conclusion on the grounds that the courageous and the cowardly go in opposite directions; for example, one goes toward war, the other avoids it. Then Socrates asks whether going to war is noble or shameful. Protagoras responds that it is noble. This means, says Socrates, that the cowardly avoid what is noble, which, as Protagoras reluctantly agrees, is impossible on the basis of their previous agreement that everyone desires what is good. The cowardly and the courageous, then, pursue the same things: the good, the noble, and the pleasurable, so that one cannot be distinguished from the other on that basis. Rather, the only thing that distinguishes the cowardly from the courageous is what each considers good and noble. The courageous are not afraid when they know that what they are confident about is something good and noble (and, conversely, they are afraid when they would pursue what is bad and shameful), while the cowardly are afraid when they are *mistaken* about what is good and noble—which means that, in their ignorance, they may boldly pursue what is bad and shameful.

Courage is knowledge of good and bad, noble and shameful. But this is more than just a syllogistic argument in favor of the unity of virtue. For by insisting that there are people who can be very courageous, yet unjust and ignorant, Protagoras seemed to endorse the view that the courageous person can act bravely with no notion of whether his action is for good or bad. Socrates is now correcting this view. If the person who seems to act courageously does not *know* whether his action is for good or bad, that person cannot be considered courageous, but is, rather, foolhardy. For an action to be courageous, one must know why the fight is a good and noble one. Fighting alone is not courage; it is rashness.

In his view of virtue as multiple, Protagoras had separated virtue from knowledge and the good. Knowledge was for gaining political and personal ascendancy; the good was the pleasurable; and virtue was for acquiring a good reputation. With his last argument about desiring the good and about courage and knowledge, Socrates has put the virtues back together again.

In this way, Socrates seems, by the end of the dialogue, to have refuted Protagoras' claim that some men can be extremely ignorant, yet very courageous. But does this exhaust this line of questioning? Protagoras certainly thinks so: *φιλονικεῖν μοι, δοκεῖς, ὦ Σώκρατες* ("you seem to be a lover of victory, Socrates," 360e3). For Protagoras all that has been at stake in the exchange with Socrates is victory and defeat, and he is even willing to concede the latter—thus appearing to be the nobler of the two. For his part, Socrates makes one last attempt to enlist Protagoras' cooperation by proposing that they continue the examination of the topic about which both have proven to be ignorant: the nature of virtue. The sophist graciously declines. Both men may desire the good but, in the end, both are frustrated in their aim: Protagoras fails to obtain the victory he desires, while Socrates fails to persuade the sophist.

#### 14. Conclusion

In my discussion of the encounter between Socrates and Protagoras, I have attempted to show that Socrates' paradoxical statements are not isolated maxims that only reflect an intellectualist ethics; they are, rather, a response to Protagoras' own claims about virtue and knowledge. In particular, I have argued that the question of the unity of virtue is a response to Protagoras' claim in his Great Speech that virtue is one; yet, under scrutiny,

Protagoras reveals that he views each virtue not only as distinct but also as in opposition to the others. Similarly, when Socrates inserts the maxim that no one does wrong willingly into his exegesis of the poem of Simonides, he implicitly chastises Protagoras for his indiscriminate advocacy of his audience's values for the sake of recognition and financial gain. On the other hand, the denial of *akrasia* has two purposes. First, it is related to Protagoras' own claim that he teaches *ἐνβουλία*—that is, self-restraint in the face of strong emotion or desire. Thus it is Protagoras who asserts that knowledge is sufficient for virtue and self-control. Second, it enables Socrates to reformulate the view of the many so that *akrasia* can mean desiring the good but being ignorant of what that is. This reformulation effects a shift away from the Protagorean view of knowledge as necessary for having power over others toward Socrates' emphasis on the need for self-rule, based on moderation and self-control.



# CHAPTER 3

## THE POWER OF SELF-RULE: SOCRATIC ETHICS IN THE *GORGIAS*

### 1. Introduction

The principal claim of Socrates' interlocutors in the *Gorgias* is that rhetoric—and specifically the kind that Gorgias teaches—is the greatest and most desirable good because its practitioner is able to acquire power over others; he both advances his self-interest and protects himself from being harmed. The power of Gorgianic rhetoric<sup>1</sup> is thus presented as a natural good that everyone desires to possess. As we saw in Chapter 1, Callicles expresses this view most boldly and eloquently in his speeches, where his main concern is the meaning of having and exercising one's natural power. In this chapter, I turn to Socrates' response to this claim, as he engages with each of his interlocutors. I will propose that Socrates' seemingly paradoxical claims and provocative arguments in these successive exchanges are meant 1) to undermine Gorgianic rhetoric's claim to power; 2) to suggest that, to the extent that Gorgianic rhetoric is either indifferent to the well-being of others or prompts others to do harm, it cannot be deemed good or powerful and, hence, cannot be desirable; and 3) to replace Gorgianic rhetoric with the rhetoric of philosophy, with its emphasis on self-rule, harmony, and community. On this reading, Socrates' claims should not be interpreted as primarily expressing an

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this chapter, I refer to Gorgianic rhetoric because it is rhetoric as conceived and taught by Gorgias that Socrates aims to criticize. As Coulter (1964: 284) notes, in the *Gorgias* Plato "subjected rhetorical doctrines which he attributed to Gorgias to criticism." Moreover, Socrates attempts to replace Gorgianic rhetoric, which aims at the pleasurable and thus at the appearance of good, with the rhetoric of philosophy, which aims at the truth.

intellectualist ethics that commits him to the notion that it is sufficient to judge something to be good in order to desire it.<sup>2</sup> Rather, I hope to show that if we understand Socrates' claims in the context of those of his interlocutors, it will become clear that his commitment is to an ethics in which reason and knowledge cannot be considered to have attained their meaning if they are either indifferent to the well-being of others or even cause them harm. True reason and knowledge recognize that what is in one's own interest requires understanding that the interests of others are part of one's own.

## 2. Gorgias and Socrates on Rhetoric

The conversation between Socrates and Gorgias that takes place shortly after the dialogue begins has often been interpreted either 1) as an *agon* between rhetorician and philosopher in which Socrates unfairly defeats Gorgias by making him contradict himself, thus besting him at his own game and proving the superiority of philosophy,<sup>3</sup> or 2) as a refutation *ad hominem* in which Socrates wishes to reveal "the inconsistency between what he says and what he does."<sup>4</sup> In contrast to these interpretations, I will

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<sup>2</sup> Scholars who have focused on the *Gorgias* as expressing, in some form or other, Socrates' intellectualist ethics include: Penner 1991; Cooper 1999a: 43; Segvic 2000; Reshotko 2006; Barney 2010; Brickhose and Smith 2010. Kahn (1987: 85) believes that Socrates' intellectualist views are "a deliberate simplification on Plato's part, designed to make plausible the insights contained in the Socratic paradoxes." Nevertheless, and despite Kahn's proleptic reading of the dialogues, he maintains that "Plato must decisively break" with Socrates' intellectualism "in order to distinguish reason and appetite as separate and potentially conflicting factors in the soul."

<sup>3</sup> There are different versions of this view, and with different emphases, but the notion that Socrates "traps" or "ensnares" Gorgias and has competitive aims is one that many interpreters share; see, for example, Irwin 1979: 125-28; Fussi 2001: 123; Stauffer 2006: 21; McCoy 2008: 88-91. Two notable exceptions are Dodds 1959:220, who remarks that the purpose of the argument on rhetoric and justice is to bring out the "implicit contradiction" between Gorgias' claim "that rhetoric is concerned with right and wrong (454b), and the denial of the teacher's responsibility (456c-457c) [...]," and Benardete 1991: 5-30, who sees Socrates as trying to demonstrate how powerless rhetoric, in fact, is.

<sup>4</sup> Kahn 1983: 80.

propose that what is at stake in the conversation between Socrates and Gorgias is more than the philosopher's desire to outdo the rhetor or the question of the value of rhetoric vis-à-vis philosophy or even Socrates' attempt to reveal Gorgias' contradictory stance. The fundamental question is whether rhetoric can, in fact, be a value-neutral activity, as Gorgias claims, given that its purpose, as he also claims, is to persuade others *in order to have power over them*. Gorgias' arguments entail that for the rhetor to be successful he must either disregard the interests of his audience or even go against them. From this perspective, it is not just that rhetoric, because it appeals to pleasure rather than reason, is bad, while philosophy, because it appeals to reason rather than pleasure, is good. Rather, the problem, as Plato has Socrates represent it, is that Gorgianic rhetoric exerts its power by being *indifferent* to its consequences for self and other.<sup>5</sup> Socrates, in this exchange with Gorgias, uses the craft analogy so as to show that Gorgianic rhetoric runs contrary to how other crafts operate. For those crafts to be effective, they must be other-minded—that is, they must take into account the interests of the person who receives the benefit of the craft and they must have knowledge of how they provide this benefit. Thus for the medical doctor to be effective he must be able to understand what ails his patient and know how to cure him; similarly, for the carpenter to be effective he must be able to build a house that is good for his client. Simply stated, craftsmen must possess the kind of knowledge that will enable them to benefit the recipient of their craft. Yet rhetoric, as Gorgias conceives it, is a craft that neither possesses knowledge nor ponders the needs of its audience. And this is where the connection between rhetoric, justice, and knowledge

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<sup>5</sup> Coulter (1964) makes a similar point, though from the perspective of comparing Gorgianic and Socratic rhetoric, by analyzing the differences between Plato's *Apology of Socrates* and Gorgias' *Defense of Palamedes*. He suggests that, despite appearances, the style and content of the *Apology* constitute a critique of the ethical and epistemological views implicitly expressed in Gorgias' *Defense of Palamedes*.

becomes relevant. Can the rhetor, as a craftsman who purports to benefit the recipients of his craft, exert influence over others without any sense of *how* he benefits or harms them? This question elicits, in turn, the motive question of the exchange between Gorgias and Socrates: can the rhetor *act* justly without *being* just and without *knowing* what it means to be just? Gorgias' implied answer to this question is yes, the rhetor can act justly, in that he can act in accordance with social and legal conventions, without himself being just or knowing what it means to be just—without, that is, having to ponder the question of what it means to harm another. For Socrates this answer is unacceptable: to limit oneself to acting according to moral conventions without an examination of what it means to act rightly or wrongly ultimately leads to wrongdoing, even if unwillingly or unknowingly.

Thus the exchange Plato dramatizes is best construed as a juxtaposition of two different views on the ways in which knowledge bears on ethical action.

### 3. Gorgias on Rhetoric as the Greatest Good

Not long after Socrates has engaged Gorgias in the question of what kind of craft rhetoric is, the famous rhetorician declares that his craft is the “greatest good” (*μέγιστον ἀγαθόν*) because “it is the source of freedom for humankind itself and at the same time it is for each person the source of rule over others in one’s own city” (*αἴτιον ἅμα μὲν ἐλευθερίας αὐτοῖς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἅμα δὲ τοῦ ἄλλων ἄρχειν ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ πόλει ἐκάστω*, 452d). He then goes on to say that rhetoric is better than the craft of the doctor, the physical trainer, and the moneymaker because (452e4-7):

καίτοι ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ δυνάμει δοῦλον μὲν ἔξεις τὸν ἰατρόν, δοῦλον δὲ τὸν παιδοτρίβην· ὁ δὲ χρηματιστὴς οὗτος ἄλλω ἀναφανήσεται χρηματιζόμενος καὶ οὐχ αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ σοὶ τῷ δυναμένῳ λέγειν καὶ πείθειν τὰ πλήθη.

with this ability you'll have the doctor for your slave and the physical trainer, too. As for this financial expert of yours, he'll turn out to be making more money for somebody else instead of himself; for you, in fact, if you've got the ability to speak and to persuade the crowds.

With this claim Gorgias has already announced the theme of power<sup>6</sup> that runs through the dialogue and he also reveals his own ethical stance. Rhetoric is the “greatest good” because it satisfies an individual's desire to have power over others. Thus Gorgias commits himself to the notion that self-benefit has to occur at the expense of another: for me to be free, you must be enslaved and, what is more, you must give your consent. Rhetoric, then, is the greatest good because it is all powerful. Gorgias' claims also anticipate the theme of *pleonexia* that is so prominent in the discussion with Callicles. He exemplifies this later in the dialogue in his speech on the power of rhetoric (456b6-c7):

φημί δὲ καὶ εἰς πόλιν ὅπῃ βούλει ἐλθόντα ῥητορικὸν ἄνδρα καὶ ἰατρόν, εἰ δέοι λόγῳ διαγωνίζεσθαι ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ ἢ ἐν ἄλλῳ τινὶ συλλόγῳ ὁπότερον δεῖ αἰρεθῆναι ἰατρόν, οὐδαμοῦ ἂν φανῆναι τὸν ἰατρόν, ἀλλ' αἰρεθῆναι ἂν τὸν εἰπεῖν δυνατόν, εἰ βούλοιο. καὶ εἰ πρὸς ἄλλον γε δημιουργὸν ὄντιναοῦν ἀγωνίζοιτο, πείσειεν ἂν αὐτὸν ἐλέσθαι ὁ ῥητορικὸς μᾶλλον ἢ ἄλλος ὅστισοῦν· οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν περὶ ὅτου οὐκ ἂν πιθανώτερον εἴποι ὁ ῥητορικὸς ἢ ἄλλος ὅστισοῦν τῶν δημιουργῶν ἐν πλήθει. ἢ μὲν οὖν δύναμις τοσαύτη ἐστὶν καὶ τοιαύτη τῆς τέχνης.

And I maintain too that if a rhetorician and a doctor came to any city anywhere you like and had to compete in speaking in the assembly or some other gathering over which of them should be appointed doctor, the doctor wouldn't make any showing at all, but the one who had the ability to speak would be appointed, if he so wished. And if he were to compete with any other craftsman whatever, the rhetorician more than anyone else would persuade them that they should appoint him, for there isn't anything that the rhetorician couldn't speak more persuasively

<sup>6</sup> See Dodds 1959: 202.

about to a gathering than could any other craftsman whatever. That's how great the accomplishment of this craft is, and the sort of accomplishment it is.

Gorgias' speech is a response to Socrates' attempt to restrict the expertise and knowledge of the rhetorician. For Socrates had said that the rhetorician is not qualified to give advice on technical questions, since he has no real knowledge (455b-d). Gorgias, however, refuses to set any limit on rhetoric. Rhetoric is more powerful than any other craft because, even without knowledge, it can accomplish what other crafts cannot: it can convince the crowds of anything. But at this point the rhetorician inserts a disclaimer into his speech: though rhetoric confers great power, this does not entitle the rhetor to use it against his friends or family. He then goes on to argue that the rhetorician should not be held responsible if his student harms another with his rhetorical skills (456d5-457a4):

*οὐδὲ γε μὰ Δία ἔάν τις εἰς παλαιστράην φοιτήσας εὖ ἔχων τὸ σῶμα καὶ πυκτικὸς γενόμενος, ἔπειτα τὸν πατέρα τύπτῃ καὶ τὴν μητέρα ἢ ἄλλον τινὰ τῶν οἰκείων ἢ τῶν φίλων, οὐ τούτου ἕνεκα δεῖ τοὺς παιδοτρίβας καὶ τοὺς ἐν τοῖς ὅπλοις διδάσκοντας μάχεσθαι μισεῖν τε καὶ ἐκβάλλειν ἐκ τῶν πόλεων. ἐκεῖνοι μὲν γὰρ παρέδωσαν ἐπὶ τῷ δικαίῳ χρῆσθαι τούτοις πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους καὶ τοὺς ἀδικοῦντας, ἀμυνομένους, μὴ ὑπάρχοντας. οἱ δὲ μεταστρέψαντες χρῶνται τῇ ἰσχύϊ καὶ τῇ τέχνῃ οὐκ ὀρθῶς. οὐκ οὖν οἱ διδάξαντες πονηροί, οὐδὲ ἡ τέχνη οὔτε αἰτία οὔτε πονηρὰ τούτου ἕνεκα ἐστίν, ἀλλ' οἱ μὴ χρῶμενοι οἴμαι ὀρθῶς. ὁ αὐτὸς δὲ λόγος καὶ περὶ τῆς ῥητορικῆς. δυνατὸς μὲν γὰρ πρὸς ἅπαντάς ἐστιν ὁ ῥήτωρ καὶ περὶ παντὸς λέγειν, ὥστε πιθανώτερος εἶναι ἐν τοῖς πλήθεσιν ἔμβραχυ περὶ ὅτου ἂν βούληται. ἀλλ' οὐδὲν τι μᾶλλον τούτου ἕνεκα δεῖ οὔτε τοὺς ἰατροὺς τὴν δόξαν ἀφαιρεῖσθαι—ὅτι δύναιτο ἂν τοῦτο ποιῆσαι—οὔτε τοὺς ἄλλους δημιουργοὺς, ἀλλὰ δικαίως καὶ τῇ ῥητορικῇ χρῆσθαι, ὥσπερ καὶ τῇ ἀγωνίᾳ.*

Imagine someone who after attending wrestling school, getting his body into good shape, and becoming a boxer, went on to strike his father and mother or any other family member or friend, that's no reason to hate physical trainers and people who teach fighting in armor, and to exile them from their cities. For while these people imparted their skills to be used justly against enemies and wrongdoers, and in defense, not aggression, their pupils pervert their strength and skill and misuse them. So it's not their teachers who are wicked, nor is this a reason why the craft

should be a cause of wickedness; the ones who misuse it are supposedly the wicked ones. And the same is true for oratory as well. The orator has the ability to speak against everyone on every subject, so as in gatherings to be more persuasive, in short, about anything he likes, but the fact that he has the ability to rob doctors or other craftsmen of their reputations doesn't give him any more of a reason to do it. He should use oratory justly, as he would any competitive skill.

With the analogy to boxing, Gorgias wishes to make the case for the ethical neutrality of rhetoric by invoking the popular Greek ethical notion that it is right to help friends and harm enemies. Neither the physical trainer nor the rhetorician is morally responsible for the wrongdoing of his pupils since they both teach their crafts within the confines of conventional norms of justice: it is just to use one's skill and power against enemies but not friends and relatives.<sup>7</sup> If the student uses his skill to harm his friends and family, this is not because the trainer or rhetorician has taught him to do injustice, but because the student has disregarded conventional norms of right and wrong. Rhetoric, according to Gorgias, does not instill values (the student brings those as part of his upbringing); rather, it teaches a value-neutral skill. The central question, of course, remains: if the purpose of rhetoric is to achieve unlimited power over others, how can rhetoric be value-neutral? In his discussion with Gorgias, Socrates brings to the foreground the contradictions inherent in Gorgias' ethical stance, as well as its underpinnings. In order to accomplish this, he uses his famous and controversial craft analogy.

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<sup>7</sup> Blundell 1989: 26: "Greek popular thought is pervaded by the assumption that one should help one's friends and harm one's enemies. These fundamental principles surface continually from Homer onwards and survive well into the Roman period ...." She goes on to give a plethora of sources, from Homer onwards, where this sentiment is expressed.

#### 4. The Controversy around Socrates' Craft Analogy

The craft analogy is what scholars have come to designate Socrates' frequent use of the crafts in different dialogues so as to make analogical comparisons to the virtues. The analogy works thus: just as being a doctor is a matter of expertise, so also being a good and just person is a matter of expertise.

Many scholars have interpreted Socrates' use of the craft analogy as expressing his desire to establish a moral *theory* in which the qualities associated with a craft, such as rational stability and dependability, can be used in the service of establishing a craft of virtue.<sup>8</sup> These scholars argue that Socrates has (mistakenly) identified moral knowledge with technical knowledge and thus conceives of this knowledge as the sole requirement for a happy and good life. Martha Nussbaum has dubbed this position “goodness without fragility,” referring to what she sees as Plato's moral optimism that an intellectualist ethics—that is, an ethics separated from the destabilizing effects of sensation and emotion—can lead to a flourishing life.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to this majority view of the craft analogy, David Roochnik has recently proposed that the goal of this analogy is not to establish a moral theory or to express moral optimism. Rather, he believes that in the “early” dialogues, “*Plato rejects techne as a model of moral knowledge*,” and that “the goal of these dialogues is *nontechnical knowledge*.”<sup>10</sup> Roochnik goes on to argue that for Socrates “moral knowledge cannot be

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<sup>8</sup> Gould 1955; Irwin, 1977; Nussbaum 1986; Reeve 1988; Penner 1992. For a discussion of the commonalities and differences among these scholars with respect to the craft analogy, see Roochnik 1998: Introduction.

<sup>9</sup> Nussbaum 1986.

<sup>10</sup> Roochnik 1998: xix, his italics.



authoritatively mastered, unambiguously possessed, and straightforwardly taught.”<sup>11</sup> On his interpretation, the Socratic analogy is meant to point toward the indeterminacy and fluidity of moral knowledge.

Although my own view of Socrates’ use of the craft analogy is, in some ways, closer to those of Roochnik, it seems to me that both his interpretation and the standard one are but two sides of the same coin. Both arguments assume that what Plato means with the craft analogy is to describe the *quality* of the moral knowledge one should wish to attain. On the majority view, the craft analogy points to the possibility of a fixed, stable, and purely rational moral knowledge; on Roochnik’s, the analogy serves the opposite task, to underscore the indeterminacy of moral knowledge. But is the quality of the knowledge what is at stake in these analogies? More specifically, is this what concerns Socrates in his exchange with Gorgias?

In contrast to these views, I will propose that the purpose of the analogy has less to do with defining moral knowledge—whether it should be fixed and stable, or fluid and indeterminate—and more with the notion that an intrinsic feature of the crafts, and of knowledge of the crafts, is their ability to confer a benefit. The carpenter’s knowledge results in the capacity to build a good and functioning piece of furniture for another. The knowledge of the medical doctor benefits his patients. Knowledge is also what can be shared and passed on from craftsman to pupil. By contrast, Gorgias seems to imply that the power of rhetoric lies in its capacity to persuade, wholly apart from any expertise or specific knowledge on the part of the speaker. In pointing to this discrepancy between the crafts and rhetoric, Socrates does not simply attack rhetoric in favor of philosophy,

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<sup>11</sup> Roochnik 1998: xxiv.

but rather he makes clear how Gorgianic rhetoric runs contrary to what one expects a craft to be able to do and accomplish—namely, to benefit both agent and receiver. Moreover, by using the model of the crafts, Socrates shows that there is a necessary and vital connection between conferring a benefit and contributing to the well-being of another. One cannot claim to confer a benefit if one's actions result in harm to another person.

Thus Socrates attempts to demonstrate that (1) it is in the nature of crafts always to aim at what is good and beneficial in their particular area; (2) the craftsman uses reasoned belief in order to understand what the benefit of his particular craft is; and (3) in order to be beneficial, the crafts do not overreach.

The craft analogy, then, rather than describing or contrasting the kind of ethical knowledge one should or can attain, points to the question of what it *means* to have ethical knowledge—that is, what it means to know that one is acting in a way that is beneficial to another.

## 5. The Craft Analogy

Socrates presents the craft analogy to Gorgias with the following series: just as a carpenter is such by virtue of having learned carpentry, and a musician is such by virtue of having learned music, and a doctor is such by virtue of having learned medicine, isn't it the case that so also "a man who has learned what's just is a just man?" (ὁ τὰ δίκαια μεμαθηκώς δίκαιος;) Gorgias agrees without hesitation, "Absolutely" (πάντως δήπου, 460b5-7).

It is this identification between knowing justice and being just that has led commentators to label Socrates an intellectualist, since he seems to believe that knowledge is sufficient for virtue. But more puzzling than this identification, however, is Gorgias' ready acceptance of it. If Socrates' analogy is so outlandish, why does Gorgias agree with it?

Commentators have either avoided interpreting this passage or glossed over it. John Cooper, for example, believes that Gorgias accepts Socrates' analogy because "Socrates has injected issues into the discussion that are too much for Gorgias to comprehend on the spot, or to see clearly how he ought to address them."<sup>12</sup> For his part, Terry Irwin believes that Gorgias must agree with Socrates if he is to avoid seeming morally indifferent.<sup>13</sup> But Gorgias doesn't seem to be confused or trapped. Rather, his response evinces that Socrates' formulation is one that he wholeheartedly believes. Dodds' comments are, in this regard, illuminating:

From Homer onwards, moral conduct had been explained in terms of knowledge, not in terms of will—a concept which is completely absent from early Greek thought. This was natural in a society which judged men by their actions, not by their intentions . . . . The *ἀγαθός* was the man who did things well, and doing things well involved knowing how to do them...The originality of Socrates lay not in the invention of a private paradox . . . but in making explicit the unconscious presuppositions of traditional Greek thinking about conduct: hence Gorgias accepts his view without a qualm . . .<sup>14</sup>

According to Dodds, Gorgias can accept the view that knowing justice also means being just because Socrates is simply repeating a widely shared belief, according to which a person's actions are identified with his moral character. Dodds' explanation tells us

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<sup>12</sup> Cooper 1999a: 45.

<sup>13</sup> Irwin 1995: 98.

<sup>14</sup> Dodds 1959: 218.

something about the kind of knowledge Socrates has in mind and how it differs from that of Gorgias. Indeed, for Gorgias, if a man knows the moral conventions of right and wrong of his society and acts according to them—or, at least, is perceived as acting that way—then that man can teach the just and the unjust and, in this way, also be just. The knowledge of justice that Gorgias probably has in mind, then, has to do with being acquainted with this set of conventional norms, in particular, the norms that govern arguing cases in a court of law. The good rhetorician knows these conventions and, with his rhetorical skill, can use them to his advantage so as to persuade his audience to view the case as he wishes them to.

Socrates, on the other hand, has something entirely different in mind when he speaks of knowledge of what is just—namely, knowing what is beneficial for someone, in particular, what is beneficial for his psychic well-being. So, while Gorgias sees the question of benefit as separate from the question of knowing right from wrong, Socrates wishes to connect them: an action is just only if it also benefits the recipient of the action, and a person is just only if he has an understanding of the benefit his action confers and how it confers that benefit. So when Socrates says that knowing what is just also means being just, he wishes to make it evident that there is no divide between self-interest and just action: one's interests will be implicit in one's actions, so that if one doesn't know what constitutes one's interests or the interests of the other, one's actions run serious risk of doing harm to oneself and the other—and hence, one will be unjust.

Socrates makes clear the connection that exists between benefit, knowledge, and action when he gives his speech on how rhetoric differs from the crafts.<sup>15</sup> He begins by distinguishing between two types of crafts, those that tend to the body, which are medicine and physical training, and those that tend to the psyche, which are legislation and justice (464b). Each of these crafts has its spurious imitation (*εἰδωλον*), which is a form of flattery (*κολακεία*). What differentiates the genuine crafts from flattery is that while the former tend to body and psyche by *knowing what is best for them*, flattery “takes no thought at all of whatever is best” and, instead, aims at what is pleasant (464cd). Moreover, while the genuine crafts can give an account (*λόγος*) of how it is that they benefit the psyche or the body, flattery “guesses at what’s pleasant” and is unable to state how or why it proceeds the way it does and what the cause of each thing is (464d-465a). Flattery, then, is an *ἄλογον πρᾶγμα*, a practice that lacks an account—an irrational practice.

From Socrates’ description of what constitutes a craft, two features emerge as particularly relevant: 1) that their *intent* is to care for and benefit that which is their object by looking toward what is best for it,<sup>16</sup> and 2) that they have a rational understanding of how to apply such care to their object.<sup>17</sup> For Socrates, then, knowledge

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<sup>15</sup> The themes in this speech have much in common with those of the conversation between Socrates and Hippocrates in the *Protagoras*. In both cases, Socrates draws on a comparison to the body to establish the need to care for the soul; in both, the question of “care” is central, and both emphasize that sophists and rhetoricians cater to the pleasant under the guise of knowing what is good, though they are, in fact, ignorant of what that is.

<sup>16</sup> ἀεὶ πρὸς τὸ βέλτιστον θεραπευουσῶν τῶν μὲν τὸ σῶμα, τῶν δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν (“they [the four crafts] always provide care, in one case for the body, in the other for the soul, with a view to what’s best,” 464c4-5).

<sup>17</sup> Socrates states this in terms of why rhetoric is a knack and not a craft, but, stripped of the negatives, it is an assertion of what characterizes the crafts: ὅτι οὐκ ἔχει λόγον οὐδένα ᾧ προσφέρει ἃ προσφέρει ὅσοι ἅττα τὴν φύσιν ἐστίν, ὥστε τὴν αἰτίαν ἐκάστου μὴ ἔχειν εἰπεῖν (“because it [flattery] has no account of the nature of

of “just things” refers not to a set of conventional norms or definitions of justice, but to having an understanding of what is most beneficial to someone—in particular, what is most beneficial to someone’s psyche. Being just requires both this knowledge and a desire to confer this benefit. And thus, the craft analogy becomes a useful metaphor for the kind of ethics that Socrates advocates. For just as the crafts are effective, not merely on the basis of the actions they take, but on the basis of their being able to confer some benefit by knowing why and how those actions are beneficial, so also the question of right and wrong cannot be settled on the basis of actions that conform to a prescribed set of norms or to a particular notion of justice, but only on the basis of an agent’s being able to account for why and how an action either benefits or harms. As long as Gorgianic rhetoric is unconcerned with the well-being of others, it cannot be considered a true craft. Its power remains that of a knack.

## 6. Polus on the Power of Gorgianic Rhetoric

The question of the value of Gorgianic rhetoric continues to be at the center of the discussion that ensues between Polus and Socrates. Unlike Gorgias, however, Polus emphasizes that rhetoric is valuable, even if it results in injustice. Polus articulates this paradox about rhetoric, when, in his bafflement that Socrates would call rhetoric a form of flattery, he asks how rhetors could be held in such low regard when they hold the greatest power in their cities, for they “put to death anyone they want, and confiscate the

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whatever things it applies in the way in which it applies them, so that it’s unable to state the cause of each thing,” 465a3-5). Dodds (1959: 230) emends this line so that it reads: *ὅτι οὐκ ἔχει λόγον οὐδένα <ἢ> ᾧ προσφέρει ἃ προσφέρει ὅποῦ ἅττα τὴν φύσιν ἐστίν, ὥστε τὴν αἰτίαν ἐκάστου μὴ ἔχειν εἰπεῖν*, and renders it thus: “it has no rational understanding of the nature of the patient or of the prescription.” The emendation is certainly helpful, in that it seems to convey Socrates’ meaning more accurately.

property and banish from their cities whomever they please” (*ἀποκτείνουσιν τε ὃν ἂν βούλωνται, καὶ ἀφαιροῦνται χρήματα καὶ ἐκβάλλουσιν ἐκ τῶν πόλεων ὃν ἂν δοκῇ αὐτοῖς*, 466b11-c2). According to Polus, rhetors are worthy of admiration not because of their skill or the benefit they offer, but because they have the power to commit injustice with impunity.

Rather than address directly the question of injustice and whether it is something good and beneficial or bad and harmful, Socrates counters Polus’ claim with two major assertions: 1) that rhetors and tyrants do not have real power in their cities because, although they do what seems best to them, they do not do what they want (466b-468e), and 2) that doing injustice is worse than suffering it (469b-475e). This latter assertion leads to the consequent claim that it is worse to commit injustice and escape paying the penalty than it is to commit injustice and be punished (476a-479e). In summation, Socrates concludes that rhetoric is of no value unless it is used to accuse oneself or one’s friends and relatives of injustice, for it is only by undergoing proper punishment that psychic disease can be eradicated and healing effected (480a-481b). With these arguments, Socrates reverses Gorgias’ claim that rhetoric is valuable as a means of having power over others through persuasion. In particular, the notion that one should accuse oneself of wrongdoing as a form of therapy is a clever reversal of Gorgias’ earlier claim that rhetoric is useful for persuading the patient to submit to the doctor’s curative prescription, no matter how unappetizing or painful it may be (see 456b). Socrates now suggests that rhetors, rather than having power over others through persuasion, should use their skill to persuade themselves and others like them of their injustice and to ask for their due punishment. Socrates’ reversal and transformation of the use of rhetoric in this

exchange is itself highly rhetorical and even humorous, yet it nevertheless captures a particular ethical stance. For Socrates argues that the proper purpose of the considerable power of rhetoric is to benefit not only oneself but also others.

In what follows, I will address only the first step in this transformation—namely, Socrates' claim that rhetors and tyrants act as it seems best to them (*ποιεῖν ὅτι ἂν αὐτοῖς δοῖται βέλτιστον εἶναι*), but not as they want (*οὐδὲν ποιεῖν ὧν βούλονται*) and that, therefore, they are the least powerful people in their cities. I will first summarize how this passage has been interpreted and then offer an alternative understanding.

In attempting to elucidate Socrates' paradoxical claim, commentators have mostly focused on what Socrates means by wanting or desiring and whether he means that people desire the apparent or the real good.<sup>18</sup> In general, however, these commentators seem to agree that Socrates refers to the *real* good. The difference is in how each agent understands this desire for the real good. Thus, for example, Terry Penner and Christopher Rowe argue that Socrates' meaning is that the agent, in acting as he does, is aiming at what will *truly* benefit him, even if the means he uses are not the ones that will enable him to obtain the good he seeks.<sup>19</sup> Heda Segvic proposes that Socratic wanting (*βούλεσθαι*) refers to desiring an object that one *knows* to be good, which entails that the agent must have prior knowledge of what is good (something that is not, in fact, apparent in the text).<sup>20</sup> Rachana Kamtekar, on the other hand, argues that the kind of wanting

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, McTighe 1984; Penner 1991; Penner and Rowe 1994; Segvic 2000; Kamtekar 2006; and Barney 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Penner and Rowe 1994: 3-10.

<sup>20</sup> Segvic 2000: 9-11.



(βούλεσθαι) Socrates speaks of refers to the agent's *unavowed* desire for what is really good, a desire that becomes evident in other conative behavior (such as feeling satisfied or dissatisfied when obtaining an avowed good). This kind of wanting does not require *knowledge* of the good (it is not, that is, cognitive) but refers to an *orientation* toward or *attraction* to the good that is present in everyone.<sup>21</sup> Most recently, Rachel Barney has argued that the Socratic notion of desiring the good (as presented in the *Gorgias* and other dialogues) entails both desiring the apparent *and* the real good so that the latter is a clarification of the former: when people desire what *seems* good to them they are also expressing a desire for what is “antecedently valuable”—that is, a desire for what is valuable aside from the agent's immediate perception of what he considers to be good for himself.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast to these interpretations, Kevin McTighe has proposed that Socrates' argument regarding rhetors and tyrants is fallacious and that its purpose is to be provocative, so as to lead Polus to contradict himself, thus “purging” him of his conceited beliefs. The fallacy, according to McTighe, is that Socrates initially argues for the view that all desire is desire for the apparent good, yet he later concludes that desiring what seems good is not equivalent to doing what one desires.<sup>23</sup>

As illuminating as some of these interpretations may be, they do not really address Socrates's intent with this argument. I will reexamine this passage and suggest that Socrates wishes to separate the desire to gratify appetitive pleasures from the desire

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<sup>21</sup> Kamtekar 2006: 153.

<sup>22</sup> Barney 2010: 65-66.

<sup>23</sup> McTighe 1984.

to benefit oneself and to identify the former with non-rational aims and the latter with rational ones. Socrates suggests that doing whatever one pleases does not necessarily mean that one is acting rationally or freely or in one's true self-interest. In support of this argument, I offer a rereading of the crucial passage.

In response to Socrates's assertion that rhetoric is not a craft but merely a part of flattery and that rhetors are not held in any regard in their cities, Polus says that, on the contrary, rhetors are highly esteemed in their cities because they possess "the greatest power" (466b4) and evidence of this we find in that they, like tyrants (466b11-c2),

*ἀποκτεινύασιν τε ὃν ἂν βούλωνται, καὶ ἀφαιροῦνται χρήματα καὶ ἐκβάλλουσιν ἐκ τῶν πόλεων ὃν ἂν δοκῇ αὐτοῖς.*

put to death anyone they want, and confiscate their property and banish from their cities anyone they see fit (466b11-c2).

Socrates, taking advantage of Polus' wording, says that with this assertion Polus is, in fact, raising two different issues and proceeds to make the following distinction (466d6-e2):

*φημὶ γάρ, ὦ Πῶλε, ἐγὼ καὶ τοὺς ῥήτορας καὶ τοὺς τυράννους δύνασθαι μὲν ἐνταῖς πόλεσιν σμικρότατον, ὥσπερ νυνδὴ ἔλεγον· οὐδὲν γὰρ ποιεῖν ὧν βούλονται ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν, ποιεῖν μέντοι ὅτι ἂν αὐτοῖς δόξῃ βέλτιστον εἶναι.*

I say, Polus, that both rhetoricians and tyrants have the least power in their cities, as I was saying just now. For they do just about nothing they want to, though they certainly do whatever they see most fit to do.

Socrates' semantic distinction is, no doubt, meant to be dialectical (rather than a literal redefinition of common usage of these terms), in that its initial purpose is to reveal Polus's *unidimensional* view of power and self-interest. For, on Polus' account, self-interest is reduced to being able to do whatever one pleases in defiance of established

norms so as to gratify one's impulses, which, in turn, requires wrongdoing. He makes this view explicit when he cites the case of Archelaus as an example of the tyrant who has prospered precisely because he has been able to attain all of what he desires by committing the most heinous crimes (*τὰ μέγιστα ἡδίκηκεν*). One can only, it seems, be free, prosperous, and happy if one gratifies one's aggressive and *pleonectic* impulses and disregards conventional norms.

It is precisely this view that Socrates wishes to counteract and refute, and he achieves this by suggesting, first, that there are two different sources of motivation for action and, second, that the value of an action is not in itself but in the benefit or harm that accrues to the agent as a result of it. Socrates wishes to locate an agent's well-being (and harm) in something other than the concrete acquisition of power and impulse gratification.

With respect to motivation, Socrates proposes that there are actions motivated by what one wants (*ποιεῖν ἃ βουλομαι*) and actions motivated by what one sees fit (*ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ μοι*). The difference between these two motivations does not become apparent until Socrates clarifies what power is (466e9-467a10):

*ΣΩ.* Ἀγαθὸν οὖν οἷε εἶναι, ἐάν τις ποιῇ ταῦτα ἃ ἂν δοκῇ αὐτῷ βέλτιστα εἶναι, νοῦν μὴ ἔχων; καὶ τοῦτο καλεῖς σὺ μέγα δύνασθαι;

*ΠΩΛ.* Οὐκ ἔγωγε.

*ΣΩ.* Οὐκοῦν ἀποδείξεις τοὺς ῥήτορας νοῦν ἔχοντας καὶ τέχνην τὴν ῥητορικὴν ἀλλὰ μὴ κολακείαν, ἐμὲ ἐξελέγξας; εἰ δέ με ἐάσεις ἀνέλεγκτον, οἱ ῥήτορες οἱ ποιοῦντες ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτοῖς καὶ οἱ τύραννοι οὐδὲν ἀγαθὸν τοῦτο κερτήσονται, ἢ δὲ δυνάμεις ἐστίν, ὥς σὺ φῆς, ἀγαθόν, τὸ δὲ ποιεῖν ἄνευ νοῦ ἃ δοκεῖ καὶ σὺ ὁμολογεῖς κακὸν εἶναι· ἢ οὐ;

*ΠΩΛ.* Ἔγωγε.

*ΣΩ.* Πῶς ἂν οὖν οἱ ῥήτορες μέγα δύναιτο ἢ οἱ τύραννοι ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν, ἐὰν μὴ Σωκράτης ἐξελεγχθῇ ὑπὸ Πώλου ὅτι ποιοῦσιν ἃ βούλονται;

Socrates: Do you think it's good, then, if a person does whatever he sees most fit to do when he lacks intelligence? Do you call this "having great power" too?

Polus: No, I don't.

Socrates: Will you refute me, then, and prove that orators do have the intelligence, and that oratory is a craft, and not flattery? If you leave me unrefuted, then the orators who do what they see fit in their cities, and the tyrants, too, won't have gained any good by this. Power is a good thing, you say, but you agree with me that doing what one sees fit without intelligence is bad. Or don't you?

Polus: Yes, I do.

Socrates: How then could it be that orators or tyrants have great power in their cities, so long as Socrates is not refuted by Polus to show that they do what they want?

For Polus to demonstrate that rhetors and tyrants are indeed powerful he must first show that their actions are motivated by *νοῦς*—that is, by sense and intelligence. Rhetors and tyrants, however, when they act as they see fit, act without *νοῦς*. It is this thoughtlessness, this lack of *νοῦς*, that characterizes their actions and that is the reason why they do not do what they want. Socrates thus implicitly connects doing what one wants (*ποιεῖν ἃ βούλομαι*) with acting rationally (with *νοῦς*), and doing merely as one sees fit (*ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖν μοι*) with acting non-rationally (without *νοῦς*). Only agents who possess *νοῦς* act as they want because only they act rationally, while agents who act lacking *νοῦς* act irrationally and, therefore, do as they see fit.

Socrates' emphasis upon *νοῦς* not only points to the irrationality of rhetors and tyrants, but also posits the motivation of an action as the source of its ethical value, rather than the action itself. Socrates is suggesting to Polus that if he wishes to judge whether rhetors and tyrants are powerful he must first inquire into the motivation for their actions. If rhetors and tyrants act as they do because they are driven by the desire to gratify their impulses—to act, that is, as they do, simply because they feel like it—without being able to account for the goodness of their action, they cannot be deemed powerful. Polus must

show that it is reason, rather than impulse, that motivates rhetors and tyrants, if they are truly to be deemed powerful.

Socrates next takes up the question of benefit. He wishes to show that in their actions rhetors and tyrants do wrong not for the sake of the action itself but for the presumed benefit of the action. Indeed, says Socrates, when an agent acts, he does so wanting the thing for the sake of which he is undertaking the current action and not the action itself (467c5-7). An example of this means-to-an-end action is when someone takes medicine: the agent doesn't *want* the medicine itself but what the medicine will bring, which is health (467c7-10). Other examples of means-to-an-end actions are walking, running, standing still, and so on. Thus Socrates formulates the following general claim (468b1-8):

*Τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἄρα διώκοντες καὶ βαδίζομεν ὅταν βαδίζωμεν, οἴομενοι βέλτιον εἶναι, καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον ἔσταμεν ὅταν ἐστῶμεν, τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἕνεκα, τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ... Οὐκοῦν καὶ ἀποκτείνουμεν, εἴ τιν' ἀποκτείνουμεν, καὶ ἐκβάλλομεν καὶ ἀφαιρούμεθα χρήματα, οἴομενοι ἄμεινον εἶναι ἡμῖν ταῦτα ποιεῖν ἢ μή·*

Therefore, it is because we pursue what's good that we walk whenever we walk, supposing that it is better to walk, and, conversely, whenever we stand still it is for the sake of the same thing, [supposing] that it is good... And don't we also put a person to death, if we do, or banish him and confiscate his property because we suppose that doing these things is better for us than not doing them?

By comparing ordinary actions, such as taking medicine or walking or standing, to the actions of rhetoricians and tyrants, Socrates suggests that all these actions are of a similar type: they are means-to-an-end actions, rather than actions that are desired for themselves. The point of this comparison is to demonstrate (1) that rhetors and tyrants, in doing wrong, do not desire the wrongful action *per se* but the benefits they believe they will receive as a result of the action, and (2) that the benefit (or harm) of the action lies

elsewhere. The question of benefit also emphasizes that rhetors and tyrants, though they derive pleasure from doing whatever they please, do not act in their own interest, even if they believe that they do. Socrates thus separates pleasure from benefit and wrongdoing from desire. He also obliquely proposes that no one desires to do wrong but that the agent who does act wrongfully believes that his acts will benefit him. The question of doing wrong, then, is no longer about whether one adapts or fails to adapt to conventional norms, but whether one is effective at securing one's self-interest. Socrates emphasizes this when he asks Polus (468d1-e5):

εἴ τις ἀποκτείνει τινὰ ἢ ἐκβάλλει ἐκ πόλεως ἢ ἀφαιρεῖται χρήματα, εἴτε τύραννος ὢν εἴτε ῥήτωρ, οἷόμενος ἄμεινον εἶναι αὐτῷ, τυγχάνει δὲ ὄν κάκιον, οὗτος δήπου ποιεῖ ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ.. Ἄρ' οὖν καὶ ἃ βούλεται, εἴτερ τυγχάνει ταῦτα κακὰ ὄντα;.

If someone, whether tyrant or orator, kills someone or expels him from the city or confiscates his property because he *supposes* that doing this is better for himself, when *in fact it is* worse, this person, I take it, *is doing what he sees fit* ... Then, is he also doing what he wants, if these things are in fact bad?

The actions of a rhetor or a tyrant are wrong not because they go against established laws, but because the rhetor or the tyrant acted deeming (οἷόμενος) his actions to be better for him, *not knowing* that *in fact* (τυγχάνει δὲ ὄν) they are worse for him. It is because he fails in his aim of benefiting himself that the rhetor or the tyrant acts as he pleases (ποιεῖ ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ) and not as he wants (ἃ βούλεται).

On the basis of these passages, I hope to have established that the purpose of Socrates' argument about rhetors and tyrants is not only to expose Polus' simplistic account of self-interest and agency, nor only to draw a distinction between desires for the

apparent good and for the real good.<sup>24</sup> Rather, Socrates wishes to question and undermine the power that Polus claims for rhetors and tyrants by linking their actions to irrational aims, which cannot, as such, truly serve their interests.

## 7. Socrates on Callicles and Geometrical Proportion

In his speeches, Callicles presents humans as naturally aggressive, as *pleonectic*, and as bound to one another only by ties of power, submission, and fear. From this perspective, success in the *polis* depends on one's ability to protect oneself and one's own from other people's wrongdoing, as well as to obtain a greater share of appetitive gratification. Whatever bonds of friendship people form, then, are on the basis of two goals: self-preservation and self-aggrandizement. In the world Callicles describes, then, there is no true community but only competitive interests.

In the last part of the *Gorgias*, Socrates does not refute Callicles' view, but rather suggests its impossibility and presents an alternative. He emphasizes friendship and community and suggests that the world operates not on the basis of excess and chaos but self-restraint and order. In this way, Socrates replaces Callicles' antithesis between *νόμος* and *φύσις* with the notion of a harmonious whole where *νόμος is φύσις*.

Socrates first underscores that humans do not exist in isolation at the outset of his exchange with Callicles (481c5-8):

ὦ Καλλίκλεις, εἰ μή τι ἦν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάθος, τοῖς μὲν ἄλλοι τι, τοῖς δὲ ἄλλοι τι ἢ τὸ αὐτό, ἀλλὰ τις ἡμῶν ἰδίον τι ἔπασχεν πάθος ἢ οἱ ἄλλοι, οὐκ ἂν ἦν ῥάδιον ἐνδείξασθαι τῷ ἐτέρῳ τὸ ἑαυτοῦ πάθημα.

<sup>24</sup> As McTighe (1984: 203-207) argues (and Barney [2010: 82 and 87] acknowledges) Socrates equivocates in his argument and refers to the good sometimes in objective, sometimes in subjective, terms, which makes it difficult to differentiate clearly between the apparent and the real good. This equivocation might well suggest that the purpose of the argument is not to make a distinction between the two.

Callicles, if human beings did not have an experience in common, some sharing one, some another, but one of us had a private experience unshared by the rest, it would not be easy to reveal one's own experience to another person.

Even before Callicles has embarked on his first speech, Socrates has anticipated and preempted its theme. The basis of human communication is commonality of experience. Communication does not consist primarily in two people saying *words* that each can understand, but of resonating with each other's experience. Here, Socrates seems to be alluding to what we would today call *empathy*—that is, the capacity to *feel* oneself into the experience of another. It is this basic capacity that enables communication and understanding among humans. Socrates goes on to exemplify this capacity when he says that he and Callicles share an experience in common, that of being lovers. Socrates understands Callicles' erotic passion because he, too, has felt it. Therefore, there is no such thing as a private world, for this would make a community of humans impossible. Rather, there is a common world within which experience is shared in common.

But with this assertion Socrates is anticipating and contradicting another Calliclean theme: inequality among humans. Socrates' assertion that humans can share in the same experiences means that a basic equality exists among them, whatever their other differences. Callicles and Socrates may well be different sorts of lovers, but their mutual experience of erotic passion equalizes them. The differences among humans, then, are not as great as Callicles imagines nor is the gap between them.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See Newell 2000: 34, who suggests that the differences between Socrates and Callicles are not as great as they seem.



But it is not until after he has completed his refutation of Callicles (at 499b) that Socrates elaborates on the themes of moderation, order, friendship, and community, when he says that the reason for promoting order and organization in the individual is that social relations would be otherwise impossible (507d6-508a8):

*οὗτος ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ ὁ σκοπὸς εἶναι πρὸς ὃν βλέποντα δεῖ ζῆν, καὶ πάντα εἰς τοῦτο τὰ αὐτοῦ συντείνοντα καὶ τὰ τῆς πόλεως, ὅπως δικαιοσύνη παρέσται καὶ σωφροσύνη τῷ μακαρίῳ μέλλοντι ἔσεσθαι, οὕτω πράττειν, οὐκ ἐπιθυμίας ἑῶντα ἀκολάστους εἶναι καὶ ταύτας ἐπιχειροῦντα πληροῦν, ἀνήνυτον κακόν, ληστοῦ βίον ζῶντα. οὔτε γὰρ ἂν ἄλλω ἀνθρώπῳ προσφιλέης ἂν εἴη ὁ τοιοῦτος οὔτε θεῷ: κοινωνεῖν γὰρ ἀδύνατος, ὅτῳ δὲ μὴ ἔνι κοινωνία, φιλία οὐκ ἂν εἴη. φασὶ δ' οἱ σοφοί, ὧς Καλλίκλεις, καὶ οὐρανὸν καὶ γῆν καὶ θεοὺς καὶ ἀνθρώπους τὴν κοινωνίαν συνέχειν καὶ φιλίαν καὶ κοσμιότητα καὶ σωφροσύνην καὶ δικαιοσύνην, καὶ τὸ ὅλον τοῦτο διὰ ταῦτα κόσμον καλοῦσιν, ὧς ἑταῖρε, οὐκ ἀκοσμίαν οὐδὲ ἀκολασίαν. σὺ δέ μοι δοκεῖς οὐ προσέχειν τὸν νοῦν τούτοις, καὶ ταῦτα σοφὸς ὢν, ἀλλὰ λεληθέν σε ὅτι ἡ ἰσότης ἡ γεωμετρικὴ καὶ ἐν θεοῖς καὶ ἐν ἀνθρώποις μέγα δύναται, σὺ δὲ πλεονεξίαν οἶε δεῖν ἀσκεῖν: γεωμετρίας γὰρ ἀμελεῖς.*

This is the mark toward which I think one should look in living, and in his actions he should direct all of his own affairs and those of his city to the end that justice and self-control will be present in one who is to be blessed. He should not allow his appetites to be undisciplined or undertake to fulfill them—that's interminably bad—and live the life of a pirate. Such a man could not be dear to another man or to a god, for he cannot be a partner, and where there's no partnership there's no friendship. Yes, Callicles, wise men claim that partnership and friendship, orderliness, self-control, and justice hold together heaven and earth, and gods and men, and that is why they call this universe a world order, my friend, and not an undisciplined world-disorder. I believe that you don't pay attention to these facts, even though you're a wise man in these matters. You've failed to notice that proportionate equality has great power among both gods and men, and you suppose that you ought to practice getting the greater share. That's because you neglect geometry.

A man who lives according to the principle of *pleonexia*, as Callicles would urge it, cannot himself prosper or be part of a prosperous community, for he would be no more than a pirate (*ληστής*) with whom it is impossible to form ties of friendship or cooperation. How can I befriend, or cooperate with, someone whose sole intention is to rob me? To endeavor to be self-controlled and just is not simply for the sake of

upholding the seemingly arbitrary conventions of the many. Rather, it is because the world as we know it depends for its existence on a community within which each member is a necessary element in the formation of a well-ordered structure. Socrates had earlier alluded to this idea when he said that for craftsmen to produce their objects they must arrange everything according to a certain harmonious order; only then can they produce a good object. For a house to be a good house its parts must stand in a certain order and arrangement with respect to each other (see 503d-e). Partnership, friendship, orderliness, self-control, and justice are not only what make human existence viable and possible but also the world itself. Callicles would understand this if he realized that what rules the world is *geometrical equality* (ἡ ἰσότης ἡ γεωμετρικὴ).

Socrates does not make clear what the relationship is between geometry, moderation, and justice, nor how geometry shows that order is natural.<sup>26</sup> The implicit contrast with arithmetical or numerical equality,<sup>27</sup> however, does imply that the world can be understood in either of these ways. In order to understand how order prevails in the world, one would have to have knowledge of geometrical proportion. Understanding the world as Callicles does requires simple arithmetical measure,<sup>28</sup> the kind that Socrates, in the *Republic*, says laymen, merchants, and traders practice.<sup>29</sup> Callicles, likewise,

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<sup>26</sup> See Irwin 1979: 226, who notes, in particular, that Socrates would have to explain further why understanding geometrical equality would make *pleonexia* undesirable.

<sup>27</sup> Dodds (1959: 339) notes that geometrical equality “stands in implied contrast both to numerical equality and arithmetical progression . . . . Irwin (1979: 226) also notes that geometrical equality “normally refers to some proportional arrangement, as opposed to numerical equality.”

<sup>28</sup> See R. E. Allen 1987: 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Rep.* 525b-c. The guardians must study arithmetic in order to understand the nature of numbers, not in order to do simple arithmetic; see also Burnyeat 2001: 9.

imagines that the world operates on additions and subtractions: when some get more, others get less or nothing, so that the gain of one is the loss of the other. From an arithmetical perspective, justice can only be a zero-sum game. But what Callicles seems not to realize is that the world could not exist on the basis of such a calculation of justice, for social relations would not be possible.

In contrast to arithmetic, geometrical equality operates on ratios and proportions. When applied to justice and social relations, geometrical proportion is based on *needs*, those of the individual and of the community. Socrates captures this best not in the *Gorgias* but in the second book of the *Republic*, when he describes how a city comes to be.<sup>30</sup> Socrates builds a *polis* based on people's lack of self-sufficiency (369b5-c4):

γίνεται τοῖνυν, ἣν δ' ἐγώ, πόλις, ὥς ἐγῶμαι, ἐπειδὴ τυγχάνει ἡμῶν ἕκαστος οὐκ αὐτάρκης, ἀλλὰ πολλῶν ὧν ἐνδεής [...]. οὕτω δὴ ἄρα παραλαμβάνων ἄλλος ἄλλον, ἐπ' ἄλλου, τὸν δ' ἐπ' ἄλλου χρεῖα, πολλῶν δεόμενοι, πολλοὺς εἰς μίαν οἴκησιν ἀγείραντες κοινωνοὺς τε καὶ βοηθοὺς, ταύτῃ τῇ συνοικίᾳ ἐθέμεθα πόλιν ὄνομα: ἧ γάρ;

I believe a city comes to be because we are not self-sufficient, but we all need many things . . . . So, then, one person associates with another out of one need, and another out of another, all being in need of many things, and we gather in a single place to live together as partners and helpers. And such a community we call a city, don't we?

Cities emerge because people come together in order to provide for their own needs, which are not *pleonectic* but proportional—different people, that is, need different things. Socrates imagines help and cooperation to occur and cities to come into being on the basis of this proportional need. Socrates goes on to say that people also have different abilities (370c) and, so, the combination of need and ability produces a division of

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<sup>30</sup> I owe the connection between geometrical equality and the notion of need as it is stated in the *Republic* to R. E. Allen 1987: 7-8, although his elaboration differs from mine.

specialized labor in which each person both provides for a specific need in the community and, in turn, has his needs satisfied. Thus farmers provide food, builders houses, weavers clothes, and so on. Once again, need and ability are proportional: what the farmer produces for the community and what he takes from it are in proportion to his need and his ability. This proportional division of labor and of goods ensures that there is neither excess nor dearth; all are satisfied.<sup>31</sup> But there is another consequence of the principle of specialization: it not only ensures mutual satisfaction but also promotes a *geometrical progression* of growth,<sup>32</sup> in which “more plentiful and better quality goods are more easily produced” (ἐκ δὴ τούτων πλείω τε ἕκαστα γίγνεται καὶ κάλλιον καὶ ἔῤῃον, 370c3-4). Mutual satisfaction of needs, then, results in a proportionally higher benefit; giving and taking is thus more effective and efficient at satisfying needs than just taking.

But perhaps the main lesson to draw from the geometrical proportion of this original city vis-à-vis Callicles is what it reveals about the nature of moderation. For, on Socrates’ account it is because humans rely on each other at a fundamental level for their well-being<sup>33</sup> that moderation is built into the fabric of social relations *beyond*

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<sup>31</sup> For a similar view about the meaning of geometrical equality in the *Gorgias*, see R. E. Allen 1987: 6-10.

<sup>32</sup> See Dodds 1959: 339. Geometrical progression refers to the fact that the ratio between the higher terms in a progression is greater than the one between the lower terms. For example, 16 exceeds 8 by more than 8 exceeds 4. In the same way, in the original city Socrates constructs in Book II of the *Republic* satisfying the needs of five people results in being able to extend the satisfaction to a greater number of people.

<sup>33</sup> I disagree with Woolf (2000: 13) that in the *Gorgias* Socrates is an individualist—that is, that he believes that social order depends primarily on the individual soul alone and that the order is built from the bottom-up. On the contrary, as I have argued, geometrical equality entails that the needs of the individual and the needs of the community are inextricably bound so that *both* create a proportional balance whereby the needs of the individual and those of the community are met. In this sense, my argument is that, when we understand Socrates’ claims in the context of those of his interlocutors, it should become clear that his commitment is to an ethics in which reason and knowledge cannot be considered to be truly such if they are either indifferent to the well being of others or even cause them harm. That is, true reason and knowledge recognize that what is in my own interest involves understanding that the interests of others are part of my own interest.

conventional norms. For it would not be possible for the individual to derive any significant benefit for himself from communal living without exercising some form of moderation—that is, without taking into account, at least to some extent, the needs of the other person. Thus, for example, if the farmer constantly tries to get more for himself from other producers and give them less, the other producers will eventually not be able to provide what is needed so that, in time, even the farmer will not be able to get what he needs. Need ties human beings in a way unlike anything. Finally, the satisfaction of need does not rely on arithmetical additions, but on geometrical proportion: only the amount that a person needs for his well-being will be satisfactory—no more, no less.

In Book IV of the *Republic*, Socrates will express this geometrical proportion, and the moderation that it entails, through a different concept, that of the tripartite psyche.

## 8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that 1) one of the main themes of the *Gorgias* is to question and undermine the power of Gorgianic rhetoric, and that 2) Socrates is committed to an ethics in which reason and knowledge can only be considered to be such when they are in the service of the well-being of others. Thus, on my reading, it is possible to see that Socrates goes well beyond the mere intellectualist notion that it is sufficient to judge something to be good in order to desire it. I have argued that Socrates' use of the craft analogy is designed to question Gorgias' claim that rhetoric is the most desirable of crafts by underscoring that it cannot be a craft, given that it is indifferent to the good of the other. With respect to Polus, I have suggested that Socrates' paradoxical claim that rhetors and tyrants do not act as they wish but only as it seems best to them is not

primarily meant to make a point about the real or apparent good but to undermine Polus' claims about their power. Rhetors and tyrants are not truly powerful people because they act irrationally and are unable to look after their self-interest. In the case of Callicles, I have proposed that Socrates wishes to counteract his rhetoric of power and *pleonectic* hedonism by emphasizing self-rule and moderation and by connecting those to the possibility of community and friendship.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE TRIPARTITE PSYCHE AND SELF-RULE IN THE *REPUBLIC*: IS SOCRATIC ETHICS TRANSFORMED?

#### 1. Introduction

In this final chapter, I turn to the *Republic* in order to examine briefly those aspects of the dialogue that commentators have often seen as either a correction to, or a departure from, the Socratic ethics of the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*. I will argue in favor of three ideas. First, the purpose of the tripartite psyche is not primarily to underline the importance of psychic conflict, but to present a further elaboration of the notion already present in the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* that it is self-rule, understood as a harmonizing of parts rather than as a forceful suppression of one part by another, that enables the individual to be successful in the *polis* and that makes social and political relations viable. Second, in arguing for psychic tripartition Socrates means to show that appetites are value neutral and, in this way, to caution against identifying pleasure with the good. Socrates' position in the *Republic* is thus in agreement with his *implicit* position in the *Protagoras*, in that Socrates denies in both instances that appetite, in itself, is a desire for the good. And third, although the Leontius story in Book IV seems to represent a strange form of *akratic* action, Socrates does not, in fact, present *akrasia* as the explanation for that phenomenon. Through this brief discussion of the *Republic*, I hope to show how consistently Plato has represented Socrates' ethical position in these three dialogues.

## 2. The Role of Psychic Tripartition in the *Republic*

Modern scholars have hailed Plato's use and elaboration of the concept of the tripartite psyche in Books IV, VIII, and IX of the *Republic* for its ability to describe the complexity of human motivation and moral action,<sup>1</sup> and much has been written about its psychological significance.<sup>2</sup> However, more recently, commentators have begun to question whether psychic tripartition in the *Republic* represents Plato's new theory of mind, given that Socrates describes it in different ways at different points in the *Republic*; these scholars have begun to see psychic partition as playing more of an argumentative than a theoretical role.<sup>3</sup>

I believe this shift in interpretation is salutary for three reasons. First, it helps explain why Socrates' views about the soul are not univocal, whether in the *Republic* or when the *Republic* is compared to other dialogues. From this perspective, any notion of soul that Socrates develops is not meant primarily as a theory of mind but in order to advance a specific argument in the most effective way. In the case of the *Republic*, it is important to keep in mind that the purpose of the dialogue is not to elucidate the workings of the human mind but to demonstrate how justice is valuable in itself, and to show the effect of its presence or absence on the soul. Advancing the notion of psychic division is an effective way of accomplishing this task. Second, this interpretive shift prevents us from arbitrarily extracting from their proper context those aspects of

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<sup>1</sup> See, most notably, Cooper 1999b: 118-13: "From this perspective Plato's *Republic* theory can be seen as a stage in the progression from Socratic rationalism to the Aristotelian theory that moral virtue is an interfusion of reason and desire ..." (p. 119).

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Kahn 1987; Klosko 1988; Reeve 1988: 118-169; Price 1995: chap. 2; Lear 1998: 219-246; Cooper 1999b: 118-137; and Bobonich 2002: 216-292.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Roochnik 2003: 17-18; Blössner 2007; and Ferrari 2007.



Socrates' views about the soul that we find suggestive and then elevating them to the level of a theory. Third, this interpretation avoids the pitfalls and circularity of the developmental view. It is not that Plato's Socrates either contradicts himself or changes his mind but, rather, he advances provisional arguments so as to support a specific view.

Following this line of interpretation, I would like to suggest that the notion of the tripartite psyche in the *Republic* has at least three important functions. First, it is a response to Glaucon's objection in Book II that justice is not worth pursuing, except instrumentally, because it does not provide the individual with what will make him happy, such as having limitless power over others, amassing material goods, and unlimited gratification of sexual appetites (see 359c-360d). From this perspective, psychic conflict is a useful concept in Socrates' effort to demonstrate to Glaucon that to pursue these supposed goods does not result in happiness and well-being, but in alienation and madness—and that, therefore, they are not real goods. Moreover, the notion of psychic tripartition enables Socrates to refute more effectively the claims of figures such as Thrasymachus and Callicles that the tyrant above all exercises sound judgment and acts intelligently (see *Rep.* 341a and 348d, *Gorg.* 491e-492a), claims about which Glaucon seems to be ambivalent.

Second, the notion of psychic tripartition enables Socrates to show that justice and self-control are not only in the interest of the individual but that they can also originate from within a person's own soul. Thus Socrates will show that the inhibition of certain desires is not primarily the result of obeying conventional norms (as Callicles would have it), but that this is a capacity that individuals constantly exercise in the service of what

they deem to be good for themselves. Odysseus and the thirsty man are good examples of self-imposed control over the appetites.

Third, the construct of the tripartite psyche enables Socrates to present justice as an immaterial, invisible order and harmony and, in this way, to dissociate it from the material and physical goods that, according to Glaucon, lead people to desire to commit injustice (360b-c). This shift is important if Socrates is to prove that justice is in the interest of the individual and that his self-interest does not preclude the well-being and success of others. By dissociating justice from the acquisition of material goods and making it rather a function of the well-ordered psyche, Socrates can present virtue as a state of being of the individual rather than a matter of his external actions.

From the perspective that I am proposing, the construct of psychic tripartition has more to do with advancing the larger argument of the *Republic* regarding the desirability of justice for its own sake than with establishing a comprehensive theory of mind that takes into account the importance of irrational desires as a motivation for action.

### 3. Justice in the City and the Soul

At *Republic* 4.434c, Socrates asserts that justice is “for the money-making, auxiliary, and guardian classes each to do its own work in the city” (χρηματιστικοῦ, ἐπικουρικοῦ, φυλακικοῦ γένους οἰκαιοπραγία, ἐκάστου τούτων τὸ αὐτοῦ πράττοντος ἐν πόλει, 4.434c7-9). Immediately after that, however, he warns that this view of justice cannot yet be taken as secure, unless “we find that the same form, when it comes to be in each individual person, is accepted as justice there as well” (ἀλλ’ ἐὰν μὲν ἡμῖν καὶ εἰς ἓνα ἕκαστον τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἶόν τὸ εἶδος τοῦτο ὁμολογήῃται καὶ ἐκεῖ δικαιοσύνη εἶναι, 4.434d2-4). In other words, justice in

the city is only possible if there is justice in the individual. Socrates' insistence in this passage and others that in order to know what justice is there must be a correspondence between city and soul has important implications for the argument. With this analogy Socrates can dispel the notion that there is tension between civic justice and the interests of the individual and, instead, posit that justice is not only necessary for there to be a city but that it is a requirement for the individual if he is to achieve well-being and happiness. In this way, Socrates' city-soul analogy effectively counters the notion that justice is the result of a social contract between those who would want to do injustice to one another but are unwilling to suffer it.

The city-soul analogy is also important in another way. It marks a shift within the *Republic* from the physical and visible to the immaterial and invisible. The existence of cities and their division into different groups of people, such as craftsmen, soldiers, and rulers, is an observable fact. The existence of a soul with different parts is not.<sup>4</sup> The city-soul analogy enables Socrates to offer an observable paradigm that can serve as a springboard to the description of more abstract concepts and even to the invisible. A focus upon the invisible and non-material is pivotal if Socrates is to sever the connection between justice and those concrete rewards, such as honor and wealth, that Glaucon and Adeimantus associated with it in Book II. The shift to the invisible enables Socrates to implicitly emphasize that it is what cannot be directly observed that has the greatest effect upon a person's well-being and happiness.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Blössner 2007: 346. He makes the additional point that the political aspect of the *Republic* "is in the service of and subordinate to the ethical goal of consideration of the individual."

<sup>5</sup> This, of course, is what Glaucon had asked Socrates to do in Book II, when he said he wanted to know the effect of justice in and of itself on the soul (cf. 358b).

#### 4. Psychic Tripartition, Appetitive Desires, and Desire for the Good

Once Socrates shifts the focus to the question of justice in the individual psyche, he proceeds to demonstrate that just as there are three parts in the city, so also the soul is constituted by three distinct parts. Socrates achieves this analogy by appealing to the principle of opposites: one cannot want and reject the same thing at the same time with the same part of oneself. Instead, it must be that one part of oneself does the wanting and another the rejecting. As I discussed earlier,<sup>6</sup> many interpreters of Plato understand this notion of psychic conflict as a correction to what they see as Socrates' intellectualist view that knowledge is sufficient for moral action. The main correction, they argue, is that the tripartite psyche permits Socrates to recognize that there are raw desires, those that are good-independent and that, for that reason, cannot align with what the agent may believe is best. This recognition is understood to prove that Plato recognizes in the *Republic* that there is an irrational part within us that can overcome our knowledge of what is good; *akrasia* is, then, possible.<sup>7</sup>

The Platonic passage that is often cited to argue for this view is the following (437d8-438a5):

*ἄρ' οὖν, καθ' ὅσον δίψα ἐστί, πλέονος ἢ οὗ λέγομεν ἐπιθυμία ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ εἶη, οἷον δίψα ἐστί δίψα ἁρά γε θερμοῦ ποτοῦ ἢ ψυχροῦ, ἢ πολλοῦ ἢ ὀλίγου, ἢ καὶ ἐνὶ λόγῳ ποιοῦ τινος πάματος; ἢ ἐὰν μὲν τις θερμοῦ τῷ δίψει προσῇ, τὴν τοῦ ψυχροῦ ἐπιθυμίαν προσπαρέχουτ' ἄν, ἐὰν δὲ ψυχρότης, τὴν τοῦ θερμοῦ; ἐὰν δὲ διὰ πλήθους παρουσίας πολλῇ ἢ δίψα ᾖ, τὴν τοῦ πολλοῦ παρέξεται, ἐὰν δὲ ὀλίγη, τὴν τοῦ ὀλίγου; αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ*

<sup>6</sup> See the Introduction to this chapter and the beginning of section 2.

<sup>7</sup> Proponents of some variant of this view include: Kahn: 1988; Reeve 1988: 135; Vlastos 1988: 99 and 105; Penner 1992: 128-129; Brickhouse and Smith 1994: 90 n. 25, 98 n. 35; Irwin 1995: 205; R. Parry 1996: 93-94; Lorenz 2004; Anagnostopoulos 2006; Brickhouse and Smith 2010: 199-205.

διψῆν οὐ μή ποτε ἄλλου γένηται ἐπιθυμία ἢ οὔπερ πέφυκεν, αὐτοῦ πάματος, καὶ αὖ τὸ πεινῆν βρώματος;  
 .....μήτοι τις, ἣν δ' ἐγώ, ἀσκέπτους ἡμᾶς ὄντας θορυβήσῃ, ὡς οὐδεὶς ποτοῦ ἐπιθυμεῖ ἀλλὰ χρηστοῦ ποτοῦ, καὶ οὐ σίτου ἀλλὰ χρηστοῦ σίτου. πάντες γὰρ ἄρα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐπιθυμοῦσιν: εἰ οὖν ἡ δίψα ἐπιθυμία ἐστί, χρηστοῦ ἂν εἴῃ εἴτε πάματος εἴτε ἄλλου ὅτου ἐστὶν ἐπιθυμία, καὶ αἱ ἄλλαι οὕτω.

Now, insofar as it is thirst, is it an appetite in the soul for more than that for which we say that it is the appetite? For example, is thirst for hot drink or cold, or much drink or little, or, in a word, for drink of a certain sort? Or isn't rather that, where heat is present as well as thirst, it causes the appetite to be for something cold as well, and where cold for something hot, and where there is much thirst because of the presence of muchness, it will cause the desire to be for much, and where little for little? But thirst itself will never be for anything other than what it is in its nature to be for—namely, drink itself, and hunger for food ...

Therefore, let no one catch us unprepared and disturb us by claiming that no one has an appetite for drink but rather beneficial drink, nor food but beneficial food, on the grounds that everyone after all has appetite for good things, so that if thirst is an appetite, it will be an appetite for beneficial drink or whatever, and similarly with others.

In the first part of this passage, Socrates wishes to underscore that appetites, as such, are *value neutral*. Being thirsty does not represent an appetite for too much or too little drink or for hot or cold drink, but solely for drink. Similarly, hunger is an appetite just for food, not any particular amount or kind of food. The implication is that how or to what extent an appetite is satisfied is independent of the appetite itself.

In the second part of this passage, Socrates further qualifies his claims by saying that, given that appetites are value neutral, we should not be disturbed when someone claims that an appetite for something is an appetite for something *good or beneficial* on the ground that “everyone has an appetite for good things” (πάντες γὰρ ἄρα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐπιθυμοῦσιν). It is this particular sentence that has been so problematic, as many commentators have taken it to mean that Socrates is referring to his own claim that

everyone desires the good and that now he is correcting that claim with the argument that there are desires that are good-independent.

The problem with this interpretation is that it is built on two assumptions: 1) that saying “everyone has an appetite for good things” is equivalent to what Socrates says about desiring the good in other dialogues, and 2) that the imaginary interlocutor whom Socrates corrects is himself.<sup>8</sup> These two assumptions are, in fact, part of a circular argument in which the veracity of the first assumption depends on the veracity of the second, which, in turn, depends on the notion that Plato changed his mind about this issue, a notion that is then taken to be proven by this very passage. Such circularity does little to explain what this passage is actually about and what Socrates means with it in the context of Book IV. The passage merits reconsideration.<sup>9</sup>

I would like to suggest that the view Socrates wishes to correct by insisting on the value neutrality of appetites is not his own that everyone desires the good, but the notion that just because an appetite is attracted to an object so as to find satisfaction in it, that appetite is good. Socrates is warning Glaucon against identifying appetitive satisfaction with what is good. Instead, he says, there are no good or bad appetitive desires, there are simply appetitive desires. This argument presents an oblique rejection of the idea that bodily pleasures, as such, can be identified with the good. Moreover, denying that appetitive desires are for good things (or bad things, or too much or too little) in no way

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<sup>8</sup> Weiss (2007a: 94-95) argues that the objector cited in this passage is not Socrates but Glaucon.

<sup>9</sup> Carone (2001: 116 ff.) also reexamines this passage with a view to reconciling it with Socrates’ position in the *Protagoras*. Her contention is that Plato is not criticizing Socrates here but rather “bad argumentative use of the Socratic thesis”—bad because it does not recognize the “proper object of a faculty” (p. 119). Weiss (2007a: 96-100) argues that it is not this passage that represents a reversal of Socrates’ position in the *Protagoras* but, on the contrary, that it is the *Protagoras*, with its unique denial of *akrasia*, that represents such a reversal.

contradicts the Socratic view, as it appears in the *Protagoras* and other dialogues, that everyone desires the good.

In order to understand the force of the argument about the value-neutrality of appetites, it is important to underscore that its purpose, ultimately, is to show that the source for determining value or measure is different from the source of the appetite itself. It is in the nature of appetites, according to Socrates, to have a driving motion toward satisfaction, a motion that they themselves cannot stop or restrain (439a-b). Restraint requires something else. So when we observe a person who is thirsty and yet does not wish to drink (439c), we know that the thirst and the “not wishing” come from separate sources, for the thirst, unimpeded, would simply follow its trajectory toward drink; therefore, there must be something different from thirst stopping its course. In this way, Socrates concludes that there are two parts in the soul, one that reasons and calculates, and another that has an appetite for sex, food, and drink (439d). The latter impels the agent toward satisfaction, while the former can restrain this motion.

A soul with two parts, each with its particular function, is a way of describing how, in the normal course of things, appetites do not dominate: just because an appetite impels toward satisfaction, an agent is not powerless. Rather, agents constantly make decisions about which appetites should continue their course to satisfaction and which they wish to stop or delay, or to what extent and how to satisfy them. Moreover, the “good feeling” of satisfying an appetite does not, in and of itself, motivate the agent to satisfy it. The agent who decides not to drink when thirsty can still imagine that drinking a glass of water would “feel good”—and yet he holds to the decision not to drink. This

means that the *goodness*, as well as the *badness*, of a drink—that is, what is considered beneficial or harmful about it—must be extrinsic to the drink itself.

We find a similar idea in the *Protagoras*, although stated in different terms, when Socrates asks Protagoras, as representative of the many, if the many would consider painful experiences, such as athletics, military training, and medical treatments, good when they result in pleasant or desired outcomes, such as health, a good condition of the body, and preservation of cities (see *Prot.* 354a-b). Protagoras says they would. To be sure, the point of Socrates' question is to show the contradiction between considering pleasure the good yet willingly submitting oneself to painful experiences, which one considers bad, and thus to reveal that neither Protagoras nor the many have any standard of value for good and bad other than pleasure or pain. Nevertheless, Socrates' examples are relevant because they show that the good one seeks and the bad one wishes to avoid are not directly related to either the satisfaction of appetite or its suppression, but to whatever overall good one desires. Therefore, whatever immediate pleasure or immediate pain an action brings cannot be equated with the good or bad *qua* pleasure and pain. From this point of view, we can see how even in the *Protagoras* an appetite for drink is not necessarily an appetite for *good* drink or for the good, but simply for drink.

In both dialogues desiring the good is not the same as seeking the satisfaction of bodily appetites. Appetites, both in the *Protagoras* and the *Republic*, are value-neutral, since their satisfaction, in and of itself, does not lead to the outcome one *ultimately* desires. Both dialogues argue that an agent's desire for the good must be distinguished from his desire to satisfy an appetite for drink or food.



## 5. Psychic Tripartition and Self-Rule

Although Socrates builds his demonstration for psychic division on the notion of psychic conflict, the gist of the argument for tripartition is to show how effective self-control can and must come from *within* the agent. From this perspective, psychic tripartition is not about conflict but about how self-rule is possible.<sup>10</sup>

This emphasis upon the regulation of the self emerges in Socrates' first example, which is about thirsty people. The way we know that the soul has different parts, Socrates asserts, is because we can see that “sometimes there are people who, though thirsty, refuse to drink” (τινας ἔστιν ὅτε διψῶντας οὐκ ἐθέλειν πίνειν, 439c2-3). Socrates then explains this phenomenon (439c5-7):

*οὐκ ἐνεῖναι μὲν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ αὐτῶν τὸ κελεῦον, ἐνεῖναι δὲ τὸ κωλύον πίνειν, ἄλλο ὃν καὶ κρατοῦν τοῦ κελεύοντος;*

Isn't it that there is something in their soul that urges them to drink, and something that prevents them from doing so, something that is different and that overpowers the urging element?

If people are able to feel thirsty and yet restrain themselves from drinking, it must be that there are two different capacities in the soul. Indeed, the emphasis in Socrates' argument falls not on the power of thirst—not on the desire, that is—but on the part of the soul that enables the agent to exercise restraint in the face of thirst. Socrates remarks that the part that restrains can overrule or overpower (κρατοῦν) the part that urges to drink, rather than the other way around. Socrates then goes on to explain why each part acts as it does. The element that inhibits does so as a result of calculation (λογισμός), while the

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<sup>10</sup> Ferrari (2007: 169) also notes this when he says, “Self-control and endurance are much in evidence in this passage on soul-division ... .”

element that drives and drags people to drink does so as a consequence of feelings and diseases. An agent can, then, inhibit an appetite through the calculative element of his soul, rather than simply through a prohibition imposed from the outside. Socrates names this element *λογιστικόν*, while he calls the appetitive one *ἐπιθυμητικόν*.

Odysseus provides further example of self-control, one in which a third element in the soul, *θυμοειδές* or spiritedness, is at issue. Socrates had already referenced Odysseus in Book III (390d) when he described the kinds of stories that should be told to the future guardians. In this instance, Odysseus restrains himself from killing the suitors by “speaking to his heart” (*καρδίην ἠνίπαπε μύθῳ*, 441b6) and thus soothing his anger. Socrates says that this passage demonstrates how Homer “has represented the part that has calculated about better and worse as different from the part that is angry and without calculation when one rebukes the other” (*ὥς ἕτερον ἐτέρῳ ἐπιπλήττον πεποιήκεν Ὅμηρος τὸ ἀναλογισάμενον περὶ τοῦ βελτιόνος τε καὶ χείρονος τῷ ἀλογίστως θυμουμένῳ*, 441b7-c2). In this example, the emphasis is again on the power that the calculative part can exert over the irrational part through weighing better and worse, thus demonstrating that self-control not only can come from within, but is also a necessary element for the agent to achieve his goals.

Moreover, in the cases of Odysseus and the thirsty person, neither agent is struggling to decide between obeying moral conventions or gratifying his personal desires, but rather between two different desires. In the case of Odysseus, he restrains his anger and desire to kill the suitors, thinking that letting the maids lie with them one last time suits his plans better (see *Odyssey* 20.9 ff.). Odysseus’ conflict is not about what is best to do ethically but between his desire for revenge and how best to achieve this goal.

As for those who feel thirst but restrain their desire to drink (which Glaucon acknowledges many people are able to do, 439c), presumably the question is not an ethical one either. As G. R. F. Ferrari remarks, it is possible that what Socrates and Glaucon have in mind in this instance are people who are concerned with bodily health and are restraining themselves out of dietary concerns.<sup>11</sup> Again, the struggle is between two different desires and goals. Both examples imply that when the agent has clear goals about what is beneficial for him, he is able to calculate accordingly and restrain himself in the service of those goals. Self-restraint, then, is possible without an external authority to impose it.

The only instance where Socrates represents lack of self-control in Book IV is the case of Leontius. But, as I will argue below, the story of Leontius is not an example of true *akrasia*.

## 6. The Story of Leontius

Many scholars have read the story of Leontius as Plato's implicit correction of Socrates' rejection of *akrasia* in the *Protagoras*.<sup>12</sup> On their account, Leontius represents the man who is overpowered by the strength of his appetitive desires, despite "knowing" better, thus demonstrating that knowledge can be overcome by appetite. For example, C.D.C. Reeve argues, "Leontius' spirited desire to avoid looking at the sexually attractive corpses is overcome by his appetitive desire to look at them. The philosopher-kings, who

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<sup>11</sup> Ferrari 2007: 173-4.

<sup>12</sup> Among them are: Reeve 1988: 126; Taylor 1991: 203; and Brickhouse and Smith, 1994: 90 n. 25, 98 n. 35.

alone possess knowledge for the good, are least likely to act contrary to knowledge. But there is no suggestion that it is impossible that they should ... [a]krasia can occur, and it is caused by desire overpowering belief or knowledge about what is best to do.”<sup>13</sup>

To be sure, the story of Leontius does seem to describe the kind of phenomenon that the many in the *Protagoras* call “being overcome by pleasure” (*Prot.* 352d-e). After all, Socrates does say of Leontius that he *κρατούμενος* ... *ὑπὸ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας* (“was overcome by his desire,” 440a1), using the language typical of *akrasia*. But the relevant question is whether Socrates means to endorse the view of the many on *akrasia* with the story of Leontius, and thus implicitly refute himself, or whether his purpose is a different one. In what follows, I will suggest that in the story of Leontius Socrates does indeed use the language commonly employed to describe *akratic* action, but that this does not represent an endorsement of that common explanation for moral failure. Instead, the story of Leontius’ “weakness” is Socrates’ oblique parody of the common man’s notion of moral failure, which he then turns into a proof of something else: the existence of a third element in the soul that is separate from appetite.<sup>14</sup>

Let’s begin by examining the passage in question (439e6-440a3):

ἀλλ', ἣν δ' ἐγώ, ποτὲ ἀκούσας τι πιστεύω τούτῳ: ὡς ἄρα Λεόντιος ὁ Ἀγλαίωνος ἀνιὼν ἐκ Πειραιῶς ὑπὸ τὸ βόρειον τεῖχος ἐκτός, αἰσθόμενος νεκροὺς παρὰ τῷ δημίῳ κειμένους, ἅμα μὲν ἰδεῖν ἐπιθυμοῖ, ἅμα δὲ αὖ δυσχεραίνει καὶ ἀποτρέποι ἑαυτόν, καὶ τέως μὲν μάχοιτό τε καὶ παρακαλύπτοιο, κρατούμενος δ' οὖν ὑπὸ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας, διελκύσας τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς, προσδραμὼν πρὸς τοὺς νεκρούς, “ἰδοὺ ὑμῖν,” ἔφη, “ὦ κακοδαίμονες, ἐμπλήσθητε τοῦ καλοῦ θεάματος.”

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<sup>13</sup> Reeve 1988: 126.

<sup>14</sup> Other scholars who have resisted the conclusion that the case of Leontius proves that Plato changed his mind on the question of *akrasia* include: Ferrari 1990; Carone 2001; Shields 2001; and Weiss 2006, ch. 6. Ferrari and Carone, each in different ways, believe that the case of Leontius is not really one of *akrasia*, while Weiss believes that Socrates never *in propria persona* denies *akrasia*. Shields argues that a divided soul is sufficient for explaining *akrasia*.

“But,” I said, “I once heard a story that I believe, that Leontius the son of Aglaion, on his way up from the Peiraeus under the outer side of the northern wall, noticed dead bodies that lay at the place of public execution. He partly had an appetite to see them and partly he felt disgusted. For a time he resisted and veiled his head, but overpowered in despite of all by his desire, with wide staring eyes he rushed up to the corpses and cried, ‘There, wretches, take your fill of the fine spectacle!’”

The example Socrates has chosen, if it is meant to endorse the standard notion of *akrasia*, is strange, in that this is not the typical *akratic* case of overindulgence in the pleasures of sex, food, or drink, which the agent then regrets (cf. *Prot.* 353c). Moreover, why would it be wrong for Leontius to desire to look at corpses? And in what way is it bad for him? Some commentators have interpreted Leontius’ desire as sexual—that is, as necrophilic,<sup>15</sup> or simply as shameful, in that it is not *καλόν* to view corpses.<sup>16</sup> But there is no indication in the text of sexual desire<sup>17</sup> or that Leontius’ behavior compromises how he would be seen by others. In contrast to these views, Danielle Allan, in her essay “Envisaging the Body of the Condemned: the Power of Platonic Symbols,” has offered a different and, I believe, more plausible interpretation.

Allen argues that “the typical Athenian response to the spectacle of execution was not, in fact, to condemn the desire to look at a punished corpse.”<sup>18</sup> Rather, the typical Athenian would have looked at the corpses of condemned wrongdoers without prompting a reaction of self-disgust or disapproval. Allen cites examples from tragedy and rhetoric

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<sup>15</sup> See Reeve 1988: 126, quoted above.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Hobbs 2000: 16-17.

<sup>17</sup> On this question, see Ferrari 2007: 182.

<sup>18</sup> D. S. Allen 2000: 136.

to argue that it was not considered wrong to exult over seeing wrongdoers punished with death; from this perspective, Leontius' behavior is atypical:

The Athenian who looked at the body of the condemned without displeasure was accepting the city's conceptual norms that wove the ethics of anger, honor, reciprocity, and spectacle together in such a way as to legitimate the execution and display of the corpse. Such an Athenian spectator was also accepting the centrality of *ὀργή* to Athenian politics. Leontius rejects all these political principles in turning away from the bodies and exhibiting displeasure. His discomfiture means that he had distanced himself from the Athenian regime and the ideological habits that made those disposed bodies a "normal" sight in the landscape.<sup>19</sup>

Allen's point, as she elaborates it further, is that with the example of Leontius Socrates wishes to transform the normal response to Athenian practices of punishment from one of pleasure to one of disgust and, in this way, to repudiate the Athenian ideology behind punishment.

Setting aside her larger interpretation of Leontius' story, Allen's contention is persuasive that Leontius' desire to gaze at the corpses was a socially acceptable practice and that it is Leontius' conflict that is unusual. Important consequences for how to interpret Socrates' story follow. Leontius' conflict is not between his appetites and his desire to uphold his view of himself as an honorable man, since his action would not be out of the ordinary. It is not even a conflict between appetite and reason—that is, between his intellectually knowing what is and is not right to do and his desire to act that way. But what, then, is Leontius' conflict about?

Socrates expresses the conflict this way: *ἅμα μὲν ἰδεῖν ἐπιθυμοῖ, ἅμα δὲ αὖ δυσχεραίνει* ("in part he had an appetite to see them, and at the same time he could not

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<sup>19</sup> D. S. Allen 2000: 139.

stand [sc. to see them]”). Leontius feels both desire and aversion. There is no explicit reflection as to why it would be good or bad to see the corpses. Perhaps his conflict is similar to that of the person who goes by the scene of an accident and has a morbid desire to see what happened but at the same time feels uneasy, both about his desire to see and at actually seeing something unpleasant. Leontius’ reaction, however, is rather extravagant and histrionic. He could simply have either taken a quick glance and kept on walking or simply stopped, looked, and kept on going. Neither response would have compromised his self-respect. Instead, he makes a scene in a way that is reminiscent of tragedy, or perhaps even comedy, particularly in the way he addresses his eyes, “ἰδοὺ ὑμῖν,” ἔφη, “ὦ κακοδαίμονες, ἐμπλήσθητε τοῦ καλοῦ θεάματος.”<sup>20</sup> It is as if Leontius were an actor on stage and he himself had become the spectacle.<sup>21</sup>

The focus of the story within the argument of Book IV is not the conflict Leontius feels between his desire to see the corpses and his aversion to them, since this proves nothing about tripartition. Rather, as Socrates says, the story proves “that anger sometimes makes war against the appetites, as one thing against another” (τὴν ὀργὴν πολεμεῖν ἐνίοτε ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις ὡς ἄλλο ὃν ἄλλω, 440a), which in turn proves that there is a third element in the soul that, though not rational, is the ally of reason. Anger may, indeed, chastise the appetites, but in Leontius’ case his anger is ineffective except as a histrionic device. By the time Leontius chastises himself, the moment of conflict has

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<sup>20</sup> The word *κακοδαίμων* appears only three times in Plato and once in Euripides, while it appears fifty-one times in Aristophanes.

<sup>21</sup> Ferrari (2007: 181) remarks that with his public cursing, “Leontius is making a spectacle of himself.” Ferrari assumes that others are watching Leontius and that, by chastising himself, he is trying to save his reputation. As I have argued, Leontius’ action should not be interpreted as being so terrible that others would reprove of him or that he would feel ashamed of himself.

already passed, and he has already “given in” to his desire. But was there ever any question that this was how it would end? His aversion to the corpses is no more rational than his desire to see them. What, then, is actually “overcome by appetite”? When he looks at the corpses, what has been vanquished? Certainly not his reasoning capacity, since the story dramatizes one non-rational element in conflict with another, not reasoned reflection and irrational appetite.

The story of Leontius is a bad example of *akratic* action: it describes a moral failure that can hardly count as such, since it is unclear how Leontius’ action either harms him directly or transgresses social conventions. Therefore, there is no compelling reason to see this story as representing Socrates’ endorsement of *akrasia* as a legitimate explanation for moral failure. But what *is* the point of this strange story, aside from its furtherance of the argument about psychic tripartition? Perhaps it is meant to reflect, and obliquely criticize, an Athenian culture that readily expresses anger and outrage out of moral compunction, but is unaffected when it comes to the question of what is truly just and unjust and the question of who deserves to be condemned to die at the hands of the public executioner.

## 7. The Truly Just Man

The examples of the thirsty man, Odysseus, and Leontius illustrate that the desire for self-control or moderation goes beyond a need to observe conventional norms. In the case of the thirsty man, nothing indicates that his drinking water would transgress any law or social norm. So, too, with Odysseus, whose anger and desire to kill the suitors would be socially sanctioned. And, as I have argued, even Leontius has no reason to feel as



ashamed as he does. On the other hand, while these examples say something about psychic tripartition, they say nothing about justice, for the capacity for self-control in and of itself does not entail justice.

There is only one example in Book IV of a truly self-controlled man, the just man. The just man has received the right mixture of music and poetry, as well as the proper physical training, so that his rational element has been nourished and his spirited one soothed, and both can harmoniously coexist in the soul. With this harmony, the two elements can now govern the appetitive part and ensure (442a):

*μὴ τῷ πίμπλασθαι τῶν περὶ τὸ σῶμα καλουμένων ἡδονῶν πολὺ καὶ ἰσχυρὸν γενόμενον οὐκ αὖ τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττει, ἀλλὰ καταδουλώσασθαι καὶ ἄρχειν ἐπιχειρήσει ὣν οὐ προσήκον αὐτῷ γένει, καὶ σύμπαντα τὸν βίον πάντων ἀνατρέψει.*

that it doesn't get filled with the so-called pleasures of the body and that it doesn't become so big and strong that it no longer does its own work but attempts to enslave and rule over the classes it isn't fitted to rule, thereby overturning everyone's whole life.

Self-control is not, in this context, a forceful suppression of appetite, but rather a harmonizing, a fitting together without conflict. The just man is courageous and wise because his reasoning element, having been properly nourished, has knowledge of what is to be feared and what is not, as well as “of what is advantageous for each part and for the whole soul, which is the community of all three parts” (τοῦ συμφέροντος ἐκάστω τε καὶ ὅλῳ τῷ κοινῷ σφῶν αὐτῶν τριῶν ὄντων, 442c7-8). This knowledge enables him to be moderate and self-controlled. Thus his self-control is the product of the “friendly and harmonious relations” (τῇ φιλίᾳ καὶ συμφωνίᾳ) between the parts (442c10). The soul of the just man, then, is not under pressure either from his appetites or from societal norms, for his actions are not aimed at satisfying one or conforming with the other. Rather, “he believes that

the action is just and fine that preserves this inner harmony and helps achieve it, and calls it so, and regards as wisdom the knowledge that oversees such actions” (*ἡγούμενον καὶ ὀνομάζοντα δικαίαν μὲν καὶ καλὴν πράξιν ἣ ἂν ταύτην τὴν ἔξιν σώζῃ τε καὶ συναπεργάζηται, σοφίαν δὲ τὴν ἐπιστατοῦσαν ταύτῃ τῇ πράξει ἐπιστήμην*, 443e5-7). The knowledge that just action stems from self-rule, rather than from knowledge of just things, is what makes the just man just.

This sketch of psychic tripartition and of the just man stands in contrast to the notion of civic virtue put forth by Protagoras in his Great Speech (*Prot.* 320d-328d). When Protagoras says that everyone has a share of justice in him (323a), he doesn’t mean that self-control comes from within, but rather that everyone is aware of the necessity of conforming to the laws of the city, lest he suffer shame or physical punishment. Protagoras’ just man is keenly aware of being observed, and his self-control is in response to this awareness. This is why Protagoras pairs justice with shame as the gifts Zeus gives to men (322c), for, without shame, the social contract wouldn’t work. By contrast, Socrates’ just man doesn’t need shame to act justly. For he is not concerned with how his actions are judged by others, but with “what is inside him, with what is truly himself and his own” (*ἀλλὰ περὶ τὴν ἐντός, ὡς ἀληθῶς περὶ ἑαυτὸν καὶ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ*, 443c10-d1). While Protagoras’ just man looks to the outside to know about himself and about virtue, Socrates’ just man looks within; and it is precisely this “looking within” that results in virtue and moderation.

### 8. The Philosopher King: Is Knowledge of the Good Possible?

A complete picture of Socrates' just man does not emerge until the middle books of the *Republic* (Books V through VII), when Socrates describes the perfectly just man—that is, the guardian who is to become philosopher king. In these books, the tripartite division of the psyche recedes into the background. Its importance had been to show how the virtues are connected to our soul's desires (see 6.506a) and, in this way, to show how justice is valuable in itself. But inner harmony, Socrates implies, will not be enough for the just man to become a just ruler of the just city. The truly just man must come to have an understanding of the good itself and not only of what is good if he is to rule the city properly. For it is only then that he will be able to identify his self-interest with the well-being of the city.<sup>22</sup> In order to attain this knowledge, the guardians of the city must undergo a lengthy and rigorous education that will prepare them to become philosopher kings. This training will be composed of ten years of mathematics, five years of dialectic, and fifteen years of practical political experience (7.521d ff.). The purpose of this education is to train the guardians to cease to look for the good in the ever-changing, variegated world of concrete reality and, instead, to inhabit the world of unqualified being, of pure rational thought.<sup>23</sup> Or rather, to realize that what underlies the sensible world is an intelligible structure.<sup>24</sup> This understanding will come primarily from their study of mathematics, in the successive studies of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and

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<sup>22</sup> See Blössner 2007: 364 and M. Miller 2007: 312.

<sup>23</sup> See Burnyeat 2001: 21, who argues that for Plato “unqualified being is exemplified in the realm of value no less than in mathematics.”

<sup>24</sup> Here, I am following M. Miller 2007 in his elucidation of Socrates' “longer way.”

harmonics. Mathematics will teach the guardians that it is abstract reasoning that has greater reality than anything else. But the importance of these studies is not primarily formal, but ethical.<sup>25</sup> The goal is not simply to turn the soul from the sensible to the intelligible but to grasp the unity and normative order of the world and of the soul. In this way, the philosopher king's ethical thought and rule will not be informed by moral tradition but by an understanding of order as a property of the good itself. Whatever is good is so on the basis of the order it produces. This is why, once he has completed his training and seen the good, the task of the philosopher kings is "to put the city, its citizens, and themselves in order, using it [the good] as their model" (*παραδείγματι χρωμένους ἐκείνῳ, καὶ πόλιν καὶ ἰδιώτας καὶ ἑαυτοὺς κοσμεῖν ...*, 7.540a9-b1).

Two considerations relevant to my study emerge from the description of the philosopher king and his education. First, by emphasizing the importance of a rigorous education in mathematics and dialectic for an understanding of ethics, Plato has Socrates not only implicitly reject the whole tradition of epic and tragic poetry as a valuable source of ethical thought but, in effect, establish the individual and his rationality as the only proper source for it. Civic tradition and social convention are thus discarded in favor of the primacy of the individual's intellectual capacity to investigate and understand the world for himself. This latter point is especially evident in Socrates' revision of education, once he has completed the simile of the cave; he says that "the power to learn is in everyone's soul and that the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body" (*ταύτην*

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<sup>25</sup> See Burnyeat 2001 for an illuminating and thorough discussion on how the content of mathematical education is important "for understanding value as an aspect of the world as it is objectively speaking" (p. 46).

*τὴν ἐνοῦσαν ἐκάστου δύναμιν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ καὶ τὸ ὄργανον ᾧ καταμανθάνει ἕκαστος, οἷον εἰ ὄμμα μὴ δυνατὸν ἦν ἄλλως ἢ σὺν ὄλῳ τῷ σώματι στρέφειν πρὸς τὸ φανὸν ἐκ τοῦ σκοτώδους,*

7.518c4-8). Socrates then asserts that education isn't the craft "of putting sight into the soul. It [education] takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn't turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and it tries to redirect it appropriately" (*οὐ τοῦ ἐμποιῆσαι αὐτῷ τὸ ὄραν, ἀλλ' ὥς ἔχοντι μὲν αὐτό, οὐκ ὀρθῶς δὲ τετραμμένῳ οὐδὲ βλέποντι οἱ ἔδει, τοῦτο διαμηχανήσασθαι*, 518d5-7). The power to know what is good and right is *within* each individual, not outside of him, but to be actualized, it requires a personal journey of transformation through education. To be sure, this journey requires the proper guide and, according to Socrates, the best possible guide is the philosopher.

The second consideration is that while the figure of the philosopher king and the description of his education underscore that ethical action has to be primarily motivated by reason and a certain kind of knowledge, they also suggest the difficulties in attaining such rational knowledge. At issue is not simply the power of intellect grappling with irrational forces, but the extraordinary difficulty of the subject matter itself and our human limitations. The description of the philosopher king's lengthy and arduous journey to the good in itself conveys that these limitations are not easy to overcome nor are they shaped primarily by our irrational passions. According to Socrates, these limitations arise from our strong tendency to focus on, and be influenced by, the multiplicity of things presented to us in the sensible, tangible, and material realm. For this reason, the movement from sensible to intelligible, from multiplicity to unity, from disorder to order requires more than just keeping one's passions under control; it requires a complete transformation of our way of perceiving the world. Only by undergoing this

transformation, aided by the power of reason together with courage, determination, and the right guide, may one attain personal clarity about good and bad, right and wrong, and then act accordingly.

In this regard, there is another important implication of the education of the philosopher king: it not only highlights how difficult it is to attain knowledge of the good but implies that having certainty about such knowledge is impossible (534b8-d1):

*οὐκοῦν καὶ περὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ὡσαύτως ὃς ἂν μὴ ἔχῃ διορίσασθαι τῷ λόγῳ ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων πάντων ἀφελὼν τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέαν, καὶ ὥσπερ ἐν μάχῃ διὰ πάντων ἐλέγχων διεξιὼν, μὴ κατὰ δόξαν ἀλλὰ κατ' οὐσίαν προθυμούμενος ἐλέγχειν, ἐν πᾶσι τούτοις ἀπτῶτι τῷ λόγῳ διαπορεύεται, οὔτε αὐτὸ τὸ ἀγαθὸν φήσεις εἰδέναι τὸν οὕτως ἔχοντα οὔτε ἄλλο ἀγαθὸν οὐδέν, ἀλλ' εἴ πῃ εἰδῶλου τινὸς ἐφάπτεται, δόξῃ, οὐκ ἐπιστήμῃ ἐφάπτεσθαι, καὶ τὸν νῦν βίον ὀνειροπολοῦντα καὶ ὑπνώττοντα, πρὶν ἐνθάδ' ἐξεγρέσθαι, εἰς Ἅϊδου πρότερον ἀφικόμενον τελέως ἐπικαταδαρθεῖν;*

And isn't it also the same in the case of the good, that unless someone can distinguish in an account the form of the good from everything else, can survive all refutation, as if in a battle, striving to judge things not in accordance with opinion but in accordance with being, and can come through all this with his account still intact, you'll say that he doesn't know the good itself or any other good. And if he gets hold of some image of it, you'll say that it's through opinion, not knowledge, for he is dreaming and asleep throughout his present life, and, before he wakes up here, he will arrive in Hades and go to sleep forever?

Socrates asserts that unless one has perfect knowledge of the good one can only claim to have murky opinions. But what human being could live up to Socrates' requirements for this knowledge? Who can give an account of the good that can survive all refutation so as to get to the other side with his account still intact? This passage implies that perfect ethical knowledge is, in actuality, impossible and that the most we can hope for in this life is to have opinions about right and wrong, good and bad. Beyond that, all we can do is constantly investigate within an endless quest to better understand ourselves and our world. If we do arrive at some moral clarity, we will by then have reached the end of our

lives and we will have to content ourselves with never having attained any certainty about the good. Perfect ethical knowledge, if it were possible, would take a lifetime. And even then we might never achieve it.

From this perspective, anyone who claims that he knows what is good and right with certainty (as Protagoras, Gorgias, Polus, Callicles, and Thrasymachus do), should be treated lightly unless he has been tested to the limit. And since it is unlikely that anyone will survive that test, our best hope for living a good life is to look for a good guide that will help us look within ourselves for answers. Such a guide is not the philosopher king, for he is only an ideal figure, but someone like Socrates himself. His knowledge is not like that of the philosopher king. His knowledge consists in his certainty that acting rightly, in accordance with one's own conscience, is always best and that it is only within one's soul that one can discover what right action is.

As bombastic as Thrasymachus' claims are in the *Republic* and as self-assured as Callicles' speeches are in the *Gorgias*, and as sensible as Protagoras' pronouncements are in the *Protagoras*, Socrates' own claims in those dialogues are rather anticlimactic. When it finally comes to the question of what is good for oneself, Socrates gives us no big pronouncements or prescriptions, but only paradoxical statements. What those paradoxes do suggest, however, is that anyone who wants answers about how to live well will have to take a hard look at himself, allow himself to be questioned to the limit, and refrain from telling others how to live.

## 9. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on some passages in the *Republic* that have traditionally been seen as a corrective to Socrates' moral psychology in dialogues such as the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*. I have argued that the tripartite psyche does not represent a shift in Socratic ethics but rather that it serves to illustrate how justice is the virtue of the well ordered soul. By presenting justice in this way, Socrates is able to dissociate it from its usual connections with honor, political power, and courtroom proceedings and to meet the challenge of Glaucon and Adeimantus that he show how justice can be valuable in itself. Moreover, the notion of justice as self-rule, with the rational part as the ruler, is in agreement with Socrates' position in the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*. From this perspective, the tripartite psyche is a further elaboration of the Socratic ideas present in those dialogues, rather than a corrective to them.

I have also briefly looked at the figure of the philosopher king so as to suggest that his arduous journey toward knowledge of the good can be taken to mean that infallible ethical knowledge is not possible. In contrast to the philosopher king, the figure of Socrates reminds us that the best ethical outlook is one in which there is a commitment to self-examination through insight, reflection and dialogic engagement.



## CONCLUSION

At the outset of this dissertation I set two main goals: 1) to challenge the standard view that a) what defines Socratic ethics in the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* is its intellectualism, in the sense that knowing what is good is sufficient for desiring it, and b) that the *Republic* represents a correction to, or deviation from, such intellectualism, and 2) to offer an alternative account of Socratic ethics in these dialogues. Addressing these goals in the foregoing chapters with a single cohesive and coherent account has been a greater challenge than it first appeared. The reason is that each goal responds to different questions and, therefore, different methods of reading Plato.

The notion of Socratic intellectualism in the so-called early dialogues and Plato's supposed correction to it with the psychology of the *Republic* stem from a developmental reading of these dialogues. This method of reading Plato makes sense of apparent discrepancies among the dialogues by extracting Socratic claims from their context, elevating them to the level of doctrine or theory, and then accounting for the similarities or discrepancies between the claims and the dialogues through an account of the chronological development of Plato's thought. The result of this reading is that at least two different Socrateses seem to emerge with two different moral psychologies. As scholars have attempted to address this disjunction in Socratic ethics, the result has been different accounts of what Socratic intellectualism means, how to understand it, and whether or not it is a departure from the *Republic*. But in all the various accounts that

have been offered, the label of intellectualism has persisted.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the notion that Socrates privileges rational desire as necessary for ethical action has not been in question; rather, the issue has been in what way he privileges rational desire. On this reading, it would seem that the larger issue of Socratic ethics has been settled and that what remains is only to ponder and interpret what kind of intellectualist ethics Socrates advances and its similarities to, and differences from, “other Socratic ethics” in other dialogues.<sup>2</sup>

In my attempt to challenge this view and offer an alternative account of Socratic ethics, the issue was how to do this without simply giving yet another account of what Socratic intellectualism means. The answer was to challenge not only particular interpretations but also the very method from which those interpretations arose. I then posed the following questions: how can one argue, as I have tried to do, that Plato has portrayed Socrates as holding an important and unique ethical outlook that is not defined by intellectualism, even as it values reason and knowledge? How can one make sense of the Socratic paradoxes, without attributing to them all sorts of external arguments for which we have no evidence in the corresponding text, yet still seeing them as meaningful? My methodological response to these issues has been to attempt to understand Socrates’ claims as a response to his interlocutors’ own claims and their

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<sup>1</sup> It is enough to look at the publications of the last decade to see that the notion of Socratic intellectualism is well and alive. The differences in treatment lie in the meaning assigned to this intellectualism and to what extent Socrates does take into account irrational desires. See, for example, Segvic 2000; Carone 2001; Kamtekar 2006; Reshotko 2006; Brickhouse and Smith 2010.

<sup>2</sup> This is, for example, what Brickhouse and Smith (2010) have set out to do.

implicit or explicit ethical positions.<sup>3</sup> In the specific cases of the *Protagoras*, the *Gorgias*, and the *Republic*, I have argued that Plato has contrasted Socratic ethical concerns with sophistic ones in the context of their both seeming to share certain values. Indeed, both Socrates and the sophists value rationality, knowledge, and some form of virtue. However, each conceives of these goods in different ways and deploys them to different ends. Plato has portrayed the sophists as concerned with how to have power over others. In this context, knowledge and rationality are *instruments* in the service of power, while they also give the impression of virtue. Also, knowledge and virtue are seen as advancing the interest of the individual to the exclusion, even to the detriment, of the interest of another.

What then characterizes Socratic ethics? My response in the preceding chapters has been that Socrates' commitment to care for the soul by never doing wrong to another and by looking out for the well-being of others implies an ethics in which one's well-being includes and depends on the well-being of the other. Rationality, knowledge, and virtue, however they may be conceived, must be for the benefit of the agent as much as for the receiver. The Socratic question, then, is not how reason enables one to desire virtue or how best to harmonize reason and appetite in the service of virtue but, rather, how to realize that one's well-being, something everyone desires, cannot be achieved at the expense of others since, ultimately, the harm one does to others will result in harm to oneself, despite appearances to the contrary. It is this realization, this insight, that sets Socrates apart from all his interlocutors in these dialogues and it is the one that Plato has

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<sup>3</sup> I am not claiming that this method is new. Literary interpreters of the dialogues have been attempting to do just this. However, when it comes to Socratic ethics and the question of intellectualism, this method has not been much used. One important exception is Weiss 2006; she focuses, however, on the paradoxes, without addressing directly the issue of Socratic ethics.

him advance in different ways. Whether it is the unity of virtue or the notion that everyone desires the good or the craft analogy or the idea that one must rule oneself before attempting to rule others, in each instance the underlying notion is that one needs to benefit others in order to benefit oneself and that, therefore, when one does harm one must be acting unwillingly and unknowingly, since one desires nothing more than one's own benefit. This is the truly difficult realization to achieve.

To advance my argument, I began, in Chapter 1, by examining the speeches of some of Socrates' interlocutors. Grouping the speeches of Protagoras, Glaucon, and Callicles and putting them in the foreground emphasized that an understanding of Socratic ethics requires an examination of the views of his interlocutors. I believe that not enough attention has been paid to unlocking the ethical outlook of some of these Platonic characters; examining these speeches first was one way of remediating that lack of attention.

As I argued, these speeches convey a particular ethics in which what is truly valuable and proper for human nature is the exercise of power over others so as to protect oneself and achieve success. Self-interest is thus conceived as fundamentally egoistic, and self-benefit is seen as clashing with the benefit of others, so that one individual's success may entail his harming another. While this reading is more evident in the speeches of Glaucon and Callicles, I argued that in the Great Speech, particularly its mythical portion, Plato has Protagoras convey a similar notion, even if in a covert manner.

Having set the stage with these speeches in the first chapter, I addressed Socrates' response to Protagoras in the second chapter. In this chapter I wanted to show that

Socrates' paradoxes are not merely isolated dicta that one must know the definition of virtue in order to be virtuous or that *akratic* action is merely the result of defective knowledge. Rather, I wanted to show 1) that Socrates' assertions are closely connected with those that Protagoras made both at the beginning of their conversation and in his Great Speech, and 2) that with his questions Socrates wishes to reveal more of the sophist's true thinking and ethical outlook and, at the same time, to shift Protagoras' ethics, with its emphasis on knowledge for the purpose of having power over others, to a Socratic ethics that emphasizes moderation and virtue in the service of acquiring knowledge.

In the third chapter, I turned to the *Gorgias*. In this chapter, I set out to challenge the notion that for Socrates knowing what is just is enough for desiring the just and, further, to show that in his conversation with each of his interlocutors Socrates wishes to undermine the notion that Gorgianic rhetoric is powerful. He accomplishes this with the craft analogy in the exchange with Gorgias, by questioning the rationality of rhetors and tyrants in the discussion with Polus, and by emphasizing that order and community are what make political life possible and viable in the conversation with Callicles.

In the final chapter, I addressed the question of whether the *Republic* represents a rejection or correction of Socratic ethics. I proposed that the tripartite division of the psyche, rather than being a theory of mind, is intended to advance the argument of why justice is valuable in itself. I also argued that in the *Republic* Socrates continues to adhere to the notion that appetitive pleasure cannot be identified with the good and that, appetitive desire does not, then, represent desire for the good. Finally, I briefly addressed

the figure of the philosopher king and suggested that his journey toward knowledge of the good implies the difficulty, perhaps even the impossibility, of attaining such knowledge.

While my dissertation has challenged a particular view of Socratic ethics and proposed an alternative, the work that remains is great. If one adheres neither to a developmental nor to a skeptical reading of the dialogues, and if one does not attempt to see in them the establishment of doctrines, what remains is to pay close attention both to the character Socrates and also to the complexity of the interlocutors with whom he engages. I believe that this is an area that has been largely neglected in Platonic studies. More often than not his interlocutors have been seen as unidimensional characters, almost as props that Plato has included only so Socrates can either advance his own views or attack those of others. Much work, then, remains to be done in examining more closely how the *dramatized interaction* between Socrates and his interlocutors contributes to the unfolding of Plato's arguments. Such an examination promises a more holistic account of Plato and of his ever relevant characters, particularly Socrates.

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## Appendix to Chapter 1

### Glaucón's Dissatisfaction: Was Plato Dissatisfied with Socrates?

In this Appendix, I address a topic that is tangential to my argument in Chapter 1 but that is nevertheless relevant to my suggestion that there is continuity between these dialogues; this is the issue of Glaucon's dissatisfaction with Socrates at the beginning of Book II of the *Republic*. Many commentators have claimed that Glaucon's dissatisfaction limns Plato's own dissatisfaction with his Socrates, as he appears in the aporetic dialogues, such as the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*; further, these scholars claim that this dissatisfaction explains the appearance of the more dogmatic and positive Socrates of the rest of the *Republic* and the later dialogues.<sup>1</sup> The view of these interpreters is that "[a]t the start of Book 2 Plato makes clear his dissatisfaction with the methods of Book 1" when "Glaucon says that he is unhappy with the way Thrasymachus has been reduced to silence, claiming that he had been 'bewitched' into giving up."<sup>2</sup> Glaucon's claims of dissatisfaction are thus interpreted as expressing the shortcomings of the elenchus as a method of persuasion and argumentation and, in turn, as indicative of Plato's own uneasiness with this Socratic method. This interpretation is based on three assumptions: 1) that Glaucon's dissatisfaction has to do with Socrates' method; 2) that Socrates' cross-examination of Thrasymachus in Book I failed because he was unable to persuade the sophist that justice is better than injustice; and 3) that the Socrates of Book I who cross-examines is different

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<sup>1</sup> Good examples of this position are Annas 1981; Reeve 1988; Vlastos 1991; and Blondell 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Annas 1981: 59. Reeve (1988: 22-23) echoes this view when he claims that "Plato presents an explicit criticism of the negative elenchus and abandons it after Book I in favour of a positive account . . . ." Blondell (2002: 199) reiterates this interpretation when she writes: "In response to the challenge posed by Plato's brothers, a newly constructive Sokrates takes charge of the conversation."



from the Socrates of Book II who embarks on sustained positive ideas. But are these assumptions really confirmed within the text itself? I don't believe so.

Let me address the last assumption first, since it is the weakest one. This assumption is itself based on another widely accepted assumption: namely, that there are Socratic and non-Socratic dialogues and that the former are aporetic while the latter are constructive or positive. But if there is one text in the Platonic corpus that refutes this assumption it is the *Republic*, precisely because Plato represents Socrates in it as engaging in *both* dialogic forms, thereby showing Socrates to be capable of refutation *and* sustained positive ideas. Moreover, nowhere in the text does Plato narrate or imply that Socrates has now changed his mind or is dissatisfied with his methods. That his interlocutors (and many of his readers, too) can get aggravated or frustrated by Socrates' methods and positions is clearly something Plato expects, since he himself represents that to be the case in many dialogues. But what Plato never does is represent Socrates renouncing his own beliefs or methods. Book II of the *Republic* is a clear example of this, for while it is true that Glaucon expresses dissatisfaction with how Socrates defended justice in Book I, Socrates himself never does.<sup>3</sup> As he states at the beginning of Book II, in his mind the discussion had previously come to an end because he believed he had adequately refuted Thrasymachus' position. And he reiterates this later on in Book II, after Glaucon and Adeimantus have both made speeches against justice and have challenged Socrates to defend it; he asserts himself to be at a loss as to how he can defend justice, since "I thought what I said to Thrasymachus showed that justice is better than

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<sup>3</sup> While Socrates may be dissatisfied with the conclusion of Book I's discussion, as he will say in Book II, he is not dissatisfied with his own defense of justice. See Rowe 2007a and Weiss 2007b: 93, for a similar argument.

injustice, but you won't accept it from me" (368b). This assertion shows that Socrates continues to abide both by his defense of justice as he stated it in Book I and by the mode of his defense. Socrates, the character, then, remains the same throughout.

Nevertheless, there are important formal shifts between Books I and II, the most important of which is that in Book II Socrates allows the brothers to make speeches, does not question them (as he does the other interlocutors in Book I) and, instead, proceeds to expound his own ideas (rather than proceeding to build his case on the refutation of his interlocutors' ideas). Yet these differences speak more to the continuity between the books than the discontinuity. Unlike Thrasymachus, Cephalus, and Polemarchus, Glaucon and Adeimantus make no claims to expertise or to knowing what justice is, and, usually, it is claims to expertise and knowledge that prompt Socrates to engage in refutation.<sup>4</sup> Also, both brothers acknowledge that, at least in principle, they are in agreement with Socrates that justice is better than injustice, and thus there is no need to refute them. Instead, Socrates attempts to persuade them that justice is a good thing in itself. The elenchus as a method, then, is not necessary. Therefore, since Glaucon and Adeimantus neither subscribe to any of the notions about justice put forth in Book I nor make claims of their own as to what justice is, the elenchus as a method of cross-examination becomes irrelevant in Book II, and it is for this reason (and not because of its inadequacies as a method) that Socrates puts it aside. Thus, Plato's setting of the elenchus aside in Book II does not entail a critique of Socrates (as Reeve would have it) nor a shift in Socrates as *dramatis persona* (as Blondell proposes). Rather, Plato marks a shift in the way in which Socrates engages with his interlocutors precisely because the

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<sup>4</sup> See Carpenter and Polansky 2002: 90-91.

interlocutors have changed. Socrates, Glaucon, and Adeimantus have a history of talking together (see *Rep.* 504e-505a) and have thus been able to establish some common ground between them. The conversation in which they engage from Book II on occurs on that basis.

This brings us to the next assumption regarding Socrates' elenctic failure in Book I. The common view is that both Socrates' arguments and his method of argumentation fail to persuade Thrasymachus to abandon his position that injustice is better than justice. But this assumption is predicated on the view that Socrates' primary role in Book I was to persuade Thrasymachus. In fact, however, Socrates in Book I acts more as a counter-force to Thrasymachus' steam-rolling personality and (seemingly) foolproof arguments in favor of injustice than as an agent of persuasion. His task is not so much to win Thrasymachus over, as to refute him and demonstrate that there is little substance behind his bullying bravado. Indeed, from the outset of the exchange with Thrasymachus Socrates shows that he is unwilling to allow the boisterous sophist to intimidate him or dominate the discussion (336de). And Socrates is indeed able to stand his ground throughout the discussion by achieving two tasks. First, by withstanding Thrasymachus' constant attacks on his character and intellect,<sup>5</sup> without responding in kind or backing down, Socrates gradually mollifies him and tones down his boastful style, which is an important part of what gives force to his argument in favor of injustice. Second, by persistently abiding by his method of cross-examination and holding Thrasymachus

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<sup>5</sup> Thrasymachus calls Socrates an idiot (336b); he says he's disgusting (338d); he calls him a liar (340d); he accuses Socrates of being out to get him so as to cause him harm (341a); and he calls him a snotty, naive child (343a).

accountable for the logic of his position,<sup>6</sup> Socrates demonstrates that the sophist's views are not as infallible as he himself or others may think they are, and that they are based more on boastful audacity than thoughtful reflection or intellectual rigor. If we view the exchange between Socrates and Thrasymachus from this vantage point, we can say that Socrates does emerge victorious at the end of Book I. His victory, however, does not consist of besting Thrasymachus in a contest of eloquence or even arguments—by his own account, Socrates is dissatisfied with the result of the discussion (see 354a13-c3). Rather, Socrates' victory is that Thrasymachus has now become gentle and has stopped mistreating him (see 354a12-13). Moreover, what is important about the exchange between Thrasymachus and Socrates is not that the philosopher cannot persuade the sophist but that the sophist cannot make persuasive arguments against the philosopher<sup>7</sup>—in all this Plato demonstrates that Socrates' qualities (calm, playful, persistent, and steadfast) and methods are a success.

And this brings us to the first assumption on which the argument that Plato uses Book II as a critique of Socrates' methods in Book I is based—namely, that Glaucon's dissatisfaction with the previous discussion is meant as a criticism of Socrates. As I argued in this chapter (see Section ten), Glaucon's dissatisfaction has more to do with his own ambivalence about the kind of life and goods he wishes to pursue than with his feeling dissatisfied with Socrates's argument *per se*. Glaucon would like to believe that

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Prot.* 336c, where Alcibiades makes explicit that this is one of the purposes of the question-and-answer method.

<sup>7</sup> After Thrasymachus has tried everything to perturb Socrates and failed, he finally says, "And how am I to persuade you, if your aren't persuaded by what I said just now? What more can I do? Am I to take my argument and pour it into your very soul?" (345b). It is Thrasymachus who expects to be persuasive, not Socrates and, therefore, it is Thrasymachus who fails at his own endeavor, not Socrates.

justice is more beneficial for the individual than injustice, but he cannot see how that is the case when Socrates' notion of benefit does not include the kinds of things that Glaucon would want, such as political power and wealth. It is this ambivalence that provides the impetus for a new beginning in the *Republic* and that prompts Socrates to defend justice on different grounds.

Thus I hope to have sufficiently demonstrated that there are no grounds to suggest that Book II represents a critique of the "elenctic" Socrates and ushers in the advent of a "constructive Socrates" who can voice "positive and sustained ideas about justice."<sup>8</sup> Therefore, there is only one philosopher, not two, in the *Republic*. The Socrates of Book I is the same as the Socrates of Book II and the rest of the dialogue. The change is in the interlocutors with whom Socrates engages. From Book II on, Socrates does not need to refute Glaucon and Adeimantus but to present an alternative view of justice that might appeal to them.

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<sup>8</sup> So Blondell 2002: 193 and 199.

### Appendix to Chapter 3

#### Polus and Socrates: The Function of the Socratic Elenchus

In this Appendix, I consider Socrates' refutation of Polus.<sup>1</sup> My interest in this section of the *Gorgias*, however, is not whether Socrates' arguments against Polus' claims are logically valid or whether Polus was effectively refuted.<sup>2</sup> Rather, I will show how Socrates' elenctic strategy consists in arguing from premises that the interlocutor can understand and accept, without Socrates' necessarily endorsing them. The purpose of this strategy is to reveal the underpinnings of the interlocutor's position and to use those so as to transform the interlocutor's initial premise and bring the discussion closer to Socrates' own account.<sup>3</sup>

Polus' argument contains three claims that respond to Socrates' previous assertions about rhetors and tyrants: 1) to suffer wrong is worse than to do it; 2) those who are able to do wrong without incurring punishment are happy (such as the tyrant Archelaus); and 3) it is those who do wrong and incur punishment that are wretched (see 461b3 to 473e5).<sup>4</sup> Socrates now proposes to refute each one of these claims. He begins with the first and asks Polus which is worse (*κακίον*), suffering or doing injustice. Polus

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<sup>1</sup> The exchange between Socrates and Polus can be divided into two sections. The first extends from 461b3 to 473e5 and consists in Polus' attempt to refute three Socratic claims. The second extends from 473e6-481b5 and consists of Socrates' refutation of Polus' claims to the contrary. My concern here is with the second section only.

<sup>2</sup> This topic has already been much debated, especially by Vlastos (1967 and 1991:140-8), who believes that Polus was not refuted and by Kahn (1983), who believes that the arguments as a whole do prove Socrates' thesis that doing injustice is worse than suffering it.

<sup>3</sup> For a similar view, see Rowe 2007b: 151.

<sup>4</sup> These are also the main claims in Glaucon's speech in *Rep.* II.

says suffering injustice. Then Socrates asks which is more shameful (*αἰσχρίον*), doing or suffering injustice. Doing injustice, Polus replies. Socrates then argues that if doing injustice is more shameful, it must also be worse. Polus adamantly disagrees. Socrates concludes, “Evidently you don’t believe that admirable and good or bad and shameful are the same.” “No, I certainly don’t,” answers Polus.

This initial exchange reveals that Socrates and Polus have different criteria for what constitutes *καλόν* and *αἰσχρόν*. This difference, however, had already become evident earlier in the dialogue when Polus pressed Socrates to say whether he thought rhetoric was something *καλόν* or *αἰσχρόν* (463d). At that time, Polus made plain that for him rhetoric is *καλόν* because it produces enjoyment for its listeners (462c), underscoring that the operative standard of value is limited to aesthetic qualities—that is, to its causing pleasurable sensations. According to Polus’ value system, then, if the orator gives a beautiful and moving speech, the speech must be *καλόν* because it is aesthetically pleasing and, hence, good for the listener. Socrates made it clear that, on his accounting, rhetoric is *αἰσχρόν* because it pretends to know what is best for the soul, when it is, in fact, mere flattery and a knack; rhetoric “guesses at what’s pleasant with no consideration for what is best” (465a). For Socrates, then, the point of reference for *καλόν* and *αἰσχρόν* is not pleasure and enjoyment but consideration of what is best for the soul. Polus, however, never really grasped Socrates’ point, intent as he was in making Socrates recognize rhetoric as an admirable and worthwhile pursuit (466a).

In the present discussion of whether it is worse to do or to suffer injustice, it is Socrates who brings up the *καλόν/αἰσχρόν* dichotomy. Once again, in his separating *καλόν* and *αἰσχρόν* from *ἀγαθόν* and *κακόν*, Polus underscores that for him the question of doing

wrong has social and prudential value, but is of no moral consequence. Indeed, implicit in the exchange is Polus' belief that the interests of the agent are at odds with those of others. While doing wrong is beneficial for the agent, it is shameful in the eyes of others. Polus' criteria for good and evil, then, are the benefit or harm that the action entails for the agent, whereas he sees the admirable and the shameful as social conventions that are in opposition to the agent's personal interests. Thus, while doing injustice is beneficial to the agent, and hence it is good for him, the same action is offensive to others and hence it is *αἰσχρόν*. But this dichotomy also reveals that Polus conceives of benefit and harm in corporeal, material, and appetitive terms. From the point of view of personal benefit and harm, the dichotomy implies that doing injustice is good for the agent (as long as he is not caught) because he gains power or wealth or both, while suffering injustice hurts him because he is deprived of those goods. The social conventions regarding what is admirable and shameful, on the other hand, have nothing to do with the individual's personal well-being. For this reason, if one has to choose between suffering and doing wrong, one would choose the latter as the more beneficial even if more shameful. The central effort of Socrates' refutation is to persuade Polus to acknowledge the moral value of doing injustice—that it is to the detriment of the agent himself and, more specifically, that it makes his soul worse.

But to achieve such a transformation in Polus, Socrates has to argue from premises that Polus can accept. For this reason he does not question Polus' dichotomy between *καλόν* and *ἀγαθόν* directly, but proceeds to give examples through which Polus might see that the admirable and the good can, in fact, coincide (474d2-e1):



ΣΩ. Τί δὲ τόδε; τὰ καλὰ πάντα, οἷον καὶ σώματα καὶ χρώματα καὶ σχήματα καὶ φωνὰς καὶ ἐπιτηδεύματα, εἰς οὐδὲν ἀποβλέπων καλεῖς ἐκάστοτε καλὰ; οἷον πρῶτον τὰ σώματα τὰ καλὰ οὐχὶ ἦτοι κατὰ τὴν χρείαν λέγεις καλὰ εἶναι, πρὸς ὃ ἂν ἕκαστον χρήσιμον ᾖ, πρὸς τοῦτο, ἢ κατὰ ἡδονήν τινα, εἴαν ἐν τῷ θεωρεῖσθαι χαίρειν τοῖς θεωροῦντας; ἔχεις τι ἐκτὸς τούτων λέγειν περὶ σώματος κάλλους;  
ΠΩΛ. Οὐκ ἔχω.

Socrates: Well, what about this? When you call all admirable things admirable, for example, bodies, or colors, or shapes and sounds, or practices, is it with nothing in view that you do so each time? Take admirable bodies first. Don't you call them admirable either in virtue of their usefulness, relative to whatever it is that each is useful for, or else in virtue of some pleasure, if it makes the people who look at them get enjoyment from looking at them? In the case of the admirableness of a body, can you mention anything other than these?

Polus: No, I can't.

In his examples, Socrates lists corporeal things that Polus can deem beautiful or admirable because of either the benefit or the pleasure they provide. Socrates then says that the same can be said of other things such as music, laws, occupations, and learning, thus moving into the realm of abstract nouns. Once Socrates has articulated the connection between *καλόν* and *ἀγαθόν* in these utilitarian terms, Polus not only agrees with him, but enthusiastically adds: “Yes, Socrates, your present definition of the admirable in terms of pleasure and good is an admirable one” (*πάνν γε: καὶ καλῶς γε νῦν ὀρίζῃ, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἡδονῇ τε καὶ ἀγαθῷ ὀριζόμενος τὸ καλόν*, 475a2-4). Socrates then adds, “And so is my definition of the shameful in terms of the opposite, pain and bad, isn't it?” “Necessarily so,” (*ἀνάγκη*) concurs Polus (475a6).

Although Polus has ascribed to Socrates the definition of *τὸ καλόν* as that which is pleasurable and useful, Socrates is merely articulating the terms under which Polus is ready to accept a definition of *τὸ καλόν* as *τὸ ἀγαθόν*—namely, if there is something desirable in the object in the form of either pleasure or usefulness. By the same token, for Polus to recognize something as simultaneously *αἰσχροτόν* and *κακόν*, the object must be

undesirable because it brings either pain or harm. In this way, Socrates reveals Polus' standards of moral value: pleasure and pain, benefit and harm. Polus understands these terms as either enhancing or diminishing the agent. By equating τὸ καλόν with pleasure and benefit and τὸ αἰσχρόν with pain and harm, Socrates turns what Polus saw as beneficial only to the other (what others find admirable or honorable) into something that he can see as beneficial to the agent. And once Polus accepts this equation, Socrates can insert the original terms ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι and lead him to accept that doing injustice is not only more shameful, but also worse. For, to the extent that the more shameful is also more painful and worse, then doing injustice is not only more shameful than suffering it, but also more painful and worse. Finally, since Polus would prefer the less shameful to the more shameful, he would also prefer to suffer than to do injustice, a conclusion to which Polus rather reluctantly agrees.

To be sure, Socrates' argument does not really prove that doing injustice is worse than suffering it (which is why so many interpreters object to it and do not see it as a successful refutation). But the point of the argument (which really extends until 479a) is not so much to refute Polus,<sup>5</sup> as to reveal the premises on which his view is grounded and then transform those premises into an account that proves Socrates' claim and that Polus cannot deny. Thus Polus cannot see doing injustice as shameful until he identifies it with a form of suffering pain; at that point, he cannot deny that doing injustice is something bad since it is to the detriment of the agent, as he understands it.

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<sup>5</sup> Kahn (1983: 93) also recognizes that the point of the argument is not the refutation itself but to present pleasure and the good as competitors that "provide alternative standards of value."

The equation of τὸ αἰσχρόν with pain and harm turns out to be crucial for Socrates if he is to reverse Polus' initial position. It enables him to assign pain to the body and harm to the soul. If Polus admits (as he does) that it is possible for the soul to be in a bad condition (πονηρία) and that such a bad condition is caused by injustice, ignorance, cowardice, and so on, and, furthermore, that, of these evils, injustice is the source of the greatest harm for the soul, then he must also admit that doing injustice is not only shameful but also worse than suffering it, for committing injustice makes one's soul worse, whereas suffering it only causes harm to the body, but not the soul. Therefore, anyone who commits injustice should run to the law-courts, openly denounce his offense, and bravely submit to due punishment, all in the knowledge that by suffering punishment he also rids himself of this harmful state and makes his soul healthy again. To all of this, Polus assents with due docility. But once Socrates returns to the question of rhetoric at the end of the refutation, and applies the previous arguments to it by saying that if rhetoric is used to defend injustice, it is of no use to anyone unless it recognizes its own injustice, denounces itself, submits to the proper punishment, and thus rids itself of its own injustice, Polus quickly returns to his previous derisive and dismissive tone. "I think these statements are absurd, Socrates," he says, and adds, "though no doubt you think they agree with those expressed earlier" (*ἄτοπα μὲν, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ, τοῖς μέντοι ἔμπροσθεν ἴσως σοι ὁμολογεῖται*, 480e1-2). Polus may be willing to submit to Socrates' cross-examination and to unquestioningly assent to his logic so as to avoid contradicting himself; and yet, at the conclusion of the argument, his love and admiration for rhetors and tyrants remain as strong and steadfast as ever.

Such obstinacy on Polus' part may lead one to conclude (as many interpreters have) that Socrates has utterly failed in his elenctic endeavor. His "dialectical trickery," one could argue, may have silenced Polus but it certainly did not persuade him. But then, what was the point of it all? Why would Plato represent his protagonist engaging in a conversation that proves to be ineffective? From a dramatic point of view, representing Polus as capable of truly changing his mind would mean that his character too has been transformed, which can hardly be accomplished in the course of a conversation. Such a representation would render the dialogue dramatically ineffective and Socrates' ideas trivial. Therefore, the point of the exchange must be other than refutation or persuasion. As I argued in my discussion of Thrasymachus, I think the point is not whether Polus was refuted but the other way around, that Polus was not capable of refuting Socrates and, hence, that Socrates' claims stand. From this perspective, the function of Socrates' refutation is as a kind of resistance to the conventional morality of which Polus is a mouthpiece, a resistance that simultaneously allows Socrates to put forth his own ethical account—in this case, that the function of any discipline or skill must be to make people better either with respect to their body or their soul. The rhetoric of Gorgias, then, would have to make people better with respect to their soul, for it to be something *καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθόν*. But Polus has proven the opposite: it makes people worse; hence, rhetoric is a shameful pursuit. While Polus (and even the reader) may be unwilling to grant this point, Polus' own position, resting as it does on his admiration for power and wealth, has nothing to sustain it other than numbers, which is only and also the opinion of the multitude.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> On more than one occasion, Polus calls upon the great number of people who think or live a certain way

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as proof of the truth of his claim. At 470d, he says that the great number of people who do wrong, yet who are happy, suffices to refute Socrates. And again at 473e4-5, he asks, "Don't you think you've been refuted already, Socrates, when you're saying things the likes of which no human being would maintain? Just ask one of these people."