

J. CLERK SHAW

Plato's Anti-hedonism
and the *Protagoras*



PLATO'S ANTI-HEDONISM AND THE *PROTAGORAS*

Plato often rejects hedonism, but in the *Protagoras*, Plato's Socrates seems to endorse hedonism. In this book, Clerk Shaw removes this apparent tension by arguing that the *Protagoras* as a whole actually reflects Plato's anti-hedonism. He shows that Plato places hedonism at the core of a complex of popular mistakes about value and especially about virtue: that injustice can be prudent; that wisdom is weak; that courage is the capacity to persevere through fear; and that virtue cannot be taught. The masses reproduce this system of values through shame and fear of punishment. The *Protagoras* and other dialogues depict sophists and orators who have internalized popular morality through shame, but who are also ashamed to state their views openly. Shaw's reading not only reconciles the *Protagoras* with Plato's other dialogues, but harmonizes it with them and even illuminates Plato's wider anti-hedonism.

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Abbreviations

Plato (Pl.)

<i>Ap.</i>	<i>Apology</i>
<i>Ch.</i>	<i>Charmides</i>
<i>Cr.</i>	<i>Crito</i>
<i>Crat.</i>	<i>Cratylus</i>
[<i>Def.</i>]	<i>Definitions</i>
[<i>Ep.</i>]	<i>Letters</i>
<i>Eu.</i>	<i>Euthyphro</i>
<i>Euthyd.</i>	<i>Euthydemus</i>
<i>G.</i>	<i>Gorgias</i>
<i>H. Ma.</i>	<i>Greater Hippias</i>
<i>L.</i>	<i>Laws</i>
<i>La.</i>	<i>Laches</i>
<i>Lys.</i>	<i>Lysis</i>
<i>M.</i>	<i>Meno</i>
<i>Phd.</i>	<i>Phaedo</i>
<i>Phdr.</i>	<i>Phaedrus</i>
<i>Phil.</i>	<i>Philebus</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Statesman</i>
<i>Pr.</i>	<i>Protagoras</i>
<i>R.</i>	<i>Republic</i>
<i>Soph.</i>	<i>Sophist</i>
<i>Symp.</i>	<i>Symposium</i>
<i>Tht.</i>	<i>Theaetetus</i>
<i>Ti.</i>	<i>Timaeus</i>
[<i>II Alc.</i>]	<i>Second Alcibiades</i>

Aristotle (Ar.)

<i>An. Pr.</i>	<i>Prior Analytics</i>
<i>EE</i>	<i>Eudemian Ethics</i>

<i>EN</i>	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
<i>Meta.</i>	<i>Metaphysics</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politics</i>
<i>Rhet.</i>	<i>Rhetoric</i>
<i>Top.</i>	<i>Topics</i>

Introduction

Hedonism – the view that pleasure is the good – offers a perennially tempting account of human flourishing. Plato is generally thought to resist the temptations of hedonism; his Socrates persistently argues against identifying pleasure with the good. The *Protagoras* is a mysterious outlier, though. There, Socrates introduces hedonism without any apparent prompting, argues for it, and uses it to defend further claims central to his larger goals in the dialogue. This anomaly obscures Plato’s considered ethical position, so it provokes consternation and debate. Existing scholarship typically seeks to reconcile the passage in which Socrates presents hedonism with the rest of Plato’s corpus in one of two ways. Some argue that we need not attribute hedonism to Socrates even in the *Protagoras*, while others argue that relevant passages in other dialogues do not actually conflict with the hedonism found there.¹

This book takes a more ambitious tack. I side with those who deny that Socrates endorses hedonism, but existing arguments for that position can often seem *ad hoc* and philosophically uninspiring. I improve on existing views in two main ways. First, I do not focus narrowly on the passage in which Socrates presents hedonism. Instead, I offer a reading of the wider *Protagoras* that gives hedonism a crucial role in that work without attributing it to Socrates. Placing hedonism into this wider interpretive context avoids the whiff of special pleading that attaches to much current scholarship on the issue. Second, the resulting picture not only reconciles the *Protagoras* with other dialogues, but harmonizes it with them and even illuminates their anti-hedonism.

More specifically, my main thesis is that the *Protagoras* depicts Protagoras as having internalized, through shame, an incoherent complex of popular evaluative attitudes. Hedonism lies at the core of that incoherent complex. Plato’s Socrates elsewhere describes how sophists internalize popular

¹ For a partial survey of existing approaches, see the introduction to [Chapter 1](#).

attitudes, but he remains vague about what those attitudes are and how they fit together. The *Protagoras* dramatizes Plato's critique of sophistry; in so doing, it fleshes out that critique by helping to specify the content and structure of the popular views that sophists and most other intellectual and political elites internalize. Thus, my reading upholds the unanimous scholarly opinion that the *Protagoras* critiques sophistry, but resists inadequate readings on which Plato either depicts sophists as manipulative corruptors or simply expresses animus toward competing intellectuals.

If I am right, then the *Protagoras* is so far from being an outlier that it perfectly illustrates and deepens Plato's critique of hedonism. It seems to be an outlier because Protagoras tries to conceal his internalized views, out of shame. But Plato signals both his shame and his concealment, and in the *Protagoras* and other dialogues, he offers the resources to explain that shame and concealment. Thus, my reading of the *Protagoras* also has implications for Plato's ethical thought more generally. Indeed, the negative side of Plato's ethical project, especially as found in the *Gorgias* and *Republic*, consists largely of attempts to diagnose and undermine (i) hedonism and the complex of popular evaluative attitudes that stem from it, and (ii) the mechanisms by which those attitudes are socially reproduced and maintained.

Such claims call for an extended defense, which this book provides. Before I sketch my main line of argument, though, it will be useful even for seasoned readers of the *Protagoras* to recall what the dialogue contains and how the problems I discuss arise in context. So, I begin with a brief, anodyne summary of the whole work. Later discussions will naturally fill in many details glossed over here in the interests of brevity.

Outline of the *Protagoras*

The *Protagoras* opens with banter between Socrates and an anonymous friend, who teases him about his love for Alcibiades. Socrates soon mentions that Alcibiades aided him earlier that day – as it emerges, in a conversation with Protagoras. His friend, previously unaware that Protagoras was in town, is keen to hear more, and Socrates agrees to describe their encounter (309a–10a). The rest of the *Protagoras* consists of Socrates' uninterrupted narration.

Socrates first describes how he came to talk to Protagoras. His story begins before dawn, as his young friend Hippocrates wakes him with the news that Protagoras is in Athens – which Socrates already knew. Hippocrates is keen to learn from Protagoras, and he wants help from

Socrates in approaching him (310b–11a). Socrates uses the early hour as an excuse to delay his friend and examine his aims. Hippocrates finds himself unable to say just what he wants from Protagoras, and Socrates urges caution in educational matters (311a–14c). The two of them then set off, talking all the way to Callias' house, where Protagoras is staying. There, an irritable doorman initially takes them for sophists and denies them entry, but he is eventually persuaded to let them in (314c–e).

Socrates and Hippocrates take in the scene, and then they approach Protagoras. Socrates and Protagoras discuss whether to talk alone or in front of the others, and finally they settle in to converse before everyone present (314e–17e). Socrates first asks what Hippocrates has to gain by studying with Protagoras – the very question Hippocrates could not answer. Protagoras eventually claims to teach general skill at deliberation; with a little prompting he identifies this with political expertise (318a–19a). Socrates, though, doubts whether this can be taught at all, first because the wise Athenians listen to any citizen on political questions (whereas if politics could be taught and learned, they would consult the experts), and second because excellent politicians often fail to transmit their virtue to their sons (319a–20b).

Protagoras replies to these objections in his “Great Speech.” His account of virtue’s teachability begins with a myth about the origins of humanity and human society, but he soon reverts to direct exposition. Briefly, Protagoras argues that everyone must have some political excellence for human society to exist and benefit its members, so everyone can – and wants to, and does – teach this to everyone else. Hence the Athenians listen to anyone speak about politics. However, people vary in their abilities both as learners and as teachers. Variation in ability to learn explains why great politicians often fail to transmit virtue to their sons; those sons had less natural ability. Variation in ability to teach salvages Protagoras’ special role as a teacher of virtue (320c–28d).

Socrates pauses to admire Protagoras’ answer, but tries to turn their conversation to brief question-and-answer for an apparently new line of inquiry: is virtue one or many (328d–29d)? Protagoras contends that it is many (329d–30b), and Socrates offers a series of arguments that seek to unify justice and piety (330b–32a), wisdom and prudence (332a–33b), and justice and prudence (333b–34c). Diversionary tactics in the form of a longer speech from Protagoras leave this last argument unfinished and even imperil the entire conversation. Socrates refuses to engage further, even at Callias’ behest, unless Protagoras adheres to the short question-and-answer format and answers the questions actually asked of him (334c–36b). Alcibiades first

intervenes to take Socrates' side at this point, but Critias, Prodicus, and Hippias all offer their own thoughts about how to proceed, and they agree to Hippias' idea of establishing a supervisor to enforce a compromise (336b–38b). Socrates, however, objects to this notion and proposes instead that he and Protagoras take turns questioning each other, starting with Protagoras as questioner. Protagoras initially resists the idea, but in the end he can hardly refuse (338b–e).

Protagoras uses his turn as questioner to challenge Socrates' grasp of a poem by Simonides. He quickly puts Socrates in the position of defending the poem's coherence against an apparent contradiction: Simonides says that it is hard to become good, but he also criticizes Pittacus for saying that it is hard to be good (338b–39d). Socrates appeals to Prodicus for help in drawing distinctions that might remove the apparent contradiction. First, they distinguish being from becoming. However, Protagoras objects that this puts Simonides in the untenable position of saying that virtue, though acquired with difficulty, is easily retained. Second, they distinguish two senses of “hard” (χάλεπόν) – “difficult” and “bad” – and Prodicus says that Simonides means “bad.” Both Protagoras and Socrates reject this proposal, though (339e–41e). Socrates then offers an extended interpretation of the poem as challenging Pittacus throughout. On his reading, Simonides says that it is truly difficult to become good, but not properly speaking difficult for a human being to be good, as Pittacus says; rather, this is impossible for a human being (341e–44a). The contrast between the difficult and the impossible removes Protagoras' objection to the initial solution – that by criticizing Pittacus' claim that it is hard to be good, Simonides commits himself to saying that it is easy to be good. Socrates then interprets the rest of the poem accordingly. Along the way, he reads into it characteristically Socratic claims about knowledge, action, and the good (344a–47a).

Socrates now encounters more procedural difficulties. Hippias wants to present his own reading of Simonides' poem, and when Socrates tries to return to question-and-answer inquiry and abandon poetry, Protagoras again resists (347a–48b). Finally, with help from Alcibiades, order is restored. After some conciliatory words, Socrates restates his earlier question about the unity of virtue. At this point, Protagoras concedes that the rest of virtue is one, but he insists that courage is distinct (348b–49d). Socrates responds with a thorny initial argument that courage is wisdom (349e–50c), to which Protagoras objects (350c–51b). Socrates seems not to respond to his objections; instead, he suddenly introduces hedonism into the discussion (351b–e) and then just as suddenly shifts to the question whether wisdom is strong (352a–53b). In these two initial skirmishes, Socrates mentions

popular claims that some pleasures are bad and that wisdom is weak. Despite Protagoras' protests, the ensuing conversation notionally seeks to persuade the many first that they are committed to hedonism (353c–55a) and then that hedonism undermines their view that wisdom can be ruled by pleasure (355a–57e). After Protagoras, Prodicus, and Hippias agree to these arguments (358a–d), Socrates draws on this material, or extends the same strategy, in a final argument that courage is wisdom (358d–60e).

The conversation closes with Socrates' reflections on the argument, especially the relationship between virtue's unity in wisdom and its teachability (361a–d). He wants to keep inquiring, but Protagoras has had enough. Protagoras makes a few closing remarks, whereupon Socrates and Hippocrates depart (361d–62a).

Overview of the book

As this summary shows, it is difficult to see why Socrates introduces hedonism into the conversation if not simply because he endorses the view. Nothing else in the dialogue obviously indicates another reason for introducing it. Again, though, if Socrates endorses hedonism, then the *Protagoras* seems to conflict with the rest of Plato's dialogues. Scholars who attribute hedonism to Socrates usually argue that those other discussions, or at least some relevant range of them, do not conflict with the particular form of hedonism found in the *Protagoras*. So, before offering a positive account of hedonism's function in the *Protagoras*, I show why this approach fails.

Chapter 1 undermines efforts to reconcile hedonism in the *Protagoras* with other Platonic dialogues – even those that do not overtly reject hedonism, such as the *Apology* and *Crito*. Proposed reconciliations fail in the first instance because the *Protagoras* presents a specifically bodily hedonism that is utterly out of step with Plato's views everywhere else. One might hope to remove this problem by abstracting away from the bodily focus of the hedonism Socrates presents. However, this response fails in two ways. First, none of the proposed abstractions successfully remove the tensions with other works. Second, this strategy abandons the best argument for attributing hedonism to Socrates in the *Protagoras*: that doing so takes the text at face value.

Chapter 2 defends a novel claim needed as a premise for **Chapter 3**: Protagoras thinks that wisdom is weak, and in particular that it can be ruled by fear. I argue for this claim through a close reading of Socrates' initial argument that courage is wisdom and Protagoras' objection to that

argument (349d–51b). First, I reinterpret a key term in the passage, *μνία*, and I apply familiar Platonic claims about causation and opposition to yield a plausible argument. In light of this reading, I then turn to Protagoras' objection, where I reinterpret a second key term, *θυμός*. This second reinterpretation reveals the real force of Protagoras' complaint: wisdom can be ruled by fear, i.e., it is weak. This reading of the passage ultimately helps to explain otherwise puzzling features of the ensuing discussion about hedonism and the strength of wisdom (351b–57e).

Chapter 3 presents the larger reading of the *Protagoras* in which I situate Socrates' discussion of hedonism. This account is partly inspired by Charles Kahn's classic article, "Drama and Dialectic in Plato's *Gorgias*." Kahn contends that the *Gorgias* can only be understood by attending to the role of shame in three crucial refutations: Gorgias is ashamed to deny that he teaches justice (461b); Polus is ashamed to deny that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it (482d–e); and Callicles is ashamed to approve the life of the *κίναϊδος*,² as his hedonism requires (494e–95c, though Callicles perseveres through his shame).³ I argue that the *Protagoras* must be understood as containing similar moments of shame. Protagoras thinks that injustice can be prudent, that wisdom is weak, and that pleasure is the good. However, he is ashamed to profess these opinions openly, so he tries to conceal them (333c, 352c–d, 351c–d). When these passages are so understood, the dialectical exchanges containing them can be seen to covertly address Protagoras' own views, thereby resolving many stubborn interpretive puzzles.

Chapter 4 turns to the *Gorgias* and fleshes out the striking parallels between that dialogue and the *Protagoras*. Shame figures prominently in each, and in broadly the same ways. Most notably, the particular topics that shame Protagoras closely resemble those that shame Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles. It takes some argument to establish these claims; in particular, it takes a somewhat different reading of shame's role in the *Gorgias* from those given by Kahn or others who have discussed the topic in his wake. Once these similarities between the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias* are revealed, an obvious question presents itself: why are these dialogues similar in these particular ways?

Chapter 5 begins to explain the similarities. It departs from a striking feature of Protagoras' three moments of shame: the many figure prominently

² Partially following Davidson 1997, I take a heterodox view of the *κίναϊδος* as a general sexual profligate.

³ See Kahn 1983. I disagree with Kahn on some points, but agree with him against Cooper 1999 that Socrates' interlocutors feel shame at these three moments; see Chapter 4.

in all three cases as the nominal subject whose views Socrates examines. These repeated references to the many reflect Socrates' deep criticism of both sophists and orators: their views are derived from popular opinion. The many inculcate popular opinion both within that class and at large through shame and the threat of punishment (*R.* 493a–c; *G.* 510a–d, 513a–c). Protagoras manifests his assimilation to popular views when he calls these mechanisms of social control *education* (320c–28d). The views that shame Protagoras and others are legacies of their internalization of popular opinion. As one might expect, the larger Platonic corpus does in fact represent the many as holding those same views.⁴

Chapters 6 and 7 describe and critique the complex of evaluative attitudes held by the many and internalized by elites (including sophists). Chapter 6 explores the central commitment of popular morality, hedonism. While we will “do and acquire and believe” whatever is merely reputed to be just or noble, everyone seeks what really is good (*R.* 505d).⁵ So, hedonism must be intrinsically plausible. Hedonism is intrinsically plausible because pleasures and pains exhaust our empirical evidence about the good. Without an alternative, this suggests pleasure as a natural candidate for the good. However, much of our empirical evidence is distorted. Context effects like those affecting color perception divorce real from perceived hedonic magnitudes. In particular, context effects make bodily and reputational pleasures seem greater than they are, and, more importantly, greater than the soul's pleasures. (Thus, Socrates connects hedonism with strong desires for bodily and reputational goods and presents a specifically bodily form of hedonism in the *Protagoras*.) Correcting these errors requires proper measurement of pleasures, which requires in turn a non-hedonic standard of measurement.

Chapter 7 explains how hedonism distorts conceptions of virtue. First, it generates a conception of justice as helping friends and harming enemies, together with the idea that injustice can be prudent. Again, Plato thinks that hedonism makes our happiness seem to depend on bodily and reputational goods. Those are competitive goods, and prudence in pursuing competitive goods produces multiply-embedded and multiply-overlapping pleonectic alliances (including friendships, families, and

⁴ Kamtekar 2005 makes part of this case by arguing that Callicles has internalized the many's hedonism. As with Kahn, I disagree with Kamtekar on some points, but her reading inspired key parts of my own.

⁵ Except where otherwise noted, translations of the *Protagoras* are my own, translations from the *Republic* are taken from Reeve 2004, and translations from other dialogues are taken from Cooper 1997, sometimes with light revisions.

cities). That produces the view that one should, as a matter of justice, help friends (pleonectic allies) and harm enemies (pleonectic rivals). Injustice toward enemies is thus enshrined as a part of justice. Hedonism distorts attitudes about piety in related ways. Further, it generates the view that wisdom is weak in the face of pleasure and fear (even though it actually entails that wisdom is strong). If wisdom is weak, then it is distinct from courage and temperance, which allow one to resist pleasure and fear, respectively; hence, virtue is many. These misconceptions of wisdom, courage, temperance, and virtue in general are closely connected to the notion that virtue cannot be taught. [Chapter 7](#) also describes intense social pressures to engage in double-think on all of these topics.

[Chapter 8](#) discusses enduring popular hostility to sophists (even though they have internalized popular morality) and to Socrates. Each seems to threaten certain pleonectic alliances, whether by strengthening rivals, forming new rivals, or eroding the allegiance of talented youth to the group and to its structuring commitments. Members of pleonectic alliances think their happiness depends upon the group's success and upon their allies' allegiance to the group and its structuring commitments. Naturally, then, they are hostile to anyone who challenges the group in any of the ways just described. Thus, Protagoras is ashamed to openly express several views that he has previously internalized through shame.

Plato's depiction of Protagoras manifests his lifelong obsession with how natural elites are corrupted by internalizing popular opinion through shame before the many and previously corrupted elites. Further, the contents of popular opinion – hedonism and the misconceptions of virtue stemming from it – remain roughly constant across the dialogues. The present book traces these commonalities, revealing coherence – not mere consistency – among treatments of pleasure in the *Protagoras* and other dialogues, especially the *Gorgias* and *Republic*. It thereby establishes, at long last, an intelligible and harmonious place for the *Protagoras* in the Platonic corpus – one that also sheds significant light on Plato's anti-hedonism and its central role in his ethical thought.

Note on methodology

I hope this summary piques the reader's interest enough to see whether its claims can be made good. However, some readers may already worry about *how* its claims will be made good. Those attuned to scholarly debates about how to read Plato may have noticed that my interpretive methods are ecumenical. For the most part, I assume little about the chronology of

Plato's dialogues; the development or unity of Plato's thought; the roles of argument analysis and literary analysis in understanding a Platonic dialogue; whether we can straightforwardly regard Socrates as speaking for Plato, and so on. However, I will also describe my actual interpretive practices so that readers know roughly what to expect.

First, I generally talk as though the character Socrates speaks for Plato, and as though Socrates has and expresses positive commitments. Still, I hope that those who sharply distinguish Plato from Socrates, or who think of Socrates and Plato as skeptical inquirers, can abstract away from this way of talking and consider my main claims (or suitably adjusted versions of them) from within their own interpretive perspectives.

Second, I refer freely to any Platonic text that seems relevant to the interpretive questions at hand. Some who believe that Plato's views developed extensively over time may wince when, for example, I cite the *Sophist* to inform my understanding of Protagoras' character. My first interpretive instincts are unitarian, but I neither assume nor argue for any general unitarianism here. Such larger questions must be approached piecemeal. I do claim to identify an important common thread that crosses widely-accepted developmental lines (especially the line between "early" and "middle" dialogues). However, even if my reading is persuasive, it neither entitles me to claim, nor does it commit me to finding, more general continuity. Developmentalists accept that there is some continuity across Plato's dialogues, and so may well be able to accept my main claims (or, again, suitably adjusted versions of them) without abandoning their larger views.

Third, this project involves both argument analysis and literary analysis. There may be some few partisans who agitate for one of these interpretive modes to the exclusion of the other, but they are few and far between. Almost everyone recognizes that both modes of analysis are legitimate tools in the interpretation of Plato. Disagreement concerns how to combine them, either in general or on particular occasions. As with questions about development or unity across the dialogues, I prefer to start from particular cases rather than mounting a general argument for the priority of one or the other mode of analysis, or for their equal footing. Naturally, I do not expect that my judgments about how to proceed in particular cases will meet with universal assent. In my experience, though, progress in these debates occurs precisely in discussions about particular cases, not in those about grand theories. Hence, I simply proceed as seems best to me and hope that those who disagree with my judgment in particular cases will engage precisely at that level.

The best possible interpretation of a Platonic dialogue would make optimal sense of everything: every explicit claim and argument in the text; every characterization and dramatic detail; its relation to evidence of all sorts from elsewhere in Plato; even its relation to all parts of the larger historical record, both philological and archaeological. That is the work of an entire scholarly community, not of a single book, which must inevitably be more selective along every one of those dimensions. Questions of what to focus on and how to proceed on particular occasions cannot be answered by general, true, informative interpretive principles, but are inevitably matters of judgment. (Call this “interpretive particularism.”) The best way to make the case for my ecumenical approach and my choice of particular approaches in particular contexts – probably the only way – is simply to argue as seems best to me, and to produce a compelling interpretation. I proceed now to that task.

*Against hedonist interpretations
of the Protagoras*

In the *Protagoras*, Plato's Socrates introduces a hedonist theory of good and virtue (351b–e), defends it (353c–55a), and uses it to argue that wisdom is strong and cannot be ruled by pleasure (355a–57e). Scholarly opinion divides over whether Socrates endorses the hedonism he presents. Call the view that he does “pro-hedonism” and the view that he does not “anti-hedonism.”¹ This chapter systematically undermines pro-hedonist readings of the *Protagoras*. I begin by reviewing the main arguments on each side.

Pro-hedonists claim that their view stays closer to the text. This argument has three parts. First, if Socrates endorses hedonism, that neatly explains why he introduces the view unprompted. Second, his exact phrasing suggests that he endorses it. Third, he seems to say that his larger argument needs the hedonist premise it employs (354e3–8). The first two arguments have some force even in light of initial anti-hedonist replies, so I consider them here. The third does not, and I discuss it later (3.3.3).

First, then, Socrates introduces hedonism quite suddenly. He argues that wisdom is courage (349e1–50c5), and Protagoras objects to his argument (350c6–51b2). Socrates then shifts the topic to good and bad lives (351b3–4) and asks whether Protagoras accepts a hedonist account of good and bad lives (351b4–6). The shift is puzzling; one scholar has even proposed that Socrates' discussion of hedonism was grafted onto the end of our text from a later version of the *Protagoras*.² Two facts must be explained here: first, why Socrates starts discussing good and bad lives at all, and second, why he offers Protagoras a hedonist theory of good and bad lives. The second of these facts, say some pro-hedonists, is best explained by supposing that Socrates accepts the hedonism he presents.³

¹ See Zeyl 1980. I use “hedonism” throughout to refer to the view that pleasure =_{id} the good.

² Taylor 1991, 162; he withdraws the suggestion in his second edition (225).

³ Chapter 2 explains the first point – why Socrates starts talking about good and bad lives at all – in a way available to pro-hedonists and anti-hedonists alike. Chapter 3, and in a way the rest of the book, defends an anti-hedonist explanation for Socrates' introduction of hedonism in particular.

Anti-hedonists respond that Socrates introduces hedonism as part of an *ad hominem* argument against Protagoras or the many, whose views are examined in the subsequent conversation. Pro-hedonists reply that this explanation fails: Protagoras rejects hedonism, and when he does, Socrates associates that rejection with the many's views (351b7–d7). So, this evidence is difficult for anti-hedonists. The text may be consistent with anti-hedonism, but pro-hedonists can lay claim to the most natural, unconstrained reading.⁴

Second, several of Socrates' locutions suggest that he endorses the hedonism he presents. C. C. W. Taylor develops this argument most fully in his detailed discussion of what exactly the various textual signs show.⁵ Anti-hedonists reply, following Donald Zeyl, that no passage compels pro-hedonism, and even Taylor now concedes that Socrates never commits himself unambiguously.⁶ Most of Zeyl's arguments succeed,⁷ but their power is limited. The text can be read, without obvious distortion, in such a way that Socrates does not endorse hedonism. However, here again pro-hedonists can reasonably insist that theirs is the most natural, unconstrained reading.

However, anti-hedonists offer these responses against the backdrop of their own main argument: attributing hedonism to Socrates makes the *Protagoras* clash with other dialogues. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates denies that the good is the pleasant (e.g., 495d–e, 500d). In the *Phaedo*, he criticizes a hedonist calculus that resembles the one he presents in the *Protagoras*

⁴ I argue in later chapters that Socrates attributes hedonism to both Protagoras and the many.

⁵ Taylor 1991.

⁶ Zeyl 1980, section I; Taylor 2003. Taylor calls Zeyl naïve for saying that hedonism cannot be reconciled with the *Apology* and *Crito* (161 n. 20). I will defend Zeyl's claim more thoroughly than he does.

⁷ One quibble: Socrates asks “Does it not seem to you, my good people, as Protagoras and I say [ὥς φαμεν ἐγὼ τε καὶ Πρωταγόρας], that these things are bad on account of nothing other than the fact that they result in pain and deprive us of other pleasures? Would they agree?” (353e6–54a1). Zeyl says this refers not to what Protagoras and Socrates say in their own voices, but to what they say the many think. In particular, it alludes to an earlier agreement about what the many will say at 353d6–e3; at 353e5–54a1 “the prediction is being tested” (255). But Socrates and Protagoras cannot well test their joint prediction by having Socrates ask Protagoras whether it will be fulfilled. Zeyl wrongly identifies the prediction at 353d6–e3 with the question at 353e5–54a1. The exchange proceeds thus: Socrates and Protagoras suppose that the many would say that eating, drinking, and sex are bad, when they are, solely because they produce disease and poverty (353d6–e3). Next, they agree that the many would say that disease and poverty produce pains (353e3–5). Finally, Socrates asks whether they would agree that this production of pains through disease and poverty is the sole reason why eating, drinking, and sex are bad, when they are (353e–54a1). The many are not quite committed to this further claim. One could agree to the first two questions and say that disease and poverty are bad for some reason other than that they produce pain. However, this is an unlikely position for the many to take, so Socrates supposes that he and Protagoras, in agreeing about the many's first two answers, have effectively agreed about the third as well.

(68c–69c). He denies that pleasure is the good in the *Republic* (505c), and even as he defends justice as more pleasant than injustice (580d–88a), he distinguishes the good from pleasure and the pleasant (581e–82a, 588a). One of Socrates' main aims in the *Philebus* is to argue that pleasure is neither the human good (e.g., 11b–c, 21a–d, 54a–d) nor its primary constituent (59e–67b). Finally, the Stranger in the *Laws*, much like Socrates in the *Republic*, argues that the just life is most pleasant (661d–64c; cf. 732e–34d), but considers the good and the pleasant distinct, though inseparable (662a, 663a–b; cf. 734d–e).

Pro-hedonists respond either that these passages do not touch the particular form of hedonism presented in the *Protagoras* (hereafter “PH”),⁸ or that even if they do, Plato's views developed: early in life, he endorsed hedonism; later, he rejected it.⁹ These strategies get specified in various ways, and while some pro-hedonists use one strategy exclusively, they are usually combined.¹⁰ The most common hybrid strategy attempts to reconcile the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias* but appeals to Plato's intellectual development beyond that.¹¹ As with anti-hedonist readings of *Protagoras* 351b–57e, however, pro-hedonist efforts to fit the *Protagoras* into Plato's corpus end up seeming *ad hoc*. On the most natural, unconstrained reading, Socrates persistently and tirelessly denies and argues against hedonism as such.

Dialogues that do not explicitly address hedonism are usually treated as neutral ground. That includes works purportedly earlier than the *Protagoras*, notably the *Apology* and *Crito*.¹² Some anti-hedonists do see a conflict between those works and the *Protagoras*.¹³ And some pro-hedonists think PH is a natural elaboration of views found there: (i) Socrates gives no informative account of the good that virtue knows; (ii) however, his

⁸ This requires distinguishing the hedonism Socrates accepts in the *Protagoras* from the hedonism he rejects elsewhere. On one view, the *Gorgias* rejects present-aim hedonism, while the *Protagoras* endorses prudential hedonism (Irwin 1979; Gosling and Taylor 1982; White 1985; Berman 1991b). On another view, the *Gorgias* rejects hedonism of felt desires, while the *Protagoras* endorses hedonism of true desires (Rudebusch 1999).

⁹ This involves commitments about the chronology of the dialogues. I prefer not to take a stand on such issues, but I grant orthodox chronological premises for purposes of *ad hominem* refutation, as I will again at 5.3. Heterodox chronologies would not obviously resist my arguments any better.

¹⁰ Hackforth 1928, 39–40, 42 and Irwin 1995a appeal only to development. At the other extreme, Butler 1999 and Butler 2003 offer hedonist readings of the *Republic* and *Philebus*. Butler views these as steps toward a uniformly hedonist reading of Plato (personal communication).

¹¹ See Berman 1991b; Rudebusch 1999; and Reshotko 2006. The other main hybrid approach comes from Gosling and Taylor 1982, chs. 4–6, who try to reconcile the *Protagoras* with the *Phaedo* as well; for a response, see Weiss 1989.

¹² See n. 9 above on chronology. ¹³ See n. 6 above, n. 15 below.

comparisons of virtue with the τέχναι suggest that virtue produces the good it knows; so, (iii) it is natural to introduce pleasure as the good virtue knows and produces.¹⁴ Again, though, these works are generally seen as neutral ground.

When one considers the *Protagoras* in isolation, then, pro-hedonism seems more plausible. When one considers the *Protagoras* as part of the Platonic corpus, anti-hedonism seems more plausible. Pro-hedonists awkwardly try to explain how the *Protagoras* fits into Plato's works, while anti-hedonists awkwardly try to explain why Socrates brings hedonism into the conversation. Rational debate reaches equipollence. This chapter aims to upset the dialectical standstill just described in favor of anti-hedonism by arguing that PH conflicts inexorably with the *Apology* and *Crito*. PH conflicts with the *Gorgias* and other dialogues in the same way. This leaves the pro-hedonist case in disarray.

I begin by arguing that *Protagoras* 351b–57e presents a specifically bodily form of hedonism. This claim is not novel, but I defend it in more detail than others have (I.1).¹⁵ For reasons to emerge below, I need only show that PH is most naturally understood as a specifically bodily hedonism, not that it must be so understood.

Next, I argue that if Socrates accepts the specifically bodily hedonism he presents in the *Protagoras*, that dialogue cannot be reconciled with the *Apology* and *Crito*. In those two works, Socrates says that one should pursue virtue and other goods of the soul rather than bodily and reputational goods, because the former are better than the latter. He reveals a sincere commitment to these claims in deeds that he performs and describes in both works. Neither claim can be reconciled with PH understood as a strictly bodily hedonism (I.2).

¹⁴ Irwin 1977; Irwin 1995a. Irwin admits that a productive model of virtue's benefits clashes with other claims about virtue in the *Apology* and *Crito* (Irwin 1977, 112–13; Irwin 1995a, 76–77). He excuses this feature of his reading because “many philosophers have accepted theories that fail to justify some of their convictions” (Irwin 1995a, 77). Interpretive charity runs out somewhere, and we may ultimately decide that Socrates has an incoherent view. However, Irwin's arguments from the craft analogy are not so strong that we should give up on the coherence of Socrates' view before giving up on Irwin's arguments. Irwin also argues that Socrates wants an account of virtue that makes no appeal to disputed properties and that the *Protagoras* provides such an account by appealing to the measurable property of pleasantness (cf. *Eu.* 7b–d). Plato surely thinks that pleasantness is measurable, but I doubt whether he considers it less disputed than justice or goodness (cf. *R.* 581c–82a).

¹⁵ See Vlastos 1969, 74–75; Zeyl 1980, 263; McCoy 1998, 36–37; contrast Denyer 2008 ad 354c8. McCoy argues that Socrates' presentation of a specifically bodily hedonism supports the notion that he presents PH *ad hominem*. I basically agree, and will argue further that Socrates presents PH as a view held by Protagoras in part because he has internalized it from the many, which explains PH's bodily orientation (Chapters 3, 5–6). However, Protagoras cares more for reputation, and perhaps for bodily goods like wealth as tokens of good reputation (cf. 328b–c), for reasons to be explained.

As a result, pro-hedonists will reject my reading of PH. First, I consider a generic response: Socrates accepts hedonism, but he emphasizes bodily pleasures and pains solely to convince the many. However, the question of PH's place in the Platonic corpus forms just one part of a larger collection of arguments. When pro-hedonists explain PH's bodily orientation by noting that Socrates is notionally addressing the many, they vitiate their own strongest positive argument: that pro-hedonism takes the text at face value. This generic pro-hedonist response thus comes at great cost in the wider dialectic.

Further, the generic strategy does not suffice. Pro-hedonists must show specifically how modifying PH (as I interpret it) can remove the conflict. I consider six possibilities. The first appeals to reciprocal harm suffered by those who wrong others. The second and third appeal to the *Euthydemus*: one to its "conditionality thesis" and the other to its purportedly adaptive account of happiness. (These first three possibilities do not require abstracting away from PH's bodily orientation.) The fourth appeals to the pains of shame, the fifth to post-mortem pleasures and pains, and the last to pleasures of virtuous activity. None of these six proposals successfully reconciles the *Apology* and *Crito* with hedonism.

More briefly, then: PH is most naturally understood as a purely bodily hedonism (1.1). So understood, it inexorably conflicts with Plato's other works, including the *Apology* and *Crito* (1.2). The conflict cannot be removed by standard pro-hedonist strategies. The obvious response – abstracting away from the bodily orientation of PH because Socrates addresses the many – carries unacceptable costs for pro-hedonism. Further, no specific way of abstracting away from PH's bodily orientation actually reconciles it with the *Apology* and *Crito* (1.3). At this point, ascribing PH to Socrates looks quite unattractive, and the ground is cleared for the alternative approach defended in the rest of the book.

1.1 *Bodily hedonism in the Protagoras*

Let us distinguish goods and bads of the body, reputation, and the soul.¹⁶ Socrates draws these distinctions in the *Republic* (e.g., 580d–81c), and he contrasts goods of the soul with goods of the body and reputation in the

¹⁶ I use "bads" because this slight infelicity is preferable to the misleading connotations of "evils" (cf. Penner 1991, 162–63 n. 17). I also phrase many points solely in terms of goods and pleasures and trust the reader to understand correlative points about bads and pains.

Apology (29d–30b, 34e–35b).¹⁷ He constantly divides goods of the body from goods of the soul, including in the *Protagoras* (313a–14c).

PH, I claim, ranges over bodily goods and bads alone, and excludes goods and bads of reputation and the soul. For as Socrates defends PH, every specific good or bad that he mentions seems to belong to the body, including:

group 1: eating, drinking, sex (353c);¹⁸

group 2: disease, poverty (353d–e);

group 3: exercise, training, being burned, being cut, taking medicine, fasting (354a);

group 4: health, physical fitness, civic preservation, political power, wealth (354b).

These lists of specific goods and bads are tilted so markedly toward the body and its needs as to seem deliberate. However, Socrates does not explicitly distinguish bodily goods and bads from others and explicitly limit PH to bodily goods and bads. Hence, my claim about the most natural reading of PH stands open to two objections.

First, some group 4 goods could be thought of as goods of reputation or the soul. For example, political power seems like a reputational good. One also might take pleasure in being admired for one's health, or use wealth to purchase education and its attendant pleasures.¹⁹ Most importantly, the wider passage's main purpose is to argue that wisdom is strong, and wisdom is surely a good of the soul.

Socrates draws a distinction that clarifies my claim about the natural reading of PH and enables me to reply to the first objection. He distinguishes two ways of being pleasant: by partaking of pleasure and by producing pleasure (Ἡδέα δὲ καλεῖς . . . οὐ τὰ ἡδονῆς μετέχοντα ἢ ποιοῦντα ἡδονήν; 351d–e). He then uses this distinction, and the implicit correlative distinction between painful things that partake of pain and those that produce pain, while he argues the many into accepting hedonism as their only resource to explain why some pleasures are bad and some pains

¹⁷ The *Phaedo* is puzzling on the relationship between bodily and reputational goods; see 68c, 82c.

¹⁸ Socrates mentions food, drink, and sexual matters (σίτων καὶ ποτῶν καὶ ἀφροδισίων; 353c), and these (or at least the first two) might be thought distinct from the activities of eating, drinking, and sex. However, Socrates thinks of food, drink, and sexual matters as being done or used (αὐτὰ πράττειν). (See below for more on the use of other goods.) Strikingly, delicacies (δψα) make no appearance in this passage; cp. *Republic* 372a–73a. Another oddity is the omission of friendship and enmity. This omission is not unique; friendship is absent from the list of goods at *Euthydemus* 279a–d as well. And in any case, civic preservation and political power imply civic friendship, at least.

¹⁹ The idea of purchasing education is fraught in this context (*Pr.* 310d–e, 313c–14b, 328b–c, 357e); I am simply articulating a possible objection.

good (353c–54e). Socrates' terminology shifts between these two passages, but the distinction is the same.

Socrates asks the many whether they call certain pleasures bad “because each of them provides [παρέχει] pleasure in the present moment and is pleasant” (353d). Here, “provides pleasure in the present moment” is equivalent to “partakes of pleasure” and specifies in advance how each of the things mentioned is pleasant. Similarly, he asks the many whether they call certain pains good “because they provide [παρέχει] extreme pain and suffering in the present moment” (354b), that is, simply because they partake of pain. Socrates then suggests a more palatable view: these pleasures and pains are bad or good when they produce pains and pleasures, respectively. In the first case, the many allow that “at a later time they produce [ποιεῖ] disease and poverty and provide [παράσκευάζει] other such things” (353d), and that “by producing disease they produce pains, and by producing poverty they produce pains” (νόσους ποιοῦντα ἀνίας ποιεῖ, καὶ πενίας ποιοῦντα ἀνίας ποιεῖ; 353e–54a). That is why the many call such pleasures bad (354a; cf. n. 7 above): they are painful (and so bad) when they produce pain, even though they partake of pleasure (and so are good to that extent). In the second case, the many grant that certain pains are good “because at a later time health and fitness of the body and preservation of cities and rule over others and wealth come to be [γίγνονται] from them” (354b), and that “these are good . . . because they result in [ἄποτελευτᾷ] pleasures and removals and avoidances of pain” (354b). That is, activities such as exercise partake of pain (and so are bad to that extent), but insofar as they produce pleasures, they are good.

Differences in terminology notwithstanding, Socrates here employs his earlier distinction. More briefly: at 353c–54e, he notes that groups 1 and 3 partake of pleasure and pain, while groups 2 and 4 produce pain and pleasure.²⁰ Groups 1 and 3 sometimes produce items in groups 2 and 4, and so indirectly produce pain and pleasure. Socrates and Protagoras agree that this is the many's only explanation for why some pleasures are bad and some pains good.

With this distinction and its application in hand, we can articulate more precisely both my claim about PH and the first objection to my claim. I say that PH ranges only over things that either partake of or produce bodily pleasure or pain. The objection says that some things productive of pleasure – items in group 4, or wisdom – could produce not only bodily

²⁰ The claim that disease produces pain rather than partaking of pain may seem strange. However, one can surely be ill without yet experiencing painful symptoms of the illness.

pleasures, but also other pleasures. However, the only things Socrates actually mentions that partake of pleasure are those that partake of bodily pleasure (group 1),²¹ and the only things he actually mentions that partake of pain are those that partake of bodily pain (group 3). Whenever PH mentions things that produce pleasure and pain, then, these are most naturally taken to produce specifically bodily pleasure and pain.²² Hence wealth and political power are bodily goods here – their value consists entirely in producing bodily pleasure (cf. *R.* 580d–81a on wealth) – and poverty is likewise a bodily bad. Similarly, PH presents wisdom as good solely because it produces pleasure and prevents pain. But again, the only pleasures and pains Socrates mentions in this context are bodily pleasures and pains – he never even alludes to pleasures of learning, or pleasure taken simply in one’s wisdom – so the most natural reading is that PH recognizes wisdom as good solely because it produces bodily pleasures and prevents bodily pains (cp. *R.* 553c–d). Similarly, PH does not mention any properly reputational pleasures and pains such as pride and shame. Hence, it is naturally read as holding that “reputational goods” are good only for the bodily pleasures they produce and the bodily pains they prevent. (In any case, neither pleasures of virtuous activity nor reputational pleasures and pains such as pride and shame can actually reconcile PH with other dialogues, as we shall see [1.3.6; 1.2, 1.3.4].)

So much by way of clarifying my main claim about PH and responding to the first objection. The second objection stems from Prodicus’ earlier distinction between bodily pleasure (ἡδέσθαι) and pleasure of the soul (εὐφραίνεσθαι; 337c). After Socrates presents PH and argues that wisdom

²¹ The introduction of things that partake of pleasure with the phrase ἐν τοῖσδε, οἷον . . . may be thought relevant here. The phrase ἐν τοῖσδε suggests that an exhaustive list follows, while οἷον suggests a more limited, possibly representative, list (cf. Adam and Adam 1893, 179). Either reading supports the claim that Socrates only considers bodily pleasures here. On the other hand, this phrase introduces not just a list of pleasures, but a list of cases in which people experience (what they call) “being weaker than pleasure.” If people usually consider themselves “overcome” by bodily pleasures, that might explain the focus of the passage without making that focus central to PH. If any pro-hedonists like this reply, I leave it to them to develop and defend it. Notice, though, that this explanation for Socrates’ bodily focus in presenting PH may compete for space with the explanation that such pleasures are simply an appropriate rhetorical tactic when addressing the many. I actually think Plato’s Socrates would agree that people are most often overcome by bodily pleasures and pains, but only because these are an ultimate source of the ignorance he eventually identifies with “being weaker than pleasure” (357e); cf. [Chapters 6–7](#).

²² Or, perhaps better: to produce things that partake of bodily pleasures and pains. Presumably an activity partakes of pleasure when pleasure is a part or aspect of the activity itself, and a pleasure is the limit case of something that partakes of pleasure. And perhaps pleasures are always best seen as modal pleasures identical to activities, i.e., perhaps the “limit case” is the universal case (cf. [n. 18](#) above).

is strong (351b–57e), and after all the sophists agree (358a), he turns to address Prodicus in particular (358a–b):

I disregard [παραιτοῦμαι] the Prodician division of names, for whether you call it “pleasant” [ἡδύ] or “delightful” [τερπνόν] or “enjoyable” [χαρτόν], or however you please to name such things, my dear Prodicus, answer my question as I intend it.

The objection is that Socrates here alludes to Prodicus’ distinction between pleasures of the body and pleasures of the soul. So, this passage hints that Socrates allows PH to range over both kinds of pleasure, even though he only mentions bodily pleasures while presenting it.

However, the distinctions in the two passages differ. The difference between them not only undermines the second objection; it actually shows that 358a–b supports my reading. Prodicus earlier distinguished between ἡδεσθαι and εὐφραίνεσθαι. Socrates here disregards as merely verbal distinctions among the ἡδύ, τερπνόν, and χαρτόν. But this list includes a form of Prodicus’ term for what is pleasant to the body (ἡδύ), and excludes any form of his term for what is pleasant to the soul. If Socrates alludes back to Prodicus’ earlier distinction, then, he here warns against merely verbal distinctions among bodily pleasures. Far from suggesting that we should abstract away from the bodily focus of PH, this passage actually supports the claim that PH is restricted to bodily pleasures and pains.

Now, late testimony from Hermias states that the historical Prodicus used χαρά to refer to pleasure of the soul.²³ Thus, one might think that Socrates brings pleasures of the soul into the discussion when he mentions the χαρτόν (*Pr.* 358a). However, Plato quite generally depicts Prodicus’ distinctions among pleasures differently from other authors. Aristotle reports that Prodicus divided ἡδονή into χαρά, τέρψις, and εὐφροσύνη (*Top.* II.6). According to Aristotle, then, Prodicus made ἡδονή the genus of all pleasure. Plato’s Prodicus, in contrast, makes ἡδονή a particular species of pleasure – bodily pleasure (337c). Perhaps Plato does not care about historical accuracy, or perhaps Aristotle and Hermias do not, or perhaps they simply rely on different sources. But if Aristotle’s report helps us to understand the *Protagoras*, it is thus: of the pleasure terms attested for Prodicus, Socrates omits one at 358a–b, εὐφροσύνη. However Prodicus himself used pleasure terms, Plato’s Prodicus reserves εὐφροσύνη for pleasures of the soul (*Pr.* 337c). Aristotle’s list underlines Socrates’ particular omission of the term that Plato’s Prodicus reserves for pleasure

²³ Cf. Denyer 2008 *ad* 35a7.

of the soul. So, *Protagoras* 358a–b bolsters the case that PH is a purely bodily hedonism.

These arguments are tenuous, given our limited evidence. So, before moving on, I consider two ways to clarify how Socrates receives Prodicus' distinctions among kinds of pleasure. First, one might consider how Socrates reacts to other Prodician distinctions in the *Protagoras*. Second, one might consider whether Socrates himself accepts a distinction between bodily pleasures and pleasures of the soul in the *Protagoras*.

Socrates mentions another Prodician distinction soon after the last one. At 358d–e, he says that whether you call it φόβος or δέος, fear is an expectation of something bad (προσδοκίαν κακοῦ). Prodicus accepts this account for δέος, but not for φόβος. Socrates blithely dismisses this worry (οὐδὲν . . . διαφέρει), since his claims are still true of δέος. This is odd; the identity of all fear with a προσδοκίαν κακοῦ is crucial to Socrates' argument. That argument now might establish that wisdom is stronger than δέος, but the possibility remains that wisdom is weaker than φόβος.

I see three ways to understand the exchange. First, Socrates might be saying that Prodicus' distinction is a baseless verbal one (cf. *Eu.* 12b10–c1). This is how I read Socrates' comment about ἡδύ, τερπνόν, and χαρτόν. Second, he might think Prodicus denies that φόβος involves taking anything to be bad; he might then doubt whether φόβος produces action on its own.²⁴ Third, he might suppose that Prodicus thinks φόβος is directed at something the agent considers bad, but which is already present, e.g., one might φοβεῖν public speaking while speaking in public.²⁵ The second and third readings have no obvious implications for how Socrates receives Prodicus' distinctions among pleasures. Hence, this evidence from the immediate context of 358a–b does not undermine the reading of that passage just defended. Neither does any of the other evidence from the *Protagoras*.²⁶

²⁴ Cf. Penner 1991, 201–2 n. 45.

²⁵ Cf. Taylor 1991, 205. In this case, Socrates' argument at *Symposium* 200a–d could be adapted to place the proper object of φόβος in the future.

²⁶ Socrates talks about other Prodician distinctions as he interprets Simonides. First, he recalls the earlier distinctions (from 337a–c), and then he adds one between βούλεσθαι and ἐπιθυμεῖν (340a–b; cp. *Ch.* 167e, *G.* 466b–68e). Next, he asks Prodicus to distinguish becoming and being (γενέσθαι and εἶναι). Protagoras applies this distinction to little effect (340d–e), but Socrates later applies it more fruitfully (343d–44c). In the interim, Socrates mentions that Prodicus objects to his calling Protagoras “fearfully wise” (σοφός καὶ δεινός), since good things cannot be fearful (341a–b). (This provides another datum for Prodicus' view of fear, but it does not clarify the distinction between φόβος and δέος. If Prodicus denies that φόβος involves taking anything to be bad, he here joins δεινός with δέος but not φόβος. However, this answers no interesting questions.) Socrates then prompts Prodicus similarly to restrict the sense of χαλεπόν to “bad” (κακόν) and not “difficult” (opposed to ῥᾶδιον). Both Socrates and Protagoras reject Prodicus' claim about how Simonides uses

Finally, does Socrates distinguish pleasures of the body from those of the soul? He tells Hippocrates that teachings nourish the soul (τρέφεται; 313c), and elsewhere in Plato, pleasure is defined as being filled with what is appropriate to our nature (*R.* 585d; *L.* 733a; cf. τοῦτο μοι ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ἀποπλήρωσον at *Pr.* 329c). So, talk of the soul's nourishment might allude to the pleasures of learning. Further, it seems significant that Socrates draws an analogy between body and soul in the midst of the passage where he discusses hedonism (352b–c). Socrates very likely thinks the soul has its own pleasures, distinct from bodily pleasures. However, if he endorses PH, this merely heightens the need to explain why he elides those pleasures in presenting his view. (A parallel point applies if Socrates recognizes the existence of properly reputational pleasures in the *Protagoras*.)

All relevant evidence, then, suggests that Socrates carefully restricts PH to bodily pleasures and pains.²⁷ So understood, everyone will concede that PH conflicts with the rest of the Platonic corpus, which invariably privileges goods of the soul over goods of the body. Even in the *Protagoras*, Socrates says the condition of one's soul is far more important than the condition of one's body (313a–c). However, we cannot rest content with the general impression that bodily hedonism conflicts with Plato's other works; we must also say where exactly the conflict lies.²⁸

1.2 PH and the *Apology* and *Crito*

To that end, I now extract from the *Apology* and *Crito* two linked claims about the relationship between virtue and other goods. Each claim conflicts with PH, and Socrates manifests each commitment in deeds. He accepts these two claims not just about virtue and other goods generally, but also about justice and survival in particular, again both in words and in deeds. (This special case is relevant to some responses considered in 1.3.)

χολεπόν. Again, none of this clarifies how Socrates receives Prodicus' distinctions among kinds of pleasure.

²⁷ Denyer 2008, 177 argues that ἀνία and its cognates refer specifically to pains of the soul. The linguistic claim is implausible (Taylor 1991, 138, but cf. 172, 176–77), and it would cause serious interpretive difficulties. For example, while arguing that the many are committed to hedonism, Socrates asks whether they think that disease and poverty produce ἀνία (353e). Context makes it overwhelmingly likely that ἀνία means physical pain. Better to let that context guide our interpretation than to insist that ἀνία refers invariably to pain of the soul.

²⁸ For one thing, as we shall see, *Protagoras* 313a–c does not conflict with PH as read in 1.1.

According to PH, virtue produces bodily goods such as health and wealth (353c–d) and prevents bodily bads such as poverty and disease (354a–b), thereby indirectly producing bodily pleasure (353e–54a) and preventing bodily pain (354b–c). The text seems to make this the sole reason to pursue virtue. According to PH, then, not only is pursuit of virtue compatible with pursuit of bodily goods; virtue should be pursued precisely as the best way to pursue bodily goods.²⁹

When he exhorts people to virtue, though, Socrates contrasts pursuit of bodily and reputational goods with pursuit of goods of the soul, especially virtue (*Ap.* 29d7–30a2, 30a7–b4; trans. mine):

“My good man, since you are an Athenian – one who belongs to the greatest city and that most renowned [εὐδοκιμωτάτης] for wisdom and strength – aren’t you ashamed [αἰσχύνη] of being eager [ἐπιμελούμενος] to have as much wealth, reputation, and honor as possible [χρημάτων . . . καὶ δόξης καὶ τιμῆς], while you neither care for [ἐπιμελεῖ] nor give thought to [φροντίζεις] wisdom [φρονήσεως], truth, and how your soul may be as good as possible?” And if one of you disputes this and purports to care [ἐπιμελεῖσθαι], I won’t immediately let him go or leave him; I’ll question and examine and test him, and if I don’t think he has attained excellence [ἀρετήν], but says he has, I’ll reproach him [ὀνειδιῶ] because he attaches less importance to things of the greatest worth [τὰ πλείστου ἄξια περὶ ἐλαχίστου ποιεῖται], and greater importance to things worth less.

I go around doing nothing but persuading both young and old among you not to care for [ἐπιμελεῖσθαι] your wealth or body before [πρότερον] or as strongly as [οὕτω σφόδρα] that your soul be as good as possible, saying that “Excellence does not come from wealth [οὐκ ἐκ χρημάτων ἀρετὴ γίγνεται], but excellence makes wealth and everything else good for human beings [ἀλλ’ ἐξ ἀρετῆς χρήματα καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἀγαθὰ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἔπαντα], both privately and publicly.”

If Socrates thought virtue were valuable for the sake of health, wealth, reputation, and honor, he would not contrast pursuit of virtue with pursuit of those goods. Nor would he think it shameful how strongly people care about (ἐπιμελεῖσθαι) other goods. He might urge people to keep caring for those other goods, but to pursue virtue as the best means to them. Alternatively, he might charge anyone who fails to seek virtue with not caring about other goods, since they do not care enough to seek them intelligently. However, he says nothing of the sort. So, PH and the *Apology* conflict over the practical relationship between virtue and other goods. PH

²⁹ I talk about bodily goods and bads and bodily pleasures and pains, even though on a hedonist theory the pleasures and pains *are* goods and bads. Expressing this fact throughout would be cumbersome without materially altering my argument.

recommends virtue as a means to bodily goods, and thereby to bodily pleasure. The *Apology* exhorts us to seek virtue rather than bodily and reputational goods. These practical positions are inconsistent. (Further, because the *Apology* prioritizes goods of the soul over reputational goods, allowing PH to range over reputational pleasures as well as bodily pleasures would do nothing to reconcile it with the *Apology*.)

There is a small hitch. In the last line quoted above – “excellence makes wealth and everything else good for human beings” – Socrates might seem to say that we should pursue virtue precisely because it produces other goods. This would reconcile the *Apology* with PH, but it would also suggest that within the *Apology*, Socrates incoherently advises people to seek virtue rather than other goods, and yet to do so for the sake of those other goods. However, if we take ἀγαθὰ at 30b3 as predicate, then Socrates says that we should pursue virtue because it makes other things good, not because it makes other good things. This reading does not attribute incoherent advice to Socrates, so it is preferable.³⁰

Now for the second conflict. At *Apology* 29d–30b, Socrates not only advises people to pursue goods of the soul rather than goods of the body and reputation, he also offers a reason for his advice: the former are superior to the latter. This admits of three readings. First, define *strict commensurability*: A and B are strictly commensurable on standard S just in case some number or amount of A exceeds B on S, and *vice versa*. If S is volume, A the Pacific, and B a teaspoon, then A and B are strictly commensurable on S. Because Socrates compares pleasures and pains to weights, thicknesses, and pluralities (*Pr.* 356b–e), pleasures and pains seem strictly commensurable on PH’s standard. But if, for example, A and B are solutions of X measured on the standard of *concentration of X*, and A is more concentrated than B, then no quantity of B can exceed A on that standard (cp. *Phil.* 52e–53c; cf. *Pol.* 284e). With that said, here are the three readings of Socrates’ axiological claim:

Reading 1. Virtue is strictly commensurable with other goods on the standard of value, but its value is far greater in magnitude than theirs.

³⁰ See Burnet 1924 *ad* 30b3. He prefers this reading because of how Socrates lives (see below), not because of the local incoherence that stems from taking ἀγαθὰ as subject. DeStycker 1994, 138–40, 334 objects to Burnet on syntactic grounds. Burnyeat 1971 suggests that an expansive sense of χρήματα would clarify the passage. However, no single notion of χρήματα could both (i) contrast strongly with ἀρετή as an object of pursuit, and yet (ii) provide the reason for pursuing ἀρετή because ἀρετή produces χρήματα (cf. Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 107–8 n. 10). See further Irwin 1992, 211, 218 n. 27; Irwin 1995a, 58–59, 363 n. 22; and Brickhouse and Smith 2010, ch. 6, section 3, esp. 176–79.

- Reading 2. Virtue is more valuable in kind than other goods, so they are not strictly commensurable on the standard of value.
- Reading 3. Superior goods such as virtue are really good, while the inferior “goods” of body and reputation are not really good at all.

I will argue that Reading 2 is the correct interpretation of Socrates’ claim. This presents a second conflict between PH and the *Apology*, one related to but distinct from the first.

Reading 1 is consistent with PH. If virtue reliably provides bodily goods, but bodily goods do not reliably guarantee their own continued provision, then virtue is superior to those goods, even if it is good only by producing them. So, when Socrates assigns greater importance to the soul and its goods than to the body and its goods within the *Protagoras* (313a–14b), this need not conflict with PH. Socrates there commits himself to nothing stronger than a comparative assessment of strictly commensurable goods. He never says in the *Protagoras* that one should pursue virtue rather than other goods, which would produce a practical conflict with PH within the *Protagoras* (but see perhaps 345b and 357e).

However, Reading 1 is excluded because Socrates urges people to not even take into account (ὑπολογίζεσθαι, *Ap.* 28b7; cf. *Cr.* 48d4, *G.* 480c7–8) bodily and reputational goods relative to virtue.³¹ It is absurd to say that certain goods count for nothing relative to others with which they are strictly commensurable. Reading 1 is consistent with PH, but it is not a plausible reading of the *Apology* and *Crito*. So, attempts to reconcile PH with those dialogues must proceed with either Reading 2 or Reading 3.

Reading 3 is inspired by a minority reading of *Euthydemus* 281e3–5. Most scholars read that passage as saying that goods other than virtue are conditionally good, where the relevant condition is possession of virtue (the “conditionality thesis”). On the minority reading, the passage says virtue is the only good, while other “goods” are not really goods at all.³² Were this the correct reading of *Apology* 29d–30b, that passage would inexorably conflict with PH. Nobody would seek a genuine good solely for the sake of things not really good. Whatever the *Euthydemus* may say, though, 3 cannot be the correct reading of the *Apology*. When Socrates later

³¹ Here I follow Vlastos 1991, ch. 8. The *Apology* passage specifically denies that death should be weighed against justice (the special case considered below), but the *Crito* generalizes, saying that one should be willing to suffer anything else – not just death – before acting unjustly.

³² See Irwin 1992; Annas 1993; Eric Brown also takes this view in unpublished work.

proposes his counterpenalty, he characterizes bads other than vice, and deprivation of goods other than virtue, as genuinely bad (37b–c).

That leaves Reading 2, which is also inconsistent with PH. PH says virtue is good solely because it produces other goods. But if X gets its value solely by producing Y, then no matter the amount of Y that X produces, X cannot have a value superior in kind to Y. So, the *Apology* is inconsistent with PH not only practically but also axiologically.³³ (Again, since Socrates' axiological claim in the *Apology* covers reputational goods as well as bodily goods, this conflict would arise even if PH ranged over reputational pleasures and pains.)

Both of these interpretations are bolstered by Socrates' defense. Socrates says that he “ignored [ἀμελήσας; cp. ἐπιμελούμενος, 29d] what the many care for – money, running the household, military or political or other leadership, or the political clubs or factions in the city” (*Ap.* 36b; cf. *G.* 526d5–6). Plato considers Socrates a good man. But this seems impossible on PH, since he makes no effort to acquire wealth and honor and the pleasures that come from these. Socrates' sole practical priority is philosophy, so he lives in poverty (23b–c, 31c).³⁴ He really does pursue goods of the soul rather than bodily and reputational goods, not for the sake of those other goods.

A similar point holds for Socrates' axiological claim. Just as goods of the soul have value greater in kind than other goods, so their value cannot be outweighed by other bads, including those caused by other people (*Ap.* 30c; *G.* 527c6–d2). Meletus persuades the jury to impose the death penalty, and he could have persuaded them to impose other penalties instead (*Ap.* 30d). In the *Apology* and *Crito*, Socrates' vulnerability to these penalties does nothing to threaten his goodness. According to PH, though, preventing bodily and reputational bads is one of virtue's main functions, so Socrates' exposure to suffering them when he need not (*Ap.* 38d–e)³⁵ reveals his lack

³³ When ἀγαθὰ at 30b3 is read as predicate (see above), *Apology* 30b2–4 endorses the conditionality thesis. Combining 2 with the conditionality thesis, then: Socrates thinks goods of the soul are superior in kind to other goods, and that goods of the soul are required to reliably realize the inferior goodness of other goods without simultaneously realizing greater bads. (In Kantian terms, virtue makes conditional goods objectively good; cf. Korsgaard 1983.) Irwin 1992 thinks this reading is inconsistent with the claim that virtue suffices for happiness, but he also notes that it need not be, if there are degrees of happiness. Plato's Socrates often implies that there are degrees of happiness (e.g., at *Euthyd.* 281b–c).

³⁴ As mentioned above (n. 30), Burnet 1924 motivates his reading of ἀγαθὰ ad 30b3 by appealing to *Apology* 31c as evidence that Socrates cannot possibly think that money comes from virtue.

³⁵ Socrates here says he would have been ashamed to say what was required to avoid a conviction; cf. *G.* 522d and see 1.3.4 on the pains of shame and 5.3 on the shame of doing vs. suffering injustice.

of virtue.³⁶ Socrates' deeds show his sincere belief that goods of the soul are superior in kind to other goods – a commitment inconsistent with PH.

As promised, I conclude with a special case: Socrates' willingness to face likely or certain death before acting unjustly. He refuses to let the generals at Arginusae be tried collectively (*Ap.* 32a–c), to retrieve Leon (*Ap.* 32c–e), to pander to the jury (*Ap.* 17b–18a, 34c–5d, 38d–9a; cf. *G.* 522c–e), or to flee Athens (*Crito*; cf. *Phd.* 98d–99a). These actions – call them “Socrates' actions” – attest to his profound concern for justice (*Ap.* 17c, 18a, 32a–33a, 35c–d, 39b; *Crito*; *G.* 521c9–d3, 522b9–c1; *Phd.* 118a). They also show him living up to a special case of his more general commitments about virtue and bodily goods.³⁷

I make two assumptions while examining Socrates' actions. The first is that justice and the “other” virtues, e.g., wisdom, are a single condition of the soul. Socrates argues for this claim in the *Protagoras*,³⁸ while the *Apology* and *Crito* seem silent on it. However, when arguing that the *Apology* and *Crito* conflict with the *Protagoras* (understood as endorsing PH), it seems acceptable to assume that they agree on the unity of virtue. Second, I assume that PH treats life as a good, even though it is absent from the list of goods at 354b (“group 4” above). Two scholars offer flawed arguments for this conclusion. They call attention to Socrates' claims that virtue saves our lives, which use forms of σωτηρία and σώζειν (356d–57b). One rejects “lofty” readings of this language because Socrates elsewhere uses the same terms to talk about mere survival (*G.* 511c–12e).³⁹ This argument is weak; Plato does not always use words the same way. Another draws on Protagoras' Great Speech to argue that at the end of the *Protagoras*, these terms must refer to mere survival.⁴⁰ But Socrates says explicitly why he calls virtue a savior: not because it preserves life, but because it makes life go well and saves us from living badly (356d).

Still, I embrace the conclusion for three reasons. First, Socrates introduces PH with a question about the good life that connotes living a

³⁶ How can Socrates be virtuous and good when he sincerely disavows the wisdom that is virtue? In Shaw 2011, I deny that knowledge is necessary for virtue. I would now say instead that Socrates thinks there are covarying grades of wisdom, virtue, and happiness.

³⁷ Again, Socrates' actions will serve as test cases for some attempts to reconcile the *Apology* and *Crito* with PH, especially those found in Gosling and Taylor 1982, 62–65. They start with justice, but move quickly to courage – as is natural, since acting justly often requires that one not fear death excessively.

³⁸ Here I endorse Penner 1973 as a simplifying assumption. Most differences among accounts of the unity of virtue in the *Protagoras* are irrelevant to my argument (but see n. 76 below). I further discuss the unity of virtue and strength of wisdom, as these bear on my main argument, in Chapters 2–4 and 7.

³⁹ Vlastos 1991, 301–2. ⁴⁰ McCoy 1998.

full life (τελευτήσειεν, 351b).⁴¹ Virtue secures a good life, so survival must be one of its crucial functions. Second, Socrates talks about salvation in the ordinary sense – not a lofty one – when he says that certain painful activities (military training; 354a4) preserve the city (τῶν πόλεων σωτηρία, 354b4). This presumably preserves the citizens as well. Finally, in the *Apology* Socrates considers survival a good (31d–e), so it would be odd for him to exclude it from the list of goods that virtue secures in PH.⁴² Certainly, survival is distinct from virtue (*Cr.* 48a–b; *G.* 512d–13a), and plausibly, life is a bodily good that the soul brings by animating the body.

Under these two assumptions, the practical and axiological relationships between justice and survival are special cases of those between virtue and bodily goods. According to PH, justice (= wisdom) is valuable solely for the sake of bodily goods (including survival). This makes it unclear how Socrates could face forced choices between justice and those other goods (collectively), and also how justice could be more valuable in kind than those other goods. In particular, PH suggests that justice should at least tend to preserve life, but Socrates asserts the opposite in the *Apology* (31e–32a). Further, according to PH, the value of justice is exhausted by the other goods it produces, so it could not be superior in kind to bodily goods, including life. Here again in the special case – indeed, more prominently than in the general case – that is not Socrates' view (*Ap.* 28b–d, 35b–d; *Cr.* 48c–d).

To summarize: PH recommends virtue (= justice) solely for the sake of bodily goods (including survival). If X is good solely for the sake of Y, then it would be odd to say either (a) that one should pursue or care about X rather than or in preference to Y, or (b) that X has value superior in kind to Y. Socrates asserts both (a) and (b) in the *Apology* and *Crito*, both in general and about justice and survival. His actions show that he is sincere. So, the most natural, unconstrained reading of PH conflicts with the *Apology* and *Crito*.

1.3 Adding resources to PH

Few pro-hedonists will grant the claims of 1.1 and persist in standard pro-hedonist strategies for fitting the *Protagoras* into Plato's works. Bodily

⁴¹ Cf. Denyer 2008 ad 351b10–11.

⁴² The Epicureans deny that a longer pleasant life is more pleasant (Principle Doctrine 19). Similarly, Rudebusch 1999, 112 denies that a longer just life is more just, probably because it is not better in respect of the pleasures of just activity (see 1.3.6). *Republic* 585b–e, in contrast, takes duration to be relevant to how pleasant a given pleasure is; for more on that passage, see Chapter 6.

hedonism cannot be squared with other parts of the corpus. Developmental explanations of PH would require that Plato held certain views about virtue and other goods early on (*Apology* and *Crito*), changed his mind (*Protagoras*), and changed it back (*Gorgias* and *Phaedo*), which seems unlikely.⁴³ Instead, most pro-hedonists will abstract away from PH's bodily orientation and argue that Socrates focuses on the body because he is addressing the many.⁴⁴ This does explain the bodily orientation of PH, but while anti-hedonists can accept that explanation blithely, it carries substantial costs for pro-hedonists in the larger dialectic.

Socrates' only argument for hedonism is located in the passage where he confines himself to bodily goods. His emphasis there is on the many's inability to deny his claims.⁴⁵ This makes it difficult to say that the hedonism belongs properly to the view that Socrates presents and endorses, while the restriction to bodily pleasures does not. To abstract away from the one but not the other is *ad hoc*. Socrates elsewhere calls the many hedonists (e.g., *R.* 505b; cf. 5.1), why should he not present a hedonist theory simply because he is addressing the many? The best reason to attribute hedonism to Socrates is that such a reading stays closer to the text; abstracting away from the text undermines that argument.

Moreover, pro-hedonists cannot simply abstract away from PH's bodily orientation. They must also describe some particular departure and show how it reconciles PH with the *Apology* and *Crito*. Recall Socrates' actions – those cases in which he risks death to act justly. PH says that virtue (= wisdom = justice) maximizes the agent's pleasure and minimizes her pain. It is unclear why virtue, so understood, requires Socrates to face likely death in these cases.⁴⁶ For the rest of this chapter, I consider particular modifications and additions to PH and argue that none reconciles Socrates' actions with PH's hedonist account of virtue.

⁴³ Compare Kahn 1988, who argues for a very early date for the *Gorgias*, making the attribution of PH to Socrates in the *Protagoras* less likely. Taylor 1991, xviii admits that Kahn's chronological claim would have this effect. I say that attributing PH to Socrates is already unlikely in this way, granted only the more orthodox view that the *Apology* and *Crito* antedate the *Protagoras*.

⁴⁴ See Adam and Adam 1893, xxxiii and Cronquist 1980, 64 n. 4. George Rudebusch also suggested this explanation in personal communication.

⁴⁵ See Sullivan 1961; Zeyl 1980.

⁴⁶ I find it implausible to suppose that Plato advances a substantive theory of virtue in the *Protagoras* and presents it through Socrates, his exemplar of human virtue, but fails to consider whether that theory accounts for Socrates' virtue. However, see again Irwin 1977, 112–13 and Irwin 1995a, 76–77 on the limits of interpretive charity.

1.3.1 Retaliation and reciprocal harm

Socrates' actions might count as just on a hedonist theory of virtue by preventing reciprocal harm he would have suffered had he obeyed the Thirty and fetched Leon, or had he followed popular opinion about the generals at Arginusae. As Naomi Reshotko stresses, Socrates thinks that when X harms Y, Y is made worse, that is, more unjust and so more likely to harm others (*Ap.* 25c–e; *R.* 335b–c). Hence Y is more likely either to retaliate and harm X or to harm others, making them worse, so that they in turn are more likely to harm X.⁴⁷ This potential for reciprocal harm might explain why, in circumstances like those that Socrates faced, the best available hedonic strategy involved significant risks.⁴⁸

However, Socrates thinks one's actions should not be guided by retaliatory threats (*Cr.* 46c). Further, he thinks one should never retaliate (*Cr.* 49c–d), and if injustice harms the unjust only because others harm them reciprocally, then non-retaliation lets injustice prosper. One might reply that retaliation is only one form of reciprocal harm; sometimes, X harms Y, who harms Z, who harms X. So, perhaps Socrates can urge non-retaliation while locating the harm of wrongdoing in reciprocal harm. However, this leaves it unclear why one should disregard retaliation but try to avoid other reciprocal harm, especially since retaliation is more likely to come to fruition than other forms of reciprocal harm.

This strategy faces a further, related problem. Socrates mentions the retaliation he risked by acting as he did (*Ap.* 32b7–c3, d7–8), but no reciprocal harm that he might have suffered had he obeyed the Thirty or the many. He surely does not simply neglect to talk about such potential harms, nor would it rescue the proposal even if he did. This proposal needs the likely reciprocal harms for Socrates' actions to be less painful than the likely reciprocal harms for acting otherwise. There is no reason to suppose this. Any given sort of reciprocal harm seems equally likely coming from whomever Socrates angers, and Socrates' actual actions surely involved a higher probability of reciprocal harm.⁴⁹ If we limit our attention to reciprocal harm, then, the expected hedonic value of retrieving Leon or allowing the collective prosecution of the generals is higher than the

⁴⁷ Reshotko 2006, 65–72, 174; her own aim is to explain why Socrates says that unjust action harms the soul. She sometimes focuses more on fear of reciprocal harm than on reciprocal harm itself (69–71), which resembles one part of the Epicurean strategy (Principle Doctrine 34, Vatican Sentence 7).

⁴⁸ Socrates' age could play a role in this judgment; see *Ap.* 38c; *Cr.* 53d–e.

⁴⁹ Reshotko neglects a difficulty for her view: when X kills Y unjustly, Y is not made more unjust, unless that injustice manifests itself in the afterlife. However, the view can be adjusted to include harms to people other than Y; perhaps violations of the law harm all who live under it (*Cr.* 49e–52d).

expected hedonic value of refusing. Socrates' other actions – provoking the jury and staying in prison – are dissimilar in that he already knows the likely or definite harm he faces, namely, death. He may consider other reciprocal harms worse than death.⁵⁰ So, these two cases are easier for the reciprocal harm theorist to explain, but the first two cases still seem intractable.

1.3.2 *The Euthydemus and the conditionality thesis*

Two aspects of the *Euthydemus* might be thought to offer resources for reconciling Socrates' words and deeds with a hedonist theory of virtue. The first is the conditionality thesis: goods other than virtue are only conditionally good, because whether they benefit or harm depends on how they are used (cf. 1.2). Virtue uses other goods well and beneficially; vice uses them poorly and harmfully (*Euthydemus*. 280d–82b). A hedonist version of the thesis says that when virtue uses other goods they provide pleasure, but when vice uses them they provide pain. This hedonist version of the conditionality thesis might explain, in a way consistent with PH, why Socrates prioritizes virtue over other goods (cf. *Euthydemus*. 282a–b).

One could reply that the conditionality thesis flatly contradicts PH. Socrates seems to say that goods such as health and wealth directly produce pleasure (354b), and bads such as disease and poverty directly produce pain (353e). On a straightforward reading, wisdom simply acquires other goods and avoids other bads; wisdom is not needed to guarantee that other goods produce pleasure. However, this reply considers too narrow a range of factors. Perhaps exercise produces health, which produces pleasure directly – but which also, when used foolishly, produces poverty or other bads that produce greater pains. PH emphasizes the equal value of equal pleasures at different times, so we must consider this possibility.

Thus, I offer a different reply. The proposed appeal to conditionality is schematic: other goods, unless guided by virtue, produce more pain and less pleasure than the agent would otherwise enjoy. This schema must be filled in by saying what specific pains foolish use produces and what specific pleasures it prevents. If foolish use produces bodily pains and prevents bodily pleasures, the appeal to conditionality cannot explain what it must. It can show why virtue is the best means to bodily goods, but not why Socrates pursues virtue instead of bodily goods. It can show why virtue has

⁵⁰ *Crito* 47e3–5 mentions bodily fates worse than death; *Crito* 46c, however, does not distinguish degrees of unconcern one should have for various reciprocal harms. For other harms, see *Ap.* 37c–e; *Cr.* 53c–e.

a higher degree of value than bodily goods, but not why it has value superior in kind. So, assume instead that the foolish use of bodily goods is supposed to produce more non-bodily pain or less non-bodily pleasure than the agent would otherwise enjoy. One must now point to specific non-bodily pleasures and pains. Most of the rest of this chapter criticizes all attempts to explain the excellence of Socrates' actions by reference to non-bodily pleasures and pains. Those criticisms apply whether or not the non-bodily pleasures and pains in question stem from the use or misuse of other goods. So, the conditionality thesis cannot play a primary explanatory role here. Pro-hedonists must already be able to show how an appeal to certain specific pleasures and pains could explain why Socrates' actions are excellent on a hedonist theory of virtue.

1.3.3 *The Euthydemus and the adaptive account of happiness*

Terence Irwin criticizes Socrates' argument in the *Euthydemus* that virtue suffices for happiness. He tries to improve the argument by giving Socrates an implicit conception of happiness as total desire-fulfillment.⁵¹ By limiting her desires to those feasible in her actual circumstances, the wise person guarantees herself total desire-fulfillment (i.e., happiness), no matter how few other goods she has. So, wisdom guarantees happiness without needing any additional good fortune.⁵² Further, no matter how many other goods the fool has, her desires may go unmet, either because her extravagant desires are infeasible even amidst plenty or because she uses her other goods foolishly. This explains and improves Socrates' argument that virtue suffices for happiness, so Irwin attributes the view to him.

Irwin argues that the adaptive account allows Socrates to prioritize virtue over other goods while being an instrumentalist about virtue.⁵³ However, he notes the flaw with this sort of view: the adaptive account explains why the wise person lacks reasons to be unjust or cowardly, but not why she has reasons to be just or courageous.⁵⁴ That is, the adaptive account makes it harder to see why virtue is necessary for happiness. Irwin is unconcerned, because Socrates does not explicitly recognize the problem. However, Irwin introduces the adaptive account because attributing it to Socrates clarifies his position on the sufficiency of virtue for happiness. If giving Socrates an implicit adaptive account of happiness also obscures his position on the necessity of virtue for happiness, Irwin cannot brush that aside by noting

⁵¹ Irwin 1992, §§ 5–6. Irwin 1995a does not say how it adapts Irwin 1992, but some of the earlier paper's main claims do recur there (Irwin 1995a, §§ 28, 38–41, 81–82).

⁵² *Euthydemus* 279c–80b; cf. *Protagoras* 344c–45c, which is difficult to interpret.

⁵³ Irwin 1992, § 9. ⁵⁴ Irwin 1992, §12.

that Socrates never *explicitly* mentions this problem about what is supposedly his *implicit* conception of happiness.

Further, Irwin only alludes briefly to any connection between the adaptive account and his pro-hedonism.⁵⁵ To maintain both views, he needs a close connection between desire-fulfillment and pleasure and between desire-frustration and pain. But now he faces a dilemma. If states like hunger and thirst are desires for food and drink, it is impossible always to restrict one's desires to a feasible set. Hunger and thirst simply are not under our direct rational control. If such states are not desires, they still involve pains (and eating and drinking still involve pleasures). In that case, Irwin's desire-fulfillment conception of happiness fails to square with hedonism.

1.3.4 *Shame*

J. C. B. Gosling and C. C. W. Taylor suggest two ways to reconcile Socrates' actions with PH. First, perhaps "a courageous death is preferable, on hedonistic grounds, to a subsequent life of shame, disgrace, slavery, etc."⁵⁶ The crucial addition here is the appeal to shame, that is, fear of a bad reputation (*Eu.* 12b–c; *L.* 646e–47a, [*Def.*] 416; see further [Chapters 3–5](#)), which is surely painful. If Socrates would have been ashamed to act otherwise than as he did, this might offer a good hedonist reason for his actions: they prevented reputational pains. However, this proposal crumbles once we inquire more deeply into the shame that Socrates might have felt had he acted otherwise (hereafter, "the shame").

Either the shame responds to something genuinely shameful or it does not. If it does not, then it is irrational – the sort of emotion from which the virtuous are supposed to be free (*Pr.* 360a). But a hedonist vindication of Socrates' actions cannot depend on his having vicious emotional responses, so the shame must respond to something genuinely shameful. Next, the alternative actions must be shameful either simply because they cause shame or for some other reason. If the alternatives are shameful simply because they cause shame, then we face an explanatory circle: the alternatives are shameful because they cause shame, but they cause shame because they are shameful.⁵⁷ Finally, if the alternatives are shameful

⁵⁵ Irwin 1992, 216–17 n. 8; cf. 210.

⁵⁶ Gosling and Taylor 1982, 63. They are probably thinking of *Apology* 28d.

⁵⁷ One might wonder whether there is a similar explanatory circle in the relationship between pleasure and the pleasant, but there is not; according to PH, pleasures are primary. The pleasantness of things other than pleasure consists in their power to cause pleasures, and not *vice versa*. In my view,

for reasons independent of the shame they cause, then they are either shameful because of some pain they would cause other than the shame or they possess some other independently shameful feature. The former possibility requires a prior account of why the alternatives are more painful than Socrates' actions – precisely what we are seeking, but have not yet found.⁵⁸ But if the alternatives are supposed to be shameful independently of their painfulness, then this proposal flatly contradicts PH, which rules out any other criterion of the shameful except the painful (359e–60b).

This last point is not an incidental feature of PH from which one can abstract away. Protagoras objects to hedonism on grounds that only pleasures taken in noble things are good; presumably, he regards pleasures taken in shameful things as bad (351c–d). Non-hedonist criteria of the noble and shameful would let Protagoras sustain his objection. He and Socrates agree that everything noble is good (358b, 359e), and surely that everything shameful is bad as well. But when Socrates presents PH, he insists that the many (and Protagoras, it seems) have no criterion for calling pleasures bad or pains good except other pains and pleasures that these produce, respectively (353c–55a). A non-hedonic account of the shameful would supply an alternative criterion for calling some pleasures bad.

Some would reject this reading because Socrates' argument for the pleasantness of going to war will only convince someone who already believes independently that going to war is noble (*Pr.* 360a).⁵⁹ Relatedly, some anti-hedonists say that Socrates' claim that war is pleasant is ironic, which shows that he rejects hedonism – or at least the version of it that he presents.⁶⁰ Both of these views are mistaken. Socrates says warfare is pleasant, when it is, because it saves the city and provides rule over others

Socrates' own position reverses this: pleasures and pains are genuine or spurious insofar as they reflect the genuine pleasantness or painfulness of their objects, but the genuine pleasantness or painfulness of the objects is not explained by the pleasures and pains they cause, whether those pleasures and pains are genuine or spurious. Pleasures and pains do still provide evidence of the pleasantness or painfulness of their causes. More on this in [Chapter 6](#).

⁵⁸ Indeed, no pleasures and pains that have other pleasures and pains as their objects, e.g., regret at one's past painful decisions (cf. μεταμέλειν at 356d), can ultimately explain why certain actions are virtuous or vicious. (This includes all Epicurean pleasures and pains of the soul, which must ultimately be referred to bodily pleasures and pains [see, e.g., Diogenes Laertius X.6; Athenaeus VII 280a; Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* III.4f; *On Ends* I.55, II.7, 29–30, 64]). So, neither fear of retribution (as opposed to retribution itself; cf. 1.3.1, esp. n. 47), nor despair at not being able to eat (as opposed to hunger itself; cf. the end of 1.3.3) can ultimately explain why certain actions are virtuous or vicious on a hedonist account. Found in a virtuous person, such fear, despair, or regret must reliably track prior hedonic facts that these emotions accurately represent.

⁵⁹ See Irwin 1977, 112; Denyer 2008 *ad* 354a5. ⁶⁰ See, e.g., Cronquist 1980, 64 n. 4.

(354a–c).⁶¹ Warfare partakes of pain, but focusing on its immediate painfulness and ignoring long-term pleasure misses the point of Socrates' argument about the measuring craft.⁶²

Thus, when we attempt to explain the excellence of Socrates' actions by reference to avoiding shame, we find an exhaustive set of choices: either (i) the shame he would feel would not be due to any real shamefulfulness of the alternatives, so that Socrates would be vicious; (ii) the shame would be due to some real shamefulfulness of the alternatives, but their shamefulfulness would be due to the shame – a vicious explanatory circle; (iii) we would need some other, prior explanation of the painfulness of the alternatives, so that the account in terms of shame cannot be the primary account; or (iv) we would have to reject hedonism.

1.3.5 *Post-mortem pleasures and pains*

Gosling and Taylor also appeal to post-mortem pleasures and pains that Socrates might receive as rewards or punishments in the afterlife.⁶³ Whatever sort of pleasures these are,⁶⁴ this proposal requires two things. First, Socrates must plausibly think there are such rewards and punishments. Second, the rewards and punishments must provide a hedonist justification for Socrates' actions without contradicting his other views.

In the *Apology*, Socrates denies knowing what happens after death (28d), but he eventually says that it must be either annihilation or relocation to Hades (40c–1b).⁶⁵ He thinks, oddly, that non-existence would be pleasant.⁶⁶ Even if this makes sense, it does not explain why Socrates' actions are virtuous, on a hedonist theory of virtue. If non-existence is equally pleasant for everyone, then the pleasures of non-existence provide no reason for any particular action during life.⁶⁷ But perhaps non-existence is not equally pleasant for everyone. Socrates argues that non-existence

⁶¹ But see Adam and Adam 1893, 181. ⁶² Cf. Taylor 1991, 209.

⁶³ Gosling and Taylor 1982, 63.

⁶⁴ They would probably be the soul's own pleasures and pains, since death separates the soul from the body (*G.* 524b; *Phd.* 64c, 67d; cf. n. 17). However, the soul might long for lost bodily pleasures, and in many of Plato's myths disembodied souls interact, which opens the door to reputational pleasures and pains.

⁶⁵ See Austin 2010 on how to reconcile these two passages.

⁶⁶ But see Austin 2010 for an argument that he merely considers annihilation more advantageous. Rudebusch 1999 heroically suggests that non-existence is a modal pleasure, but this makes its pleasantness no less puzzling (for a more complete reply, again see Austin 2010).

⁶⁷ One possible exception: the pleasures of non-existence might provide a reason to seek death. However, Socrates does not seek death, and he thinks that his divine voice benefited him by keeping him out of politics, thereby preventing his early death (*Ap.* 31c–e).

is pleasant by contrasting it with life's bothers (*Ap.* 40d–e; contrast *R.* 583b–5a), so the pleasantness of non-existence may increase with the painfulness of life. If the painfulness of life depends on one's virtue or vice, though, then non-existence will be more pleasant for the vicious than the virtuous (cp. *Phd.* 107c). So, the first alternative – that death is annihilation – is either useless in justifying Socrates' actions (since everyone is ultimately annihilated), or it makes justifying them harder (if non-existence is more pleasant for the vicious).⁶⁸

Gosling and Taylor have in mind the second alternative – that death is relocation to Hades. If Socrates thinks his treatment there depends on what he does while alive, that could provide a hedonist justification of his actions. He mentions certain judges in Hades (*Ap.* 41a), says on behalf of the Laws of Athens that the afterlife involves punishments and rewards (*Cr.* 54b–c), and says the good can be hopeful about death because the gods will not neglect their affairs (*Ap.* 41c–d). This evidence is inconclusive; perhaps the judges in Hades merely adjudicate conflicts among the dead,⁶⁹ perhaps the Laws' views are distinct from Socrates' own,⁷⁰ and perhaps a good man's affairs include his family's fate after his death. But more importantly, even if Socrates believes in post-mortem punishments and rewards, this cannot explain why his actions are virtuous.

First, concern for one's reputation among the gods and divine post-mortem rewards or punishments differs only immaterially from concern for one's reputation among human beings and this-worldly rewards or punishments (cf. 1.3.4, 1.3.1). Indeed, Plato treats these as parallel cases in the *Republic* (358a–67e, 612b–21c). In this context, though, it is best only to use material that Gosling and Taylor accept as contemporaneous with or prior to the *Protagoras*. Hence, I argue that their proposal runs afoul of the *Euthyphro*.⁷¹

⁶⁸ If the added pleasures of non-existence for the vicious are large enough, they might even make it prudent to be vicious during this life. But then someone who does the calculation and seeks to be vicious for this reason is acting prudently – i.e., virtuously – undermining the goal. So, positing additional pleasures of non-existence for the vicious could well make the hedonist theory self-effacing – and while not everyone thinks that theorizing about the good life must be able to guide our actions, Socrates certainly does.

⁶⁹ So Burnet 1924 *ad* 41a3 on Minos and Rhadamanthus. The *Gorgias* does give these two, along with Aeacus, the function of evaluating lives and assigning rewards and punishments (523a–27a).

⁷⁰ See Weiss 1998 and especially Harte 1999. This claim is particularly plausible once the Laws start appealing to reasons that Socrates has previously urged Crito to disregard (*Cr.* 53a ff.; cp. 46c). Contrast Gosling and Taylor 1982, 63.

⁷¹ Gosling and Taylor 1982, 66 consider the *Euthyphro* roughly contemporaneous with the *Protagoras*, so they will allow evidence from the former into debates over the latter. Gosling and Taylor 1982, 63 admit that “[i]t is . . . doubtful if hedonism can account for the alleged fact that the gods punish such acts as cowardice,” but they hold that “that is a question of what is ultimately defensible, not of what

Again, Gosling and Taylor say that Socrates thinks the gods will reward him for his actions (here I agree), and that this can make his actions excellent and just by making them the most pleasant actions available in his circumstances (here I disagree). Consider *why* the gods would reward Socrates' actions. When Euthyphro says that piety is what is dear to the gods (*Eu.* 6e–7a), Socrates suggests that the gods love whatever they consider good, noble, or just (7e–8a; cf. *R.* 334c). So, I begin from these possible reasons for the gods to love and so reward Socrates' actions.⁷² If the gods reward Socrates' actions because they are just, then our explanation is circular. If they reward his actions because they are good or noble, then they must be good and noble independently of any divine rewards. But PH identifies the good and noble with the pleasant, so this proposal needs a prior account of why Socrates' actions were the most pleasant ones available in his circumstances.⁷³

Introducing other objects of divine love does not remove the problem. Consider Socrates and Euthyphro's later discussion. They agree that (1) the gods love the pious because it is pious, and (2) the pious is not pious because the gods love it (10d). Current discussions of the "Euthyphro dilemma" consider generalized versions of (2),⁷⁴ and Socrates would surely accept versions of 1 and 2 that replaced "pious" with relevantly similar terms. There are limits here; most obviously, a version that replaced "pious" with "god-loved" would vitiate Socrates' larger argument. However, Socrates would surely accept that (1') the gods love the just because it is just, and (2') the just is not just because the gods love it. He would certainly accept 1' and 2' if he embraced the strongest version of the unity of virtue, that piety *is*

is immediately obvious." Whether or not the difficulties are obvious, Plato would be sensitive to them (as I now argue).

⁷² Even if the gods love and hate different things, these can still be the (apparent) features of actions that ground their love. Their love and hatred for different objects simply must be traceable to disagreement over what is good, admirable, and just (7b–e). In any case, Socrates rejects stories of divine disagreement (5e–6a), and he must think the gods are free of false belief.

⁷³ This leaves open one more possibility: even though the good and admirable must reduce to the pleasant in this dialectical context, I assume further that Socrates' actions are good and admirable, i.e., pleasant, for him. Perhaps the gods love Socrates' actions because they are good and admirable, i.e., pleasant, for others. These others cannot be the gods themselves; that would be to make justice the art of exchange between gods and humans, which Socrates rejects as an account of piety (14b–15b). Still, perhaps Socrates' actions are pleasant for other humans, the gods love his actions for that reason, and the gods reward him in the afterlife, thereby making his actions excellent and just. If any pro-hedonists find this reading plausible, I leave its development and defense to them.

⁷⁴ Such discussions address divine-command theories of morality, rather than divine-love theories of piety. They depart from the *Euthyphro* in another way, too: Socrates and Euthyphro agree to (1) and (2) without argument, but the "Euthyphro dilemma" is a dilemma for those who reject (1) and (2), or their analogues.

justice.⁷⁵ Attributing that view to Socrates in the *Euthyphro* raises problems, because he there suggests that piety is a part of justice (12c–d).⁷⁶ However, even that weaker claim makes it quite unlikely that Socrates would affirm 1 and 2 but resist analogous claims about justice as a whole (1' and 2').

So, suppose that Socrates accepts 2', which is all we need. If actions are not just because the gods love them, then they are not just because the gods love them on grounds G, no matter what G is. (In particular, it does not matter whether the justice of those acts grounds the gods' love for them, that is, whether 1' is true.) Hence, we need not worry whether Socrates considers his list of grounds for divine love exhaustive (7e–8a). Whatever grounds the gods' love, their love cannot explain the justice of what they love, including Socrates' actions. But Gosling and Taylor say that Socrates' actions could be just precisely because of divine rewards. Assuming that the gods reward actions they love, this says that Socrates' actions are just because the gods love them – precisely what 2' denies.⁷⁷

1.3.6 Pleasures of virtuous activity

George Rudebusch agrees that PH makes virtue entirely instrumentally valuable, that is, pleasant solely because it produces pleasure. However, he also thinks that virtuous activities are among the pleasures that virtue produces.⁷⁸ If virtuous activities are pleasures, that might explain why Socrates' actions are the most pleasant ones available.

⁷⁵ Problems with opaque contexts introduced by “love” and “because” may lurk. However, such problems at least do not arise for identical properties and the attitudes of experts on such properties (e.g., the gods). For an even stronger view, see Penner 1988 and Penner 1991.

⁷⁶ Cf. Vlastos 1981, ch. 10, and cp. *Laches* 198a. At least within the *Protagoras*, my own sympathies lie closer to Penner 1973; see Chapter 2.

⁷⁷ Gosling and Taylor 1982, 63–65 make three further points. First, Socrates argues that life with an unjust soul is not worth living, and in doing so he compares injustice to bodily illness (esp. *Cr.* 47d–48a). Gosling and Taylor are unclear whether they think this is merely consistent with hedonism or actually suggests it, but the first is irrelevant and the second false. Second, they argue that a hedonist can justify acquiring a courageous disposition that may lead to sacrificing her life, even if she would benefit from cowardice on particular occasions. They offer no evidence for such a view in Plato; instead, they cite J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (64 n. 6). This is no surprise; Socrates denies that beneficial retreat can be cowardly or harmful endurance courageous (*Pr.* 360a–b). Third, they doubt whether Plato is any sort of egoist (cf. Taylor 1991, 175; Denyer 2008 *ad* 354b4). Many consider it “obvious that no egoist can consistently advocate the pursuit of other-regarding virtues at the expense of diminution of one’s welfare, and it is clear that Plato wishes to advocate the pursuit of justice” (64–65). But Plato thinks precisely that justice and other virtues cannot diminish one’s welfare. (Compare the quote above with Glaucon’s speech in *Republic* II.) They are also wrong to say that egoism cannot explain the rule of the philosophers in the *Republic*; see Brown 2000.

⁷⁸ Rudebusch 1999, 145 n. 2 and Chapters 6–10. Irwin 1995a, § 50, in contrast, implies that Socrates thinks virtuous activities are also instrumental to happiness; cf. his discussion of Aristotle’s

However, this proposal produces an explanatory circle: Socrates gives an account of virtue in terms of pleasure, but then gives an account of some pleasures in terms of virtue. Virtue is knowledge of good and bad, which according to PH is knowledge of pleasure and pain. Virtuous activities are those that this knowledge recommends – those that take into account the real magnitudes of all available pleasures and pains, whatever their temporal location or other accidents (*Pr.* 355e–57b), and so realize the greatest available balance of pleasure over pain. But if virtuous activities are pleasures, then part of what makes a given action pleasure-maximizing, and so virtuous, is precisely that it is a virtuous activity.

Again, according to PH virtue is explained in terms of pleasure. If virtuous activities are among the pleasures, then virtue is explained in terms of virtuous activities. But virtuous activities surely must be explained in terms of virtue. Indeed, Plato makes powers prior to activities generally: the Forms, which are explanatorily prior without qualification, are δύνάμεις (e.g., *Phd.* 99c; *R.* 443b; *Soph.* 247e). Aristotle confirms this by criticizing the Academy for making potentiality prior to actuality (*Meta.* III.6, IX.8, XII.6). If Plato denied priority to powers or activities, at least within the “Socratic” dialogues, this objection might fail, but there is no evidence to support such a reading.

Rudebusch might reply that he offers a reductive identity of pleasure and virtuous activity, not a circular explanation. One can explain temperance in terms of wisdom and wisdom in terms of temperance, so long as these are reductive explanations that identify wisdom and temperance as a single condition of the soul.⁷⁹ However, identifying pleasure with virtuous activity presents its own problems. Virtue measures pleasures to determine the activities it issues in. If pleasure is simply virtuous activity, then virtue simply measures its own activities. At best, then, virtue is knowledge that knows itself and its own activities, which is problematic (*Ch.* 166b–75d; *R.* 505b–c). Moreover, even if virtuous activities are pleasures, there are other pleasures, e.g., eating, drinking, and sex.⁸⁰ These activities are sometimes virtuous, but even when they are, their pleasure is not exhausted by their being virtuous

distinction between action and production and the instrumentalist implications of Socrates’ craft analogy (§§ 48–49).

⁷⁹ This has been Rudebusch’s response in personal communication.

⁸⁰ Rudebusch 1999, 81 might be read as denying this: “lovers of sensations . . . will find Socrates’ restriction of pleasure’s value to modal (in particular, moral) activity incredible.” This is ambiguous; “in particular” could qualify “restriction . . . to,” in which case the sentence says that moral activities are the only pleasures. It could also qualify “find . . . incredible,” in which case the sentence says that lovers of sensations will find the idea that moral activity is pleasure particularly incredible.

activities, and when they are not, they still partake of pleasure *qua* activities of eating, drinking, and sex.

Another possible response might be to say that the pleasures of virtuous activity come out in the wash.⁸¹ Virtue need not measure its own activities in deliberation, because it always issues in virtuous activities. Virtue can simply assess pleasures other than virtuous activities and act on those measurements, as it unfailingly does.⁸² The ensuing actions will always be virtuous and so will always be pleasures. This is true even when the best options are merely pain-minimizing, which could help to explain how virtue suffices for happiness. However, this revised proposal cannot explain why Socrates' actions were the most pleasant ones available to him. The revised proposal implies that every virtuous activity realizes the greatest possible balance of pleasure over pain, independently of the pleasure it partakes of *qua* virtuous activity. We would still need a prior account of why Socrates' actions were the most pleasant ones available to him, taking into account only pleasures other than virtuous activities.

1.4 Conclusion

In the first two sections above, I argued that PH is most naturally read as a purely bodily hedonism and that such a view cannot be reconciled with the *Apology* and *Crito*. In the last section, I began by arguing that the obvious pro-hedonist response (that PH focuses on the body because Socrates addresses the many) undermines the best argument for pro-hedonism (that it takes the text at face value). I then considered specific strategies for reconciling PH with the *Apology* and *Crito*, including several that abstract away from PH's bodily orientation, and I argued that none succeeds. The upshot is that pro-hedonists have not met their most pressing argumentative burden: to show how PH fits into Plato's works.

However, I have not yet addressed anti-hedonism's most pressing argumentative burden: to explain, in a way that is not merely *ad hoc*, why Socrates introduces hedonism into the conversation without apparent prompting. Now suppose that anti-hedonists could explain why Socrates introduces PH in a way sensitive to its immediate context (*Protagoras* 349d–62a) and its wider context (the whole dialogue). Suppose this

Rudebusch probably intends the latter claim; see Rudebusch 1999, 90, 126, 145 n. 6. I see no problem with understanding eating, drinking, and sex as modal pleasures (see above, n. 18 above).

⁸¹ This is my own proposal on Rudebusch's behalf, not one that he has suggested or endorsed.

⁸² Virtue could perhaps still reason about its own activities when making certain calculations involving life and death, but cf. the comment about Rudebusch at n. 42 above.

explanation not only reconciled the *Protagoras* with other dialogues on the topics of pleasure and hedonism, but also harmonized it with them and pointed the way to a better understanding of Platonic anti-hedonism generally. Anti-hedonism should then carry the day. The rest of this book attempts to hit those marks. That task begins with a close reading of the passage that leads immediately into Socrates' discussion of hedonism: the initial exchange over the unity of courage and wisdom (349d–51b).

Courage, madness, and spirit at 349d–51b

The discussion of hedonism in the *Protagoras* forms one part of a larger series of arguments (349d–60e) in which Socrates completes his efforts to show that virtue is one (329b–34c). In light of their earlier conversation, Protagoras rests his case that virtue is many on the promising notion that courage differs from the rest of virtue (349a–d). The subsequent exchange begins with an argument from Socrates that courage is wisdom (349d–50c) and ends with another (359a–60e), but the relationship between these arguments is unclear. Protagoras objects to the first (350c–51b); in reply, Socrates suddenly shifts the discussion to hedonism (351b–e), then to the strength of wisdom (352a–53b), then back to hedonism (353c–55a), and finally to the relationship between hedonism and the strength of wisdom (355a–57e). This intervening material helps to set up the second argument (359a–60e), but because Socrates' transitions seem abrupt, it is unclear how hedonism connects the initial and final arguments. A fully satisfying account of hedonism's place in the *Protagoras* must explain its role in this larger context.

This chapter explains Socrates' sudden shifts through a close reading of his initial argument and Protagoras' objection to it (349d–51b). The last half-century has seen many detailed interpretations of this passage in part or whole, yet some points about it go largely unexplored, especially how to understand two key terms, *μανία* and *θυμός*. Scholars typically construe the former narrowly as insanity and the latter as a passing state of anger. I argue instead that *μανία* here is ignorance and that *θυμός* is innate spiritedness. These interpretations clarify the whole passage. The claim that *μανία* is ignorance sets up a new causal reading of Socrates' argument. The claim that *θυμός* is spirit then reveals the deep problem raised by Protagoras' objection, and in turn how Socrates' reply pertains to that problem. The deep problem is that knowledge can, Protagoras thinks, be ruled by fear. This obviously explains why Socrates turns to discuss the strength of wisdom (352a–53b). But Socrates' claim is limited: knowledge

of good and bad is strong (352c4–5). His initial argument discusses knowledge of various conditional goods and bads, not knowledge of what is unconditionally good and bad for a human being. Hence, Socrates must introduce the topic of living well and badly (351b3–4). This does not yet explain his prompt hedonist specification of what makes a life go well or badly, however (351b4–e9).

On the interpretation advanced here, Protagoras thinks wisdom is weak. However, he says that wisdom is strong (352c–d). [Chapter 3](#) explains this as part of a larger pattern: three times, Protagoras is ashamed to say what he thinks, so he conceals his views. Hence, this chapter and the next mutually support each other. This chapter prepares the way for the next by impugning Protagoras’ sincerity when he says that wisdom is strong. The [next chapter](#) confirms this one by showing that his evasiveness about the strength of wisdom forms part of a larger pattern of shame and concealment. Protagoras’ repudiation of hedonism forms another part of that larger pattern.

For now, I simply interpret 349d–51b. I begin by translating the passage (2.1.1) and reviewing two puzzles about confidence (2.1.2.1). I then consider two approaches to Socrates’ argument, mutual predication readings and causal readings, and note problems for each (2.1.3). Next, I present my own view and its advantages relative to existing views. First, I argue directly that $\mu\omicron\nu\nu\iota\alpha$ is ignorance (2.2.1). I then show how that interpretation enables a new causal reading of Socrates’ argument (2.2.2), and I revisit earlier puzzles about the relationships among knowledge, ignorance, and confidence (2.2.3). Finally, I turn to Protagoras’ objection. After sketching existing readings (2.3.1), I argue that reading $\theta\upsilon\mu\acute{o}s$ as spirit reveals that Protagoras thinks wisdom is weak and can be ruled by fear; this helps to explain Socrates’ seemingly abrupt transitions (2.3.2). I conclude by tying up some loose ends concerning Socrates’ own position on spirit (2.3.3).

2.1.1 Translation of 349d–51b

Here are Socrates’ initial argument and Protagoras’ objection to it:¹

¹ I cast this exchange in direct dialogue instead of including instances of “he said” and “I said.” Socrates reports this conversation to friends, but that is largely irrelevant for now. ([Chapter 3](#) discusses how the frame of the *Protagoras* affects the whole dialogue.) For ease of later reference, I label sections of the exchange; “P” sections are spoken by Protagoras, “S” sections by Socrates. Within sections, I label some individual sentences and clauses with lower-case letters in chevrons. Square brackets indicate material understood rather than stated. Finally, I underline a controversial “the” that translates a $\tau\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ found in all manuscripts (see 2.1.2.1).

- P1: <a> Well, Socrates, I say that all these [sc. wisdom, temperance, courage, justice, and piety] are portions of virtue, and that while four of them are fairly similar to each other, still courage is really quite different from all the rest. Here's how you'll know that I speak the truth: you'll find plenty of people who are extremely unjust, impious, undisciplined, and unlearned, but exceedingly courageous.
- S2: Come then; it's worth examining what you say. Do you say that the courageous are confident, or otherwise?
- P2: Yes, and raring to go after what the masses are afraid to go for.
- S3: Well now, would you say that virtue is something noble, and do you offer yourself as a teacher of it as something noble?
- P3: It's the noblest thing – unless I'm mad, anyway.
- S4: And is one part of it base, but another part noble, or is it all noble?
- P4: It's all as noble as can be.
- S5: And do you know who dives confidently into wells?
- P5: I certainly do: well-divers.
- S6: Is that because they know, or for some other reason?
- P6: Because they know.
- S7: And who is confident about fighting from horseback? Cavalry, or non-cavalry?
- P7: Cavalry.
- S8: And who [is confident about fighting] with shields? Peltasts, or those who aren't [peltasts]?
- P8: Peltasts – and moreover in all other cases, if that's what you're looking for, those who know are more confident than those who don't know, and they're more confident once they know than they themselves were before they knew.
- S9: But haven't you actually seen some who lack knowledge of all these things, but who are confident when it comes to each of them?
- P9: Indeed I have; they're too confident.
- S10: Well, are these confident ones also courageous?
- P10: No way – in that case courage would be base, since these people are mad.

I render *μανία* and its cognates “madness” or “mad” and argue later that *μανία* is ignorance. I translate *θυμός* as “spirit” and defend that decision later. I use “courage” (*ἀνδρεία*), “confidence” (*θάρρος*), and “noble” (*καλόν*); later, I persist in those translations when glossing writings that render these terms differently (e.g., “bravery,” “boldness” or “daring,” and “fine”). Consistent terminology should make the discussion easier to follow. Finally, as Protagoras and Socrates move freely among *τέχνη*, *ἐπιστήμη*, *σοφία*, and their cognates, so I move freely among “knowledge,” “expertise,” “wisdom,” and their cognates when paraphrasing later.

S11: And what do you say about the courageous? Isn't it that they're the confident?

P11: I say so now, too.

S12: <a> And so these people who are confident in this way evidently are not courageous, but mad? And on the other hand, those who are wisest are also most confident, <c> and being most confident, most courageous? <d> And on this account, wouldn't courage be wisdom?

P13: <a> You're not remembering well [lit. "nobly"], Socrates, what I said in my answers to you. I, when asked by you whether the courageous are confident, agreed. <c> But whether the confident are courageous as well, I was not asked. <d> For if you'd asked me then, I'd have said that not all of them are. <e> But you never demonstrated that the thing I agreed to, I wasn't right to agree to – that the courageous aren't confident. <f> Next, you showed that those who know are more confident than they themselves [were when they didn't know] and more confident than others who don't know, and on these grounds you think courage and wisdom are the same. <g> Proceeding this way, though, you would also think that strength is wisdom. <h> For if, proceeding this way, you first asked me whether the strong are powerful, I would agree. <i> Then if [you asked] whether those who know wrestling are more powerful than those who don't know wrestling, and more powerful once they know it than before they knew, I would agree. <j> But once I agreed to these things, by using the same proofs you'd be able to say that according to what I had agreed, strength is knowledge. <k> But I nowhere at all agreed that the powerful are strong, though I did agree that the strong are powerful. <l> For power and strength are not the same, but the one, power, does come from knowledge, but also from madness and from spirit, while strength comes from the nature and good nurture of the body. <m> So too in the other case, confidence and courage are not the same, so that it follows that while the courageous are confident, not all of the confident are courageous. <n> For confidence does come to people from expertise, but also from spirit and from madness, just like power, while courage comes from the nature and good nurture of the soul.

2.1.2.1 *Courage and confidence*

One venerable puzzle about this passage concerns the relationship between courage and confidence. The readings of Socrates' argument discussed below, including my own, all share certain commitments about this puzzle.

These stem from extending maximal interpretive charity to Socrates. As a result, the readings below also share the difficulties that come along with those shared commitments. Ability to handle the common difficulties is one dimension on which members of this family of interpretations should be evaluated. I hope to show that my reading does well on that dimension.

The basic problem is this: S2 asks whether the courageous are confident.² S11 asks, seemingly, whether the courageous are *the* confident. Call this the “strong reading” of S11, since it entails not only that the courageous are confident but also that the confident are courageous. Three features of the text, however, suggest that S11 actually just repeats that the courageous are confident (the “weak reading” of S11).³ First, Socrates phrases S11 as though seeking confirmation of an earlier agreement (λέγεις),⁴ and Protagoras’ response (καὶ νῦν γε) shows that he hears the question that way. Second, when Socrates later recalls his initial argument, he uses the phrasing from S2 (359b–c). Third, if S11 entails that the confident are courageous, then it contradicts the material immediately before and after, which explicitly says (9–10) and then repeats (S12a) that some confident people – confident non-experts – are not courageous.

However, the strong reading of S11, on which Socrates says that all and only the courageous are confident, also has something going for it. At first blush, the final stage of Socrates’ argument seems to run:

AA1. The wise are confident (S12b).

AA2. The confident are courageous (S12c).

AA3. So, the wise are courageous (S12d).⁵

S12c, understood as in AA2, follows from the strong reading of S11 (that all and only the courageous are confident). That gives S11 a role in the

² O’Brien 1961 disagrees; see two paragraphs below in the main text for a summary of his reading.

³ Sauppe 1892 offers these three points. Scholars allow for the weak reading either by emending or deleting the definite article τοὺς (starting with Sauppe) or by giving an unusual reading of the article (starting with Taylor 1991). Wolfsdorf 2006 criticizes Taylor’s reading of the article but, like Sauppe, thinks that τοὺς should be emended or deleted. Cronquist 1980, 75–77, as part of his wider argument (see n. 20 below), says that Socrates means the courageous are the *really* confident, i.e., the *extremely* confident. Socrates could have said this, using adverbial phrases such as τῶ ὄντι or ὡς ἀληθῶς, but he does not. For further references, see O’Brien 1961, 408 n. 1.

⁴ Using the present to refer to an earlier part of the ongoing discussion (Adam and Adam 1893 *ad* 350b l.30; references to this edition throughout follow its line numbers). Greek has no special way of expressing the present progressive, which one would expect in English.

⁵ The stated conclusion of the argument is “wisdom is courage.” For the moment I assume, with mutual predication readings (cf. 2.1.3.1), that (i) Socrates aims to show that all and only the courageous are wise; (ii) he expresses this claim by saying “wisdom is courage”; and (iii) he has already implicitly shown that the courageous are wise. Hence, rather than explicitly stating AA3, Socrates simply concludes that wisdom is courage. (As we shall see in 2.1.3.2, many causal readings of the argument agree on point (iii).)

argument. (On the weak reading, S₁₁ just repeats S₂; what would prompt Socrates simply to repeat that the courageous are confident?) Further, S_{12c} read as AA₂ is precisely the implication of the strong reading that makes S₁₁ seem to conflict with steps 9–10 and S_{12a} (which say that confident non-experts are not courageous). Hence the weak reading of S₁₁, just by itself, offers at best trivial gains in the overall consistency of Socrates' argument. S_{12c} is still there and still in conflict with steps 9–10 and S_{12a}.

As against the arguments above for the weak reading, it might actually be *intended* to contradict 9–10 and S_{12a}.⁶ Perhaps Socrates mistakenly takes Protagoras to have agreed that the confident are courageous at S₂, and then offers two *ad hominem* refutations based on that misapprehension. On this view, at S₉–S_{12a} Socrates stresses one contradiction that he thinks Protagoras commits himself to: that all of the confident are courageous, but that some of the confident are not courageous.⁷ Socrates and Protagoras misunderstand each other throughout; at both S₂ and S₁₁, Socrates means to ask whether all *and only* the courageous are confident. On both occasions, Protagoras takes him to be asking merely whether *all* the courageous are confident. Socrates is at fault for not phrasing his question clearly at S₂, while Protagoras is at fault for failing to notice the misunderstanding when Socrates asks his question more clearly at S₁₁. However, Protagoras corrects the error at the beginning of his objection (P_{13a}–d). That correction defeats Socrates' initial, purely *ad hominem* argument, which explains why Socrates tries an entirely new tack starting at 351b.⁸

However, the final stage of Socrates' initial argument can be read differently:

VE₁. The wise are confident (S_{12b}).

VE₂. The confident and wise are courageous (S_{12c}).

VE₃. So, the wise are courageous (S_{12d}).⁹

VE₁ entails that the wise are confident and wise, so this reading of the final stage is also valid. The important difference comes in reading S_{12c} as VE₂

⁶ Adam and Adam 1893 *ad* 350b l.31 say this, and O'Brien 1961 develops the claim as below.

⁷ Compare *Gorgias* 467b, where Polus is astonished that Socrates distinguishes *doing what you want* from *doing what seems best*. Thinking this a flat contradiction, Polus repeats himself. Also compare Socrates' *καὶ γὰρ νῦν ὁμολογῶ* (*G.* 467b5) with Protagoras' *καὶ νῦν γε* (P₁₁, at *Pr.* 350b7).

⁸ According to O'Brien 1961, 415, Socrates also thinks that Protagoras commits himself to the claim that wisdom is courage, which he had denied. On this reading, Socrates offers no constructive argument here, which seems at odds with Protagoras' take (P_{13f}).

⁹ Vlastos 1956, xxxii: his inference from C and G to H in the main text; cf. his n. 27. See 2.1.3.1 for a full outline of Vlastos's reading. Strangely, Vlastos says nothing about S₁₁, even where one might expect him to (at xxxii n. 28, or at xxxiii–iv). Klosko 1979, 138 and Russell 2000, 317 n. 17 mistakenly think that Vlastos does discuss S₁₁; as a result, both misrepresent his view.

rather than as AA2. S12c is a participial phrase (θαρραλέωτατοι δὲ ὄντες ἀνδρείωτατοι) that VE2 reads as limited by the preceding clause to those whose confidence is attended by wisdom – or, in particular, whose confidence stems from wisdom.¹⁰ (My phrasing here tracks the diversity of opinion among those who accept such a “restricted reading” of S12c. VE2 expresses a predicative restricted reading. Others think that Socrates makes a causal claim: those confident *from wisdom* are courageous.)

AA2 (“the confident are courageous”) is a stronger reading of S12c than VE2 (“the confident and wise are courageous”). In particular, AA2 suggests a need for the strong reading of S11 (“the courageous are *the* confident”) as support. The weaker VE2 also follows from the strong reading of S11, of course – indeed, it follows from AA2. However, VE2 allows for a valid argument without making S12c contradict 9–10 and S12a, as AA2 does. That is, the claim that the confident and wise are courageous does not conflict with the claim that confident non-experts are not courageous, as does the claim that all *and only* the courageous are confident. Hence, a restricted reading of S12c (“the confident and wise are courageous”) and a weak reading of S11 (“the courageous are confident”) remove any contradiction with 9–10 and S12a (which deny that confident non-experts are courageous). On this view, Protagoras’ first objection – that he never agreed that all the confident are courageous – misconstrues Socrates’ argument. But this is plausible. Protagoras himself says that he was never asked whether the confident are courageous (P13c). That bolsters the weak reading of S11. If Protagoras understood S11 to have asked whether all *and only* the courageous are confident, he would hardly say that he was never asked whether the confident are courageous.¹¹

Still, this defense of the weak reading of S11 (“the courageous are confident”) faces three problems. First, there now appears to be either no argument or only a bad argument for S12c read restrictedly (“the wise

¹⁰ The strong contrast between two groups of confident people, those with knowledge and those without, suggests this limitation on the scope of the participle. Adam and Adam 1893 *ad* 350c l.34 themselves note that ἐκεῖ in S12b picks out those with knowledge; it is natural to understand this adverb as governing S12c as well. The Adams also point out the chiasmus οὗτοι . . . οἱ οὕτω θαρραλέοι . . . καὶ ἐκεῖ αὐ οἱ σοφώτατοι οὗτοι. Cf. Weiss 1985, 15 on καὶ ἐκεῖ αὐ.

¹¹ Cf. Weiss 1985, 17. Sauppe 1892, paraphrased by O’Brien 1961, 414 n. 10, also seems to think that P13c militates against the strong reading of S11. Two replies are possible, though. First, Protagoras might mean that he was never asked *literally that question* (though he now realizes that he agreed to something entailing it). That would be churlish, but perhaps consistent with how Plato depicts Protagoras. Second, he may refer back specifically to S2 (τότε in P13d), since he says that Socrates next (ἔπειτα in P13f) showed that the wise are confident (i.e., in S5–8). Adam and Adam 1893 *ad* 350c l.40 also suggest a contrast between τότε at P13d and καὶ νῦν γε at P11.

and confident are courageous”).¹² Second, again, S11 read strongly (“all *and only* the courageous are confident”) plays a role in the argument by supporting S12c read unrestrictedly (“the confident are courageous”). In contrast, it is unclear why Socrates would ask S11 read weakly, i.e., why he would want to reestablish their recent agreement that the courageous are confident. Third, if Protagoras’ objection simply misunderstands Socrates’ argument, it is odd that Socrates adopts a new strategy starting at 351b, rather than simply removing the misunderstanding. So, while all of the approaches seriously considered below agree on a weak reading of S11 (“the courageous are confident”) and a restricted reading of S12c (“the wise and confident are courageous”), more must be said to defend those positions.¹³

2.1.2.2 *Knowledge and confidence*

More recently, C. C. W. Taylor has raised a puzzle about the relationship between knowledge and confidence here.¹⁴ Steps 5–8 argue that experts are more confident than non-experts, and Socrates uses this claim in the final stage of his initial argument, at S12b. The claim can seem simply untrue; an expert will surely sometimes be less confident than a non-expert. For example, a doctor might worry that the standard cure for a disease will harm her patient’s health more than the disease. In such cases, she will not confidently apply the standard cure. Further, the existence of confident non-experts (9, S12a) strongly suggests that such people could even be more confident than experts.

Two solutions to this problem have been proposed. First, Roslyn Weiss argues that Socrates implicitly qualifies his initial claim that experts are more confident than non-experts (5–8) in light of the confident non-experts he soon mentions (9). The overall message of steps 5–9, then, is that experts are generally more confident than non-experts. As we saw above, Socrates’ apparent repetition of the claim that experts are more confident than non-experts is plausibly read as restricted to experts (S12b; cf. n. 9). In that case, S12b merely says that among experts, those who know most are most confident.¹⁵ This is possible, but unlikely; the

¹² No argument: Vlastos 1956, xxxiii–iv. Bad argument: Taylor 1991, 159.

¹³ Devereux 1975; Weiss 1985; and Russell 2000 do say more on some of these points; see below.

¹⁴ Taylor 1991.

¹⁵ Weiss 1985, 22 n. 20. The idea that confidence due to knowledge varies directly with knowledge, while confidence from other sources does not, also figures in Weiss’s larger causal reading; see n. 31.

emphasis throughout is on the greater confidence of experts than non-experts – both others and oneself prior to gaining expertise.

Second, David Wolfsdorf argues that the claim that experts are more confident than non-experts is implicitly qualified all along. It should be understood as saying that experts *per se* are more confident than non-experts *per se*. However, non-experts may have another source of confidence *per accidens*. In such cases, non-experts can be confident – perhaps even more confident than experts *qua* experts – without undermining Socrates’ claim. It is not *qua* non-experts that non-experts are confident, when they are.¹⁶

Protagoras’ explanation for the confidence of confident non-experts is madness, and Socrates seems to agree (9–10; S12a). Wolfsdorf calls this “merely a dialectical expedient,” in light of “[Socrates’] subsequent analysis of the weakness of being overcome by pleasure as ignorance.”¹⁷ This is problematic in two ways. First, Wolfsdorf’s own proposal requires some source of confidence that non-experts may have *per accidens*, but he suggests no such source that he thinks would be consistent with Socrates’ later argument. Second, Socrates still opposes madness and courage later, when doing so no longer serves as a dialectical expedient (360b). Still, Wolfsdorf’s basic worry is well-taken. If Socrates admits madness as a source of confidence, we should ask how that can be reconciled with his later argument, i.e., why he thinks that knowledge cannot be ruled by madness.

2.1.2.3 Senses of “confidence”

Before moving on, I touch on an ambiguity in talk about confidence that pervades these discussions. It is tempting to see confidence (θάρρος) primarily as an affective state opposed to fear. However, traits upstream of this affect, and actions downstream of it, also merit the name “confidence.” Upstream, confidence (in some respect or domain) belongs to someone who characteristically has the affect of confidence (in that respect or domain). Downstream, “confidence” can describe the actions characteristic of one who is confident rather than fearful: typically motion towards, or standing one’s ground against, the object of one’s confidence. When Socrates says that the wise are confident, he means all three. Wisdom causes relevant affective responses of confidence

¹⁶ Wolfsdorf 2006, 441. ¹⁷ Wolfsdorf 2006, 441 n. 37; cf. Russell 2000, 333.

and the actions typical of someone who has such affective responses. Hence, wisdom is a form of confidence *qua* trait. Existing scholarship moves among these senses of “confidence” without comment, and that practice reflects the text.¹⁸ I have no complaint on either score, and I also talk about confidence in all three ways, relying on context to disambiguate. Still, one should be aware that “confidence” is being used in all three ways.

2.1.3 Existing readings

There are two ways to give Socrates a plausible positive argument at 349d–50c. “Mutual predication readings” have him arguing first that the courageous are wise, and then that the wise are courageous. “Causal readings” have him arguing that wisdom and courage play the same role in producing action. These approaches are related to the debate over what Socrates means when he says that virtue is one. Some think that Socrates asserts only the reciprocity of the virtues, i.e., that anyone with one virtue has each of the several virtues (329e2–4). The reciprocity view fits well with mutual predication readings, since such readings can only establish reciprocity. Others think that he asserts the identity of the virtues, i.e., that “piety,” “justice,” “temperance,” “wisdom,” and “courage” are five names for one thing (329c6–d1). The identity view fits well with causal readings, since “two” conditions with the same causal powers are, plausibly, the same condition. I think Socrates’ argument has a causal structure and that he accepts the strict identity of the virtues. Little turns on the latter claim, either here or in the rest of the book, but my arguments involve some unavoidable references to the debate over unity.¹⁹

¹⁸ The text emphasizes that the confident are ready for action and go toward whatever they are confident about; Socrates also moves easily between acting confidently (θαρραλέως; 350a1) and being confident (θαρραλέοι; 350a3). (Cf. *Protagoras* 332b–d, where Socrates moves among: X acts ὑπὸ F [gen.]; X acts μετὰ F [gen.]; X acts by F [dat. of instrument]; X Fs; and X acts F-ly.) Among scholars, Weiss 1985 calls courage itself “a special kind of confidence” (16), which suggests confidence *qua* trait, but she also moves from “source of courageous action” to “source of confidence” (13; emphasis altered), which suggests confidence *qua* action characteristic of a confident person. Most strikingly, Wolfsdorf 2006 says, in a single passage (440): “courage is a form of fine confidence” (cf. 437, 442 – “is a type of”); knowledge “makes some confidence fine”; and “those who dive into wells have confidence because they possess relevant knowledge” (cf. 441 – “knowledge . . . is a source of confidence”; all emphasis added).

¹⁹ For the classic arguments, see Penner 1973 and Vlastos 1981, chs. 10, 18–20.

2.1.3.1 Mutual predication readings

The standard mutual predication reading is due to Gregory Vlastos:²⁰

VA1. Virtue (in all its parts) is noble.

VA2. Courage is a virtue.

VA3. So, courage is noble.²¹

VB1. Those confident without wisdom are mad.

VB2. Madness is base.

VB3. So, those confident without wisdom are base.²²

VC1 (= VB3). Those confident without wisdom are base.

VC2 (= VA3). Courage is noble.

VC3. So, those confident without wisdom are not courageous.²³

VD1. The courageous are confident.

VD2 (= VC3). Those confident without wisdom are not courageous.

VD3. So, the courageous are not without wisdom, i.e., they are wise.²⁴

VE1. The wise are confident.

VE2. The wise and confident are courageous.

VE3. So, the wise are courageous.

VF1 (= VD3). The courageous are wise.

VF2 (= VE3). The wise are courageous.

VF3. So, wisdom is courage (i.e., all and only the courageous are wise).²⁵

If Socrates argues that the courageous are wise and that the wise are courageous, though, it seems strange that he never states either intermediate conclusion (VD3/VF1 or VE3/VF2). It might make sense for him not to state VE3, and instead to immediately draw his final conclusion. It might even make sense for him not to state VD3 right after P10, when he is first entitled to it. But to repeat VD2 at S12a, instead of the conclusion which it allegedly supports as a premise, seems distinctly odd.²⁶

²⁰ See also Taylor 1991 and Cronquist 1980. Taylor thinks that Socrates accepts the identity of the virtues, but he still analyzes this argument as seeking to establish reciprocity; Socrates must show “at least . . . that all and only the courageous are wise” (150, emphasis added). Cronquist innovates by arguing that Socrates thinks extreme confidence is good, since “degrees of goodness are correlated with degrees of being” (75); hence the comparatives and superlatives found in his argument (cf. Russell 2000, 316–17). However, extreme cases of bad things (e.g., injustice), or of neither good nor bad things (e.g., confidence, surely) are not thereby good.

²¹ Vlastos 1956, xxxii: his B/Ba and his n. 30. I have rearranged the material in this outline from the order in which Vlastos presents it.

²² Vlastos 1956, xxxiii: his Da/Db/E in his n. 33.

²³ Vlastos 1956, xxxii: his inference from Ba and E to F in the main text. Cf. n. 51 below.

²⁴ Vlastos 1956, xxxv: his inference from A and F to J in the main text.

²⁵ See the reflections on Socrates’ wider aims at Vlastos 1956, xxxv; cf. n. 5 above.

²⁶ See Vlastos 1956, xxxiv–v; Taylor 1991, 151–52, 157; Cronquist 1980, 77. This problem seems especially pressing if Protagoras’ main claim is that one can be courageous but unlearned (P1b),

2.1.3.2 *Causal readings*

Terry Penner was the first to propose a causal reading of Socrates' argument.²⁷ As I reconstruct Penner's reading, it has four main parts:

PA₁. Experts are confident, they are more confident than non-experts, and they are more confident than they were when they were non-experts.

PA₂. The best explanation of the facts in PA₁ is that expertise is what makes experts confident (διότι, διὰ, ὅτι; 350a2).

PA₃. So [abductive inference], expertise is what makes experts confident.

PB₁. The courageous are confident.

PB₂. The ignorant confident are not courageous.

PB₃. So, the courageous are the knowing confident – they are experts.

PC₁ [= PA₃]. Expertise is what makes experts confident.

PC₂ [= PB₃]. The courageous are the knowing confident – they are experts.

PC₃. So, expertise – knowledge – is what makes the courageous confident.

PD₁ [= PC₃]. Knowledge is what makes the courageous confident.

PD₂. Courage is what makes the courageous confident.

PD₃. So, knowledge = _{id} courage.²⁸

Several features of this argument are noteworthy. First, Penner mentions that Socrates argues for PB₂, but says nothing more about that argument. He thereby minimizes the role of both the *καλόν* and of *μανία* in Socrates' argument. Second, like Vlastos, Penner must explain why Socrates never states the intermediate conclusion that the courageous are wise

which VD₃ denies. Vlastos thinks this is his main claim, and that Socrates has therefore refuted Protagoras already at P10, though he neglects to say so. Vlastos explains that for his wider argument, Socrates must say something about the converse predication as well. There is a better response available: Prb is not Protagoras' main claim, but his evidence for P1a, his main claim, that courage differs from the other virtues. Still, advocates of mutual predication readings really must explain why Socrates elides VD₃ throughout but repeats VD₂, allegedly a premise in an argument for VD₃.

²⁷ Penner 1973, 53–56; others include Weiss 1985; Russell 2000; and Wolfsdorf 2006. Perhaps in response to Vlastos 1981, ch. 19, Penner 1992, 153–54 clarifies that his identity reading of the unity claim does not require that virtue is a causal entity. That seems right, so I have cast arguments PA–PD below in terms that can be read non-causally by reading “makes” non-causally – perhaps constitutively, as Vlastos says. However, I do understand the argument causally, so I sometimes continue to speak in specifically causal terms.

²⁸ Weiss 1985, 12–16 follows the same basic structure. She emphasizes the causal claim in step 6 and understands its role as in PA (13–14). She thinks that Socrates ultimately reasons as in PD (13–14). (She reads the conclusion differently [14, 21 nn. 7–8], but I cannot discern her positive view.) She outlines the intervening steps as in PC (16) and, at first, as in PB (14–15). However, she alters this initial reading of PB to remove an objection; see n. 31 below. One last difference: Weiss limits the argument to the sorts of experts mentioned in 5–8 (cf. Wolfsdorf 2006, 441) on grounds that τοῦτων at S9 refers to the specific examples given. However, Protagoras draws a perfectly general conclusion at P8, and τοῦτων in S9 is naturally taken to cover all cases. Compare *Laches* 192e–93a, which mentions finance and medicine.

(PB₃/PC₂ = VD₃/VF₁), and instead repeats a supposed premise in an argument for that conclusion, that those confident without wisdom are not courageous (PB₂ = VD₂).²⁹ Finally, there are two worries about the scope of PB₃. PB₃ can seem too narrow, since it suggests that agents cannot occupy a middle ground between ignorance and knowledge; Penner explicitly attributes that view to Socrates.³⁰ Importantly, though, PB only commits Socrates to the claim that there is no middle ground between ignorance and knowledge among those who are confident; I argue shortly that not all non-experts are ignorant, though all confident non-experts are. On the other hand, PB₃ can seem too broad, since it assumes that all of the knowing confident are courageous, not just some of them.³¹ A restricted reading of S12c states precisely this general claim: that the confident and wise, or those confident from wisdom, are courageous. But one drawback of restricted readings of S12c, recall, is that they leave S12c unsupported and unmotivated (2.1.2.1).

2.2.1 *Madness is ignorance*

On my view, mentions of madness in Socrates' argument are not throw-away lines, but crucial moves that refer to ignorance under another name. In this section, I argue directly that it makes sense to read *μᾶνία* as ignorance in the argument's immediate context, in the larger context of the *Protagoras*, and in the wider philosophical context. The claim that madness is ignorance also raises further questions about the relationships among madness, wisdom, and confidence, which I begin to address at the end of this section.

When Socrates asks whether confident non-experts are courageous, Protagoras answers that they are not courageous but mad, and Socrates

²⁹ In presenting PB, strangely, Penner talks about the class of courageous people rather than about courage (55). Weiss 1985 also talks about the courageous and the wise as coextensive classes (15). On the next page she says "the courageous are identified as the knowledgeably confident" (16), though this too could be meant to assert no more than an identity of classes.

³⁰ Penner 1973, 52 n. 24; cf. Vlastos 1981, 438–39. Many who write on this argument move without comment between lack of knowledge and ignorance – see Cronquist 1980, 73, 77; Weiss 1985, 15; Wolfsdorf 2006, 436, 440–41.

³¹ See Adam and Adam 1893 *ad* 349e, 1.9; Penner is silent on this point. Weiss 1985, 15–16 is sensitive to the worry and tries to remove it by clarifying Socrates' reasoning as follows: knowledge makes people confident (5–8), but confidence can outstrip knowledge (9–10). So, knowledge produces not confidence *simpliciter*, but a certain sort of confidence that varies directly with knowledge (cf. Taylor 1991, 155; Wolfsdorf 2006, 441 n. 38), as witnessed by Socrates' use of comparatives and superlatives. But the courageous are confident (2, 11), and courage runs out when knowledge does (3–4, 9–10). So (abductive inference) knowledge makes you courageous specifically, not just confident in some way or other.

seems to embrace this view (10, S12a). Protagoras' claim is perfectly general.³² In making his assessment, he relies on nothing more than that the relevant people are confident non-experts. He does not, for example, know antecedently that certain people are mad, hear of them acting confidently without relevant expertise, and propose that their confidence is due to madness. That fact constrains our understanding of madness. Protagoras and Socrates surely do not consider all confident non-experts strictly insane – though insanity may still be a form of madness.

Other parts of the *Protagoras* provide further clues about madness. First, in the immediate context: when Socrates asks whether virtue is noble, Protagoras replies, “It’s the noblest thing – unless I’m mad, anyway.” The natural reading is that error on this point would reveal deep ignorance about virtue, not insanity.³³ Slightly further afield, Socrates comments that had Simonides wanted to say that it is hard for a man to become good, it would seem crazy (μανικόν) to place a μέν near the beginning of his ode. Such writing would be utterly illogical (οὐδέ ἐπὶ ἕνα λόγον) unless he were replying to Pittacus as a rival (343c–d). This is exactly the sort of linguistic ignorance one would least expect from Simonides. Socrates’ overall interpretation of the poem is notoriously strange; still, his comment here establishes that he finds it natural to call the irrational and ignorant “mad.” Finally, and less directly, recall Wolfsdorf’s worry: if Socrates accepts that madness produces confidence, he must explain why knowledge is never ruled by madness (2.1.2.2). Understanding madness as ignorance eliminates the problem, for madness and wisdom then exclude each other, making it impossible for the former to rule the latter. (One consequence of this view is that ignorance produces confidence. Wolfsdorf denies this because Socrates says that knowledge produces confidence, and he thinks, wrongly, that all non-experts are ignorant [cf. n. 30]. I defend these claims below.)

Standardly, though, Greek opposes μανία to σωφροσύνη.³⁴ Protagoras uses this contrast earlier: those who admit to injustice exhibit μανία, as

³² See also Vlastos’s VB1, but contrast Devereux 1975, 37–38.

³³ Charles Young has objected that Protagoras’ comment could be mere idiom. Had he said “It’s the noblest thing, or I’ll eat my hat,” we would draw no conclusions about Protagoras’ views on haberdashery and its relationship to virtue; such a remark would simply underline his confidence. Still, his comment offers a starting point for inquiry. If apparently idiomatic uses of a lexical item, read literally, help to explain clearly non-idiomatic uses of that lexical item, or of others in its semantic field, we should reevaluate our idea of the former uses as mere idiom.

³⁴ North 1966 s.v. *Mania*, esp. 115 n. 90. Scholars sometimes talk about “senses” of σωφροσύνη – sanity, prudence, self-control, self-knowledge, and so on. One can approach these through the opposed terms (cf. North 1966 s.v. *Antitheses to sophrosyne*). Plato thinks these reveal aspects of one thing, and he has complicated reasons for thinking so, expressed against serious opposition (e.g., *G.* 491d ff.).

against the σωφροσύνη of those who admit that they lack flute-playing or some other such skill (323b–c). Presumably, admitting to injustice is mad because it attracts punishment (e.g., 325b), i.e., because it is imprudent. When Protagoras calls confident non-experts “mad,” he criticizes them for their imprudence too, e.g., for the imprudence of diving into a well without knowing how. Compare *Laches* 192c–d: Laches suggests that courage is endurance (καρτερία). Socrates replies that senseless endurance (ἡ μετ’ ἀφροσύνης [καρτερία]) is harmful, so not noble, so not courage. If Protagoras thinks of madness as senselessness and imprudence, our current argument is remarkably similar. The similarity extends even to the curious form of argument from the claim that senseless and imprudent endurance is not courage to the claim that sensible and prudent endurance is courage. (In our passage, seemingly: inexpert and imprudent confidence is not courage, so expert and prudent confidence is courage.)³⁵

So, some passages in the *Protagoras* suggest that madness is ignorance, while others suggest that it is imprudence, and the latter contrast is more familiar. But we do not face a forced choice here. Socrates and Protagoras agree earlier that prudence (σωφροσύνη) is wisdom, because they share an opposite, ἀφροσύνη, and opposites are unique (332a–33b). They surely also agree that ignorance is opposed to wisdom and madness to prudence; these contrasts are common currency. But again, their earlier argument concluded that prudence is wisdom. Hence, madness and ignorance share an opposite, variously called “prudence” and “wisdom.” But they agree that opposites are unique. Therefore, they are committed to the claim that madness is ignorance.³⁶

Again, it is more common to oppose μανία and σωφροσύνη than to identify these with the pair ignorance and wisdom, but the latter also occurs outside of Plato. In *Dissoi Logoi* V, the author, who was likely influenced by Protagoras,³⁷ implicitly equates madness and prudence with

³⁵ See further 2.2.2.

³⁶ [II *Alc.*] initially identifies μανία with ἀφροσύνη (138c–39c), but then with the greatest ἀφροσύνη only (139d–40d). The comparison with crafts (140b–c) suggests that the greatest ἀφροσύνη concerns good and bad as such, rather than the conditional goods aimed at by the subordinate sciences (cf. 144d–46d, esp. 146c). Compare the contrast between justice and other crafts at *Pr.* 323b–c and the move from several crafts in our present argument (349d–50c) to knowledge of good and bad thereafter (351b ff.). Plato himself sometimes talks differently about madness: *Ti.* 86b makes madness and ignorance two species of ἄνοια, and the *Phaedrus* introduces divine madness (244b–45c ff.; concerning 245a, cp. *Ion* 535d).

³⁷ See Robinson 2003. The next section of the work (VI) treats the teachability of virtue in a way that shows influence from the *Protagoras*, and there may be some Platonic influence in V as well. The author also seems familiar with the *Phaedrus* (II.2; perhaps VIII.3–6) and *Republic* (III.2–3; perhaps II.3).

ignorance and wisdom. He argues for and against the view that “the mad [μαϊνόμενοι] and the sane [σωφρονοῦντες], and the wise [σοφοί] and the foolish [ἄμαθεῖς] do and say the same things” (VI.1).³⁸ These might seem to be two distinct topics, but the author later says it is absurd to think that “the wise are mad, and the mad wise.” This substitution of madness for foolishness, or of wisdom for sanity, clearly assumes the identity of this pair of opposites. The author does not offer double arguments about these identities, but assumes them casually in passing.³⁹

Plausibly, then, when Socrates and Protagoras say that confident non-experts are mad, they accuse them of ignorance. But not all non-experts are confident, and Protagoras and Socrates only call the confident ones mad. Hence madness cannot simply be lack of knowledge. Granted that experts generally act more confidently in their area of expertise than non-experts (steps 5–8 above; cf. 2.1.2.2 for complications), we might say that non-experts who act confidently act as if they were experts. That is, such people reveal in deeds that they think they know what they don’t. As Socrates says of the slave in the *Meno*, “even now he does not yet know, but then he thought he knew, and answered confidently as if he did know [θαρραλέως ἀπεκρίνετο ὡς εἰδώς]” (84a; cf. 70b–c). This suggests a more refined account of madness/ignorance: thinking you know what you don’t. (Here one might add that inexpert flute-players who present themselves as experts, thereby exhibiting *μανία* rather than *σωφροσύνη* according to Protagoras [323b–c], act confidently as well; there is nothing mad about simply lacking expertise at flute-playing.) As one who doesn’t think he knows what he doesn’t, Socrates is intermediate between the wise and the ignorant.⁴⁰ This also adds a certain piquancy to Protagoras’ comment at P3. He claims to teach virtue, but if he falsely thinks he is expert in virtue, the noblest thing (cp. *G.* 448c, 451d), then he thinks he knows what he doesn’t, and he is indeed mad.

Still, why should everyone ignorant in this sense act confidently? In the *Apology*, Socrates suggests that such ignorant people are timid; he says

³⁸ Notice also how Socrates’ final argument for the identity of courage and wisdom (359a–60e) resembles this section of the *Dissoi Logoi*. In effect, Socrates says that the courageous and the cowardly do the same things (go after what they consider hopeful and avoid what they consider fearful) but different things (for the former fear and hope appropriately, while the latter fear and hope inappropriately; cf. V.9).

³⁹ The identity of madness and ignorance was also accepted by other Socratically-inspired philosophers, including at least some Cynics and Stoics (see, e.g., Stobaeus II 7.5b13).

⁴⁰ Again, cf. n. 30 for those who explicitly or implicitly deny that Socrates recognizes an intermediate between knowledge and ignorance.

that fear of death is nothing but (οὐδὲν ἄλλο . . . ἤ) wrongly thinking oneself wise – in particular, wrongly supposing that one knows death is bad (29a). Socrates clearly thinks ignorance on this point causes excessive caution about death, not excessive confidence. (This is the flip side of Taylor’s puzzle about the claim that experts are more confident than non-experts [2.1.2.2].)

Socrates implicitly recognizes this possibility in his final argument about courage and wisdom. There, he asks whether “the fear and confidence of the cowardly, the rash, and the madmen are disgraceful” (360b). One could think of the cowardly, the rash, and the mad as coequal characters opposed to the courageous (whose fear and confidence are admirable; 360a–b). But Socrates thinks opposites are unique, so this would commit him to the identity of the cowardly, rash, and mad. Identifying the rash and the cowardly seems especially problematic. However, if madness is ignorance, we can understand his view to be that madness (i.e., ignorance) is opposed to courage (i.e., wisdom) *simpliciter*, and that cowardice and rashness are ways madness manifests itself, or even species of madness.⁴¹ Of course, this fails to explain why ignorance manifests sometimes as cowardice and sometimes as rashness, or why specific cases of ignorance fall into the species of cowardice or rashness. I return to this problem later (2.3.3).

2.2.2 *The new causal reading*

So, Socrates and Protagoras plausibly take madness to be ignorance. I now show how that reading enables a new, improved causal reading of Socrates’ argument.

Taylor, as one step in his larger mutual predication reading (cf. n. 20 above), suggests that Socrates offers a different sort of causal argument for S12c on his way to showing that the wise are courageous. (Recall that S12c, read restrictedly, states that those who are confident and wise – or those confident from wisdom – are courageous.) In this section, I alter Taylor’s proposal and defend the result, not as one step in a mutual predication reading, but as the key move in a new causal reading of Socrates’ argument.

⁴¹ Taylor 1991 *ad* 360b4–5 suggests that the mad are the rash. (Cp. Ar. *EN* III.7, which treats madness as an extreme excess of confidence and suggests that ordinary rash people have an admixture of cowardice.) Taylor’s suggestion does not explain how the cowardly and rash can both be opposed to the courageous. Like me, Russell 2000, 333–35 suggests that cowardice and rashness are species of ignorance, but he denies that madness causes foolish action (cf. n. 17 above).

On analogy with:

TA1. Lack of oxygen prevents a burning match from igniting wood shavings.

TA2. So, presence of oxygen causes a burning match to ignite wood shavings.

Taylor, struck by the repetition of P_{10} in S12a, reads

TB1. Lack of knowledge prevents confidence from being courage. (S12a)

TB2. So, having knowledge makes confidence into courage. (S12b–c)

However, says Taylor, “the argument fails because [TB1] does not allow Socrates to assert that knowledge is the only condition necessary, together with [confidence], if one is to be courageous, but merely that it is *a* necessary condition of being courageous.”⁴²

Taylor’s objection conflates causes with conditions necessary for causes to operate as causes (cf. *Phd.* 99b; *Ti.* 46c–e).⁴³ This may result from his embrace of the mutual predication reading, on which Socrates argues that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for courage. Taylor even says that, in a case like TA1, “the addition of oxygen will be sufficient, together with the ignition of the match, to cause the shavings to catch fire” (159). That is, he identifies the cause of the ignition of the shavings with the individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions of their ignition. This has little to recommend itself as a theory of causation; still less is there any reason to attribute such a view to Socrates.⁴⁴ However, this suggests a way to improve Taylor’s reading as interpretation: adapt it to conform to Plato’s commitments about causation.⁴⁵

I expand on the structure of Socrates’ entire argument shortly, but first, here is the simplest altered version of the crucial step:

⁴² Taylor 1991, 159; cf. Weiss 1985, 15.

⁴³ I am not saying that Plato implicitly employs the theory of forms in the *Protagoras*. I do think he relies on implicit assumptions about causation that also help to motivate the theory of forms.

⁴⁴ What would Plato say about the match? Presumably that the presence of air is a necessary condition of the match’s causing the shavings to ignite (but cf. *R.* 507d ff. on vision and light). Perhaps the correct Platonist answer, in light of the modern theory that combustion is oxidation, is that oxygen is the cause and the energy provided by the lit match is the condition necessary for oxygen to act as a cause.

⁴⁵ Cf. Taylor 1991, 191–92: Socrates says first that anyone who regularly makes correct choices must do so from knowledge, and then that anyone who does not must lack knowledge. Taylor accuses him of inferring $\neg p \rightarrow \neg q$ from $p \rightarrow q$. When both claims are understood causally, however, their relationship comes into clearer focus. If someone regularly makes correct choices, we explain this by citing the cause of such reliable correctness, knowledge. If someone doesn’t regularly make correct choices, on the other hand, she must lack the knowledge that, had she had it, would have regularly produced correct choices. (This ignores the possibility that one could lack a mere necessary condition of correct choice.)

TB1'. Madness (i.e., ignorance) causes base confidence (i.e., rash action).
 TB2'. So, knowledge causes noble confidence (i.e., courageous action).⁴⁶

This inference differs from Taylor's in three ways. First, ignorance (knowledge's contrary) replaces lack of knowledge (its contradictory) for reasons canvassed above (2.2.1). Second, instead of suggesting that knowledge merely shapes pre-existing confidence, this version says that knowledge produces confidence – bracketing puzzles about that claim (2.1.2.2). This is not to deny that education shapes pre-existing confidence (see 2.3.3), but Taylor's version elides Socrates' claim that knowledge itself makes people confident. Finally, rather than saying that lack of knowledge prevents confidence from being courage, TB' says that ignorance causes something (base confidence) – again, bracketing some puzzles (2.2.1). This new inference instantiates a familiar Platonic assumption about causation: opposites cause opposites. In particular, the opposites ignorance and knowledge cause the opposites base confidence and noble confidence, respectively. (The correlative principle that like causes like is also at work in the argument. Since madness produces base confidence, Protagoras infers that if madness were courage, then courage would be base. That is, the cause of base confidence must be base, for like causes like.⁴⁷)

Why does Socrates assume that the relevant opposite of base confidence is noble confidence – and not, say, base caution? Socrates lays the groundwork for this assumption in the lead-up to TB'. To show how, I offer the new causal reading of Socrates' argument by paraphrasing in his order of presentation, followed by a less intricate paraphrase:

NC1. Courage produces noble confidence [i.e., courageous action]. (2–4)⁴⁸

NC2. Knowledge produces confidence. (5–8)⁴⁹

NC3. [Ignorance alias] madness produces base confidence [i.e., rash action], so it is not courage [which produces noble confidence, i.e., courageous action]. (9–10)

⁴⁶ The equivalence of base confidence with rash action and noble confidence with courageous action is due to Wolfsdorf 2006. Here, I am talking about confidence *qua* action that characteristically flows from confident affect. The inference here, and the full argument below, could be recast to emphasize confidence *qua* affect or confidence *qua* trait. (Cf. 2.1.2.3.)

⁴⁷ Compare *Pr.* 330c–e. These causal assumptions are not unique to Plato; see Makin 1990–91.

⁴⁸ Socrates reasons thus: courage produces confidence (2), and courage is noble (3–4); so (understood) courage produces noble confidence. Superficially similar arguments can be flawed; cp. *Euthyd.* 298d–e.

⁴⁹ The language of causation is explicit only here (in step 6), not in the cases of courage and madness. So, a reconstruction that makes a causal claim about knowledge, but no causal claims about courage or madness, might have a textual advantage. I cannot find a plausible reconstruction along those lines.

- NC4. Remember: courage does produce confidence. (11-weak; cf. NC1)
- NC5. Also remember: [ignorance alias] madness produces base confidence [i.e., rash action] and so is not courage [which produces noble confidence]. (S12a; cf. NC3)
- NC6. Also remember: knowledge, on the other hand [καὶ ἐκεῖ αὖ] produces confidence as well [καί – as well as madness, i.e., ignorance] . . . (S12b; cf. NC2)
- NC7. . . . and, in producing confidence, [since knowledge and madness, i.e., ignorance, are contraries that both produce confidence, and since madness produces base confidence,] produces [noble confidence, i.e.,] courageous action. (S12c-restricted; cf. TB⁵⁰)
- NC8. So by this reasoning, [since courage and knowledge are each the source of noble confidence, i.e., courageous action,] courage is knowledge. (S12d; cf. PD)

That is, Socrates places courage, knowledge, and ignorance (alias madness) in the genus of confidence-producers. He markedly emphasizes this by repeating all three claims in a row at 11, S12a (abbreviated, perhaps because recently expressed at 9–10), and S12b.⁵⁰ In the genus of confidence-producers, ignorance produces a certain sort of confidence (base).⁵¹ As its contrary within that genus, knowledge produces a contrary sort of confidence (noble). But in the genus of confidence-producers, the condition that produces noble confidence is courage. So, knowledge is courage.

The new causal reading allows us to explain or avoid many interpretive problems encountered above. First, against a backdrop of Platonic views about causation and opposition, it explains why Socrates infers that everyone confident from knowledge is courageous. That is, it explains Socrates' warrant for S12c, read restrictedly (2.1.2.1, 2.1.3.2). Second, it explains the repetition of the claim that the courageous are confident (S2, S11), which

⁵⁰ Cf. Ar. *Meta.* V.10: "We call contraries [*antikeimenon*] . . . (2) the most different of things in the same genus." Opposition within a genus is familiar in Plato too; in this very dialogue, Socrates opposes high pitch (ὀξύ ἐν φωνῆ) with deep pitch (τὸ βαρὺ [ἐν φωνῆ]). Cf. *Ch.* 159b–60d; *R.* 437d–e, 454c; [*Def.*] 416a24–25.

⁵¹ Taylor 1991 objects to step 10: "even if the state of being [confident] but lacking in knowledge is not itself any part of excellence, and *a fortiori* not courage, it does not follow that those in that state do not possess some *other* state which *is* courage. The argument would require the additional premise that no one who is mad possesses any of the virtues" (155). Wolfsdorf 2006, 441–42 n. 39 replies that Socrates means that the ignorant confident are, *as such*, base. But this leaves open the possibility of their being base in respect of their ignorant confidence but noble in respect of some other capacity – possibly courage. Indeed, that is just the sort of move that Wolfsdorf needs for his other defense of Socrates against Taylor, that the ignorant are not confident *qua* ignorant but could be confident in some other respect (2.1.2.2). On the new causal argument, however, madness (i.e., ignorance) is the contrary of courage (i.e., wisdom), so one cannot be both mad and courageous.

was a puzzle for anyone who reads S11 weakly (2.1.2.1). Third, it explains the repetition of the claim that those confident without knowledge are mad, not courageous (9–10, S12a). This was a puzzle for both Vlastos and Penner, who see this claim as a premise on the way to the implicit intermediate conclusion that all the courageous are wise (VD in 2.1.3.1; PB in 2.1.3.2). Finally, it avoids another infelicity of existing readings: on those readings, steps 3–4 bear no relationship to the material on either side of them. They establish a premise – that courage is noble – which Socrates does not use until steps 9–10. On the new causal reading, these steps establish the sort of confidence that courage produces, allowing for a natural flow to the argument. The order of these steps could be explained in other ways,⁵² but this still looks like an advantage for the new causal reading.

2.2.3 *Knowledge and ignorance as confidence-producers*

Knowledge and ignorance are contraries, so it can seem unlikely that both of them produce confidence. Making them contraries within the genus of confidence-producers offers a formal solution, but does not explain why both knowledge and ignorance belong in that genus. Indeed, we have seen puzzles about why either knowledge or ignorance is a confidence-producer, since each seems liable to produce caution or fear, at least sometimes (2.1.2.2, 2.2.1). I now explain why Socrates considers knowledge a confidence-producer, and then I extend that explanation to cover ignorance.

Experts in a given domain can reliably realize the good and avoid the bad in that domain. For example, the doctor, an expert in medicine, can reliably realize health and avoid illness. This makes many more bodily conditions hopeful for the doctor (with respect to health), many more financial conditions hopeful for the financial expert (with respect to wealth), and so on. In short, expertise is asymmetric with respect to its effects on hope and fear. Hence, expertise is a confidence-producer rather than a caution-producer, even if experts are sometimes more cautious than non-experts.

Ignorance is a confidence-producer parasitically. Expertise in a domain makes domain-relevant situations more hopeful for the expert; ignorance produces confidence *via* false beliefs that these same situations are

⁵² It could manifest dialectical skill; Aristotle mentions asking questions out of order, so that the answer doesn't see where the questioner is headed (*An. Pr.* II.19; Marc Gasser helped me to find this reference).

more hopeful for the ignorant. As in the case of knowledge, this clarifies why ignorance is a confidence-producer rather than a caution-producer. Together, these points explain why knowledge and ignorance both belong in the genus of confidence-producers: ignorance apes knowledge and so produces affective and behavioral similarities, at a certain level of description. Now, if both the wise and the ignorant are relatively confident, one might reasonably ask in comparison to *whom* they are relatively confident; they cannot each be confident compared to the other. Again, though, the ignorant are those who wrongly think they know, not those in the intermediate state of neither knowing nor thinking that they know. The wise and ignorant are both confident in relation to those people.⁵³

The situation is somewhat different for wisdom proper, i.e., knowledge of what is unconditionally good and bad for a human being. Wisdom proper suffices for happiness and so makes all circumstances hopeful for its possessor. The ignorance opposed to this wisdom, which Socrates repeatedly encounters – wrongly thinking that one knows what is unconditionally good and bad for a human being – frequently does not make its possessor so confident. That is, many such ignorant people are cowardly, not rash. Consider the fear of death that Socrates calls ignorance in the *Apology*. Someone ignorant in this way thinks she understands death; as part of her ignorance, she apparently thinks that no expertise can make death a hopeful affair. For some reason, those ignorant about death rarely, if ever, come to think that they know death is not bad. This is probably due to the specific false beliefs that the ignorant have about what is good and bad for a human being. Those beliefs focus on bodily and reputational goods beyond their control – more on that in [Chapter 6](#) – which makes them feel vulnerable in ways that the wise don't feel.

2.3.1 *Existing readings of Protagoras' objection*

We can now better understand Protagoras' objection and Socrates' response to it. Protagoras' objection has three parts. First, he says he never admitted that all the confident are courageous, implying that Socrates had assumed as much in his argument. Second, he undermines Socrates' argument by sketching a parallel argument for the conclusion that knowledge is strength. The parallel argument reconfirms that Protagoras locates Socrates' failure in the assumption that all the confident are courageous (P13k). Finally,

⁵³ Casey Perin pressed me to explain how, and in relation to whom, both the wise and ignorant are confident.

Protagoras states his own views about the sources of power, strength, confidence, and courage.

As we saw earlier (2.1.2.1), some scholars agree that Socrates says all the confident are courageous (S11, S12c). On this reading, the first part of Protagoras' objection defeats his argument, prompting a fresh start.⁵⁴ All the reconstructions detailed above, in contrast, give Socrates an argument to which this objection is irrelevant. Once more, though, that raises the question of why Socrates doesn't simply respond to Protagoras by clarifying his argument.⁵⁵

The second part of Protagoras' objection comes in for criticism on two grounds. First, his summary of Socrates' argument ignores the premise that those confident without knowledge are base, and so not courageous. Second, the relevant parallel to this claim – that power without knowledge is base, and so not strength – does not appear in his proposed parallel argument, and would be implausible anyway.⁵⁶

Others focus on the last part of Protagoras' objection, his claims about the sources of confidence and courage. Penner thinks that this expresses the core objection: Socrates cannot explain courageous action simply by appeal to knowledge, without mentioning the nature and psychological conditioning of the courageous as well.⁵⁷ Daniel Devereux takes a different approach. Noting that P13 reaffirms that the courageous are confident, he asks: which sources listed at P13n (τέχνη, μανία, or θυμός) provide their confidence?⁵⁸ (Weiss asks the same question; she concludes that Protagoras severs the connection between courage and confidence, since his proposed sources of confidence and courage do not overlap.⁵⁹) Devereux answers that P13n lists sources of confidence other than courage.⁶⁰ On this view, Protagoras thinks that explaining someone's confidence by her expertise implicitly denies that she displays courage (as does explaining it by her madness or rage). But, as Devereux notes, this only works if Protagoras

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Adam and Adam 1893 ad 350d l.48; O'Brien 1961, 416. For other views of the objection not discussed here, see Klosko 1979, 139–41 and Cronquist 1980, 78–79.

⁵⁵ See, e.g., Vlastos 1956, xxxiii n. 34; Devereux 1975, 37; Weiss 1985, 19 (see n. 59 below for her account of Socrates' new approach); and Russell 2000, 317.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Adam and Adam 1893 ad 350d l.48; Weiss 1985, 19; and Russell 2000, 317 n. 16.

⁵⁷ Penner 1973, 55–56; his main concern is to confirm that Socrates' argument is about the cause(s) of courageous action. I sympathize, but P13m, read charitably, suggests that Protagoras takes "confidence and courage are not the same" to mean "the confident are not all and only the courageous."

⁵⁸ Devereux 1975, 37.

⁵⁹ Weiss 1985, 19. She also claims that Protagoras' account of the sources of courage undermines his claim to be able to teach virtue (I disagree; see n. 71 below), and that Socrates responds as he does because he is looking for an account of virtue on which Protagoras might be able to teach it.

⁶⁰ Devereux 1975, 37–38; cf. Wolfsdorf 2006, 442–43, described just below.

does not think that all confident non-experts lack courage. He would have to think that only some confident non-experts, namely the mad, lack courage. But again (see 2.2.1), P9–10 is more naturally read as saying that all confident non-experts are mad, not courageous. If Devereux were right, then when Socrates asks whether those confident without knowledge are courageous, Protagoras should say “Well, some of them are courageous, others enraged, and still others mad.”⁶¹ Still, this leaves the important challenge which Devereux sets and which Weiss deems unmeetable: to explain which sources of confidence Protagoras thinks the courageous have.

Finally, David Wolfsdorf offers a reading of P13 entire.⁶² He thinks Protagoras’ objection is highly elliptical: at P13a–d, he does not deny merely that all the confident *simpliciter* are courageous, but instead that all the noble confident are courageous.⁶³ That is, Protagoras objects to Socrates’ causal inference on grounds that noble confidence has at least two different sources, knowledge and courage. Thus, on Penner’s reconstruction, the argument wrongly assumes that expertise uniquely makes experts confident rather than simply that it is one thing that makes experts confident; likewise, the new causal argument wrongly assumes that there is only one noble confidence-producer.

This may be a fair objection, but is it not Protagoras’ objection. First, although Wolfsdorf notes that his reading is continuous with Devereux’s,⁶⁴ he never addresses the problem that Devereux raises for his own approach. On Wolfsdorf’s reading, Protagoras thinks some confident non-experts – namely, the courageous – are nobly confident. Again, this sits uneasily with P9–10. Second, P13m repeats the objection that not all the confident are courageous. P13n supports P13m (γάρ), which leaves Wolfsdorf with a dilemma. If P13m elliptically denies that all the noble confident are courageous, then how does P13n support P13m? P13n lists sources of confidence: τέχνη, θυμός, and μανία. But if P13n supports the claim that there are multiple sources of noble confidence, then (i) it is bizarre to place μανία, a source of base confidence, on the list; (ii) it is strange that courage does not appear on the list – the whole point being, on Wolfsdorf’s view, that this is a

⁶¹ In Pro, Protagoras mentions only the mad; he fails to mention either the courageous or those with θυμός. Contrast Devereux 1975, 37, who inserts the claim that confidence from θυμός is base, and cf. Weiss 1985, 19: “(passion, too?).”

⁶² Wolfsdorf 2006, 442–44.

⁶³ Wolfsdorf 2006, 444 reads the parallel argument elliptically as well: “strength is a form of power *and fine* and knowledge is a form of power *and fine*” (emphasis added). He does not fill in the details or address those who doubt whether this results in an equally good parallel argument (see n. 56 above).

⁶⁴ Wolfsdorf 2006, 442–43 n. 43.

distinct source of noble confidence; and (iii) it is unclear what we should say about θυμός – whether or not it is a source of noble confidence. But if P13m is not read elliptically, then we are evidently expected to see two superficially identical assertions that “not all the confident are courageous” and, without further prompting, to read one of these elliptically (P13a–d) and the other not (P13m). So, Wolfsdorf’s reading fails.

2.3.2 *θυμός is spirit*

These readings differ in the charity they extend to Protagoras. Is his objection supposed to be entirely defensible, or should we freely read him as making howlers? I take the latter view, for one objection is plainly laughable. At P13e, Protagoras complains that Socrates never refuted his claim that the courageous are confident. But Socrates neither needs nor wants to refute this claim, to which they twice agreed (S2, S11). Nor does a Wolfsdorf-style elliptical reading help here, since they agree that the courageous are nobly confident. Protagoras cannot be saved on this point, so we may attribute other errors to him, provided it helps to make sense of the passage.⁶⁵ In particular, we should admit that Protagoras errs in saying that Socrates assumes all the confident are courageous, if only we can explain why Socrates does not simply correct Protagoras’ blatant error.

Here, I agree broadly with Dan Russell, who says that Socrates replies to a deeper objection raised at P13n.⁶⁶ Russell suggests that Protagoras’ proposed sources of courage – εὐτροφία and φύσις – provide, respectively, “epistemic” and “non-epistemic” elements in courage. The next natural thought is that εὐτροφία, the “epistemic element in courage,” is simply knowledge. Thus, Protagoras’ point is that courage requires not only knowledge but also φύσις. Contrast Devereux and Wolfsdorf: they think Protagoras’ core objection is that knowledge is a sufficient but not necessary cause (not: logical condition) of noble confidence. Russell and I think his core objection is that knowledge is a necessary but not sufficient cause (not: logical condition) of noble confidence. (This contrast between causes and logical conditions is necessary to distinguish Protagoras’ view from Socrates’. I argue below that Socrates thinks one needs φύσις to become courageous and wise, so he admits it as a logical condition on courage and wisdom.) This raises two questions. First, when and why

⁶⁵ Contrast Wolfsdorf 2006, 436, who is determined to show how both Socrates and Protagoras can have reasonable positions in this exchange.

⁶⁶ Russell 2000, 317–18; I develop his suggestion differently.

might knowledge fail to produce courageous action? An answer to this question specifies a causal role for φύσις, the natural condition that compensates for knowledge's deficiencies. Second, what natural condition or φύσις would compensate for the supposed deficiencies of knowledge, so that knowledge and φύσις would jointly guarantee courageous action and so jointly constitute courage?

Reflecting again on our parallel argument in the *Laches* helps to answer the first question. There, recall, Laches proposes that courage is endurance (καρτερία). Socrates objects that imprudent endurance is not courage, and concludes that courage must be prudent endurance instead (192c–d). Next, Socrates presents two puzzles for his account (192e–93c). First, an expert who endures in a course of action within her domain of expertise because she knows it is safe hardly seems courageous. Second, a non-expert who endures in a dangerous course of action in his domain of non-expertise seems courageous, although his endurance is evidently foolish.⁶⁷ Military examples take center stage here; Socrates compares a military expert who knows that his strategic position is favorable, and so endures, to a military non-expert in the opposite camp. However, this comparison of an expert enduring in favorable circumstances to a non-expert enduring in unfavorable circumstances conspicuously omits the case of an expert in unfavorable circumstances.⁶⁸ In such circumstances, one might imagine that expertise does not provide endurance (or confidence) adequate for courageous action. Thus, one might doubt whether knowledge alone suffices to produce courageous action.

Suppose a peltast is more confident in battle than he was before learning peltastry. His knowledge enables him to do things safely that he couldn't do safely before – he can perform certain military feats without meeting injury or death – and so he now accurately finds those circumstances hopeful rather than fearful (cf. 2.2.3). However, in unfavorable circumstances, i.e., those in which his expertise cannot secure his bodily safety, he may well still be timid. But courage sometimes requires willingness to face injury or

⁶⁷ Lurking here is the popular view that courage involves facing fearful things; cf. *Pr.* 359c–d, where Socrates rejects this view. The misconception may arise like this: X considers Z fearful. X observes Y going for Z anyway. X supposes that it is obvious what is fearful (e.g., death), and that Y must also appreciate the fearfulness of her action. So, X supposes that what makes Y behave as she does is some ability to face things that are, both in fact and by Y's lights, fearful. See further 7.2.

⁶⁸ Socrates alludes to such cases in the rhetorically complex Simonides discussion (344b–45b). The idea that wisdom is good luck in the *Euthydemus* (279c–80b) might be thought to rule out the possibility of someone wise in unfavorable circumstances, but I think this ultimately applies only to those wise in the strict sense (those who know what is unconditionally good and bad for a human being). For such a one, all circumstances are hopeful (cf. 2.2.3), though perhaps not all circumstances are equally hopeful.

death. So, the peltast's skill will not suffice for courage when his skill cannot secure him against injury and death. His knowledge must be joined by a further condition of the soul that bolsters its deliverances. This explains our peltast's timidity as a case in which fear (of injury or death) overcomes knowledge. Socrates argues in the sequel that knowledge is strong and cannot be overcome by fear. Hence, this reading explains one crucial aspect of Socrates' shift in response to Protagoras' objection.

What natural condition of the soul might Protagoras have in mind to supplement knowledge and prevent its being ruled by fear? Identifying a plausible candidate in what Protagoras says will confirm my reading still further. In the peltast case, expertise fails to produce confidence sufficient for courageous action. That suggests in turn that the relevant supplement to expertise must provide additional confidence. Happily, Protagoras gives his own list of the sources of confidence: τέχνη, θυμός, and μανία. Since we are asking what a courageous person needs beyond expertise, the supplement obviously cannot be τέχνη. Neither can it be μανία, for madness is ignorance, which excludes knowledge (2.2.1; even if that argument is rejected, madness is excluded because it produces base confidence).

That leaves θυμός, which is usually understood here as a passing affective state of anger. This reading has some textual basis. Socrates later lists θυμός among the emotions thought capable of ruling knowledge (352b), and that suggests anger. But it would be quite strange to say that our cowardly peltast must suffer from a dearth of anger. However, the hypothesis can be rescued by understanding θυμός as spirit. Plato describes spirit most fully in the *Republic*. (I do not mean that spirit in the *Protagoras* should be understood as a part of the soul; for the distinctness of these two questions, see *R.* 435d–36b.) There, he gives spirit the following core features:

- (1) Humans possess a greater or lesser degree of spirit from birth; relatedly, some non-human animals, e.g., dogs and lions, also possess it.
- (2) It involves a propensity to anger, perhaps especially at perceived injustice.
- (3) It involves a propensity to confident action and endurance in the face of painful obstacles.
- (4) It is opposed to (i.e., contrary to) another innate character (as in 1) that makes its possessor gentle and cautious (in contrast to 2 and 3).⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Just as confidence (θάραχος) and endurance (καρτερία) are characteristic of a person with spirit (θυμός), but are shameful and harmful when accompanied by foolishness, so that none of these is courage, so too quietness (ἡσυχιότης) and bashfulness (αἰσχυντηλός) are characteristic of a person with modesty (αἰδώς) in the *Charmides*, but none of these is temperance, since temperance is always

Unlike lack of anger, lack of spirit – or possession of its contrary – provides an appropriately general explanation for expert failures of courage. Spirit is thus an appropriately general supplement for making experts act courageously. Further, since the spirited are innately spirited, spirit makes an appropriate candidate for the φύσις that Protagoras claims as a source of courage.⁷⁰ So, I understand Protagoras to say that the courageous must be both naturally spirited and nurtured with education. On this reading, *contra* Weiss, Protagoras preserves a twofold connection between courage and confidence. Both of his proposed sources of courage (εὐτροφία and φύσις) are on the list of sources of confidence under different names (τέχνη and θυμός).⁷¹

This yields both a plausible reading of Protagoras' account of courage at P13n and a partial explanation of how Socrates' response addresses his view. Protagoras' account says that knowledge can be ruled by fear and so must be bolstered by spirit; Socrates replies by showing that knowledge cannot be ruled by fear and so needs no bolstering. But Socrates does not begin there. First, he suddenly introduces the topic of good and bad lives, and that too must be explained. He then moves quickly to a specifically hedonist theory of good and bad lives, which I do not aim to explain just yet. For now, I explain his sudden introduction of the topic of good and bad lives – or, equivalently, what is unconditionally good and bad for a

noble and good, whereas modesty and its attendant actions and emotions are not always noble or good (159b–61b).

⁷⁰ Also compare P13l with [Def.] 416, where the third definition of power (δύναμις) is “natural strength” (ισχύς κατὰ φύσιν).

⁷¹ Weiss 1985; cf. at n. 59 above. She also claims that εὐτροφία must begin in early childhood, whereas learning a τέχνη need not, but she does not support either claim. (For the importance of early training in a τέχνη, see *R.* 374c.) Weiss also claims that giving φύσις an important role in virtue undermines Protagoras' claim to teach it, but this is in principle consistent with his defense of virtue's teachability (see esp. 327b–c; cf. Vlastos 1956, lii n. 4). Protagoras might be thought inconsistent on this point when he says that his teaching by itself improves others (318a–b). His claim is only comparative, though (cf. 328b–c), and anyway Socrates has already extolled Hippocrates' nature (316b–c, esp. b9–10). This, one presumes, is exactly the sort of introduction Hippocrates wanted (310e; see further 2.3.3 on Socrates on φύσις).

However, there are genuine puzzles about Protagoras' position. He gives the same sources for power and confidence, but apparently different sources for strength and courage (nature and nurture of the body vs. the soul). Now, Protagoras' one allusion to courage in the Great Speech suggests that bodily weakness compels cowardice (326b–c; cp. Cephalus on poverty compelling injustice at *R.* 331a–b). Further, there is evidence that the actual Protagoras thought the soul was nothing but the senses (Diogenes Laertius IX.51), and Plato associates the senses with the body. So, Plato might depict Protagoras as committed to the identity of courage and strength. A further difficulty: Protagoras says that people do not blame each other for bodily weakness because this is due to nature or chance (323d). However, 326b–c and 351a both say that strength requires training. As we know, in the latter passage Protagoras says that courage likewise requires both nature and nurture. Is cowardice due to lack of the appropriate nature therefore not blamed? Is weakness due to lack of appropriate bodily training actually blamed?

human being – in a way compatible with all major views about who in the dialogue, if anyone, endorses hedonism.

The introduction of the unconditionally good and bad can be motivated from both characters' perspectives. First, consider what Socrates might say about our cowardly peltast. It seems that either this person's knowledge is ruled by fear, or else he lacks knowledge. But by hypothesis, he knows peltastry, so Socrates cannot argue that such a person lacks knowledge of peltastry. However, he can still argue that such a person acts out of ignorance of the unconditionally good and bad. From Protagoras' side, the issue can be approached substantively and textually. Substantively, where does Protagoras' account of courage leave us? Do expertise and spirit together unfailingly produce noble confidence, i.e., courageous action? Suppose that expertise and spirit together guarantee confidence sufficient to make that expertise effective in action and even to yield its end, e.g., military victory.⁷² Still, confident actions that achieve that end may not be noble; victory is merely a conditional good (cf. *La.* 195c–d). When military victory is base, so bad, and so fearful, an expert who achieves military victory acts in ignorance of the unconditionally good and bad.⁷³ Textually, Protagoras should accept this line of reasoning. As his title suggests to Hippocrates (312c), Protagoras teaches wisdom. Socrates says before meeting Protagoras that he sells teachings (μαθήματα), which nurture the soul (τρέφεται, 313c; cp. εὐτροφία). These teachings, which allegedly amount to virtue, do not include strategy or mathematics (318e). Instead, Protagoras teaches good deliberation or political expertise (318e–19a) – in Socratic terms, he claims to teach knowledge of good and bad, full stop.

In sum, ordinary forms of expertise fall short of always producing the confidence required by courage, unless bolstered by spirit. Even if bolstered by spirit, they fall short of always producing noble confidence, unless they are governed by knowledge of good and bad. These two considerations set up Socrates' shift to knowledge of good and bad (351b), and to an argument that that science is strong and needs nothing beyond itself, including spirit, to produce noble confidence, i.e., courageous action (352c): “or does knowledge seem to you noble [καλόν] and the sort of thing that rules a

⁷² This is an obvious overstatement; we need merely imagine that both sides in a battle include spirited military experts. Hence it is important to Socrates that the unconditional good not be competitive, if knowledge of it suffices to achieve it. See further [Chapter 6](#) on competitive and cooperative goods.

⁷³ Or, better: the various forms of expertise, assuming that they are effective in producing expert actions that achieve their ends, have noble ends, but ends that are only qualifiedly noble. Hence these forms of expertise count as courage only qualifiedly – indeed, they are only qualifiedly forms of knowledge. That is, every expert is wise, courageous, and in general virtuous, but only in a qualified way. So I would want to say, at any rate; I cannot defend the position here.

person, and if ever someone knew goods and bads, would he never be conquered by anything, so that he would never do anything but what knowledge commands? Do you think prudence suffices to save a person?”

2.3.3 *Socrates and θυμός*

Socrates argues that knowledge of good and bad needs no supplemental spirit to be practically effective. One might suppose, then, that he either denies the existence of spirit or denies its importance to courage (= wisdom). I now argue for the contrary view: Socrates accepts the existence of spirit and considers it important in relation to courage. However, rather than giving spirit an occurrent, sustaining role in producing courageous action, Socrates thinks one must be naturally spirited to become courageous in the first place.⁷⁴

Consider how neatly Socrates’ description of Hippocrates conforms to the features of spirit drawn from the *Republic* above (2.3.2). Hippocrates confidently pursues his slave, confidently calls on Socrates before sunrise, and confidently seeks an education from Protagoras (310b–11a). This last action, at least, is rash – Hippocrates acts in ignorance of what a sophist is (312c) – but that merely shows the limitations of spirit. Socrates urges him to be confident (θήρρει, 311a) that Protagoras will still be at Callias’ house after they talk; in the ensuing discussion, he starts to try to shape Hippocrates’ spirit into something more prudent. Socrates even jokes that Protagoras must have wronged Hippocrates, given his eagerness to find him (310d); anger at being wronged is, again, characteristic of the spirited person. Finally, Socrates introduces this joke narratively by mentioning that he recognized Hippocrates’ ἀνδρεία (310d). Chronologically, he describes Hippocrates this way after he identifies courage with knowledge of good and bad. He surely doesn’t think Hippocrates has such wisdom; rather, he casually calls Hippocrates’ obvious spiritedness ἀνδρεία.

Spirit plays at least two roles for Socrates. First, spirit enables dialectic, and so learning, to proceed. Plato portrays this role of spirit in the *Laches*. Laches, who is spirited in battle and in conversation, declares that he is angry with himself (ἀγανακτῶ) for being unable to answer Socrates’ questions (194a–b). Contrast those who get angry with Socrates for refuting them, or

⁷⁴ The discussion above assumes that other forms of expertise, including military expertise, can be acquired without spirit. This cannot really be true; one who is not spirited will not willingly dive into wells or go into battle in the first place, and nobody could become expert in these domains without the experience of acting in them. (NB Protagoras makes military expertise [πολεμική] part of politics [πολιτική; 322b].)

for his associations with those who refute them (*Ap.* 23c–d). Moments earlier, Socrates suggested that dialectic requires endurance (καρτερία; *La.* 193e–94a), which helps one to persevere through the pains of dialectic. Dialectic’s painfulness is clear not only from how most people react to Socrates, but also from how he himself describes education (e.g., *R.* 515d–16a, 535a–c). So spirit, a natural state that enables one to get angry at oneself and to endure pain, is a necessary condition for courage (i.e., wisdom) because it enables one both to recognize that one is unlearned and to persist in learning.⁷⁵ Indeed, the spirited person’s irascibility and her ability to endure pain seem connected (cf. *R.* 440c–d).

Second, Socrates can appeal to natural differences in spiritedness and gentleness to explain differences among the ignorant. Earlier (2.2.1), we saw Socrates oppose knowledge with three states: madness, cowardice, and rashness. Understanding madness as ignorance, and understanding cowardice and rashness as manifestations of ignorance, or as species of it, helped us to understand this opposition without violating Socrates’ principle of unique opposites. However, that left us needing to explain why ignorance manifests itself in these different ways, or why specific cases of ignorance fall into these two species. But if Socrates accepts the existence of opposed natural conditions of the soul that incline their possessors toward confidence or caution, we can explain just that. The apparent opposition between cowardice and rashness, though both are ignorance, is explained by the real opposition between these two further natural conditions of their souls. The rash are ignorant and spirited, in those respects in which they are rash; the cowardly are ignorant and meek, in those respects in which they are cowardly. (I doubt that Socrates would classify anyone as entirely spirited or entirely gentle, so we should expect him to think that cowardly or rash people will also exhibit rashness and cowardice, respectively, to some extent and in some circumstances.)

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Protagoras thinks wisdom is weak in the face of fear. It has thus prepared the way for discussions of hedonism in the

⁷⁵ In *Republic* VI, spirit is only one of a massive suite of natural talents that characterize the philosophical soul, including cleverness and good memory as well. Hippocrates is explicitly characterized as lacking at least some ability here, given his forgetfulness (310c); compare Socrates’ feigned forgetfulness (334c–d). See further [Chapters 5](#) and especially [8](#) on the natural abilities of true philosophers and their corruption.

Protagoras in its full context (Chapter 3) and of the misconceptions of courage that stem from hedonism (Chapter 7). I proceed now to my larger reading of the *Protagoras*, and especially of the three moments in which Protagoras answers out of shame. One of these is his overt statement that wisdom is strong (352c–d).

Drama and dialectic in Plato's Protagoras

Charles Kahn claims that Socrates' refutations of his three main interlocutors in the *Gorgias* are fully intelligible only by reference to "the personal and dramatic elements that contribute to [each one's] defeat."¹ In particular, each could say something to avoid formal logical refutation, but would be ashamed to say it. In this chapter, I argue that the *Protagoras* exhibits a similar pattern: Protagoras holds three views he is ashamed to admit publicly, so he conceals them. The passages in which he conceals his opinions can only be fully understood in light of that fact. In each case, evidence internal to the dialogue also supports attributing the relevant views to Protagoras.

Protagoras and Socrates approach their conversation with different priorities that combine to produce a complex dialectical structure. In an early speech, Protagoras reveals how he understands his social situation and prepares the reader for a pattern of shame and concealment on his part (3.1). Socrates, in his first argument for the unity of virtue, insists on examining Protagoras' own views. So, he presses him to say what he believes (3.2.1). Socrates soon seems to suspend his "say what you believe" requirement to examine a view Protagoras rejects – that injustice can be prudent. In fact, though, Protagoras thinks injustice can be prudent, but is ashamed to say so. Socrates therefore examines his view covertly (3.2.2). These different aims – Socrates keen to examine Protagoras' views, and Protagoras keen to conceal some of his views – are not easily harmonized. Covert examination reconciles them, though the procedure is imperfect for both parties.

This pattern recurs toward the end of the *Protagoras* (349d–60e). First, I explore that passage's purpose in the dialogue and its basic internal structure. My main aim is to show that Socrates intends to examine Protagoras' views throughout their conversation, and in particular

¹ Kahn 1983, 76.

throughout 349d–60e (3.3.1). However, much of that passage seems to examine views that Protagoras rejects (351b–57e). Again, though, Protagoras in fact holds two views that he declines, out of shame, to endorse openly: he thinks that pleasure is the good, and he thinks that wisdom is weak and can be ruled by the passions (3.3.2).²

Protagoras' psychology in these moments can be seen in different ways. First, we could understand him as a pretender whose thoughts and feelings are self-transparent, and who conceals himself from others. Second, we could understand him as self-ignorant, in that he fails to grasp his own thoughts and feelings. Protagoras may also lie between these two poles, and pure pretence about his opinions may manifest self-ignorance of some other kind. Consistently observing the full range of nuanced possibilities would lengthen this chapter to little purpose; a simplifying assumption is in order for ease of exposition. In the *Sophist*, the Stranger classifies the sophist as one kind of pretender (268a–c; cf. *Ch.* 171c).³ That ultimately seems to comport with the *Protagoras*. So for now, I assume that Protagoras is aware of holding the opinions he is ashamed to state and self-consciously declines to state them openly. Again, he may still be self-deceived in some other, larger way.

3.1 Protagoras at Athens

When Socrates and Hippocrates first meet Protagoras, they have an intriguing and significant opening exchange (316b–17e):

We approached Protagoras, and I said: “Protagoras, Hippocrates here and I have come to see you.” “Wanting to talk alone,” he said, “or with the others too?” And I said, “Makes no difference to us. Listen to why we've come, and consider it yourself.” “Well,” he said, “what's the reason you've come?”

“Hippocrates here is a native [Athenian], a son of Apollodorus, belonging to a great and blessed house, and he himself seems a match for anyone his age in natural talent [φύσιν]. He seems to me eager to become renowned in the city, and he thinks this would be most likely to happen if he associated with you. Now, you consider whether you think you ought to talk about these things alone or with the others.”

² Some parts of this reading were originally inspired by Goldberg 1983.

³ The *Sophist* passage would be more helpful if the Visitor and Theaetetus discussed why they place the sophist on that side of the division, or even who lies on the other side. *Protagoras* 313c might be thought to indicate that Socrates thinks the sophist deceives on purpose (ἐξαπατήσει; cf. 323a), but his qualification of this verb in the *Gorgias* (ἐκόντος . . . ἐξαπατηθήσεσθαι; 499c3) undermines that idea. Irwin 1993, 13 denies the contrast between answering sincerely and answering out of shame.

“You rightly take foresight on my behalf, Socrates,” he said. “A foreign man who comes into great cities and persuades the best of the youth in them to abandon their associations with others, family or otherwise, old or young, and to associate with himself, on grounds that through association with him they will become as good as possible – someone doing these things should be cautious [χρή εὐλαβεῖσθαι]. For no small jealousies [φθόνοι] arise around such affairs, and also other forms of hostility, and plots [ἄλλαι δυσμένειαι τε καὶ ἐπιβουλαί]. Now, I say the sophistic art is ancient, but those among ancient men who took it up, fearing its burdens [φοβουμένους τὸ ἐπαχθές αὐτῆς], made a disguise and concealed themselves [πρόσχημα ποιῆσθαι καὶ προκαλύπτεσθαι], some with poetry, such as Homer and Hesiod and Simonides; others with rites and prophecies, such as Orpheus and Musaeus. Still others, I perceive, [concealed themselves with] physical training, for instance Iccus the Tarentian and Herodicus the Selumbrian, formerly of Megara, who was inferior to no sophist down to the present day. Your own Agathocles, who was a great sophist, made a disguise [πρόσχημα ἐποίησατο] of music, as did Pythocles the Cean and many others. All of these, as I say, fearing jealousy [φοβηθέντες τὸν φθόνον], used these crafts as cover [ποραπετάσασιν]. But I disagree with all of them on this, for I think they didn’t achieve what they wanted; they did not manage to escape the notice [λαθεῖν] of powerful people in the cities, which is the reason for these disguises [πρόσχηματα] – since the many perceive practically nothing, but recite whatever refrain the powerful call out. Not to be able to escape by running away, but to be obvious [καταφανῆ], is great folly on the part of one who makes the attempt, and it must arouse still greater hostility [πολύ δυσμενέστερους] among people; they think such a one, besides everything else, is utterly wicked. So, I have travelled an entirely opposite path: I admit that I am a sophist and that I teach people, and I think this precaution [εὐλάβειαν] is better than that one – to admit it rather than to deny it. And I have sought out other [precautions] besides this, so that, God willing, I don’t suffer anything terrible from admitting that I am a sophist. I’ve been in the trade for many years now. Indeed, I’m pretty far along in general – there is none of you whose father I might not be, given my age – so that it is by far pleasantest for me [πολύ μοι ἥδιστον], if you’re willing, to give my account [τὸν λόγον ποιῆσθαι] of all this in front of everyone in the house [ἅπάντων ἐναντίον τῶν ἔνδον ὄντων].”

And I – suspecting that he wanted to show off [ἐνδείξασθαι] to Prodicus and Hippias and to glory [καλλωπίσασθαι] in our having come as his admirers [ἔρασταί] – I said “Why don’t we call over Prodicus and Hippias and those with them, so they can listen to us?”

This speech reveals several facets of Plato’s Protagoras and his perceived situation.⁴ I begin with his comments about sophistry in general and the

⁴ I will not evaluate how well Plato’s portrayal reflects the historical Protagoras. Scholars of early sophistic, starved for direct evidence, sometimes overstate the sympathy and accuracy of Plato’s

social and psychological landscape those comments evoke. Then I return to Protagoras' own circumstances.

Protagoras says sophists are vulnerable to the dangers of social hostility. Fear of those dangers prompts them to take the precaution of concealing that they are sophists. But this fear of social hostility – fear for one's reputation – is shame (cf. 1.3.4). So, earlier sophists concealed what they did out of shame. Likewise, Hippocrates blushes at the idea that he hopes to become a sophist (ἐρυθρίσας, 312a2), and admits that he would be ashamed (αἰσχύνοιο, α5) to present himself to the Greeks as a sophist. This is crucial, so I pause now to examine more closely Plato's views of shame, caution, and concealment.

In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates argues that the pious differs from the god-beloved (9d–11b). This annoys Euthyphro, so Socrates gives him a hint: perhaps piety is a proper part of justice. When Euthyphro fails to understand, Socrates offers an analogy: shame is a proper part of fear. Shame is fear or dread of a particular sort of object, bad reputation (δόξαν πονηρίας; 12c1).⁵ Socrates here follows the phrasing of a poem whose lesson he inverts, so he says that “where there is shame, there is fear” (12c4). This might suggest that Socrates does not identify shame as a species of fear, but merely says that whenever someone feels shame, she feels fear in addition. However, Socrates' aim is to find out what piety is, not some affect or quality of it (11a–b). Hence, his analogy concerns what shame is, and he says that shame is a species of fear. The *Laws* confirm this when the Athenian says that “we often fear for our reputation, when we imagine we are going to get a bad name for doing or saying something shameful. This is the fear which we, and I fancy everyone else, call ‘shame’” (646e–47a; cf. 671d, 699c). So too the *Academic Definitions* defines shame (αἰσχύνη) as “fear in anticipation of a bad reputation” (φόβος ἐπὶ προσδοκίᾳ ἀδοξίας, 416a). This comports with the familiar Platonic definition of fear as the anticipation of something bad (προσδοκίαν . . . κακοῦ, *Pr.* 358d; cf. *La.* 198b; *L.* 646e; [*Def.* 415e]). Shame, then, is the species of fear that anticipates a particular sort of bad object, bad reputation. Here I hasten to add that this does not make shame a narrowly social phenomenon; since one can have an opinion of oneself, one can fear losing one's good opinion of oneself and so be ashamed in one's own eyes. For example, one can think that one has some important knowledge but then be

portrayal (e.g., Nill 1985). Plato scholars, on the other hand, tend to overstate his hostility to the sophists; for a useful corrective, see Irwin 1995b, and cf. Chapters 5 and 8.

⁵ Socrates seems indifferent to the Prodician distinction between fear and dread (cf. 1.1). Likewise, the poem he opens with calls shame αἰδώς (12b4), but Socrates quietly replaces this with αἰσχύνη (b10).

ashamed when revealed *to oneself* not to have it. In general, then, Plato's definition is compatible with the familiar phenomenon of being ashamed because one has failed to live up to one's own standards.⁶

The *Definitions* also contains two terms, standing in a structurally similar relation, for responses to fear and to correct shame. Caution (εὐλαβεία; cf. *Pr.* 316d1, 317b5–7) is guarding against what is bad (φυλακὴ κακοῦ, 413d), i.e., against the generic object of fear. Modesty (αἰδώς), on one definition, is a species of caution, namely, caution against correct censure (εὐλαβεία ὀρθοῦ φόγου, 412c). So, modesty is guarding against (one result of) the object of proper shame. As modesty is to caution, so correct shame is to fear. The former are species of the latter distinguished by the particular bads they concern. One way to guard against bad reputation and censure, correct or otherwise, is to conceal whatever provokes bad reputation. Hence, concealment is the typical form of caution concerning whatever one would be ashamed to display (*Phil.* 65e–66a; *Ch.* 169c–d; cf. *Dissoi Logoi* II.4). Protagoras says his predecessors took just this sort of precaution against their fear of social hostility and bad reputation, i.e., their shame: they concealed that they were sophists.⁷

I now examine Protagoras' situation. He still faces the dangers that his predecessors sought to avoid. In fact, he first mentions them with reference to himself. Protagoras does not take their precaution; he openly admits to being a sophist. But for that very reason, he needs another way to deal with the underlying dangers faced by sophists. And in fact, he explicitly says that he takes other precautions – but what are they? Because he faces the same dangers of social hostility, we should expect him to exhibit shame (the characteristic affective response to such dangers) and to conceal himself (the characteristic precaution against them). Protagoras by no means disdains concealment as such. He disparages his predecessors' strategy solely because concealing that they were sophists was less effective at preventing danger than frankness on that point. Protagoras does not hide in the same way, but he still feels shame and he still conceals himself. Both themes are telegraphed early.

⁶ Singpurwalla 2013 criticizes accounts of the fine in purely social terms, and she argues for a view on which the fine involves living up to one's own rational views of how to behave. Plato's account of shame, as understood here, unifies the individual and social sides of the shameful (and the fine).

⁷ Protagoras uses the generic terms, fear and caution, but the species – shame and caution concerning one's reputation – are clearly in play; he says that the sophists fear jealousy and hostility and take precautions to avoid those particular reputational bads. It matters whether the sophists fear bad reputation itself or the punishments that can stem from bad reputation, but Plato groups these together; cf. Chapter 5.

As mentioned above, Hippocrates' reactions connect sophistry in general to shame. Plato also anticipates Protagoras' own susceptibility to shame by having Socrates mention, before his narrative, some help he received from Alcibiades (309b). We later discover that Alcibiades first takes Socrates' side in a procedural dispute, urging that if Protagoras does not agree to Socrates' constraints on the conversation, he effectively grants his inferiority at dialectic (336c). Ultimately, the whole audience pressures him into accepting Socrates' proposal to take turns asking and answering questions (338e). Second, Alcibiades shames Protagoras (αἰσχυνθεῖς) into keeping his agreement to continue the conversation on those terms (348b–c; cf. 347b). The first-time reader will not immediately notice this, but the frame of the dialogue foregrounds Protagoras' social situation and social emotions.

As for concealment, Protagoras immediately asks whether Socrates and Hippocrates want to talk alone or in front of others. Socrates is indifferent, making it seem strange for Protagoras then to credit him with foresight on his behalf. This can be understood in two ways. First, Protagoras might actually exercise foresight on his own behalf. Under cover of concern for Socrates and Hippocrates, he guarantees that his own concern for privacy will be addressed. Second, he might be genuinely concerned for whatever privacy Socrates and Hippocrates want.⁸ When Socrates declines the choice, Protagoras understands him to be deferring the same important decision to him.⁹ In either case, Protagoras' opening query is revealing. His first thought is that discussions may need to take place privately, whether for his own safety or that of others. He is immediately alive to the social dangers of sophistry, which he sketches to explain his comment about foresight, and to the concern for privacy that they occasion.¹⁰ In the event, of course, Protagoras converses in public. (This can serve the same purpose as frankness about being a sophist; willingness to talk in public conveys

⁸ Thanks to Rachana Kamtekar for insisting on this possibility.

⁹ On this reading, Protagoras fails to realize that Socrates considers it a matter of principled indifference whether he converses in public or private (*Ap.* 33a–b; cf. 8.2). Of course, Plato does not think concealment is always bad. The *Republic* endorses concealing some things from most citizens (e.g., 459e), and Socrates goes along with others' self-concealment here and in the *Lysis* (210e with 207b). He might think that concealment is *prima facie* unjust but not always unjust, like lying (*R.* 331c, 414b–15d).

¹⁰ According to one ancient tradition, Protagoras was expelled from Athens and his books burned because of his agnosticism (Diogenes Laertius IX.51–52). (Perhaps Protagoras would not discuss theology in front of everyone?) That tradition seems unlikely (cf. *Pr.* 317c; *M.* 91d–e; Socrates emphasizes the good repute [εὐδοκιμῶν] that Protagoras maintained), but for a different view, see Kerferd 1981, 21, 43. Despite what Protagoras would have us expect, others secure the same result (*M.* 91e9–92a2). Apparently he overstates the superiority of his precautions, even on their own terms.

that one has nothing to hide.) Precisely because he declines the precaution of privacy, though, we should watch for signs of shame in the more public setting he chooses, and for signs that he takes the precaution of concealing views that could damage his reputation.¹¹

Further, the exact audience for the conversation is less straightforward than it may seem. On the one hand, even the larger group is limited to relatively sympathetic listeners: all those *within* (ἀπάντων ἐναντίον τῶν ἔνδον ὄντων; 317b). Protagoras spends his time indoors (ἔνδον, 311a6; cf. α1, α7),¹² and is accessible only to those who know he is at Callias' house and who can enter there. Interested parties are unaware that Protagoras is in town until well after Socrates (310b, 309d). Even once Hippocrates knows, and despite his eagerness, he approaches Protagoras only with Socrates (310e–11a). They find difficulty in entering Callias' house despite Socrates' presence – or because of it, since the doorman overhears them talking and mistakes them for sophists (314c–e). Hippias later emphasizes the natural kinship of the elites gathered there (337c–e). A limited audience is thus assured for any conversation with Protagoras, whether strictly alone or before “all those within.”¹³

Still, there are no guarantees that the whole audience will blithely accept whatever Protagoras might say or do. And more importantly, the reader already knows that the day's events have leaked out. Most of the *Protagoras* consists of Socrates' narration of the entire discussion to multiple anonymous friends (ἡμῖν, ἀκούητε; 310a), whose allegiances and views are unknown. (Socrates could disclose a fully private discussion just as easily, but full privacy would afford Protagoras more plausible deniability.) The friend who banters with Socrates has some discretion (ὥς γ' ἐν αὐτοῖς ἡμῖν εἰρησθαι; 309a4), but that might be limited to affairs of the heart, such as Socrates' love for Alcibiades. Once Socrates' auditors hear what happened in Callias' house, almost anyone might find out. This reintroduces the question: what might Protagoras be ashamed of and

¹¹ Cp. Adkins 1973, who argues that Protagoras' Great Speech is full of προσχήματα, and Goldberg 1983, 31–35, who claims that Protagoras' self-proclaimed role as educator is a screen (though it is unclear what he thinks it conceals). Kerferd 1981, 22 proposes that the undisclosed precaution could be friendship with Pericles. Denyer 2008, 90 argues that specificity might compromise the precautions (which seems likely), but also suggests that this is pure bluff – Protagoras has no other precautions beyond alluding to other precautions (which seems doubtful).

¹² Reading this as a schoolyard taunt about Protagoras' effeminacy (Denyer 2008, 71–72) misses out on a suggestive clue about the social dynamics of the *Protagoras*.

¹³ I do not mean that characters always intend to emphasize the difficulties of accessing Protagoras, or to protect his privacy, in the doorman's case; the dialogue exhibits some dramatic irony.

conceal about himself in a *relatively* public setting, one from which information will probably leak?

3.2.1 *Say what you believe*

Socrates approaches the conversation with different priorities. His first argument for virtue's unity connects justice and piety (330b–32a). After Protagoras agrees that piety is pious and justice just, Socrates asks whether each is such as the other – whether justice is pious and piety just. That provokes the following exchange (331b–d):

“It doesn't seem so simple to me [οὐ πάνυ μοι δοκεῖ . . . οὕτως ἀπλοῦν], Socrates,” he said, “that I'd agree that justice is pious and piety just; rather, there seems to me some difference [τί μοι δοκεῖ . . . διάφορον] in this case. But what difference does it make [τί . . . διαφέρει]?” he said. “If you like [εἰ γὰρ βούλει], let's assume [ἔστω] that justice is pious and piety just.”

And I said, “No, thank you! I don't want to test any of this 'if you like' [εἰ βούλει] or 'if you think so' [εἰ σοι δοκεῖ], but me and you! I say 'me and you' because I think the account [τὸν λόγον] will be tested best that way – if one removes the 'if' from it.”

Protagoras here tries to defer to Socrates (εἰ βούλει) by granting (ἔστω) his position (εἰ σοι δοκεῖ) rather than defending what he thinks (μοι δοκεῖ), and he minimizes the significance of doing so (τί . . . διαφέρει). Socrates insists that Protagoras not defer; such a procedure fails to examine them, so it does worse at testing the account (λόγον). Protagoras says twice that he thinks (μοι δοκεῖ) Socrates is wrong about justice and piety. It is this, his own belief, that he says makes no difference. He contrasts saying what he thinks and saying what Socrates thinks and would like him to say (or so he supposes). Hence, when Socrates demands that Protagoras not do the latter, the point is that he should do the former – say what he thinks. In that way, they will examine themselves and so best test the account.

The context confirms this reading. Looking back, we see what account Socrates wants to test, and he insists on its being Protagoras'. He repeatedly says what he thinks and asks whether Protagoras thinks the same thing (330c2, c6–7, d1, e1). Finally, Socrates tells a notional questioner that he doesn't think virtue has many unlike parts, but Protagoras does. He then imagines the questioner asking Protagoras “Is this account yours?” (ὁὗς οὕτως ὁ λόγος ἐστίν, 331a3–4). The rhetorical device of the imaginary speaker highlights that this is Protagoras' view by repeating the point, first in Socrates' voice and then in a confirmatory question and answer. Each party attends carefully to what the other thinks after Socrates'

procedural admonishment as well (331e5–32a1). 331b–d alone shows that Socrates wants Protagoras to say what he thinks, but this is clearer still when sandwiched between moments of marked concern for who thinks what. Socrates wants to test the λόγος that virtue has many unlike parts, and he wants to test it because it is Protagoras' λόγος.¹⁴ He wants Protagoras to remove the “if” (that is, “if you like” and “if you think so”) because he is refusing to defend his view, and the best way to test Protagoras' view is for him to stand by it and defend it.

So, Socrates articulates a “say what you believe” requirement at 331c–d, with the idea of examining Protagoras' λόγος. This is no great surprise. Hippocrates, who knows Socrates' ways, recognizes that he should tell Socrates what he thinks (312a6–7). Socrates himself, when he approaches Protagoras, says that he must tell Protagoras what he thinks (319a9–10).¹⁵ Socrates returns to this theme insistently (3.3.1). Apparent counterexamples all involve Protagoras refusing, out of shame, to state his views openly (3.2.2, 3.3.2). I turn now to the first such case.

3.2.2 *Justice and prudence*

Socrates' third argument for virtue's unity connects prudence (σωφροσύνη)¹⁶ and justice (333b–34c). Here, a scant two pages after insisting that Protagoras say what he believes, Socrates seems to examine a position that he rejects. If so, we must either explain why Socrates suspends his “say what you believe” requirement or else reinterpret 331b–d to show that he never imposes one.¹⁷ I argue instead that Socrates sticks to his “say what you believe” requirement.¹⁸ The passage opens like this (333b–d):

“Does someone doing injustice seem to you [σοι δοκεῖ] prudent insofar as he acts unjustly?”

¹⁴ Compare τὸν λόγον ποιεῖσθαι (317c5), λόγον . . . δοῦναι (336c), and λόγον ὑποσχέτω (338d).

¹⁵ Denyer 2008, 96: the γε in πρὸς γε σέ suggests that Socrates “has to be frank before Protagoras, even if he might hope to succeed in dissimulating before someone else.” More likely, Socrates thinks he should state his disagreements with someone renowned for wisdom, so that he might learn from him.

¹⁶ The previous argument joining wisdom and σωφροσύνη (332a–33b) suggests reading σωφροσύνη as prudence; such a reading of σωφροσύνη lends plausibility to the view examined in our main passage (333b–34c); and, as we shall see, Socrates' inferences in that passage strongly indicate such a reading.

¹⁷ Vlastos 1991, 111–12; Irwin 1993; and Vlastos 1994, 7–11 think Socrates has a “say what you believe” requirement that he suspends. Taylor 1991, 131–32; Annas 1999, 168; and Denyer 2008, 128 deny that Socrates has any such requirement. For other possible suspensions of the requirement, see Benson 2000, 37–39, 53 n. 73 and also *Charmides* 161c.

¹⁸ To my knowledge, Benson 2000, 37–39, 53 n. 73 is the only other scholar to take this position.

"I would be ashamed [αἰσχυνοίμην ἂν ἔγωγ'] to admit this [ὁμολογεῖν], Socrates," he said, "though many people do say so [ἐπεὶ πολλοὶ γὰρ φασιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων]."¹⁹

"Shall I pursue the argument [τὸν λόγον] with them," I said, "or with you?"

"If you like [εἰ βούλει]," he said, "argue with this, the many's argument [τὸν λόγον . . . τὸν τῶν πολλῶν], first."

"It makes no difference to me [οὐδὲν μοι διαφέρει], provided only that you answer, whether you think these things or not [εἴτ' . . . δοκεῖ σοι ταῦτα εἶτε μή]. I am testing the argument [τὸν . . . λόγον] most of all, though perhaps it happens [συμβαίνει . . . ἴσως] that I, the questioner, and the answerer too, are tested."

At first, Protagoras played it coy [ἐκαλλωπιζέτο] – he alleged that the argument [τὸν λόγον] was uncongenial [δυσχερῆ] – but then he agreed to answer.

"Come then," I said, "Answer me from the beginning. Do some people seem to you [δοκοῦσί . . . σοι] to be sensible when they act unjustly?"

"Let it be so [ἔστω]," he said.

This passage (333b–d) echoes the earlier one (331b–c), but apparently to the opposite effect. There, Socrates wanted to test the account (λόγον) – Protagoras' account – where this would be accomplished best if Protagoras defended his account. Here, as before, Socrates says that his main concern is to test the account. But unlike before, here he invites Protagoras to posit views (ἔστω) whether he believes them or not (εἴτ' . . . δοκεῖ σοι . . . εἶτε μή), and he merely says that it might happen (συμβαίνει . . . ἴσως) that the discussants are tested by testing the account. He even denies that his procedure makes any difference (οὐδὲν μοι διαφέρει), which seems flatly inconsistent with his earlier stance. Socrates cannot be indifferent to examining the many's view rather than Protagoras' if that excludes the best way of testing the argument.

Nor is this the only puzzle. Why does Protagoras say he would be ashamed to agree that injustice can be prudent, rather than simply denying it? Why does he want Socrates to test a view he would be ashamed to agree to? If he wants Socrates to test the many's view, why is he reluctant to answer for them? Further, at least two more questions arise from the balance of the discussion (333d–34a):

"Come then," I said, "Answer me from the beginning. Do some people seem to you [δοκοῦσί . . . σοι] to be sensible when they act unjustly?"

"Let it be so [ἔστω]," he said.

¹⁹ On ἐπεὶ, see Smyth 1984, § 2380; Irwin 1993, 8–9; and Denyer 2008, 132 (with cross-references). Note that ὁμολογεῖν and φασίν are both ambiguous between *believing* and *stating*.

“And you say [λέγεις] that being sensible is having good sense?”

He agreed [ἔφη].

“And having good sense is having good judgment, insofar as they do injustice?”

“Let it be so [ἔστω],” he said.

And I said, “If those doing injustice fare well, or if they fare ill?”

“If [they fare] well.”

“Well, do you say [λέγεις] some things are good?”

“I say so [λέγω].”

And I said, “And are those things good that are beneficial to human beings?”

“Yes, by God,” he said, “And even if they should not be beneficial to human beings, I still call them good [ἔγωγε καλῶ ἀγαθά]!”

Now Protagoras seemed to me angry [τετραχύνθαι], distressed [ἀγωνιᾶν], and set against answering [παρατετάχθαι πρὸς τὸ ἀποκρίνεσθαι].²⁰ So, seeing that’s how he was, I asked my questions cautiously [εὐλαβούμενος]. I said, “Do you mean [λέγεις] things that are beneficial to no human being, Protagoras, or things that are beneficial in absolutely no way? Do you call [σὺ . . . καλεῖς] such things good?”

“Not at all,” he said. “But I know [ἔγωγε . . . οἶδ’] many things that are harmful to humans – foods and drinks and medicines and many others – and others that are beneficial; some that are neither for humans but are for horses;²¹ others for cows only; others for dogs; and others still for none of these, but for trees. And some are good for the roots of a tree, but bad for its outward growth – for example, even manure is good for the roots of any plant when spread in among [them], but if you should apply it to the shoots and young branches, it destroys them all. And olive oil is ruinous for all plants and most inimical to the hair of all other animals except that of humans; it is congenial for the hair of human beings and for the rest of their bodies. The good is something so variable and manifold that even here it is good for the exterior of the human body, but the very same thing is terrible for its interior. Because of this, all doctors order sick people not to use olive oil beyond the smallest possible amount in what they’re going to eat – just enough to quell their disgust at the smell that arises in the presence of bread and relish.

Why is Protagoras so invested in an argument over a view he declines to endorse that he gets agitated and derails Socrates’ attempt to examine the

²⁰ The verb ἀγωνιᾶν can also mean “to be aggressive,” as might seem suggested by the ensuing military metaphor. However, “distressed” fits better with the preceding mention of anger, and Protagoras’ posture is defensive; he is positioned (παρατετάχθαι) against answering, not positioned for an attack.

²¹ It is unclear whether this means “are one or the other for horses” or “are beneficial and good for horses.”

many's views – especially when he insisted that Socrates examine them?²² Why does he interrupt Socrates when and as he does? Does the direction of Socrates' argument help to explain his interruption?²³

Solutions have been proposed to some of these puzzles. For example, perhaps Socrates suspends his “say what you believe” requirement to “spare [Protagoras'] battered ego further mauling.”²⁴ This is doubtful; Socrates grants Protagoras' ego only brief respite before he mauls again.²⁵ Perhaps Socrates suspends his requirement to examine a crucial objection, though Protagoras happens not to share that objection.²⁶ However, this does not explain why Socrates thinks Protagoras may end up being examined. Moreover, the abortive effort in the text does little to secure Socrates' view, and this proposal heightens other puzzles – particularly why Protagoras interrupts the argument, and why he interrupts it when and as he does. Ideally, we would like to understand the argument's premature conclusion as well as its introduction. As for the puzzles about Protagoras, perhaps he is upset because failing to best Socrates in argument is bad for business, and perhaps he asks Socrates to test the majority position so as to maximize his opportunities for eristic victory. But in that case, he should be eager to answer for the many, not reluctant. Perhaps, then, Protagoras is reluctant because he rejects the many's view so viscerally that he would be ashamed even to defend it on another's behalf?²⁷ If he were that repelled by the view, one might expect him to resist even witnessing discussion of it. Then again, might he actually be keen to see the view refuted, like Glaucon

²² Protagoras' personal investment in the argument may also be reflected in his answers. Socrates asks second-person questions throughout (δοκοῦσι . . . σοι; λέγεις; καλεῖς); Protagoras begins by answering with third-person imperatives (ἔστω) but soon starts answering first-personally (λέγω; καλῶ, οἶδ᾽ ἔγωγε). The questions he answers first-personally are not themselves sensitive, but such answers still suggest that Protagoras considers himself personally concerned with the content of the argument. Cp. 353c–58d and discussion in Sullivan 1961, 27(a).

²³ For earlier versions of some of these puzzles, see Goldberg 1983, 124–26 and McKirahan 1984, 20.

²⁴ Vlastos 1994, 10.

²⁵ Cf. Irwin 1993, 7, who, however, does think that Socrates suspends his requirement; see below. Another approach says that Socrates never requires Protagoras to say what he believes (cf. n. 17 above). This approach must reinterpret 331b–d and explain why the discussants are tested by testing a view they reject. Annas 1999 gives the most plausible story: Socrates “requires that the interlocutor defend a thesis and answer Socrates' questions honestly . . . but . . . not that the thesis defended be what the interlocutor is personally committed to”; this “is indirectly a test of both respondent and questioner in that it serves to clarify what they are committed to, and enable them to discard false beliefs” (168). Certainly one can answer questions about another's view honestly, by saying what one takes the view to be. However, it is unclear how this would reveal one's commitments or lead one to discard false beliefs – unless examining the view brings out its advantages, which surely is not what Socrates envisions in the present instance.

²⁶ Irwin 1993. ²⁷ Cf. Irwin 1993, 7.

and Adeimantus? This merely heightens the need to explain why he interrupts Socrates midstream.

A single, simple hypothesis offers a neater, general solution to all these questions: Protagoras thinks injustice can be prudent. Socrates does not insist that Protagoras say that he believes what he says, but merely that he say what he believes.²⁸ Before I show how this hypothesis solves all the puzzles, I argue that Protagoras in fact thinks that injustice can be prudent. In the Great Speech, he says (323a5–c2):

But lest you think yourself deceived [into believing] that everyone really thinks all men partake of justice and the rest of political excellence, accept this proof too. In the case of other excellences, as you say, if someone says he is a good flute-player, or [has] whatever other expertise he lacks, people either laugh or get angry, and his family comes around to admonish him on grounds that he is mad [ὡς μαινόμενον]. But in the case of justice and other political excellence, even if they know someone is unjust, if he speaks the truth about himself before many people [ἐναντίον πολλῶν], what before they considered prudence [σωφροσύνην] – speaking the truth – they now think madness [μανίαν], and they say that one should say they're just, whether or not they are, or else be mad not feigning justice [μαίνεσθαι τὸν μὴ προσποιούμενον], since it is necessary [ἀναγκαῖον] that everyone partake of it to some degree, or else not be among humanity.²⁹

Madness (μανία) is here opposed to prudence (σωφροσύνη), as it often is (cf. 2.2.1). So, Protagoras says that it is mad to pretend to most crafts and prudent to admit lacking them, but mad to admit lacking justice and prudent to pretend to it. If concealing one's injustice is itself unjust, then, Protagoras here says it can be prudent to act unjustly. Further, pretending to justice is surely supposed to be prudent because injustice angers others;³⁰ as a result, whoever admits to injustice risks such punishments as confiscation of property, exile, or even death (323d–24b, 325a–d). On Protagoras' telling, justice is taught through such punishments (325a–26e), so he evidently thinks it prudent for an unjust person to

²⁸ Cf. Benson 2000, 53–54 n. 73, who (again) draws the same conclusion. However, the point is incidental to his main purpose, so he does not defend it in detail.

²⁹ This final phrase, ἐν ἀνθρώποις, is ambiguous, probably intentionally so. It could mean either that one must not be part of human society (suggested by references to punishing the unjust with exile and death; e.g., 325a–c) or that one cannot be human (suggested by Protagoras' story of human nature; 322c–d). It could also mean both, insofar as being part of human society is constitutive of being human.

³⁰ Injustice is laughable only when impotent to retaliate against laughter (*Phil.* 48e–49c). It is unclear who gets angry at the sham flute-player. It could be his family, for making them laughable by association; it could be the real experts, if he gets away with his pretence; or it could be those who rely on his expertise, if he gets away with it at first (cf. *Meno* 91d–e). (NB According to the *Republic*, it is unjust to pretend to any craft that one lacks.)

remain unjust, and mad for an unjust person to seek to become just. (Contrast *Gorgias* 476a–80e: Socrates argues that just punishment removes injustice from the unjust person's soul, thereby benefiting her.)³¹

This fits neatly with another claim in the Great Speech (327a4–b4):

If it were impossible for the city to exist unless everyone were a flute-player to the extent each is able, and if everyone taught this to everyone publicly and privately, and blamed the one who did not play beautifully, and were not jealous [ἐφθόνει] of this, as now nobody is jealous [φθονεῖ] of justice and lawfulness and nobody hoards them [ἀποκρύπτεται], as they do other forms of expertise – for I think one another's justice and virtue benefits us [λυσιτελεῖ γὰρ οἶμαι ἡμῖν ἢ ἀλλήλων δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀρετή], for which reason everyone eagerly tells and teaches what is just and lawful – if it were so . . .

Protagoras could say that each person's justice benefits herself; instead, he says that each person's justice benefits others. He could have said that one should eagerly learn justice as good for oneself; instead, he says that everyone is eager for others to learn justice, but regards her own justice as necessary (323b7–c1). These claims are familiar from arguments elsewhere that it is prudent to seem just but to be unjust. Memorably, Glaucon says that most people consider justice onerous (χαλεπόν, *R.* 358a6; cf. *Pr.* 340e–41e, esp. 340e5–7); practice justice as necessary, not as good (ὡς ἀναγκαῖον ἀλλ' οὐχ ὡς ἀγαθόν, 358c3–4; cf. *Pr.* 323b7–c1), and think that someone who sincerely agrees not to do injustice when she could get away with it through deceit or force is mad (μαίνεσθαι, 359b3).³² Protagoras thinks what both he and Glaucon say most people believe – that injustice can be prudent.

When Socrates asks Protagoras directly whether injustice can be prudent, he does not openly agree, but neither does he dissent outright; rather, he says he would be ashamed to agree. (Each person should pretend to justice, as Protagoras prudently does here.) This explains why Protagoras wants Socrates to address the position: he accepts it. (He probably thinks

³¹ In Protagoras' myth, human power stems from an injustice, Prometheus' theft of the crafts and fire. This injustice was punished, so it does not seem to have been prudent in any narrow sense. Protagoras also describes Prometheus' antitype, Epimetheus, as forgetting himself (321c); self-ignorance, like *μανία*, is often opposed to *σωφροσύνη*.

³² So I agree broadly with Denyer 2008 *ad* 322b5–c1 with cross-referenced notes. See also Duncan 1978, 219–20; Goldberg 1983, 45–49, 114–15, 125; McCoy 1998, 29; and Benson 2000, 53–54 n. 73. For other views, see Kerferd 1953, 143–44; Adkins 1960, 248; and Nill 1985, ch. 2. Nill thinks "Protagoras' arguments . . . are quite inadequate to the task of showing that acting morally [*sic*] necessarily benefits the agent" (40; cf. 44, 102 n. 116). He agrees, however, that 323b suggests that injustice benefits the unjust person (42). If Protagoras thinks injustice can benefit the unjust person, it is unsurprising that his arguments to the contrary, if there are any, fail.

the position is easily defended, though it is socially awkward to do so; δυσχερῆ [333d2] likely means the argument is uncongenial, not difficult.) Socrates suspects this, so he does not depart from his requirement that Protagoras say what he believes; he merely appears to depart from it. Hence it makes sense for Socrates to insist, despite Protagoras' reluctance, that he answer questions for the many. Even if the personal aspect of this refutation is concealed from the public eye, Socrates still wants to refute Protagoras. Hence, the two of them are tested, not despite testing a λόγος which neither endorses, but precisely because they test a λόγος that Protagoras endorses and Socrates rejects. This hypothesis also explains why Protagoras is reluctant to answer for the many, though he is eager to have their view examined. Socrates says he “played it coy” (ἐκαλλωπίζετο, 333d), whereas before he used the same verb to say that Protagoras wanted to “show off” (καλλωπίσασθαι, 317c). This verb captures two seemingly opposed actions: earlier, Protagoras speaks boldly before everyone present; later, he timidly resists speaking for the majority view about justice. What unifies these actions is that both are concerned with appearances and reputation.³³

This begins to explain Protagoras' emotional investment and his fraught response to questioning. He cares about the argument both because it examines his views and because he worries about his reputation while defending those views publicly, even under cover of rejecting them. These considerations pull in different directions: his adherence to the view favors a full-blooded defense, but his concern for his reputation disfavors it. He is upset in part because he is torn about how to proceed. To vindicate this proposal, though, we must consider why he becomes upset when and as he does by examining his outburst and the reasoning leading up to it.

The thesis says that injustice can be prudent, so Socrates begins by examining what prudence requires. Protagoras agrees that whenever injustice is prudent (σωφρονεῖν), the person who acts unjustly must act with good sense (εὖ φρονεῖν) and good judgment (εὖ βουλευέσθαι; cp. εὐβουλία at 318e), and so must fare well (εὖ πράττειν). Socrates now asks whether there are good things. This continues the same line of thought; one fares well and is happy just in case one has goods, or has them and uses them wisely and beneficially (*Symp.* 204e–5a; *Euthyd.* 280b). Protagoras agrees, so Socrates asks whether good things must be beneficial for human beings. Protagoras replies that even if not, they may still be good. Soon, Socrates reports having asked whether Protagoras meant things beneficial

³³ Contrast Denyer 2008, 133.

to no human being, or things beneficial in no way at all. Protagoras huffily denies the latter and launches into a speech about the relational nature of good and benefit.

As mentioned above, though, Protagoras suggests in his Great Speech that each person's justice benefits others. The only benefits alluded to for the just person are those resulting from her reputation for justice (e.g., avoiding punishment). Socrates approaches the purported connection between injustice and benefit by asking whether good things benefit human beings. Injustice obviously does not benefit human beings *simpliciter*; it typically harms those who suffer it. But Protagoras has a strong interest in eliding this asymmetry between self- and other-benefit. (Socrates could recall his claims about justice in the Great Speech and draw out their consequences!) So, it is no accident that Protagoras interrupts when he does, nor that his interruption continues the theme of relational harm and benefit, even as it diverts attention away from questions about the relational harms and benefits of injustice. Thus, precisely how Socrates might have concluded the argument is irrelevant. The crucial fact is that he walks right up to the point of discussing the relationship between justice and benefit for various parties, starting with the obviously false idea that injustice benefits human beings generally. Protagoras is understandably anxious to avoid that line of questioning.³⁴

This proposal solves all the puzzles above by attributing to Protagoras views about justice that are attested within this dialogue and familiar from elsewhere as typical sophistic attitudes. It solves every puzzle, rather than giving *ad hoc* solutions to each puzzle that tend to threaten each other. This proposal comports with Protagoras' concerns about public image, which he expresses as soon as he appears on the scene. Finally, it harmonizes with another famously difficult passage in the *Protagoras*.

3.3.1 *Structure of the Dialogue and ad hominem intent at 351b–57e*

At 351b–57e, Socrates argues from hedonism to the claim that wisdom is strong. Again, he seems to suspend his “say what you believe” requirement

³⁴ Contrast McKirahan 1984, 23–24, who says that Protagoras was about to raise the issue of whom justice and injustice benefit and harm (cf. Adam and Adam 1893 *ad* 334a), and that Socrates drops the matter because (i) it would be too complicated to deal with here (as a point about Plato's purposes, this is plausible) and (ii) Protagoras does not think injustice is prudent (this view goes back at least to Adam and Adam 1893 *ad* 333c–d; obviously I disagree). See also Denyer 2008, 133–34, who says that “clarity on such questions might be embarrassing” for Protagoras, but who still thinks he defends this position merely “for the sake of argument.” These two claims are not easily reconciled. For other discussions, see Sullivan 1961, 16 n. 1 and Sprague 1976.

to examine views that Protagoras rejects. I begin to argue that he does not by sketching the coarse structure of his entire narration. This underlines Socrates' persistence in examining Protagoras' own views and clarifies the function of 351b–57e in its larger context.

Socrates visits Callias' house with Hippocrates, who hopes to learn from Protagoras (310b–11a). The practical question whether Hippocrates should persist in that aim drives the narrative. Ultimately, he leaves with Socrates (ἀπῆμιν, 362a4).³⁵ He does so because Socrates has elicited from Protagoras contradictory claims about virtue, thereby revealing that he lacks the knowledge relevant to teaching it. Hence, the guiding practical aim of the discussion strictly requires *ad hominem* refutation.

Hippocrates cannot say what he hopes to learn from Protagoras (311b–14c). The latter, for his part, claims to teach good deliberation – that is, political expertise and virtue (317e–19a). Socrates doubts virtue is teachable, but Protagoras defends its teachability (319a–28d). When Socrates follows up by asking about virtue's unity, this can seem like an incidental topic – one that happened to come up in Protagoras' defense (323e3–24a1, 324e2–25a2). However, virtue is teachable just in case it is unified in wisdom (361a–c). Hence, the discussion of virtue's unity (329b–34c; 349a–60e) subserves the discussion of whether virtue is teachable, and the unity discussion examines Protagoras. The question is whether a supposed teacher of virtue can consistently maintain that virtue has many unlike parts. So, Socrates insists at the outset that the discussion of virtue's unity examine Protagoras' position (3.2.1), and he keeps examining that position until interrupted (3.2.2).

After the interruption, Socrates and Protagoras agree to take turns asking questions (334c–38e). Protagoras uses his turn to ask about Simonides (338e–41e), but Socrates takes control and – with Protagoras' consent – gives a long speech (341e–47a). Notoriously, Socrates distorts the poem to say what *he* believes, so far as possible. More procedural wrangling then sets in. Protagoras must be shamed into abiding by the agreement to take turns asking questions (347a–48c), but Socrates' larger concern is this (347b8–48a6):

I defer to Protagoras [about who will ask and who will answer questions] – whichever is more pleasant for him. But if he will, let's drop the odes and poems. I would gladly carry on to the end, with you as an inquirer into what I originally asked you about, Protagoras. Discussion of poetry seems to me very like the symposia of inferior, vulgar people. Because of their inability to

³⁵ However, Hippocrates is no longer with Socrates when he meets his friends soon after leaving Callias' house (ἔφτι, 309b7).

keep company with each other on their own [ἀλλήλοισ δι' ἑαυτῶν συνεῖναι], with their own voice and their own views [διὰ τῆς ἑαυτῶν φωνῆς καὶ τῶν λόγων τῶν ἑαυτῶν], while drinking – due to lack of education – they pay the price for flute-girls, and pay a great deal for the alien voice [ἄλλοτριαν φωνήν] of the flute, and they keep company with each other through those voices [διὰ τῆς ἐκείνων φωνῆς ἀλλήλοισ σύνεισιν]. But when educated gentlemen have a symposium, you won't see flute-girls, choruses, or harpists; they suffice to keep company themselves, with their own voices [αὐτοῖς . . . συνεῖναι . . . διὰ τῆς αὐτῶν φωνῆς], without that childish nonsense, talking and listening to each other in orderly turn, even if they drink an enormous quantity of wine. Such gatherings, if they comprise men such as most of us claim to be, also don't need alien voices of the poets [ἄλλοτρίας φωνῆς . . . ποιητῶν],³⁶ whom one cannot question about what they mean, and most of those who introduce them into the conversation [ἐν τοῖς λόγοις] talk about a matter they cannot test [ἐξελέγχειν] – some say the poet had these things in mind, and others others. They abandon such gatherings, keep company with themselves on their own [ἑαυτοῖς σύνεισιν δι' ἑαυτῶν], and test one another, giving and receiving [accounts] in their own words [ἐν τοῖς ἑαυτῶν λόγοις πείραν ἀλλήλων λαμβάνοντες καὶ διδόντες]. I think you and I should rather imitate such people, and that we should put aside the poets and give each other accounts on our own [δι' ἡμῶν αὐτῶν πρὸς ἀλλήλους τοὺς λόγους ποιεῖσθαι] and, in giving [accounts on our own], test the truth and ourselves [τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν πείραν λαμβάνοντας].

This passage restates the core of the “say what you believe” requirement. And indeed, after some soothing comments (348c–49a), Socrates again asks about Protagoras' own account, that virtue is disunified, offering him the chance to backtrack or admit that he earlier said something he didn't think (349a–d, esp. b6, c5–d1).

By this point, Socrates has joined justice and piety, prudence and wisdom, and he was trying to join prudence and justice when interrupted. Protagoras now concedes the unity of those four virtues, but he insists that courage is distinct.³⁷ Hence, Socrates tries to show that courage is wisdom; with that, he will have completed his argument that all virtue is one (349d–60e). He begins with one argument that courage is wisdom

³⁶ There is a pun here on the “foreignness” of Simonides' “voice”; cf. δίκαιον γὰρ τὴν Σιμωνίδου φωνὴν τοῦτον ἔρωτᾶν at 341b7–8. This can be understood as a double accusative (“it is right to ask [Prodicus] about Simonides' dialect”) or an appositive (“it is right to ask [Prodicus], the voice of Simonides”). The former is more natural, but the second meaning pops out when we read this passage with 347c–48b.

³⁷ Socrates never finishes his argument about justice and prudence, but if Protagoras has a strong interest in avoiding that argument, he has the same interest in not returning to it; cf. Duncan 1978, 220.

(349d–51b) and finishes with another (359a–60e). His final argument starts by restating Protagoras' view, just as the initial argument did (359a–b; cf. 349d). Early in the final argument, Socrates pauses to insist that Protagoras say what he thinks, not what the many think (359c–d). At the close of the final argument, he asks whether Protagoras still thinks some people are unlearned but courageous (360e; cf. 349d, 359a–b). In the aftermath, Socrates compares his view with Protagoras' own view (361a2–3, b3–5, b7–c1). Quite clearly, then, 349d–60e as a whole tests and refutes Protagoras' own views – most immediately, his view that courage is distinct from the rest of virtue.

The first argument that courage is wisdom fails, but the second one succeeds. The intervening material corrects the shortcomings of the first argument and prepares the way for the second.³⁸ Socrates' first argument falls to Protagoras' core objection: that wisdom is weak and can be ruled by fear (cf. [Chapter 2](#)). So, the virtuous person needs a distinct virtue, courage, that bolsters her wisdom and prevents its being dragged around by fear. Hence, in between his two attempts to identify courage and wisdom, Socrates argues that wisdom is strong and cannot be ruled by any affect, starting with pleasure and moving to fear.³⁹ However, only wisdom proper – knowledge of the unconditionally good and bad for a human being – is strong. For the intervening passage to serve its purpose, then, Socrates must discuss that knowledge, not knowledge of conditional goods and bads. So, he takes up two topics: wisdom's strength (352a–53b, 355a–57e), and wisdom's object, the unconditionally good and bad for a human being (351b–e, 353c–55a).

For now, it is irrelevant how Socrates argues in the interim (353c–57e). Granted that he first argues for hedonism and from there to the strength of wisdom, our question is whether he adheres to his “say what you believe” requirement and examines Protagoras' own views. Looking at the argument's function in context, it seems he must. Looking at the aftermath, in which Protagoras accepts the argument (358a–d),⁴⁰ it seems that he did. But perhaps Protagoras consents not because he agrees but because Socrates' advertisement for sophistry is too good to pass up. And how the two main theses at issue are introduced – that wisdom is strong and pleasure the good – gives strong reason to doubt whether Socrates

³⁸ Cf. Zeyl 1980; Weiss 1985; Russell 2000.

³⁹ 353a–57e could be seen as a second argument for the identity of wisdom and *σωφροσύνη*, understood as ruling one's pleasures and desires.

⁴⁰ The remaining piece of the interim passage (358d–e) articulates a bridge principle about fear – that it is an expectation of something bad for the subject – that Socrates uses to connect the interim argument about wisdom's strength to the final argument that courage is wisdom.

examines Protagoras' views. I turn now to those introductory moves (351b–53b); on both points, I argue, Protagoras is ashamed to state his views openly and unequivocally. He is a hedonist who thinks wisdom is weak. Socrates then argues, as usual, from a view that Protagoras accepts (hedonism) to a conclusion he rejects (that wisdom is strong), not from a view that Protagoras rejects to one he already accepts (as most prohedonists think).

3.3.2 *Hedonism and the strength of wisdom introduced (351b–52d)*

Again, once his first argument fails, Socrates introduces the unconditionally good and bad for a human being and then specifies living well and badly in hedonist terms (351b3–c2):

“Do you say, Protagoras,” I said, “that some people live well, and others badly?”

He did.

“And do you think a person lives well, if he lives in pain and distress?”

He didn't.

“What if he lives pleasantly to the end of his days [τελευτήσειεν]? Don't you think he lives well that way?”

“I think so,” he said.

“Therefore [ἄρα], to live pleasantly is good, and to live unpleasantly bad?”

“If he lives taking pleasure in noble things [τοῖς καλοῖς], anyway,” he said.

Scholars generally say that Protagoras rejects hedonism immediately, but this is false.⁴¹ He initially accepts that a painful life cannot be good and that a pleasant life must be good. But when Socrates draws a seemingly innocuous conclusion, Protagoras backtracks, adding that the pleasures of a good life must be taken in noble things. He could have rejected hedonism immediately, but as actually portrayed, Protagoras first agrees and then balks.⁴²

⁴¹ The rule is epitomized by Adam and Adam 1893, xxix; Dodds 1959, 21 n. 3; Sullivan 1961, 22 n. 1 (following Dodds); Cronquist 1980, 63–64; Nill 1985, 19, 48, 102 n. 116; Nussbaum 1986, 111; Kahn 1988, 47; Vlastos 1991, 300; Irwin 1995a, 86, 94; Hemmenway 1996, 20; perhaps Annas 1999, 169–70; and Russell 2000, 319. The exceptions are Taylor 1991, 164 (but see 163, “challenged by Protagoras”) and Zeyl 1980, 252–53.

⁴² David Ebrey has pointed out that there may be a real gap between 351b4–7 and b7–8. Maybe Protagoras commits himself to saying that all and only pleasant lives are good, but not to saying that the pleasures of a good life constitute its goodness. So, he could say that pleasure supervenes on the good life without backtracking on any previous agreements. However, that is not the approach Protagoras actually takes.

Although Protagoras initially endorses hedonism, this does not show that Socrates introduces hedonism *ad hominem*. For that, Socrates must have some reason, in advance of asking his questions, to suppose that Protagoras harbors hedonist sympathies. Nothing in the immediately preceding argument offers such evidence; that is partly why the transition seems so sudden. However, two earlier moments suggest that Protagoras is a hedonist. We have seen the first, when he considers whether to converse publicly or privately. Protagoras is attuned to the dangers he faces as a declared sophist and to the implications this decision may have for his personal and professional safety. After describing those dangers, he elects to speak before everyone present, because it is most pleasant for him (μοι ἡδιστόν, 317c4). He treats this as sufficient explanation of a decision that he regards as crucially important.

The second moment comes soon after that. Socrates elicits from Protagoras a claim to teach virtue, and then he expresses doubt whether virtue is teachable at all. Protagoras is now on the spot. He must defend his way of life; if virtue isn't teachable, he is either deluded or manipulative. So, the decision of how to argue that virtue is teachable is also a crucial one for him. It is striking, then, that Protagoras decides whether to defend himself through myth (μῦθος) or argument (λόγος) entirely on hedonic grounds: a myth,⁴³ he says, would be more pleasant (χαριέστερον, 320c6–7).⁴⁴ It is not entirely clear whose pleasure Protagoras has in mind, his audience's or his own. Both are probably relevant to him; by pleasing his audience, Protagoras is more likely to persuade them that virtue is teachable, and persuading them (especially in this way?) will be more pleasant for him. These two comments, at crucial moments, give Socrates two good reasons to think that Protagoras has practically effective hedonist commitments.⁴⁵

⁴³ Denyer 2008 *ad* 320c4 suggests that a myth helps Protagoras to “avoid committing himself on some sensitive issues,” especially whether the gods exist. If so, that would be another way in which Protagoras conceals himself for his own safety (cf. n. 10 above). However, Protagoras surely could have given a λόγος that didn't mention the gods, as he does from 322d–28d. (He only notes that he has abandoned myth for argument at 324d–e; this may be an example of how sophists and orators fail with respect to the form as well as the content of their speeches. Cf. *Phdr.* 230e–34c vs. 238d–41d [which corrects form via an organizing psychological-*cum*-ethical principle (237a–38c)] vs. 244a–57b [which corrects content via a superior psychological-*cum*-ethical principle].)

⁴⁴ Goldberg 1983, 35–36 and McCoy 1998, 22 note the terminology here (but not at 317c). McCoy does not make this an explicit reason for Socrates to attribute hedonism to Protagoras, but that must be why she flags it. NB Protagoras' reason for admitting that courage and wisdom are the same is to gratify Socrates (χαριοῦμαι, 360e), but that happens well after Socrates introduces hedonism.

⁴⁵ Socrates uses similar language at various points (335c6–7, 335e1, 347b8–c2, 348d6, 361d6, 362a2–3 taken with 335d4–5). However, 335c6–7 and 335e1 portray Socrates deciding against the more pleasant course, presumably on grounds independent of hedonic value. (In the latter case, the

Socrates may also have other grounds. First, Protagoras' *homo mensura* doctrine probably entails a hedonist conception of the good, at least by Plato's lights. Defending that claim would take me too far afield, and references to *homo mensura* in the *Protagoras* are elusive anyway. Second, suppose that Socrates thinks people who deem injustice prudent and wisdom weak hold such views because they are hedonists, and that Protagoras has revealed just such views. Socrates could then provisionally diagnose him as a hedonist. However, while I have argued that Protagoras holds such views of virtue, I have not yet argued that Plato thinks those views stem from hedonism (but I do in [Chapter 7](#)).

Again, at 351b Socrates must discuss knowledge of the unconditionally good and bad for a human being. He has some reason to think Protagoras has hedonist sympathies. So, he introduces a hedonist conception of the good life. Protagoras' responses confirm Socrates' suspicions (351b4–7). However, Protagoras quickly retreats, and his stated reasons are significant (351b7–d7):

“Therefore [ἄρα], to live pleasantly is good, and to live unpleasantly bad?”

“If one lives taking pleasure in noble things [τοῖς καλοῖς], anyway,” he said.

“What, Protagoras? You don't also, as the many [οἱ πολλοί] do, call some pleasant things bad and some painful things good, do you? I mean [ἐγὼ γὰρ λέγω]: to the extent things are pleasant, aren't they to that extent good, unless something else comes from them? And likewise, isn't it just the same with painful things: to the extent they are painful, they are bad?”

“I don't know, Socrates,” he said, “whether I should answer unqualifiedly [ἄπλῶς οὕτως], as you ask the question, that all pleasant things are good and all painful ones bad. I think it's safer for me [ἐμοὶ ἀσφαλέστερον] to answer not just with an eye to my present answer, but also with an eye to the whole rest of my life, that some pleasant things aren't good, and again too that some painful things aren't bad, though some of them are, and that others are neither, but a third thing – neither good nor bad.”

Protagoras says that living well requires taking pleasure in noble things, thereby excluding pleasures taken in shameful things. Pleasure taken in

claim that he cannot give long speeches is belied by what follows.) 347b8–9 suggests that Socrates recognizes Protagoras' hedonist criterion of choice. 347b9–c2, 348d6 (though ironic), and 361d6 are most naturally read as saying that Socrates would find the conversation pleasant because of its worth, not *vice versa*. Finally, at 362a2–3 it is unclear whether Socrates really stayed with the conversation simply to please Callias – he was prepared to leave if it did not proceed in a certain way (334c–36b). The *Gorgias* is also shot through with loaded uses of pleasure vocabulary: e.g., 457e–58a, 458d1–4, 462c8–d7, 497c1–2, 501c7–8, 504c4–5, 505c5–6, 514a4, 516b4–6, and 521b2–3. It is unlikely that all of these, or even most of them, are coincidental uses of idiom. Likewise for many uses of desire vocabulary in the *Gorgias*, starting at 447b2–3.

something shameful is itself shameful, and it would be shameful to recommend such pleasures as parts of happiness. Protagoras acts deftly to avoid this problem, as is confirmed by what follows. Socrates asks if he really agrees with the many that some pleasures are bad. So, Protagoras explains why he retreated from unqualified (ἀπλῶς οὐτῶς) hedonism: doing so is safer, not only with respect to his present answer, but with respect to his entire life. His new answer presents some danger, but his original answer presented more danger. With Protagorean foresight (cf. 317a–b), he offers his new answer. But what dangers is Protagoras weighing?

Some say that “Protagoras is . . . hesitant to allow that pleasure is the good . . . because he appreciates the importance of *overall* enjoyment of one’s life.”⁴⁶ That cannot be right. First, hedonism does not conflict with prudential hedonism. Second, Socrates initially asks about a life lived pleasantly throughout (τελευτήσειεν, 351b6), so Protagoras’ first answers already concern prudential hedonism. Third, Socrates’ follow-up clarifies that he is asking whether pleasure as such is good, ignoring whatever results from it. It is in response to this question that Protagoras mentions caring for his whole life. Lastly, this reading obscures the contrast between Protagoras’ present answer and his whole life. The proposal says that Protagoras changes his answer because if the content of his original answer structured his ends, the result would be a hedonically inferior entire life. But then, what of the contrast between his entire life and his present answer? The point would be that if the content of his original answer structured his ends, that would provide a hedonically superior present moment. In other words, being an unqualified hedonist would be hedonically inferior over his whole life, but hedonically superior in the present moment. That seems unlikely.

Instead of reading Protagoras as talking about the results of allowing the content of his answer to structure his ends, we should read him rather as talking about his speech act. Protagoras thinks it would be safer for now to express unqualified hedonism, but safer for his life as a whole to express a more qualified view. This reintroduces the question: what dangers is Protagoras weighing? The danger of his revised answer, I suggest, lies in being refuted. He seems to consider hedonism obviously true – witness his earlier deliberations, his initial answers, and his subsequent inability to see how pleasure could be bad except by producing pain (353c–55a). Denying

⁴⁶ Russell 2000, 320; see also Nill 1985, 48, 102 n. 115.

the obvious answer will likely get him into dialectical trouble, whereas sticking to it would help him to avoid refutation. But Protagoras has his whole life to think of, and with an eye to that, it is safer to deny that everything pleasant is good. He claims to teach good deliberation (εὐβουλία) and nothing else (318d–19a), so if he did not qualify his hedonism to exclude shameful pleasures, he would appear to provide shameful instruction. The harm to his reputation from being refuted is smaller. That is, it is safer overall for Protagoras to retreat from unqualified hedonism, though he thinks that position is true, so easier to defend, and so safer with respect to his present answer.⁴⁷

Socrates next follows up with the very same question, in slightly different terms, and Protagoras suggests that they inquire together (351d7–e11):

I said, “Don’t you call ‘pleasant things’ either those that partake of pleasure or those productive of pleasure?”

“Certainly,” he said.

“I mean this [τοῦτο τοῖσιν λέγω]: insofar as things are pleasant, aren’t they good? I’m asking [ἐρωτῶν] whether pleasure itself isn’t the good.”

“Just like you’re always saying, Socrates,” he said, “Let’s examine this, and if the claim should seem apt [ἐὰν μὲν πρὸς λόγον δοκῆ εἶναι τὸ σκέμμα], and the pleasant and the good appear to be the same thing, we will accept it [συγχωρησόμεθα]; if not, then we will dispute it [ἀμφισβητήσομεν].”⁴⁸

“Do you want to lead the investigation,” I said, “Or shall I?”

“It’s right for you to lead it, since you also started the discussion.”

This further undermines the reading on which Protagoras qualifies his hedonism because structuring his ends according to unqualified hedonism would be hedonically imprudent. For here again, Socrates limits his question to pleasant things insofar as they are pleasant, but Protagoras still will not openly and unequivocally accept the proposed claim.

Protagoras’ third moment of shame comes on the heels of the last. Right after they agree to discuss whether pleasure is the good, Socrates shifts to the question of wisdom’s strength (352a–d):

⁴⁷ Cf. Sauppe 1892 *ad* 351d; Goldberg 1983, 32, 243–44. Denyer 2008, 178 also mentions 316–17, but explores neither the consequences of that parallel for the discussion of hedonism nor why Protagoras’ retreat is safer. By 358a, Protagoras can endorse hedonism openly because Socrates has excluded, by reference to hedonic consequences, the shameful pleasures that worried Protagoras – again, although Socrates asked about prudential hedonism throughout. Cf. Chapters 4 and 8 on Callicles.

⁴⁸ Zeyl 1980 ignores this passage and Taylor 2003 treats it inadequately. The correct reading can be found in Adam and Adam 1893 *ad* 351e, l.26. I translate πρὸς λόγον as “apt” so as to capture the ambiguity between “relevant” and “reasonable.”

“Well,” I said, “Might it become clear [καταφανές . . . γένοιτο] to us in this sort of way? Just as if someone examined a person for health or some other bodily property based on his appearance [ἐκ τοῦ εἶδους], saw his face and hands, and said ‘Come, uncover [ἀποκαλύψας] and display [ἐπίδειξον] your chest and back too, so I can examine you more clearly [σαφέστερον]’ – I too long for such a thing in [this] examination [σκέψιν]. Having seen how you stand on the good and the pleasant, as you say [θεασάμενος ὅτι οὕτως ἔχεις πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ τὸ ἡδὺ ὡς φῆς], I need to say something like this: ‘Come, Protagoras, uncover [ἀποκάλυψον] this part of your thought to me as well: how do you stand on knowledge? Do you think it’s also as the majority of people think, or otherwise? The many think something like this about knowledge: it’s neither strong nor controlling nor ruling. They don’t think it’s something of that sort, but that often, when knowledge is in a person, the knowledge doesn’t rule him, but something else does – at one time anger, at another time pleasure, at another pain, sometimes love, often fear. They think about knowledge like a slave, as something dragged about by all the rest. Now, does it seem to you too that it’s something of that sort, or does knowledge seem to you noble [καλόν] and such as to rule a person, and that if someone ever knew good and bad, he wouldn’t be conquered by anything, so he would never do anything but what knowledge commands? Do you think prudence [φρόνησιν] suffices to save a person?’”

“It seems [to me] too just as you say, Socrates,” he said, “and further, if [it is shameful] for another, it is shameful for me also [αἰσχρὸν ἔστι καὶ ἐμοί] not to say that wisdom and knowledge are the most powerful of all human things.”⁴⁹

Socrates’ first sentence suggests that he introduces this topic to remove an unclarity about hedonism. That is, the subject of γένοιτο seems to be σκέμμα, or λόγος. However, this seems to conflict with the structure of his argument. Socrates discusses hedonism to refute the claim that wisdom is weak – and to argue from there that virtue is one and teachable, though not by Protagoras. Reading on helps to explain this oddity.

Socrates next likens his examination of Protagoras’ soul to a doctor’s examination of a patient’s body. The doctor looks first at surface features of the patient’s face and hands and then, it might seem, proceeds to deeper realities by inspecting the chest and back. On this reading, Socrates begins with a surface examination of Protagoras’ soul by considering his views about pleasure, and proceeds to deeper examination of his soul by considering his views about knowledge. So understood, the analogy confirms that Socrates thinks the inquiry into knowledge subserves the inquiry into pleasure. However, this is a misreading. The doctor examines

⁴⁹ Kerferd 1981, 137–38 mentions broad scholarly surprise at this admission – I do not know to whom he refers – but he concludes that Protagoras is fully sincere.

the body's outward appearance (its εἶδος) to diagnose the body's real condition. To make the best diagnosis, the doctor wants to gather more signs from the body's outward appearance – not only those from the face and hands, but also those from the chest and back. All this information is superficial, but the more such information the doctor has, the better she can diagnose the patient. On this view, Socrates gathers external signs of the condition of Protagoras' soul – utterances, which are outward appearances of his psychic condition – to reach a diagnosis. Hence, he says he has already seen how Protagoras says he stands on pleasure and the good (ὡς φῆς).⁵⁰ To reach a better diagnosis, he must gather more evidence in the form of outward behavior – this time, what Protagoras says about knowledge. Socrates does want to reveal (καταφανές; cf. καταφανῆ at 317a7) an account or λόγος – but the account in question is Protagoras' own view.

In response to Socrates' question, Protagoras says he believes wisdom is strong, and he says so before saying anything about shame. In this respect, his third moment of shame differs from the first two. Still, he also says it would be *shameful* for him, of all people, to deny that wisdom is the most powerful human thing.⁵¹ Protagoras lives as a self-styled teacher of virtue in the form of wisdom; certainly it would shame him to have to admit that the value of his teaching is subject to his students' fickle affective conditions.⁵²

If this mention of shame were the only reason to think that Protagoras' views about wisdom are different than he lets on, the case would be weak. However, when Protagoras concedes that wisdom is strong, he effectively gives up on the plurality of virtue. If wisdom cannot be ruled by fear, then the wise person has no need of courage as an *additional* virtue. The strength of wisdom and the unity of virtue are two sides of the same coin. Why, then, does Socrates not complete his argument that courage is wisdom right after Protagoras' concession? This makes sense if he thinks that

⁵⁰ We might also translate: "that your position on pleasure and the good is what you say it is," ὡς picking up οὕτως in οὕτως ἔχεις. Even if Socrates says here that Protagoras' position is what Protagoras says it is, the felt need to say so suggests a background condition of doubt as to whether he speaks his mind. It is unclear how anything Protagoras says or does might have removed such suspicion.

⁵¹ This harmonizes with Socrates' comment that he thought the good do not become good through any human practice (ἀνθρωπίνην ἐπιμέλειαν; 328e). Socrates became good through divine power, and whatever he can do to make others good is also due to divine power, whether directly or indirectly (cf. Shaw 2011). This theme also crops up in the discussion of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* (162c–e).

⁵² Protagoras need not deny that qualities beyond his control as a teacher play a role in being virtuous, though; cf. Chapter 2, n. 71.

Protagoras does not really believe wisdom is strong, and argues for that claim instead of relying on shame to produce a merely apparent refutation. In fact, as I argued in [Chapter 2](#), that is why Socrates introduces this topic in the first place: Protagoras' core objection to his first argument that courage is wisdom was precisely that the latter is weak and can be ruled by fear.

Moreover, consider Socrates' final argument. The interim material that purports to establish wisdom's strength – that is, to establish what Protagoras already verbally concedes at 352c–d – makes the difference between the initial and final arguments. If Protagoras' root objection to the identity of courage and wisdom is *not* that wisdom can be overcome by fear, then his objection must be something else. If he has another objection, though, it is unclear how the interim material removes it. And if his root objection is not removed by the interim material, he can simply renew that objection. That he does not do so confirms that Protagoras had no other objection, and that his admission that wisdom is strong was all Socrates needed to complete his argument. Again, though, Socrates wants to examine and refute Protagoras, and not merely give a verbal refutation from insincere admissions.

Finally, as with the initial “say what you believe” passage (331c–d) and subsequent exchange about justice and prudence (333c–4d), Socrates seems strikingly of two minds about examining Protagoras' own views from 347c–60e. He insists that they speak their own minds rather than introducing absent voices into the conversation (347e–48a); he elicits Protagoras' view and repeatedly insists on examining that view (349a–d, 359c–d, 360e) and Protagoras' larger position that virtue is many, yet teachable (361a–c). In between, though, Socrates seems to examine the foreign voice of the many, who are not there to answer questions any more than Simonides. But even as Socrates prepares for a discussion of the many's attitudes, he uses the image of examining Protagoras' soul as a doctor might examine his body (352a–c). This is all readily explained if Socrates is covertly examining Protagoras' position under the guise of examining the many. What alternative sense could be made of his procedure, I cannot say.

3.3.3 *Socrates' procedural comment at 354e3–8*

I said above that the details of Socrates' argument from hedonism to the strength of wisdom were irrelevant for my purposes (3.3.1). At one point, though, Socrates seems to say that his conclusion depends on hedonism

(354e3–8). In fact, arguments like Socrates' do not depend on hedonism.⁵³ He could wrongly think that they do, but a closer look shows that he never clearly says so. Since hedonism is not really essential for Socrates' argument, and since he never clearly says it is, we should not saddle him with such a view.

Protagoras has just agreed that the many are committed to hedonism (353c–54e). Socrates now imagines them asking why he is “going on so much . . . and in so much detail” about their implicit hedonism (354e3–5) and he imagines how he would reply (354e5–8):

“Pardon me,” I'd say. “First [πρῶτον], it's not easy to show [ἀποδείξαι] what this thing is that you call ‘being weaker than pleasure.’ Next [ἔπειτα], all the proofs depend upon this [ἐν τούτῳ εἰσὶν πᾶσαι αἱ ἀποδείξεις].”

Socrates' first point (πρῶτον) – that he talks so much about hedonism because it is hard to explain “being weaker than pleasure” – is consistent with a purely *ad hominem* reading.⁵⁴ The difficulty of his task explains his lengthy discussion of hedonism, but his task may still be to show the many that their hedonism conflicts with their original analysis of “being weaker than pleasure.” Socrates does not say or imply that hedonism is an essential premise in any argument for his claim that “being weaker than pleasure” is ignorance – at least, not yet.

Socrates' second point (ἔπειτα) can be read in two ways. He says that something is essential for certain proofs, but what is essential to which proofs? On one reading, this is a second reason why his analysis of “being weaker than pleasure” requires a long discussion of hedonism. His argument is difficult and hedonism is crucial to it; these jointly explain why he talks so much about hedonism. On another reading, he says that the proofs that virtue is one depend upon the claim that “being weaker than pleasure” is ignorance – τούτῳ refers to the conclusion of the present argument, not to its hedonist premise.⁵⁵ 354e itself offers no clear reasons to prefer either reading. In the wider context, however, the whole interim discussion aims to show precisely that wisdom is strong, in order to argue that virtue is one. The second reading – on which Socrates says that all the

⁵³ Cf. Frede 1992. Pro-hedonists who make heavy weather of 354e3–8 must explain how Socrates can argue for the same or similar conclusions elsewhere while rejecting hedonism (e.g., *G.* 466a–68e).

⁵⁴ This leaves in place other difficulties about whether 351b–57e as a whole can be read as an *ad hominem* argument. All I argue for here is that 354e presents no independent reason to doubt that the argument can be read that way.

⁵⁵ Contrast, e.g., Grote 1865, 64. Curiously, Adam and Adam 1893 *ad* 354e comment that “πᾶσαι αἱ ἀποδείξεις means all the proofs that pleasure is good and pain evil,” although they earlier claimed that Socrates offers no arguments at all for hedonism (xxix).

proofs about virtue's unity depend on his argument that "being weaker than pleasure" is ignorance – thus faces a lower burden of proof.⁵⁶ Closer in, Socrates made this very point when Protagoras objected to examining the many's view that wisdom is weak: "I think this is worthwhile with an eye to finding out about courage and how it relates to the other parts of virtue" (353b1–3).⁵⁷ In fact, Socrates' use of *πάλλιν τοίνυν* (354e3) seems likely to refer back to just this passage.⁵⁸ Overall, then, it is not plausible that Socrates regards hedonism as an essential premise in any argument for the conclusion that "being weaker than pleasure" is ignorance.

3.4 Conclusion

I have argued that Socrates insists on examining Protagoras' views throughout their conversation. Along the way, I argued that Protagoras distances himself from three claims he believes, as a precaution against damaging his reputation. In those instances, Socrates examines Protagoras covertly. Puzzles remain, however. Strikingly, every time that Socrates covertly examines one of Protagoras' views, he says he is examining the many's views. This cannot be an accident, but the purpose of his saying so is obscure. I clarify the many's role in the *Protagoras* in Chapter 5. First, though, Chapter 4 examines certain parallels between the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*. In particular, I argue that the views Protagoras is ashamed to state are quite close to those that Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles are ashamed to state.

⁵⁶ This reading also has the advantage in that Socrates in fact does offer multiple proofs that virtue is one (in keeping with the plural *πᾶσαι αἱ ἀποδείξεις*), but only a single argument that wisdom is strong.

⁵⁷ Protagoras prompts this reply by asking: "Why must we examine the opinion of most people [τὴν τῶν πολλῶν δόξαν ἀνθρώπων; cp. 333c4–5], who say whatever occurs to them?" Protagoras, by contrast, is not so naïve as to simply say how things seem to him on each occasion.

⁵⁸ Socrates uses the same phrase, *πάλλιν τοίνυν*, to resume his discussion after Protagoras' protest (353c1).

Drama and dialectic in Plato's Gorgias, revisited

Shame clearly plays a major role in Socrates' refutations of his interlocutors in the *Gorgias*, though debate about the details persists. The [previous chapter](#) argued that shame plays a similarly crucial role in the *Protagoras*. Protagoras holds several views that he would be ashamed to state openly. Each time, Socrates nonetheless examines his views under cover of examining the many. The three views that he conceals out of shame are, again:

- (1) Injustice can be prudent.
- (2) Pleasure is the good.
- (3) Wisdom is weak and can be ruled by the passions, including fear.

This chapter reassesses shame's role in the *Gorgias* and fleshes out relevant parallels with the *Protagoras*. Those parallels help to situate the *Protagoras* with respect to larger anti-hedonist themes in Plato, giving it an intelligible place in the corpus. This chapter teases out the similarities between the two dialogues; subsequent chapters provide a common account of the roles played by shame and hedonism in both works.

First, I explore similarities in the social settings of the *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*, which are background conditions for the similar operations of shame in each. I also distinguish substantive and procedural shame ([Chapter 3](#) mentioned examples of each) and examine procedural shame in the *Gorgias* ([4.1.1](#)). Next, I argue that the substantive views that shame Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles closely resemble those that shame Protagoras ([4.2](#)).¹ Finally, I connect the views that occasion substantive shame in both dialogues with Socrates' explicit account of oratory and sophistry in the *Gorgias*. Those connections suggest a new account of why Socrates examines the characters he does, in the order he does, in the *Gorgias* ([4.3](#)).

¹ There are important differences among the interlocutors in the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*, and between them and the many (despite the similarities to be described in [Chapter 5](#)). However, I focus on the similarities.

4.1.1 *Setting*

In the *Protagoras*, Socrates and Protagoras talk before everyone in Callias' house (ἐνδον, 317c), which is not easily entered. This makes the conversation private to a point, but it also places the discussants before a significant number of people, makes it likely that accounts of their conversation will reach outsiders (as seen in the frame), and makes it hard for Protagoras to plausibly deny accurate accounts of the discussion. This setting provides part of the backdrop against which to understand Protagoras' shame and concealment. He might still have felt shame had the conversation been private, or had it been guaranteed to stay among those present. Still, the larger the definite and possible audiences, the greater the potential for shame and the greater the felt need for concealment.

The setting of the *Gorgias* is comparatively obscure, but three early passages offer clues. First, Callicles mentions that Gorgias just finished giving a display speech to those inside (ἐνδον, 447c). Second, Socrates mentions that those inside (ἐνδον) may want to learn from Gorgias, which spurs him into bold claims for rhetoric (455c). Third, Socrates essentially warns Gorgias that he is about to be refuted (457c–58b); the latter then tries to beg off, on grounds that those who heard his display speech may be tired (458b–c).

The first passage can be taken to show that the parties are then standing outdoors, and that the conversation either takes place entirely outdoors or else moves indoors.² The former alternative might be suggested by the second passage above. If Callicles' mention of "those inside" implies that the discussants are outside at the time, so must Socrates'.³ In the second passage, though, Socrates also mentions that those inside could ask questions, were they not ashamed to, which places the discussion indoors at that point. Further, the third passage shows that the audience for the conversation includes the audience for the display speech. The auditors have not exited; Socrates still calls them "those inside" in the second passage.⁴ But this undermines in turn the original evidence that the conversation begins outside. If Socrates can talk about "those inside" while he is inside, so can Callicles. This reading removes any need to supply an implicit transition from outside to inside, of a sort that Plato elsewhere makes explicit (*Lys.* 206d–e; *Tht.* 143b). It remains somewhat unclear where they are and who composes the audience, but probably the

² Zeyl 1987, 1 n. 1; Dodds 1959, 188 (from whom I draw some points just below).

³ Zeyl 1987, 1 n. 1, though he does not spell this out. ⁴ Dodds 1959, 188, expanded somewhat.

scene is Callicles' house,⁵ and the audience those interested in learning rhetoric from Gorgias.

4.1.2 *Process and procedural shame*

My chief concern is with shame at displaying one's views before an audience, or "substantive shame," and with topics of substantive shame common to the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*. (Recall that one can feel shame because one loses status in one's own eyes. Shame essentially involves someone's opinion of me, including my own opinion of myself. Still, I primarily discuss the multi-person case.) Both works also contain "procedural shame," or shame at the prospect of public failure in one's activities – here, conversation understood as a contest over reputation for wisdom (cp. *R.* 495c–e, 499a; cf. [Chapters 5, 8](#)). Like substantive shame, procedural shame can disrupt a conversation, but it can also be used to preserve a conversation. Compare: a celebrated runner may refuse to run a race that she fears she will lose. She may also find excuses for a loss: she was not trying her hardest; her muscles cramped; course conditions favored her opponent. She may even abandon a race with some such excuse. (Of course, excuses are sometimes true.) When her reluctance to compete comes to general attention, though, she may be shamed into running the race, since refusing to run effectively admits defeat. Likewise, excuses for losing leave room to shame her into running the race again.

With this distinction between substantive and procedural shame in hand, I now review cases of procedural shame in the *Protagoras*. Protagoras considers the conversation a contest over reputation for wisdom, and his desire to win structures his approach at every turn. Protagoras' reputation for wisdom, and in particular for skill at speaking, comes up early (310e, 312d). Socrates then raises expectations for Protagoras' abilities as he eases the discussion away from long speeches and into dialectic (329b). Soon, as Socrates concludes his argument that justice is piety, Protagoras minimizes his success by deferring. He thus conveys that his view remains unrefuted and indeed that he is not even trying, all the while painting his maneuver as a magnanimous gesture (330b–31e). Socrates then argues that wisdom is prudence; in the end, Protagoras resists answering and so conceding defeat (333b). Next, Protagoras interrupts Socrates' argument about justice and

⁵ If the whole conversation occurs inside, there is nothing strange in Callicles' failure to invite them in (cf. Dodds 1959, 188). Socrates and Chairephon might know that Gorgias is at Callicles' house right then without knowing that he is staying there, so Callicles' invitation at 447b also presents no problem.

prudence with a speech on the relational nature of benefit (334a–c). Substantive shame threatens to derail the conversation here. Socrates was not nearing a refutation, but he was approaching ideas that Protagoras does not care to discuss, and that he has taken care to avoid.

The dynamic of procedural shame now becomes more explicit. Socrates mentions Protagoras' reputed ability to teach using either long or short speeches, and he requests the latter procedure (334e–35a). Protagoras retorts that he would not be renowned at verbal contests if he conceded all such questions to his opponent (334e–35a). Socrates notes that Protagoras has himself claimed a reputation for skill at both modes of speaking (335b–c). After Callias pleads with Socrates to stay, he uses an analogy with running to insist yet again that Protagoras show his ability at short speeches (335d–36b).⁶ This is the first time Alcibiades comes to his aid, saying that if Protagoras refuses to play by Socrates' rules, then he concedes the title at brief speaking (336b–d). Protagoras' reluctance to engage on such terms is shameful for one who proclaims his ability to proceed either way. When Socrates proposes that they take turns asking questions, and everyone deems that fair, Protagoras can hardly demur without admitting Socrates' superiority.⁷ Socrates later employs further agonistic analogies to characterize Protagoras' approach (339d–e), and he even interprets Simonides' poem as an attempt to outdo Pittacus in reputation for wisdom (343c).

When the time comes to say who will ask questions in the next stage, Protagoras refuses to decide. Like a runner who agrees to race under certain conditions, but who backs out of her agreement for fear of losing when the time comes, this effectively concedes defeat. Hence, Protagoras feels Alcibiades' second effort to shame him into abiding by his agreement. Once Protagoras agrees, Socrates tries to put the conversation on a better footing by emphasizing the need for cooperation in seeking the truth about virtue (348c–49a). Soon, though, in the initial exchange over hedonism, Protagoras must choose between procedural and substantive shame. He can openly endorse unqualified hedonism, by his lights the obvious conception of goodness, and remain unrefuted, or else he can avoid the shameful implications of unqualified hedonism but leave himself vulnerable to refutation.

⁶ Hence the analogy with running above to explain procedural shame.

⁷ This takes for granted the conception of the discussion as a competition. Socrates regularly insists that that is not his aim, and I take him to be sincere in insisting that dialectic is a cooperative endeavor.

As Socrates prepares to examine his views under the guise of examining the many, Protagoras tries once again, unsuccessfully, to leave off (353a–b). Then, when Protagoras attempts to pass off even the last argument as binding only on the many, Socrates insists on explicitly examining Protagoras' view (359c–d). Finally, when Socrates finishes his argument that wisdom is courage, Protagoras refuses to answer outright, accuses Socrates of desiring victory (φιλονικεῖν), and answers only with another show of appeasing him (360d–e). Socrates insists once more that his aim is cooperative inquiry (360e–61a, 361c–d), but Protagoras refuses to discuss virtue further, thereby avoiding any more embarrassment. He withdraws with words of praise for Socrates' abilities and predicts that he will be reputed for wisdom. Even here he tries to maintain his own reputation; once his defeat is manifest to all, the only way left to save face is to inflate the victor's prowess.

Procedural shame pervades the *Gorgias* as well. Callicles reports that Gorgias will answer any question he is asked. Gorgias confirms that report (447c–48a; cf. *M.* 70c) and boasts that he can give either long or short answers (447c). Later, when Socrates warns Gorgias that he is about to be refuted, he explains that he aims to discover the truth, not to win a contest (457d–e; cf. 453b–c). Facing procedural shame, Gorgias attempts to exit the conversation and avoid refutation. Everyone prevails on him to continue, and procedural shame now forces him to face the refutation. Having bragged that he will answer whatever questions he is asked, he can hardly refuse now (458b–c). When Polus takes over, he accuses Socrates of desiring victory (461b–c) – just the impression that Socrates tried to avoid earlier.⁸ Polus also claims that he can answer any question (462a), although Socrates has more trouble getting him to agree to answer briefly (461d–62a; cf. 448d–e). When Socrates concludes his argument that orators and tyrants have the least power in the city, Polus refuses to answer and so complete the refutation (468e). Likewise, Polus withdraws from the ensuing argument that doing injustice is worse than suffering it (475d–e).

At the end of Socrates' first refutation of Callicles, he too initially refuses to answer (489a). After clarifying Callicles' position, Socrates gives his first substantial refutation of hedonism (495e–97a), which Callicles dismisses as sophistry (σοφιστή, 497a6). He agrees to participate in the next, related argument (497b–d) only when Gorgias reminds him of his promise to let

⁸ He could also be echoing Socrates' own claim to enjoy refuting others (458a; cf. *Ap.* 33c, *Phil.* 48e–49a in the context of 48a–50a).

Socrates examine him however he likes – though he portrays this as a favor to Gorgias (497a–c).⁹ Callicles thereafter takes an irregular approach. Sometimes, he repeats that he answers only as a favor to Gorgias (501c, 505c), and to gratify Socrates by granting whatever he says (501c, 510a, 516b). At other times, he refuses to answer (504c, 505c–d). However, he does continue to show real interest on occasion (e.g., 503a–d, 510a–b), and he gives some clearly sincere answers (517a–b, 520a, 521a–c). Finally, like both Protagoras and Polus, Callicles accuses Socrates of wanting to win (515b). This suggests that he too views his conversation with Socrates as a contest over reputation for wisdom (*G.* 484d, 486c), which largely explains his many attempts to avoid and distract from Socrates’ refutations.¹⁰

4.2 Substantive shame in the *Gorgias*

In the *Gorgias*, Plato has characters diagnose each other’s dialectical failures:

- S1. Polus says that Gorgias would have been ashamed to deny that he would teach his students what is just – and noble and good – if they didn’t already know (461b; cf. 482c–d, 487a–b, 494d, 508c).
- S2. Callicles says that Polus would have been ashamed to deny that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering injustice (482d–e; cf. 487a–b, 494d, 508b).
- S3. Socrates insinuates that Callicles is ashamed to endorse the life of the κίναϊδος as good, though his unqualified hedonism commits him to that claim (494d–e). However, Callicles persists through his shame.

Much disagreement surrounds these passages: whether Socrates shares the diagnoses in S1 and S2; whether S3 as stated is accurate; whether Plato shares all three diagnoses; and whether shame here constitutes a “moral sense” that infallibly tracks moral truth. I argue that Plato and Socrates accept all of S1–S3, and that each case parallels one of Protagoras’ moments of substantive shame. I pay particular attention to the harder cases, S1 and S3.¹¹

⁹ 497a7–b2 is an irresolvable textual crux, so exact conclusions about the dramatic structure of 497a–c are impossible; see Dodds 1959 *ad* 497a9. It is also unclear where Callicles promised to let Socrates examine him however he liked.

¹⁰ Compare *Apology* 24d–e and 27c, where Socrates and the jury must shame Meletus into answering.

¹¹ Plato denies that shame infallibly tracks moral truth, any more than pride; see *Charmides* 159b–61b (on which see Chapter 2, n. 69). Chapter 5 discusses shame’s corruptive power in more detail.

4.2.1 *Gorgias and Protagoras on what they teach*

Gorgias is ashamed to deny that he will teach his students what is just if they do not already know it. Protagoras is ashamed to deny that wisdom, which he claims to teach, is strong. These reactions seem to share only the theme of *teaching*. However, consider the relationship between Gorgias' shame and his refutation. Gorgias could have conceded that he teaches justice without being refuted, had he denied that one who knows justice is just, does just things, and wants to do just things (460b–c).¹² That would have been to deny that knowledge of justice is strong. But on one reading, Gorgias would have been ashamed to deny that one who knows justice is just for the very same reasons that he would have been ashamed to deny teaching justice.¹³ If so, then Protagoras and Gorgias are both ashamed to deny that the knowledge they teach is strong. I argue that this is correct; along the way I offer a new account of why Gorgias is ashamed. I begin by reviewing Socrates' conversation with Gorgias, Polus' diagnosis of his defeat, and later references back to Polus' diagnosis.

Gorgias is an orator, and he teaches others to be orators (449a2–b3, c9–d1). When Socrates asks what oratory is about, Gorgias says it concerns speeches. Other crafts speak about their objects too, so Socrates seeks more specificity. Oratory, Gorgias replies, speaks only on some topics, and understands (φρονεῖν) what it talks about (449d–e),¹⁴ namely, “the biggest and best of human concerns” (τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀνθρωπείων πραγμάτων . . . καὶ ὄριστα; 451d7–8). Soon, Gorgias identifies the biggest and best concern as “the source of freedom for humanity itself and at the same time . . . for each person the source of rule over others in one's own city” (452d) – that is, “the ability to persuade by speeches” in law courts, councils, assemblies, and other political gatherings (452e). Socrates finds this suggestive of the topics on which oratory persuades and whether it persuades by teaching or by instilling conviction, but he doesn't want to assume too much (453a–54b). Gorgias next clarifies that oratory's topic is justice and injustice, and he repeats that the persuasion it produces is the sort that occurs in “law courts and . . . other large gatherings” (454b). He then agrees that persuasion in large groups can instill conviction but cannot teach the truth (454b–e), and Socrates summarizes: “oratory is a producer of conviction-persuasion and not of teaching-persuasion concerning what's just and unjust” (454e–55a).

¹² Irwin 1979; Cooper 1999. ¹³ Kahn 1983, 79–84.

¹⁴ Kahn 1983 neglects this comment and so denies that Gorgias is strongly committed to the claim that he has and teaches some sort of knowledge; see esp. 83–84 n. 13.

However, this account of oratory is unstable; it tends to slide into either conviction-persuasion on every topic or teaching-persuasion about justice and injustice. Socrates first tips Gorgias in the former direction. Gorgias is an orator and makes others into orators – including, potentially, those listening to their discussion (455c–d; cf. 449a–d). Like Polus, he makes grand claims for his craft (451d, 452d–e; 448c–e), such as that oratory enslaves the other crafts (452e). That is what leads people to seek him as a teacher. Hence, Socrates asks whether oratory isn't in fact conviction-persuasion on every topic. Gorgias agrees to this revision, which aggrandizes oratory. However, he insists that he imparts this power for just use; when it is used unjustly, one should blame the pupil, not the teacher (455b–57c).

Socrates now claims that Gorgias is saying things that “aren't very consistent . . . with what you were first saying about oratory” (457e). At this point, Gorgias tries to back out of the discussion, supposedly out of concern for the audience. When they protest, he cannot refuse to continue without shaming himself, since he offers to answer any and all questions (458d–e). But unless he thought that Socrates had uncovered a genuine problem, Gorgias would have little reason to try to conclude the discussion. Recall what Gorgias first said about oratory: it has a special topic that it understands and makes speeches about (449d–e). Now, though, he seems to deny that oratory has a special topic that it understands and makes speeches about. So, he really is contradicting his earlier statements.

Socrates reviews the idea that oratory is conviction-persuasion on every topic, requiring no knowledge of any (458e–59c). He then asks whether oratory takes the same approach to the just, noble, and good (459c–60a). Gorgias says – according to Polus, out of shame – “if he really [τύχη] doesn't have this knowledge, he'll learn these things from me as well” (460a3–4). Socrates now explains the contradiction. If his students don't know the just, noble, and good, Gorgias will teach them those topics, so they will know them. If his students know justice, though, they will be just, do just things, and want to do just things (460a–c). But Gorgias tried to blame the unjust use of oratory on the student of oratory, not the teacher (460c–d; cf. 456c–57c). Such a plea assumes that orators can act unjustly, which Gorgias now denies (460d–e). Ever since Gorgias said that oratory concerns justice and injustice (454b; implicitly since 452d–e), Socrates thought it would never be unjust, and he was surprised at Gorgias' contrary assertion (460e–61b).

Polus now interrupts to say that Gorgias was ashamed to deny that he knows and teaches what is just, noble, and good, and that this admission caused the contradictions he fell into, if any (461b–c; ἴσως, 461b8). Other

characters confirm Polus' diagnosis. Callicles later says that Polus experienced what he said happened to Gorgias – speaking out of shame and so being refuted (482c–d). Callicles might track what Polus said without endorsing it, but he also says that Polus rightly ridiculed Socrates for his procedure (καί σου κατεγέλα, ὡς γέ μοι δοκεῖν ὀρθῶς, τότε; 482d5–6), indicating that he agrees with Polus' reasons for ridicule. So unless Callicles is also mistaken, Polus must be right.¹⁵ Moreover, Socrates refers back to Polus' comment three times. First, he contrasts Callicles' frankness with Gorgias and Polus' shame (487a–b). Second, during his conversation with Callicles, he mentions having shamed both Gorgias and Polus (494d). Third, he reintroduces the key claims that Polus and Gorgias agreed to and mentions that Callicles and Polus took them to have agreed out of shame (508b–c). This last passage does not commit him to endorsing the diagnoses he mentions,¹⁶ but the first two passages certainly seem to.¹⁷

However, some scholars think Polus was mistaken. They locate Socrates' key move elsewhere, in the claim that one who knows justice will be just, act justly, and want to act justly.¹⁸ Gorgias agrees that he will teach justice quite casually, which seems odd if he is wracked with shame at the time.¹⁹ And maybe Socrates speaks ironically when he seems to agree with Polus.²⁰ Against these views, I explain why Gorgias reacts calmly as he concedes something out of shame, and also why he would be ashamed to deny that the knowledge of justice he provides makes people just. This lets us take Callicles and Socrates at their word when they endorse Polus' diagnosis. I start with a new account of why Gorgias would have been ashamed to deny that he would teach his students what is just (and noble and good).

¹⁵ Cooper 1999 neither mentions that Callicles endorses Polus' diagnosis of Gorgias nor gives any reason to suppose that he does not endorse it; his only references to 482c–d are at 48 n. 26 and 49 n. 27.

¹⁶ Cf. Cooper 1999, 49 n. 27. Kahn 1983, 79 mentions only this reference back to Polus.

¹⁷ Plato's view might differ from Socrates'. Cooper 1999 distances Plato from Socrates to argue that Plato uses Callicles to introduce problems with the Socratic moral psychology implicit in the claim that knowing justice entails being just (cf. n. 18 below). But Callicles agrees with Socrates and Polus about Gorgias' shame, so distancing Plato from Socrates does not help to show that Plato thinks Polus is wrong.

¹⁸ See Irwin 1979, 126–29. Kahn 1983, 79–84 defends Polus. In Gorgias' public position, it would be dangerous to deny that he would teach justice, as shown by his insistence that one should hate and prosecute the unjust student of oratory, not his teacher. For the concession that he will teach justice to protect him, though, Gorgias cannot deny that his teaching makes his students just. Cooper 1999, 33–51 sides with Irwin, adding that Polus' incorrect diagnosis is one of several clues that call attention to the problematic idea that knowing justice makes one just. That in turn prepares the way for a confrontation between Socratic and Calliclean moral psychology that reveals weaknesses in the Socratic view. McKim 1988 and Moss 2005 do not much discuss Gorgias; more on that below.

¹⁹ So, I agree with Cooper 1999 that if Kahn 1983 were right about the source of Gorgias' shame, then we would not expect him to act so casually.

²⁰ See McKim 1988 and Cooper 1999.

Comparison with another possible conversation illuminates this one. Suppose that Socrates asked whether Gorgias would teach his students their letters, the basic elements of speech, if they did not already know them. Gorgias' background expectation would be that any potential student of his would already know that much. But obviously, if they happen not to know their letters already, Gorgias of all people can teach them. Any literate person would be ashamed to say she couldn't teach someone their letters. But oratory is somehow particularly concerned with speeches (λόγοι), so it would be particularly shameful for an orator to deny that he could teach such a basic prerequisite of the craft.

In the actual conversation, Socrates asks Gorgias whether he will teach his students what is just (and noble and good), if they do not already know them. He replies with easy confidence: "I suppose that if he really [τὴν] doesn't have this knowledge, he'll learn these things from me as well" (460a). His background expectation seems to be that his potential students will know these things already. Anyone might be ashamed to say that she couldn't teach justice.²¹ But oratory is somehow particularly concerned with justice, so it would be especially shameful for an orator to deny that he could teach such a basic prerequisite of the craft. This is compatible with Gorgias' accustomed ridicule of those who claim to teach virtue (*M.* 95c). He may ridicule such people not because the practice is far too grand, or irrelevant to living well, but because they proudly lay claim to an ability shared by everyone, just as his student Meno considers it common knowledge what virtue is (71b–72a).²²

The linguistic analogy derives from Protagoras' argument that justice is a basic competence of adult humans, taught by all to all, like the Greek language (*Pr.* 320c–28d). However, Meletus also voices something like this view, when he says that everyone except Socrates improves the youth, while Socrates alone corrupts them (*Ap.* 24d–25a). So does Anytus when he recommends education to virtue by ordinary citizens rather

²¹ So Polus says (461c). After Kahn 1983 defends his claim that Gorgias admits to teaching justice out of shame, he must say that Polus is wrong about the source of that shame (116). This complicates Kahn's use of Callicles and Socrates' references back to Polus' comment as confirmation that Polus is right about Gorgias' shame, since Callicles repeats Polus' claim about the source of Gorgias' shame.

²² In what sense did Gorgias promise to teach something whose special object was justice, if not in the sense of teaching them what justice is (which he expects people to know already)? I suppose he teaches his students how to navigate particular matters of justice, presuming that justice is what everyone says. That is (see below), he teaches them what they must know to help friends and harm enemies effectively. Thus Cooper 1999 is wrong to say that Gorgias had already admitted what he says at 460a.

than by those who purport to be experts, the sophists (*M.* 89e–95a, esp. 92e–93a).

On one competing account, Gorgias concedes that he teaches justice because of his tenuous social position as a foreign teacher in Athens.²³ This view can explain why Gorgias does not simply reject Socrates' claim that knowing justice entails being just, acting justly, and wanting to act justly. For Gorgias' claim to teach justice to serve its function – for it to remove suspicion of him as a foreign teacher – he must claim to teach justice in a way that makes his pupils be just and act justly. The account based on the linguistic analogy may have other advantages, but it resurrects the question of why Gorgias does not simply avoid refutation by denying that knowing justice entails being just.²⁴

To see why Gorgias accepts that those he teaches justice will act justly, we must see how he understands justice. His conception of justice is a commonplace – as one might expect, given how confidently he assumes that he, like most people, knows justice and can teach it to anyone who doesn't know it. Gorgias thinks that justice is helping friends and harming enemies. This platitude is implicit in his plea of non-responsibility for unjust pupils: their skill was imparted for just use, to help friends and harm enemies, and not to harm friends (456d–57a).

Because Gorgias thinks that justice is helping friends and harming enemies, we can see why he accepts that knowing justice entails being just, acting justly, and wanting to act justly. His assent must be indexed to his conception of justice (a mistaken one, as Socrates thinks). Gorgias agrees that one who knows justice will be just and want to be just – she will help friends and harm enemies, and will want to do those things. It would be problematic from Gorgias' own perspective to deny that the justice he teaches leads his students to help friends and harm enemies rather than harming friends and helping enemies. For helping friends and harming enemies benefits the agent: probably everyone thinks of their friends' good as partially constituting their own, but at the very least, their friends will benefit them in turn and they will avoid being punished. Gorgias insists that one should “hate, exile, and kill” the unjust student, not his teacher. Implicit in the mention of such penalties is the idea that injustice – harming friends and helping enemies – often meets with harmful punishments. Compare Protagoras: of course Pericles teaches his sons justice and

²³ So Kahn 1983, 80–81, who compares Protagoras' opening speech at *Pr.* 316c–17c.

²⁴ Cooper 1999 also rejects Kahn's account, but he does not explain why Gorgias doesn't object to the claim that knowing justice entails being just.

temperance; otherwise, they would face confiscation, disenfranchisement, exile, or death (325a–c). Here too, the assumption is that one who learns justice will be just and act justly. Otherwise their learning it would be of no use.

To further see Gorgias' own commitment to the claim that knowing justice entails being just, consider what he says before Socrates spots a contradiction: (i) oratory has a special object; (ii) it knows that object; (iii) its object is the greatest good, superior to those provided by medicine, gymnastics, and finance; and (iv) its object *is* justice. Gorgias offers specialized knowledge of the greatest good, which is knowledge of justice. Acting on that knowledge of justice, then, would realize the greatest good for a human being, whether constitutively or instrumentally. Students come to him precisely to acquire that knowledge of justice, acting on which one realizes the greatest human goods and so lives well. Hence, Gorgias has his own reasons to agree that when he teaches justice, his students act on that knowledge. If he teaches the greatest good for humanity, but his teaching, once conveyed, does not command the practical assent of his students, then either what he claims to teach is not the greatest good, or he is a terrible teacher. Put another way: a natural construal of the claim that justice is the greatest human good is that justice is unconditionally good for a human being. For knowledge of justice to be itself unconditionally good, and so provide students with the benefit they seek, that knowledge must be practically effective – strong.²⁵ So, Gorgias is in a situation like Protagoras': someone who claims to convey knowledge of the greatest good for humanity would be ashamed to deny that what he teaches is effective in getting his students the benefits they seek from his instruction (*Pr.* 352c–d).

So, why does Gorgias say that orators might act unjustly? Why does he sometimes assume that knowing justice does not strictly entail being just, acting justly, and wanting to act justly? Gorgias' conception of justice is incoherent; it enshrines harm and injustice to enemies as a part of justice, entailing that justice is sometimes unjust. Plato thinks justice must always be just and good, and could never harm anyone. That does not yet explain how Gorgias' conception of justice leads to harming friends, but the same

²⁵ Socrates' *epagoge* concerns the relationship between knowing X and being an X person, e.g., knowing music and being a musical person. But – and this is tracked in the argument – being musical does not entail acting musically and wanting to act musically, since acting musically could be harmful in particular circumstances. But if justice is of unconditional value, it cannot be harmful in particular circumstances, so the person who knows justice always acts justly. Gorgias, I have argued, effectively commits himself to this claim by agreeing that oratory knows the greatest good, justice. This takes for granted that all desire is for the good.

commitments that lead to his conception of justice produce problems in the identification of friends and enemies. Hence, ordinary adults who are competent at justice (as ordinarily understood) sometimes harm their friends (as ordinarily understood), as can be observed all too easily (cf. *R.* 334b–35b).²⁶ Gorgias' incoherent conception of justice is the proximal reason why he says inconsistent things about justice, though he wrongly purports to know and teach it.

This interpretation makes optimal sense of why Gorgias admits to teaching justice, readily agrees when Socrates argues that knowing justice makes you just, and yet implies that his students sometimes act unjustly. Further, on this reading Gorgias' position is like Protagoras'. Both claim to teach a virtue, whether justice or wisdom. Both advertise their teaching as surpassingly good. Because they claim to teach a surpassingly great good – i.e., something unconditionally good – neither can admit that the value of their teaching is conditioned on further facts about their students' psyches. Yet both recognize that those who have learned what they can teach sometimes act foolishly or unjustly.

4.2.2 *Polus and Protagoras on justice*

The parallel between Polus and Protagoras is easiest to establish, but presents some superficial difficulties. Protagoras thinks injustice can be prudent, but is ashamed to say so. In contrast, Polus says openly that it is better to do injustice than to suffer it (473a, 474b), and he says that injustice is often prudent, not merely when it helps one to avoid suffering injustice (470d–71d). However, Polus is ashamed to say that doing injustice is nobler than suffering it; rather, he says that doing injustice is more shameful (*G.* 474c). When Socrates suggests that the good and noble are the same (474b), Polus astutely disagrees. However, he accepts a close relative of that claim (474d–75b), which suffices to refute him (475b–e).²⁷

²⁶ See further 7.1. For now, notice that unjust use of oratory involves appropriating goods produced by other crafts, e.g., health and wealth (452e), and robbing them of their reputation for wisdom (456b–c, 457a–b). That is, Gorgias works with an implicit conception of benefit and harm that takes bodily and reputational goods as objects one will seek for oneself and one's friends, at the expense of one's enemies.

²⁷ Vlastos 1991 and Kahn 1983, in different ways, think Socrates plays fast and loose with the parties for whom doing and suffering injustice are bad, shameful, or painful. However, his argument is valid. Doing injustice is more shameful for the person who does injustice than suffering injustice is for the person who suffers it. So, doing injustice is either worse or more painful for the person who does it than suffering injustice is for the person who suffers it. But doing injustice is not more painful for the person who does injustice than suffering injustice is for the person who suffers it. So, doing injustice

Why does Polus proclaim that doing injustice is prudent while being ashamed to say it is noble? Perhaps he concedes that doing injustice is more shameful “because *that is what everyone will say* (regardless of what they really think).”²⁸ But most people also refuse to say that injustice is prudent, regardless of what they really think (cf. 5.1). Perhaps he says openly that injustice is prudent because he is impulsive (463e), and unlike Gorgias he “has no international reputation to lose.”²⁹ But then, why should he not say openly that doing injustice is also nobler than suffering it? In any case, both Polus and Protagoras think injustice is prudent, but each is ashamed to endorse injustice fully. This similarity is more important than accounting for differences in the exact shape of their shame.

4.2.3 *Callicles and Protagoras on hedonism*

Some scholars think Callicles is ashamed of his hedonism, or certain consequences of it, and that his refutation turns on that shame.³⁰ Others deny that Callicles is ashamed of his hedonism or its consequences;³¹ on this view, his refutation does not depend on any shame. I argue instead that Callicles feels shame at certain consequences of his hedonism, but that Socrates’ ultimate refutations of Callicles do not depend on his shame. Unlike Gorgias and Polus, Callicles persists through his shame to avoid being refuted (494e–95c), and Socrates refutes Callicles with arguments that make no appeal to shame (495c–99b).³² In reply, Callicles promptly rejects unqualified hedonism (499b–c). He is still ashamed to endorse that view openly, and persevering in it after he is refuted no longer serves the purpose of avoiding procedural shame.

Consider first the context of this exchange over hedonism. Callicles identifies what is good with what is naturally, not conventionally, noble. Polus said that injustice is good but shameful, because injustice is conventionally shameful. Callicles insists that natural justice – which convention calls “injustice” – is both good and naturally noble. According to natural justice, the superior rule and get a larger share. Socrates overlooks that because he loves philosophy, which leaves him ineffective in civic affairs and so vulnerable to others (483a–86d). Socrates now pushes

is worse for the person who does injustice than suffering injustice is for the person who suffers it.

There is no good reason to think that the first premise is dialectically improper. (Cp. Berman 1991a.)

²⁸ Kahn 1983, 94. ²⁹ Kahn 1983, 84. ³⁰ Kahn 1983; McKim 1988; Moss 2005.

³¹ Cooper 1999.

³² Chapter 6 discusses the arguments themselves, and Chapter 8 discusses why Callicles is ashamed (while this chapter argues merely that he is).

Callicles to refine his claim that under conditions of natural justice, the superior rule and get more. The superior do not excel in brute strength (488b–89d), nor in intelligence about any old craft (489e–91a); they are intelligent about politics and also courageous (491a–d). Likewise, the larger share that the superior get in conditions of natural justice consists not in the goods provided directly by the intelligence of any old craft (489e–91a), but in whatever they hanker for – the objects of whatever craft they like (491b–92e). (This aspiration is familiar from Gorgias' advertisement for rhetoric, which talked about making other crafts work for you [452e] and taking their reputation for wisdom [456b–c, 457a–b]. It also appeared in Polus' view about the benefits of oratory [466c].) In this way, the superior live pleasantly and well (494a–c).³³ Callicles' hedonism comes out clearly at this stage, but he freely expresses his concern with appetites and pleasures early on (484d5–6). Moreover, earlier he exhorts Gorgias to continue the conversation using pleasure terminology (ἡσθη, 458d2; χαριεῖσθε, 458d4), and earlier still he uses the language of appetitive desire to describe Socrates' desire to hear Gorgias (ἐπιθυμεῖ, 447b4). Chairephon, in contrast, uses the language of rational desire on both occasions (βουλομένων, 458c4; βούλη, 447b3).

Once Callicles' hedonist commitments are fully exposed,³⁴ he and Socrates have the following exchange (494c4–95c2):

Very good, my good man! Do carry on the way you've begun, and take care not to be ashamed [ἀπαισχυνη]. And I evidently shouldn't shrink from being ashamed [ἀπαισχυνησθαι], either. Tell me now first whether a man who has an itch and scratches it and can scratch to his heart's content [ἀφθόνως], scratching his whole life long [διατελοῦντα τὸν βίον], can also live happily.

What nonsense, Socrates. You're a regular crowd pleaser [δημηγόρος].

That's just how I shocked Polus and Gorgias and made them be ashamed [αἰσχύνεσθαι]. You certainly won't be shocked, however, or ashamed [αἰσχυνησθαι], for you're a brave man [ἀνδρεῖος]. Just answer me, please.

I say that even the man who scratches would have a pleasant life.

And if a pleasant one, a happy one, too?

Yes, indeed.

³³ As Cooper 1999 rightly says against White 1985, Callicles' view is not a variety of present-aim hedonism in contrast to prudential hedonism. Callicles thinks the superior are capable of satisfying their desires on any occasion, not that they are indifferent to future satisfactions. Cooper does not say – though I think he would find the point congenial – that Callicles criticizes pleasures that he thinks undermine reliable desire-satisfaction, and in particular the pleasures of philosophy (484c).

³⁴ Some scholars claim that Socrates foists hedonism off on Callicles, whose main commitment is to the idea that some people are naturally superior and rule as a matter of natural justice. Notice, though, that Socrates agrees with the latter commitment.

What if he scratches only his head – or what am I to ask you further? See what you'll answer if somebody asked you one after the other every question that comes next. And isn't the climax of this sort of thing, the life of the sexual profligate [ὁ τῶν κιναιδῶν βίος], a frightfully shameful [αἰσχρὸς] and miserable one? Or will you have the nerve [τολμήσεις] to say that they are happy as long as they have what they need to their heart's content [ἀφθόνως]?

Aren't you ashamed [αἰσχύνῃ], Socrates, to bring our discussion to such matters?

Is it I who bring them there, my splendid fellow, or is it that man who claims, just like that [ἀνέδην οὕτω] that those who enjoy themselves, however they may be doing it, are happy, and doesn't discriminate between good kinds of pleasures and bad? Tell me now too whether you say that the pleasant and the good are the same or whether there is some pleasure that isn't good.

Well, to keep my argument [λόγος] from being inconsistent if I say that they're different, I say they're the same.

You're wrecking your earlier statements, Callicles, and you'd no longer be adequately inquiring into the truth of the matter with me if you speak contrary to what you think [παρὰ τὰ δοκοῦντα σαυτῷ].

You do it too, Socrates.

In that case it isn't right for me to do it, if it's what I do, or for you either. But consider, my marvelous friend, surely the good isn't just unrestricted enjoyment [τὸ πάντως χαίρειν]. For both those many shameful things [αἰσχρά] hinted at just now obviously follow if this is the case, and many others as well.

That's your opinion, Socrates.

Do you really assert these things, Callicles?

Yes, I do.

So we're to undertake the discussion on the assumption that you're in earnest?

Most certainly.

This exchange parallels Protagoras' shame over hedonism (*Pr.* 351b–d). I begin with some reminders about that passage. Socrates there must discuss the unconditional good rather than the conditional goods achieved by the crafts that he mentioned in his first argument about courage and wisdom. He suspects that Protagoras has hedonist sympathies, so he introduces a hedonist conception of the unconditional good. Protagoras agrees at first, but he soon raises the spectre of shameful pleasures by insisting that the good life must consist of pleasures taken in noble things. He then explains his retreat: sticking to hedonism would be safer with respect to his present answer, but not with respect to his whole life. He could more easily avoid refutation if he stuck to hedonism,

and being refuted will erode his intellectual reputation. But escaping refutation here has other, greater costs. It would be outrageous to endorse shameful pleasures as constituents of the good life that he helps people to achieve by teaching them good council (εὐβουλίᾳ). Qualifying his hedonism is thus safer with respect to his whole life; so, Protagoras retreats from unqualified hedonism.

The exchange between Socrates and Callicles parallels several of these points. One exception is that Callicles makes no claim to teach good council. If he did, he might face more social pressure to disavow hedonism. Otherwise, though: Callicles gets annoyed with Socrates for suggesting that he thinks the superior will have a greater share of this or that conditional good, according to natural justice (490b–91b). Instead, he offers a candidate unconditional good: having a greater share of whatever they like, and so having a greater share of any and every sort of pleasure (491d–94c). But Protagoras realizes on his own that he must qualify his hedonism to cover only pleasures taken in noble things, while Socrates must explicitly bring Callicles to see the shameful consequences of his view.

Socrates pre-emptively urges Callicles not to be ashamed at his next questions, and suggests that even asking such questions might be considered shameful. Callicles has said that the good life consists in having unrestrained appetites, being able to fulfill them, and taking pleasure in those fulfillments. Socrates asks about a life of unrestrained itching, being able to scratch, and taking pleasure in scratching.³⁵ When Callicles resists answering, Socrates thinks he is on the verge of demurring out of shame, and exhorts him to persevere through that shame. He then alludes to a series of other shameful pleasures he could ask about, culminating in his most shocking question: whether Callicles endorses the life of the κίνοιδος, a man of unrestrained sexual desires, provided that he can always fulfill his sexual appetites and take pleasure in them.³⁶ Socrates calls this life shameful and suggests that Callicles will have to be daring – he will have to persist through his shame – to endorse such a life. (I attempt to explain *why* Callicles finds the example of the sexual profligate

³⁵ Socrates seems to think of itching as an appetite to scratch, just as thirst is an appetite to drink and hunger an appetite to eat (494b–c).

³⁶ On the standard view, the κίνοιδος specifically desires anal penetration; Davidson 1997, 167–82 argues that this is part of his larger sexual insatiability, or even of his overall femininity, which includes sexual insatiability but not primarily a desire for penetration as such. (Davidson even suggests that the κίνοιδος is an extreme general profligate, without special reference to sex. However, sexual profligacy is clearly central to who the κίνοιδος is, even if he is also profligate with respect to his other appetites.)

shameful in [Chapter 8](#), after I have said more about hedonism and its ramifications.)

Callicles asks whether he is not ashamed even to mention such matters (as Socrates anticipated). But obviously, if Callicles boggles at Socrates' shamelessness in asking this question, he would be ashamed to endorse such a life. However, it would also be shameful for Callicles to be refuted by Socrates, especially after insisting that he knows how to live and that Socrates is babbling. Callicles must either admit inconsistent views and incur the shame of being refuted, or else he must endure the shame of endorsing sexual profligacy so as to remain unrefuted. This is the same choice that Protagoras faces, though Protagoras sees it coming sooner and makes the opposite decision. Gorgias and Polus likewise weigh shameful courses of action against each other, as Socrates says: "they've come to such a depth of shame [αἰσχύνης] that, because they are ashamed [αἰσχύνεσθαι], each of them dares [τολμᾷ] to contradict himself, face to face with many people [ἐναντίον πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων], and on topics of the greatest importance" (487b). The concern not to say something shameful and the concern not to be refuted and so revealed as lacking wisdom, or as lacking the ability to argue, often crop up individually (cf. 4.1.2). In these cases, both concerns arise together, so that love of reputation pulls in two different directions.

Socrates' ensuing anti-hedonist arguments (495e–99b) depend not at all on shame; Callicles agrees to nothing because he would be ashamed not to.³⁷ After those arguments, his situation changes. Before, he chose the shame of endorsing shameful pleasures over the shame of being refuted by rejecting them. After Socrates' arguments, he has incurred both the shame of endorsing shameful pleasures and the shame of refutation. To avoid both sources of shame, he now disavows unqualified hedonism and insists that he only agreed to it, and its consequences, as a joke (cf. *Pr.* 349c–d; *G.* 461b, 481b–c; *Ap.* 26e–27a). *His* position has not been refuted, he says – though he repeatedly avowed the refuted view (495a–c) – so no shame of refutation attaches to him. Further, whatever restrictions he now places on his hedonism will exclude lives arranged around shameful pleasures. Hence, he also avoids the substantive shame of openly endorsing unqualified hedonism and its consequences.

³⁷ Again, [Chapter 6](#) discusses these arguments and shows that they do not depend on shame. Kahn 1983, in contrast, says that the "argument from opposites" (495e–97a, 497b–d) is merely a distraction that softens up Callicles, and that the "argument from pleased cowards" (497e–99b) relies on his shame.

4.3 Socrates on sophistry and oratory in the *Gorgias*

In between his refutations of Gorgias and Polus (462b–65e), and again later (500a–2d), Socrates gives accounts of sophistry and oratory. He calls each a knack (ἐμπειρία) and a kind of flattery (κολακεία) aimed at pleasure. Sophistry and oratory are two of four knacks for producing pleasure; they are directed at the soul, while cosmetics and cookery (literally, delicacy-making) are directed at the body. Each of these practices imitates a craft that aims at the good of the body or soul. Oratory and sophistry “wear the masks” of justice and legislation, the parts of political expertise; cookery and cosmetics imitate medicine and gymnastics, respectively. These claims – that oratory and sophistry are aimed at pleasure and that they imitate justice and legislation, the parts of political expertise – are reflected in Plato's depictions of sophists and orators in both the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*.

Protagoras claims to teach good deliberation, which he identifies with political expertise (*Pr.* 318e–19a). Teaching an expertise requires having it, so Protagoras presents himself as a political expert. The language of “good deliberation” (εὐβουλία) even suggests legislative aspects of politics rather than judicial aspects. Plato encourages us to doubt his self-presentation, but Protagoras “wears the mask” of the political expert. Further, he is a hedonist who teaches others how to organize their lives; whatever he teaches in that vein will thus aim at pleasure – a form of flattery, by Plato's lights. The talk of “wearing a mask” suggests both the presentation of an outer image and concealment of a deeper truth. Since the outer image concerns justice and benefit, the deeper truth will concern the same topics. We know that Protagoras is ashamed to endorse hedonism and injustice openly, so he conceals his views behind a publicly acceptable veneer. Socrates strips off sophistry's mask to reveal its underlying ugliness, while Protagoras resists that revelation.

Things are more complicated in the *Gorgias*. Socrates engages three characters extensively, and one cannot assume that all three represent common views and concerns. E. R. Dodds proposed one relationship among the conversations: “Gorgias' teaching is the seed of which the Calliclean way of life is the poisonous fruit.”³⁸ This rhetorically satisfying phrase has become conventional wisdom.³⁹ Dodds unquestionably merits

³⁸ Dodds 1959, 15.

³⁹ See, e.g., Kahn 1983, 84 and Kamtekar 2005, 335–36. Irwin 1995b rejects the view that Gorgias' teaching is responsible for Callicles' condition (without mentioning Dodds). However, he does not consider the alternative relationship I suggest just below.

scholarly piety, but here his verdict is backwards. Socrates does not examine the social consequences of Gorgias' teaching. Rather, he pursues the principles of oratory, back through its distorted conception of justice, to its hedonist conception of the good. Both of these are implicit in the discussion with Gorgias, who locates justice in helping friends and harming enemies (456d–57a), and benefit in getting whatever one likes that the other crafts produce (452e). Polus expresses more clearly the aim of pleasure (462c–d) in whatever one likes (466a–68e), and especially the connection between that aim and the prudence of injustice that escapes punishment (468e–81b). Callicles most fully expresses the relevant conception of justice and its connection to benefit, understood as appetite-fulfillment and pleasure (esp. 483b, 486a–b, 492c, 503c).⁴⁰ In response, Socrates finally tracks rhetoric back to its first hedonist principle and critiques that root source of its ethical errors. The dialogue culminates in his critiques of hedonism, which depend not at all on shame. The increasing frankness that Socrates encounters as he proceeds from Gorgias to Polus to Callicles helps him to reason back to oratory's first principles, gradually stripping it of its mask. Socrates then returns on the “downward path,” comparing oratory and its false conceptions of justice and the good with true politics and its knowledge of justice and the good. All of this reflects Socrates' account of oratory as an imitator of justice that aims at pleasure rather than the good.

4.4 Conclusion

The *Gorgias* and *Protagoras* are both deeply structured by the interlocutors' concern for their reputations; that concern surfaces in the form of both procedural and substantive shame. These two dialogues share common points of substantive shame as well – the beliefs that the virtue one teaches is weak, that injustice is prudent or admirable, and that pleasure is the good. The latter two beliefs and their concealment are reflected in Socrates' account of rhetoric and sophistry in the *Gorgias*: they aim at pleasure and imitate political expertise.

The rest of the book deepens and explains these similarities. [Chapter 5](#) discusses how shame and fear of punishment reproduce popular attitudes about virtue and the good, especially in sophists and orators. The popular attitudes thus internalized by sophists and orators include the points of substantive shame shared between the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*, which starts

⁴⁰ See Rudebusch 1999 for a different view of the relationship between Polus and Callicles.

to explain the similarities. Chapters 6 and 7 describe the content and structure of popular values in more detail, starting with the hedonism that is the core commitment of the many, sophists, and orators, and moving on to the misconceptions of virtue that flow from hedonism. Chapter 8 then examines popular hostility to sophists and philosophers (which is the source of substantive shame during each dialogue) in light of intervening material. Taken together, all of this shows how the *Protagoras* exemplifies the negative side of Plato's ethical project: his critique of hedonism, the misconceptions of virtue that flow from hedonism, and the mechanisms by which popular morality as a whole is reproduced and reinforced.

Shame, internalization, and the many

Chapters 3 and 4 argued that the *Gorgias* and *Protagoras* contain parallel structures of procedural and substantive shame. Each work unfolds in part around the interlocutors' concern to avoid two sorts of procedural shame: being publicly refuted and so losing (what they see as) a contest over reputation for wisdom, and publicly refusing to take part in that contest, thereby conceding it. The same characters conceal certain opinions so as to avoid the substantive shame of being seen to hold them.¹ Notably, the interlocutors are ashamed to express roughly the same opinions in each dialogue. I now explain those similarities by appeal to a common cause of the interlocutors' basic opinions about goodness, justice, and virtue: they have internalized majority views through shame and fear of punishment.² This shame (and fear) occurred well before the events of the dialogues – in particular, well before shame suffered within the dialogues, whether procedural or substantive. Indeed, the views that the interlocutors have internalized through shame and fear prior to the dialogues are the very ones they would be ashamed to state openly within the dialogues. In other words, they would be ashamed to reject certain views that they would also be ashamed to profess openly. Such cases are coherent and even familiar; Chapters 7–8 explain them further.

This chapter takes off from recurring references to the many whenever Protagoras suffers substantive shame. I begin by comparing Protagoras' views with those attributed to the many. At first they seem to disagree on

¹ These moments of substantive shame could be glossed as fear of gaining a reputation for injustice (if one professed that injustice is prudent), for intemperance (if one professed hedonism), and for incapacity (if one admits to teaching virtue in a practically ineffective way). They could also involve procedural shame; stating such views openly is foolish, by the lights of the interlocutors and their audience (cf. *Pr.* 353a7–8).

² This is not the only source of their views; see the conclusion and Chapter 6. Chapter 6 also explains the connection between hedonism and strong desires for reputational goods. So, this chapter explains the common points of substantive shame in both dialogues, and this chapter together with the next explains why the interlocutors strongly desire a reputation for wisdom and so are prone to procedural shame.

some topic or topics on which Protagoras feels substantive shame. That makes it seem unlikely that Protagoras has acquired his views by internalizing the many's. So, I argue that Protagoras and the many do in fact hold the same basic views (5.1). Next, I explore Socrates' claims in the *Gorgias* and *Republic* that sophists and orators internalize their basic commitments from the many (5.2). Finally, I examine failed attempts to shame Socrates into popular values in the *Gorgias* and *Crito* (5.3). These exchanges show that Plato does not consider shame a moral sense that conduces infallibly to truth. I conclude with lingering puzzles about popular values and the processes by which they are reproduced and maintained; these help to motivate the rest of the book. As those puzzles show, the social-psychological processes discussed in this chapter do not fully explain the common values held by sophists, orators, and the many; fuller explanation requires an analytically pre-social account of the source of those values.

5.1 Protagoras and the many

Each time that Protagoras suffers substantive shame in the *Protagoras*, the many play a prominent role. First, Protagoras says "I would be ashamed to admit [that injustice can be prudent] . . . though many people do say so" (333c).³ Second, when Protagoras retreats from unqualified hedonism out of shame, Socrates asks, "What, Protagoras? You don't also, as the many do, call some pleasant things bad and some painful things good, do you?" (351c). Third, Socrates asks "Do you think [knowledge] is also as the majority of people think, or otherwise? The many think something like this . . ."; Protagoras denies the many's view out of shame (352c–d). Each time, Socrates tests Protagoras' concealed views under cover of examining the many. This pattern calls out for explanation.

The many seem like an odd proxy for Protagoras. If he speaks earnestly in these three passages, then (i-a) he denies that injustice is ever prudent, while the many think it sometimes is; (ii-a) he denies that all pleasures are intrinsically good, which the many also deny; and (iii-a) he denies that wisdom is weak and can be ruled by the passions, which the many think often happens. On this reading, Protagoras agrees with the many in rejecting

³ The lack of a definite article before πολλοί at 333c2 might leave it open whether Protagoras means the numerical majority or οἱ πολλοί as a class. Heindorf (cited in Adam and Adam 1893, 137) inserts οἱ in keeping with τῶν at c5. Adam and Adam reject the emendation (which I agree is unnecessary) because Protagoras would then misrepresent the many, as seen at *Republic* 348e (here I disagree; see below).

hedonism but disagrees with them about justice and wisdom. If he tries to conceal his views, as I have argued, then it seems that (i-b) Protagoras, like the many, thinks injustice is sometimes prudent; (ii-b) Protagoras, unlike the many, thinks pleasure is the good; and (iii-b) Protagoras, again like the many, thinks wisdom is weak and can be ruled by the passions. That is, he disagrees with them about hedonism, but agrees with them about justice and wisdom. Neither reading has Protagoras and the many agreeing on all three points; that makes it seem hard to argue that he has internalized popular attitudes in all three cases.

To find our way here, we must reflect on the views that Socrates and Protagoras ascribe to the many. First, Protagoras says that “many people say [φασιν]” that injustice can be prudent. The root meaning of φημί is “to state,” but it can also mean “to believe”; this ambiguity is crucial. Plato certainly thinks that the many believe injustice can be prudent. Socrates says in the *Gorgias* that nearly everyone except him thinks an unjust person can be happy (472a–b; cf. 473e–4b, 475d). In the *Republic*, Glaucon says that most people deem justice a necessity, not a good, and Socrates concurs (358a). Glaucon explains: the many think injustice is prudent whenever one can avoid punishment through concealment or force (358b ff.). (Compare *Gorgias* 470a–c: Socrates says that one should kill, banish, and confiscate when these actions are just; Polus says that one should do these when immune from retaliation.) However, if the many believe that injustice is prudent when the unjust person can avoid retaliation, we should not expect them to say so, for two reasons. First, endorsing this view of justice arouses the suspicions of others; second, it effectively advises others to treat the speaker unjustly. So, while Socrates thinks that most people believe injustice is prudent, he also finds it noteworthy when someone says so. The many would be ashamed to state this view openly, for much the same reasons that Protagoras is.

This lesson about popular views of justice extends to the case of pleasure. Outside of the *Protagoras*, Plato describes the many as hedonists. When Socrates introduces the Good in the *Republic*, he says that the many think it is pleasure (505b). In the *Philebus*, he says that popular opinion is hedonist (66e, 67b; cf. 47b). Both times, though, he notes that popular opinion recognizes some pleasures as shameful and bad (*R.* 505c, *Phil.* 65e–66a; cf. *H. Ma.* 299a–b). Overall, then, Plato depicts the many as believing that pleasure is the good but also that some pleasures are shameful and bad. Because of these shameful pleasures, the many will be ashamed to endorse hedonism openly. (In the *Protagoras*, notice, Socrates does not say that the many overtly deny that pleasure is the good; he says only that

they consider some pleasures bad. For all he says there, then, the many's position could be the same inconsistent hedonism that he attributes to them in the *Republic* and *Philebus*.)

Once we spell out popular attitudes about justice and pleasure, then, Protagoras and the many agree on all three topics. Both think that injustice is prudent, but are ashamed to say so. Both think that pleasure is the good, but are ashamed to say so, or to embrace hedonism's logical consequences. Both think that wisdom is weak. Protagoras' strong claim to teach virtue makes it more shameful for him to say openly that wisdom is weak; the many face this problem to a lesser degree, since they do not typically claim to be *peculiarly* well-suited to teach wisdom.⁴ This rescues the possibility of explaining common points of substantive shame in the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*, as well as references to the many in all of Protagoras' moments of substantive shame, by reference to the characters' having internalized the same cluster of popular attitudes in both works.

Even if Protagoras and the many agree on all three points, there is another oddity about using them as a proxy: Protagoras disdains the many.⁵ When Socrates proposes to test the many's views on the strength of wisdom, Protagoras takes a swipe: "people say a lot of other things erroneously too" (352e). When he persists, Protagoras asks, annoyed, why he insists on examining those "who say whatever occurs to them" (353a).⁶ Nor is this the first time that he slights the many. While criticizing his predecessors for hiding the fact that they were sophists, Protagoras says that "they did not manage to escape the notice of powerful people in the cities, which is the reason for these disguises – since the many perceive practically nothing, but recite whatever refrain the powerful call out" (317a–b).⁷

One peculiarity of this last comment heightens the puzzle of why Socrates uses the many as a proxy for Protagoras' views, but it also points to an answer. First, the peculiarity: in Athens, the rulers *are* the many. In Protagoras' situation, then, distinguishing the many from the powerful

⁴ Hence, Socrates examines Protagoras and the many simultaneously at 351b–57e, and he argues, as usual, from a view they accept (hedonism) to a conclusion they reject (that wisdom is strong).

⁵ Kamtekar 2005 addresses a similar puzzle about Callicles' "love of the people"; see n. 25 below.

⁶ Protagoras here criticizes the many for saying what they think, which may show that he is aware of not saying what he thinks and that he considers his reticence a manifestation of his superior wisdom (cf. n. 1 above). One might instead read Protagoras as criticizing the many for lacking a stable view. That seems unlikely; the many do not seem wishy-washy about wisdom's weakness prior to Socratic examination.

⁷ This description of the powerful as leaders of a chorus parallels Socrates' characterization of Protagoras as the leader of a chorus (314e–15b). If Protagoras is part of a chorus led by the many, then his followers themselves follow the many at one remove (cf. *Ion* 535e–36d). See also *Gorgias* 482b–c.

seems confused (cf. *G.* 488b–89b). However, the distinction makes sense if he thinks that Athens under Pericles, for example, was a democracy in name only (cp. Thucydides II.65).⁸ Persuasive speakers were thought to be able effectively to rule Athens. In such political circumstances, capable youths who wanted renown and influence sought to learn how to persuade; in fact, that is why Hippocrates wants to meet Protagoras (312d; cf. 318e–19a; *Soph.* 232d).⁹ So, Protagoras disdains the many and distinguishes them from the powerful because they are easily manipulated and so have only nominal power. They think, feel, and decide whatever a clever speaker persuades them of. (This view surfaces in the *Theaetetus* as well; there, Socrates has Protagoras say that his superior wisdom consists in the ability to change how things seem to the city; 167a–d.)¹⁰

This makes it seem stranger to say that Protagoras has internalized popular opinion. His scorn makes it unlikely that he cares much about the many's opinion of him. Even if he does care, he considers it simple to make them think, feel, and decide whatever he likes, about himself or anything else. He might need to teach local elites how to persuade the many, both in general and on his behalf. But even this has advantages; such teaching cements his friendships with other elites and frees him from the need to engage with the many directly. So again, why would Protagoras internalize the views of the many, whom he scorns and considers easily manipulated, whether directly or through the efforts of others?

The simple answer is that Socrates rejects Protagoras' claim about what sophists and orators accomplish. In the *Gorgias* and *Republic*, he argues that sophists and orators are not fundamentally opinion-makers, but opinion-absorbers. They internalize popular opinions on the most important questions: what justice, beauty, and the good are. This leaves room for sophists and orators to persuade, e.g., to produce certain convictions about justice (cf. *G.* 453a). However, such persuasion proceeds by reference to culturally-accepted views about what justice is. Gorgias and his students can persuade a city to make a treaty or go to war, perhaps, but this

⁸ In the Funeral Oration, Pericles says that Athens both allows a genuine voice to the many and grants public office based on superior ability (Thucydides II.37). How does this fit with II.65? The former passage is supposed to be what Pericles says in public; the later is Thucydides' own observation about Athens. He might think that Pericles simply must say this sort of thing to the many (cf. I.22).

⁹ This makes rhetoric, or something like it, the main attraction of the sophists (cp. *Gorgias* 465c, 520a–b; contrast Nill 1985, 17). I do not claim that early sophists and orators themselves cared about persuasion (see Gagarin 2001 for a skeptical view, focusing on Gorgias); I aim to interpret Plato.

¹⁰ Recall Gorgias' claim that rhetoric is the source of freedom for humanity and rule for individuals (452e). It is the source of freedom because it allows us to live collectively without resorting to force (cf. *Pr.* 322a–d). It is the source of rule because it allows the talented few to set the terms of social cooperation in ways that they could not through sheer force. Cf. Cooper 1999.

persuasion proceeds from the culturally-accepted notion of justice as helping friends and harming enemies. Oratory flatters its audience in part by arguing from their antecedent conception of justice to the claim that some person or action is just or unjust, confirming and reinscribing the audience's belief that it knows justice. However, this persuasive task, as we shall see, requires sharing the many's conception of justice.

5.2.1 *Sophists and the many in the Republic*

In the *Republic*, Socrates says quite explicitly that sophists teach nothing but public opinion on the greatest topics (493a–d):

Each of these private wage-earners – the ones these [the many] call sophists and consider to be their rivals in craft – teaches nothing other than the convictions the many hold when they are assembled together, and this he calls wisdom. It is just as if someone were learning the passions [ὀργάς] and appetites of a huge, strong beast that he is rearing – how to approach and handle it, when it is most difficult to deal with or most docile and what makes it so, what sounds it utters in either condition, and what tones of voice soothe or anger it. Having learned all this through associating and spending time with the beast, he calls this wisdom, gathers his information together as if it were a craft, and starts to teach it.¹¹ Knowing nothing in reality about which of these convictions or appetites is fine or shameful, good or bad, just or unjust, he uses all these terms in conformity with the great beast's beliefs – calling the things it enjoys good and the things that anger it bad. He has no other account to give of them, but calls everything he is compelled to do just and fine, never having seen how much the natures of necessity and goodness really differ, and being unable to explain it to anyone . . . does this person seem any different from the one who believes that wisdom is understanding the passions [ὀργήν] and pleasures of the masses – multifarious people – assembled together, whether in regard to painting, music, or politics for that matter? For if a person associates with the masses and exhibits his poetry or some other piece of craftsmanship to them, or his service to the city, and gives them mastery over him to any degree beyond what is unavoidable, he will be under Diomedean compulsion, as it is called, to produce the things of which they approve.¹²

¹¹ Socrates says here that the sophist's so-called craft comes in part *τριβή*; in the *Gorgias* he calls oratory an *ἐμπειρία καὶ τριβή* (463b, 501a). He probably calls oratory a "routine" insofar as it takes its principles from common beliefs rather than independent inquiry, and he probably calls it a "knack" insofar as it takes its principles from experience, particularly experiences of pleasure (see esp. 484d and Chapter 6), without assessing the evidential value of that experience (465d). Cf. τοῦ εἰωθέτου at 501b.

¹² Irwin 1995b puts this passage at the center of his interpretation of Plato's criticisms of sophistry; he also suggests that it can guide interpretation of the *Protagoras* (579–82).

This indictment of the sophists forms part of Socrates' argument that philosophers should rule the city. He and Glaucon agree that this claim will face hostility (473c–74a), but he defuses the hostility by explaining who the true philosophers are (474b–c). Philosophers love all knowledge (474c–75c), and they love knowledge, not mere opinion (475d–80a). So, they are well-equipped to establish and preserve laws, and if they are at least equal to others in experience and the other virtues, they should rule (484a–d). Socrates then argues that they will have the other virtues, and he describes the natural talents that philosophers need (485a–87a). He is about to discuss the education of those with the requisite natural talents (487a) when Adeimantus interrupts to say that he has not yet removed the hostility that philosophical rule faces (487b–d). Socrates replies in an interlude that contains the passage above (487d–502c); he then returns to proper philosophical education (502c–41b).

Adeimantus concedes the force of Socrates' argument that philosophers should rule, but he notes a mismatch between its conclusion and people's ordinary experience of philosophers as useless or corrupt. Socrates actually grants that philosophers are useless or corrupt, but then he explains why. Decent philosophers are useless because nobody asks them to rule, not because they cannot rule well (487e–89d).¹³ His account of the corrupt philosophers is more complicated, but it has two main aspects. First, those with the talents needed to become philosophers (“natural philosophers”) do tend to be corrupted. Second, when the natural philosophers abandon philosophy, those who are suited for other crafts, but who are particularly clever, take on the mantle of philosophy and seek its reputation for wisdom by producing sophisms (σοφισματα, 496a). When people say that most philosophers are corrupt, they are thinking of these sophists (490e–91a, 495c, 500a–b).¹⁴

The passage about sophists quoted earlier is part of Socrates' explanation for why most natural philosophers are corrupted. The general view is that

¹³ If philosophers wanted to rule, they might not need to be asked, but the true ruler does not want to rule, as Socrates insists early on (347a–d), alludes to here (489b–c), and continues to claim later (519b–20e).

¹⁴ Socrates explains how some natural philosophers escape corruption (496a–e), and seems to conclude his response to Adeimantus (497a), but then continues (498d–99a, 499d–500b, 500d–e, 501c–2a). Why? Against each wave of ridicule of Socrates' political proposals, he argues that his proposal is both desirable and practicable (cf. 450c, 452e, 456b–c, 457a–58b, 461e, 464b, 466d, 471c–e). 487b–97a argues that philosophical rule is desirable; 497a–502c argues that it is practicable despite present social disapproval, and despite the difficulties of persuading the many (*contra* Protagoras). NB Discussion of philosophical rule is needed to show that Socrates' proposed sexual communism is practicable (471c–73e).

these talented youth are corrupted by the sophists (492a), but Socrates thinks the corrupting influence is popular education to “virtue” (492a–d):

Do you too believe, as the masses do, that some young people are corrupted by sophists – that there are sophists, private individuals, who corrupt them to a significant extent? Isn’t it, rather, the very people who say this who are the greatest sophists of all, who educate most effectively and produce young and old men and women of just the sort they want?

When do they do that?

When many of them are together in assemblies, courts, theaters, army camps, or any other gathering of a majority in public and, with a loud uproar, object excessively to some of the things that are said and done, then approve excessively of others, shouting and clapping; and when, in addition to these people themselves, the rocks and the surrounding space itself echo and redouble the uproar of their praise and blame. In a situation like that, how do you think – as the saying goes – a young man’s heart is affected? How will whatever sort of private education he received hold up for him, and not get swept away by such praise and blame, and go be carried off by the flood wherever it goes, so that he will call the same things beautiful and ugly as these people, practice whatever they practice, and become like them?

The compulsion to do so will be enormous, Socrates.

And yet we have not mentioned the greatest compulsion of all.

What is that?

It is what these educators and sophists impose by their actions if their words fail to persuade. Or don’t you know that they punish anyone who is not persuaded, with disenfranchisement, fines, or death?

Socrates describes two mechanisms of popular education: shame and punishment. The public gatherings that he describes tell the youth what opinion others will hold of them if they live in various ways, and how they can expect to be praised or blamed. The youth then call the same things noble and shameful, take up the same practices, and so assimilate themselves to popular opinion. If this mechanism fails, the many fall back on punishment.

The first mechanism assimilates people to the many because praise and blame cause pride and shame. Pride and shame represent things as noble and shameful, respectively. Absent knowledge of the truly noble and shameful, which would enable one to resist what pride and shame say, one’s attitudes about the noble and shameful are shaped by social approval and disapproval. (That is why Socrates says that in the first instance, people end up calling the same things beautiful and ugly as the many, not another pair of opposites.) One then acts on the attitudes so instilled, i.e., practices them (ἐπιτηδεύειν); such practice reinforces the attitudes acted upon, which bolsters and completes one’s assimilation.

It is harder to say why punishment, or fear of punishment, assimilates the punished person to the punisher. (Parallel points apply to rewards and the hope for rewards.) First, punishment might signal disapproval of one's actions or oneself more strongly than mere blame. In that case, one might feel shame at the bad opinion that punishment signals, but not at the punishment itself. Second, one might fear the opinion of those with the power to punish – be ashamed before them – for the sake of the punishment they can inflict.¹⁵ Third, one might be ashamed of one's incapacity to avoid punishment (see further 5.3). Finally, fear of punishment might shape one's attitudes directly, without any need for shame. Insofar as fear alters one's behavior, and insofar as actions based on certain notions of benefit and harm reinforce those notions, the attempt to avoid punishment might transfer the seeming badness of punishment onto the actions for which one is punished. This would happen roughly as one might move from fearing the dark because one fears predators to fearing the dark even in the absence of any predators. Socrates thinks this happens with desire, as when desire for money continues past the point at which money has instrumental value. The crucial point is *that* Socrates thinks people are assimilated to popular opinion through shame and fear of punishment.¹⁶

Socrates' proximal goal is to replace the common opinion that sophists corrupt the youth with his claim that the many corrupt the youth. More distally, he aims to show that the many think most philosophers are corrupt because they are thinking of those corrupt pseudo-philosophers, the sophists. But his sketch of how popular education corrupts the natural philosophers also explains the corruption of the sophists. When he says that the many "produce young and old men and women of just the sort they want," this is a *general* account of how the many corrupt. Further, popular shame and punishment explain not only why any education contrary to popular opinion is ineffective (492d), but also why sophists do not even try to educate contrary to popular opinion (492e).¹⁷ Socrates, in light of *that* fact (493a4), compares sophists to those enslaved to the passions and appetites of a beast (493a–d). The implication is that sophists, like almost everyone else, are assimilated to popular views of the good,

¹⁵ Aristotle denies that this would be shame: "Shame is the imagination of disgrace [*adoxias*], in which we shrink from the disgrace itself *and not from its consequences*" (*Rhet.* II.6).

¹⁶ However, I think it more likely that Plato would accept one of the mechanisms involving shame; consider how Socrates imagines people talking to him at his trial: "Are you not ashamed, Socrates, to have followed the kind of occupation that has led to your being now in danger of death?" (28b).

¹⁷ Socrates here emphasizes that no *human* practice resists education in popular virtue (cf. 500b). This recalls the characterizations of both Protagoras and Gorgias as engaged in specifically human practices (*Pr.* 328e, 352d, *G.* 451d; cf. *G.* 484d), in contrast to Socrates' divine practice.

noble, and just through shame and punishment. At best, but also at worst, the sophists are systematizing middle-men of popular education to virtue.¹⁸

Socrates soon explains how natural philosophers are particularly vulnerable to corruption, especially when favored with external goods (494a–95a); I return to this and related matters in [Chapter 8](#), which also adds detail concerning the social dynamics in play. For now, my main goal is to establish that Plato thinks that sophists and orators internalize popular opinions about the good, noble, and just. In the *Republic*, Socrates says as much about sophists (and painters, musicians, and politicians; 493d and cf. 602a–b, 604d–5a). He makes similar claims about oratory and ordinary politics in the *Gorgias*.

5.2.2 *Callicles and the many in the Gorgias*

When Callicles takes over the discussion, Socrates says that he loves the people and cannot contradict them (481d–82a; ἀντιλέγειν, ἐναντιοὔσθαι). Because Callicles cannot contradict his beloveds, and his beloveds are unstable and conflicted, he himself is unstable and conflicted – he has internalized incoherent popular opinion. (In contrast, Socrates’ love of stable, harmonious philosophy makes him stable and harmonious.) Callicles accuses Socrates in kind: he shamed Gorgias and Polus by appealing to conventional standards (482c–83b; cf. [Chapter 4](#)). Callicles then explains the origins of those conventional standards and their hold over Gorgias, Polus, and others (483b–c); after sketching the standard of natural justice, on which the superior get a greater share, Callicles then returns to conventional justice (483e–84a):

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 frighten¹⁹ the more powerful among men, the ones who are capable of having a greater share, and so they say that getting more than one’s 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 like getting an equal share, since they are inferior. These are the reasons why trying to get a

¹⁸ Is assimilation to the many a peculiar feature of democratic politics? In the *Republic*, oligarchs and tyrants also assimilate themselves to the many (551d–e, 564e–65b, 578d–79a), and this seems related to Socrates’ comments about the brute force of the masses in the *Gorgias* (488c–89c). In an aristocracy, the rulers actually persuade the many (*R.* 463a–b, 498d–502a), as they do not in other regimes.

¹⁹ Zeyl 1987 has “they’re afraid of,” but ἐκφοβοῦντες is active, not passive.

greater share than most is said to be unjust and shameful by law and why they call it doing what's unjust.

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 [καλόν] and just.

Callicles agrees with the Socrates of the *Republic*, at least,²⁰ on two points. First, the many use praise and blame to frighten the best and most capable into conformity with popular opinions about what is just and noble. Given the references to praise and blame, more specifically they shame them into conformity. On this view, Socrates continues the many's project when he shames Gorgias and Polus. Second, the many establish not just behavioral conformity with their standards of the just and noble, but also inward agreement.

However, there is a crucial difference. Socrates says in the *Republic* that the many externalize not only their opinions about the just and noble, but also their opinions about the good. Callicles criticizes conventional standards of justice and nobility, but he is silent about conventional standards of the good. The reason is that he accepts conventional standards of the good. For example, Callicles considers it worse to suffer injustice than to do it (483a–b), on the standards of (what he considers) naturally bad and shameful, which coincide. Socrates agrees that the naturally bad and shameful coincide, but considers the opinion that suffering justice is worse than doing it a paradigmatically conventional attitude. Socrates and Callicles actually agree that Polus is refuted because he does not adhere consistently to natural standards of the good and noble, which coincide. Callicles thinks that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it only by convention, while suffering injustice is worse than doing it by nature. Socrates thinks that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it by nature and convention both, while doing injustice is worse than suffering it by nature but not by convention. Socrates and Callicles thus advocate different strategies for harmonizing the naturally good and naturally noble.²¹

²⁰ Moss 2005 argues that Socrates in the *Gorgias* considers shame purely improving, while Callicles considers it purely corrupting; in the *Republic*, Socrates develops a more satisfactory hybrid view. Kahn 1983 and McKim 1988 agree that Socrates sees shame as a perfectly reliable moral sense in the *Gorgias*. I think Socrates and Callicles both hold more nuanced views of shame in the *Gorgias*.

²¹ Socrates argued from Polus' agreement that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it to the conclusion that doing injustice is worse than suffering it (474c–75e). Callicles responds by drawing a *modus tollens* inference to Socrates' *modus ponens*. This is the problem Plato finds pressing, as he would not if he thought the earlier argument were fallacious; cf. Chapter 4, n. 27.

Callicles' criticism of conventional justice reveals his conventional views about good and bad. He says that according to natural justice, the superior get more and the inferior less, while according to conventional justice, all get an equal share. These are incomplete formulas; one must supply what the greater, lesser, or equal share is *of*. Clearly, these are shares of goods; according to Callicles, nature and convention disagree over distribution of goods. For these views of justice to conflict, though, the goods whose distribution they fix must be the same goods. So, Callicles implicitly commits himself to conventional views of good and bad even as he criticizes conventional views of justice and injustice. (By Socrates' lights, both the view of justice that Callicles rejects as conventional and the one he accepts as natural express merely conventional views. Both concern the distribution of goods that are conventionally more important but naturally less important than other goods.)

Predictably, then, Socrates next targets conventional standards of good and bad. Callicles accepts conventional standards on which power is a great good, so Socrates shows that he thereby commits himself to conventional standards of the just and noble as well (488d–9b). Next, he inquires more deeply into Callicles' view of the good, confirming his commitment to hedonism (490a–95e). Finally, he refutes hedonism (495e–99b).

During that exchange, conventional views of courage and temperance also surface. First, Callicles says the superior must be not only intelligent but also courageous (491b–d). That is to say, with Protagoras and the many, that wisdom differs from courage. The latter is an additional condition of the psyche that bolsters wisdom's deliverances and guarantees that it is not ruled by fear. In fact, as Socrates prepares to refute Callicles' hedonism, he reviews hedonism and the distinction between wisdom and courage as a single target (495c–e). Second, right after Callicles distinguishes courage from wisdom, Socrates asks whether the superior "rule themselves" in the many's sense – whether they are temperate (σώφρονα), controlled (ἐγκρατῆ), and rule their pleasures and appetites (491d–e). This question has sometimes been thought sudden and peculiar, but the pattern of questioning recalls the *Protagoras*. Both Callicles and Protagoras accept hedonism and think that wisdom can be ruled by fear, so that it needs an additional virtue, courage. In each case, Socrates replies by asking whether wisdom can be ruled by pleasure as well as fear.²² As further

²² Socrates does not deny that one can rule or be ruled by one's pleasures and desires in the *Protagoras*; he simply insists that being ruled by one's pleasures is ignorance (357e); by implication, ruling one's pleasures is wisdom. (Callicles, in contrast, identifies ruling one's pleasures with ignorance; 491e.) For more on hedonism, courage, and temperance, see 7.2.

evidence that this whole conversation examines Callicles' conventional views about good and virtue, notice that Socrates next says that others think the same things, but will not say so (492d).

Socrates later returns to his claim that Callicles has internalized conventional views. This happens when he reintroduces the question of whether doing or suffering injustice is more shameful and worse by nature (508c–9b). If suffering injustice is worse, as Callicles says, then how should one protect against the greater harm (509b–d)? They agree that one should either rule the city or befriend the ruler (510a).²³ But rulers fear their superiors and despise their inferiors. So, in keeping with the saying that like is friend to like, befriending the ruler requires being like the ruler (510b–c). The way to avoid suffering injustice, then, is to praise and blame the same things as the ruler (ψέγων καὶ ἐπαινῶν, 510c8; cp. *R.* 492b–c) and to like and dislike the same things (χαίρειν καὶ ἄχθεσθαι, 510d7; cp. *R.* 493a–d). The same friendship that protects against suffering injustice, though, also grants the ability to do injustice without fear of retaliation. Thus, striving above all to avoid suffering injustice results in a far greater bad, corruption of the soul (510d–11a).²⁴

Callicles focuses on how awful it is to suffer injustice and to be unable to protect oneself against it (511a–b). So, Socrates offers a more modest vision of the benefits of not suffering injustice (511c–12e). He then returns to the costs of avoiding suffering injustice by assimilating oneself to the ruler (512e–13c):

[One who is truly a man] should . . . give consideration to how he might live the part of his life still before him as well as possible. Should it be by becoming like the regime under which he lives? In that case you should now be making yourself as much like the Athenian people as possible if you expect to endear yourself to them and have great power in the city. Please see whether this profits you and me, my friend . . . Our choice of this kind of civic power will cost us what is most dear. If you think that some person or other will hand out a craft of the sort that will give you great power in this city while you are unlike the regime, whether for better or for worse, then in my opinion, Callicles, you're not well advised. You mustn't be their imitator but be naturally like them in your own person if you expect to produce any genuine result toward winning the friendship of the Athenian people . . . Whoever then turns you out to be most like these men, he'll make you a politician in the way you desire to be one, and an orator, too. For each group

²³ This comparison of the value of crafts or quasi-crafts is a recurrent theme – in Callicles' rant (484c–86d), in Socrates' last refutation of Polus (477e–78d), and in the initial exchange with Gorgias (451d–52d).

²⁴ Presumably, part of the reason is that the ruler expects friends to do unjust things with and for them.

of people takes delight in [χαίρουσι] speeches that are given in its own character, and resents [ἄχθονται] those given in an alien character – unless you say something else, my dear friend. Can we say anything in reply to this, Callicles?

This restates Socrates' recent argument with more emphasis on some points. For example, he says more explicitly that one cannot simply pretend to be like the ruler, which he earlier implied by saying that the ruler's friend not only praises and blames the same things but also likes and dislikes the same things. There are difficulties about *why* Socrates thinks that mere pretence is impossible here, but it is clear *that* he considers it impossible.²⁵

This leads Callicles to say that Socrates speaks well but does not persuade him. To explain Callicles' feeling, Socrates returns to his love of the people (513c–d):

I don't know how it is that I think you're right [μοι . . . δοκεῖς εὔ λέγειν], Socrates, but the thing that happens to most people [τὸ τῶν πολλῶν πάθος] has happened to me; I'm not really persuaded by you.

It's your love for the people, Callicles, existing in your soul, that stands against me.²⁶ But if we closely examine these same matters often and in a better way, you'll be convinced.

Whatever frequent, improved examination might accomplish, another round of the same does little for Callicles. To the end, he focuses on the awfulness of suffering injustice and being unable to protect oneself against

²⁵ Kamtekar 2005 asks why Socrates calls Callicles a lover of the people, given his disdain for them. She answers that Callicles loves the people in that he gets his conception of the good from them. She argues for this claim in several steps. She first juxtaposes Callicles' desire for power with Socrates' claim that power requires assimilation to the ruler, and asks why one cannot pretend to be like the ruler. She considers but rejects the idea that rulers can simply tell genuine from sham likeness. If the relevant assimilation is assimilation in one's conception of the good, the question is refined: why does political power require that one's conception of the good is really like the ruler's? Kamtekar says that: (i) seeking power reveals prior assimilation to the regime's conception of the good; and (ii) the actions needed to gain power reinforce that conception. The first part of this proposal assumes what must be explained, and the second part relies on the first. (The need for commitment to the regime's conception of the good before assimilation can start is, I think, inevitable. There is no ultimate account of assimilation without an analytically pre-cultural story about that conception's intrinsic attractiveness. Then, cultural assimilation can do a great deal of explanatory work.) Ultimately, Kamtekar suggests that Callicles' core commitment is to getting more, which leaves him liable to seek more of whatever those around him seek. (In contrast, I think that Callicles' hedonism lands him with the idea that living well requires getting more, and that we must make sense of why hedonism is tempting independent of cultural influences.)

²⁶ Kamtekar 2005 suggests that Socrates is premature in declaring that Callicles loves the people at 48d. However, he implies here that Callicles' preference for doing injustice over suffering it reveals his love of the people. That is the preference that provokes Callicles' initial intervention, where he says that Socrates' contrary view overturns human life. So, Socrates' claim is not premature, though it is proleptic.

it (521a–c, 522c).²⁷ Hence, the quote above is often considered an emblem of Callicles' peculiar recalcitrance, indeed as revealing Plato's doubt that Socratic moral psychology can deal with someone like Callicles, so that he develops a new moral psychology in the *Republic*. This is an odd reading. Callicles sees his experience as commonplace – he calls it “the many's experience.” Socrates seems to agree when he replies that Callicles' experience is due to his love of the people.

Instead, compare what Adeimantus says most people experience when Socrates argues (487b–d; $\pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\chi\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\nu$, 487b3). His listeners see the logical force of his arguments, but they are not persuaded. They think Socrates argues eristically (cp. *G.* 497a). They find philosophers useless or corrupt, and they blame persistence in philosophy for that outcome (cf. *G.* 485a–e, 520a). When Socrates mentions Callicles' love of the people, he stresses that the two of them share $\pi\acute{\alpha}\theta\eta$ of love that let them communicate, and he notes how hard it would be to convey a unique experience (481c–d). In his response to Adeimantus, Socrates introduces a unique and hard-to-communicate $\pi\acute{\alpha}\theta\omicron\varsigma$, that of the decent philosopher in an ill-governed city (488a; cf. 604e). This corresponds to no other single experience, and must be conveyed through an image composed of other, shared experiences (*R.* 488a). Socrates' ensuing “ship of state” image closely resembles his attempts to explain his political situation to Callicles with the image of a doctor vying in court with a delicacy-maker (*G.* 521e–22c).

These parallels confirm that Plato has stable concerns about elite relations with the many across the *Gorgias* and *Republic*. To a first approximation, he accepts a stable social-psychological account of how and why sophists and orators internalize popular views. This stable account identifies the etiology of the opinions about the good, noble, and just that Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles hold but are ashamed to state openly. Those opinions closely parallel the views Protagoras is ashamed of (cf. [Chapter 4](#)). Further, each time that Protagoras is ashamed of his views and refuses to say what he believes, the many serve as a proxy for Socrates to examine (cf. [Chapter 3](#)). This use of the many as a proxy (*Pr.* 333b–34c, 351b–57e) is appropriate not only because Protagoras happens to hold views that the many do, but because the shared views are no accident. They result from Protagoras' having internalized, through shame and fear of punishment, popular attitudes about the good, noble, and just. Likewise, his conception

²⁷ In this respect, most readers of the *Gorgias* are closer to Callicles than to Socrates. Standard descriptions of Callicles (e.g., “immoralist”) function as ritual denunciations that let us side notionally with Socrates while avoiding the self-examination that he calls us to.

of education – as the inculcation of socially-accepted attitudes and behaviors through shame and the fear of punishment (*Pr.* 325a–26d) – reflects the popular conception of education that Socrates describes in the *Republic* and *Gorgias*. Protagoras has thus internalized his conception of education from the many as well.²⁸

5.3 Failed externalizations of popular opinion onto Socrates

One doubt about this argument stems from an interpretive framework that sees the *Protagoras* as a “Socratic” dialogue, the *Republic* as a post-“Socratic” dialogue, and the *Gorgias* as transitional between these two phases. So, I now show that a paradigmatically “Socratic” work, the *Crito*, reflects the same concern with elite internalization of popular views about the good, noble, and just.²⁹ I start from passages in which Polus and Callicles attempt to externalize popular views onto Socrates, and then I discuss parallel passages in the *Crito*.

When Polus tries to persuade Socrates that suffering injustice is worse than doing it, he appeals to popular opinion (473e; cf. 471e–72d), frightens him with bogeys (473c–d), and laughs at him (473e). The appeal to popular opinion is the core of this approach; the bogeys are consequences of a bad reputation, and laughter responds to someone out of step with common sense.³⁰ Polus uses shame and fear of punishment in an attempt to persuade Socrates of the same views of justice and benefit that he has internalized from the many.³¹

Callicles makes similar efforts throughout the last part of the *Gorgias*. Philosophy ruins one’s chances at renown (εὐδοκίμον, 484d2) and pre-eminence (ἀριπρεπεῖς, 485d6), makes one laughable (καταγέλαστοι, 484e1; καταγέλαστον, 485a7), by implication shameful (αἰσχρόν, 485a5), and in need of a beating (πληγῶν . . . δεῖσθαι, 485d2). When Callicles

²⁸ This explains why Protagoras, like Polus, regularly appeals to the views of the Athenians (322d, 324c–d, 328c) and to what “everyone” thinks (323a, 324c), without any appeal to the *homo mensura* doctrine.

²⁹ A full discussion of internalization and the many in Plato would consider passages in “late” dialogues as well, especially the Athenian’s discussion of music, popular opinion, pleasure, and virtue in *Laws* II–III. I cannot adequately address those passages here.

³⁰ This point about ridicule is prominent in *Republic* V–VI. Dodds 1959 and Irwin 1979 both helpfully compare Polus’ approach with Crito’s appeal to the bad effects of popular hatred.

³¹ Kahn 1983, 94–95 sees Polus as a “slave to public opinion,” “of which Polus as an apprentice sophist [*sic*] is the faithful mirror.” However, he says that Callicles has greater intellectual independence. In fact, though, both mirror public opinion, even if they differ in frankness, self-awareness, and maturity.

addresses Socrates in particular, he emphasizes the shameful condition (αἰσχρόν, 486a5), particularly his inability to defend himself and his own from suffering at the hands of his enemies (486a–c). So, he urges Socrates to seek a *reputation* for intelligence (δόξεις φρονεῖν, 486c5–6) and renown (δόξα, 486d1). Socrates' condition is shameful for two reasons: he lacks reputation, and that lack leaves him vulnerable to losing his freedom, his possessions, and his life (486a–d). Like Polus, then, Callicles uses both shame and fear to try to persuade Socrates of his internalized popular opinions about justice and benefit, and he continues those efforts all the way to the bitter end (511a, 521a–c, 522c).³²

Callicles professes good will to Socrates in making these arguments (485e–86a), and Socrates agrees (487a–e). Some see this as a joke,³³ but notice that Crito, who certainly wishes Socrates well, makes the same appeals. (Socrates has more luck persuading Crito than Callicles, but then Crito has been his lifelong companion.) Crito urges Socrates to escape – not only because it is intrinsically bad for Socrates to die and for his friends to lose him, but also because most people will think that he and Socrates' other friends cared less for their friend than for their property (*Cr.* 44b–c). Socrates disdains this appeal to popular opinion, but Crito thinks that one must care what people think; after all, Socrates' bad reputation has led to his death (44c–d). Crito soon expands on the shameful of not escaping the injustice that Socrates proposes to suffer: Socrates is complicit in the aims of his enemies (45c) and is being cowardly (45d). At least, that is what people will say about him and his friends (45e–46a). These pleas are exactly what we would expect Callicles to say, if he visited Socrates in prison.

Likewise, Socrates' response to Crito is basically the same as what he tells Callicles. The many's ability to punish does not show that one must attend to and respect their views (46c–47a), that one must fear the blame and welcome the praise rooted in such views (47b–c), or that one should be afraid or ashamed to disagree with them (47c–d). In particular, one need not be afraid or ashamed to disagree with the many about what is good, noble, and just (48a). Even more particularly, one need not be afraid or ashamed to disagree with them about whether it is just to return harm for

³² Compare Callicles' summary of his view at 492a–c. The many, unable to get what they want and avoid punishment, are ashamed of that incapacity (αἰσχύνην) and so they conceal it (ἀποκρυπτόμενοι, 492a4). They introduce conventions that what they are incapable of – ἀκολασία – is shameful, and they instill those conventions in the superior through praise (ἐπαινοῦσιν, 492a8; cf. ψόγον, 492b8).

³³ For example, McKim 1988.

harm and injustice for injustice (49a–e). Finally, of course, Socrates argues that it would in fact be unjust to escape, as Crito proposes (49e–53a).³⁴

So, Plato’s Socrates worries about elite assimilation to the many through shame and fear in both “Socratic” and “middle-period” dialogues. There seems little reason to deny in advance that he might criticize sophists and orators in both kinds of works for failing to resist such assimilation. Thus, we should freely use insights from the *Gorgias* and *Republic* to explain the many’s role in the *Protagoras*, at least until better explanations are produced.

5.4 Conclusion

The many, then, are a fitting proxy for Protagoras’ concealed views in the *Protagoras*. He and the many share the views that he would be ashamed to profess openly, and the many would also be ashamed to profess them openly. Characters in the *Gorgias* hold and are ashamed to profess the same views. These similarities are no coincidence. Socrates’ interlocutors share their views with the many in part because, prior to the dialogues in which they appear, they have internalized popular views through shame and fear of punishment. This point is never made explicit in the *Protagoras*, but it best explains shared features of the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*, as well as the many’s role as a proxy for Protagoras. That starts to harmonize Socrates’ discussions of hedonism in the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Republic*. According to all of these dialogues, the many indoctrinate elites (and each other, from one generation to the next) into hedonism and certain views of virtue.

Two tasks remain. The primary one is to further describe popular views of virtue and the good. I have sketched some particular views held by the many and internalized by most elites. However, we might want to know more in several ways. First, we might want more detail about what the popular conceptions of justice, wisdom, and the good involve. Second, we might wonder whether there are related conceptions of other virtues. [Chapters 3](#) and [4](#) touched only briefly on temperance and courage. Are there well-defined popular conceptions of these too, and if so, do sophists

³⁴ The same structures of ethical concern – the many’s and Socrates’ – also crop up in the *Apology*, though less systematically. Socrates was slandered because he spent his time in ways other than the many (20c). Some will consider such a way of life, which may result in his death, shameful (28b). Socrates replies that he is convicted not out of incapacity but because it would be unjust and so shameful to do what would be necessary to avoid suffering injustice in these circumstances (38d; cf. 35c–d, 31d–32a). See further [8.2](#).

and orators internalize them? Finally, we might wonder how hedonism and all these conceptions of virtue fit together. Do they fit into an intelligible structure, or do they amount to nothing more than a jumble of views?

The second task is to address lingering puzzles about the general account of shame, internalization, and the many just defended. (Some of these are related to the need to expand on the content and structure of popular values.) First, the idea that sophists and orators internalize their ethical views from the many sits uneasily with the well-attested fact that sophists and the many dislike each other. Recall Protagoras' comments about the many in the *Protagoras*, or Calicles' in the *Gorgias*. Popular hostility toward the sophists is described in *Republic VI* and something like it is depicted at *Meno* 91b–92d – though Anytus is among the elite. This worry is especially pressing because Socrates says in the *Euthyphro* that anger and hostility arise from disagreement about what is just and unjust, noble and shameful, and good and bad (7b–d). The problem is mitigated because the views that sophists and orators absorb from the many are incoherent and unstable (cf. *Lys.* 214c–d), but more must be said.

Second, for the many to “teach” that suffering injustice is worse than doing it, those whom they shame and frighten must already accept the view they are meant to internalize – they must already be ashamed or afraid of suffering injustice at the hands of the many. Socrates demonstrates this nicely; he lacks the relevant prior commitments, so he cannot be frightened or shamed as others can be (cf. 5.3).³⁵ Relatedly, citing social influences as the only source of distorted ethical views leads to an explanatory regress about the precise content of popular morality. For both of these reasons, social influences cannot be the sole root cause of the particular distorted ethical views that Socrates finds in the community.

Third, and again related to the previous puzzle: Socrates denies that social pressures can directly instill views about the good. He says that we “do and acquire and believe” what is reputed just or noble, but that everyone desires what really is good (*R.* 505d). Just before that, though, he insists that sophists teach nothing but what the many declare to be just, noble, and good, and have no other account to offer on any of these topics (493a–d). Given their desire for the real good, how do sophists internalize popular attitudes about the good?

The last three chapters describe the structure and content of popular morality and address all the puzzles just described. That obviously requires moving past the purely social explanations for popular morality offered in

³⁵ Socrates credits his daimonion for keeping him from corruption; see *Republic* 496a–e and Shaw 2011.

this chapter. [Chapter 6](#) explains why hedonism is intrinsically plausible, without any reference to social pressures, and yet false. It also explains why Plato connects being a hedonist with having strong desires for bodily and reputational goods. (6.4 explains why some hedonists favor bodily goods while others favor reputational goods.) [Chapter 7](#) then explains how hedonism generates and sustains popular views of virtue: that justice is helping friends and harming enemies; that courage is the ability to persevere in the face of the fearful; that temperance is the ability to resist the pleasant; that wisdom is weak; and that virtue is many and unteachable. Popular morality thus has a structure, and its core structuring commitment is hedonism. Hedonism's intrinsic plausibility stops any regress problem in explaining the determinate content of socially-transmitted popular morality. Further, since social pressures transmit popular views about virtue, and since those views stem from hedonism, popular morality's structure makes room for hedonism to be indirectly socially sustained. The same structure also explains how assimilation to popular views of justice, including the idea that suffering injustice is worse than doing it, can, without circularity, depend on an antecedent fear of suffering injustice. Hedonism is plausible independently of social pressures, and hedonism is the source of popular views of justice, so suffering injustice seems fearful independently of social pressures. [Chapter 7](#) also explains the social structures that stem from a hedonist conception of justice (and other social virtues, such as piety and friendship). That in turn prepares the way for [Chapter 8](#) to explain why the many and sophists are mutually hostile, even though they share their basic conceptions of justice and the good.

Thus, the last three chapters delve more deeply into the ultimate sources, content, structure, and reinforcement of popular values. They also descend from abstract accounts of popular values and their transmission to concrete social phenomena both depicted and described in the dialogues. Among these are popular hostility to the sophists, popular hostility to Socrates, and widespread understandings of Socrates as a kind of sophist.

Hedonism, hedonic error, and ethical error

This chapter explains why hedonism is intrinsically plausible, independently of any social pressures to be a hedonist. It also explains why Plato associates being a hedonist with having a strong concern for goods of the body and reputation, and it offers partial, provisional answers to most of the puzzles posed at the end of [Chapter 5](#). I begin with the good's role in structuring both mind and world. Then, I explore how Plato understands the nature of the good, beautiful, and pleasant, and the relationships among these. The pleasant and the good are connected in such a way that pleasure and pain offer fallible evidence about what is good and bad for us. That, as we shall see, explains hedonism's intrinsic plausibility (6.1.1). However, Socrates argues in the *Republic* that our hedonic evidence about the good is systematically distorted by contrast effects.¹ As a result, many hedonic experiences make their objects seem more pleasant than they are, and so better than they are. In particular, uncorrected hedonic experience reports that goods of the body and reputation are more pleasant, and so better, than goods of the soul. Hedonic distortions can only be corrected by reference to a non-hedonist conception of the good. Thus, hedonists cannot correct for hedonic error. Hedonism and its concomitant hedonic error also produce misconceptions of virtue – that is, they are responsible for ethical error in general (6.2.1; cf. [Chapter 7](#)). Next, I argue that these same concerns lie behind and structure Socrates' arguments against hedonism in the *Gorgias*; recognizing that helps to explain his arguments and bolster them against obvious objections (6.3). I conclude by explaining briefly how this reading of Socrates' anti-hedonist strategies and arguments, especially in the *Republic* and *Gorgias*, may relate to his discussion of hedonism in the *Protagoras* (6.4).

¹ He argues to much the same effect in the *Philebus*. My discussion of hedonic error focuses on the *Republic*, but I draw connections with the *Philebus* in footnotes as well.

6.1.1 *The Good structures mind and world*

Plato ascribes to every soul a basic desire for the real good. All our other desires – even our desires for beauty and justice – derive from or otherwise depend on our desire for the good. That desire is, in the first instance, a desire for our own highest good, but our own highest good is to know the form of the Good. Knowledge of the Good also allows us to use other goods, including other forms of knowledge, correctly and beneficially (cf. 1.2, esp. n. 33). Not only is the Good our primary object of desire, which structures all of our other desires; the Good also structures all of reality. It is the primary being and the primary thing known; all other beings (in particular, other forms) depend on the Good for their being and their being known. Changing perceptibles depend in turn on the forms by “having a share of” or “participating in” or “partaking of” them.

When Glaucon hears all this, he declares that Socrates could not mean to say that pleasure is the good (*R.* 509a). This recalls Socrates’ recent claim that the many think pleasure is the good – inconsistently, since they also think some pleasures are bad and some pains good (505b–c; cf. 5.1). The many may not even entertain the claim that Glaucon rejects, since they deny that there is a good distinct from the many goods (493e–94a; cf. 475d–80a). But the many still have basic desires for the real good, just like everyone else. Plato thus owes us an account of the pervasive error: why do so many people with a basic desire for the real good go wrong about it, and why do they all go wrong in the same way, by being hedonists (albeit inconsistent hedonists)?

Plausibly, such an account is also needed to explain why most people go wrong about justice and beauty. Since other beings depend on the good for their being and being known, error about other beings plausibly depends on error about the good. Specifically, beauty and justice depend on the good, so errors about beauty and justice plausibly depend on errors about the good. Our “doing and acquiring and believing” what is merely reputed just and beautiful (*R.* 505d), for example, depends on connecting the good with reputed justice and beauty rather than real justice and beauty. That in turn helps to explain how social pressures shape one’s conceptions of justice and beauty (cf. “believing” at 505d). Hence, in order to redirect our concern away from being reputed just and onto being just – the aim of *Republic* II–X – Socrates must connect the good more firmly with justice than with reputed justice. That same goal structures the *Gorgias*, where Socrates pursues error about justice back to its source in error about goodness – specifically, hedonism (4.3). Thus, to explain pervasive error about justice and beauty and how those errors are socially transmitted and

maintained, Plato must explain why there is pervasive error about the good – and in particular, why hedonism is pervasive – despite our desire for the real good.

6.1.2 *The good, the noble, and the pleasant*

To see why Plato thinks hedonism is plausible and yet false, we must see how he thinks about the real nature of the good, the noble or beautiful (*καλόν*), and the pleasant. These are tricky topics, and the sketch offered here is highly tentative. Even those who disagree with the details of the sketch may still be able to accept something close to my account of Plato's explanation for pervasive hedonism. The latter is what matters most in the present context.

Plato thinks the Good is Unity.² Hence, Socrates praises civic unity as the greatest good for a city (*R.* 462a–b; cf. *L.* 739d), and he praises psychological justice effusively for its power to unify the soul (443d–e). Both of these passages call the good “binding,” just as Socrates associates the good with the binding when he examines teleological causes in the *Phaedo* (99c). Plato also thinks that beauty is proportion or harmony (*Phil.* 64e, 66b),³ and that ugliness is disproportion or disharmony (*Soph.* 228a). Since complexes are unified by having proportionate and harmonized parts, beauty is intimately connected to the good, as we would expect. Everything beautiful is thus good, but not everything good is beautiful – simples such as Forms are unities without needing to be harmonized.⁴

Plato's views of justice and temperance support this reading. He thinks that justice is organization (*τάξις*) and that temperance is order (*κόσμος*; *G.* 504d–e; cf. *Crat.* 413c; *Symp.* 209a–b; *R.* 430e, 443d–e, 500b–c, 540e). Justice and temperance are thus beautiful, for order and organization instill proportion and harmony. That is why Socrates chides Callicles for neglecting geometry and proportional equality (*G.* 508a). Proportional

² See *Ar. Meta.* 988a8–17, *EE* 1218a20 and Aristoxenus, *Elementa Harmonica* II.1.

³ In the *Philebus*, Socrates distinguishes the human good, the cosmic good, and the Good itself (64a). He then picks out measure and proportion as good-making features of the mixture that is the human good (64d–e). Next, he associates the measure and proportion of that mixture with its beauty, and he uses measure and proportion as proxies for the mixture's goodness. These proxies are reliable precisely because goodness and beauty are so closely related. In the absence of knowledge of the Good, we must use such proxies in our attempts to discover the human good (64d–65a).

⁴ On one view, the Good is the harmony of other forms, which allows it to be beautiful (cf. 509a). This also allows other forms to be derivatively beautiful, because each partially constitutes a larger harmony – much as a patch of color in a painting may be beautiful because of its role in the larger canvas rather than because of its intrinsic beauty (cf. 420c–d). However, Socrates usually seems to talk about the Good as the primary being alongside others, not as a larger entity that comprises them.

equality contrasts with the arithmetic equality that Callicles sees as the end of conventional justice (483b–c), which is what leads him to reject equality altogether. (Callicles thus seems to have fully internalized the popular conception of equality. Because he thinks that this is simply what equality is, and because he lacks any clear alternative conception of equality – in particular, proportional equality – he rejects all limits on appetitive desire. Proportional equality as understood by Socrates requires placing *different* limits on appetitive desire than arithmetic equality, for different reasons.)

Plato associates the good, beauty, temperance, and justice with unity, proportion, harmony, order, organization, equality, and the like. The exact relationships among these matter less than how they collectively relate to the pleasant and to pleasure. First, we must distinguish two kinds of harmonized complexes: those that are unalterably harmonized (e.g., the heavenly bodies, perhaps) and those whose harmony admits of being disintegrated and restored (other living things). In the *Philebus*, Socrates identifies pain as the perceived disintegration of a harmonious condition, and pleasure as the perceived restoration of that harmonious condition (31d–32b, 33d–34a).⁵ Elsewhere in the *Philebus*, he also calls these disintegrated conditions “lacks” and their correlative processes of restoration “fulfillments” (51b). The notion that pleasures are perceived fulfillments of lacks, or something close to it, is familiar from other dialogues as well (e.g., *G.* 491e–94c, 496d–e; *R.* 585a–86b). We must also distinguish pleasure and pain from the pleasant and painful. Pleasant things are not only those that partake of pleasure – activities or experiences that have pleasures as parts or aspects – but also those that produce pleasure (*Pr.* 351d–e; cf. *G.* 506d). In eating, for example, the food, the fulfillment of eating, and the perception of that fulfillment are all pleasant. However, only the last is a pleasure. We can now see that neither a pleasant restoration nor any awareness of such a restoration (i.e., any pleasure) is the same as the harmony restored. So, neither pleasure nor the pleasant is either beauty or the good (*Phil.* 53c–55a).⁶

6.1.3 *The intrinsic plausibility of hedonism*

So, the pleasant is related to the beautiful and good much as the beautiful is to the good. For a complex to be unified, its parts must be harmonious. Simples have no parts, so they are unified without being harmonious.

⁵ Anticipated future disintegrations and restorations are also pains and pleasures, as are higher-order representations of past and present disintegrations and restorations (32b–c, 39c–e).

⁶ However, the passage cited here elides the distinction between pleasant processes and pleasures.

Therefore, everything beautiful is good, but not everything good is beautiful. Likewise, for a changing complex to be harmonious, it must undergo processes of restoration. Unchanging complexes are harmonious without undergoing processes of restoration, because their harmony persists unalterably. Hence, everything pleasant is beautiful, but not everything beautiful is pleasant.⁷ Finally, the pleasant is closely related to pleasure, in that pleasure takes pleasant things as its proper objects. The pleasant thus provides a bridge between pleasure and the good – one that will explain hedonism's intrinsic plausibility.

Because of the relationships just described, pleasure and pain constitute evidence for what is pleasant and painful, and therefore for what is beautiful and ugly, good and bad. Further, pleasure and pain likely exhaust our evidence for what is beautiful and ugly, good and bad. (Pre-natal acquaintance with the Good and Beautiful could be construed as independent evidence, but the doctrine of recollection actually seems meant to account for certain sorts of reasoning about the evidence, rather than adding to the stock of evidence.) But if pleasure and pain exhaust our evidence for what is beautiful and ugly, good and bad, then there is an obvious explanation for the plausibility of hedonism. One key feature in any account of the good is that it must cover all cases of goodness. Our evidence for each thing's goodness lies in the pleasures that it produces or involves – so, pleasure is a common feature in all manifest instances of goodness. The obvious one-over-many inference is that pleasure *is* the good. In the absence of some alternative account of the good and beautiful like the one sketched above, we simply take pleasure to be the good.

This explanation for hedonism's plausibility may seem to undermine its supposedly pernicious influence. On the account above, after all, pleasure and pain seem to provide a fully reliable proxy for their objects' agent-relative goodness. This proxy may not lead us to a full grasp of beauty and goodness, but it would seem to suffice for practical purposes and allow us to lead rather good lives, even if not the best lives (in which we would understand that the good is unity). To see why this is not so, and why Socrates considers hedonism to be pernicious, we must examine the systematic hedonic error to which we are subject. Hedonic error severs the tie between felt pleasures and the real pleasantness – and so the real agent-relative goodness – of their objects.

⁷ However, most pleasant things are not unconditionally beautiful, any more than most beautiful things are. I claim that whatever is pleasant at a given time, in a given way, and to a given extent, is beautiful at that time, in that way, and to that extent.

6.2.1 *Hedonic error and ethical error at Republic 583c–88a*

In the *Republic*, Socrates argues that it is better to be just than unjust, regardless of one's reputation for justice or injustice. He gives three arguments, the last of which he calls "the greatest and most decisive of the overthrows" (583b). However, that argument concludes that the just life is more pleasant than the unjust life.⁸ Many readers wonder why Socrates, who after all rejects hedonism (505c–d), gives this argument pride of place. Existing readings usually see the argument as supplementary, but that approach neglects the importance that Socrates claims for it.⁹ I argue instead that the argument is so crucial because it identifies hedonic error as the root cause of ethical error, including mistakes about the nature and value of justice.

The argument comes in three stages. First, Socrates discusses hedonic errors due to contrast effects (583c–85a). Second, he considers the real relative magnitudes of different kinds of pleasure (585a–e). Third, he describes the hedonic conditions of the vicious and virtuous (585e–88a). I begin with the first stage, in which Socrates distinguishes three hedonic states: pleasure and pain, which are opposites, and a neutral state between them.¹⁰ Hedonic error arises through contrasts among these states: pleasure and pain contrast with each other, and each of them also contrasts with the neutral state. We should look at three cases.

The first two cases occur when one confuses either removal of pain or the neutral state with pleasure. Socrates distinguishes these cases in one of his analogies. He compares pleasure, pain, and the neutral state with what is above, below, and in the middle (584d–e). Within the analogy, he notes

⁸ Socrates' second argument reaches the same conclusion: philosophers are superior in experience, knowledge, and argument, so their claim that the just life is most pleasant is authoritative (580c–83a). I would suggest that the "greatest and most decisive" argument specifies what experience, knowledge, and argument the philosophers rely on in rendering their verdict.

⁹ Most scholars say that Socrates aims to persuade someone (whether Glaucon, Thrasymachus, hedonists, or everyone) that injustice does not offer hedonic compensation for psychic conflict, or that the superior pleasantness of the just life is another way in which it is more choiceworthy (Murphy 1951, 207; Crombie 1962, v.1, 139; Irwin 1977, 338; Annas 1981, 294, 315, 326; Gosling and Taylor 1982, § 6.4; Frede 1985, 157–58; Stokes 1990, 41–42; Kraut 1992, 313–14; Brown 2003, § 3.2). Others say that Socrates is experimenting (Guthrie 1962, v. 4, 542); that all three arguments are the best he can do without knowing the Good (Gosling and Taylor 1982, §§ 6.4.1–3); that the pleasure arguments set up a brief *a fortiori* argument at 588a (Stokes 1990, 31–32); that these arguments flesh out the *Republic's* psychology (Brown 2003); or that they explain how justice integrates the just person's affects into her life as a whole (Russell 2005, 127, 134–35).

¹⁰ Socrates generally calls cognitions of opposite properties opposite cognitions (e.g., *R.* 436a–41b, 523a–25a, 602c–3b). The first and last of these passages divide the soul because opposite properties appear at the same time, in the same relations; in the second, opposite cognitions grasp opposed properties at the same time but in different relations.

two confusions. One might confuse motion from below into the middle with motion into what is above, or one might confuse standing in the middle with standing above.¹¹ In each case, the confusion arises through contrast of one's motion into the middle, or contrast of one's position in the middle, with what is below. Leaving the analogy: one might feel removal of a pain as a pleasure, or one might feel the neutral state as a pleasure. Both appearances occur through contrast with a pain that is either then being removed, or that one might have experienced but is free from (as, for example, when one recently felt pain but is now free from it).

The third case occurs when the same contrasts distort the felt magnitude of actual pleasures. When one experiences pleasure juxtaposed with pain or the removal of pain, the pleasure's felt magnitude exceeds its real magnitude. Socrates is less explicit about this case at first. Within his discussion of hedonic error, he seems to suggest that most bodily pleasures are merely removals of pain or states of freedom from pain (584c), while the rest are pure pleasures like those of smell (584b). However, he clarifies his position in the second stage of his argument, in which he compares real relative magnitudes of different pleasures. There, he clearly assumes that bodily pleasures such as eating and drinking do in fact have real magnitude. They partake less of being than other pleasures – they are less [pleasant] – but they still partake of being to some degree. Likewise, in the third stage of his argument Socrates says that those who focus on bodily pleasures enjoy pleasures, though their pleasures are mixed with pain and so seem greater than they are (586b). Soon after that, he says once again that appetitive and spirited pleasures have real magnitude (586d–e). So, Socrates overstates his view about bodily pleasures at first. He soon reveals that his considered view is more modest – though still quite bold.¹²

¹¹ Socrates assumes that there is a non-relative middle space in the natural world (cf. *Phd.* 97e). This makes the analogy more complicated for anyone who has internalized the idea that spatial location is relative. Worse, mapping the spatial analogy onto the third case (below in the main text) requires the agent to be in multiple places at the same time. The analogy could perhaps be adapted to refer to the agent's spatial parts.

¹² Scholars distinguish four kinds of false pleasure in the *Philebus*: false anticipatory pleasures (38b–41a); false pleasures of overestimation (41a–42c); non-pleasures that are really nothing more than removals of pain (42c–44b); and mixed pleasures (46b–51a). The *Republic's* account maps precisely onto the last three kinds. Non-pleasures map onto the first case in the main text. False pleasures of overestimation and mixed pleasures are two aspects of the same phenomenon. When Socrates introduces the false pleasures of overestimation, he clearly says that they are mixed pleasures (42b), and his later discussion of mixed pleasures emphasizes their apparently great size (44d–45e, 47a–b, 51a–b). Together, these map onto the last case in the main text. That leaves only false anticipatory pleasures (better, I would say: false higher-order pleasures; cf. n. 5 above). Socrates says explicitly how these differ from other false pleasures: false beliefs about pleasure cause false higher-order pleasures; false pleasures of overestimation (and non-pleasures) cause false beliefs about

We might compare Socrates' claims about real and apparent magnitudes of pleasure with familiar contrast effects in color perception – much as he himself compares hedonic states with white, black, and grey (585a). Consider two contrasting colors, red and green. A green patch against a red background looks more vivid than it does against a neutral background, which in turn looks more vivid than it does against a green background. Further, looking steadily at a red patch for about a minute and then quickly replacing it with a neutral color produces a green afterimage. Compare these cases with hedonic contrasts. The felt pleasure of eating while hungry exceeds that of eating when sated, and the felt pleasure of scratching an itch exceeds that of mere scratching. If these comparisons of hedonic contrast to color contrast are plausible, and if pleasure and pain are crucial or even exhaustive sources of evidence about good and bad, then Socrates is onto something genuinely important.¹³

Socrates identifies such hedonic errors as the root cause of ethical error. Hedonic errors routinely make us overestimate how pleasant the objects of bodily and reputational pleasures are, and so how noble and good they are. We experience most bodily pleasures – centrally, those of food, drink, and sex – mixed with the pains of hunger, thirst, and sexual desire. So, most pleasures of eating, drinking, and sex occur together with pain and its removal, intensifying their felt pleasantness (584c, 586a–b). Similarly, pleasures of victory and honor are mixed with pains of anger and envy, which intensifies their felt pleasantness (586c–d).¹⁴ Pervasive hedonic error thus makes us overestimate the value of bodily and reputational goods compared to goods of the soul such as knowledge, true belief, and virtue (cf. 585b–c), whose associated pleasures are not mixed with pain and its removal.¹⁵ That overestimation leads in turn to greed and civic conflict (586a–b). Hedonic error is thus the root cause of error about

pleasure (42a). There is an asymmetric dependence here: false higher-order pleasures depend on false beliefs about pleasure, which depend on false first-order pleasures, which are the result of the same contrast effects that Socrates discusses in the *Republic*.

¹³ Socrates is a realist about color (the generic object of visual perception) and the pleasant (the generic object of pleasure). However, realism is not necessary to the analogy. Any account of color on which the phenomena just surveyed count as errors or illusions, whether realist or not, holds out the possibility of a parallel view of the pleasant that allows for hedonic error or illusions.

¹⁴ This observation does not require placing spirited pleasures in a distinct, spirited part of the soul, as Socrates in fact does in the *Republic*.

¹⁵ Unfortunately for Socrates, this seems empirically false; the frustrations of failing to grasp a concept and then the “pleasant” relief of finally grasping it seem widespread. However, Socrates' argument about the greater true magnitude of the pleasures of the knowledge and virtue (see below) may still work.

justice; that is why Socrates calls his third argument the greatest and most decisive one, even though he is not a hedonist.¹⁶

The fact that we are subject to pervasive hedonic error rules out using felt pleasures as a reliable guide to what is good for us. Felt pleasures do not merely offer an incomplete picture of what is noble and good; they also offer a distorted picture of what is noble and good. Still, one might hope to correct for contrast effects and use true hedonic magnitudes as a guide to living well, if not as well as possible. Perhaps one could even do so while thinking that pleasure is the good – that the happy life consists in pleasures of the greatest true, not felt, magnitude.¹⁷

This approach is ruled out by the second stage of Socrates' argument (585a–e). He first explains pleasure as the filling of a lack. Hunger and thirst are bodily lacks, and ignorance and senselessness are psychological lacks. When a hungry person eats or a fool learns, she fills the lack – instills a harmony in her body or soul – which is pleasant.¹⁸ Socrates also connects the pleasant and the good in ways consonant with the discussion in 6.1. He says that objects of lacks and fulfillments must be appropriate to our nature (τῶν φύσει προσηκόντων; 585d11), and that what is most pleasant is best (βέλτιστον) and most congenial (οικειότατον, 586d–e). So, felt pleasures are fallible evidence that their objects are pleasant, appropriate, congenial, and good, and real magnitudes of pleasure are a fully reliable proxy for what is really good.

Socrates then compares the degree of being of fulfillments of the body and soul.¹⁹ His claim is highly compressed (585b–c):

Which kinds do you think partake more of pure being: those that are of bread and drink and relish and nourishment generally, or the kind that is of true opinion and understanding and sense, and in general all of virtue? Make your decision like this: the one, possessed of what is always the same and immortal and true, that is itself of that sort and that comes to be in

¹⁶ Chapter 7 elaborates on how hedonism and concomitant hedonic error cause errors about justice, and also discusses how they cause errors about piety, friendship, family, courage, temperance, wisdom, and education or teaching.

¹⁷ Cf. Rudebusch 1999, who attributes to Socrates a hedonism of true, not felt, appetite and satisfaction.

¹⁸ Socrates does not here distinguish filling a lack (which is pleasant) from perception of filling a lack (which is pleasure), as he does in the *Philebus*. However, what he says is consistent with that distinction, and even in the *Philebus* Socrates does not deploy the distinction every time it applies (cf. n. 6 above).

¹⁹ We are left to work out for ourselves why spirit's fulfillments lie in between reason's and appetite's (cf. 583a). (I assume that the soul's fulfillments at 585b–c belong to reason, and that the body's belong to appetite.) Here we might reflect on the endurance of victories and honors compared to the objects of appetitive and rational pleasures (see below and cf. Diotima's speech in the *Symposium*).

something of that kind, is more, don't you think, than that possessed of what is never the same and is mortal, and is itself of that sort and comes to be in something of that kind?

The one possessed of what is always the same exceeds the other by a lot.

Glaucon blithely agrees, but Socrates' language needs clarification. First, forms of εἶναι here carry a predicative semantic value. For a fulfillment to partake of being is for it to be a fulfillment (or: for it to be pleasant). For a fulfillment to partake more of being is for it to be a greater fulfillment (or: for it to be more pleasant).²⁰ Second, Socrates provides three criteria for how much anything partakes of being [F] in general: sameness, immortality, and truth. Plausibly, sameness is stability over time and across circumstances, immortality is endurance without being destroyed, and truth is degree of Fness. Quite generally, then, something's degree of being [F] is fixed by how long it exists and is [F], how constantly it is [F] over time and across circumstances, and how F it is over that span, at those times, and in those circumstances in which it is F. In the case that concerns us here, something's degree of being pleasant is fixed by how enduringly and stably it exists and is pleasant, and how pleasant it is at those times and in those circumstances in which it is pleasant. Third and finally, Socrates gives three ways to deploy the criteria of being (sameness, immortality, and truth) when it comes to a fulfillment. These three criteria can be deployed in relation to the fulfillment itself (e.g., eating or drinking), in relation to that of which the fulfillment is possessed (its object, e.g., food or drink), and in relation to that in which the fulfillment arises (its subject, e.g., the body or the soul). He seems to treat the being of the fulfillment as a function of the being of the fulfillment's subject and object, which are fixed in turn by the subject and object's sameness, immortality, and truth. So, the being of a fulfillment – how pleasant it is – is a function of the sameness, immortality, and truth of its subject and object. However, it seems that one can also apply the criteria of sameness, immortality, and truth directly to a fulfillment and so measure how pleasant it is directly.

Socrates says that learning is more pleasant than eating by these criteria, and we can see why. First, consider the immortality of the fulfillment's subject, of its object, and of the fulfillment itself. The soul is immortal while the body is mortal, and reason is immortal while appetite is mortal (*Phd. passim*; *R.* 608c–12a).²¹ Further, objects of knowledge such as the forms are eternal, while food perishes or is digested. So, by the criterion of

²⁰ Cf. Kahn 1981 and the opening sections of Brown 1986.

²¹ However, the *Phaedrus* suggests that appetite and spirit also survive death.

immortality of the fulfillment's subject and object, learning partakes more of being – is more pleasant – than eating. This is reflected in the fulfillments themselves. Every day, or at least most days, we must eat. Learning requires maintenance too, namely study (*Symp.* 207e–8a), but learning persists longer and requires less maintenance than bodily fulfillments. These judgments of relative pleasantness are not available to hedonists and anti-hedonists on an equal basis. Our *awareness* of our fulfillments varies inversely with their immortality. The more immortal a fulfillment is, the less often we perceive it. Less immortal fulfillments, which involve more maintenance and more recovery from correlative pains, thus present two problems. First, they feel more pleasant than they are because of contrast effects in the moment; second, less immortal fulfillments come to our attention as pleasant through felt pleasures more often, precisely because they do not persist for as long.²²

It seems less obvious how to compare the relative sameness and truth of learning and eating. However, by focusing on the objects of these fulfillments, and exploiting the connection between the pleasant and the good described above, we can see once again why Socrates thinks that learning comes out ahead. Plato argues throughout his corpus that *goods* of the soul are more constantly and truly good than bodily *goods*. Bodily goods are conditionally good – they are good for us only at certain times, in certain circumstances, and in certain relations. Goods of the soul, or some of them (virtue, knowledge, and true belief, the objects of pleasure that Socrates actually mentions at *Republic* 585b),²³ are good for us without condition – at all times, across all circumstances, and in all relations. Thus, they exceed bodily goods on the measure of sameness (as goods). Further, even at times, in circumstances, and in relations in which bodily goods *are* good, goods of the soul are better (cf. 1.2). That is, goods of the soul exceed bodily goods on the measure of truth (as goods). But if goods of the soul are more constantly and truly good for us, they are also more constantly and truly appropriate to our nature, and so more constantly and truly pleasant. So, by the criterion of sameness and truth of the fulfillment's object, learning partakes more of being – is more pleasant – than eating. Again, though, this line of reasoning requires appeal to a non-hedonic metric. Felt

²² The *Meno* seems to say that knowledge is better than true belief solely by the criterion of immortality and not by the criteria of sameness and truth, though Socrates does not put the point in those terms.

²³ “Natural virtues” such as spiritedness and gentleness also depend on context for their goodness (cf. 2.3.3), as do the crafts that produce bodily goods (cf. *R.* 504d–5b). Consider also the soul's pleasure in hearing imitative poetry as compared to its pleasure in virtue; not all pleasures of the soul are equal.

pleasures cannot play that role; they are distorted by contrast effects, which is why we must reason about real magnitudes of pleasure in the first place. But correctly measured pleasures cannot be assumed in advance when the inquiry precisely concerns real magnitudes of pleasure.

Real magnitudes of pleasure track how good their objects really are; however, only someone with a non-hedonic criterion can measure how enduringly, constantly, and truly pleasant the objects of our pleasures are, which determines real magnitudes of pleasure. Correcting for hedonic error, and so correcting for ethical error, thus requires denying that pleasure is the good. It follows that hedonists are inevitably subject to hedonic error and to the ethical errors that stem from hedonic error.²⁴

6.2.2 *Hedonic error and ethical error in the Cave* (Republic 514a–19b)

This account of hedonic error and true hedonic magnitudes in *Republic* IX helps to explain how Socrates depicts our ethical condition and true education in the Cave image. That passage in turn puts Socrates' claims about hedonic error into a larger context, and it confirms that he considers hedonic error the root cause of ethical error. Further, the Cave relates Socrates' claims about the causes of ethical error to the popular "education in virtue" described earlier, in [Chapter 5](#).

The Cave image describes certain prisoners chained in place with their attention fixed on a cave wall. Behind them lies a wall, over which puppeteers hold puppets; behind that a fire burns. The fire casts shadows of the puppets on the cave wall, which also echoes the voices of those puppeteers who talk. The fire casts shadows of the prisoners as well, and the cave wall echoes their own voices. The prisoners take the shadows and echoes to exhaust reality.

Glaucon finds this image and the prisoners in it strange; Socrates says they are "like us" (515a). To see why, we might try to synthesize the Cave and Line images (cf. 517a–b). According to the Line, reflections and shadows are objects of the lowest cognitive faculty (εἰκασία). The perceptibles of which they are reflections and shadows – living things and artifacts (510a) – are objects of the next-highest faculty (δόξα). The prisoners' condition corresponds to the lowest segment of the Line. However, our daily lives revolve around actual perceptibles, not their shadows and

²⁴ Compare the earlier argument (1.3.6) that hedonism and virtue supremacism cannot be reconciled simply by including pleasures of virtuous activity in the hedonic calculus; cf. also 6.4 below.

reflections. Hence, many scholars puzzle over how we are supposed to be like the prisoners.²⁵

Socrates gives us a partial key to the Cave image and explains how the prisoners are like us when he identifies bodily pleasures as the source of the prisoners' shackles (519a–b). The shackles themselves are desires for bodily goods that bodily pleasures instill in us. As we have just seen, Socrates thinks that bodily pleasures often make their objects seem more pleasant than they are through contrast with bodily pains. He describes these pleasures as “shadow-painted” (σκιαγραφία, 583b), strongly suggesting the cognitive achievements of εἰκασία. Socrates thinks such pleasures are pervasive, and that they structure people's whole lives by “begetting mad passions for themselves” (586c; again, the passions are the shackles that fix the prisoners' attention on the wall). Shadow-painted pleasures are thus plausible candidates for putting us in a condition of life represented by the prisoners and for helping to keep us there (though they are not the sole cause of our staying there).²⁶

Further parallels between the Cave and Book IX confirm this partial reading. In Book IX, Socrates describes the condition of those who fail to correct for hedonic error and live according to the hedonic appearances (586a–b):

They are always looking downward like cattle and, with their heads bent over the earth or the dinner table, they feed, fatten, and fornicate. And, in order to do better [πλεονεξίας] than others in these things, they kick and butt with iron horns and hooves, killing each other, because their desires are insatiable. For they aren't using things that are to fill the part of themselves that is a thing that is, and a leak-proof vessel.

You have described the life of the many, Socrates, just like an oracle!

Here, Socrates says that shadow-painted pleasures and the desires they produce direct most people's vision downward. So too in the Cave, he says that the shackles fastened by bodily pleasures keep the prisoners' vision directed downward (519b). Here, he makes the bodily desires instilled by shadow-painted pleasures the source of greed, and thus of violence and injustice (cf. 343e–44a, 359c). In the Cave, he says that certain

²⁵ See, e.g., White 1979, 185–86; Annas 1981, 250; Burnyeat 1999, 300–5. Irwin 1995a, 275–76 says that the prisoners are like us with respect to “moral properties,” and I basically concur. However, he focuses solely on the social sources of the prisoners' attitudes (as do some others).

²⁶ Cf. *Phaedo*: our desires imprison us (82e), surrender to pleasure and pain causes imprisonment (83d–84a), the pleasures that do this are the *seeming* bodily pleasures that derive from contrast with pain and removal of pain (60b–c, 64d–65a, 81b, 114e), and all of this causes war and civil conflict (66c; see below).

shadows – all of which our attention is directed to by the shackles – are shadows of justice (517d). Together, these two passages identify the desires instilled by bodily pleasures as sources of injustice (Book IX) and misconceptions of justice (Book VII). But injustice and misconceptions of justice go hand in hand, on Plato's view. Thus, hedonism and its associated hedonic errors produce related theoretical and practical errors about at least one virtue, justice. Socrates also says in the Cave that the prisoners have a distorted idea of wisdom (516c). Both points confirm an earlier expectation (6.1.1): as justice and wisdom owe their being and their being known to the Good, so errors about justice and wisdom are grounded in errors about the good. (Chapter 7 goes into more detail concerning the errors about justice and wisdom that hedonism and hedonic error lead to, and it extends the point to other virtues as well.)

The argument of this section as a whole (6.2.1–2) offers partial, provisional answers to most of the puzzles from the end of Chapter 5. Those puzzles were: (i) how shame and fear of punishment can transmit popular values when the transmission of those values depends on a prior commitment to one key element of popular morality – that it is worse to suffer injustice than to do injustice; (ii) why popular morality has the determinate content it does; (iii) how popular morality arises and is socially transmitted at all, given our desire for the real good; (iv) whether popular morality is an unstructured collection of views or has a quasi-intelligible structure; and (v) why sophists and the many are mutually hostile even though they share their core conceptions of good and virtue.

We have seen that hedonism is intrinsically plausible and that misconceptions of virtue flow from hedonism and associated hedonic errors. Hedonism's intrinsic plausibility explains how popular morality arises and can be transmitted at all, despite our desire for the real good. Hedonism's production of mistakes about virtue provides the broad structure of popular morality and explains why it has the determinate content that it does. The same process also explains why most or all of us believe, prior to popular "education" in virtue, that it is worse to suffer injustice than to do injustice. For as we have seen, hedonism and its associated hedonic errors lead us to consider bodily and reputational goods better than goods of the soul such as virtue (and in particular, justice). It seems to follow fairly directly that suffering injustice (being unjustly deprived of bodily and reputational goods) is worse than doing it (depriving oneself of a good of the soul). This analytically pre-social reason to prioritize not suffering justice over not doing injustice provides the basis on which people can frighten and shame each other in ways that instill and reinforce popular values. All of

these explanations are, again, partial and provisional; Chapter 7 fills them in by explaining further how specific ethical errors stem from hedonic error. Further, of course, I have not yet said anything to address the puzzle about sophists and the many restated in (v) above.

The Cave image also brings this chapter's account of hedonic and ethical error into contact with the last chapter's account of the social enforcement of popular morality. When someone reaches a vision of the truth and returns to the cave, (a) the prisoners ridicule her for incompetence in their discussions and activities; (b) they blame her philosophical inquiry, symbolized by the journey above, for her incapacity; and (c) if she tries to free the prisoners, they kill her. The ridicule, blame, and violence toward philosophy depicted in the Cave clearly recall potential reactions to Socrates' claim that philosophers should rule (473c–541b). That claim risked ridicule and violence (473c–74a), so he had to say who the philosophers are, explain popular hostility to philosophy, and explain how to dissolve it. As seen in Chapter 5, Socrates does this in part by putting popular hostility to philosophy into a larger context. The many confuse philosophers with sophists and try to assimilate both groups (conceived as a single group) to themselves and their values, disallowing any education that opposes the many's views. They do this through shame, including ridicule, and fear of punishment, including death (487b–97a). Socrates explicitly returns to the need to dissolve popular hostility to philosophy several times, including in the Cave image (516e–17a; cf. 498d–99a, 499d–500b, 500d–e, and 501c–2a, 535c with 536b–c).²⁷

The many's aim, in the Cave image, is to ensure that everyone remains shackled, with their attention fixed on the shadows and echoes coming from the cave wall.²⁸ That is, the social enforcement of popular values reinscribes antecedently plausible but false views about goodness and justice (and wisdom and other virtues). Such social enforcement relies on the antecedent plausibility of the views enforced. This is not surprising;

²⁷ Socrates' discussion of mathematical education also constantly returns to comparisons between popular and philosophical ideas about the usefulness of mathematics; cf. 525b–26a, 526d–e, 527d–28a, 528c, 528e–29c, and 530e–31c.

²⁸ A classic view of the Cave says that the relationship between the puppeteers and the prisoners represents manipulation of popular opinion by sophists, orators, and artists. Wilberding 2004 says instead that the puppeteers are the many and the prisoners are sophists, orators, and artists. (Oddly, he makes little use of *Republic* 493a–c.) However, the social control of deviance, which Wilberding rightly puts in the hands of the many, is performed by *prisoners*. So, the many are among the prisoners – as are sophists, orators, and artists. But then, who or what are the puppeteers? Perhaps they are divinities, and the ones who talk are *daimones* who communicate with humanity. Divinities do not harm humanity, but then the puppeteers are not said to harm the prisoners. Compare, perhaps, *Laws* 644d–45c.

Plato cannot explain popular values entirely through the social enforcement of popular values; that way lies a vicious regress. So, his total explanation for pervasive ethical error appeals to two causes: the persuasiveness of the (hedonic) appearances and the influence of companions.²⁹

6.3 Hedonism, hedonic error, and ethical error in the *Gorgias*

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates pursues error about justice back to its source in hedonism (cf. 4.2.3, 4.3). Further, Socrates' critique of hedonism in the *Gorgias* reflects roughly the same worries about hedonic error as those we have seen in the *Republic*. In both works, Socrates considers not only hedonism, but also and more particularly the pervasive hedonic error that is hedonism's inevitable concomitant, to be the root cause of ethical error, and especially of mistaken conceptions of the virtues.

Socrates' examination of Callicles reaches a crossroads when the latter's notion of natural justice bottoms out in an ideal of cultivating and fulfilling large appetites for the sake of pleasure (491d–92d). Socrates approaches this hedonism in several ways. First, he uses two images to disparage the life of undisciplined appetite-satisfaction, first in itself and then as compared to the disciplined life (492e–94b). When Callicles is unmoved, Socrates shames him, but Callicles persists through his shame (494b–95c). After restating Callicles' view – that courage, wisdom, and pleasure are distinct, but that pleasure is the same as the good (495c–d) – Socrates refutes him twice without relying on either images or shame. The argument from opposites comes in two versions (495e–97a, 497a–d); Callicles briefly tries to interrupt the second because of his shame at being refuted (497a–b). The argument from pleased cowards also comes in two versions, one about cowards and the other about fools (497e–99b). Callicles cannot respond to these arguments, so he removes the substantive and procedural shame he suffered earlier by saying that he only ever endorsed hedonism as a sort of joke (cf. Chapter 4).

These approaches – the peculiar images, the attempts to shame, and the arguments that rely on neither images nor shame – seem to be something of a jumble, unified only by a common target of criticism. In fact, though, all of Socrates' strategies depart from a single diagnosis: Callicles has fallen into hedonic and ethical errors that a hedonist cannot avoid. This emerges

²⁹ Plato is probably the source of the Stoic formula echoed here. See esp. Galen, *On the Doctrines of Plato and Hippocrates* V.5 (LS 65M), which identifies pleasures and pains as the relevant appearances, and cf. Diogenes Laertius VII.89. See also Chapter 5, n. 11 on the twin description of oratory as an ἐμπειρία καὶ τριβή.

most clearly in the argument from opposites, but it also helps to explain and unify Socrates' other strategies. I begin by reviewing his image- and shame-based strategies, noting some difficulties that my hypothesis aims to resolve.

6.3.1 *Images and shame*

Socrates relates how a clever man adapted stories about the afterlife into two images of the soul's condition within this life (492e–93d). The first story describes the uninitiated dead carrying water in a sieve in a futile attempt to fill a leaking jar. The image based on this story changes the uninitiated dead into living fools, the leaking jar into their appetite, and the sieve into their soul. This image's main theme is the insatiability of fools' appetites within this life. Their insatiability derives in part from their embodiment and resultant bodily appetites – the images aim to revalue the value of life and death in general – but it also derives in part from their foolishness more specifically. The second image confirms this; it compares undisciplined fools to the self-controlled within this life. The appetites and their objects now appear as several jars with various contents. The undisciplined person's jars leak (just like a fool's single jar in the first image), so she spends her time filling her jars to avoid the pain of unfulfilled appetites. The self-controlled person's jars are intact, so her appetites are full and her life is quiet (493d–94a). Socrates does not say whether the self-controlled and the undisciplined share all the same appetites in different conditions, or whether each has jars that the other lacks. They certainly share many of the same jars in different conditions – again, each has bodily appetites simply because they are embodied, but the self-controlled have moderate bodily appetites. However, it also seems likely that the undisciplined have some (insatiable) desires that the self-controlled lack entirely, while the self-controlled have some (satisfiable) desires that the undisciplined lack entirely.

The fools in the first image face two problems: their jars leak, and so do the sieves with which they fill their jars. The undisciplined in the second image clearly face the first of these problems – their jars leak – while the self-controlled do not. However, the second image contains no direct parallel to the sieve from the first. Socrates says in the second image how hard it is to procure the jars' contents for both the undisciplined and the self-controlled. Still, the fools' souls in the first image are sieves precisely because they are fools, and Socrates denies that the self-controlled are foolish (491e). The self-controlled surely find it easier to procure the object

of any given appetite they have. So, undisciplined fools in both images not only have appetites that are less satiable in their own right; they also find it harder to fulfill any given appetite of fixed “leakiness” or satiability, because they are foolish.

Unsurprisingly, these images fail to move Callicles. They embody disputed Socratic assumptions, and so seem to simply pound the table. At the outset, Callicles and Socrates disagree over whether or not the self-controlled are foolish (491e), and Callicles calls those who need nothing corpses (492e; cp. the many’s opinion about philosophy at *Phd.* 64b–c). Socrates’ images do nothing to address those disagreements. Neither his description of the undisciplined person’s hectic life nor his bare assumption that the undisciplined are fools should convince Callicles. As yet, he has given no reason to suppose that someone with undisciplined appetites cannot fulfill those appetites, or that the life of busily fulfilling undisciplined appetites would be bad rather than good.

As he leaves behind the jar images, Socrates uses examples of eating while hungry and drinking while thirsty as starting points to capture the ideal of unqualified appetite-fulfillment. When Callicles reaffirms that ideal, Socrates shames him on grounds that he thereby commits himself to endorsing lives filled entirely with particular kinds of appetite-fulfillment. First he mentions a life of scratching itches, then a life of scratching only one’s itchy head (494c–e), and finally a life of sexual desire and gratification (494e–95b).³⁰

A life structured around scratching itches, or scratching itches just on one’s head, certainly seems ridiculous and so shameful. However, refutation through ridicule often just reinscribes conventional attitudes (473e, 482c–83a, 486d–88a; cf. *R.* 452a–e, 457a–b). Callicles is ashamed of what he is committed to, but if that shame stems from internalized conventions that he has not yet thrown off, and if there is really nothing wrong with such lives by nature, then Socrates here gives Callicles no good reason to abandon his view. Of course, once Socrates refutes hedonism and Callicles abandons it, the problem disappears (in a way). Callicles can then reject the lives of scratching and sex that shamed him, but which his ideal committed him to endorsing. Still, unless Socrates’ refutations show why

³⁰ Again, I understand the κίτριδος to be a general sexual profligate; see Davidson 1997. Socrates’ mention of other shameful things hinted at (495b) may allude to lives filled with specific sexual activities. That it, he may be gesturing at activities that are related to sexual profligacy in general as scratching itches only on one’s head stands to scratching itches in general. It is worth noting that jars are not unique to Plato as images of appetitive or even specifically sexual desire; cf. Davidson 1997, 176–80.

lives filled with scratching or sex are defective, it remains unclear why Callicles should not flout convention. However, precisely because Socrates' strategies are unified by his worry about hedonic error, we can show that he does not merely reinscribe convention, and that his images are more than just table-pounding – though they also are not transparent rational arguments. The crucial passage for making this case is the “argument from opposites.”

6.3.2 *The argument from opposites and hedonic error*

The argument from opposites looks to be invalid. I will argue that its invalidity is best repaired by appealing to the pervasive phenomenon of hedonic error due to contrast effects. The first version or phase of Socrates' argument runs like this:

- A1. Faring well is the opposite of faring badly. (495e)
- A2. Faring well = being happy = having good things; faring badly = being unhappy = having bad things. (cf. *Euthyd.* 278e–79a; *Symp.* 204c–5a)
- A3. Opposites neither exist together nor cease together in the same place at the same time. (495e–96b)³¹
- A4. Good and bad neither exist together nor cease together in the same place at the same time. (496b; from A1, A2, A3)
- A5. Every appetite gives immediate pain wherever the appetite is. (496c–d)
- A6. Every filling of an appetite gives immediate pleasure wherever the appetite is. (496c–e, 494b–d)
- A7. Fillings of appetites and the appetites they fill exist together in the same place at the same time. (496d–e)
- A8. (At least some) pleasures and pains exist together in the same place at the same time. (496e; from A5, A6, A7)
- A9. Pleasure and good are not the same; pain and bad are not the same. (497a; from A4, A8)

The second version or phase of his argument extends the first:

- A10. Fillings of appetites and the appetites they fill cease together in the same place at the same time. (497b, 497c, 494a–b)
- A11. (At least some) pleasures and pains cease together in the same place at the same time. (497c–d; from A5, A6, A10)
- A12 (= A9). Pleasure and good are not the same; pain and bad are not the same. (497d; from A4, A11)

³¹ Dodds 1959, 310 notes that Socrates never quite says this, but he takes it for granted.

The problem is that the inferences at A9 and A12 appear invalid.³² Socrates is entitled to conclude that pleasure and pain are jointly distinct from good and bad, but not that they are severally distinct.³³ His conclusion would follow if we supplied the premise that pain and pleasure are opposites.³⁴ However, supplying such a premise directly undermines A3. The whole thrust of the argument is that some pleasures and pains exist together and cease together in the same place at the same time. If pleasure and pain are opposites, then some opposites fail to behave as A3 says they behave, and so the argument still fails.

One might reply that pleasure and pain are simply irrational or strange opposites (*ἄλογον*, 496b; *ἄτοπον*, *Phd.* 59a, 60b–c), precisely in that they violate the principle of non-opposition. Flattery and its parts would then be derivatively irrational, since they take pleasure as their end (465a, 501a, 519d).³⁵ But if certain opposites violate the principle of non-opposition, there seems no principled reason why good and bad could not also be such opposites. The peculiar behavior of pleasure and pain would then be consistent with their being identical to good and bad, and the argument from opposites would still fail.

We need not abandon the principle of non-opposition to repair the argument from opposites;³⁶ we need only introduce Socrates' account of hedonic error through contrast with pain and its removal. Here in the *Gorgias*, Socrates uses his pleasure vocabulary to cover experiences of any felt hedonic magnitude. However, Socrates is regularly easy in his use of language, and both his examples and his descriptions of those examples suggest that hedonic contrast and error lurk in the background. Eating while hungry and drinking while thirsty require painful appetites of hunger and thirst, as Socrates clearly recognizes. The odd fact to be explained is that these pleasures exist together and cease together with their correlative pains. But this is readily explained, on the hypothesis that the relevant pleasures are not pleasures, but mere removals of pain. Removals of pain obviously must exist together with pain and cease together with pain. To explain why these felt pleasures behave so strangely in relation to their purported opposites, all that must be added is

³² My exposition of the problem follows Franklin 2005, 235–37; see also his references at 235 n. 16.

³³ Callicles never says explicitly that pain is the bad. He could say that pleasure is the good and deny that pain is the bad, but this logically possible position seems unattractive.

³⁴ As Franklin 2005 notes, Socrates at least insinuates that they are opposites at 475a.

³⁵ This is Franklin's strategy for dealing with the problem.

³⁶ However, cases like this may show why the principle of non-opposition calls for further inquiry (*R.* 437a).

that removals of pain seem pleasant by contrast with the pain being removed.³⁷

So, by attributing a *Republic*-style view of hedonic error to Socrates in the *Gorgias*, we can rescue and deepen his argument from opposites. On this reading, Socrates argues somewhat enigmatically in pursuit of a punchy *ad hominem* refutation of Callicles, who takes the hedonic appearances at face value. However, that seems a fair interpretive price to pay. Socrates is rarely averse to a little mystery, and the alternative reading pays a higher price by supposing that Socrates abandons or qualifies the principle of non-opposition and lacks any principled reason to suppose that good and bad observe that principle.³⁸

6.3.3 Images and shame again

As promised, this reading helps to show how Socrates' use of shame amounts to more than enforcement of social convention, and his use of images to more than table-pounding. The same background thoughts about hedonic error that clarify and improve the argument from opposites uncover the point and power of those opening maneuvers.

Socrates introduces his attempts to shame by reviewing the ideal of cultivating and satisfying large appetites; his examples are eating while hungry and drinking while thirsty. The argument from opposites uses the same examples, which suggests that we might apply its insights not only to eating and drinking, but also to the appetite-fulfillments that shame Callicles – scratching and sex. As read above, the argument from opposites does suggest a rational critique of the life of scratching. That argument, I suggested, can be rescued by assuming that some pleasures are either magnified through juxtaposition and contrast with pain and its removal, or are nothing but removals of pain. Scratching an itch, like the pleasures of convalescence (*R.* 583c–d; cf. *Phil.* 45a–c), seems to fall into the latter category. But alternately inducing and removing pains for an entire life is

³⁷ More exactly, eating while hungry and drinking while thirsty are not pure pleasures whose felt magnitude reflects their real magnitude, but mixed pleasures whose felt magnitude is magnified due to contrast with appetitive pain and its removal. The real pleasures involved in eating cannot, on this account, exist in the same place, at the same time as the painful appetites and appetite-removals with which they occur.

³⁸ *Phaedo* 60b–c reflects the same view of what people call pleasure. Socrates does not say that one cannot *have* these so-called pleasures at the same time as pain, as some translations have it. Rather, he says these so-called pleasures cannot *arise* together (παράγλυψεσθαι) simultaneously with pain. That is what we should expect; pain cannot simultaneously arise and be removed, any more than knowledge (*Phd.* 76c–d).

obviously *hedonically* worse than a life free from both pain and its removal, whether the pains in question are itches or the pains of illness.³⁹ (*Gorgias* 478c–d makes a parallel point, that it is *better* never to get sick than to get sick and recover. Cultivating illnesses simply in order to recover from them is ridiculous.) The “pleasures” of scratching and convalescence have no real magnitude – they are removals of pain that merely seem like pleasures – and so a life organized around such experiences is ridiculous and shameful not only by convention, but also by nature.

The sexually profligate life can be critiqued similarly. The pleasures of sex, like the pleasures of eating and drinking, are magnified by contrast with painful appetites and removals of those pains, though they do have real magnitude. If we import Socrates’ account of real relative magnitudes of pleasure from *Republic* 585a–e, we can then say that the pleasures of sex, like those of eating and drinking, are in fact smaller than others that Callicles neglects (e.g., the pleasures of philosophy; cf. 484c–d). So, there are good reasons for Callicles to be ashamed of endorsing a life organized around the desires of the sexual profligate (or the glutton or the drunk). Thus, Socrates is not merely taking advantage of baseless conventional attitudes that Callicles has yet to root out.

However, we should be cautious. Socrates’ account of hedonic error in the *Republic* resolves difficulties internal to the *Gorgias*’ argument from opposites. Thus, it is reasonable to use that account to offer a rational (and not merely conventional) basis for criticizing the life of scratching. But Socrates’ account of real relative hedonic magnitudes is *not* necessary to make sense of the argument from opposites. (In the case of scratching, Socrates’ positive account of real hedonic magnitudes is otiose; scratching an itch is simply a removal of pain that involves no genuine pleasure. Socrates’ account of real relative hedonic magnitudes is not needed to reach this conclusion.) So, while Socrates’ discussion of hedonism implicitly relies on the phenomenon of hedonic error, and that implicit reliance vindicates his use of the life of scratching to criticize Callicles’ hedonism, the same implicit reliance can only gesture toward a way of vindicating his use of the sexual profligate that is fully articulated in the *Republic*. As I shall argue in [Chapter 8](#), the *Republic* also provides the resources for understanding, from Callicles’ own perspective, why he is ashamed to endorse the life of the κίτριδος.

Finally, Socrates actually uses the jar images in the third part of his “greatest and most decisive” argument (*R.* 586a–d). He describes those who

³⁹ It is a little odd to call itching a pain, but itching is surely unpleasant, i.e., the opposite of pleasant.

fail to correct for hedonic error – those inexperienced in (the pleasures of) knowledge and virtue – like this (586b, 586d):

Their desires are insatiable [ἀπληστίων]. For they aren't using things that are to fill the part of themselves that is a thing that is, and a leak-proof vessel.

Even where the desires of the profit-loving and honor-loving parts are concerned, those who follow knowledge and argument, and pursue with their help the pleasures that wisdom prescribes, will attain – to the extent that they can attain true pleasure at all – the truest pleasures.

Those who fail to correct for hedonic error lack certain appetites – appetites for knowledge and virtue – and so neglect their satisfactions. This parallels one feature of the jar images in the *Gorgias*, as interpreted above: the undisciplined lack certain satiable appetites that the disciplined have and satisfy. Further, those who fail to correct for hedonic error lack the knowledge that would restrain their appetitive and spirited desires, which leaves them with insatiable appetitive and spirited desires and with less ability to fulfill even more moderate appetitive and spirited desires. This too parallels the jar images as interpreted above. The *Gorgias* presents the jar images in far more detail than the *Republic*, but it does not say how those images do more than embody disputed Socratic views (especially the claim that the wise are self-controlled). The *Republic* explains the jar images and justifies those disputed views by showing how hedonic error makes appetitive and spirited goods seem greater than goods of the soul. Hence, the very same people have strong appetitive desires (their objects seem more pleasant and better than they are), lack strong desires for virtue and knowledge (these seem less pleasant and good than they are), and are less able to fulfill even restrained appetitive desires than are those with strong desires for virtue and knowledge. This is not to say that Callicles, or any reader of the *Gorgias* just by itself, will understand how hedonic error provides the implicit rational force that lies behind the jar images. Still, this does seem to be the implicit rational force that lies behind the jar images.

6.3.4 *The argument from pleased cowards*

Socrates' last argument against hedonism before Callicles officially rejects it is the argument from pleased cowards (497e–99b):

- B1. People are good by the presence of good things and bad by the presence of bad things. (497e, 498d, 498e)
- B2. The wise and courageous are good, the foolish and cowardly bad. (497e, 498c, 499a)

- B3. Fools and cowards feel as much pleasure as the wise and courageous, if not more. (497e–98c, 498e)
- B4. The bad feel as much pleasure as the good, if not more. (from B2, B3; 498c, 499a)
- B5. If hedonism is true, then people are good by the presence of pleasure and bad by the presence of pain. (from B1; 498d, 498e, 499a)⁴⁰
- B6. If hedonism is true, then the bad are as good as the good, if not better than they are. (from B4, B5; 498c, 499a–b)
- B7. Hedonism is false. (from B6)

One natural response would be to reject B3. Callicles thinks that the wise and courageous are better positioned to cultivate and fulfill the full range of appetites, and so experience more pleasure than the foolish and cowardly (see esp. 491e–92a). So, he should not agree that in general, fools and cowards feel at least as much pleasure as the wise and courageous.

Socrates argues for B3 by describing how the courageous and the cowardly react to the movements of enemy troops. Callicles agrees that the cowardly feel as much pleasure as the courageous when the enemy retreat, if not more (498a–b). Notably, Socrates describes the affective experiences of the courageous and cowardly over a brief period, not over their whole lives. So, we seem to face a choice: either read Socrates as arguing against present-aim hedonism, so that he has a good argument against an implausible target – or read him as arguing against prudential hedonism, in which case Callicles could appeal to longer-term hedonic consequences of being courageous or cowardly to avoid refutation.⁴¹

This dilemma can be avoided. Socrates implicitly casts doubt on the reliability of our present hedonic experiences, thereby undermining prudential hedonism just as surely as present-aim hedonism. To see this, we must examine more closely what Socrates says about the hedonic experiences of the courageous and cowardly. Callicles agrees that the cowardly feel as much pleasure as the courageous when the enemy retreat, if not more (498a–b).⁴² Socrates replies that it doesn't matter whether cowards feel as much pleasure or more (498b), and for the argument as reconstructed above, it does not. Whether the bad are as good as the bad or better than the bad, we reach a contradiction. Thus, it seems odd that Socrates next *pursues* the question whether the cowardly feel as much pleasure as the

⁴⁰ Socrates actually assumes hedonism *ad hominem* and derives a contradiction rather than introducing it conditionally, but this difference in phrasing should make no important logical difference.

⁴¹ See especially Irwin 1979; Gosling and Taylor 1982; and White 1985.

⁴² See Dodds 1959 *ad* 498a8 on the textual problem here.

courageous or more (498b). First, he asks whether the cowardly feel as much pain as the courageous when the enemy advance, or more. Here, Callicles is understandably tempted by the stronger view – the cowardly feel more pain than the courageous when the enemy advance. Socrates then infers that the cowardly must also experience more pleasure when the enemy retreat. The natural explanation is that felt pleasure at the enemy's retreat is merely removal of the pain felt at their presence or advance. If removal of a greater pain offers a greater felt pleasure, then someone who feels greater pain at the enemy's presence or advance will experience more felt pleasure when they retreat. That is why Socrates pursues the question – irrelevant to his argument as presented above – of whether the courageous only feel as much pleasure as the cowardly when the enemy retreat, or more.

In this way, Socrates can avoid the dilemma above. If passing affective experiences mislead in this way – if removal of pain feels like pleasure, but is not – then any form of prudential hedonism that trusts in present affective experiences is also undermined by the argument. To weigh the long-term hedonic value of courage and cowardice requires a reliable measure of pleasure at any given moment. If present hedonic experiences are susceptible to error when they occur, then they cannot provide such a measure. Prudential hedonists need some other measure against which to correct present hedonic experience. That measure cannot be other fallible felt pleasures and pains, whether past, present, or future. So, once again, correcting for hedonic error requires a non-hedonic measure of the pleasant. The natural reply to the argument from pleased cowards thus fails, once we see how Socrates connects hedonism and hedonic error in the *Gorgias*.⁴³

Again, then: behind all of Socrates' diverse and seemingly unconnected strategies for refuting hedonism in the *Gorgias* lies a commitment to the existence and pervasiveness of hedonic error. Attributing such a commitment to him helps to explain and improve all of his strategies. It also unifies his treatments of hedonism in the *Gorgias* and *Republic*.

6.4 Hedonic error and hedonic measurement in the *Protagoras*

In earlier chapters, I explored two competing explanations for (i) why Socrates presents a hedonist theory of good and virtue in the *Protagoras*;

⁴³ *Philebus* 55a–c offers a similar argument, just after Socrates argues that being in a stable harmony is better than undergoing disintegration and restoration (53c–55a). Frede 1993, 66 n. 2 thinks this passage is out of place. If I am right, both arguments depend on larger thoughts about hedonic error, so both are well-situated in a sequence of arguments that alludes to (*Gorgias*) or discusses (*Philebus*) such error.

and (ii) why he presents a specifically bodily form of hedonism. Pro-hedonists explain the former point by saying that Socrates is a hedonist presenting a view that he endorses, and the latter by noting that Socrates notionally addresses the many, who will find a specifically bodily hedonism more appealing. These two explanations fit uneasily, though: the first appeals to the face value of the text, while the second abstracts away from the face value of the text (cf. [Chapter 1](#)). In contrast, I explain (i) by saying that Socrates introduces hedonism *ad hominem*, because he suspects Protagoras is a hedonist. Protagoras confirms his suspicions, but he immediately backs away from hedonism out of shame (cf. [3.3.2](#)). The many provide a fitting proxy for Protagoras' concealed hedonism both because they too are hedonists and because Protagoras formed his conception of the good in part by internalizing the many's through shame and fear of punishment (cf. [Chapter 5](#)). Then, I explain (ii) by saying that Socrates is (partly) addressing the many, who will find a specifically bodily hedonism more appealing. However, this raises two questions: first, what is the connection between these explanations? Are the many prone to accept a specifically bodily form of hedonism *because* they are hedonists? Second, if so, why is the connection between hedonism and desire for bodily goods broken in the case of Protagoras and most of the interlocutors in the *Gorgias* – all of whom seem to desire reputational pleasures and goods more than bodily ones?

The account of Plato's anti-hedonism developed in this chapter explains why the many, as hedonists, would organize their lives around bodily goods and pleasures. Bodily pleasures seem larger than they are, and it takes a non-hedonist criterion of the good and pleasant to correct such errors. As hedonists, the many trust the apparent magnitudes of their pleasures. Bodily pleasures seem to them to be the largest pleasures, so they prioritize bodily pleasures and the goods relevant to obtaining them. The many's hedonism seems to treat reputational and intellectual goods primarily as means to bodily goods and pleasures (cf. [Chapter 1](#)). Protagoras' desire for reputational pleasures and goods admits of a similar explanation: spirited pleasures are also subject to magnification through contrast with pain. As the many value reputational goods primarily as means to bodily pleasure, so Protagoras treats bodily goods such as wealth primarily as tokens of esteem (cf. [328b–c](#)). But why do the many prioritize bodily pleasures and goods over reputational pleasures and goods, while Protagoras does the opposite? Briefly, most people – literally “the majority” – have stronger appetitive desires than desires for victory, reputation, and other spirited goods, right from birth. A few people, including

Protagoras, have stronger desires for positional goods such as victory and reputation. Contrast effects work differently for these two groups. So, while Protagoras and the many are both hedonists, their hedonism leads them to seek different pleasures as their final ends. Whether a given person's hedonism leads her to prioritize bodily or reputational goods depends on the strength of her desires for each sort of good. Those desires vary innately, but they are also altered, shaped, and directed by upbringing.⁴⁴

One might wonder whether the measuring craft could correct for hedonic error, breaking the connection between being a hedonist and having excessive desires for bodily (or reputational) goods. However, that craft as described in the *Protagoras* cannot redirect one's priorities away from bodily or reputational pleasures and goods and toward pleasures and goods of the soul. Socrates introduces the measuring craft while arguing that pleasure cannot rule wisdom (355a–56a). One objection to his claim says that immediate pleasures differ from temporally distant pleasures. This objection clearly comes from the perspective of the ignorant, and expresses one common way in which people are weaker than pleasure. The ignorant, Socrates responds, wrongly prioritize immediate pleasure because they lack the art of measurement. As visible things seem small from far away and large when seen up close, so too pleasant things seem less pleasant from a temporal distance and more pleasant when immediately available. Knowledge of good and bad (= pleasure and pain) corrects for these temporal distortions and weighs distant pleasures and pains on an equal footing with proximate pleasures and pains. The agent thus avoids being ruled by immediate pleasures.

This sort of measurement, just by itself, cannot correct the many's preference for pleasures and goods of the body over those of the soul, because those preferences are not driven by mistaken preferences for immediate over distant pleasure. Immediate bodily pleasures seem greater than immediate pleasures of the soul, and distant bodily pleasures seem greater than distant pleasures of the soul. Thus, no correction for temporal distance will inform the agent that learning is more truly pleasant for her than eating, and so make the *relevant* appearances lose their power.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ One possible explanation for the hostility between sophists and the many, in spite of their shared values, would be that their hedonism leads them to value different goods – the many's hedonism and associated hedonic errors lead them to value bodily goods; the sophists' lead them to value reputational goods. In fact, though, sophists and the many both value both bodily and reputational goods, even though the relationship between them is different. Again, [Chapter 8](#) will address the true source(s) of hostility.

⁴⁵ *Philebus* 42b mentions two causes of hedonic error: observing pleasures and pains alternately from close up and far away, and observing them simultaneously side by side. The *Protagoras* only

While Socrates says that immediate pleasures and distant pleasures must be subjected to a common measure, he never suggests any need to correct for the relative apparent pleasantness of different immediate pleasures. Such a correction is needed to reprioritize pleasures and goods of the soul over those of the body. Therefore, in presenting hedonism to the many, Socrates focuses on bodily pleasure, which seems greater to them than other pleasures at a fixed temporal distance. Measurement in the *Protagoras* uses an imperfect measure, the best result of which would likely be the life of popular virtue (*Phd.* 68d–69c), of the oligarch (*R.* 553a–55b), of human prudence (*Phdr.* 238d–41d), or of a clever prisoner in the Cave image (cf. “divining the future” at *R.* 516d).

6.5 Conclusion

This concludes the first stage in addressing the two tasks sketched at the end of [Chapter 5](#): to explain in more detail the content and structure of popular morality, and to address several puzzles about elite internalization of popular morality. In particular, this chapter has discussed the content of popular (and elite) hedonism. It has started to show that Socrates thinks hedonism lies at the core of a complex of popular attitudes about the good and virtue, though the structure must be articulated in more detail. It has explained why hedonism is intrinsically plausible, which is why those with a desire for the real good can be hedonists. Insofar as popular views of virtue stem from hedonism, this also blocks any regress in purely social explanations of popular morality’s content, and it explains why the many’s “education” in virtue can rely on a prior commitment that suffering injustice is worse than doing it. These answers must be shored up by a fuller account of how popular views of virtue stem from hedonism ([Chapter 7](#)). Finally, one puzzle about internalization of popular values has yet to be addressed: why sophists and the many are mutually hostile, even though they share their core conceptions of virtue and the good (8.1).

mentions the first sort of error, which is why the measuring art as described there only corrects for that sort of error.

Hedonist misconceptions of virtue

I have argued that we should expect Plato to say that mistakes about virtue flow from mistakes about the good. Further, hedonism and its associated hedonic errors are the core mistakes that most people make about the good – not only the many, but also sophists, orators, artists, and most other political and intellectual elites. Combining these points, we should expect Plato to say that widespread mistakes about virtue flow from hedonism and its associated hedonic errors. That expectation is met; right after Socrates explains hedonic error and the measurement of true hedonic magnitudes in *Republic IX*, he describes the ethical mistakes of those who fail to correct for hedonic error – and especially the injustices they commit. That passage echoes the Cave image, which depicts the condition of those who suffer from systematic hedonic error – in which sense they are oriented toward images. Desires produced by hedonic errors fix the prisoners' attention on the cave wall; two of the shadows on the wall are said to be images of two virtues, justice (517d) and wisdom (516c).

I have also given a parallel reading of the *Gorgias*. There, Socrates critiques oratory and sophistry in two ways: each seeks pleasure without the good and each merely imitates a craft that knows justice. As each craft's nature is set by the good at which it aims, so each knack's nature (as an imitator of justice) is set by the felt pleasures at which it aims, as if they were good. The large-scale structure of the *Gorgias* reflects the same point: Socrates pursues mistakes about justice (and virtue more generally) back to their source in mistakes about the good – and in particular, back to hedonism and its associated hedonic errors. Further evidence for this general outlook can be found in other dialogues as well. In the *Theaetetus*, for example, the first genuine refutation of Protagoreanism says that anyone who distinguishes the wise from the foolish must deny Protagoreanism about the good (169d–71e).¹

¹ The self-refutation argument's focus on attitudes about the good seems to be elided in most scholarship. I say "first genuine refutation" because Socrates offers responses to all his previous objections (157e–68c).

Rejecting Protagoreanism about the good requires abandoning it about the useful (that is, about the future good), and so in turn about justice (172a–b, 177c–79b).

So, Plato thinks that mistakes about the good, and in particular, hedonism and its associated hedonic errors, lead to mistakes about virtue. But we would like to know more about how hedonism leads to specific mistakes about virtue in general and about particular virtues such as justice, piety, courage, temperance, and wisdom. That is this chapter's task. I begin with the case that has already received the most attention: how hedonism and its associated hedonic errors produce misconceptions of justice. I also explain related views of families, friends, and cities, and how mistakes about social virtue shape social life, and I extend my account to cover piety (7.1). Next, I turn to popular misconceptions of courage, temperance, wisdom, and virtue in general. First, I describe popular views of courage and temperance, and I argue that these grow out of popular views about wisdom and virtue in general: that wisdom is weak and, relatedly, that virtue is many. Then, I argue that these views of wisdom and virtue stem from hedonism. That may sound odd; Socrates says in the *Protagoras* that hedonism entails that wisdom is strong. However, he has a consistent view. Socrates thinks that *being* a hedonist leads one to *think* wisdom is weak and virtue many, which leads in turn to popular views of courage and temperance. Hedonism *entails* that wisdom is strong and virtue one. So, most people hold inconsistent views, but that is what we would expect Socrates to say (7.2). Finally, I reconstruct Socrates' closely related diagnosis of popular morality's inconsistent views about whether virtue is teachable (7.3). Throughout, I attempt to explain why popular morality makes its adherents ashamed not to hold certain views that they would also be ashamed to express openly.

7.1 Justice and piety

I begin with a brief review of relevant material from [Chapter 6](#). There, we saw that pleasures are perceived restorations of a good and harmonious condition. So, felt pleasure is defeasible evidence about what is good for its subject. This connection between pleasure and the good makes it plausible to draw a simple one-over-many inference and to suppose that pleasure is the good, i.e., to be a hedonist. But not only are felt pleasures not identical to the goods they offer evidence for; they are not even a fully reliable guide to what is good. Contrast effects with pains cause hedonic error, so our hedonic evidence is systematically distorted. In particular, bodily and

reputational pleasures seem bigger than they are thanks to contrast with the pains of lack. That makes their objects seem more pleasant than they are, and so better than they are. Only by using a non-hedonic criterion of the good, i.e., only by rejecting hedonism, can one correct for hedonic errors. The true magnitude of a pleasure is fixed by how enduringly, stably, and truly pleasant its object is. Measuring how enduringly and truly pleasant something is cannot be done by reference to felt pleasures alone, because further felt pleasures are also subject to contrast effects and hedonic error. So, hedonists are inevitably subject to uncorrected hedonic errors and harbor excessively strong desires for goods of the body and reputation. Which desires are stronger for a given hedonist results from the innate strength of her felt appetitive and spirited lacks, which produce stronger felt pleasures when filled.² Of course, nominal goods of the soul can still seem important to hedonists, insofar as these produce bodily and reputational goods and pleasures (cf. 1.1).³

That brings us from hedonism and its associated hedonic errors to strong desires for bodily and reputational goods. Chapter 6 also briefly and schematically described how Socrates connects such desires with mistakes about the nature of justice and with injustice. These are related; failing to grasp that justice is unconditionally good – a mistake about its nature – connects, through our desire for the good, with acting unjustly in pursuit of other goods on which the value of justice is taken to be conditioned. However, this does not yet fully explain why someone who aims at bodily or reputational goods and pleasures must act unjustly, rather than simply failing to pursue justice to the extent she might. (Compare: someone who cares more about music than health need not practice her instrument to the point of illness, even if she prioritizes practicing over other activities that would make her healthier.) We have seen why strong desires for bodily and reputational goods lead one to think that suffering injustice is worse than doing it (6.2.2), but we have not yet seen why such desires lead one to do injustice rather than neither doing nor suffering injustice.

The crucial point here is that bodily and reputational goods are competitive goods.⁴ Food, drink, sexual access, victory, or honor that one person

² Cf. *Philebus* 35a–d on the relationship between lack and desire: not every felt (painful) lack is a desire, since desires are for the objects remembered to fulfill a painful lack. Hence I avoid talk of “desires” here in discussing our innate natural variance in the felt painfulness of different lacks.

³ Again, it is unclear why Socrates thinks the soul’s own pleasures do not also seem greater than they are; relief from the pain of grappling with a math proof surely increases one’s felt pleasure once one solves it.

⁴ See Adkins 1960 on competitive and cooperative conceptions of virtue and Plato’s ethical project.

enjoys cannot be shared by another without loss.⁵ Not so those goods of the soul sought by philosophy, the sharing of which benefits both recipient and donor (*Ch.* 166d; *G.* 505e). Indeed, Socrates frames his narration of the *Protagoras* by referring to the “double favor” it constitutes: Socrates benefits his friends by telling them what happened, and they benefit him by listening (310a). In particular, someone who shares knowledge, true belief, or virtue does not thereby deprive herself of her knowledge, true belief, or virtue. Further, sharing knowledge, true belief, or virtue benefits the person who shares by making the recipient like herself and her friend.⁶

Certain kinds of knowledge and true belief are not like this. Nominal goods of the soul that are instruments to bodily and reputational goods are, derivatively, competitive goods that cannot be shared without loss. So, for example, craftsmen jealously guard trade secrets (*Pr.* 327a–b), and sophists will only teach for a fee – even if, like Protagoras, they let students set their own price after the fact (328b–c).⁷ As the latter example reminds us, and as Plato is well aware (e.g., *R.* 369b–72d), an exchange of competitive goods can benefit both parties to the exchange. However, mutually-beneficial exchange of competitive goods occurs only under certain conditions. One possibility is that the parties to the trade have roughly equal information and power, so that neither party can outdo the other through fraud or force and must benefit the other party in turn. Another is that both parties see their trade as occurring within the larger context of a cooperative good, justice, that is more important to each of them than the competitive goods they are justly trading. The former conditions are significantly easier to come by than the latter.

According to Plato, then, hedonism is inevitably associated with hedonic error, and hedonic error leads to strong desires for bodily and reputational goods, as well as for goods of the soul that produce bodily and reputational goods. Those are all competitive goods – goods that cannot be shared without loss. But if competitive goods are the primary or only goods at stake, then prudence calls for being acquisitive, or pleonectic. Often, though, the best way to acquire more competitive goods is to take those that belong to others, making them worse off and so harming them. By

⁵ This may seem least obvious in the case of sex; see 8.1 for more on why sex is a competitive good.

⁶ For further discussion relevant to this theme, see especially Woolf 2000.

⁷ Protagoras' main aim seems to be acquiring a reputation for wisdom (cf. Chapter 4). For him, then, the fee he charges is primarily a token of esteem. Making this boast projects confidence in the esteem of others, which can itself produce the reputation he desires. (People think that nobody would be foolish enough to make the offer that Protagoras does if his students often judged his teaching to be faulty after the fact. Therefore, they suppose that those in the know consider him wise, and so they consider him wise too.)

the same token, keeping one's competitive goods may require harming others pre-emptively. Hence, pleonectic desires for competitive goods cause conflict and injustice both within and among cities (*Phd.* 66c–d; *R.* 359c, 372c–73e, 586a–b; cf. 422a–23a). Most people have a competitive conception of the good, grounded in their hedonism, so most people will think that injustice can be prudent, and that in the right circumstances even the just person will act unjustly, acquire more goods for herself, and so be happier (*R.* 359b–c). Protagoras and Glaucon both say that this view of justice is widespread, and Socrates agrees with them. However, only a few outliers like Callicles and Thrasymachus openly profess such a view;⁸ as Glaucon says, people usually publicly praise justice, “deceiving each other for fear of suffering injustice” (360d).

So, we can see why Plato connects hedonism to the views that suffering injustice is worse than doing injustice and to the view that doing injustice is prudent. To see why he connects hedonism to the popular conception of justice as helping friends and harming enemies, we must inquire further into the limiting conditions under which doing injustice is prudent.⁹ First, prudent injustice on any significant scale requires mutual cooperation. Second, prudent injustice on any scale requires avoiding reciprocal harm. These facts are not unique to unjust acts, but extend to just acts as well. Standing up for justice publicly is dangerous and can lead to unjust treatment (*Ap.* 31e–32a; *R.* 496c–d), so safely standing up for justice in public requires allies (*R.* 496c–d; [*Ep.* VII] 325c–d). Of course, sometimes one must take a stand in public by oneself and risk suffering injustice as a result, as in the cases that Socrates relates in the *Apology* (32a–e; cf. 1.2).

The second condition on prudent injustice – avoiding reciprocal harm – seems more obvious, both in itself and in the text. At least, it is mentioned more frequently by Plato's characters and by scholars. For example, Polus grants that killing, exiling, and confiscating benefit the agent only when he avoids punishment, while Socrates insists that these actions benefit both agent and patient only when done justly (*G.* 470a–c). Likewise, Glaucon opens his praise of injustice by saying that the only reason not to do

⁸ In my view, most of the apparent differences between Callicles and Thrasymachus are either notational variants or functions of their social situation. For a different account, see Barney 2004.

⁹ Epicureans avoid the conclusions that Plato thinks hedonists must draw. They say pleasures of the soul are greater than those of the body, and explain that the soul ranges over past, present, and future, while the body can only experience the present. They also think freedom from pain is the limit of pleasure – and in particular, that freedom from psychological pain is the limit of psychological pleasure. Crucially, this is a cooperative good; *ataraxia* can be shared without loss, and indeed achieving and maintaining it requires social support. So, the Epicureans are hedonists who think the pleasant life requires justice.

injustice is to avoid suffering it, as part of an agreement neither to do nor suffer injustice. Anyone who can do injustice without suffering it will, unless he is mad or cowardly (358e–59c, 360d; cf. *G.* 491a–92c and [Chapter 2](#) on madness and cowardice).¹⁰ One can do injustice without suffering it in three main ways: by concealing the injustice, by persuasion (not just verbal persuasion, but also bribes and payoffs), and by physical force (see, e.g., *R.* 341a–b, 344a, 345a, 360b–c, 361a–b, 365c–66a, 367b–c, and cf. 327c).

Hence my comments above about mutually-beneficial trade in competitive goods. Each party to such a trade would be better off, with respect to competitive goods, if they got what they did without giving what they did. Mutually-beneficial trade in competitive goods, then, depends upon the parties' neither doing nor suffering injustice (beyond some minimum, e.g., where one party shortchanges the other by a little). Those who think of the good as exhausted or dominated by competitive goods will mutually refrain from injustice only under threat of reciprocal harm. So, mutually-beneficial trade in competitive goods requires either rough equality of power and information (so neither party can do injustice unilaterally, through force, persuasion, or concealment), or else joint recognition that justice is more important to the happiness of each than the competitive goods they trade.

Socrates most clearly voices the less obvious point, that prudent injustice requires mutual cooperation, in response to Thrasymachus. The latter says that injustice is more advantageous and happier, more powerful, and more virtuous and wiser than justice (343d–44c, 348c–e). Socrates argues in reply that justice is more virtuous and wiser (349a–50d), more powerful (350d–52c), and more advantageous and happier (352d–54a).¹¹ In the second of these arguments, he says that one city can unjustly enslave others only through justice in its internal affairs; that one faction in a city can gain an unjust advantage over others only through justice among its members; and that in general, injustice depends asymmetrically on justice for its very ability to do injustice.¹² (Socrates extends this point all the way to the

¹⁰ Glaucon says that “the badness of suffering [injustice] far exceeds the goodness of doing it.” This could mean that whenever X wrongs Y, Y is harmed more than X benefits. More likely, the idea is that those treated unjustly retaliate with greater harms than the benefit derived from the original injustice – as is necessary for an effective deterrent. Notice that “suffering injustice” here includes any reciprocal “harm,” including punishments that Socrates would count as just and beneficial in removing injustice from the soul of the person punished. Cf. also [1.3.1](#) on retaliation and reciprocal harm.

¹¹ This covers the second half of the exchange with Thrasymachus (343d–44d, 347e–54a). There are puzzles about how this relates to the first half, which overlaps the second (336a–43c, 345b–47d).

¹² Contrast Heraclitus' essential unity of opposites, which denies any such asymmetry, as manifested by his claim that “justice is strife” (22B80, 22A22). As I read him, Nietzsche wants to resurrect the

individual psyche; an unjust person must have some degree of justice internally to accomplish injustice externally.) Without mutual cooperation and assistance, the unjust could only accomplish relatively minor injustices, such as pick-pocketing, that offer relatively small gains in competitive goods (*R.* 348d; cf. 575b). Hence, Thrasymachus cares mainly about the “complete injustice” exercised by rulers, especially tyrants (344a), which requires social cooperation (cf. 575a–76a, 578d–79e). Socrates’ point that prudent injustice on a significant scale requires social cooperation also complements and extends the point that prudent injustice requires not suffering reciprocal harm. Defending oneself by force against reciprocal harm requires not just individual physical strength and courage, but also aid from allies.¹³ Allies can also help one to persuade – for example, by improving one’s reputation for justice – and to conceal (cf. *R.* 361b; *G.* 479c).¹⁴

Call these social groups that cooperate in prudent injustice “pleonectic alliances,” since their function is to get more competitive goods for the group and its members. As at the individual level getting more competitive goods requires harming and being unjust to others, so too at the group level it requires harming and being unjust to competing groups and their members. For a group to successfully compete against outsiders, again, it needs some degree of justice and mutual benefit to prevail among insiders. Otherwise, insiders will become mutually hostile and the group will be unable to achieve its aim: getting more for the group and its members. Mutual cooperation within pleonectic alliances therefore comes to be seen by insiders as a requirement of justice. But the purpose of this mutual cooperation is to get more competitive goods for insiders at the expense of outsiders, so its members must also harm outsiders as part of fulfilling the duty of justice to help friends. Because most of humanity is primarily concerned with competitive goods and is driven by pleonectic desire, these same considerations structure nearly all of human social life. That produces a widely-shared conception of justice as helping friends (those inside a given group) and harming enemies (competing groups and their

Heracleitean position in his critique of Platonism and the “faith in opposite values” (*Beyond Good and Evil* I). This is also a major goal of the *Genealogy* – to show how moral values depend on their opposites.

¹³ Recall Socrates’ argument to Callicles that the many are superior in brute force (*G.* 488c–89c).

¹⁴ When Adeimantus summarizes his reasons for being dissatisfied with Socrates’ arguments thus far, he emphasizes that Socrates should not just show that justice is stronger than injustice (367b, 367e), which must refer back to this argument (350d–52c); it is unclear to me why he singles out this argument.

members).¹⁵ This conception of justice flows from a conception of the good as a competitive end pursued in circumstances of limited power and knowledge, so that prudent pursuit of the competitive end requires social cooperation (within limits, since it is for the sake of competitive goods).

This conception of justice was pervasive in ancient Greece.¹⁶ Gorgias implicitly accepts it in the *Gorgias* (cf. 4.2.1). Polemarchus gives the first appropriately general account of justice in the *Republic*: it is helping friends and harming enemies (331d–32c). Socrates considers this view of justice untenable because it enshrines injustice as a part of justice (335b–e), but few others share his concern. Crito effectively accuses Socrates of helping his enemies to kill him, and so of acting unjustly (*Cr.* 45c; cf. 5.3). Callicles complains repeatedly that philosophers not only cannot help themselves, but also cannot help friends and family (*G.* 483b, 485e–86b, 492c; cf. 508c–9c, 522c–d).¹⁷ Thrasymachus says that the just person in the strict sense, who refuses to do his family and friends unjust favors, ends up hated by them (*R.* 343e). Finally, when Glaucon and Adeimantus take up Thrasymachus' mantle, they mention both the unjust person's need for friends to help him (361b–65d) and the unjust help he gives to his friends (362c–d; cf. 360c).

The positions held by Callicles and Thrasymachus, and developed by Glaucon and Adeimantus, are sometimes described as “immoralist” or “egoist.” Whatever else we say of them, these views are not narrowly self-interested.¹⁸ They embrace injustice in significant part for the apparent benefits that one's injustice provides to others. One might attempt to redescribe this other-concern as merely instrumental to self-benefit, but nothing about the views as stated requires such a reading. Here we should recall that Plato's Socrates is in some sense an egoist, but one who desires the good of others either as constituents of his own good or because his desire for their good expresses or helps constitute his own good. If Callicles and others are egoists only in this attenuated sense, they are just like Socrates.

Pleonectic alliances produce enormously complex social structures and processes. Plato explores the complexities only implicitly and up to a point. However, two features in particular are important to understanding the

¹⁵ This is oversimplified; e.g., a full account would probably need a degreed notion of group membership.

¹⁶ See esp. Blundell 1989, ch. 2 and references at 26 n. 1; see also the essays in Gill *et al.* 1998.

¹⁷ Notice too Callicles' close partnership with three others: Teisander, Andron, and Nausicydes (487c–d). Andron is present in the *Protagoras* (315c).

¹⁸ Cf. Kamtekar 2005, 324–25; Bobonich 2002, §§ 1.3, 1.15.

connections among popular hedonism, popular conceptions of virtue, and how popular values are transmitted and sustained through shame and fear of punishment. Both features help to explain certain conflicts that inevitably arise within pleonectic alliances. First, when one alliance fully contains others, e.g., when a city contains political factions, I say the latter are *embedded* in the former. Factions can have subfactions embedded within them, cities can be embedded in larger alliances, and so on in both directions. Second, when two alliances share some members, but neither is embedded in the other, I say they *overlap*. Groups may overlap with each other in complex ways. Systems of pleonectic alliances are usually multiply-embedded and multiply-overlapping, which explains some of their structure and behavior.¹⁹

Overlapping and embedding can cause tension and conflict between and among groups. Overlapping clearly presents problems about the loyalties or priorities of members shared between groups. Embedding has two similar effects. First, suppose that groups A and B are embedded in C, and do not overlap.²⁰ That might roughly capture the hostile relationship between democrats and oligarchs at Athens. Nor is that situation peculiar to Athens; as Socrates explains why his ideal city will succeed in battle, he says that most cities contain this kind of division and conflict (*R.* 422e–23a; cf. 551d):

Each of them is a great many cities, but not a city . . . they contain two, at any rate, which are at war with one another: the city of the poor and that of the rich. And within each of these, there are a great many more.

This passage says that embedded pleonectic alliances are multiply-embedded. As cities are divided between rich and poor, so too the rich and poor are internally divided.

¹⁹ This simple model can be hard to apply to structures of friendship and animosity that constitute social life at a given place and time. For example, if a given alliance is made up *almost* entirely of citizens of one city, we could treat embeddedness as a matter of degree, or we could redraw the lines and describe it as a faction fully embedded in the city, but one that has an alliance with a few outsiders. Which description to prefer depends in part on further facts about the larger alliance, for example, which ties of friendship and animosity are firmer and which more tenuous. Still, even more detailed inquiry, even with a fixed purpose, and even assuming that all social relations are constituted by multiply-embedded and multiply-overlapping pleonectic alliances, will not yield a uniquely true, exhaustive description of social reality.

²⁰ At this level of abstraction, it is tempting to assimilate this simple case to that of two individual human beings in the same pleonectic alliance (e.g., two citizens of the same city). However, that would assume that human beings are not themselves collective agents that can overlap. Just as Plato extends his point that external justice requires internal justice down into the soul, so too he countenances alliances between soul-parts or even attitudes in different people (*R.* 559e–61b, 572b–75a). Plato clearly thinks that overlap between human beings is not just possible but commonplace.

Embedding causes conflict in a second way as well. Suppose group A is embedded in group B, which is embedded in C. Even at this level of description, conflicts predictably arise. Consider what happens when families come together to form a city. First, conflicts of interest and hostility may arise among families within the new civic alliance, much as they do among political factions (see above). So, when Socrates describes his ideal city, he abolishes private families among the guardians (*R.* 462a–65b). For otherwise (464c–d):

one would drag into his own house whatever he could separate from the others, and another would drag things into a different house to a different wife and children, and this would make for private pleasures and pains at private things.

Further, though, each citizen also has a family, so her loyalties may be divided between her family and (not other families but) the larger civic whole of which her family is now a part. This might be taken to describe the situations of Antigone and Creon.²¹ More complicated examples of multiply-overlapping and multiply-embedded alliances could be devised, but for present purposes, these basics should suffice.

The above account enables us to explain, as promised, why people are ashamed to express certain views openly that they also would be ashamed not to hold. Put differently, we can now explain why there are social pressures to hold certain views but also not to state them openly. Consider the view that injustice can be prudent. [Chapter 3](#) argued that Protagoras holds this view but is ashamed to express it openly. [Chapter 4](#) looked briefly at Polus, who is willing to say both that suffering injustice is worse than doing injustice and that injustice can be prudent, but who would still be ashamed to say that suffering injustice is more shameful than doing it. [Chapter 5](#) argued that Protagoras and Polus both hold their views of justice – the very ones they are ashamed to express openly – because they have internalized majority opinions out of shame and fear of punishment. We can now see why society presents this structure of incentives. Internal to the popular conception of justice as helping friends and harming enemies is the need to accept that injustice (against enemies, i.e., pleonectic competitors) can be prudent. At the same time, openly declaring that injustice can be prudent is not socially acceptable within a pleonectic alliance. Anyone in a pleonectic alliance will also be a member of other embedded or overlapping alliances. Such a social structure may present reasons to commit injustice

²¹ On these points about families and cities, see also Okin 1977.

against any given alliance of which one is a member. So, most pleonectic alliances will see it as socially unacceptable – as threatening to the alliance in question – to openly declare that injustice can be prudent.

Pleonectic society thus requires double-think about justice and injustice. One must be ready to commit injustice on behalf of a given pleonectic alliance to acquire competitive goods for insiders at the cost of outsiders. But the same prudential reasons that make one willing to commit injustice for the sake of one pleonectic alliance will make one willing to commit injustice for the sake of another that is, in certain circumstances, in competition with the first. Pleonectic alliances thus require that their members be willing to commit injustice for certain reasons in certain circumstances, but that they be unwilling to commit injustice for the very same reasons in other circumstances. Hence the seemingly odd fact: we must be willing to be unjust but cannot openly say so. We must be shamed if we will not unjustly acquire competitive goods for insiders, but we must also be shamed if we openly declare a willingness to unjustly acquire competitive goods. Closely connected double-think surrounds commitments about the good. Failing to be a hedonist and value bodily and reputational goods is shameful for at least two reasons. First, this is the obvious view of the good (6.1.3; 3.3.2), which it would reflect shameful ignorance to reject. Second, strong desires for bodily and reputational goods underlie pleonectic alliances. Because such desires are connected to hedonism, rejecting hedonism means opting out of the prevailing system of social organization. At the same time, though, some pleasures are shameful, and so openly endorsing unqualified hedonism is also shameful.

Socrates makes a related point while talking to Meletus in the *Apology* (25c–26a). Socrates stands accused of corrupting the youth. But (he argues) everyone knows that bad (i.e., unjust) associates and fellow-citizens harm those around them. So, if Socrates corrupts the youth (i.e., makes them bad and unjust, and so more likely to harm him), he must do so unwillingly, out of ignorance. This can be read as a narrow refutation, but Socrates is also bringing out an uneasy attitude toward injustice at the center of official political life: it is organized around competitive goods (cf. again *Ap.* 29d–30b), so it requires double-think. Inculcating injustice in the youth – corrupting them, which Socrates thinks most people do when they “educate in virtue” (25b) – invites self-harm. Socrates defends himself with this observation, but he also indicts prevailing norms of education in virtue.

We have seen how a competitive conception of the most important goods in life, in conditions of limited power and information, produces views of friendships, families, and cities as pleonectic alliances, and a

conception of justice as helping friends (including family-members and fellow-citizens) and harming enemies (competing families and cities). However, this leaves a crucial social virtue: piety. Whether piety is part of justice (*Eu.* 11e–12e; *G.* 507a–b) or simply is justice (*Pr.* 330c–31e), the popular conception of piety should be closely related to the popular conception of justice. And so it is: according to popular theology, the gods are acquisitive. So, they clash with each other and form competitive alliances with each other and with human beings. Throughout the *Iliad*, to take an obvious example, various gods favor different human beings and peoples and conflict with each other throughout. Further, human beings do what they can to attract and maintain the allegiance of certain gods, and act to propitiate or avoid angering others.

In Plato's dialogues, these themes are prominent in the *Euthyphro*, *Republic* II, and *Laws* X. In the *Laws*, the idea that the gods can be influenced through supplication and sacrifice is the most pernicious of three impieties, the other two being atheism and deism (885b, 905d–7b). In the *Republic*, Adeimantus claims that one can receive praise and rewards from the gods – rather than blame and punishment, whether in this life or after it – by propitiating them (365d–66b). Euthyphro expresses this view of the gods most clearly when he suggests that piety is pleasing the gods through prayer and sacrifice in return for protection of the household and city (14b). Socrates replies that what pleases the gods must either benefit them or be dear to them; the former makes the gods needy (14c–15a), while the latter reduces to the earlier failed definition (15b; cf. 9c–11b). This coheres with a view on which the gods conflict with each other (5e–6c, 7b–8b) but also have divine allies and favorites among human beings, accordingly as other gods and humans benefit or harm (or please or displease) them. So, religious innovation need not cause a problem, but the wrong kind can – as new friendships need not cause a problem with old ones, but the wrong kind can.

7.2 Courage, temperance, and wisdom

The dialogues contain two kinds of evidence about hedonism's relationship to misconceptions of courage. Some passages – the “argument from pleased cowards” and a brief restatement of that argument in the *Philebus* (55b–c) – argue directly that hedonism cannot account for courage as a virtue. I have argued that these passages use background assumptions about the connection between hedonism and hedonic error (6.3.4). Other passages directly state the core popular misconception of courage – namely,

that it is perseverance in the face of what is fearful – without overtly connecting that conception to hedonism. As Socrates starts his second argument that courage is wisdom, this is exactly what Protagoras says most people think (359b–c):

“So I asked him whether he would say that the courageous are confident, and he said ‘Yes, and raring to go.’ Do you remember giving these answers, Protagoras?” I said. He agreed. “Come then,” I said, “tell us: what do you say the courageous are raring to go for? For the same things as cowards?” He said no. “So for different ones?” I said. “Yes,” he said. “Do cowards go after encouraging things, while the courageous go after fearful ones?” “So people say, Socrates.”

Socrates here alludes to their earlier exchange over courage, which began like this (349e):

“Come then,” I said, “It’s worth examining what you say. Do you say the courageous are confident, or otherwise?” “Yes,” he said, “And raring to go for what the masses are afraid to go for.”

Here, Protagoras identifies just what the courageous are characteristically raring to go for: things that the many fear. But the many think that what they fear is genuinely fearful, so they will simply say that the courageous characteristically go for what is fearful, full stop. Protagoras endorses the majority view about courage (probably while supposing that he and others are courageous, while the many are cowardly) and defends it. This is the account of courage – perseverance in the face of the fearful – that Socrates refutes.

The many hold a parallel conception of temperance. In the *Republic*, Socrates says to Adeimantus (389d–e):

And aren’t these the most important aspects of moderation for the majority of people, namely, to obey the rulers and to rule the pleasures of drink, sex, and food for themselves?

And in the *Gorgias*, Socrates and Callicles have this exchange (490d–e):

Is there no need at all for [the intelligent ruler] to rule himself, but only to rule others?

What do you mean, rule himself?

Nothing very subtle. Just what the many mean: being self-controlled and master of oneself, ruling the pleasures and appetites within oneself.

Socrates not only alludes to a popular conception of temperance as ruling one’s pleasures and desires, he also seems inclined to endorse it. However, he can accept this as a true one-sentence description of temperance without

accepting the many's total analysis. For in the *Protagoras*, in disagreeing with the many, he says (358c):

“Being weaker than oneself is nothing other than ignorance, and being stronger than oneself nothing other than wisdom.”

So, the core popular conception of courage is the ability to persevere in or even to go after what is fearful, while the core popular conception of temperance is the ability to resist or even to retreat from what is pleasant.²² Popular conceptions of courage and temperance share certain features, but what is the connection, and how might each or both of these accounts flow from hedonism?

A middle step is needed. Popular conceptions of courage and temperance are each connected to popular views of wisdom and virtue in general. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates says that the many think wisdom is weak and that it can be ruled by pleasure and fear. But if wisdom can be ruled by pleasure and fear, then other virtues in addition to wisdom are needed to make wisdom's deliverances practically effective. The additional virtue needed to make wisdom's deliverances effective in the face of fear would be courage; the additional virtue needed to control desire and pleasure would be temperance.²³ But if wisdom suffices for wise action (i.e., if wisdom is strong and rules the wise person), then no further virtue is needed to make someone fully virtuous. (Recall [Chapter 3](#): if Protagoras thinks wisdom is strong, he is committed to the unity of virtue, and Socrates can refute his position at 352e. Instead, he argues for what Protagoras has already officially conceded: that wisdom is strong. In the midst of an exchange that examines Protagoras' own account of virtue, that suggests that Socrates does not consider Protagoras' concession sincere.)

This reduces two questions – how hedonism explains popular morality's conceptions of courage and temperance – to one. From the notion that wisdom is weak (and capable of being ruled by pleasure and fear) comes the felt need for further distinct virtues to bolster wisdom in the fully virtuous person. Thus, courage and temperance come to be thought of as capacities to persevere in the face of fear and to resist the lure of pleasure. So, if we can explain why hedonism leads people to think that wisdom is weak, we can

²² In the *Laches*, Socrates pushes these conceptions together by suggesting that one can persevere in the face of desires and pleasures (191d–e).

²³ Socrates also mentions anger, pain, and love as feelings that can rule wisdom. Presumably justice would be the additional virtue that prevents wisdom's being ruled by anger, while temperance would prevent its being ruled by love, and temperance or courage would prevent its being ruled by pain.

then explain why hedonism produces popular misconceptions of courage and temperance.

That may not sound like much of an advance. For Socrates argues in the *Protagoras* that hedonism *entails* that wisdom is strong, and that “being weaker than pleasure” or “being weaker than fear” is merely ignorance. So, it may seem hopeless to sketch the lines from thinking that pleasure is the good, through thinking that wisdom is weak, to thinking that courage is the ability to persevere in the face of fear and temperance the ability to resist the lure of pleasure. The proposed strategy thus seems not to get off the ground. However, this objection fails, because popular morality is internally incoherent. Socrates’ argument that hedonism *entails* that wisdom is strong does not rule out the possibility that *accepting* hedonism leads people to *think* wisdom is weak. However, to show that Socrates could hold this position is not yet to show that he does or why he does.

Here, it is crucial that the many’s hedonism is (by Plato’s lights) false. So, the many are ignorant about the good. But again, Socrates says that being ruled by pleasure (or fear) simply is ignorance (*Pr.* 358c). So, those who are ignorant about the good – hedonists – are ruled by pleasure and fear. In fact, as Socrates describes his notional conversation with the many, they are not concerned with an abstract possibility that someone wise might be ruled by pleasure or fear. Rather, they are concerned with their own experiences of being ruled by pleasure and fear. Socrates offers them a different account (352d, 352e, 353c, 357e):

You know that the majority of people [οἱ πολλοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων] will not be convinced by you and me; rather, they say that many people [πολλοὺς] know what is best and don’t want to do it, though it is possible, but do other things instead.

Come then, try with me to convince people and teach them what this experience of theirs [αὐτοῖς τοῦτο τὸ πάθος] is, which they say is being weaker than pleasure.

Do you say this happens to you [ὑμῖν τοῦτο γίνεσθαι] in the following sort of cases: . . .

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.

Clearly, the many are aware of the phenomenon that they call “our wisdom being ruled by passions” and that Socrates calls “ignorance.” They become aware of it because they make practical mistakes that they recognize as

such. (Socrates thinks the mistakes are inevitable; those who value bodily goods and pleasures over goods and pleasures of the soul do worse even narrowly with respect to the former [*R.* 586d–e; 6.3.1]. If the many inevitably make mistakes about bodily goods and pleasures, it is not surprising that they notice them.) Suppose that someone falsely thinks she knows good and bad. When she makes practical mistakes, she notices that her (putative) wisdom does not rule her life and make her live well (the question at issue when asking whether wisdom is strong; *Pr.* 352c). She now has two options. First, she can admit that she lacks wisdom and ascribe her failures to ignorance. Socrates finds that most people will not admit such ignorance (*Ap.* 21c–23d). Rather, they maintain that they are wise but say that wisdom is weak, so that they are ruled by pleasure, fear, and so on. The belief that wisdom is weak and the associated belief that full virtue requires multiple distinct and dissociable virtues constitute a defense mechanism against admitting to one’s own ignorance about good and bad.²⁴ Popular morality contains conflicting views on this topic; a natural presumption persists that the wise will act wisely (and the temperate temperately, etc.; cf. Chapter 2, n. 18). Still, people are emotionally attached to the idea that they are wise, so they deny that the wise always act wisely. Popular morality thus ends up with inconsistent views about wisdom.

7.3 Virtue and teaching

That completes the link from being a hedonist to thinking that wisdom is weak, and from there to thinking that temperance is the capacity to resist the lure of pleasure and courage the capacity to persevere in the face of fear. These aspects of popular morality are closely related to its attitudes about whether virtue can be taught. Meno says that good men of his acquaintance (including himself, one presumes) hold inconsistent views about whether or not virtue can be taught (*M.* 95b; cf. 70a). Meno’s views of virtue and the good are those of popular morality as described above; he thinks a man’s virtue involves entering politics to help friends and harm enemies (71e), ruling (73d), and desiring beautiful things and having the

²⁴ Rusty Jones has pointed out that this requires most people to admit that they lack courage or temperance in explaining their actions to themselves and others. Why would people sooner abandon a conception of themselves as courageous or temperate than a conception of themselves as wise? Notice that someone who (say) regrets not being bolder in a certain situation, and who diagnoses herself as wise but lacking in courage, cannot choose between thinking she is wise but not courageous and thinking she is courageous but not wise. She clearly lacks courage; the question is whether she can keep thinking of herself as wise.

power to obtain them (77b). By “beautiful things,” he means bodily and reputational goods such as health, wealth, honors, and offices (78c). So, Meno not only reports that most people hold conflicting views about whether virtue can be taught; as an adherent to popular views of virtue and the good, he manifests the same conflicts. Socrates not only seeks the right account of virtue before he says whether it can be taught; he also treats Meno’s puzzlement as a symptom of his distorted views about virtue and the good.

Protagoras likewise evinces conflicting attitudes about whether virtue can be taught. He claims to teach virtue. Socrates says he doubts it can be taught – both because the wise Athenians consult with any citizen on matters pertaining to virtue and because good men like Pericles fail to make their sons virtuous (319a–20b). Protagoras argues that virtue can be taught (320c–28d), and Socrates shifts to the question of whether it is one (328d–29d). This turns out to be related to the original question. At the end of the dialogue Socrates, in the voice of the *λόγος*, says that they have switched positions. Because Socrates argues that virtue is unified in wisdom, he must say it can be taught; since Protagoras resists, he must deny it (361a–c; *M.* 86d–89a). Thus, Protagoras has conflicting views about whether virtue can be taught. By itself, that shows that he, at least, cannot teach virtue (*M.* 95b).²⁵

Whence these conflicting attitudes? As there is a common presumption that the wise act wisely, so there is a common presumption that the virtuous teach virtue (*M.* 93c). However, we must also explain popular morality’s commitment to the contrary view, that virtue cannot be taught. This is connected in at least two ways to popular morality’s views about wisdom’s strength and its related conceptions of courage and temperance.

First, recall that virtue is teachable just in case it is unified in wisdom. But virtue is unified in wisdom just in case wisdom is strong and needs no distinct virtues to ensure its practical efficacy, e.g., courage to guarantee that the sage perseveres in the face of fear or temperance to guarantee that she resists the lure of pleasure. These conceptions of courage and temperance connect directly to the idea that virtue cannot be taught. For if courage is natural boldness and temperance is natural self-restraint,²⁶ then

²⁵ Socrates does not actually change positions over the course of the dialogue. His stated doubts depend on the presumption that the Athenians are wise and their leading politicians virtuous, but we know that he would deny both claims. See n. 28 below on the prevalence of virtue.

²⁶ Someone who possesses one of these natural virtues but thinks of it as a full virtue can come to see the contrary natural virtue as a vice. The naturally bold think of themselves as courageous and look upon the naturally self-restrained as cowardly, weak, naïve, and so on. The naturally self-restrained

both come by nature and neither they nor virtue entire can be taught. Because of his other views, then, Protagoras must deny that virtue can be taught (361a–c), as must the many (357e; cf. 319b–d).

Second, popular morality's denial that virtue can be taught is the immediate social correlate of its denial that wisdom is strong. To review, the natural presumption is that the wise act wisely. When those who wrongly consider themselves wise confront their manifest failures to act wisely (even by their own lights), rather than admitting their ignorance they blame wisdom for being weak. Insofar as one is invested not just in one's own wisdom but also in one's friends', their manifest failures to act wisely prompt the same reaction. In like manner, again, the natural presumption is that the virtuous teach virtue. When those who wrongly consider themselves wise confront their manifest failures to make others virtuous, they blame virtue for being unteachable. Insofar as one is invested not just in one's own virtue but also in one's friends', their manifest failures to teach virtue will prompt the same reaction. For example, if Pericles is a civic friend whom one considers virtuous but who manifestly fails to make his sons virtuous, one may conclude that virtue cannot be taught.

Here, we should recall that putative teachers of virtue claim to teach something practically effective. To see this, let us revisit Protagoras' shame at the prospect of denying that wisdom is strong and Gorgias' shame at the prospect of denying that he will teach justice to any student who doesn't already know it. Protagoras suggests that it would be shameful for anyone to say that wisdom is weak, but especially so for him. This can be explained: he says in the Great Speech that everyone teaches virtue to everyone, but that he teaches it especially well. So, although it would be shameful for anyone to deny that the wisdom they teach is strong, it would be especially shameful for him to deny it. Likewise, Gorgias is ashamed to deny that he will teach justice to any student who doesn't already know it. He seems to assume that everyone teaches justice to everyone, so that anyone might be ashamed to deny that they can – which is what Polus says (461c). So, although it might be shameful for anyone to say that they cannot teach justice, it would be especially shameful for an orator, who claims special facility with justice. Further, Gorgias does not claim to teach justice in a way disconnected from being just, acting justly, and wanting to do just things. He teaches his students to navigate social life and act justly – by his lights, how to help friends and harm enemies effectively. Because this

think of themselves as temperate and look upon the naturally bold as uncontrolled, crazy, predatory, and so on.

conception of justice makes injustice part of acting justly, Gorgias' students sometimes act unjustly. Protagoras and Gorgias both display the ordinary presumption that teachers of virtue teach something practically effective.²⁷ If a putative teacher's students fail to act virtuously, that undermines her claim to teach virtue. That would ordinarily undermine her claim to be virtuous, but she can maintain that she is virtuous simply by denying that virtue can be taught at all.²⁸

7.4 Conclusion

This concludes my discussion of the general structure of mistakes about virtue and the good. The core mistake that most people make, understandably, is to identify pleasure with the good, i.e., to be hedonists, whether in full awareness of that commitment or not. Hedonists cannot correct for the pervasive hedonic errors that we experience in our embodied, socially-embedded condition. Hedonism and hedonic error in turn lead to (i) prioritization of bodily and reputational goods over goods of the soul; and (ii) practical mistakes, even by the hedonist's own lights. These lead in turn to all of the basic mistakes about virtue that Plato critiques throughout the dialogues.

Because bodily and reputational goods are competitive, and because we operate in the context of limited power and limited knowledge, (i) leads to a conception of justice as helping friends and harming enemies. That conception makes injustice against enemies partially constitutive of justice. It also leads to the idea that injustice can be prudent, for two reasons: first, it can be necessary to acquire or protect bodily and reputational goods for oneself; second, it can be necessary to acquire or protect those same goods for one's friends, family, or fellow-citizens. The same considerations lead to a misconception of piety as knowing how to give to and beg from the gods; effectively, the gods are pleonectic allies or competitors with vastly superior power and knowledge.

Further, (ii) leads to popular misconceptions of wisdom, courage, and temperance. Hedonists inevitably make practical errors by their own lights;

²⁷ Cf. 3.3.2; 4.2.1.

²⁸ Popular morality, in the hands of the many and in the hands of others who internalize it, considers virtue, knowledge of virtue, and teaching of virtue to be widespread. Protagoras and Gorgias express these opinions, and the many clearly consider themselves wise in the discussion of wisdom's strength. The same commitments come up elsewhere, too. Meno is shocked when Socrates says he does not know what virtue is (71a-c), and Meletus says that the jury, audience, Council, and Assembly – all of Athens except for Socrates – improve the youth, while Socrates alone corrupts them (*Ap.* 24e–25a).

when they do, rather than granting that they are ignorant of the good, they explain their failures by reference to their having been overcome by pleasure, fear, and so on. That is, they infer that wisdom is weak and can be ruled by pleasure, fear, and so on. This leads in turn to two further mistakes about virtue: first, that there are many dissociable virtues – courage and temperance being the capacities to persevere in the face of fear and to resist temptation in the face of pleasure or desire. Boldness and self-restraint are manifestly unevenly distributed from birth, so this leads in turn to the second mistake: the idea that virtue, or at least some parts of virtue, cannot be taught but come by nature.

Popular morality also has contrary commitments, making it internally incoherent. Most people think that justice is a virtue and virtue must benefit; that we can talk about virtue as a single thing; that the wise act wisely; and that the virtuous pass on their virtue. Most people have systematically incoherent, unstable views about the value of justice and piety and the unity and teachability of virtue. Socrates can thus refute them and show that they are ignorant about virtue and the good. These inconsistencies come along with social expectations that require double-think. In particular, we must be hedonists but not say so; think injustice can be prudent but not say so; and excuse our own and others' failures to act wisely and teach virtue, but not say that those failures reveal a lack of virtue in ourselves or others.

Popular hostility to sophists and philosophers

We have seen that Protagoras and interlocutors in the *Gorgias* hold and are ashamed to express roughly the same views (Chapters 3, 4). These similarities derive from their shared internalization of basic views about virtue and the good, through shame and fear of punishment, from the many (who both hold and are ashamed to express the same views). Socrates and other genuine philosophers feel the same social pressures, but have epistemic resources to resist (Chapter 5). The central commitment of popular morality is hedonism – the view that pleasure is the good – which provides no way to avoid systematic hedonic error (Chapter 6). Together, hedonism and its associated hedonic errors explain why most people hold the misconceptions of virtue that Socrates criticizes in the dialogues (Chapter 7).

Because Socrates and other philosophers resist social pressures to accept popular morality, they face continuing popular hostility. Surprisingly, so do the sophists, even after they internalize popular views. Both kinds of hostility must be understood in the context of widespread conceptions of justice and resulting modes of social organization (7.1). To review: because of hedonic errors, popular morality prioritizes competitive goods. The prudent pursuit of competitive goods, under conditions of limited power and knowledge, requires organization into pleonectic alliances and a correlative conception of justice as helping friends and harming enemies.

Members and presumptive members of a pleonectic alliance face social pressures of two kinds: first, to become and remain loyal to that alliance, and second, to embrace its core attitudes – both those peculiar to a given group and those that give shape and purpose to pleonectic alliances in general. Members of such groups think their happiness depends on their allies' commitment to the group and its structuring attitudes. So, pleonectic allies use all available social resources (including shame and the threat of punishment) to sustain their allies' shared attitudes. This felt need is particularly strong in relation to the youth; especially if they are talented, the group tries to acculturate them, which replicates popular morality in

the next generation. The group also tries to assimilate other would-be teachers to the point where they teach nothing to threaten group loyalties and attitudes. In Plato's dialogues, both Socrates and the sophists act and speak in this social context. I discuss those persisting social pressures now, and then I conclude the book by briefly restating my reading of the *Protagoras*: Socrates critiques popular morality in the person of Protagoras, who has internalized it from the many but who operates in social circumstances that are still potentially quite hostile to him.

8.1 Popular hostility to the sophists

First, I focus on the sophists. Earlier, we saw Protagoras' speech about the dangers they face (3.1). That speech begins, again, as follows (316c–d):

A foreign man who comes into great cities and persuades the best of the youth in them to abandon their associations with others, family or otherwise, old or young, and to associate with himself, on grounds that through association with him they will become as good as possible – someone doing these things should be cautious. For no small jealousies arise around such affairs, and also other forms of hostility, and plots.

Earlier sophists dealt with these dangers by concealing that they were sophists. Protagoras thinks that was the wrong strategy (317a–b):

They did not manage to escape the notice of powerful people in the cities, which is the reason for these disguises – since the many perceive practically nothing, but recite whatever refrain the powerful call out. Not to be able to escape by running away, but to be obvious, is great folly on the part of one who makes the attempt, and it must arouse still greater hostility among people; they think such a one, besides everything else, is utterly wicked.

Protagoras thus openly declares himself a sophist, but he takes other precautions. For one thing, he conceals his views about justice, virtue, and the good so as to avoid the hostility that attaches to those who express such views openly (though, as we have seen, failing to hold the same views also provokes hostility).

Outside of the *Protagoras*, the Platonic corpus contains two parallel passages about the social position of travelling sophists.¹ First, in the *Apology* Socrates mentions self-styled teachers of virtue (19e–20a):

Yet I think it is a fine thing to be able to teach people as Gorgias of Leontini does, and Prodicus of Ceos, and Hippias of Elis. Each of these men can go to

¹ *Hippias Major* 283b–86c is also well worth reflecting on in this connection.

any city and persuade the young, who can keep company with anyone of their own fellow citizens they want without paying, to leave the company of these, to join with themselves, pay them a fee, and be grateful to them besides.

Second, he offers a similar description in the *Theages* (127e–28a):²

If Theages here refuses to associate with the politicians and seeks some other men, who claim to be able to educate young people, there are a number of such men here: Prodicus of Ceos, and Gorgias of Leontini, and Polus of Acragas, and many others, who are so wise that they go from city to city and persuade the most aristocratic and wealthiest of the young men – who can associate with any of the citizens they want without charge – these men persuade them to desert the others and associate only with them instead, to pay a great deal of money up front, and, on top of that, to be grateful!

For all the similarities among the passages above, there are striking differences of emphasis. Protagoras emphasizes the dangers that foreign sophists face when they enter cities and attract the youth; Socrates does not mention these at all. To forestall a possible confusion: while outsiders may have it worse, their problems are not unique. Protagoras names some (supposed) sophists who were not itinerant but who still felt the need to use other ways of life as disguises (316d–e). And in the *Meno*, Anytus says explicitly that even locals who take up sophistry should be exiled (92a–b). It should become clearer why hostility to sophists is not limited to foreigners as we consider the sources of that hostility.

The sources start to emerge when we see what Socrates emphasizes but Protagoras does not mention: the youth pay fees to learn from the sophists,³ and they are grateful to them in addition. First, sophists extract money from families (cf. *Ap.* 20a), in competition with others who might want that money for other ends. Second, they educate some but not all of the city, which may provide a perceived advantage to some groups over others. Insofar as they charge a fee, rich families will be advantaged (cf. “wealthiest” in the *Theages*). Sophists intervene in a system of multiply-embedded and multiply-overlapping pleonectic alliances in a way that threatens to disrupt their imperfect equilibrium.

Third, sophists form ties of gratitude that include them in alliances or even start to constitute new alliances. Consider Hippias’ claim that those gathered at Callias’ house are an elite, akin by nature rather than

² The *Theages* is widely considered spurious. I tend to think it is genuine, but nothing much turns on that.

³ Protagoras does mention his system of payment later (328b–c); contrast “up front” in the *Theages* passage.

convention, in contrast to their inferiors (*Pr.* 337c–e). This might conjure up a Socratic image of a natural intellectual elite concerned with goods of the soul, but for Hippias' concern with money (*H. Ma.* 282d–e).⁴ This source of hostility requires a longer discussion, especially in relation to *Republic* 487b–96e. Chapter 5 used that passage to argue that, while Protagoras thinks that the many follow elite opinion, Plato thinks that sophists and most other political and intellectual elites follow popular opinion about the nature of justice, beauty, and the good. Another look at that passage vindicates my claim that the many (and established elites) hate and fear the sophists in part because they form ties of gratitude across the boundaries of existing pleonectic alliances. It also helps to explain hatred and fear of Socrates, as we shall see (8.2).

To defend his claim that philosophers must rule the city, Socrates first defines them (473e–80a) and then describes their natural talents (484c–87a). Adeimantus objects that most people think philosophers are either useless or corrupt (484b–e). Socrates grants that they are but explains further. Among those with a natural aptitude for philosophy, some escape corruption, thanks to divine dispensation. In particular, they escape because they avoid politics, whether because they are exiled, ill, live in a city that provides no occasion for grand political ambition, or hear a divine voice (496a–e; cf. 492a, 493a). These “useless” philosophers should rule the city. However, they do not want to rule; they would rather inquire and contemplate. Nor are they asked to rule, since they are considered impractical and others are eager to rule (487e–89c). Most who have a natural aptitude for philosophy enter politics and so are corrupted; this is one group spoken of as corrupt philosophers. This group's corruption leaves the office of philosopher largely unoccupied, so others who lack a natural aptitude fill the role. These are the sophists, another group spoken of as corrupt philosophers, who love not wisdom but a reputation for wisdom (495b–96a).⁵

Why are those with a natural aptitude for philosophy usually corrupted? Politics is clearly a key part of the story, since “useless” philosophers are those who stay out of politics for various reasons. But after Socrates reviews the characteristics of natural philosophers (489e–90d), he suggests that these same characteristics – natural virtues, especially when accompanied by bodily and external goods such as beauty, wealth, strength, good birth,

⁴ Like Protagoras, Hippias may be less concerned with money as such than money as a token of esteem.

⁵ Compare Socrates' claim in the *Gorgias* that sophists imitate legislators and orators imitate judges (464b–65d, with 456a–c; cf. 4.3). Orators appropriate the reputation for wisdom that properly belongs to other crafts (457b), including especially the reputation that belongs to the craft of justice.

and height – explain their corruption (491a–e). This is one instance of a general principle: when the best natures are malnourished (e.g., the most vigorous young plants and animals), they turn out worse than lesser specimens that receive the same treatment (491c–d).

The general claim is less clear than Socrates thinks;⁶ fortunately, he also expands on the particular case that concerns us. First, though, he rejects an alternative account, that sophists corrupt the youth (492a–93e). Rather, the many themselves are responsible for corrupting them (492c). They see other educators, including the sophists, as potential competition (493a, more on this below). So, they place the same pressures on sophists and assimilate them to popular opinion too. Thus, Plato says that sophists and orators do not shape public opinion, as Protagoras thinks; rather, they absorb public opinion about what justice, beauty, and the good are. Since the many shape sophists' basic views about justice and the good, they cannot educate talented youth contrary to those basic views.

So far, though, this neglects any role for the talents of those with an aptitude for philosophy, which is what Socrates says causes their corruption. After another reminder of those talents and natural virtues (494a–b), Socrates expands on his positive account, giving them their requisite role – especially, as before, when accompanied by bodily and external goods (494b–c). Because someone suited for philosophy must be so talented, their fellow-citizens and family hope to turn him to their own purposes. They see that he will make a valuable pleonectic ally – and in particular, provide them with a comparative advantage over other families or cities whose youth are less talented (494b). So, they “pay court to him with their requests and honors, trying by their flattery to secure for themselves ahead of time the power that is going to be his” (494b–c). When a young person's friends and family see him this way, they fear anyone else's turning his talents to their own ends and especially his feeling grateful to them for his education. So, though the many assimilate the sophists to their basic views about virtue and the good, they are still hostile to them, in part because they threaten to form ties of gratitude across the boundaries of existing pleonectic alliances.

This brings us to a fourth source of hostility against sophists: as the many's “rivals in craft” (493a), they threaten to appropriate the status of “teachers of virtue.” When sophists say they teach virtue, they implicitly say that they can while (other) fellow-citizens cannot. Some find their

⁶ He gives this reason, whose force is obscure: “the bad is more opposed to the good than it is to the merely not good.”

claim plausible enough to try to learn from them rather than from their fellow-citizens, presumably in part for one of the reasons Socrates gives for thinking virtue cannot be taught – the failures of good men to transmit their virtue to their sons. If virtue can be taught, and if the virtuous can teach virtue if anyone can (*M.* 93c), then the sophists seem to imply that others lack virtue. As a defense mechanism, rather than facing up to the lack of virtue revealed by their inability to teach virtue, many people become hostile to the sophists. In the *Meno*, for example, when Socrates says he has not found teachers or learners of virtue, Anytus appears (89d–e). Socrates suggests that sophists teach virtue, and Anytus reacts badly (90e–92b); he thinks one should consult any Athenian gentleman (92e; cf. *Ap.* 24c–25b). Socrates replies that some of their sons turned out badly, showing that they cannot teach virtue (93a–94e). Anytus threatens him for slandering them (94e–95a) – for denying them their rightful claim to teach virtue.

Most people have inconsistent views about whether virtue can be taught (*M.* 95b), stemming from wider inconsistencies in their views about virtue (7.3). These in turn produce inconsistent views about whether sophists teach it (95c) and social demands for double-think about whether it can be taught at all. Sophists violate those social demands when they claim to teach virtue, which undermines others' claims to virtue. That produces hostility to sophists, much as Anytus gets angry at Socrates for suggesting that sophists can teach virtue but good Athenian gentlemen cannot. Hence, Protagoras is in a tricky spot when Socrates expresses doubts about whether virtue can be taught. His clever response is to argue that he is especially skilled at teaching virtue, but that most others teach it too; Socrates admires his navigation of the social terrain (328d).

So far, then: the sophists compete for money with ordinary family structures; they threaten to advantage some groups within a city over others, e.g., the wealthy over the poor; they threaten to form new alliances that overlap previously existing ones; and they compete for the social status of “teacher of virtue,” effectively suggesting that others are not virtuous. All of these points proceed on the assumption that sophists internalize more or less exactly the many's commitments and then explain why the many are hostile to them nonetheless.

A final source of popular hostility to sophists differs from these. Some sophists, such as Protagoras and Hippias, closely track what one can say in public about justice, pleasure, wisdom, and virtue. Thrasymachus and Callicles are bolder. They bring into the open strands of popular morality that the existing social order requires one to accept but not to state openly,

for example, that injustice can be prudent. They too share the many's most basic commitments about the good and virtue, but they are disruptive intellectually as well as socially.⁷ I focus on Callicles, who internalizes popular morality but embraces certain of its commitments more fully and explicitly and ends up shamed by his inability to resist still further implications. In terms of the *Republic's* psychology, he has a democratic psyche that cannot give stable reasons to resist psychological tyranny.⁸

Chapters 4–6 each discussed aspects of Socrates' exchange with Callicles. Chapter 4 argued that Socrates shames Callicles over his hedonism – in particular, over its implication that the well-supplied sexual profligate lives well – but that Callicles perseveres through his shame, so that Socrates' refutations do not depend on that shame (4.2.3). Chapter 5 argued that Callicles has internalized conventional views of justice and the good through shame and fear of punishment (5.2.2). Chapter 6 argued that Socrates' refutations of Callicles' hedonism depend on connections between hedonism and hedonic and ethical errors; these reveal the rational basis for Socrates' uses of images and shame (6.3). However, Chapter 4 never fully explained why Callicles was ashamed to endorse the life of the sexual profligate. Having explained hedonism and its ramifications more fully, I undertake that task now.

One explanation might start by observing that sexual access is a competitive good – the sort of good that gives rise to pleonectic alliances. Pleonectic alliances need justice in the internal distribution of the goods they seek. Sexual profligacy produces a sort of greed that threatens that internal justice.⁹ So, pleonectic alliances disapprove of sexual profligacy and shame members who tend in that direction. However, this explanation is shallow; it does not explain why Callicles was not already ashamed to reject temperance generally.¹⁰ We need a reason why Callicles finds endorsing *sexual* profligacy shameful, in contrast to his open endorsement of profligacy in general. Charles Kahn follows the standard account that the κίνοιδος is the “passive” (penetrated) partner in anal sex. He says that

⁷ Thanks to Ravi Sharma for pressing this point.

⁸ Ingrained commitments likely ensure that Callicles' psyche remains democratic, even though he cannot give reasons. Of course, he would not identify as a sophist, but Socrates finds sophists and orators hard to distinguish (*G.* 520a). Differences that might make Thrasymachus a sophist but not Callicles should be irrelevant for purposes of analyzing Plato's view of the social pressures faced by sophists.

⁹ For one historical case in which sexual competition gave rise directly to internal political conflict, see *Ar. Pol.* 1303b. Externally, cities treated sexual access to women of conquered peoples as spoils of war.

¹⁰ This is also a strike against interpreting the κίνοιδος as a general profligate, without special reference to his sexual profligacy, as Davidson 1997 sometimes seems tempted to.

Callicles has enough “aristocratic pride” to regard such people as “vulgar, disgusting, and unmanly.” He also knows that the κίναϊδος can be disenfranchised for prostitution, which is inconsistent with his political ambitions.¹¹ The first point fails to explain why Callicles is not ashamed sooner; the second fails to explain why Callicles does not simply recommend concealment.

The deeper explanation relates to connections among sex, reproduction, and family structure that make sex a particularly important area for social regulation. This emerges in *Republic* V. After Socrates faces one wave of ridicule for proposing that women share the occupations and education of men (451c–57c), a second wave appears. If the old divisions of labor are removed, and women mix with men in the military, then the old conventions about sex cannot persist either, and new ones are needed (458b–e). The new conventions include a rigged sexual lottery (459c–60b), ages past which sex is unregulated, infanticide of babies conceived outside of the auspices of the sexual lottery (460d–61c), and provisions for avoiding incest when nobody can identify their biological parents, children, or siblings (461b–e). The establishment of ages at which sex is no longer regulated clearly shows that the special importance of conventions around sex and the special shame for violating them result from its connection to reproduction and family structure. Socrates’ sexual laws have eugenic aims (458e–59b), but also the social aim of civic unity through the abolition of private families (464b–65b).¹² Because the ideal city replaces its citizens through sexual reproduction, it must establish laws about sex (cf. *Laws* 720e–21e, which is the first law; *Ar. Pol.* VII.16). The same is true in non-ideal cities (and families) organized as pleonectic alliances. Every pleonectic alliance will (formally or informally) establish some control over its members’ sex lives, e.g., to guarantee that children are born into the family or city, or to ensure legitimate heirs.¹³ The special shame surrounding sexual profligacy as opposed to other kinds of profligacy derives from the special social importance of sexual reproduction to the community: its more-or-less stable continuation depends on its standards for sexual reproduction. (This is also clearly related to the city’s special concern for the allegiance of its youth, though at the earlier stage of actually producing the youth.)

¹¹ Kahn 1983, 105–7.

¹² Also relevant here is the proposal that military valor should be rewarded with the opportunity to kiss and be kissed by everyone.

¹³ But see Davidson 1997, 183–84 for differences between ancient Greek and more modern times.

That shows why sexual profligacy is a special object of social disapprobation, and so especially liable to arouse feelings of shame; it does not explain why Callicles feels shame. Here, the most promising approach is through the discussion of soul-types in *Republic* VIII–IX. Callicles has characteristics of the democratic soul. This is suggested by Socrates' claim that he loves the people (δῆμος, 481d–e). More importantly, the democrat sees moderation as cowardice (*R.* 560c–d), and Callicles says that those who praise moderation do so because they are cowards (*G.* 492a–b).¹⁴ Further, the democrat treats his desires as equals, satisfying whichever comes along at any given moment (*R.* 561b–d), while Callicles' ideal man boldly and cleverly satisfies whatever desire he happens to have at any given moment (*G.* 492a).

The democratic soul lies in an equilibrium between the oligarchic constitution of the previous generation, which satisfies necessary desires and represses unnecessary desires by force, and the temptation to satisfy unnecessary desires (559d–61a). The democrat does not give himself over to unnecessary desires, as the psychological tyrant does. He is pulled back toward oligarchy by shame (560a) and comes to rest in the middle (572c–d), putting all of his desires on equal footing. The next generation falls into psychic tyranny because of ἔργως,¹⁵ which leads a crowd of unnecessary appetites and associated activities (572d–73c) and which drives out shame (573b).¹⁶ The κίνοιδος, I suggest, is the tyrannical soul, driven by unnecessary sexual desires (and secondarily by other unnecessary desires). Callicles is ashamed, as any democrat would be, at the prospect of surrendering to his unnecessary desires (or at the prospect of saying that nothing about surrendering to unnecessary desires logically precludes perfect happiness).

8.2 Popular hostility to Socrates and other philosophers

In the *Apology*, Socrates says several times that the many are hostile to him (18c, 19d, 31e–32a), at least in part because he does not conform to their expectations (20c). Earlier, I described how he faces the same pressures as the sophists to accept popular views of justice and the good, though he does

¹⁴ Cf. [Chapter 6](#), n. 32 and [Chapter 7](#), n. 26.

¹⁵ Outsiders who “have no hope of keeping hold of the young man in any other way” (572e) implant this desire; they are opposed by family members. Recall the family's concern to keep hold of young men in *Republic* VI, as described above.

¹⁶ See [n. 10](#) above on whether the κίνοιδος is a general profligate or is especially concerned with sex; here we see that Plato thinks other unnecessary desires follow in the train of more central unnecessary sexual desires.

not (5.3). And above, I described further the many's view of the sophists as educators who compete for the loyalties of talented youth in the city (8.1). The same passage directly addresses popular hostility to true philosophers. Because sophistry seeks a reputation for wisdom and gives the appearance of being wise, the many overlook the distinction between sophists and philosophers. So, they have similar attitudes toward both groups, which helps to explain the hostility Socrates arouses. In part, the many see him as a teacher who competes for the commitments and loyalties of talented youth; because they dislike his influence, they say that he corrupts them.

As we just saw, a natural philosopher's family and fellow-citizens want to shape and direct his talents to their pleonectic ends, so they flatter him. This makes him think he is happy, and makes him unreceptive to genuine philosophy (494d). Even if he is drawn to philosophy, Socrates asks (494d–e):

What do you think those people will do, if they believe that they're losing their use of him and his companionship? Is there anything they won't do or say about his persuader – whether plotting against him in private or publicly bringing him into court – to prevent him from such persuasion?¹⁷

Two aspects of this situation must be explained. First, there is what Socrates is trying to do with the youth, which really does inconvenience their families. Second, there is what their families think Socrates is trying to do. On the first score, people are hostile to Socrates in part because he genuinely seeks to root out commitments that give shape and purpose to pleonectic alliances in general. He argues that injustice is never prudent and stands up for justice; that sometimes gets him into trouble directly (*Ap.* 32a–e; cf. [Chapter 1](#)), and it also presents a social problem when he tries to persuade others to share his commitments. As Calicles and Thrasymachus say constantly, someone who never wrongs or harms anyone intentionally is vulnerable to slander and injury from those who would harm or wrong her, precisely because she will not defend herself with injustices of her own. To the extent that Socrates actually convinces anyone to share his views, he makes them unwilling to protect themselves or their families unjustly. As families are angry with relatives who refuse to do them unjust favors, so too they will be angry with outsiders who convince their relatives to refuse to

¹⁷ A little later, Socrates seems more optimistic about how the many can see true philosophy: they are not harsh by themselves (499d–500a, 500d–e, 501c–2a), but are riled up by competitors to certain social positions (500b). Still, even if people can be convinced to make philosophers their rulers, the rulers will start with a clean slate (501a) by sending everyone over the age of ten to the countryside (540e–41a).

do unjust favors.¹⁸ This is psychologically consistent with their hostility to figures like Callicles, who make their commitment to the prudence of injustice manifest. Popular morality requires double-think about justice – one must think injustice can be prudent, but not say so. Relatedly, popular morality requires double-think about the good. Socrates assumes that his exhortations to prioritize goods of the soul over other goods could not corrupt (30b), but they might well be thought to. It is one thing to reject hedonism, strong desires for bodily and reputational goods, and modes of social organization that result from these; it is quite another to exhort others to reject the same positions.¹⁹

So, what Socrates actually does intelligibly angers his fellow-citizens. But then there is also what they think he does. In particular, they suspect him of being party to an unjust conspiracy. Socrates defends himself against this suspicion explicitly (33a–b):

Throughout my life, in any public activity I may have engaged in, I am the same man as I am in private life. I have never come to an agreement with anyone to act unjustly, neither with anyone else nor with any one of those who they slanderously say are my pupils . . . If anyone says that he has learned anything from me, or that he heard anything privately that the others did not hear, be assured that he is not telling the truth.

He is not directly accused of any such thing, but Socrates feels the need to deny that he is conspiring to commit injustice. Passages leading up to this one address the same concern. After describing the advice that he gives to everyone publicly (29d–30b), Socrates insists that “if anyone says that I give different advice, he is talking nonsense” (30b). More obliquely, he uses his neglect of his own affairs and his poverty (and failure to charge a fee) to testify that he is god’s gift to Athens (31b); to some, though, the same activities and results are a sign that something secret is happening. When Socrates explains why he does not advise the whole city (31c–d), he implicitly addresses the suspicion that he aims to benefit a faction instead. Later, he insists that he ignores clubs and factions (36b), but anyone who thinks such pursuits are the necessary means to a happy life will doubt it.

¹⁸ One might wonder why the families of youths who spent the most time with Socrates are not angry with him (33d–34b). They may focus on the good provided to them: more cooperative, just family members, which is good for relations within the family. Experience leads them to see the value in what Socrates does (cp. *G.* 519a; *Soph.* 234d–e on how experience affects one’s opinions of orators and sophists).

¹⁹ As with some sophists (cf. 8.1), Socrates faces hostility at home, but if he accepted exile and agreed to speak to the youth in foreign cities, he might face even more – their elders would exile him again (37c–e).

Such people interpret all human actions as acquisitive; they are in touch with a shadow of human psychology.²⁰

This illuminates a puzzle from earlier in the *Apology*. Socrates says the source of his “reputation and slander” is his human wisdom (20d) – not thinking he knows what he does not. By showing others that they too lack knowledge, he accumulates “many slanders and a reputation for wisdom” (22e–23a), in particular, for the very knowledge he and others lack. Being reputed to know what one does not sounds like an excessively good reputation, not a bad one. Why is it slander to say that Socrates knows what he does not? This makes sense if he is suspected of being secretly factionalist. If Socrates knows what people say he does, but he denies knowing it, then he unjustly conceals his knowledge. (This presupposes that virtue is not a unity: he is wise but unjust.) The idea that people unjustly hoard knowledge is found elsewhere too. Socrates says that if he went into exile and refused to talk to the youth wherever he went, they would urge their elders to drive him out (37e), probably on the assumption that Socrates is holding out on them. In the *Protagoras*, Hippocrates claims to be wronged because Protagoras won’t share his wisdom (310d), and Socrates jokes that the Spartans conceal the source of their courage, namely, their wisdom (342a–d). In all of these cases, wisdom and virtue are conceived of as competitive goods.²¹

Parallel points apply to the charge of impiety against Socrates. Plato addresses this accusation in three ways across the *Apology* and *Euthyphro*. First, Socrates’ older accusers say that he explains earthly and heavenly phenomena without appeal to divine agency. Briefly, he is an atheist (18b–c), as Meletus also says during the trial (26c). Second, Euthyphro says that Socrates’ divine sign is the source of the charge (3b); others envy it, just as they envy Euthyphro’s prophetic abilities (φθονοῦσιν, 3c). Third, Socrates says that his heterodox theology, which denies that the gods conflict with each other, is the source of the charge (6a). These accounts fit together. Socrates says that Meletus accuses him of “creat[ing] new gods while not believing in the old gods” (3b). The divine sign is the new god that Meletus mocks in his deposition (31d). Rejecting core features of the old gods – their role in earthly and heavenly events or the strife among

²⁰ One might think that Socrates’ willingness to die for the sake of justice establishes conclusively that he is sincere in his account of his motives (cf. 1.2). However, one could still assume that Socrates’ aim is reputation, and perhaps also certain benefits for his friends that such a reputation would bring.

²¹ Knowledge of competitive goods is competitive; cf. 7.1 on trade secrets. So if the highest human goods were competitive, then wisdom, or systematic knowledge of those goods, would be as well.

themselves and in relation to humanity – can easily be seen as tantamount to atheism.²²

Socrates plays these two sides of the accusation against each other; he can hardly be an atheist if he introduces new gods or divinities. This makes the charge of impiety sound incoherent. But the charge is intelligible. Rejection of old gods has political ramifications, since the city's gods protect it and bless its activities. But then, the city is conceived of as a pleonectic alliance, and its activities as acquisitive. Popular stories say the gods take sides in human acquisitive conflict and fight among themselves over competitive goods. When Socrates rejects these stories, then, he rejects the gods as pleonectic allies to the city, which is readily seen as a betrayal. The role of Socrates' divine sign in the impiety charge must be seen against the same background. His introduction of "new gods" is not a problem just by itself. The opening of the *Republic* shows no concern about new forms of worship to new divinities. However, new factional gods are a concern. Compare: if the Athenians newly befriend a people, this need not disrupt their domestic or foreign affairs. If a faction befriends them, without making them friends to the whole city, that disrupts the city's existing equilibrium. The rest of the city will be envious of the faction's new friendship. As it happens, Socrates introduces a new private divinity – viewed against the background notion that he is secretly engaged in factional politics, a new factional divinity. Socrates does not bring his special divine ally into the civic fold, to benefit all, but keeps his sign to himself and his friends. This makes it all the more striking that Socrates, when he explains why he does not engage in politics or advise the city (unless required by law), appeals to his divine sign (31c–32a).²³

8.3 Conclusion

I have now discussed the content and structure of popular morality (Chapters 6–7); how the many transmit it through shame and fear of punishment (Chapter 5); and why they remain hostile both to those who internalize popular morality and to the few who do not (Chapter 8). This helps us to understand the *Protagoras* better, including the hedonist theory of good and virtue found there. Socrates' examination of Protagoras concerns both the core of popular morality (hedonism, in a form that

²² Socrates embraces heterodoxy about divine conflict but rejects it about divine activity in the world; *Ap.* 18b–c, 19b–d, 26d. See also references to the *Laws* on deism in 7.1.

²³ Compare *L.* 909d–10d, which forbids private shrines in Magnesia.

reflects its associated prioritization of bodily and reputational goods) and various commitments that stem from the hedonist core (that wisdom is weak and can be ruled by the passions; that virtue is many, not one; that virtue cannot be taught; that courage is the ability to persevere in the face of what is fearful; and that injustice can be prudent). The examination also depicts Protagoras' guiding desire for reputational goods, which stems from his hedonism, in two ways: through his attempts to avoid refutation (procedural shame) and through his concealment of positions that might provoke hostility (substantive shame). When Protagoras conceals his views, Plato uses the many as a proxy. That proxy signals that Protagoras has internalized the many's basic views through shame and fear of punishment. As we have seen, large swaths of the *Gorgias* can be interpreted in the same way.

As promised, then, I have gone beyond narrowly reconciling the passage in which Socrates presents hedonism with passages about pleasure in other dialogues. Once Plato's concern with hedonism is placed into a larger context, the *Protagoras* as a larger whole finds a coherent place in the corpus. Neither my account of how Plato views popular morality nor my reading of the *Protagoras* is complete.²⁴ Certainly neither is accurate in every detail. However, I hope to have offered useful insights, made fruitful errors, and given new ways of thinking both about the *Protagoras* and about Plato's anti-hedonism.

²⁴ In particular, I do not pretend to have fully accounted for much of the Simonides interlude, but there is plenty else as well.

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