

How to Find Socrates' Views in Plato's *Protagoras*?

Bernd Manuwald (Universität zu Köln)

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Except for the *Symposium*, the *Protagoras* is probably the most varied of all of Plato's dialogues in terms of content and scenery; at the same time, not least because of its multifaceted nature and its vivid narrative style, it raises a number of interpretative problems. This situation is reflected in the very different views put forward by scholars as they can be found in the enormous number of publications on the *Protagoras*. All interpreters claim that their readings are based on the text. To some extent, the differences are certainly caused by the fact that one may disagree on the interpretation of individual passages, an issue affecting all literary texts. In this case, however, the widely divergent opinions are primarily a consequence of the difficulties encountered when one tries to find out which utterances of the Platonic Socrates reflect his convictions, i.e., to what extent the figure of Socrates can be understood as a transmitter of Plato's doctrines and where these doctrines are most likely to be grasped. Such a situation is characteristic of all of Plato's early dialogues; yet due to its complex structure, the issue is particularly prominent in the *Protagoras*.

In this paper, I would like to begin by surveying two contrary readings advanced recently to exemplify the problem just sketched; following on from that, by an analysis of the dialogue's text, I will try to find criteria for answering the question of where and how the concepts of the Platonic Socrates in the *Protagoras* may be found and then compile these beliefs systematically.

To start with, let me mention two recent interpretations of Protagoras' Great Speech since, together, they illustrate the wide range of interpretations presented so far. As is well known, the introductory scenes of the dialogue are followed by the first major section, the Great Speech, put into the sophist's mouth by Plato, in which Protagoras intends to show that ἀρετή can be taught, which Socrates had denied. Robert Bees strongly argues that this speech is a fiction created by Plato and only has a parodic relationship to the historical Protagoras;¹ in that case, this section would be of no value as a testimony for Protagoras' doctrines. By contrast, Daniel

1 Bees 2014.

Silvermintz assumes such an accurate representation of Protagoras' doctrines that the text (on a second level of interpretation) also yields a secret doctrine of Protagoras, namely the doctrine of the survival of the fittest.² In doing so, Silvermintz has to presuppose that Plato was apparently not aware of this doctrine because he does not have his Socrates comment on it. Bees' theory, though, is not unproblematic either: for it would have been odd for contemporary readers, who still had direct access to Protagoras' doctrines, to see Plato have his Socrates criticize the theses of the dialogue's Protagoras if not even their basis had any connection with the historical Protagoras, but they were entirely a product of Plato's imagination.

In whatever way one may describe the relationship between the content of the Great Speech and Protagoras' doctrines, it certainly is not a problem of real vs fictitious views of Socrates. The Speech, however, is important for the problem that Socrates develops on this basis, which is meant to be significant: Socrates does not continue with the discussion of teachability; instead, he addresses a lack of clarity he notices in Protagoras' model of virtue. Specifically, Socrates claims that it is not clear to him to what extent the virtues form a unity in Protagoras' opinion. Indeed, this uncertainty can be shown to run through Protagoras' entire speech — whether or to what extent it may have applied already to the doctrines of the historical Protagoras can be left open in this context.

The question of the unity of the virtues determines the flow of the dialogue almost until its end, interrupted by two lengthy sections that at least appear to be digressions, Protagoras' and Socrates' interpretation of a poem by Simonides (*Prt.* 338e–347a) and the 'hedonistic' section (*Prt.* 351b–359a), which is based on a fictitious dialogue on pleasure by Socrates and Protagoras with 'the many.' In order to solve the question of the unity of the virtues, Socrates asks Protagoras whether the unity of ἀρετή is to be understood in the sense that individual virtues, such as justice or moderation, are parts of ἀρετή or whether these are different names for the same thing. Protagoras favours the view that they are different parts since, according to him, it is possible to have a single virtue without the others (*Prt.* 329c–330b). Later, Protagoras will modify this theory and assign a special status only to courage: one may be courageous without being wise (*Prt.* 349d; cf. 359a–c). By contrast, Socrates tries to defend the other extreme in that he declares individual virtues as identical with each other, suggesting that all of them are knowledge. Then, they would merely be different

2 Silvermintz 2016.

names for knowledge as a whole, and knowledge would be a sufficient cause for acting rightly, in line with the Socratic paradox that whoever knows what is good will do it. If one regards this as a belief of the Platonic Socrates, one arrives at the so-called Unity Thesis, which is linked particularly to the name of Terry Penner³ and still has adherents particularly in the English-speaking world. One misses, however, a demonstration by the proponents of how to prove that Socrates' opposing position is indeed his belief.

The same problem applies to the assessment of the controversially discussed 'hedonistic' section, in which not only the pleasant as such is called good, but also the good and the pleasant are identified. If one regards this position as a view of the Platonic Socrates, following, e.g., C.B. Gosling and Christopher C.W. Taylor,⁴ a further doctrine emerges (in addition to the Unity Thesis), specific to an early Platonic dialogue, which cannot be found in any other dialogue in the same way. For this reason, among others, most scholars doubt whether Plato's Socrates really adopts this doctrine or even reject this possibility, but not everyone. A particular approach to taking the doctrine on pleasure in the *Protagoras* seriously has been put forward by Jörg Hardy,⁵ who combines it with the doctrine of the power of knowledge and thus proposes an interesting solution to the Socratic paradox on the level of the discussion in the dialogue *Protagoras*:

“Je angenehmer eine Handlung ist, die man auszuführen wünscht, desto stärker ist der entsprechende Wunsch. Nach dieser einfachen sokratischen Gleichung ist das bessere Wissen auch der jeweils stärkere Wunsch (der Wunsch mit dem größten Lustpotential).”⁶

For actions that require courage, he arrives at the following conclusion:

“Wenn jemand weiß, dass eine Handlung auf die Bewältigung einer Gefahr gerichtet ist und die Ausführung dieser Handlung für den Handelnden vorteilhaft (angenehm) und aner kennenswert ist, dann weiß er, dass diese Handlung (in einem umfassenden Sinne) gut ist und möchte diese Handlung ausführen. ... Die Tapferkeit lässt sich zum einen als eine bestimmte Handlungsmotivation und zum anderen als ein Wissen charakterisieren, das mit eben dieser Motivation intrinsisch verknüpft ist. Das »Wissen davon, was gefährlich oder unbeden-

3 Penner 1973 (1992).

4 Gosling and Taylor 1982, 45–68.

5 Hardy 2001.

6 Hardy 2001, 146.

klich ist«, und die Motivation des Tapferen sind zwei Seiten derselben Medaille.”⁷

Thus, Hardy not only postulates the element of volition, which is supposed to be lacking in Socrates’ intellectualism, for the dialogue *Protagoras* (like Lorraine S. Pangle),⁸ but even finds arguments for it in the dialogue itself.

This position raises the question of whether it is methodologically permissible to combine elements from different argumentative contexts to create a thesis that cannot be found explicitly in the dialogue. Moreover, a possible objection to all these theories is that the dialogue ends in aporia. This point is not assigned its full significance or is virtually ignored even in the most recent publications. Such a procedure is all the more astonishing since elsewhere Plato demonstrates in theory and in practice how to deal with an aporia. The well-known core text is part of the *Meno* (82b–85b). Working out how to double the area of a square, which originally fails through the slave’s aporia but is eventually successful, demonstrates two points: (1) Aporia frees people from assumed knowledge and is a salutary intermediate state that enables them to find the right solution. If one tries hard, an aporia can be resolved. (2) The solution is not achieved on the level of the discussion that led to the aporia. The slave intended to double the area of the square by first choosing the double length of its side, then one and a half times, both of which would have more than doubled the area. The solution does not consist in looking for a suitable length of the side between its single length and 1.5 times the length, but in a new approach, namely in showing that the diagonal of the original square indicates the side length for a square of double size. Proof of the fact that these two points are rightly inferred as conclusions from the aporia section in the *Meno* is Plato’s procedure in the *Republic*: Book 1 ends in aporia. The question after the nature and the impact of justice is then continued on a different level in Book 2, which could not have been reached from the perspective of Book 1, but only once the doctrine of the soul and of the state have been introduced.

This situation should make one cautious in assuming that a coherent overall thesis could be inferred solely from an aporetic dialogue. Nevertheless, it cannot be excluded that in such dialogues there may be isolated theorems or statements matching the beliefs of the Platonic Socrates. Yet in

order to avoid a random selection, one will have to try to find criteria that make such decisions about authenticity as plausible as possible.

The dialogue *Protagoras* actually does offer some direct and indirect hints of both a positive and a negative nature as to where views of the Platonic Socrates might be found or might not be found. With the help of these pointers, it is possible at least to limit the range of possibilities. In what follows, I will investigate these pieces of evidence with a look to the ramifications for the interpretation of the dialogue as a whole.

Discussing the question of the unity of the virtues, Socrates, when reviewing Protagoras’ theses, introduces a fictitious interlocutor, who expects answers from Protagoras and Socrates (continuing what Socrates had started):

‘... Is justice something (πράγμα τι), or not a thing at all? It seems to me that it is something; what do you think?’ — ‘I think so too.’ — ‘Well, then, suppose someone asked us, “The two of you, Protagoras and Socrates, tell me, is that thing whose name you have just mentioned, justice, itself just or unjust?” I should reply that it is just. How would you cast your vote? The same as mine, or different?’ — ‘The same.’ — ‘So my reply to the question would be that justice is such as to be just; would you give the same answer?’ — ‘Yes.’ — ‘Suppose he went on to ask us, “Do you say that there is also such a thing as holiness?” we should, I think, say that we do.’ — ‘Yes.’ — ‘And do you say that that too is something?’ We should say so, don’t you agree?’ — ‘I agree there too.’ — ‘And do you say that this thing is itself such as to be unholy, or such as to be holy?’ I should be annoyed at the question, and say, “Watch what you say, sir; how could anything else be holy, if holiness itself is not to be holy?” What about you? Wouldn’t you give the same answer?’ — ‘Certainly,’ he said.

‘Suppose he carried on with his questioning: “Well, what was it that you were saying a moment ago? Didn’t I hear you correctly? You seemed to me to be saying that the parts of virtue (ἀρετή) are related to one another in such a way that none of them is like any other.” I should say, “Yes, you heard the rest correctly, but you must have misheard if you think that I said that. It was Protagoras who said it in answer to a question of mine.” Suppose he said, “Is that right, Protagoras? Do you say that none of the parts of virtue is like any of the others?”

⁷ Hardy 2001, 161.

⁸ Pangle 2014. ἔπειτα by ἔπειτα.

Is that your opinion?" What would you say? — 'I should have to agree, Socrates,' he said. (*Prt.* 330c1–331a5)⁹

Socrates here explicitly distinguishes between questions and answers. He does not wish to be tied down to his questions, but is this perhaps all right for his statements, especially when they are answers? For, if Socrates, who usually is the one who asks questions, introduces a fictitious questioner and thus voluntarily creates a situation forcing him to give answers himself, then this may be regarded as an obvious sign inserted by the author, indicating that these answers are important and should be treated differently from other utterances by Socrates. Therefore, it can be assumed that Socrates' proposition that the individual virtues are πράγματα and not merely ὀνόματα is meant to be regarded as correct. This observation increases in importance when one realizes that the exposition on justice and piety noticeably agrees with comments made in connection with the doctrine of ideas. It is not only that there is mention of αὐτὸ τὸ πρᾶγμα, as is frequently the case with reference to ideas (including, for instance, δίκαιον and ὅσιον, *Phd.* 75c11–d2), but in the *Phaedo* there is also the following comment of Socrates (100c4–6):

9 ἡ δικαιοσύνη πρᾶγμα τί ἐστὶν ἢ οὐδὲν πρᾶγμα; ἐμοὶ μὲν γὰρ δοκεῖ τί δὲ σοί; — Κάμοι, ἔφη. — Τί οὖν; εἴ τις ἔροιτο ἐμέ τε καὶ σέ· “Ὁ Πρωταγόρα τε καὶ Σώκρατες, εἴπετον δὴ μοι, τοῦτο τὸ πρᾶγμα ὃ ὠνομάσατε ἄρτι, ἡ δικαιοσύνη, αὐτὸ τοῦτο δίκαιόν ἐστιν ἢ ἄδικον;” ἐγὼ μὲν ἂν αὐτῷ ἀποκρινάμην ὅτι δίκαιον· σὺ δὲ τίς ἂν ψήφον θεῖο; τὴν αὐτὴν ἐμοὶ ἢ ἄλλην; — Τὴν αὐτὴν, ἔφη. — “Ἐστὶν ἄρα τοιοῦτον ἡ δικαιοσύνη οἷον δίκαιον εἶναι, φαίην ἂν ἐγωγε ἀποκρινόμενος τῷ [d] ἐρωτῶντι· οὐκοῦν καὶ σύ; — Ναί, ἔφη. — Εἰ οὖν μετὰ τοῦτο ἡμᾶς ἔροιτο· “Οὐκοῦν καὶ ὁσιότητά τινά φατε εἶναι;” φαίμεν ἂν, ὡς ἐγώ μιν. — Ναί, ἢ δ' ὅς. — “Οὐκοῦν φατε καὶ τοῦτο πρᾶγμα τί εἶναι;” φαίμεν ἂν ἢ οὐ; — Καὶ τοῦτο συνέφη. — “Πότερον δὲ τοῦτο αὐτὸ τὸ πρᾶγμα φατε τοιοῦτον πεφυκέναι οἷον ἀνόσιον εἶναι ἢ οἷον ὅσιον;” ἀγανακτήσαιμι ἂν ἐγωγε, ἔφη, τῷ ἐρωτήματι, καὶ εἴποιμι ἄν· Εὐφόμει, ὦ ἄνθρωπε· σχολὴ μὲν τὰν τι ἄλλο ὅσιον εἶη, εἰ μὴ αὐτὴ [e] γε ἡ ὁσιότης ὅσιον ἔσται. τί δὲ σύ; οὐχ οὕτως ἂν ἀποκρίναιο; — Πάνυ μὲν οὖν, ἔφη. Εἰ οὖν μετὰ τοῦτο εἴποι ἐρωτῶν ἡμᾶς· “Πῶς οὖν ὀλίγον πρότερον ἐλέγετε; ἄρ' οὐκ ὀρθῶς ὑμῶν κατήκουσα; ἐδόξατέ μοι φάναι <τὰ> τῆς ἀρετῆς μόρια εἶναι οὕτως ἔχοντα πρὸς ἄλλα, ὡς οὐκ εἶναι τὸ ἕτερον αὐτῶν οἷον τὸ ἕτερον.” εἴποιμι ἂν ἐγωγε ὅτι τὰ μὲν ἄλλα ὀρθῶς ἠκούσας, ὅτι δὲ καὶ ἐμὲ οἶει εἰπεῖν τοῦτο, παρήκουσας· Πρωταγόρας γὰρ [331a] ὅδε ταῦτα ἀπεκρίνατο, ἐγὼ δὲ ἡρώτων. εἰ οὖν εἴποι· “Ἀληθὴ ὅδε λέγει, ὦ Πρωταγόρα; σὺ φῆς οὐκ εἶναι τὸ ἕτερον μῶριον οἷον τὸ ἕτερον τῶν τῆς ἀρετῆς; σὺς οὗτος ὁ λόγος ἐστίν;” τί ἂν αὐτῷ ἀποκρίναιο; — Ἀνάγκη, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὁμολογεῖν. Trans. Taylor 1991, adapted.

It seems to me that if anything else is beautiful besides the beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no reason at all other than that it participates in that beautiful; and the same goes for all of them.¹⁰

It would be an odd coincidence if such a prominent statement in the *Protagoras* was intended to mean something different from what it means in other Platonic dialogues. In any case, the passage in the *Protagoras* yields an argument against assuming that Socrates believes that the virtues are merely ὀνόματα of one and the same thing; in a later section Socrates speaks of parts of virtue as a matter of course (*Prt.* 353b2), as elsewhere in the *Corpus Platonicum*. To infer from the *Protagoras* the Unity Thesis as a view of Socrates is, therefore, not particularly advisable.

But, it might be objected, Socrates tries to present the individual virtues as a single thing over large stretches of the dialogue, aiming to demonstrate that they are knowledge. Such an observation provokes the following comments in response:

- (1) It is obvious that in terms of the argumentation Socrates reacts to Protagoras' argument for the individuality of the virtues with the extreme counter-thesis of unity. At the same time Socrates indicates on several occasions that he regards the dialogic conversation as a testing of each other (*Prt.* 333c; 348a); this can be understood as another methodological hint. Socrates explicitly envisions the possibility that Protagoras only introduced his original thesis of the virtues to test him and did not actually believe in it (*Prt.* 349cd). The same procedure will therefore have to be assumed as potentially applying to Socrates, too. Whether he makes use of this method in the case of proving that all virtues are one and the same, however, is not yet demonstrated on this basis.
- (2) In the course of the dialogue, it emerges that Socrates does not commit unequivocally to the Unity Thesis. While he originally intends to make Protagoras identify knowledge (or wisdom) and courage (*Prt.* 350c), the discussion eventually reveals that courage is a *part* of knowledge, namely the knowledge of what is dangerous and what is not dangerous (*Prt.* 360d). Both propositions cannot be valid at the same time, as readers, attentively following the discussion in the dialogue, will recognize.

10 φαίνεται γὰρ μοι, εἴ τί ἐστιν ἄλλο καλὸν πλην αὐτοῦ τὸ καλόν, οὐδὲ δι' ἑν ἄλλο καλὸν εἶναι ἢ διότι μετέχει ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ πάντα δὴ οὕτως λέγω. Trans. Gallop 1983.

(3) All of Socrates' attempts at identification have logical flaws, because of operations of whose problematic nature Plato is aware, as can be seen from other dialogues.¹¹ Moreover, there is another methodological hint: Protagoras does not accept Socrates' identification of knowledge and courage since it is based on a wrong inversion. Socrates does not defend himself against this objection; instead, after a long argumentative detour he arrives at the definition of courage mentioned above, namely that it is knowledge of what is dangerous and what is not dangerous, a definition again inferred on the basis of logically problematic procedures. The revelation of the wrong inversion that is not rejected can be understood as a pointer for readers: they are to check the argumentation carefully and have to allow for the possibility of logical errors.

If one brings all these points together, there are good reasons for not regarding the Unity Thesis as the belief of Socrates.

A particular method that Plato employs to demonstrate convictions of his Socrates is the interpretation of a poem by Simonides, which Plato puts into Socrates' mouth (*Prt.* 339d–347a). Philosophical scholarship does not always value this section appropriately since at first glance it seems to be an interpretation of a piece of poetry and thus irrelevant in philosophical terms. Socrates' interpretation is triggered because Protagoras, who is fed up with being asked questions, intends to take the lead in the conversation and to show his brilliance by demonstrating contradictions in Simonides. In view of this, Socrates rises to 'defend' Simonides by giving a longer speech, in contrast to the dialogic character of the conversation. But as Socrates says afterwards, he does not approve of interpretations of poetry because some claim that the poet intends to say one thing, and others claim that he intends to say something else, so the conversation is concerned with a matter impossible to verify (*Prt.* 347e). This means that such interpretations reveal the opinions of readers of the poem and not those of the poet. (I will note only in passing that modern scholars may be subject to the same criticism when they interpret Plato's writings. Plato himself has not entangled himself in contradictions since he did not rely on written doctrine as his sole medium.) As for Socrates' procedure, he provides a prime example of arbitrary interpretation in reading the Simonides poem, which suggests that one is meant to see Socrates' own views in this reading. One can discern the thesis that, in contrast to god, a

11 For more details see Manuwald 1999 and 2006.

human being is not able to be constantly good and thus also knowledgeable (*Prt.* 344b–345c), a concept that equally transpires from later Platonic dialogues. Hans-Joachim Krämer already highlighted the importance of this section.¹² Moreover, Socrates infers from the poem in an astonishing interpretation that good and correct behaviour is based on knowledge (345ab) and 'that no intelligent man believes that anyone does wrong freely or acts shamefully and badly of his own free will' (*Prt.* 345d9–e2),¹³ which he declares to be his belief (*Prt.* 345d–e). Here, too, connections to other Platonic dialogues, including later ones, can be pointed out,¹⁴ so that, again, one is justified in assuming that Socrates says something he really believes in.

In the 'hedonistic' section, Socrates and Protagoras agree on the thesis that knowledge is the key factor in acting appropriately, an opinion that is explicitly shared by Socrates (*Prt.* 352c–d):

[Socrates] ... if someone knows what is good and bad, he would never be conquered by anything so as to do other than what knowledge bids him? In fact, that intelligence is a sufficient safeguard for man? (352c4–7)¹⁵

That Socrates also accepts this thesis as valid cannot be doubted in view of his comments on the Simonides poem; what may be doubted, however, is that, when he demonstrates to 'the many' that knowledge is decisive in hedonistic contexts too, he also agrees with the identification of the pleasant with the good. For Socrates repeatedly asks whether 'the many' are not able to name a τέλος other than pleasure (*Prt.* 354b7–c2; d1–3; d7–e2), especially when he says:

12 Krämer 1990, 87 and n7.

13 ὅτι οὐδεὶς τῶν σοφῶν ἀνδρῶν ἡγεῖται οὐδένα ἀνθρώπων ἐκόντα ἐξαμαρτάνειν οὐδὲ αἰσχρά τε καὶ κακὰ ἐκόντα ἐργάζεσθαι. Trans. Taylor 1991.

14 For evidence, see Manuwald 1999, 326–327; 347–349. Only god is really good and wise: *R.* 379b1; *Smp.* 204a1–2. Restrictions of becoming like god: *R.* 613a7–b1; *Tht.* 176a9–b2; *Phd.* 107b8; *Smp.* 203e–204b. Nobody does wrong of his own free will: *Ti.* 86d7–e1; *Lg.* 731c2–3.

15 καὶ εἴανπερ γινώσκῃ τις τὰ γαθὰ καὶ τὰ κακά, μὴ ἂν κρατηθῆναι ὑπὸ μηδενὸς ὥστε ἄλλ' ἅττα πράττειν ἢ ἂν ἐπιστήμῃ κελεύῃ, ἀλλ' ἰκανὴν εἶναι τὴν φρόνησιν βοηθεῖν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ; Trans. Taylor 1991.

But even now you are at liberty to withdraw, if you can give any other account of the good than pleasure, or of evil than pain. Or are you content to live a pleasant life without pains? (*Prt.* 354e8–355a3)¹⁶

This can be seen as a sign of distancing himself from the views of 'the many' and as an indication of the fact that Socrates has a τέλος other than pleasure in mind.

But how is one then to assess the theory of measuring pleasure, which Socrates vehemently advocates (*Prt.* 356c–357b), as it is meant to put an end to the power of semblances and lead to scientifically proven decisions, as it were? Is this perhaps not a doctrine that Socrates subscribes to? The upshot of Socrates' exposition is criticism of 'the many' since, in order to save money, they do not visit the sophists present for obtaining the knowledge necessary for acting rightly (*Prt.* 357e). It is hardly possible to disavow the knowledge of measuring pleasure more ironically. Moreover, Socrates proposes to investigate on another occasion what kind of knowledge it is (*Prt.* 357b). This example of the so-called 'gaps' in Plato's oeuvre, perhaps the earliest one, belongs to a type that has a counterpart elsewhere in his writings,¹⁷ namely in the *Politicus* (esp. 283c–284e). In this dialogue, two ways of measuring are distinguished, a relative one and an absolute one with reference to the right measure (μέτριον, cf. esp. *Plt.* 283d7–9; e8–11; 284e2–8.). This right measure, which appears under different names (e.g. 'the exact itself' [αὐτὸ τὰκριβές], *Plt.* 284d2; cf. also 284e6–8), is the criterion for the ethical sphere (*Plt.* 283e3–6). These two forms (the relative and the absolute art of measurement) are already adumbrated in the *Protagoras*, when Socrates moves from absolutely measurable entities (one chooses a large size instead of a small one, not a larger one instead of a smaller one) to relations between larger and smaller entities, which include feelings of pleasure. The presupposed need to assess what a bigger or a smaller pleasure is, now or later, makes the objective measuring, which could remove the deception of semblances, absurd. In the *Phaedo*, such calculations about pleasure, the moderation out of fear of missing out on a bigger gain of pleasure, are sharply criticized by the Platonic Socrates (68e2–69a4). It is not necessary to assume that, when Plato has a forward reference in the *Protagoras*, he had already in mind exactly what can be found in the *Politicus* (although this cannot be excluded), but he certainly

thought of more than what is said in the *Protagoras*. This 'gap', then, suggesting further discussion, together with the other pieces of evidence mentioned, justifies regarding the knowledge of measuring pleasure not as a serious opinion of Socrates.

An argument against this reading seems to be that Socrates defined the investigation of the opinions of 'the many' as of some significance for finding out how courage relates to the other parts of ἀρετή (*Prt.* 353b1–3), so that the 'hedonistic' section might contribute to clarifying this question. Strictly speaking, this should lead to the conclusion that the final round of argument on defining courage is based on the hedonistic thesis and the knowledge of measuring pleasure. Indeed, Socrates creates the impression that there is a seamless transition. In fact, however, he leaves the hedonistic basis without explicitly saying so.¹⁸ While so far, the indications of what may or may not be regarded as a conviction of Socrates have been fairly obvious, from now on the indications are becoming subtler.

One of these is that the art of measuring pleasure is *not* employed, although it would be easily possible. For instance, when one's own city is suffering an enemy attack, the hardships to expose oneself to the dangers of fighting could be balanced by the consideration that these pains will be more than outweighed by the pleasant feeling of living in freedom after the fight and not to be enslaved, so that the unpleasant fighting should be accepted for the sake of a bigger gain of pleasant feeling throughout one's whole life. There is no trace of such a consideration; instead, it emerges that the criterion of pleasure does not help to distinguish between courageous individuals and cowards since nobody is keen on what is dangerous, i.e. selects what is bad and unpleasant for themselves (*Prt.* 359c–e). The overall sum of pleasure has been entirely forgotten. In fact, as Protagoras objects, the courageous and the cowards are distinguished from each other because the former wish to go to war, the latter do not (*Prt.* 359e). It is then established as a criterion that the courageous have no disgraceful fear when they are afraid (*Prt.* 360ab), i.e., the category of αἰσχρόν independent of pleasure. Yet only a few lines earlier, the following sequence was set up: praiseworthy (καλόν) and good (ἀγαθόν), thus pleasant (ἡδύ) (*Prt.* 360a2–3);¹⁹ this is a significant inversion of an earlier statement: pleasant, thus praiseworthy and good (*Prt.* 358b3–6),²⁰ i.e., the pleasant is now deter-

16 ἀλλ' ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἀναθέσθαι ἔξεστιν, εἴ πη ἔχετε ἄλλο τι φάναι εἶναι τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἢ τὴν ἡδονήν, ἢ τὸ κακὸν ἄλλο τι ἢ τὴν ἀνίαν· ἢ ἀρκεῖ ὑμῖν τὸ ἡδέως καταβιάσθαι τὸν βίον ἄνευ λυπῶν; Trans. Taylor 1991, adapted.

17 Cf. Szlezák 1999, 51.

18 Cf. Manuwald 1999, 425–429.

19 Οὐκοῦν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, εἴπερ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθόν, καὶ ἡδύ;

20 αἱ ἐπὶ τούτου πράξεις ἄπασαι, ἐπὶ τοῦ ἀλύπτως ζῆν καὶ ἡδέως, ἄρ' οὐ καλαί [καὶ ὠφέλιμοι]; καὶ τὸ καλὸν ἔργον ἀγαθόν τε καὶ ὠφέλιμον;

mined by the good, no longer the good by the pleasant. This agrees with the fact that prior to the last argument on defining courage, only the non-hedonistic evaluative terms αἰσχρόν, καλόν and ἀγαθόν are used and the category of ἡδύ has disappeared (from *Prt.* 360a8 onwards).

In addition, the second definition of courage, the knowledge of what is dangerous and what is not dangerous (*Prt.* 360d4–5), agrees with the definition of courage as put forward by Nikias in the *Laches* (194e11–195a1), where it is in no way linked to the doctrine of pleasure.

All this suggests that the second definition of courage in the *Protagoras* is entirely separate from the hedonistic basis, and the indications in the text do not justify combining the definition of courage and the doctrine of pleasure and regarding the latter as the motivation for taking action, complementing knowledge, as Hardy has argued. His thesis leads to a concept interesting in itself, but not to a concept that Plato is trying to suggest in the *Protagoras*. Therefore, one may ask why the doctrine of pleasure is introduced at all in this dialogue. One reason may be to show that the thesis of the power of knowledge could be proved even if pleasure and the good are identified — which seems more plausible than Marina McCoy's assumption that Socrates demonstrated to Protagoras by his questioning about hedonism that the latter's statements in the hedonistic discussion implied the central significance of knowledge in comparison with the other virtues.²¹ Additionally, there is the side effect that the sophistic interlocutors, who completely agree with the pleasure thesis in the end, are revealed as covert hedonists, though not in the way in which McCoy believes, namely that Protagoras' comments include a hedonistic position from the start.²²

It remains to address the issue of how to clarify whether the second definition of courage, by which Socrates achieves victory over Protagoras, who denies a necessary link between knowledge and courage until the end, can be regarded as the belief of the Platonic Socrates. Apart from the dialogue's aporetic conclusion, there are no direct signals that would encourage doubt, but there are indirect ones. Just as the earlier proofs, the proof for the definition of courage is evidently logically problematic. There is a transition from contraries ('not disgraceful') to polar opposites ('praiseworthy', *Prt.* 360b2–3), although Socrates shows himself aware of the difference between the two elsewhere in the dialogue (cf. esp. *Prt.* 346d1–2). Then he operates with a double expression consisting of ignorance (ἄγνοια) and er-

ror (ἀμαθία, *Prt.* 360b7), apparently in order to refer back with ἄγνοια to the word introduced previously (γινώσκοντες, *Prt.* 360a4), by which Socrates managed the transition from the expressions of opinion used earlier to the term knowledge. In fact, he had already employed ἀμαθία in the sense of 'false opinion' (*Prt.* 358c4). As a result of the double expression, ἀμαθία is now reduced to the contrast to knowledge, and only for this reason will the subsequent proof work.

Further, the question of whether the definition of courage can be regarded as that of Socrates should not be answered without taking the *Laches* into account, though this dialogue is not even mentioned in the recent studies by L. S. Pangle and R. C. Bartlett.²³ It is not unlikely that the *Laches* was written earlier than the *Protagoras*. The figure of a Socrates whose background and character have to be introduced to at least some of the interlocutors (as is the case in the *Laches*) only makes sense in the early instalments released by an author of Socratic dialogues. Then contemporary readers or pupils of Plato could see that, in his conversation with Protagoras, the Platonic Socrates insists on a definition that he rejected in the *Laches* and that led to an aporia in that dialogue. Attempts have been made since Hermann Bonitz²⁴ (and Hardy does so in his commentary on the *Laches*)²⁵ to save Nicias' definition by linking it with the notion of endurance (καρτερία), which Socrates apparently regards as an element of courage (*La.* 192b9–c1; d10–11); so it was believed that one could infer a result from opinions put forward in the dialogue itself, though its end is aporetic. But such a combination does not resolve the problem raised by Socrates in the *Laches*, namely that there is only overall knowledge (of the good) and not partial knowledge, i.e. knowledge of courage that merely covers the future that may or may not be dangerous. Therefore, the *Laches* on its own does not reveal how endurance and knowledge of virtue are to be linked in Plato's concept of courage. Only by the new aspect of the doctrine of the soul, as outlined in the *Republic*, do these elements come together (*R.* 442b10–c3).²⁶

Against this background, it is unlikely that the second definition of courage in the *Protagoras* is meant to be seen as the view of the Platonic Socrates. Indeed, in the dialogue Socrates himself indicates that he does not regard the entire issue of virtue as resolved (*Prt.* 360e6–8).

21 McCoy 2008, 70.

22 McCoy 2008, 66ff. See also the misinterpretation of 354c3 (p. 68).

23 Pangle 2014; Bartlett 2016.

24 Bonitz 1886.

25 Hardy 2014.

26 Cf. also Manuwald 2000.

If one accepts that in the *Protagoras* Plato has provided hints indicating to readers which positions Socrates really subscribes to or is prepared to discuss more seriously, these criteria lead to a few points that can be assumed with a fair degree of certainty to represent the views of the Platonic Socrates positively or negatively:

According to Socrates, the individual forms of virtue are something substantial (cf. e.g. *Prt.* 330cd): justice and piety appear almost like ideas (*Prt.* 330c3–e1), and in so far as every form of virtue is an entity, there are parts (μέρη) of virtue (as they are called by Socrates in his own argument on one occasion, *Prt.* 353b2). These, however, cannot be possessed each in isolation. Knowledge (or wisdom) is the unifying characteristic of virtue (cf. e.g. *Prt.* 361b); without knowledge there will be no virtue. The other parts of virtue are neither identical with knowledge (or wisdom) as a whole, nor are they to be understood as parts of a genus ‘knowledge.’ Virtue based on knowledge can be achieved by individuals for a limited period of time, albeit not forever (*Prt.* 344b–345c). If there is knowledge of the good and the bad, this will be a sufficient condition for acting rightly (*Prt.* 345d–e; 352c–d). Of the models mentioned at the beginning of the discussion on the unity of virtues (*Prt.* 329c–330b) — Socrates had presented the options of whether the virtues are mere names, or quantitatively different like parts of gold, or qualitatively different like parts of the face — the model of the face is most plausibly seen as Socrates’ view if one does not interpret it (like Protagoras) as including the option of separating the virtues (*Prt.* 329d5–6; e2–6), but as an indivisible organic entity, which involves qualitative differences, but of which one cannot have one part without the other or without the whole (i.e. knowledge).²⁷

Against this background, the issue of the teachability of virtue, which Socrates did not pursue any further after Protagoras’ Great Speech, when he used the speech as a prompt to look at the unity of the virtues, is more complex than it seems. Therefore, even if the question of the character of virtue was answered, it would be justifiably brought up again at the end (*Prt.* 361), in contrast to the *Meno*. What seems partly unclear on the level of the *Protagoras* (since Plato does not convey a solution in the *Protagoras*) can receive a possible (preliminary) solution when the doctrine of virtue is linked with the doctrine of the soul in the *Republic*; according to that doctrine, the leading part of the soul (λογιστικόν) is in possession of the overall knowledge of what is advantageous for each part and for the whole (composed of the three parts) while there are also individual forms of virtue.

Additionally, courage (as part of virtue and the particular virtue of the courageous part of the soul), for instance, is neither knowledge nor can it exist without knowledge (cf. *R.* 442b10–c3).²⁸

According to the *Protagoras*, the criterion for taking action is not a maximum of pleasure, but an aim beyond pleasure (*Prt.* 354b–355a), i.e. the good. This is to be seen as a point of orientation for an absolute art of measurement, which neutralizes the confusing power of semblances and has the soul keep to the truth (*Prt.* 356de). In comparison with this art of measurement, the relative art of measuring pleasure, which merely measures the pleasant and the unpleasant quantitatively, can only be a distorted picture. The distinction between an absolute and a relative art of measurement, as it becomes clear from the *Politicus* (esp. *Plt.* 283c–284e), is already somehow adumbrated in the *Protagoras*.

It is a fact, however, that only readers who know more of Platonic philosophy than the *Protagoras* reveals are able to understand and evaluate the hints that are sometimes seemingly contradictory and only emerge after careful interpretation.

Still, the demonstrated procedure is not an inadmissible method in that it would read into an ‘early’ dialogue something that Plato had not yet conceived of at the time. For if the individual elements that can be made plausible as beliefs of the Platonic Socrates in the *Protagoras* as well as in the *Laches* combine to form a plausible whole only from the point of view of later dialogues, the *Republic* in particular, this cannot be a coincidence, or one would have to assume that Plato highlighted some elements as clearly visible convictions of his Socrates, but had not yet noticed under which aspect they could be brought together. Moreover, Plato signals in the *Protagoras* that his Socrates has greater knowledge than is systematically revealed in this dialogue. In the first conversational crisis (*Prt.* 334c–338e) Socrates, who typically does not know anything and therefore enquires, offers the arrangement that Protagoras should ask questions and Socrates will try to show how the respondent should answer. He adds that, as soon as he will have provided answers to everything Protagoras would like to ask, the roles should be reversed again (*Prt.* 338cd). Thus, Socrates presents himself as the teacher of answering, who is ready to answer all questions and claims to be able to do so. Protagoras, however, does not take up this opportunity since he moves to a new theme (in his view) by starting on the

28 Καὶ ἀνδρεῖον δὴ, οἶμαι, τούτῳ τῷ μέρει καλοῦμεν ἓνα ἕκαστον, ὅταν αὐτοῦ τὸ θυμοειδὲς διασφῶν διὰ τε λυπῶν καὶ ἡδονῶν τὸ ὑπὸ τῶν λόγων παραγγελθὲν δεινόν τε καὶ μὴ.

27 On the issue of the unity of virtues see also Manuwald 2005.

interpretation of Simonides, so that readers do not get to know Socrates' answers either, though they apparently exist.

All these elements together support the theory suggested at the beginning, namely that an aporetic dialogue cannot be interpreted fully just on its own; instead, a proper satisfactory reading needs further material, methods and doctrines that the author of the aporetic dialogue is already aware of and that readers can identify if they look at other dialogues — as far as answers can be found in Plato's written doctrine.

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