

Courage and the Soul in Plato

Helen Margaret Clare Mawby (0002542)

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Philosophy Department, Arts Faculty, Glasgow University

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Abstract

In the Introduction I briefly lay out the history of the value terms that I will be considering in my thesis and consider the philosophical relevance of the development of such values in the 5th century. The infiltration of modern ideas of morality into what was considered to be good to the Greeks has a great influence on the literature and philosophy of this period. Plato prioritises these quiet moral virtues, but also tries to hang on to some of what had come before, and thus faces difficulties with his moral theory. I will show that courage presents Plato with an acute difficulty when attempting to develop a consistent ethical theory.

In Chapter 2 I look at the *Protagoras* where the main issues about courage that Plato will continue to discuss throughout his life are introduced. The questions of the extent to which the virtues can be taught and the unity of the virtues are introduced early on. What follows is an attempt to explain and justify the Socratic idea that the virtues are co-dependent and that they all in some way boil down to knowledge. In Chapter 3 on the *Laches* I will show that the discussion focuses more particularly on the virtue of courage and is mostly a more sophisticated attempt to understand courage than the one presented in the *Protagoras*. The early dialogues are chiefly concerned with the Socratic idea that virtue is knowledge and my discussion in those chapters considers how well this theory works when related to courage. The role of fear in a definition of courage is not explicitly considered in these early works but it is clearly a fundamental part of any explanation of courage. The position Plato takes on fear in the early dialogues is not altered in any significant way until we get to the *Laws* –and even then not substantially enough – and so the inherent problems in this approach are continued into the middle period.

In the following three chapters (4-6) I examine the position taken in the *Republic* in detail, which I take to be more representative of the Platonic rather than Socratic position. Plato's psychological model – which includes direct influence from the lower soul – is a

more reasonable interpretation of the internal workings of the agent than the simpler model in the early dialogues of the only direct motivator being beliefs or knowledge. This model supports the definitions given of the virtues in the *Republic* and thus Plato's ethical theory is presented more clearly than perhaps anywhere else in his corpus. The same problems face Plato in explaining courage though, in spite of his meticulous thesis, he still must explain how fear operates within his definition and I look at this in detail in Chapter 6 on the emotions.

The chapter on the *Laws* considers the idea that some of the apparent differences between the *Republic* and the *Laws* are due to Plato's growing realisation that courage will not be assimilated into a unified ethical theory of the type that he wishes to propose. Plato takes the dramatic step of referring to the acts of mercenary soldiers as courageous and thus the issue of whether courage should always be considered a virtue arises. I consider what Christopher Bobonich has called the Dependency Thesis as an attempt to understand the relationship between these two apparently different types of courage. At the end of the *Laws* Plato seems more unsure about the position he should take on the unity of the virtues and how to explain the virtue of courage. As I will show over the next six chapters, courage presents a challenge that Plato is never quite able to meet, but the ways in which he fails to incorporate it into his ethical position provides illuminating discussion on the troubling quality of courage.

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Translations

Unless otherwise noted, the following translations of Plato's dialogues have been used throughout¹:

Apology, trans. G.M.A. Grube, *Plato: Complete Works*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indiana, 1997.

Crito, trans. G.M.A. Grube, *Plato: Complete Works*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indiana, 1997.

Euthydemus, trans. Robin Waterfield, *Early Socratic Dialogues*, Plato, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1987.

Gorgias, trans. Robin Waterfield, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994.

Laches, trans. Iain Lane, *Early Socratic Dialogues*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1987.

The Laws, trans. Trevor J. Saunders, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1970.

Meno, trans. W.K.C. Guthrie, *Protagoras and Meno*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1956.

Phaedo, trans. G.M.A. Grube, *Plato: Complete Works*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indiana, 1997.

Phaedrus, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, *Plato: Complete Works*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indiana, 1997.

Protagoras, trans. Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell, *Plato: Complete Works*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indiana, 1997.

Republic, trans. Desmond Lee, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1955.

¹ I have altered the translations slightly when necessary.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In his influential book *Merit and Responsibility* A.W.H Adkins puts forward the thesis that the important value terms in Greek times – those such as *agathos*, *aretê*, *kalos*, *kakos* and *aischron* – were heavily influenced by the needs of the society. When the most important quality in a man was that he could protect his dependents from the threat of death or servitude through warfare the *agathoi* were those who were able to do this. Thus the people depicted in Homer who are given the highest honours are the strong and powerful who are able to protect the weaker who depend on them. Adkins calls the virtues that were commended in heroes such as Achilles and Agamemnon competitive virtues. Adkins also says:

Being the most powerful words of commendation used of a man, they [courage, successful leadership etc.] imply the possession by anyone to whom they are applied of all the qualities most highly valued at any time by Greek society.¹

In the 5th century the meaning behind such value terms becomes much more muddled, perhaps due to the need for internal civic concord which relies more on justice and temperance than courage and skill in warfare. We start to see value terms occasionally being connected with characteristics that were not previously recognised as important. What Adkins calls the quiet virtues – as opposed to the competitive virtues of the Homeric world – start to seep into the works of dramatists such as Euripides, Sophocles and Aeschylus. For example in the *Suppliants* by Aeschylus we find him praising justice:

Zeus...watches over these things, and holds the balance, assigning to the *kakoi* their unjust deeds, to the law abiding, their righteous deeds.²

And in the *Ajax* by Sophocles we find him commending temperance:

¹ A.W.H.Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility*, p. 31.

² Aeschylus, *Suppliants*, 402, from Adkins' own translation in *Merit and Responsibility*.

The gods love men who are temperate and hate those who are kakoi.³

I do not mean to suggest that there are not examples of Homer or Hesiod praising justice or temperance, but that the occurrence is so infrequent as to be noticeable. Also the references to the warrior or king being *agathos* because they are brave and powerful are plentiful in those works. So when the writers of the 5th century start to praise these quiet virtues it is not that they have never been spoken of well before but that they are now given a stronger position in what makes a man *agathos*.

This development towards the inclusion of quiet virtues into the concept of what makes a man good can be seen more explicitly in the works of Plato. In the *Apology* Socrates acts in a way that will have surprised his audience, and gives the first sign that in the work of Plato we will appreciate a more structured and analytical approach to this change in attitude. Socrates does not present himself to the court in the usual manner; he does not parade his friends and children around the court and make emotional appeals to the jury. In this way his approach to his defence would have been in contrast to the norm of the day. In another way, what Socrates does in court would not have seemed out of place to his audience even if what he said would have. It was common practice in Greece at this time to appeal for leniency on the grounds that you have been a valued citizen who has contributed to the life of the state. Socrates does make reference to what he has done for Athens, but does not do so as an emotional appeal but as an attempt to explain his lifestyle, and his value to his homeland. After the verdict of guilty is given Socrates says:

I did not follow that path that would have made me of no use either to you or to myself, but I went to each of you privately and conferred upon him what I say is the greatest benefit, by trying to persuade him not to care for any of his belongings before caring that he himself should be as good and as wise as possible, not to care for the city's possessions more than for the city itself, and to care for other things in the same way.⁴

³ Sophocles, *Ajax*, 132, from Adkins own translation in *Merit and Responsibility*.

⁴ *Apology* 36c1-d1.

Socrates believed that he had provided a valuable service to the men of Athens. What is surprising about Socrates' speech in the *Apology* is that he frequently links the value of justice with aretê. He does this both implicitly - by his claims that the only thing that matters is that he has behaved justly - and explicitly:

Do you think I would have survived all these years if I were engaged in public affairs and, acting as a good man must, came to the help of justice and considered this the most important thing.⁵

By claiming that a good man, an *agathos*, would come to the help of justice Plato is making an explicit claim about what kind of person a good man is. To attempt to clarify the meaning of a term such as *agathos* at that point in the 5th century was a particularly challenging exercise, but one which Plato took on:

Plato's chief problem in ethics is the problem which has existed in Greek values from Homer onwards: namely, that of affixing *dikaiosune*, and the quiet virtues generally, to the group of values based on aretê so firmly as to make future severance impossible.⁶

As well as establishing Plato's position on the importance of the quiet virtues, the *Apology* establishes Socrates as the heroic figure of Plato's work. By having respect for the old values – such as courage, and the new ones – such as justice, Socrates himself represents the ethical position Plato will take in most of his works. When Socrates puts the question he expects from others – ‘are you not ashamed, Socrates, to have followed the kind of occupation that has led to your being now in danger of death?’⁷ – he replies by comparing his behaviour with that of Achilles:

According to your view, all the heroes who died at Troy were inferior people, especially the son of Thetis who was so contemptuous of danger compared with disgrace...he despised death and danger and was much more afraid to live a coward who did not avenge his friends. “Let me die at once,” he said, “when once I have

⁵ *Apology* 32e3-5.

⁶ Adkins p. 259-260.

⁷ *Apology* 28b3-4.

given the wrongdoer his deserts, rather than remain here, a laughingstock by the curved ships, a burden upon the earth.”⁸

Socrates is like Achilles in his lack of interest in death; the continuity between their positions is that only what makes one *good* should be considered – even if that would have meant different things to these two men – and that the threat of death itself should not sway you. Achilles is also said to be afraid of living like a coward and doing what he believed to be shameful. The idea that the brave man should feel fear of doing the wrong things is a central part of Plato’s definition of courage in his dialogues.

The clash between the traditional values of the Homeric period and the new set of values can be seen perhaps more clearly in the *Gorgias* than the *Apology* in an impassioned speech by Callicles:

What nature approves and sanctions...is to do nothing to hinder or restrain the expansion of one’s desires...Now, I don’t think most people can do this, and that’s why they condemn those that can; they’re ashamed, and they try to disguise their failings by claiming that self-indulgence is contemptible...And why do they praise self-discipline and justice? Because their own timidity makes them incapable of winning satisfaction for their pleasures.⁹

Callicles rejects the redefinition of *aretê* so as to predominately include the quiet virtues that Plato is attempting, he explicitly holds to the traditional interpretation of what makes a man good.

The virtue of courage spans both the traditional definition of what makes a man *agathos* and the new interpretation. The Homeric heroes were expected to be brave almost above all else, but it is also one of the four central virtues that Plato includes in his theory about virtue. As the Homeric system of values was not analysed to the extent that Plato examined the virtues in his work it was traditionally an acceptable part of a slightly

⁸ *Apology* 28c2-d4.

⁹ *Gorgias* 491e9-492b1.

muddled conception of virtue. However, including courage in the transition to a generally more quiet conception of virtue creates considerable problems for Plato; this is because our common conception of courage can be exhibited by people who are certainly not just, moderate and wise. We will see in the following chapters that Plato's attempt to include courage in a unified theory of virtue in the *Protagoras*, *Laches*, *Republic* and the *Laws* presents him with considerable difficulty. At each stage of his career courage challenges the consistency of Plato's view; by the time of the *Laws*, Plato appears to be aware of the difficulty courage presents to his thesis and quite radically alters his interpretation of the virtue – in that it is no longer necessarily a virtue at all.

On a different note, there is an important difficulty when trying to analyse the views of Plato. His choice to use the dialogue form, in which he never appears, means that in the early dialogues at least, his own ideas are never explicit. Due to this difficulty there has been much discussion of whether the dialogues can be considered to reflect the views of the historical Socrates or those of Plato. There are two main schools of thought concerning this issue – the Unitarian view and the developmental. The Unitarian tradition, supported by Shorey, Friedlander and to some extent Kahn, subscribes to the view that all Plato's dialogues were written from a single unchanging point of view. In contrast, developmentalists, such as Guthrie and Vlastos, believe that Plato started from the position of the historical Socrates and gradually developed his own views, which grew and changed throughout his life.

The most common developmentalist position is that which supports the idea that the 'early' dialogues are Socratic and the 'middle' and 'late' dialogues are Platonic. Thus Guthrie said the early dialogues are where Plato 'is imaginatively recalling, in form and substance the conversations of his master without as yet adding to them any distinctive doctrine of his own'¹⁰. I reject the Unitarian view and some versions of the developmental view of the Socratic or Platonic content of the dialogues. The main

¹⁰ Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. IV, p.345.

difficulties with the Unitarian position are that there are inconsistencies between the early dialogues, and that most thinkers do develop and change their views throughout their lifetime, and it is natural to assume that Plato would have. I will, for example, argue in the following chapter that the hedonism Socrates espouses in the *Protagoras* is not consistent with his position in the *Gorgias* or other early dialogues.

What I intend to argue is that the picture is more complex than Unitarians and some Developmentalists allow for, and that the 'early' dialogues do contain the ideas that Plato learned from conversations with Socrates, but not just those. I do not agree that the division between the early and middle dialogues is based on the idea that Plato started introducing his own theories only in the middle dialogues, or that the Socratic influence over Plato disappeared at this time. I think that there is evidence that Plato was already testing out his own views, and seeing how they fared against the Socratic ones in some of the dialogues that are certainly considered to be 'early'. If this were the case it may mean either that the generally accepted chronology is incorrect, or that the chronology cannot be organized into neat compartments the first of which is labelled 'Socratic' and the second 'Platonic'. I am not sure whether the question of chronology is one that can be conclusively answered with the information we have, and I will not attempt to answer it here. I will discuss the various reasons I have for believing that there was more of Plato in the early dialogues than has been accepted in the developmental tradition in the following two chapters on the *Protagoras* and the *Laches*. It is enough at this point to say that the picture I favour is one where we do see the Socratic ideas in the early dialogues, but that it is not Plato's intention to simply immortalize them in his writing. It is more correct to see the early dialogues as Platonic exercises, which enabled him to come to the philosophical conclusions that he espoused later. To some extent then he did begin from the Socratic position, but he did not do so uncritically.

Chapter 2: Courage and Hedonism in the *Protagoras*

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1. Introduction

The *Protagoras* is the first of the early dialogues to put courage centre stage¹. In this dialogue Socrates argues for the thesis that virtue is in some way reducible to knowledge. It is in this dialogue that the problems associated with applying such a theory to courage start to take shape. We will see that Plato has great difficulty in explaining courage in the light of the position he takes on hedonism in the *Protagoras*, the role of which in this dialogue is to bolster his anti-akratic, intellectualist stance. Given that the thesis that virtue is knowledge is subsequently built on hedonism it is clear from the outset that courage is going to be problematic. We may be able to accept that being a good person is the best kind of life, but that doesn't mean we can also accept that it will be the most pleasurable, or that it should be. Wouldn't a man who took pleasure in the slaughter of battle be a monster rather than an example of virtuous behaviour? Ultimately, Socrates' support of hedonism creates more problems for a coherent definition of courage than it solves. I will also argue in this chapter that the *Protagoras*, like the *Laches*, provides Plato with a forum to examine the ideas of his teacher and other ideas of the time before he took the step of writing a more assertive dialogue like the *Republic*.

¹ I will argue this in this and the following chapter.

2. Courage

The dialogue begins with the question whether virtue can be taught. Protagoras believes that it can be and defends his position in his great speech². The point of this is that even though there are no recognised teachers of virtue, the Athenians make every effort to teach virtue to the young. The education they receive (especially the musical elements) is designed for this purpose and so are the laws of the city. But instead of replying directly to these claims Socrates raises the question of the unity of virtue. The discussion of unity is perhaps intended to illuminate the question of the teachability of virtue and in the end place both Socrates and Protagoras in difficult philosophical positions. Their contrasted positions in the final pages – that Socrates thinks virtue is knowledge but cannot be taught and Protagoras thinks virtue is not knowledge but can be taught – confirms that something is awry in the discussion – or their initial statements concerning teachability.

After the introductory discussion and Protagoras' first speech the conversation turns to the question of the unity of the virtues. Protagoras has spoken in his speech about the virtues as if they were 'collectively one thing'³. In response to this Socrates asks:

Is virtue a single thing, with justice and temperance and piety its parts, or are the things I have just listed all names for a single entity?⁴

To this question Protagoras responds by claiming that 'virtue is a single entity, and the things you are asking about are its parts'⁵. Socrates wants to know whether Protagoras thinks the individual virtues are 'heterogeneous in the way that eyes, ears and nose are parts of a face, or are they homogeneous like the parts of a lump of gold?'⁶ Protagoras responds that they are like the parts of a face, whereas Socrates' aim in the *Protagoras* is to try and argue that they have a stronger connection, perhaps that they are more akin to parts of a lump of gold – all reducible to knowledge. Protagoras rejects both

² *Protagoras* 320d1-328d3.

³ *Prot.* 329c5.

⁴ *Prot.* 329d1-3.

⁵ *Prot.* 329d4-5.

⁶ Hobbs, Angela, *Plato and the Hero*, p. 113.

the stronger and the weaker versions of the unity of the virtues. The stronger thesis is that the virtues all amount to the same thing; that 'bravery', 'wisdom', 'temperance', 'justice', and 'piety' are all words that refer to the same thing. The weaker thesis is that the virtues are necessary and sufficient conditions of each other, in that people are brave if and only if they are wise, temperate, just and pious. As Terry Penner explained, the former thesis is called the stronger because it entails but is not entailed by the latter – the weaker thesis⁷. Protagoras makes it clear that he rejects both theses of the unity of the virtues when he claims that the virtues are not even necessarily found together: 'many are courageous but unjust, and many again are just but not wise'⁸.

To challenge the claims made by Protagoras that the virtues are distinct and separable Socrates gives three arguments. Each of the arguments is intended to show that two of the virtues that Protagoras believes can be found separately are in fact intrinsically linked. The first argument⁹ is designed to show that justice and piety are the same kind of thing, but it is not successful. Protagoras says concerning the virtues that 'they are not like each other in power or function or in any other way'¹⁰. Protagoras believes that the virtues can be found separately, therefore that we cannot assume that if a person is just then they will be pious. Socrates then asks him:

Isn't piety the sort of thing that is just, and isn't justice the sort of thing that is pious? Or is it the sort of thing that is not pious? Is piety the sort of thing to be not just, and therefore unjust, and justice impious?¹¹

Socrates is asking Protagoras to say whether he thinks that piety is either just or unjust, but this is not an appropriate question given what Protagoras has said. Protagoras is clearly committed to the idea that *it is not the case that piety is just*, whereas Socrates has asked him whether *piety is just or unjust*. Socrates is guilty of a switching the scope of the negation such that Protagoras must respond by either

⁷ Penner, T., 'The Unity of Virtue', *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion and the Soul*.

⁸ *Prot.* 329e5-6.

⁹ *Prot.* 331a7-332a3.

¹⁰ *Prot.* 330a6-7.

agreeing that piety is just or not. Protagoras rightly does not agree to respond to Socrates' conclusions and it is clear that as he hasn't agreed with these initial points there is no point in Socrates' taking the argument further. Socrates appears to mask the failure of this argument with insincere magnanimity when he says that he has irritated Protagoras and that they should move on for that reason.

The second argument¹² is designed to show the connection between temperance and wisdom. Socrates has more success with this attempt even though he perhaps should not have had. After establishing the idea that each thing can only have one opposite, Socrates goes on to argue that folly is the opposite of both temperance and wisdom, and therefore temperance and wisdom must be the same thing. Protagoras could have argued that folly is not the opposite of temperance even though it may be the opposite of wisdom, but instead he grudgingly agrees with the conclusion even though he is not happy about it.

The third argument¹³ sets out to establish a connection between justice and wisdom but Socrates and Protagoras are at loggerheads from the start. Protagoras claims that one can show good judgement whilst acting unjustly – a particularly un-Socratic claim – but that this is only the case if the end result is good. Protagoras is then committed to the idea that we only show good judgement when we do something if the end result is good¹⁴. This idea rules out the possibility that someone could act unjustly and cleverly and according to all possible information but be foiled at the last moment by an act of god that no one could possibly have foretold. In this situation it seems somewhat unfair to say that they did not show good judgement if without the act of god everything would have turned out as they intended and to their advantage. Protagoras is thus committed to the claim that those who may be said to think wisely while behaving unjustly must actually bring about some good consequences. What is

¹¹ *Prot.* 331a8-b1. This is the first argument Socrates gives to challenge Protagoras' claim that the virtues are distinct.

¹² *Prot.* 332a3-333b3.

¹³ *Prot.* 333d3-c4.

¹⁴ *Prot.* 333d8-12.

not clear is who the consequences should be good for. One would guess that Protagoras thinks of them as being advantageous to the agent, but Socrates' question of whether these 'goods things constitute what is advantageous to people?'¹⁵ muddies the waters and enables Protagoras to get out of the argument by going on to a digression about the relativity of good. We might think that a distinction needs to be made between moral and non-moral good or between what is good for the agent and what is good for the community. It is possible that Protagoras has the latter in mind, but of course Socrates needs to avoid such a distinction.

Socrates' choice of arguments in response to Protagoras' belief that the virtues are not unified is interesting. Protagoras' specific claim is that 'many are courageous but unjust, and many again are just but not wise'¹⁶. Socrates has attempted to respond to the claim that many are just but not wise with his third argument, but has not addressed the idea that people can be courageous but unjust. As I have argued in Chapter 1, courage presents a particularly acute problem for Plato because, more than any of the other cardinal virtues, it does not easily fit into the conception of being wholly good. This may be why Plato does not include courage in these arguments; he might recognise that courage presents a difficulty for the unity of the virtues and thus have Protagoras more explicitly single out courage so that Socrates has no choice but to confront this problem. After an interlude and the discussion about poetry Protagoras makes his position clear:

What I am saying to you, Socrates, is that all these are parts of virtue, and that while four of them are reasonably close to each other, courage is completely different from all the rest. The proof that what I am saying is true is that you will find many people who are extremely unjust, impious, intemperate, and ignorant, and yet exceptionally courageous¹⁷

Socrates responds to this bold claim with the following argument:

(i.) 'courageous men are confident'.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Prot.* 333d8-e1.

¹⁶ *Prot.* 329e5-6.

¹⁷ *Prot.* 349d4-8.

¹⁸ *Prot.* 349e2.

- (ii.) 'virtue is something fine'.¹⁹
- (iii.) 'Those with the right kind of knowledge are always more confident than those without it, and a given individual is more confident after he acquires it than he was before'.²⁰
- (iv.) However, 'men lacking in knowledge of all these occupations...[can] be confident in each of them'.²¹
- (v.) The men who are ignorant and 'are so confident turn out to be not courageous but mad'²², because otherwise courage would be contemptible.
- (vi.) 'And, on the other side, the wisest are the most confident and the most confident are the most courageous...
- (vii.)...And the logical conclusion would be that wisdom is courage'.²³

This argument given by Socrates is particularly unsuccessful; it convinces neither Protagoras nor the modern reader that courage and wisdom are the same. I will discuss point (iii.) below in section 3, but for the moment I wish to concentrate on the other issues involved in this argument. Working our way through the argument we already face a questionable premise at (ii.). Why should we agree with Plato both that courage is one of the virtues, and that a virtue is 'something fine'? Plato has to make these assumptions in order to incorporate courage into his concept of virtue, but many of the problems Plato faces in his ethical theory are created by these inconvenient but perhaps unavoidable²⁴ assumptions. Protagoras of course accepts this premise without blinking an eyelid, as it would have been a familiar idea to him as well. I will address the issue of courage being something other than a virtue in greater depth in a later chapter. For the time being it suffices to say that this statement alone (and the claim derived from it in (v.)) does not itself invalidate the argument, and that they are necessary for the conclusions Socrates wishes to draw.

One of the logical flaws committed by Plato in this argument is in his conclusion in (vi.). In (vi.) Plato claims that the wisest people are the most confident and that the most confident people are the most courageous. What Plato appears to be arguing here

¹⁹ *Prot.* 349e4.

²⁰ *Prot.* 350a10-12.

²¹ *Prot.* 350b1-2.

²² *Prot.* 350c2-3.

²³ *Prot.* 350c3-5.

²⁴ By 'unavoidable' here I mean that given the ethical tradition it was unlikely that Plato would initially challenge the idea that courage is always good. We shall see that in the *Laws* he resigns himself to

is that the groups of people we would call 'wisest, 'most confident' and 'most courageous' are co-extensive, by which I mean that the same people would be found in each group. Plato has gained Protagoras' acceptance of the idea that the wisest people are the most confident in (iii.), but Protagoras has at no point accepted that the most confident are the most courageous. Protagoras responds with the statement that:

When I was asked if the courageous are confident, I agreed. I was not asked if the confident are courageous. If you had asked me that, I would have said, 'Not all of them'. You have nowhere shown that my assent to the proposition that the courageous are confident was in error. What you did show next was that knowledge increases one's confidence and makes one more confident than those without knowledge.²⁵

Protagoras has spotted one thing that is amiss in Socrates' argument – if the argument is to be successful Socrates needs to establish that the confident are courageous but Protagoras has agreed only to the claim that the courageous are confident. In fact he thinks that some confident people are not courageous but mad. However Protagoras does not draw attention to a second flaw in Socrates' argument. If (vi.) were true it would imply that the wisest are the most courageous, but to say this is not the same as to say that wisdom and courage are the same. The claim that the wisest are the most courageous would be compatible with the claim that the moderately wise are not courageous at all. But if that were the case then wisdom and courage could not be the same property. Socrates might have established that wisdom and courage converge at the limit but that would not entitle him to claim as he does in 350c that his argument shows that wisdom is courage.

having to change this part of his theory presumably due to the fact that cannot deal with the problems encountered in previous works.

²⁵ *Prot.* 350c7-d4.

3. Hedonism

After Protagoras' speech explaining why he rejects the argument set out to prove that wisdom is courage Plato suddenly introduces a new theme. Socrates asks Protagoras whether 'some people live well and others live badly?'²⁶ To this question Protagoras replies in the affirmative. However when asked if he is willing to connect pleasure and the good in such a way that 'to live pleasantly is good, and unpleasantly, bad'²⁷, he declines. The hedonistic view which is apparently introduced at this point has perhaps been the most discussed of the themes in this dialogue, and the most challenging part of the dialogue to explain. Plato appears to be arguing for an idea that is inconsistent with the rest of his work, which raises the question to what extent he genuinely supported the arguments presented in this dialogue. I will argue that the version of hedonism that Socrates argues for in the *Protagoras* does present us with a serious interpretative problem as long as we wish to believe that the (early) dialogues are genuine accounts of either Socrates' or Plato's views. The views expressed in the *Protagoras* do conflict with those expressed in the *Gorgias* and other 'early' works. I will show that two attempts to interpret these two works consistently – Gosling and Taylor, and Rudebusch – ultimately fail. I do not think it is likely that the answer to this inconsistency is that either Socrates or Plato simply changed his mind. Although that is a possible explanation, it is not the most likely as it would mean that either Socrates or Plato were committed to a theory for a short space of time that the dialogues that came before and after were implicitly critical of. Such a change of heart would also have to have involved extensive revision of the early Platonic position. If it is then the case that Plato is advocating a theory that not only does not appear in the other dialogues but also is actually explicitly argued against in other works then other kinds of explanations must be sought. If Plato could not consistently believe in all the theories that Socrates argues for in the early dialogues (without regularly, and rather drastically, changing his mind), then these dialogues were most probably not functioning as records of Socrates' actual beliefs. If this is the case then in what other way could they have been functioning?

²⁶ *Prot.* 351b1-2.

²⁷ *Prot.* 351c1.

i. The Protagoras and the Gorgias

The main problem with the hedonism in the *Protagoras* is that Socrates' position in other dialogues does not seem to support such a view. This is particularly the case in the *Gorgias*, and so interpreting these two dialogues in such a way that they are not openly contradictory has been rather a challenge. As Rudebusch says in his book *Socrates, Pleasure, and Value* a straightforward 'reading causes an interpretive dilemma for those who seek to ascribe a coherent ethical theory to Socrates that underlies his argumentation in both dialogues'²⁸. In the *Gorgias* Socrates argues explicitly against Calicles that pleasure and goodness are two different things. Near the beginning of the discussion Socrates and Calicles say:

[Socrates]: All right, let's have it on record that Calicles of Acharnae claims that 'pleasant' and 'good' are identical...[Calicles]: And what shall we say about Socrates of Alopecce? Does he or does he not agree with Calicles? [Socrates]: He does not.²⁹

Whereas there is much support for the view that Socrates is advocating some kind of identification of 'pleasure' and 'goodness' in the *Protagoras*. For example:

What's this, Protagoras? Surely you don't follow the common opinion that some pleasures are bad and some pains good? I mean to say, in so far as they are pleasant, are they not also good, leaving aside any consequence that they may entail? And in the same way pains, in so far as they are painful, are bad.³⁰

ii. Gosling and Taylor

Gosling and Taylor³¹ offer an explanation of the apparent inconsistency between the *Gorgias* and the *Protagoras* by drawing a distinction between two types of hedonism – one they think is argued against in the *Gorgias*, the other supported in the *Protagoras*. Their position is that in the *Gorgias* Socrates argues against Calicles' version of hedonism that states that any pleasure is the good, whether that be the pleasure of immediate gratification or the pleasure of long-desired and worked for

²⁸ Rudebusch, George, *Socrates, Pleasure, and Value*, p.19.

²⁹ *Gorgias* 495d5-e1.

³⁰ *Prot.* 351c3-8.

ambitions. In the *Protagoras* they think that Socrates is arguing for an enlightened hedonism that is only committed to the idea that goodness can be found in long-term pleasure. Gosling and Taylor work through the arguments in the *Gorgias* and show that the hedonism of the *Protagoras* is not a target, and that what Socrates is doing in his discussion with Callicles is demonstrating that the good is not the satisfaction of all and any desires that come along³². Thus they conclude that:

It appears that the alleged inconsistency between the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* is illusory. What is maintained in the former is not what is attacked in the latter, nor is Socrates' position on pleasure in the former inconsistent with the stance which he adopts in the latter³³

The argument provided by Gosling and Taylor allows us to interpret these two dialogues in a way that does not cause conflict. By arguing that Socrates' arguments against Callicles show only that one must distinguish goodness from immediate pleasantness the hedonism in the *Protagoras* that allows for the Socratic *technê* of measurement is left untouched.

The account given by Gosling and Taylor does therefore avoid certain difficulties, however it encounters a different one by drawing a distinction between long-term and short-term pleasures. Rudebusch argues that the distinction that Gosling and Taylor draw between long-term and short-term pleasures creates the loss of the commensurability that is so important for the identification of virtue with knowledge and the unity of the virtues – and there is much evidence for such ideas being genuinely Socratic. The reason why the commensurability is so important is explained well by Terence Irwin. Irwin describes Socrates' position in the *Protagoras* as *epistemological hedonism*; we need to be able to assess which options will provide the most overall pleasure in order to pursue what is pleasurable (or good)³⁴. He argues that hedonism in the *Protagoras* is essential for Socrates if he is to defend the truth of

³¹ Gosling & Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*.

³² For more detail of this point see Gosling & Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*.

³³ Gosling & Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, p.76-77.

³⁴ Irwin, T., *Plato's Moral Theory*, chapter IV.

the unity of the virtues (UV) and the idea that knowledge is sufficient for virtue (KSV). He says that:

If the many were not hedonists, their initial objection to KSV would not be refuted. For they suggested that some of man's desires – for food, sex, revenge, and so on – might move him apart from his beliefs about the good; and only HP showed that they could not recognise such incontinent desires³⁵

His claim is that without a general and inclusive hedonism, which provides a commensurable scale on which to compare our options, knowledge could not be the determining factor of virtue. Knowledge after all needs a subject area to work on, and with the acceptance of the idea that what contains the most pleasure is the good, it would just need to assess which options contain the most pleasure. And the fact that value is to be understood in terms of pleasure makes the connection between knowledge and action so acceptable, as:

Then if the pleasant is the good, no one who either knows or believes that there is another possible course of action, better than the one he is following, will ever continue on his present course when he might choose the better.³⁶

And if knowledge is sufficient for virtue then it is sufficient for all virtue and the virtues then become one; they are all essentially knowledge of what the right thing to do is. As Irwin says:

Socrates defends hedonism only by showing that the many implicitly accept it in their choices. But to defend the truth of KSV and UV, hedonism must be true, and not only the many's belief.³⁷

Irwin's argument that Socrates relies on this belief in hedonism in order to argue for other theses seems plausible. Therefore if the point of including hedonism is to give support for these other more important theses, this role that hedonism is playing must not be undermined by an attempt to interpret the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias* consistently.

³⁵ *ibid*, p.106. 'HP' stands for the Hedonism Principle.

³⁶ *Prot.* 358b10-c4.

However, the implausibility of Gosling and Taylor's interpretation is not simply that it would negate the value of the hedonism for Socrates, but that there is textual evidence that he did not support such a position. To draw any distinction between different types of pleasures, whether it is between long-term and short-term pleasures, or high or low pleasures, implies that not all pleasures can be quantified on the same commensurable scale. And as Socrates says in the *Protagoras*:

For if someone were to say: 'But Socrates, the immediate pleasure is very much different from the pleasant and the painful at a later time,' I would reply, 'They are not different in any other way than by pleasure and pain, for there is no other way that they could differ. Weighing is a good analogy; you put the pleasures together and the pains together, both the near and the remote, on the balance scale, and then say which of the two is more. For if you weigh pleasant things against pleasant, the greater and the more must always be taken.'³⁸

This statement makes it clear that Socrates is not advocating an enlightened version of hedonism that prioritises long-term pleasures over short-term ones, but that the fact that some pleasures are in the future should mean that they often carry less weight than they should in the decision-making process. It is clear then that Gosling and Taylor's distinction between different kinds of pleasures mistakenly interprets the thesis argued for, and invalidates the relevance of hedonism in the *Protagoras*.

iii. Rudebusch

Rudebusch's theory is subtly, but importantly, different from Gosling and Taylor. His theory also relies on a distinction between types of pleasures, that of *real* and *apparent* pleasures. He also believes that his distinction reconciles the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* because Socrates is only attacking *apparent* pleasures in the *Gorgias*, whereas he is advocating a scale of *real* pleasures in the *Protagoras*. This distinction does not face the same problems as the Gosling and Taylor distinction as it is plausible that Socrates is discussing what is genuinely pleasurable in the *Protagoras*, and that his attack on Polus' and Callicles' position in the *Gorgias* is on mistaking what is only apparently pleasurable for what is genuinely pleasurable. Socrates

³⁷ Irwin, T., *Plato's Moral Theory*, p. 108.

³⁸ *Prot.* 356a6-b6.

attempts to persuade his interlocutors that by doing what they desire they may not be doing what they will, or what they genuinely desire. Socrates first gets Polus' assent that what we do we do for the sake of the good³⁹. He then states that:

We don't, then, in an unqualified sense, want to slaughter people or exile them from their communities or confiscate their property. We want to do these things only if they're in our interest, but if they're not we don't want to do them because, as you admit, we want good things, but don't want things that are either indifferent or bad.⁴⁰

Socrates' theory can be stated in the form of the biconditional: 'I desire to murder if and only if the murder is in fact an extrinsic good for me'⁴¹ (where an extrinsic good is one which is not a good in itself but is good or bad contingent on a further criterion). Therefore if the murder is in fact not in the person's interest Socrates would claim that the person did not genuinely desire it, and it would be only an apparent desire. The distinction between apparent and genuine desires does then appear in the *Gorgias*, and could therefore be the target of Socrates' argument. However, I shall show that there are two problems with this theory that Rudebusch does not seem to appreciate. The first is that the *Protagoras* is discussing pleasure not desire – two different states – and when the discussion in the *Gorgias* turns to pleasure when Socrates is talking to Callicles the theory is no longer so credible. The second is that by making the *Protagoras* consistent with the *Gorgias* in such a way, he is in danger of alienating it from many of the other early dialogues. I will discuss each of these problems in turn next.

The theory set forward by Rudebusch is interesting and quite plausible when considering the views of Polus in the *Gorgias*. However, if we look at Socrates' discussion with Callicles his position becomes less convincing. Socrates articulates Callicles' position in the *Gorgias*:

³⁹ *Gorgias* 468b-c.

⁴⁰ *Gorgias* 468c3-9.

⁴¹ Idea found in Rudebusch's *Socrates, Pleasure, and Value*.

All right, let's have it on record that Callicles of Acharnae claims that 'pleasant' and 'good' are identical, but that knowledge and courage are different from each other and from goodness.⁴²

Socrates, on the other hand, claims not to be a supporter of such a view. It is clear at this point that Callicles' position is not that the good and *apparent* pleasure are the same, but that the good is the same as genuine pleasure. When Socrates paraphrases Callicles' position it is the identification of goodness with actual pleasure that he means, and the argument that follows shows that Socrates is arguing against this position and not one that assimilates goodness to apparent pleasure. The argument falls into two parts. In the first part Socrates gains Callicles' acquiescence to the idea that as good and evil fortune are opposed to one another they are therefore mutually exclusive. He provides examples such as if you had ophthalmia in both eyes, your eyes cannot at the same time be healthy – in other words, what is good for the eyes and what is bad are mutually exclusive. He concludes this part with the statement that:

Whenever we find a person losing and keeping things at the same time, then, we'll know that we're not faced with the good and the bad. Do you agree with me about this?⁴³

This is a statement to which Callicles agrees. In the second part of the argument Socrates begins by saying that thirst and hunger are painful and the satisfaction of such desire is pleasurable. So Callicles has admitted that by drinking and satisfying your thirst you are both in pain (because you are thirsty) and enjoying the pleasure of drinking by satisfying your thirst. Socrates then reminds Callicles that he earlier agreed to the claim that what is good and evil cannot be experienced at the same time, and therefore concludes that pleasure is not the same as the good, and pain is not the same as the bad. I am not concerned with the possible flaws in this argument but simply that Socrates' attack is not levelled at apparent pleasure. The argument certainly could be used to show that apparent pleasures and pains are not the same as good and evil respectively, but it can – and appears to be – levelled at genuine pleasures. Rudebusch's argument is that Socrates' arguments in the *Gorgias* are not attacking the genuine pleasures that are used so effectively in the *Protagoras*, but as

⁴² *Gorgias* 495d5-8.

⁴³ *Gorgias* 496c1-4.

this argument with Callicles does target the identification of pleasure with the good regardless of the distinction between genuine and apparent pleasures his argument does not hold water.

The struggle with the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* is not simply a matter of finding a reading of them both so that they do not contradict one another, but a matter of finding a reading of the early dialogues that includes both the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*. Otherwise the ongoing efforts to align the arguments of the *Protagoras* with those of the *Gorgias* would be only an academic exercise, and would not necessarily tell us anything interesting about the early work of Plato. Rudebusch's interesting reading of the *Protagoras* accepts that Socrates was actually arguing for a version of hedonism. What all cases of hedonism have in common is described very well by J.C.B. Gosling in his book, 'Pleasure and Desire: the case for hedonism reviewed'. He says that what is common to all cases of hedonism is that:

Pleasure is set up as the criterion and/or motive of (good) action, principles or way of life. There are many other ethical views which make out, for instance, that the life of virtue must at least be pleasant, or contain some pleasures, which, however admirable or interesting they may be in themselves, fail to qualify as hedonistic because they explicitly, and not just by unacknowledged implication, introduce some other criterion than pleasure for deciding between the good or the bad life or action.⁴⁴

For Socrates' theory to be a version of hedonism it must be committed to the idea that what is good can only be defined as such by considering the amount of pleasure it produces or contains. There can be no other criterion included in the evaluation that determines the ethical value of an action, principle or way of life.

The difficulty in attributing a consistent hedonism to the Socrates of the early dialogues can be seen in the *Crito*. There Socrates says:

⁴⁴ Gosling, J.C.B., *Pleasure and Desire: the case for hedonism reviewed*, pp.25-26.

Since our argument leads to this, the only valid consideration, as we were saying just now, is whether we should be acting justly in giving money and gratitude to those who will lead me out of here, and ourselves helping with the escape, or whether in truth we shall act unjustly in doing all this.⁴⁵

Socrates is saying that the only relevant question is whether running away would be the right thing to do. The things that Crito wishes him to consider – his family, friends and himself – he does not believe should be taken into account. Strictly speaking this would be consistent with hedonism but only if Socrates believed that it is always pleasanter or less painful to do what is just than to behave unjustly and in particular that in his case being put to death was pleasanter or less painful than running away. On the face of it these claims look obviously false and Socrates does nothing to suggest that he accepts them. So if the Socrates of the early dialogues is supposed to be a hedonist we have to accept that in the *Crito* he is concealing his true views. However, the lack of support for a hedonistic Socrates in the *Crito* coupled with a possible misunderstanding of the arguments of the *Crito* will not suffice to show that the *Protagoras* is at odds with this dialogue. Even though the hedonistic theory is not explicit in the *Crito* it does not mean that Socrates was not at this point an advocate of such a theory. Also, Socrates may have believed that a life in exile without the company of his friends away from the city he loved – and the knowledge that he did not live by his beliefs – would have been the more painful option. The reason that the *Crito* contradicts the *Protagoras* is the primacy of goodness in the above statement. He says that ‘the only question which remains to be considered is, whether we shall do rightly’, if that is the only question which should be considered then even if the right option is the most pleasurable Socrates cannot be a supporter of hedonism here as he introduces ‘some other criterion than pleasure for deciding’⁴⁶ what he should do, that of rightness itself.

iv. An alternative interpretation

If there is no successful argument that can explain the hedonism of the *Protagoras* in such a way that produces consistency with the *Gorgias* and the other early dialogues

⁴⁵ *Crito* 48c7-d3.

⁴⁶ See footnote 16.

then a different kind of explanation must be sought. Socrates is arguing for a theory he does not support elsewhere, and in the *Gorgias* openly criticises. Once we accept this fact the kinds of explanations we must turn to in order to understand the *Protagoras* become clearer. There are two routes open to us at this point. The first may be the route of the ‘ad hominem’ argument. This theory claims that Socrates is concerned only with the person he is arguing with, and therefore tailors his arguments to suit the situation. This implies that the positions Socrates takes in the early dialogues are not necessarily his own (they could be of course in situations where it is the argument that his interlocutor needs to hear). The second is the one I have already proposed above – that the most plausible explanation of the *Protagoras* problem is that it does not represent Socrates’ own view, but that it allows Plato to challenge and consider certain theories. The problems encountered in the *Protagoras* were obviously considerable enough for Plato to reject hedonism as a basis for action, and it is these problems that I will consider in the section on courage. The reason I think the second theory is preferable is that the ‘ad hominem’ idea is an implausible interpretation of the arguments in some of the early dialogues given the amount of cross textual support from other writers⁴⁷. It cannot, of course, apply to a middle period dialogue such as the *Republic* – for the *Republic* seems to be far too genuinely argued for and discussed to simply be an ad hominem argument for the good of Glaucon and Adeimantus. The second theory calls on evidence in the *Republic* which shows how the ideas and problems of the early dialogues directly impact of the ideas of the middle period.

⁴⁷ Notably Aristotle and Xenophon.

4. The Commensurable Scale

It may seem that the hedonism Socrates proposes in the *Protagoras* relies on a scale of commensurable values, in other words, that every action can be reduced to the amount of pleasure it contains and that these pleasures can be quantified and compared. This reliance on a commensurable scale means that the pleasure involved is essentially the same stuff that exists to a greater or lesser degree in certain activities. The commensurability of values is used by Socrates to show that akrasia is not possible – a claim that has been challenged by Michael Stocker – and that when we behave in a way that is commonly described as weakness of will we are simply in ignorance of what we actually value as best⁴⁸. What I will consider in this section are the following issues: i. Whether we can have commensurability such that we can judge all options open to us on the amount of pleasure contained; ii. Whether incommensurability is necessary for Socrates' denial of akrasia.

i. Can we have commensurability such that we can judge all options open to us on the amount of pleasure contained?

Much has been written on the claims made in the *Protagoras* concerning the commensurable scale of pleasure. Can every option available to us be assessed and compared by how much pleasure each contains? Zeckhauser and Schaefer, in their article 'Public policy and normative economic theory' use the following gruesome example: '[a] man would not agree to have his arms and legs cut off in exchange for any number of desserts'⁴⁹. This claim is surely true, and a difficult case for a supporter of commensurability. According to the commensurability claim it would be the case that we could work out how much pleasure there is in each of the desserts on offer, and how much displeasure there is in having one's legs and arms cut off, and then could in principle find an amount of desserts that matched or exceeded in pleasure the amount of displeasure felt at the alternative. One may be prevented from enjoying all the desserts by premature death or some other reason, but that does not interfere with

⁴⁸ Stocker, Michael, *Plural and Conflicting Values*.

⁴⁹ Zeckhauser & Schaefer, 'Public policy and normative economic theory', p.52.

the conclusion that there is an amount of desserts that balances out the pain of amputation. This doesn't seem to be a plausible explanation.

This may appear to be an incontrovertible case against commensurability, but as I will show the above statement from Zeckhauser and Schaefer is not necessarily inconsistent with a commensurable scale. As described by James Griffin, the pleasure contained in the puddings would decrease over time, particularly if we needed to eat a lot every day in order to have any hope of eating the required amount over our lifetime. If each dessert was less enjoyable than the previous one, say 4 pleasure points, then 2, then 1, the total amount of pleasure would end up approximating a natural number, in this case 8, as the amount added on would never be enough to take the total significantly further. In which case it would presumably never be possible to have enough desserts to balance out the amount of displeasure experienced. Therefore the claims that '[a] man would not agree to have his arms and legs cut off in exchange for any number of desserts', could be accepted as true as well as a commensurable scale of pleasure. A similar argument could be given from the method of decision-making Socrates proposes in the *Protagoras*. The loss of the arms and legs would not only score badly on the pleasure scale (into negative amounts which I am assuming will amount to pain), but will also prevent future pleasure which could have been obtained by someone with a full set of limbs. Given that the negative pleasure points will continue to be accrued after the operation it is clear that the amount of desserts will never make up for it.

What then will count, if anything, against a commensurable scale of pleasures? We do appear to value things in different ways; we may value doing our duty as well as the pleasure in eating chocolate cake. Are we involved in the same process when we evaluate both of these options? Stocker discusses the distinction between cognitive and affective evaluation:

The distinction between the cognitive and the affective turns on how the relevant object is taken up. It might be, so to speak, seen or appreciated through reason, even if this is a thoroughly evaluative reason. Or it might be felt.⁵⁰

He says that the fact that we can value things in different ways explains how akrasia can be possible. If the way that we value different options can fragment we can see how a situation could arise in which we think one option is the best course of action but are more attracted to the alternative and therefore we do not act on our judgment of what is best⁵¹.

So are pleasures the kinds of things that can always be compared with one another quantitatively? There are such a variety of different pleasures to be found, the claim that all pleasures are essentially the same, just caused by different objects, is intuitively unappealing. David Wiggins says:

It seems that in the sphere of the practical we may know for certain that there exist absolutely undecidable questions – e.g. cases where the situation is so appalling or the choices are so gruesome that nothing could count as the reasonable practical answer.⁵²

Unlike the case above where the choice is easy between having one's arms and legs chopped off and having many desserts, Wiggins is claiming that there are cases where there is no right thing to do. Philippa Foot warns against concluding that there are undecidable cases because of the fact that the choices are ghastly and she is right to do so⁵³. How would we rationally make a decision between two such different things as losing our sight, and a never being with a loved one again? There do appear to be cases where it is not possible, even in principle, to make a decision based on pleasures and pains. We may indeed be able to actually make a choice if forced, but that does not mean that our decision is based on any rational criterion. If all options can be assessed in terms of pleasures and pains, as Socrates contends in the *Protagoras*, this

⁵⁰ Stocker, Michael, *Plural and Conflicting Values*, p.216.

⁵¹ I will discuss below Stocker's reasons for saying that this fragmentation can also occur with a commensurable scale of values.

⁵² Wiggins, David, 'Truth, Invention and The Meaning of Life', p. 371.

⁵³ Foot, Philippa, *Moral Dilemmas*.

is a relevant case, and one that Socrates, or a supporter of this theory, does not have a reasonable answer to⁵⁴.

However, we must guard against assuming that commensurability and comparability are the same thing. I will discuss the difference between these two ideas in the next section and consider whether commensurability is indeed necessary for Socrates or whether he can get away with using the less disagreeable concept of comparability.

ii. Is commensurability necessary for Socrates' denial of akrasia

Socrates is relying implicitly on two ideas in the *Protagoras*; that the value of all actions can be reduced to the amount of pleasure they contain, and that all types of pleasure are commensurable. Much has been made of the claim that commensurability is necessary for Socrates' argument, and the argument has been attacked because of the difficulty of such a claim. However, could Socrates argument work with the less controversial claim that pleasures are comparable rather than commensurable?

These two terms – commensurability and comparability – denote similar ideas. Comparability is the claim that we can compare pleasures and rank them according to how much we value them, in other words the idea that we can make sense of the claim that one pleasure is better than another pleasure. Commensurability is a stronger claim than this, as it is the idea that not only can we compare pleasures, but that they are essentially the same stuff but found in greater or lesser amounts. Therefore one could coherently claim that pleasures are incommensurable but comparable. Some people, such as Joseph Raz hold that drawing this distinction is not a meaningful one⁵⁵. As T. K. Seung and Daniel Bonevac explain in their article 'Plural Values and Indeterminate Rankings':

⁵⁴ A hedonist could recognise some undecidable cases, such as (a) if we knew that the pleasures and pains involved in each of the available courses of action to be absolutely equal, or (b) if we could not tell which action would produce more pleasure or pain. A hedonist cannot recognise cases which are undecidable because the pleasures and pains are incommensurable in some way, which is what I am arguing for here.

For Raz, the idea of incommensurability entails the idea of incomparability. When two things are incommensurable (there is no common measure for their respective values), he holds, they cannot be meaningfully compared.⁵⁶

The idea supported by Raz that if values are not commensurable then we are unable to compare and rank them seems contrary to experience. Putting aside the argument that pleasures are incommensurable, if we consider two possible options such as the ethical choice and the pleasurable option, it seems that we are able to choose between them. In this sense then we can rank them in such a way that allows us to choose between them. As Griffin explains:

Some judgments of the form “A is preferable to B” do not rest upon other judgments about the quantity of something found in A and the quantity of it found in B. When, in employing the principle of utility, one talks about A’s yielding greater satisfaction than B, this should be understood as saying that having A is the satisfaction of a greater desire than having B would be. One wants A more than B. But one’s desires are not ranked by quantities of satisfaction⁵⁷.

We may be able to recognise that A is preferable to B without it being the case that A contains more of some specific quality than B. Kant may believe that ‘there is no common measure for the value (dignity) of human beings and that (price) of material things’⁵⁸, but he also ranks the dignity of human beings as higher. He is not being inconsistent here, just simply recognising the fact that even if two things are incommensurable that doesn’t mean that we are unable to compare and rank them.

To return to the above heading, there is evidence in the *Protagoras* that Socrates did indeed support a form of commensurability of pleasures, and that he did require a stronger sense of similarity than comparability. The analogies he uses when he is trying to persuade his interlocutor that salvation lies in this art of measurement suggest a quantitative commensurability that could not be replaced with the ability to rank one’s options. Socrates says:

⁵⁵ Raz, Joseph, *The Morality of Freedom*.

⁵⁶ Seung, T.K., & Bonevac, D., ‘Plural Values and Indeterminate Rankings’, p.800.

⁵⁷ Griffin, James, ‘Are there incommensurable values?’, pp.48-9.

⁵⁸ See 20

Weighing is a good analogy; you put the pleasures together and the pains together, both the near and the remote, on the balance scale, and then say which of the two is more.⁵⁹

And:

If then our well-being depended on this, doing and choosing large measures, avoiding and not doing the small ones, what would we see as our salvation in life? Would it be the art of measurement or the power of appearance?⁶⁰

Socrates also refers to knowing the greater number, and his art of measurement as a science. The language used gives us clear indications of the quantitative nature of Socrates' skill of measurement. The complexity of such a skill suggests that the theory that pleasures are comparable rather than incommensurable would not be sufficient, and also supports Socrates' use of commensurability. Comparability may be enough to support us making a decision between two options, but when we have to take into account all the possible pleasures and pains of each option facing us, comparability will not give us the necessary clarity to make such complex choices.

The fact that Socrates is advocating a commensurable scale rather than a comparative one makes the hedonism of the *Protagoras* problematic. If Plato is indeed using hedonism to support the unity of the virtues and the thesis that knowledge is sufficient for virtue then the foundation is weak. As well as these inherent problems with hedonism, Socrates' commitment to such an idea intensifies the difficulty of including courage in his general theory.

⁵⁹ *Prot.* 356b2-5.

⁶⁰ *Prot.* 356d1-5.

5. Courage

Once Socrates has developed the relationship between pleasure and the good, and the idea that people always go for what they believe to be best, he continues:

Then if the pleasant is the good, no one who knows or believes there is something else better than what he is doing, something possible, will go on doing what he had been doing when he could be doing what is better. To give in to oneself is nothing other than ignorance, and to control oneself is nothing other than wisdom.⁶¹

And he goes on to say:

[Socrates]: 'Now, no one goes willingly towards the bad or what he believes to be bad; neither is it in human nature, so it seems, to want to go toward what one believes to be bad instead of to the good. And when he is forced to choose between one of two bad things, no one will choose the greater if he is able to choose the lesser.'

They agreed with all of that too.

[Socrates]: 'Well, then, is there something you call dread or fear?...I say that whether you call it fear or dread, it is an expectation of something bad...If what I have said up to now is true, then would anyone be willing to go toward what he dreads, when he can go toward what he does not? Or is this impossible from what we have agreed? For it was agreed that what one fears one holds to be bad; no one goes willingly toward those things which he holds to be bad, or chooses those things willingly'.⁶²

Socrates is claiming that because we go towards what we believe to be the best option, the courageous do not go towards what is frightening to them because one would only fear the worse option. Once Protagoras has agreed with the hedonistic position as described by Socrates he appears to think that he has no choice but to acquiesce in the continuing discussion. However this is a controversial step for Socrates to make. Plato's claim that 'what one fears one holds to be bad; no one goes willingly toward those things which he holds to be bad, or chooses those things willingly' is surely an oversimplification of the matter. The idea that no-one ever does anything that frightens them is troubling; why should it be the case that the someone cannot go towards something they feel fear about, just as long as they believe it to contain the greater overall pleasure? One might think that this is what the courageous typically do.

⁶¹ *Prot.* 358c1-c5.

It may be true that people fear what they consider to be bad, but you may feel fear about a particular action because of one element involved (such as the possibility of death) but not think that the action overall is bad. Socrates appears to be forgetting about his theory of maximising pleasure at this point and ends up oversimplifying the argument. The Socratic belief that we always choose to do what we believe to be the best thing for us could have allowed for the feeling element of fear towards what we actually do⁶³, as long as we think that it is the best thing overall, and provided that Socrates distinguishes the feeling of fear from the judgement that motivates us. Socrates' previous argument allows him to claim that:

But all people, both the courageous and the cowardly, go toward that about which they are confident; both the cowardly and the courageous go toward the same thing.⁶⁴

And,

[Protagoras]: But, Socrates, what the cowardly go toward is completely opposite to what the courageous go toward. For example, the courageous are willing to go to war, but the cowardly are not. [Socrates]: Is going to war honourable or is it disgraceful? [Protagoras]: Honourable [Socrates]: Then, if it is honourable, we have agreed before, it is also good, for we agreed that all honourable actions were good.⁶⁵

This idea is not inconsistent with the brave man also having feelings of fear of what inspires confidence in him. Fortunately Socrates' definition of courage in the *Protagoras* does not need to depend on the idea that the courageous do not feel fearful of what they do. He could have said that the courageous go towards what gives them most confidence but that they can also feel fear of it. Perhaps he believed that by accepting the idea that courage may involve acting in spite of feelings of fear' he would have to allow for *akrasia*, but this is not the case. By oversimplifying the argument at this point it loses the logical connection with the previous points in the dialogue and becomes much more open to criticisms such as the one above.

⁶² *Prot.* 358d1-e8.

⁶³ As long as the feeling element of fear is different from the judgement that something is bad.

⁶⁴ *Prot.* 359e1-3.

⁶⁵ *Prot.* 359e4-10.

The claim that the courageous option is also the more pleasurable is a rather problematic one. There is something odd about claiming that the courageous option would also be the pleasantest. We commonly consider courageous actions to be the kind of actions that are difficult or painful – pleasure is a term rarely applied to courageous deeds. Whether we believe that courageous deeds are done in spite of fear, or because of fear of what ought to be feared as Plato does, the courageous deed is an act done for a reason. Courageous acts are not done thoughtlessly or because someone felt like it, and if an act is done in these manners we would not consider them to be courageous. This also counts for someone motivated by pleasure. If a woman runs into a burning building and saves a child we would think of her as courageous, however if someone rushed into a burning building simply for the thrill we would not regard them as brave. It looks as though a courageous act must serve some point beyond the immediate pleasure of the act.

Socrates' positive thesis about courage is thus:

Cowardice is ignorance of what is and is not to be feared...courage is the opposite of cowardice...So then, wisdom about what is and is not to be feared is the opposite of this ignorance...So the wisdom about what is and is not to be feared is courage and is the opposite of ignorance⁶⁶

As we can see from this definition, Socrates argues that courage is knowledge of what should really be feared and cowardice is ignorance of this. Presumably then, the courageous person is also the person who knows what will bring most pleasure, which is the opposite of what should truly be feared. The brave person is thus motivated to do the courageous act by the desire to move away from what is most fearful and move towards what brings most pleasure. The idea that the courageous person is motivated by moving away from what is most fearful is incorporated in Plato's definition of courage beyond the *Protagoras*, and I will discuss it in later chapters. The idea that we move towards what brings pleasure when we act courageously is unique to the *Protagoras*, and the main problem with the definition offered in this dialogue.

⁶⁶ *Prot.* 360c12-d9.

So how could Plato justify the claim that by choosing to act courageously you make the correct choice for his hedonistic calculus? He could mean one of two things: either that the actual act of bravery brings pleasure, or that the rewards of being a brave person bring more pleasure than any other option. If the former is to stand a chance as the correct interpretation then Plato must mean to include cerebral pleasures – even if he cannot draw a distinction between cerebral and physical pleasures that elevates the importance of one or the other without damaging his thesis. So assuming that Plato is not claiming that going into battle, for example, is physically pleasurable, he could be claiming that there are cerebral pleasures associated with it that outweigh the pleasures of running away. But what could these cerebral pleasures be without recourse to the idea that pleasure comes from doing the morally right thing? The theory that whether one is courageous or not depends on whether one gets pleasures from the act of battle is clearly unacceptable.

Perhaps Plato meant the latter – that the rewards of being a brave person bring more pleasure than any other option. This interpretation also leads to insuperable difficulties. The thesis could only be plausible if the person were to survive the courageous act otherwise they would not accrue the long-term benefits. If that were the case then either we must return to the above problematic interpretation that one gets pleasure from the act of battle, or deny that anyone who dies is courageous. Neither of these options are appealing.

6. The Development from the *Protagoras* and the *Laches* to the *Republic*

There is evidence in this dialogue that in writing the *Protagoras* Plato was not only motivated by immortalising the thought of his teacher, but that it provided him with a means of working out his own view. Protagoras is portrayed as a much worthier opponent than most of the other interlocutors Socrates talks with; he is articulate, thoughtful and competitive. The dialogue ends with Protagoras being forced into a contradiction, as with so many of the dialogues, but it is clear that he thinks he has somehow been tricked by Socrates and is not convinced by the arguments. At the end of the dialogue both Socrates and Protagoras are apparently in difficult positions. Socrates seems to believe that virtue is knowledge but that it cannot be taught, whereas Protagoras believes that virtue is not knowledge but that it can be taught. In his great speech Protagoras says:

Starting when they are little children and continuing as long as they live, they teach them and correct them. As soon as a child understands what is said to him, the nurse, mother, tutor, and the father himself fight for him to be as good as he possibly can, seizing on every action and word to teach him and show him that this is just, that is unjust, this is noble, that is ugly, this is pious, that is impious, he should do this, he should not do that.⁶⁷

Plato later argues for a similar system himself. In the *Republic* Plato makes a strong case for the importance of education in the moral development of the individual, where he stresses the roles of physical and mental training for children. He claims that:

And the first step, as you know, is always what matters most, particularly when dealing with those who are young and tender. That is the time when they are easily moulded and when any impression we choose to make leaves a permanent mark.⁶⁸

He starts by discussing music and poetry, and of them what kinds will be appropriate for young minds. He says that:

⁶⁷ *Prot.* 325c6-d6.

⁶⁸ *Rep.* 377a11-b2.

Then it seems that our first business is to supervise the production of stories, and choose only those we think suitable, and reject the rest. We shall persuade mothers and nurses to tell our chosen stories to their children, and by means of them to mould their minds and characters which are more important than their bodies.⁶⁹

By the time of *Republic* Book III Plato is explicit that education, as Protagoras maintained, does have an impact on virtue. However, he is also to some extent in agreement with what Socrates argues in the *Protagoras*, as he does continue to stress the importance of knowledge for virtue. So it looks as though Plato has found some compromise between the two contradictory and inconsistent views espoused by Protagoras and Socrates in the *Protagoras*, by selecting a piece from each theory that are not inconsistent with one another. So, by putting the theories of these two great thinkers against one another in this imaginary conversation Plato was able to see which part of each of their views he should pick up and carry forward.

A further point of interest in the *Protagoras* regarding how these early dialogues should be read is the treatment of courage in this dialogue. As stated above, Protagoras claimed that regarding the virtues, 'four of them resemble each other fairly closely, but courage is very different from all the rest'⁷⁰. When reading the *Protagoras* it is natural to agree with Protagoras when he claims that each of the virtues are different from the others, but that they are connected, like the parts of a face. When Protagoras claims that courage seems to be a special case he is keying into a common assumption that the other virtues, such as justice and temperance, are necessarily required of a good person but that courage is possibly something beyond that⁷¹, or that someone could be courageous without having the other virtues. Socrates argues against the separation of courage from the other virtues by trying to prove in argument that the virtues can be shown to be the same. However, Plato seems more convinced by the Protagorean view in the *Republic*. When he discusses the virtues in that later work courage is the only virtue not said to primarily reside in the rational part of the tripartite soul. All the other virtues are said to primarily rely on the reasoning part of

⁶⁹ *Rep.* 377b9-c4.

⁷⁰ *Prot.* 349d3-4.

⁷¹ By which I mean that in some cases it is commonly thought to be supererogatory to be courageous but that this is not always the case.

the soul, and that this part needs to be developed in order to have these virtues. Genuine courage⁷² does also rely on having a developed reason of course, but the fact that it also relies on the development – rather than suppression – of another part of the soul is interesting. Only Courage is explained by the inclusion of the thumos, the spirited part. This division between courage and the other virtues again shows that the early dialogues were not just about the views of Socrates, but were exercises used to discover his own more workable view.

⁷² Courage of the Philosopher Kings.

7. Conclusion

The *Protagoras* ends in a paradoxical position. At the beginning of the discussion Socrates claimed that he didn't think that virtue could be taught, but has gone on to argue that virtue is knowledge. Protagoras, on the other hand, expressed the view that virtue could be taught, but rejected the idea that it is some sort of knowledge. The implication of the dialogue ending on such a note is that neither Socrates' nor Protagoras' viewpoint is wholly acceptable. It perhaps also implies that a satisfactory account of virtue and whether it can be taught will draw on both positions and make a more consistent whole. The fact that the end of the dialogue suggests we need a new account of virtue and its teachability applies to courage in particular since that virtue has proved the most difficult to fit in with Socrates' view. The temporary commitment to hedonism doesn't help Socrates produce a workable theory – in fact it creates more problems. I will show in the following chapters how Plato attempts to deal with these problems.

Chapter 3: Courage in the *Laches*

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1. Nicias and Laches on military training

The *Laches* is an early dialogue that discusses some of the main ‘Socratic’ issues, such as whether virtue is knowledge and consequently whether it can be taught, with reference to the specific case of courage. It begins with Lysimachus and Melesias looking for advice on how to best bring up their sons ‘in order to make first-rate men of them’¹. They have asked Nicias and Laches, two famous Athenian generals, to join them in the hope that they might be able to tell them whether military training will help in this aim. Laches encourages Lysimachus and Melesias to bring Socrates into the discussion, as he believes him to have some experience in these matters. In his usual fashion, Socrates asks Laches and Nicias to give their opinion on military training first, as he is ‘younger than these gentlemen and rather inexperienced in the field’².

Nicias speaks first, and says that he believes that this kind of training gives men many advantages, among them that it will make them ‘fit and healthy’³, ‘trained in the use of military equipment’⁴, and it will encourage an interest in military technique. He makes one particularly interesting additional point concerning training which is that ‘the possession of this same knowledge will make any individual a great deal braver and more daring in battle than he would otherwise be’⁵. Why would Nicias make such a claim? Presumably the point is that military laymen dropped into a war zone may not be as inclined to act courageously because they do not have experience of such situations. The knowledge the trained soldier possesses may at times enable him to perform courageous acts that the layman would not even consider.

It is then Laches’ turn to state his position on the matter of military training. Contrary to Nicias, he claims that military training does not increase bravery in the individual. He

¹ *Laches* 179b3.

² *Laches* 181d2-3.

³ *Laches* 181e4.

⁴ *Laches* 182a5.

⁵ *Laches* 182c4-6.

gives various points in support of this view. The first is that if it did increase bravery then the Spartans, the most militarily respected of the Greeks, would practise it. Iain Lane claims in the footnotes of his translation of the *Laches* that the first of these is simply wrong, 'The Spartan Army, known and feared as the finest in Greece, was the product of a ruthless regime of training which began for all male citizens at the age of seven'⁶. This view has been criticised as it has been claimed that it does not appreciate the nature of the kind of training being discussed. If the nature of the exercise was to demonstrate the beauty of military technique then Laches' claim that the Spartans have not practised it would not necessarily seem so ridiculous. In this case he would be claiming that the Spartans are so well versed in military matters that if this kind of training benefited soldiers in any way, they would be practicing it. However, Laches' point is only correct if they really were only discussing a particular kind of military training, and one which the Spartans did not practise. If the discussion is meant to be a more general one which is to include the benefits of all kinds of military training, then Laches has missed the point of the conversation.

Secondly, Laches claims that the instructors themselves are not noted for their bravery, and so a connection between this military training and bravery cannot be established:

I've come across quite a number of these instructors when they've been faced with the real thing, and I know the stuff they're made of. We can see right away how the land lies: not one man who has done this military training has ever made a name for himself on active service...And yet in every other subject the men with high reputations come from the ranks of those who have gone through the appropriate training.⁷

This claim is based on Laches' personal experience of the men that practise this skill. It seems to be an early example of the adage 'those who can, *do*, those who can't, *teach*'. As a military man himself, it is interesting that Laches has not seen someone be brave in battle who is well known for using such methods. However, this point is perhaps more

⁶ Iain Lane, *Early Socratic Dialogues*, p.87.

⁷ *Laches* 183c1-7.

instructive about Laches' approach to the argument. He is thinking about the issue they are discussing in a much more practical sense: *have I seen anyone who uses such methods show bravery in war?* This point also suggests that what Laches is thinking of is a special kind of artistic military training designed to be put on show for its aesthetic value, rather than a more general military training. This reading would support his point above that the Spartans do not train their soldiers in this way⁸.

Laches' third reason for thinking that this kind of military training does not make soldiers braver is that he thinks it only succeeds in making cowards take foolish risks, and the brave the focus of attention and criticism. This claim is of more interest and is worth quoting in full:

And it would be true to say, I think, that if someone who was a coward were to imagine that he knew all about it, he would become over-confident and then make it all the more obvious what his true colours were. If, on the other hand, he were a brave man, people would watch his every move, and if he made even the slightest mistake, he would have to put up with a great deal of abuse. People have a grudge against men who profess to know such things, so unless a man is strikingly braver than the rest, there's no way he can avoid becoming a laughing stock if he claims this kind of knowledge.⁹

There are many ambiguous translations in this paragraph that create a difficulty in interpretation. Firstly, the word 'thrasus' is here being translated as 'over-confident'. Does this translation adequately exhibit what Plato was originally trying to say? Given this translation I assume Laches means that the coward would over-estimate his ability, which is actually not as effective as he thinks. So why would he then make his 'true colours', or elsewhere translated 'true nature', more obvious? I can only imagine that this statement might be describing a situation where the coward would put himself into a

⁸ It is interesting to note that Laches' arguments against military training do follow a logical structure. He first argues that military training is not necessary for courage, as the Spartans are well-known for being courageous and they don't do it. He then argues that it is not sufficient for courage as those who do practise it are not brave. This pattern is then inverted later when Socrates points out that the first two definitions Laches gives for courage are merely sufficient (standing one's ground) and then merely necessary (endurance) but that the does not give one that is both necessary and sufficient, which is what Socrates is searching for.

⁹ *Laches* 184b4-c4.

dangerous situation, for example into battle, because he considers himself to be less threatened by it than he previously thought because of his new found skill in fighting. However, because he is by nature a coward, he runs away at the last minute, revealing his true colours. However, this reading seems to create a problem when we look at it in relation to the brave man. The passage appears to be saying that the brave man would put himself in situations of danger where his ability could be assessed. And if he has claimed to have superior skills in fighting the criticism will be harsh if he fails to live up to these claims. The claim that a man can only avoid this if he is 'strikingly braver' however does not seem to make sense. Why would a braver man be less likely to make a technical mistake in fighting? I think that this examination shows that the above translation is not sufficient to explain what Plato was saying in the *Laches*.

Hobbs offers an alternative reading of this passage. She says that *deilos* and *andreios*, above translated as *coward* and *brave man*, could also be translated as good or bad at fighting. In this case Laches could be referring to a situation where 'the poor fighter is lured by his overreaching confidence into situations which he is in fact ill-equipped to handle, thus exposing his woeful lack of prowess'¹⁰. Under this interpretation, with *andreios* being translated as a man good at fighting, 184b7-c1 would again refer to the jealous scrutiny of observers wanting to find a flaw. 184c1-4 would now more coherently refer to the '*andreios*', or man skilled at fighting, who is so skilled that mistakes never occurred, and therefore he cannot be mocked by those who are jealous of him. This alternative reading does avoid the problem of how to understand Laches claim that 'unless a man is strikingly braver than the rest, there's no way he can avoid becoming a laughing stock if he claims this kind of knowledge', but also requires an implausible translation of '*andreios*' and '*deilos*'. What this passage perhaps suggests is that Laches does not have a firm grip on the notion of courage and on the difference between courage and some kind of skill in battle.

¹⁰ Hobbs, A., *Plato and the Hero*, p.82.

This final point by Laches does have further implications. Nicias supports the view that knowledge of this area makes you braver, probably because he is supposed to be familiar with the Socratic tenet that virtue is knowledge and is the tool by which Plato will allow Socrates to challenge such a view. Laches, on the other hand, thinks that knowledge of fighting will not make you braver, which for the Greeks necessarily had only positive connotations, but it makes you rasher. Laches rejects knowledge as a component of what makes one braver, and we see later that he does not believe it to be a virtue that is dependent on intellectual qualities. Socrates later uses this distinction between courage and rashness to support the idea that it is knowledge (the kind of moral knowledge Socrates requires) that is what distinguishes the two – it being a part of courage but not of rashness.

This discussion is used to introduce the main themes of this dialogue. Laches and Nicias show what their later position will be through what they say about the matter of military training – Nicias in favour and Laches against. Nicias supports the view that some kind of fighting skill will increase bravery. This may be because he is attracted to the Socratic view that virtue is knowledge but has not appreciated the difference between the kind of knowledge Socrates has in mind and the kind conveyed by the sophists and teachers of fighting skill. Laches' early conversation with Socrates shows that he is not a particularly philosophically-minded man, and that he is not familiar with the Socratic position, and we can see early on that he will probably not be very sympathetic to it. Apart from establishing the characters of the two men this discussion also shows the reader that there is a problem that needs to be addressed. The contrast in the positions of Nicias and Laches demonstrates that the issue at hand is the role of knowledge in virtue. Nicias is established as the representative of the Socratic view that virtue is knowledge and Laches as the opponent to this view. Plato is then free to use Socrates as a more neutral figure in order to examine the cogency of the two positions. This part of the dialogue also brings up the question of what kind of knowledge is relevant for virtue, for Laches has ruled out the idea that it is any type of knowledge when he said that those with some form of military knowledge are not necessarily courageous people. Socrates then redirects the

conversation away from the case of military training, and onto the far more interesting question of what courage itself is.

2. Laches' first definition of courage

Laches' first attempt at a definition of 'andreios' is:

If a man is prepared to stand in the ranks, face up to the enemy and not run away, you can be sure that he's brave.¹¹

This definition incorporates all the complexity Laches sees in the word and uses what he probably considers to be its paradigmatic context, that of war. As we can see from above, 'andreios' can be used to represent courage and can also be used to connote manliness in this and previous periods. Laches may have intended to convey something of these different translations, combining the ideas of courage and manliness. How can we expect Laches to make a clear statement about what is essential to courage when the vocabulary open to him was used to distinguish a more general idea? Socrates wanted Laches to say what the defining quality of all the cases of courage was – the element by virtue of which they were cases of courage. The term 'andreios' may appear to us to be a confused term with various meanings, but Laches was working with one word with a deep and complex history. This fact makes it all the more understandable when he does not initially understand what Socrates is looking for when he is asked what courage is. Even though Socrates must also have been able to appreciate the breadth of the word Laches was trying to contain in one sentence, this was clearly not the kind of answer he wanted from him.

It is interesting to note, as Charles Kahn did, that

Plato never uses Aristotle's word for definition (*horismos*); and the term he does occasionally employ for this notion, *horos*, preserves the flavour of its literal meaning, "boundary mark." What we call "defining" is for Plato "marking the boundaries".¹²

¹¹ *Laches* 190e2-4.

¹² Kahn, C., *Plato and the Socratic dialogue*, p.171.

Evidently in the *Laches* Socrates wanted to limit the boundaries of 'andreia' to cases where this specific element was exhibited, and not include all cases that might have been thought to demonstrate that a person was manly or courageous. Plato wanted it to define a specific quality, not be a term that denotes a family resemblance.

Plato also wished to extend the boundaries of 'andreia' to cover all kinds of people. He tries to explain this to Laches when he explains what he wants from him:

I wanted to find out not just what it is to be brave as an infantryman, but also as a cavalry man, and as any kind of member of the forces; and not just what it is to be brave during a war, but to be brave in the face of danger at sea; and I wanted to find out what it is to be brave in the face of an illness, in the face of poverty, and in public life; and what's more not just what it is to be brave in resisting pain or fear, but also putting up stern opposition to temptation and indulgence – because I'm assuming, Laches, that there are people who are brave in all these situations.¹³

Laches responds by saying 'Very much so, Socrates'¹⁴. It is perhaps surprising that Laches does not challenge what must have been to him a radical change of interpretation. Not only did he have to see 'andreios' as not only military, but also not as the province of men alone.

¹³ *Laches* 191c9-e3.

¹⁴ *Laches* 191e4.

3. Laches' second definition of courage

Laches' second definition is:

I take it, in that case, to be a certain endurance of the soul, if I have to mention the element essentially present in all cases.¹⁵

It is at this point that Socrates takes for granted a fact about courage which is one of the major sources of disagreement about it:

Now, this is how it appears to me: by no means every kind of endurance, I think, can appear to you to be bravery. I make that surmise because I'm almost certain, Laches, that you think of bravery as one of the finer things.¹⁶

This statement raises the question of why Socrates dismisses the possibility of the courageous fool so readily; the idea of the person who intends to do good and faces terrifying danger in the attempt, but unfortunately is seriously misguided and ends up doing harm. Hobbs explains that: 'there are serious linguistic barriers preventing such an approach being readily available to Greek thinkers. No matter how conceived, the very term *andreia* connotes an ideal of male character and behaviour which cannot be value-neutral'¹⁷. Here Hobbs is saying that the term 'andreia' could not be used to describe a foolish person because it had only positive associations, and would not have been used about someone who failed or acted foolishly. This is an important issue for Plato's definition of courage, and one that I will discuss further in the conclusion below.

Laches agrees with this alteration of his definition to wise endurance. Socrates then provides Laches with various examples where he believes the more foolish man is the more courageous. Laches agrees that these examples cause a problem for his theory of courage as wise endurance, but does he have to? One of the cases Socrates gives for the fool being more courageous in his endurance than the wise man is as follows:

¹⁵ *Laches* 192b9-11.

¹⁶ *Laches* 192c2-5.

¹⁷ Hobbs, A., *Plato and the Hero*, p.89.

Well then, suppose during a war a man showed endurance by being prepared to fight: he has calculated his chances wisely and realized that others will support him, that he'll be fighting an enemy outnumbered and outclassed by his own side, and that he has the stronger position – now, which would you say is the braver, the man showing endurance with the benefit of this kind of wisdom and these resources, or a man from the opposing camp willing to show endurance in standing against him.¹⁸

However, is the endurance of the outnumbered man necessarily the more foolish? If he is fighting to save his family and homeland from destruction, then the fact that he is 'outnumbered and outclassed' does not make him foolish¹⁹. In that case, he would be taking the best possible action in a difficult situation. This example seems particularly strange being offered by Socrates, considering he believes that whether one acts 'foolishly' or 'wisely' is not just a matter of self-protection, but that other issues, such as what the *right* thing to do is, should be taken into account. Taylor, Vlastos and Hobbs all argue that Socrates and Laches need to distinguish between 'prudential knowledge, narrowly defined in terms of one's physical and material wellbeing, and knowledge of overall objectives and values'²⁰. So in the case of courage, prudential knowledge would cover such areas as whether you are outnumbered or not, better trained, or even who is most likely to win. Knowledge of overall objectives and values on the other hand refers to the moral element in the beliefs that we have, for example, whether it is morally right to stay and fight or run away. The outnumbered man may be acting foolishly if he were only armed with prudential knowledge, but if he is aware of his overall objects, and they are worth the risk, then he is not acting foolishly.

Socrates also refers to cases of men involved with cavalry attacks and diving down wells in an attempt to illustrate the point that those with less knowledge are the more

¹⁸ *Laches* 193a2-9.

¹⁹ It is not necessarily foolish to fight when 'outnumbered and outclassed' because by fighting you at least have a chance of victory, and when there is so much at stake it probably worth taking that chance.

²⁰ Hobbs, A., *Plato and the Hero*, p.92.

courageous. Interestingly the same examples are used in the *Protagoras* in a discussion concerning courage. It is generally agreed that in these two discussions Plato is referring to the same cases to illustrate completely opposite points. In the *Protagoras* the conversation goes:

[Socrates] Do you know who dives confidently into wells? [Protagoras] Of course, divers. [Socrates] Is this because they know what they are doing, or for some other reason? [Protagoras] Because they know what they are doing.²¹

And in the *Laches*:

Anyone willing to go down into a well, and to dive, and show endurance in this or in some similar activity, will be braver than the experts, although not an expert himself.²²

In the *Laches* he is assuming that those who do such things as dive down wells without knowledge are braver than those who do it with knowledge. In contrast, in the *Protagoras* people who do such things without the relevant knowledge Protagoras classifies as 'mad'. Socrates appears to be relying on his interlocutors having different intuitions about such cases in these two dialogues. Vlastos, as well as others, has argued that the fact that Plato used the same examples in order to illustrate a contradictory point cannot be accidental:

Plato could hardly have introduced the same three examples in the *Laches* unless he were deliberately contrasting the position he gives Socrates here with the one allowed him in the *Protagoras*. I submit that the simplest explanation of this fact is an advance in moral insight in Plato's own understanding of the true intent of the Socratic conception of courage as wisdom: when Plato has come to write the *Laches* he has seen clearly what he not yet seen when he wrote the *Protagoras* – that the wisdom that accounts for the brave man's courage has everything to do with moral insight, and nothing to do with technical skill.²³

I agree with Vlastos that there has been an advance in moral insight between writing the *Protagoras* and then writing the *Laches*. In the *Protagoras* Plato tries to develop a simple

²¹ *Prot.* 350a1-5.

²² *Laches* 193c4-6.

²³ Vlastos, G., *Socratic Studies*, p.117.

relationship between knowledge and virtue; in that dialogue he claims that knowledge without qualification will make one braver. In the *Laches* we advance beyond the difficulties of the *Protagoras* and it becomes clear that not all kinds of knowledge count towards courage. For instance, the knowledge of the general who knows he is in a far superior position to his adversary on the battlefield will not mean that he is the braver, in fact the contrary is probably true. This change from the *Protagoras* to the *Laches* regarding such cases coupled with his desire to still include knowledge in a definition of courage shows that Plato is now explicitly distinguishing between different kinds of knowledge and has decided what kind of knowledge is important for his theory. He is now making it clear that it cannot be any kind of knowledge, utilizing the distinction described above by Hobbs as the discussion continues.

4. How the *Laches* should be read

This part of the dialogue is particularly instructive about the issue of whether the Unitarian or Developmentalist tradition²⁴ can provide a coherent picture of the early dialogues. In the discussion above Plato introduces a further example to the one given at 193a2-9. And as we have also seen above, in the *Laches* Plato says:

And as many as would be willing to endure in diving down into wells without being skilled, or to endure in any other similar situation, you say are braver than those who are skilled in these things.²⁵

Plato is relying on the intuition that anyone would believe that the person who dived into the well without experience or training would be braver than those who went in with such expertise, in order to convince Laches that his definition of courage as wise endurance is not satisfactory. However, in the *Protagoras* Socrates uses the same example, but in that case wishes us to have the contrary intuition – that those who dive into wells with knowledge are courageous, those without knowledge are fools²⁶. The Unitarian interpretation claims that Plato wrote the dialogues from a single point of view, and so we can therefore have an understanding of the Platonic view of the dialogues as a whole. However, given the inconsistency above, this theory clearly has some particularly difficult textual contradictions to explain if it is to be a credible interpretation. This may also present difficulties to the proponent of some versions of the Developmentalist position as it is common for supporters of this theory to claim that we can find a coherent Socratic view in the early dialogues. Thus to some extent both of these popular theories will struggle to incorporate such a discrepancy between two early dialogues.

²⁴ See Chapter 1: Introduction for a discussion of the difference between the Unitarian and Developmentalist positions.

²⁵ *Laches* 193c4-6.

²⁶ *Prot.* 349e1-351.

What is also interesting about this part of the dialogue is that Socrates does not dismiss Laches' view and move on to the one suggested by Nicias, but rather leaves the option open:

If you don't mind, let's stick to the search and show some endurance, in case Bravery herself pokes fun at us for not bravely searching for her, when perhaps endurance actually is bravery after all.²⁷

Socrates was obviously not satisfied with Laches' definition of courage as endurance, but was also unwilling to reject it completely. The concept of endurance reappears in the *Republic* firstly when discussing education. Socrates claims that in order for the Guardians to stimulate their 'thumos' they must endure 'strenuous exercises in their physical training'²⁸. It is the thumos – the seat of courage in the *Republic* – that will be stimulated by endurance. The idea is included again when Socrates is specifically discussing courage. In Book IV of the *Republic* Socrates claims that in order to be courageous one must retain in all circumstances the correct beliefs about what should be feared. The courageous person must not be overcome by 'pleasure or pain, desire or fear'²⁹. In other words, they must tolerate, or endure, situations where they are tempted to renege on their beliefs because of the threat of pain or the enticement of pleasure. I think that the statement made above (*Laches* 194a1-4), even though it is in the form of a joke, gives us a nod to the ideas expressed later in the *Republic*. In this point I am partly in agreement with Charles Kahn who is well known for his view that we should read some of the early dialogues³⁰:

proleptically, looking forward rather than backward for their meaning: reading them not to find out what Socrates said so long ago but to see how Plato will pursue his paths of inquiry from one dialogue to the next, and ultimately onto the doctrines of the middle dialogues.³¹

²⁷ *Laches* 193e10-194a3.

²⁸ *Rep.* 410b6.

²⁹ *Rep.* 429d1-2.

³⁰ *Laches, Charmides, Lysis, Euthyphro* and *Protagoras*.

³¹ Kahn, C., 'Did Plato Write Socratic Dialogues?', p.39.

It may be true that the *Laches*, and the *Protagoras* as well, show us the views of the historical Socrates (in the *Laches* through Nicias)³², but they are more informative about the development of Plato's philosophical beliefs. Therefore I do not think they should only be read proleptically, but that that is a particular source of interest.

³² Such as 'we're good in so far as we're clever, but in so far as we're ignorant, we're bad', *Laches* 194d1-2.

5. Nicias' definition of courage

Nicias changes the type of definition of courage to one much more fitting to the views of Socrates. As Hobbs says, he changes the definition under discussion from a non-cognitive psychological quality to a purely cognitive one. Cognitive theories of qualities, in this case the virtue of courage, are ones where the central tenet is that the relevant quality is identified as being a belief. In the early dialogues we get the cognitive theory that the virtues are knowledge of different areas, so the idea is that a quality can be defined in reference to a certain kind of knowledge. What Nicias says of courage is:

I've often heard you saying that we're each good in so far as we're clever, but in so far as we're ignorant, we're bad...So if a brave man is a good man, it's obvious that he's clever.³³

Laches does not understand what kind of knowledge Nicias would think could play a part in courage, so Nicias continues: 'This is the knowledge I mean, Laches: knowledge of what is fearful and what is encouraging, both in wartime and in all other situations'³⁴. Laches still cannot understand what the objects of this kind of knowledge would be and tries to prove Nicias' theory wrong with unrelated examples. He says: 'For instance, in the case of ill health, doctors are the ones who know the dangers, aren't they? Or do you think brave men are the ones who know? Or perhaps you'd call doctors brave?'³⁵ Laches is clearly still stuck on the distinction between knowledge of overall ends and objectives and knowledge of practical matters which foiled his attempts at a definition, and cannot see that Nicias means fear of doing the morally wrong thing. Nicias tries to explain to Laches that it is not prudential knowledge of the details of medicine or farming, but knowledge of overall objectives and what is genuinely for the best, a distinction Laches is ultimately unable to grasp in the dialogue.

³³ *Laches* 194d1-4.

³⁴ *Laches* 194e12-195a2.

³⁵ *Laches* 195b2-5.

Nicias' general picture of courage is thus: imagine a man standing in the ranks at the beginning of a battle. He has the choice of risking life and limb by joining his fellow men in the charge, or running away. He feels a rational fear of running away and this rational fear, according to Nicias in the *Laches*, is a fear of what is genuinely to be feared – fear of the morally wrong action. We can see in the other dialogues that Plato was committed to the idea that it is the morally wrong action that can harm you the most, as it harms your soul³⁶. The virtue of courage is when the man knows that running away from the battle is what is to be feared, as it is the option that is most dangerous to him.

The theory presented by Nicias asks us to think of courage in a different way to the modern conception. Courage is often conceived to be an overcoming of fear rather than acting out of fear. However, there is analogous evidence that Plato was aware that the idea that courage was acting on fear of doing the wrong thing would have seemed strange to his readers. His subtle response to this comes at the beginning of the dialogue when Nicias and Laches are trying to persuade Lysimachus and Melesias to bring Socrates into the discussion:

[Laches] What's more, Lysimachus, you mustn't let him slip away. I've seen him in a quite different context proving a credit not just to his father, but also to his country. He marched back with me in the retreat from Delium and, I assure you, had the rest of the troops been prepared to follow his example, our city would now have its head held high and would never have taken such a terrible fall. [Lysimachus] When your conduct wins the praise of men of such authority, this is praise indeed, Socrates!³⁷

And also:

But what about another man, a man who still fights the enemy, but runs away and doesn't make a stand?...I suppose just like the Scythians are said to fight every bit as much in retreat as in pursuit, and perhaps just like Homer said in praise of Aeneas' horses that they know how 'quickly to cover the ground in flight or in pursuit, it makes

³⁶ We can see that this is Plato's view in the *Republic*.

³⁷ *Laches* 181a7-b6.

no odds', and pays 'tribute to Aeneas himself for his knowledge of fear, and says he's a 'contriver of fear'.³⁸

In both of these sections he is encouraging us to believe that courageous behaviour can be thought of as a moving away from something just as much as a moving towards. These passages are not evidence in favour of the theory of courage as knowledge of what should be feared, as obviously Plato is not claiming that retreat is always the braver thing to do. However, he is trying to open up the minds of his listeners and readers to thinking about courage in a new way. The example of Socrates, who is set up in the dialogue as an appropriate person to discuss the education of Lysimachus' and Melesias' sons, is seen as the archetypal example of courageous behaviour. In the *Crito* he establishes why he believes it would be wrong to escape from captivity before his death, and he makes his decision based on reasoning:

We must therefore examine whether we should act in this way or not, as not only now but at all times I am the kind of man who listens to nothing within me but the argument that on reflection seems best to me.³⁹

Also, at the end of the *Crito* Socrates gives a speech to his friend explaining why he will not run away, drawing together all of the points he has made throughout the dialogue concerning his reasons for staying and receiving his sentence. We see Socrates' behaviour as courageous, and it is explained by Plato as being due to his belief that the alternative will be worse for everyone – his friends, his family, and perhaps most importantly himself. There is no mention of feeling fearful of running away, he is simply calmly explaining his reasons for staying and dealing with the sentence in the *Crito* and *Phaedo*. However, if Socrates is the archetypal courageous man, why does he not make mention, or indeed at any point appear to be, afraid of the immoral alternative? This leads us on to the question of whether or not Plato expected us to actually have the feeling of fear of doing to immoral thing, or whether fear was simply the ascription of dangerousness.

³⁸ *Laches* 191a5-b4.

³⁹ *Crito* 46b3-6.

A particular difficulty with the theory as presented by Nicias is the question of why we would necessarily feel fear of the option we know to be the worst for us. As Nicias and Socrates do not specify the nature of the fear in the morally fearful option we are left to consider which interpretation of the role of fear will make this theory of courage the most plausible. If we interpret the fear as a felt sensation, then the theory faces this problem of why we would necessarily feel fearful of the option we identify as being the most dangerous. The student going into final exams may feel frightened and need courage, but I doubt it is fear of the alternative at that moment that encourages them. If they were asked to think about why they decided to go to university and sit exams they may on reflection say that they felt frightened of what their life would be like without qualifications, but that does not mean that they felt that kind of fear on the day. To have fear of that kind you need time to reflect, and situations requiring courage are infamous in not allowing that. So Plato cannot justifiably expect us to have the feeling of fear of doing the immoral alternative, as indeed he does not display Socrates doing in the *Phaedo*. Therefore, the alternative interpretation of the theory is where the knowledge of what is fearful is simply knowledge without any feeling necessarily associated with it.

This interpretation – that no feeling element was necessary to the Socratic definition of courage – seems the most plausible in the light of the Socratic position that we are only directly motivated by our beliefs. It could also be argued that the question of whether the knowledge of the truly fearful option is accompanied by the feeling of fear is not a relevant one to the theory. If the rational decisions that one makes are the all important factor for Socrates, then whether you actually have the feeling of fear will not be an issue that would have seemed important to him.

To return to Nicias' argument with Socrates, once Nicias has made this distinction Socrates moves onto the other problems he perceives in Nicias' theory. Socrates brings

up a possible problem for all cognitive definitions of courage – the question of animals and children:

It's obvious, Nicias, you don't believe even the Crommyonian pig could have been brave. I don't mean to be flippant by that remark; I think that if one puts forward this theory, one is forced either to deny that any animal whatsoever is brave, or else to allow that an animal like a lion, or a leopard, or even a wild boar, is clever enough to know things which all but a few human beings find too difficult to understand. And if one has the same concept of bravery as you, one is bound to admit that as far as being brave is concerned, lions, stags, bulls and apes are all in this same position.⁴⁰

A cognitive definition of courage relies on that claim that virtues such as courage are dependent on beliefs or knowledge – in Plato's case, knowledge of what is fearful. Given that animals and young children do not have the necessary rationality for such beliefs, they cannot therefore be courageous. Nicias accepts the outcome of the first argument – that animals and children can't be brave. He states that what people have commonly referred to as courage in animals and children is what he would call fearlessness and foolishness⁴¹:

'Brave' is not a word I use to describe animals, or anything else that's not afraid of danger because of its own lack of understanding; I prefer 'fearless' or foolish'. Or do you suppose I call every little child brave because it doesn't understand, and so is not afraid of anything? No, I think to be unafraid and to be brave are two quite different things.⁴²

There is no response given to Nicias' position on this matter, and the discussion changes to set up the final problem of the dialogue. Nicias has defined courage as knowledge of future evils, but Socrates states that knowledge is not something that can be separated into past, present and future knowledge:

It seems to your friend and me, taking account of all objects of knowledge, that it's never one thing to know how a past event took place, another to know how events are

⁴⁰ *Laches* 196e4-12.

⁴¹ *Laches* 197a7.

⁴² *Laches* 197a5-b2.

unfolding in the present, and another to know how future events will come about and what the best course for them would be: it's the same knowledge throughout.⁴³

However, if we cannot separate knowledge into knowledge of the past or the future then courage cannot be knowledge of only future goods and evils but of all goods and evils; but knowledge of goods and evils must be the whole of virtue not just courage. The discussion thus ends negatively with the intellectualist position that virtue is knowledge again being shown to be in some way inadequate. The lesson from the *Protagoras* is that we need to give more consideration to what kind of knowledge virtue could be, whereas the *Laches* identifies the kind of knowledge needed for courage but this knowledge is then indistinguishable from what is needed for virtue as a whole. It seems likely that at this point Plato is using this argument about courage to indicate the fundamental nature of the unity of the virtues, and the difficulty that this creates when trying to identify the separate natures of the individual virtues.

⁴³ *Laches* 198d1-5.

6. Further support for part 4

Nicias argues for the more traditional Socratic theory that virtue is knowledge. It is interesting to note that here Socrates argues against the idea that we commonly think of him supporting. It is as if Plato wants to have Socrates in the dominant position as always but wants to challenge his usual ideas, and therefore he puts Socrates' actual view into the mouth of Nicias. This shows that the Socrates in the dialogues may not always argue for what we think the historical man thought, and that Plato was not always, if ever, interested in writing in order to exhibit Socrates' intellectual prowess. Socrates criticizes Nicias' view by arguing that his definition of courage, which he believes is a part of goodness, could also be the definition of the whole of goodness. Nicias is clearly unhappy with the fact that he would either have to reject his definition or accept that courage is in some way the whole of virtue. It is interesting that Plato challenges the idea that virtue is knowledge by discussing courage, as it is singly the one among the virtues which would have the greatest claim to uniqueness. This point is brought up in the *Protagoras* when Protagoras himself says that of the virtues 'four of them resemble each other fairly closely, but courage is very different from all the rest'⁴⁴.

The *Laches* does not only show us the Socratic view, but also reveals that Plato's uncertainties about the core Socratic ideas are showing through in his discussion of the issue of courage. Firstly, we have evidence that Socrates was committed to the idea that virtue is knowledge – the view supported by Nicias in the dialogue – but that it is not the surviving view at the end of the dialogue (That such views as 'Virtue is Knowledge', and 'No one does wrong willingly' are Socratic is supported by cross-textual analysis with Xenophon and Aristotle). By making Socrates argue against his own view Plato is able to keep Socrates as the main character who is more able in discussion than the others, whilst highlighting the problems with his view. The early dialogues enabled Plato to work through Socrates' ideas and establish his own position. Secondly, the two main definitions of courage, endurance and knowledge, that are each shown to be inadequate

⁴⁴ *Prot.* 349d3-4.

individually, make up the definition Plato gives of courage in the *Republic*, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 5.

7. Conclusion

The *Laches* raises some interesting and meaty issues for any theory of courage. Even though it is in a sense unsuccessful in that the definition of courage offered by Nicias creates problems when trying to successfully distinguish the virtues from one another, it still succeeds in drawing out what are, and will be for Plato in the *Republic*, key points that any attempts at a definition of courage must take into account. It is a key step in Plato's long and difficult relationship with the virtue he will in the end rank as the least important of the four main virtues⁴⁵.

So what are the problems encountered in this dialogue? The main issue this dialogue brings up is the role of knowledge in courage. We can see the importance Plato places on knowledge by the fact that the discussion focuses on it right from the start. The discussion of military training where Nicias and Laches present their opposing views both foreshadows what their approach will be in the second half of the dialogue, and helps us to understand that the question of what role knowledge can play in a definition of courage is not an easy one to answer. If a definition of courage is going to include knowledge as a necessary or sufficient part we need to first clarify what kind of knowledge we are talking about – which is where the *Protagoras* fails and the *Laches* succeeds. In response to Laches' second attempt at a definition, Socrates' response demonstrates that if wisdom (or knowledge) is to be included it cannot be a prudential kind of knowledge; knowledge that we will probably be victorious and are therefore not taking too much of a risk does not amount to courage. I do not mean to imply that Socrates and Plato were necessarily aware of the distinction between prudential knowledge and knowledge of overall ends and objectives, but that it is likely that Plato may have been, given the different types of knowledge that are being referred to in Laches' and Nicias' definitions, and that it is one that the dialogue makes the modern reader aware of. Nicias certainly seems to be talking about a different kind of knowledge

⁴⁵ In the *Laws*, see chapter 7.

to Laches, which is why Laches finds it so difficult to fathom what Nicias is talking about.

What role then can knowledge of overall ends and objectives have in a definition of courage? If we are to accept this type of knowledge as the whole, or a part of, our definition of courage we will also have to accept two conclusions that arise from it. The first is that we must be committed to the idea that courage is necessarily a good thing, which we can see that Plato and his contemporaries all accepted. This is an idea that Plato will only relinquish when he writes the *Laws* many years later, and only then in part. So if we need knowledge of what the right thing to do is in our definition we must also be committed to objective moral values and that courageous behaviour will always adhere to them. Thus the misguided suicide-bomber who goes to his death for what he believes will not under this theory be acting courageously. This does not necessarily mean the theory is wrong of course, but it does mean it excludes cases that many would commonly assume would be included in cases of courage. Secondly, as stated above, any cognitive theory of the virtues will have to exclude non-rational beings, such as animals, as well as pre-rational ones, such as children. Children, animals and suicide-bombers will then be distinguished from cases of genuine courage because of their lack of knowledge. What will we then call this kind of behaviour? Would it simply be rashness as Nicias says? But the difference between courage and rashness is surely more a matter of the amount of fear experienced by the individual, not their knowledge; the rash man doesn't take account of the dangers involved whereas the courageous man does and acts anyway. If we cannot adequately account for the apparently brave-seeming behaviour of animals, children and suicide-bombers in any other way, then maybe we should accept the intuition that they are exhibiting bravery.

I would also like to say something in favour of the definition presented by Nicias in this dialogue that I am taking to be Socrates' own. If we think of courage as simply overcoming fear we do not learn anything from that definition about what makes people

be courageous and why some people are and some people aren't. Nicias' definition is also an explanation of sorts of why people act in this way. The idea that courage is the overcoming of fear does not help us to understand why some people are courageous and some people aren't. It also does not rule out cases of overcoming fear that we would certainly not consider to be courageous – such as the man who overcomes his fear of disgrace in order to commit a heinous crime. Whereas the idea that courage is knowledge of what should be feared means that to act courageously one must act out of fear rather than in spite of it – a motivation that is particularly understandable. Thus the definition of courage as knowledge of what truly should be feared gives a plausible definition of this character trait that also includes an explanation as to why someone would act courageously.

We shall see that in the *Republic* Plato manages to retain the idea of courage being knowledge of what is truly fearful or encouraging whilst avoiding the outcome that it cannot be distinguished from virtue itself by including an additional element – enduring those things that try to make us lose our beliefs. So the *Laches* points us towards the theory in the *Republic* in two ways. The second part of the dialogue provides the main thrust of the theory (that virtue is knowledge), whilst the first part works out what must be added in order to solve the problems raised in this dialogue (some kind of endurance). With Nicias expressing the Socratic definition of courage as knowledge the character of Socrates can bring to light the difficulties of defining this virtue as part of a unified cognitive theory. Nicias and Socrates seem to edge around the important point that Plato appears aware of in the *Republic*: that courage is different from the other virtues – one could know what is right without being brave enough to do it. Laches' definition tries to capture the distinctiveness of courage but it fails because it describes a kind of behaviour that is often courageous but need not be. By combining the two definitions of courage given by Nicias and Laches, Plato arrives at a new definition in the *Republic* that is able to avoid some of the problems encountered in this dialogue. The view in the *Republic* is clearly developed as a result of working through these issues in the *Laches*.

Chapter 4: Republic 1 – The Soul

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1. Introduction

In this chapter I will consider the dynamics of Plato's tripartite soul, and in the next the impact that this model has on his definition of courage. I will start by considering the argument given by Plato for the division of the soul – often called the argument from opposites. Various interpretations have been offered of how, in the tripartite soul, Reason, Appetite and Spirit interrelate. I will consider the merits of two main types of response to this issue; the 'strength model' and the 'persuasion model', and consider in the light of the problems of these models whether there are any more acceptable alternatives. We shall see that an alternative interpretation of Plato's tripartite soul can provide insights into the importance of courage for such a model, which will be discussed in the following chapter. Before I start, however, I will provide a brief description of Plato's controversial thesis.

2. The Tripartite Soul

The Platonic theory of the elements or parts of the soul is presented in the *Republic*, and although alluded to in other dialogues, is not argued for directly in any other work. This may be because we are supposed to assume the theory when reading his later works, or that he recognised some serious problems inherent in the view that he was unable to rectify without abandoning at least some of what he had previously thought. This is open to interpretation. One line of thought is that with awareness 'of its problems, we are tempted to suppose it still alive in the *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus*, but dead by the time of the *Laws*'¹. However, we cannot assume that absence implies a change of heart, for if it did we could claim that Plato was incessantly capricious as his dialogues do not always cover old ground. I will return to this question in the chapter on the *Laws* below.

In brief then, Plato claims that the soul is made up of three distinct 'parts' or 'elements'². Each of these parts has different functions within the soul. Reason is the part that will dominate a just soul, is rational and concerned with the overall good of the agent. The Spirit is the part that is the seat of emotions such as anger, indignation and is the driving force behind courage, and is generally concerned with honour and the image of the individual. And finally, the Appetite, which encompasses the desires usually associated with the body - hunger, thirst, sexual desire etc. This much is clear from the *Republic*. However, how these parts relate to one another is less explicitly explained, and is what I will consider next.

¹ Price, A.W., *Mental Conflict*, p.93.

² It is a controversial matter how Plato should be translated when he discusses the parts of the soul, and whether he means it literally or symbolically.

3. The Argument for the Division of the Soul

i. The Argument

The argument for the division of the soul is given in Book IV of the *Republic* at 435a-441c. The crux of Plato's argument rests on two specific ideas and the examples he gives in support of it. The first I will call the Principle of Opposites³:

Clearly one and the same thing cannot act or be affected in opposite ways at the same time in the same part of it and in relation to the same object; so if we find these [contradictions] we shall know we are dealing with more than one [faculty].⁴

The second essential part of Plato's argument is that human beings do have 'opposite' feelings towards the same object. Plato is relying on the fact that most of us are familiar with having a desire for another piece of cake, or staying in bed in the morning, but also having the 'opposite' feeling that we shouldn't. Due to the fact that we do have these 'opposite' emotions about the same object at the same time Plato concludes that the soul is not one thing, but has different parts that have different attitudes towards the same object. In other words, if a man's mind tells him he is thirsty but 'there is something in it that resists its thirst, it must be something in it other than the thirsty impulse which is dragging it like a wild animal to drink'⁵. We can imagine Plato could be referring to a man who has an illness that means he shouldn't drink. In this case the thirst for water comes from the appetitive part, the motivation behind not drinking comes from Reason, and Spirit assists Reason in the choice to not drink. I will address the role played by Spirit in greater detail below, as it provides insight into Plato's model of the soul and is especially relevant to his concept of courage.

To clarify, the argument for the division of the soul is thus:

³ I will use this name, as opposed to the Principle of Non-contrariety or the Argument from Contradiction, as both of these names imply a certain interpretation of the passage.

⁴ *Republic*. 436b9-c1.

⁵ *Rep.* 439b4-6.

Premise (1): 'one and the same thing cannot act or be affected in opposite ways at the same time in the same part of it and in relation to the same object'.

Premise (2): A human soul can experience opposite feelings (to experience opposite feelings is to be affected in opposite ways).

Conclusion: The soul is not one and the same thing.

ii. The Contrary/Contradictory Distinction

The first problem of this argument to note is that Premise (1) contains an ambiguity that needs to be clarified before an analysis of the validity of this argument can be attempted. This ambiguity is contained in the translation of the phrase *ταναντία*, 'in opposite ways'. There are two possible modern interpretations of this phrase – contradictory and contrary ways. Propositions are contradictory if it is impossible for both to be true or both to be false, and that the truth of one implies the falsity of the other. Propositions are contrary if only one can be true but they can both be false, thus the truth of one implies the falsity of the other but the falsity of one does not imply truth of the other. There is also an ambiguity in the notion of acting or being acted upon. The important point to note is that Plato illustrates his principle of opposites where there is some kind of physical activity, but he applies it to mental activity. The reason why this creates a problem can be seen if you consider two different kinds of cases in which the contrary/contradictory distinction might be employed:

External acts:

(A) Moving/not moving.

(B) Moving towards a place/moving away from a place.

(A) is a clear case of contradictories, and (B) of contraries.

Mental states:

(C) Wanting to move/ not wanting to move.

(D) Wanting to move/ wanting not to move.

(C) is also a clear case of contradictories, whereas with (D) it is not so clear. It is not

obvious that (D) satisfies the definition of contraries since it could be argued that one and the same person at the same time could want to do P and want to do not-P.

iii. Evidence for Plato's intended meaning of 'in opposite ways'

The evidence does show us that Plato applied his words that we translate as *opposite* to what we would call contradictory *and* contrary predicates. Meno, in the dialogue of the same name, asks Socrates the question: 'But what do you mean when you say that we don't learn anything, but that what we call learning is recollection? Can you teach me that it is so?'⁶ To this question Socrates replies to Meno that 'evidently you want to catch me contradicting myself'⁷. Here Plato appears to be referring to a genuine contradiction, and not to a case of contraries. Socrates first states that virtue is not teachable, but then if he took Meno up on his request to teach him he would be exhibiting behaviour that supported the view that virtue is teachable – a clear case of applying contradictory predicates to the same object. Interestingly, Plato uses the same word in the *Republic*⁸ and the *Meno*⁹ that we translate as 'in opposite ways' and to 'contradict myself' (with *legōn*). A further example of Plato using the idea of contradiction appears in the *Euthydemus*, during the discussion between Euthydemus, Dionysodorus and Ctesippus at 285d5-286c. The conversation goes as follows:

'Yes,' he said, 'for if you remember, Ctesippus, not long ago we demonstrated that no one describes things as they are not, when we showed the impossibility of speaking non-facts.'

'So what?' said Ctesippus. 'Does that alter the fact that you and I can contradict each other?'

'If we were both describing the same event,' he asked, 'would that constitute contradiction? Or wouldn't we both, surely, just be saying the same thing?...what about when neither of us describes the event?' he asked.

'Would that be contradiction? Or would that rather be neither of us having the event in mind at all?'¹⁰

In this case Plato uses the verb 'ἀντιλέγω' meaning 'to speak against' or 'to

⁶ *Meno* 81e3-5.

⁷ *Meno* 82a1-2.

⁸ *Rep.* 436b9-c1.

⁹ *Meno* 82a2.

¹⁰ *Euthydemus* 286a1-b2.

contradict'. Socrates disputes the validity of this argument by saying: 'I'll have you know that I've heard this argument plenty of times from plenty of people...it means falsehood is impossible, doesn't it – that people either speak the truth or are not speaking at all?'¹¹. However, he does not dispute the point that we would need to be discussing the same thing in order to disagree with one another. This argument appears to foreshadow the argument in the *Republic*, when Plato includes the phrase 'πρὸς ταύτων' to show that he is conscious of a common object being necessary for genuine conflict. While I think that these examples point to Plato meaning contradiction, not contrary, in the *Republic*, *Meno* and *Euthydemus*, there are also ones where he seems to be referring to the use of contraries. As in the *Republic* when Plato says:

Then would you not class assent and dissent, impulse and aversion to something, attraction and repulsion and the like as opposite actions or states...and what about hunger and thirst and the desires generally...or, again, willing and wishing, don't they all fall under one of the two classes of opposites just mentioned?...And what about disinclination, unwillingness and dislike? Shouldn't we put them in the opposite class, with repulsion and rejection?¹²

There is enough evidence to show that Plato was aware of situations where both contradictory and contrary predicates could apply, even if he is unaware of the distinction and uses one word to describe them all.

iv. The application of predicates to parts and wholes

Before discussing the cogency of either position I wish to look at the idea of how predicates of simple parts relate to the predicates of complex wholes. In this discussion I will be assuming that when Plato uses the phrase 'one and the same thing' at 436b9 he is referring to a simple thing; in other words, a thing without parts. In his discussion of the soul, Plato is using the idea that opposite predicates cannot properly be applied to one thing, and that if we find them to be in some sense appropriate we must reallocate them to parts of the thing.

¹¹ *Euthydemus* 286b9-c7.

¹² *Rep.* 437b2-c9.

However, can the soul conceivably work in such a way that we cannot say things of the whole that we can of the parts? To what extent then should we ascribe predicates to the 'parts' that we cannot ascribe to the agent, when the agent simply is the 'parts' that make up the soul? Given that Plato does not posit an extra part of the non-physical aspect of a person above the soul (the difficulties with this possibility are discussed below), then we are, and only are, our soul and body. Consider the example: 3 is odd and 2 is even but $5(3+2)$ is not both odd and even. In this case we cannot ascribe the predicates of the parts to the whole, but that does not mean that we cannot divide 5 into 3 and 2. However, 5 is not just the total of 3 and 2, it is also a number in its own right and we don't have to think of 5 as being made up of 3 and 2. Perhaps a different example would be more useful: two walls and the ceiling of a room are green and the other two walls and the floor are red. In this case we would feel comfortable applying these two predicates to the room as well as the individual parts, but does this case properly support Plato's claim that opposite predicates can be applied to a complex thing? We can say that the room is both red and green, and by saying this we surely mean that there are parts of the room that are red and parts of the room that are green. The fact that we can apply both of these predicates to the same room means that we can assume that we can divide the room up into parts and that the predicate 'red' applies to one part (or parts) and the predicate green applies to another part (or parts). Applying this example to Plato's argument would support the idea that Plato meant 'in opposite ways' to refer to contraries rather than contradictories as red and green are contraries and not contradictories.

So if it is the case that we do not balk at the ascription of contrary predicates to the same thing – as in the red and green room – is it the case that they can actually justify the kind of division that Plato is after? Given that the awareness of having contrary desires (like wanting a piece of chocolate cake and wanting not to have a piece of chocolate cake) is such a familiar experience should we necessarily agree with Plato that we are committing an error of judgement when we ascribe them to 'one and the same thing'? I will look at the issue of whether contrary predicates properly support

Plato's argument below, as well as considering which reading of 'in opposite ways' is the more likely given what he says, and which is most helpful to Plato's cause.

v. Modern and Ancient terminology

I will now consider how the different modern interpretations of the ambiguous phrase 'in opposite ways' affects the argument for the division of the soul. However, it is important to be wary when using a modern distinction when looking at an ancient text. It is likely that the Greek we have translated as 'in opposite ways' covered the same examples as our phrase. However, the distinction we draw today between the two interpretations of 'in opposite ways' would not necessarily have been clear to Plato. The language may have simply not have facilitated the philosopher in these cases. So Plato may have used 'τάναντία' to represent what we call contradictions as illustrated by (A) and (C) or contraries as illustrated in (B) or something rather looser in (D). He also may have used it in different ways in different places in the dialogues. Even if we accept that Plato was working with a different set of concepts and words to describe them that does not mean that his work will not stand up to a modern analysis. It seems somewhat condescending to let Plato off the hook for mistakes or ambiguities we would not accept today. Also, if such an argument is to convince the modern reader then it needs to be examined by modern methods. I will therefore look at the principle of opposites by using the distinction of contradictory and contrary predicates (and some looser version of contrary predicates), to decide whether Plato's theory of the tripartite soul is metaphysically persuasive.

vi. 436b9-c1: (A) and (B)

Firstly, I will look at the distinction drawn in (A) and (B) above, in the phrase 'one and the same thing cannot act...in opposite ways'. Plato includes the phrase 'προς ταύτον' in his principle of opposites, which is above translated as 'in relation to the same object'. Plato illustrates this principle with examples of movement and their opposites. Moving towards a place and moving away from it could clearly be construed as cases where something is acting or acted upon in different respects or in

relation to a different object. Cases of this kind could not therefore furnish counter-examples to the principle of opposites. Not surprisingly therefore Plato makes it clear that he is referring to the contradictories – moving and not moving as in (A) – rather than to say supposed contraries as in (B). If he means to use ‘opposite’ in this way then he is making an uncontroversial point when he says that ‘one and the same thing cannot act...in opposite ways’. However, this interpretation runs into trouble when we consider the final statement of the Principle of Opposites: ‘so if we find these contradictions we shall know that we are dealing with more than one faculty’. Plato cannot here be envisaging a case in which we find a single undivided thing actually to have opposite properties because he denies the possibility of such cases. He must therefore have in mind cases where something which seems to be single is found to have opposite properties and is thus shown to be complex. But if ‘opposite’ means ‘contradictory’ it is impossible to describe such a case.

vii. Plato’s three examples

The examples that Plato uses to support the Principle are cases of movement. He believes that these might be presented to him as proof that the same thing can bear opposite predicates, but not ‘at the same time in the same part of it and in relation to the same thing’¹³. They are:

1. If we were told that a man, who was standing still but moving his hands and his head, was simultaneously both at rest and in motion, we should not accept that as a proper statement of the case, but say that part of him was standing still and part of him in motion.¹⁴
2. It might be argued as a further refinement that a top, spinning around a fixed axis, is both at rest and in motion as a whole, as indeed is any body in circular motion on the same spot. We should not agree, but argue that it is not the same parts of such bodies that are at rest and in motion; they have both an axis and a circumference, and their axis as it has no inclination in any direction, is at rest, but their circumference is in motion.¹⁵
3. it is not fair to say that an archer’s hands are pulling and pushing the bow at the

¹³ *Rep.* 436e9-437a1.

¹⁴ *Rep.* 436c8-12.

¹⁵ *Rep.* 436d3-e3.

same time, but that one hand is pushing it, the other pulling.¹⁶

In example 1 it is correct to say that he is moving in reference to his hands and head, but stationary in reference to his trunk. At first glance this appears to be a suitable example to illustrate his point about the fact that contradictory predicates cannot be applied to one simple thing, and if this *appears* to be the case actually there is a subject confusion, which would be rectified by using simple parts of the complex subject in question instead of the thing as a whole. It appears on first inspection to be difficult not to agree with him that the statement that a man is both in rest and motion is understandable in this case but not strictly accurate and needs qualification. If we were faced with such a man and asked whether he was stationary or in motion we would probably go for one or the other with the justification that he is moving because his arms are moving, or he is stationary because he is staying in the same place. If pushed we might concede that his arms are moving and his legs are staying still, and we might qualify it in the same way as Plato. So this seems to be a case of finding contradictions in a person and therefore concluding that we must be dealing with more than one part.

How does this example look in the light of the previous discussion? I established above that regarding action, as we need a specific object we can only understand examples like these as cases of contradiction. However, the difference between example 1 and the Principle of Opposites Plato is working from is that in this case there does not at first glance appear to be a single specified object. So in order for the example to fit with the Principle I will conceive of it as including the following contradiction:

(A') The man moves his body/ The man doesn't move his body

The problem now is whether we can 'find these contradictions'. Plato is relying on the fact that it is illogical to apply opposite predicates to one simple thing, but also that it is possible in some situations to apply them to a thing with parts, even if we don't

¹⁶ *Rep.* 439b10-12.

accept it as a 'proper statement of the case'. The difficulty with this example is the process of application of the opposite terms. If we assume that Plato is taking 'at rest' and 'in motion' to be contradictories, in the sense that 'not at rest' would mean the same as 'in motion' then the application of the terms to the man is not just an improper statement of the case, it is illogical. We may say that the *man* is 'in motion' as part of him is in motion. However, it is not legitimate to claim that the man is 'at rest' if part of him isn't. Plato appears to be relying on the fact that when appraising this man, people would allow themselves to use such terms because they had already divided him in their mind. And given that this is an argument intended to establish a partition this is not an acceptable element of Plato's examples. If the man has not already been divided into parts then if we find this contradiction in example 1 then either we are using the terms 'in motion' and 'at rest' to mean 'partly in motion' and 'partly at rest', in which case they are not contradictions and not in conflict, or we are committing a logical error. Either way it is not a sound foundation for a logical argument.

The second example does not work for Plato, in fact he appears to be providing us with a case of a simple thing that can be given opposite predicates. Plato wants us to agree that part of the top is in motion (the circumference), and part is at rest (the axis). Even though the axis and the circumference are different properties of the spinning top that does not mean that they are different 'parts', and that one can move while the other does not. If the top is spinning then the whole of the top is spinning, whether or not it stays stationary on the same spot. Even though the axis and the circumference of the spinning top are different that does not mean that they are different 'parts'. Richard Stalley argues that this is only a genuine counterexample if we translate the phrase 'κατα ταύτον' as 'in the same part' as opposed to the alternative translation 'in the same respect', or 'in the same way'¹⁷. I think that Stalley is correct when he states that this alternative interpretation will rule out the spinning top as a counterexample of the Principle, his explanation being that 'the top is stationary so far as one kind of motion is concerned and moving so far as a different kind of motion is concerned'.

¹⁷ Stalley, Richard, 'Plato's Argument for the Division of the Reasoning and Appetitive Elements within the Soul, p.120.

However, we accept this translation at a cost to the overall argument. It is clear later that Plato does wish to establish the existence of parts, and in order to do this his argument for division must make reference to them.

The third example unfortunately faces the same problems as the first, but in a different way. In this case there is a single specified object, the bow, and the man is acting ‘in opposite ways’ in relation to it: pulling and pushing. The structure of this example is in this case the one found in (B) and can be formalised as follows:

(B’) The man pulls the bow / The man pushes the bow

They cannot be contradictory predicates because they can both be false, and with contradictory predicates this is not the case. However, it is not clear in this case whether they are contrary predicates either, as they can surely both be true. As with example 1 it is the application of these predicates to the man that is problematic. It seems that when we apply either or both of these predicates to someone we do not mean them in a way that would imply conflict. If I were to say that the man before me is pulling a bowstring, I do not mean that he is using his entire body and all of his force to pull the bow, I mean that he is using one of his arms. If this is the case then what I really mean when I say *that man is pulling a bow* is *that man is in part pulling a bow*. So I am assuming the existence of parts of the man when I initially apply the predicate. However, if the predicates are to be in conflict in the way Plato needs them to be to justify division, then they would have to mean:

(B’’) The man pulls the bow with all his strength / The man pushes the bow with...

If this is the case then these two predicates can in no way be found to relate to the same man at the same time. So if the predicates are meant to be opposites applied to the same man we simply cannot ‘find these contradictions’, and if they are not then they are not enough for Plato’s argument.

As the argument progresses it becomes clear that Plato is mainly interested in the soul and its motivations, even though he continues to utilise examples of action to support his point. Plato obviously felt that the examples above concerning external action, being explicitly observable would be of assistance in determining how to interpret the less explicit ones of the covert workings of the soul. In which case Plato was presumably unaware of the problems inherent in the examples he gave and the difficulties the Principle would face by including external action as well as internal motivations.

viii. 436b9-c1: (C) and (D)

So let's now turn to the question of whether Plato's argument can still stand when we utilise the different ways in which the word 'opposites' can be understood, but this time in relation to internal motivation. I have argued above that in regard to external actions Plato faces problems whether the examples are in the form of (A) as with example 1, or in the form of (B) as with example 2. Unfortunately, the Principle also contains minefields when looking at interpretations of (C) and (D) as well. If Plato were relying on (C) to justify the partition of the soul, 'wanting to move' and 'not wanting to move' would be sufficient for the job of justifying division; as it is an impossibility that 'one and the same thing' can at the same time have a desire, and also have an absence of desire, then it would seem to be correct to conclude in this case that we are in fact dealing with more than one thing. However, the problem with the interpretation of the argument in the form of (C) is the same as the problem encountered when looking at (A): how would we 'find these contradictions'? Surely not from introspection. I cannot imagine a situation where I would claim to want something but also to experience the absence of wanting it. Does Plato then mean that we can find these contradictions in others? This cannot be the case either. We can observe someone else having a desire, through the way they behave or what they say, but we could not at the same time observe the absence of desire in them. The fact is that if we are talking about 'one and the same thing', we cannot accept these contradictions in the way that Plato needs us to in his argument and examples to justify the division. Given the above discussion I think it unavoidable to conclude that if Plato was intending to use interpretation (C) as the structure of a valid argument he

is facing the same overwhelming problems he was with external action. So, although (C) may imply division, Plato cannot use it to justify the tripartite soul. It is perhaps advantageous to Plato then that there is evidence that he may have been making the statement at 436b9-c1 with reference to the looser distinction described in (D).

The vocabulary Plato is using to describe the opposite affections to the same object imply that he is contrasting wanting something ('assent', 'impulse', 'attraction'), with an active feeling of wanting not to have it ('dissent', 'aversion', 'repulsion'), not, as in (C), with the absence of feeling about the relevant object. So, if Plato is referring to situations when we have two conflicting *feelings* about the same object then it looks like he cannot be referring to (C) at this point, which is characterised by the contrast of wanting and an absence of wanting. It is much more likely that at 437b1-c9 Plato is actually referring to the structure of (D): wanting to move and wanting not to move. If Plato is relying on a weak version of contrary desires¹⁸, as opposed to contradictory, then his position relies more heavily on personal experience; whereas (C) cannot be found within the one individual, we know from experience that (D) is perfectly conceivable, and an everyday occurrence.

The consequence of this discussion is that (D) might not be enough for Plato to conclude that these two impulses come from different internal sources. If Plato believes that he is presenting the reader of the *Republic* with a sound argument to persuade us of his division then he is facing serious problems. Under interpretation (C) premise 1 was perfectly plausible, but premise 2 was unacceptable. However with (D) the situation is more complicated. Wanting to move and wanting not to move are contrary in a sense but it is not clear that this is the strict logical sense in which contrary predicates may be true of the same object. As we have seen, one might simply insist that a single entity can desire to drink and desire not to drink at the same time. But premise 1 is not a necessary truth unless 'contrary' is taken in the strict logical sense. Thus, on this interpretation, it is not clear that the argument is valid.

¹⁸ We would commonly think of wanting to do something and wanting not to do it as being contrary in some way but they do not satisfy the definition of contrary predicates.

ix. A fourth example

I would like to introduce a fourth example to be used to help understand the workings of the soul which goes as follows: imagine a man is standing still and is having both his arms pulled in opposite directions. In this case we could say that the man is being affected or acted on 'in opposite ways at the same time', in the sense that each movement is mutually exclusive. It may be contested that the idea of being pulled in two different directions does not contain contradictions or contraries in the way that Plato means. It does not contain contradictions, as it does not claim to be a case of *Person A being pulled north with their right arm/Person A not being pulled north with their right arm*. It is a case of contraries where Person A is being pulled north and not-north (south) at the same time. However, it is clearly an appropriate example as the argument above shows that Plato is relying on the idea of exclusivity, and in this case the body of the man cannot move both in one direction and in its opposite. So, given the idea of division originating from plural affects I imagine that Plato would explain this situation by saying that the man's right arm is being pulled in one direction, and his other arm is being pulled in the other direction. However, is this really what the man experiences? Surely in this case the man as a whole is both being pulled in one direction and being pulled in the opposite direction as well. To explain the situation by changing the subject from the man to his arms ignores the fact that the man is also a unity, and that being acted on in one part will affect the rest.

It follows from Newton's Laws that if two forces act upon a body in different directions the resultant motion will be in a third direction unless the original forces are opposite. Even in this case the body will still be affected by both forces, to the extent that it will move towards the stronger force at a speed proportional to the weaker force. In the case of the man being pulled in two directions it is the whole body that is being affected by two different forces, whereas to interpret these physical analogies in the way that Plato wants to we would have to deny this. This case, and others like it, could be used to provide a different understanding of the soul from the Principle of Opposites that would suggest that the soul is not divided in the sense that parts are

affected individually. It is perhaps a more appropriate example because it applies more readily to cases of being affected psychologically by an object; this case and the psychological examples are to do with being acted on.

x. Conclusion

This alternative example of the Principle reveals that the Principle does not adequately support the idea of strict division in the soul when considering cases of contrary predicates acting on the individual either. But what we can say is that we experience internal conflict in such a way that speaking of parts, as we so often do (*'part of me wants t...'*) does provide us with a way to interpret our experience. I will not comment on whether I believe Plato was relying on (A), (B), (C) or (D), I think it is extremely likely that he was not aware of the distinction. Particularly as there is evidence that he was using the term 'opposite' in both ways at different times as if they were the same. What I think I have shown is that if 'opposite' is construed as contradictory as in (A) and (C) the claim that something acted or was acted on in opposite ways would entail that it contained more than one part. However there is no experience that could count as 'finding these contradictions'. Thus the principle of opposites interpreted in this way could not provide a method for demonstrating that something which appears to be a unity is in fact complex. If we interpret 'opposite' in the loose sense of contrary suggested by (D) we can imagine finding a soul to be qualified by the relevant contraries but this would not prove that the soul is divided.

4. Models of Plato's Tripartite Soul

i. The Strength Model

One possible view is that when the individual has to make a decision it is the strength of the feelings in the parts that determines which gets its way. If the desire of the appetitive part is stronger than the rationality of the overall good of Reason, and stronger than the pride felt by the spirited part for not being the kind of person who gives in to temptation, then the desire will win out. There is much evidence that Plato believed that the parts interact in such a way. This can be seen particularly clearly in the language he uses. When discussing the case of the thirsty man who shouldn't drink he says:

How are we to describe such cases...Must we not say that there is one element in their minds which bids them drink, and a second which prevents them and masters the first?¹⁹

And also, when discusses the phrase 'being master of oneself' Plato says:

What the expression is intended to mean, I think, is that there is a better and a worse element in the personality of each individual, and that when the naturally better element controls the worse then the man is said to be "master of himself", as a term of praise. But when (as a result of bad upbringing or bad company) the smaller forces of one's better element are overpowered by the numerical superiority of one's worse, then one is adversely criticised and said not to be master of oneself and to be in a state of indiscipline.²⁰

To speak of one part mastering the other certainly sounds like Plato believed that it is a contest of the strength of feeling of the three parts. So the agent will then act according to the strongest desire, may it be the desire of the Appetite, Spirit or Reason²¹. So, the strength of the drive towards the object of the part is causally related to the feelings of attraction and repulsion to the object. In other words, the more the agent desires the drink the stronger the drive will be, and the more Reason thinks it is not for the good of the agent the stronger it will be against the Appetite. Christopher

¹⁹ *Rep.* 439c5-8.

²⁰ *Rep.* 431a4-b4.

Bobonich finds fault with this interpretation because if 'the interaction of the parts is limited to a competition between their respective desires in terms of strength' then 'the conflicting imperatives seem to do no work in explaining why the agent acts one way rather than another'²². In other words, if the Appetite is saying 'Drink!' and Reason is saying 'Don't drink!' the decision is made on the strength of the view not on the actual content of the view. In this case the model would appear to have little explanatory power if it can only tell us that if we drink, then there was a greater force in us towards that goal. This would make Plato's soul much less psychologically interesting as it would do little work in explaining why we do what we do.

There is also the problem that if we allow that the parts operate within the Strength Model by issuing commands, to whom are the imperatives supposed to be addressed? It cannot be to some 'whole person' over and above the three parts of the soul, as they are what constitutes the whole soul. The parts must relate to each other, not to some extra part of the soul to which they are instrumentally inferior. It may be agreed that Plato does not argue for another part of the soul to control the main three, but how *are* we to understand the process of decision-making between the parts without positing an extra part? In the tripartite soul, there is no adjudicator to decide which part has the stronger feeling towards a certain object. So is the weaker part supposed to acknowledge its weakness and back down, not being able to keep up the fight against a more powerful opponent? But how would this assessment be made? Or are we to be left only with the idea of the stronger part simply overpowering the weaker, but without any idea how this is to be understood? But perhaps no further explanation is needed. Perhaps we can only understand this phenomenon of one motivational feeling overpowering another through the analogy of one person overpowering another. Recourse to subjective experience may help us to understand this also. In the case of irrational desires, it can feel as if the strength of the desire blocks out the motivational force of any other inclination. The best example of this might be when we make a snap decision to do something that we would not have done given more time to think.

²¹ By 'desire' here I do not mean to attribute desires to the Spirit and Reason in the same way as the Appetite. By desire I mean the course of action they wish to follow because of reasons contained in their function.

Even if we accept that the cogency of the Strength Model provides an understanding of the mechanics of how this model works, does this mean it is an adequate explanation of the tripartite soul? I think not. I want to argue that the main problem is the difficulty of relating the Strength Model to both the just and unjust soul. The unjust soul is characterised by:

some kind of civil war between these same three elements, when they interfere with each other and trespass on each other's functions, or when one of them rebels against the whole to get control when it has no business to do so, because its natural role is to be a slave to the rightfully controlling element.²³

Also, when arguing for the existence of the spirited part of the soul, Plato says that in 'a man whose desires are forcing him to do things his reason disapproves of...It's like a struggle between political factions'²⁴. In the case of 'civil war' or a 'struggle between political factions' resolution is usually reached combatively, where the strength of the sides determines the outcome. So the description of the way decisions are made in the case of the unjust soul, if we are to follow the analogy of the state, does seem to be through some kind of intellectual arm-wrestling. As said above, this seems to fit with the experience of being overcome by our desires. Acting on our desires often appears to be a matter of rejecting any process of deliberation; not wanting any other feeling to have the chance of changing one's mind. However, are we also to understand the just soul as operating in the same way?

Plato tends to use the same kind of language to describe the just soul that he uses to describe the unjust soul. He often refers to the control exhibited by Reason when it is the dominant part²⁵. So what reason is there to think that the just soul and the unjust soul don't both operate in accordance with the Strength Model? The reason is this.

²² Bobonich, C., *Akrasia and Agency in Plato's Laws and Republic*, p.11.

²³ *Rep.* 444b1-5.

²⁴ *Rep.* 440a10-b3.

²⁵ *Rep.* 444d7-9; *Rep.* 443b1-3; *Rep.* 442c5-8.

The just soul is one controlled by Reason backed up by Spirit. A soul thus constituted would surely have Reason in the prime position because of its specific advantage – the ability to think rationally. If we imagine three people, who are each characterised by one part of the tripartite soul, trying to reach agreement about what they should all do, we would not expect the rational man to try and get his way through force against two much beefier opponents – that in itself would not be rational. I would assume that for the physically weaker rational man to be in charge it would have to be done through persuasion and argument. It is the unjust soul, then, that the Strength Model explains adequately; with Desire achieving dominance through superior ‘size’, but a sufficient explanation of the operations of the just soul seem to be further from this model’s grasp. This intuition suggests that a different interpretation may have something to contribute to the understanding of Plato’s soul. I will now consider the Persuasion Model to see if it offers a more comprehensive understanding, and if not, whether it can be joined to the Strength Model in some way to provide for a more intuitive and comprehensive understanding of Plato’s soul.

ii. The Persuasion Model

The image of the parts of the tripartite soul using persuasion and reasoned argument to gain influence over the actions of the person does seem to apply more satisfactorily to the just soul. As said above, in the case of the three people representing the parts of the soul, it would not be rational for an intellectually superior but weaker man to try to use his physical strength over a physically stronger opponent. However, the main argument against accepting the view that the parts of the soul persuade each other in the course of reaching a decision is that this model requires that all parts have enough rationality to understand the arguments, including Desire. This doesn’t seem to fit with Plato’s original description of the role of Desire. He says that:

The mind of the thirsty man, therefore, in so far as he is thirsty, simply wants to drink, and it is to that end that its energies are directed...If therefore there is something in it that resists its thirst, it must be something in it other than the thirsty impulse which is dragging it like a wild animal to drink.²⁶

Using the analogy of Desire being like a 'wild animal' may fit well with the Strength Model but doesn't seem to fit well with it also having a rational capacity to make decisions about the soundness of arguments. There is some evidence that Plato did conceive of Desire having a rational capacity. When he speaks of self-discipline being when 'all these three elements are in friendly and harmonious agreement, when reason and its subordinates are all agreed that reason should rule'²⁷ it suggests that Desire can be tamed to be responsive to the natural superiority of Reason. And later, in Book IX Plato attributes the love of money to Desire, because 'wealth is the means of satisfying desires'²⁸ of the kind felt by Desire. Julia Annas argues that this means that Desire is capable of 'means-ends reasoning' and that

Most significantly, we find that very different kinds of life can be said to be dominated by this part of the soul. Plato describes the oligarchic man, obsessively subordinating all other concerns to the getting and keeping of money; the democratic man, following any desire that happens to be uppermost and thus dividing his time between worthy and trivial pursuits; and the tyrannical man, dominated by unfulfilled lust.²⁹

For these lives to be possible, and in line with the persuasion model, the reasoning part of Desire must be assisting Desire proper in obtaining the object of their desire. In this case, some kind of rationality of Desire is essential to Plato because otherwise the life of a person ruled by desire would be so disorganised that it would arguably be impossible for it to attain any of its goals. From the evidence of the different types of character, Plato clearly thinks that those ruled by Desire do have the ability to rationally consider how to get what they want. So if the persuasion model is to offer us an accurate theoretical structure of the tripartite soul there must be a convincing explanation of why attributing rationality to Desire is the best way of explaining the organisation of the unjust life. The problem for this model is that it cannot consistently explain the description given of Desire in Book IV (as above 439a9-b6) and the unjust lives presented in Book IX.

²⁶ *Rep.* 439a9-b6.

²⁷ *Rep.* 442c10-12.

²⁸ *Rep.* 580c3-4.

iii. Problem 1

If Plato's soul is interpreted only in terms of the Persuasion Model akrasia would present a serious problem. When we say that someone persuaded us of something, we think of them making us change our minds about what would be the best thing to do. For Desire to be persuaded by Reason, it must be persuaded of the fact that Reason's choice is better. So after being persuaded we are in a different epistemic state, we have different beliefs, for if we didn't we would not agree to go along with the views of the other person, or other part of the self. If we are to agree to this definition of 'persuade', then if we act in accordance with the wishes of the Desiring part, Reason must have agreed that this was in some sense best. This interpretation therefore cannot account for the existence of akrasia.

Akrasia, or the weakness of will, is commonly seen to be some kind of inability to stick to what one believes to be the best thing for oneself. For a proper case of akrasia to occur the agent must really believe that what they are doing is not the best thing for them, and do it anyway. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates rejected the concept of akrasia and claimed that no one does wrong willingly. Bobonich argues that Plato's more complex psychological model does have a way of understanding this phenomenon: 'Although he [Plato] rejects the possibility of akratic action in the *Protagoras*, he reworks his moral psychology in the *Republic* to accommodate its possibility'³⁰. For Plato, akrasia is when the actions of the agent are not dominated by Reason. The reasoning part of the soul is the part that considers what is best for the person as a whole, and not just in the short term. When this part is not in control the agent will act in a way they believe not to be the best thing for them, in spite of this belief. However, as stated above, if action is a result of one part being persuaded by another of what is best, then akratic action becomes impossible. However, if Desire takes control of action by force and not by persuasion this problem is avoided, as in this case Reason is still aware of what is actually the best thing to do, but the actions of the individual are not the same as this belief.

²⁹ Annas, Julia, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, p.130.

³⁰ Bobonich, C., 'Akrasia and Agency in Plato's *Laws* and *Republic*', p. 3.

iv. Problem 2

Perhaps a combination model would successfully rule out certain problems associated with both models. This may be the case but there would still be the problem of justifying a rational part of Desire which is necessary if Reason rules through persuasion. The reason behind the division of the soul is to separate it into parts that have different capacities which represent the different motivational forces that we feel. Won't mixing a bit of Reason in with Desire affect the fundamental argument given for the division of the soul in the first place? And, given Plato's argument for dividing the soul, would he not consider it necessary to separate Desire into two parts, separating its rational part from its irrational part? Bobonich says that

The very possibility of a conflict within the Desiring part between its desire for what is best for itself and its desires for food and drink calls its unity into question. Does not such a conflict within the Desiring part force us to apply the Principle of Opposites to the Desiring part itself and thus subdivide it further?³¹

These problems arise I think from the different ideas expressed in Book IV and IX. In Book IV Plato puts the original case for the division of the parts of the soul. 436b9-c1 cited above expresses the view of Book IV. Under this view Desire could not possibly have a rational element that could understand the 'persuasion' of Reason because if this were the case rational Desire would at times 'be affected in opposite ways at the same time' as Desire proper. And if this were to happen, then, following the argument presented in Book IV, Desire would have to be split again³². So, as far as Book IV goes, Reason, Spirit and Desire represent three very different parts with different motivational forces. Given the argument for the division of the soul as presented in Book IV, this part of the *Republic* would appear to assume the truth of the Strength Model. It is the examples given in Book IX of the unjust lives and societies that suggests a different picture.

³¹ Christopher Bobonich, 'Akrasis and Agency in Plato's *Laws* and *Republic*', p.13.

³² It could be argued that Plato might not object to the desiring part having contrary desires, and that this part of the soul may even be partly characterized by such disunity. This may be true, but it is still a logical problem for the tripartite soul, as if desire has its own reasoning element Plato would have to distinguish sub-parts within desire and this might have to go on ad infinitum.

Let's remind ourselves of the evidence provided by books IV and IX, to see whether some of the problems with interpreting Plato's theory are due to inconsistencies in the text. In Book IV Plato makes the statements at 436b9-c1 and 439a9-b6, which clearly characterise Desire as having a simple impulse towards a target object. These quotations show that the Desire of Book IV could not be reasoned with, but only controlled or obeyed. Book IX, however, presents a different picture. The life of the tyrannical man is ruled by Desire. He is the archetypal akratic personality in whose 'life its always been the later pleasure that has had the better of it at the expense of the earlier'³³. Plato describes the tyrannical man as a kind of criminal, subject to the desires he cannot control. He turns to 'burgling a house or holding someone up at night' as a means of getting money to fund his desires. This is where the unjust man of Book IX differs from the one depicted in Book IV. The criminal in Book IX also desires money as a means to his desires; as Julia Annas said above he is capable of 'means-ends reasoning'. This is not the wild irrational Desire presented, and justified, to us in Book IV. So there appears to be unreconcilable differences between Plato's descriptions in the *Republic*; either there are inconsistencies between Book IV and Book IX, or he has unwittingly presented an argument for a soul split into four parts - Reason, Spirit, Desire proper and the rational element of Desire - not three.

³³ *Rep.* 574a7-8.

5. An Alternative Model

There is a way to avoid this difficulty, and it involves a new model of Plato's tripartite soul. So far certain conditions for a satisfactory model have been established: The just soul, ruled by Reason, would not rule with strength or force, but with its essential characteristic - its ability to reason; however, for Reason to rule through rationality we need to explain how Desire, essentially irrational, is to respond to the rationality of Reason; and that the unjust soul, ruled by Desire, will use strength as its currency. And, also, what is the role of Spirit in the soul's dynamics? The discussions above of the Strength and Persuasion Models have shown that they are each able to explain the workings of the unjust and just soul respectively. So perhaps the best interpretation is to combine these two models. In this interpretation, Reason, being wholly rational, would not communicate with Desire, being wholly irrational but would communicate with Spirit and Spirit would then restrict the power of Desire. Spirit of course is not rational either but given the right education – which Plato places great importance on in the *Republic* – it can be appealed to through the beliefs established in childhood. If Spirit has not been given the right moral education then Reason will not be able to appeal to these stored beliefs and Spirit will use its strength against Reason itself. This model would explain why Plato dedicated so much of the *Republic* to the education programme of those of the Auxiliary and Ruler classes, for the state of the Spirit established in early life would then determine the character of the person in later life.

One possible objection to this theory is that Plato may not have agreed with the idea that Reason's job is not to rule the soul as a whole directly, but to influence Spirit in such a way as to overpower Desire. However, I think that this objection would be spurious. In Plato's analogy with the state he believes that the spirited class would 'police' the city and keep order: 'the young men whom we have been describing as Guardians should more strictly be called Auxiliaries, their function being to assist the Rulers in the execution of their decisions'³⁴. Cornford, in his translation, goes even

³⁴ *Rep.* 414b4-6.

further than this when he translates 414b6 as ‘to enforce the decisions of the Rulers’³⁵. Reason is thus still ruling the soul, but with the help of the Spirit.

One of the advantages of the Combination Model is that it offers a mode of operation that does not assign rationality to the desiring part. However it needs to provide an explanation for the problem of how the irrational but ordered lives in Books VIII and IX are possible. One possible explanation is to think of Desire utilising the functional capacity³⁶ of Reason to fulfil its appetites on its behalf. In this case Plato would not need to explain the inclusion of a rational element in Desire, given his basis for dividing the soul into parts. As Gerasimos Santas argues in *Goodness and Justice*, Plato’s ‘discussion in Book VIII of the *Republic*, shows clearly enough that he was aware of the view that spirit and appetite can dominate and reason be used purely instrumentally’ (evidence that Plato conceives of the Desire and Spirit ‘using’ Reason in an unjust soul in this way can be found in the conclusion to Book IX)³⁷. When discussing the ‘composite’ beast, comprised of the many-headed beast (Desire), the lion (Spirit) and the man (Reason), Plato illustrates his point by arguing that:

to say that it pays him to give the many-headed beast a good time, and to strengthen it and the lion and all its qualities, while starving the man till he becomes so weak that the other two can do what they like with him; and that he should make no attempt to reconcile them and make them friends, but leave them to snarl and wrangle and devour each other.³⁸

So if Desire and Spirit ‘can do what they like with’ Reason, and not just ‘do what they like’, then Reason must be performing a function in this situation. In fact, given the characterisation Plato gives of desire, it seems likely that in all organisations of the soul Reason’s function is closely intertwined with Desire. Plato argues that desire is irrational and simple drives towards certain objects - drink to satisfy thirst, food to satisfy hunger:

³⁵ *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Cornford, F.M., Clarendon, London, 1941.

³⁶ By ‘functional capacity’ I mean its ability to reason, not including any other element of Reason.

³⁷ Santas, G., *Goodness and Justice, Plato, Aristotle, and the Moderns*, p.126.

³⁸ *Rep.* 588e4-589a4.

Then is thirst, in so far as it is thirst, the desire in the mind for anything more than simply drink? Is it thirst for hot drink or cold...for any particular kind of drink at all? Isn't it rather that if heat is added to thirst it brings with it the desire for cold...Simple thirst, on the other hand, is the desire for its natural object, drink...and any qualification is an addition.³⁹

Desire can motivate the soul to drink or eat, but cannot qualify the thirst or hunger in order to satisfy anything other than the most primal needs of the body. Qualification will come from Reason, for it is Reason that can comprehend the connection between the heat of the body and the effect of a cold drink. So in the case of the tyrannical man who has a 'formidable extra crop of desires growing day by day and night by night and needing satisfaction'⁴⁰, the fact that he needs money to continue his lifestyle of 'drunkenness, lust and madness'⁴¹ can only be worked out by the means-ends rational capacity of Reason.

So it seems reasonable to claim that in Plato's soul, whatever desires we have, we need more than just the desire to obtain it. Getting from the internal motivational state of desire to the acquisition of the desired object will always involve reasoning of some kind, even for a much less extravagant desire than the lifestyle of the tyrant. In any case, why should Reason be dormant in an unjust soul, when desire is not dormant when the soul is just? In any formation of the soul each element will play some part, but the part played depends on the power balance within the soul.

It is important to remember not to infer too much where Plato is silent; we may have to accept that the *Republic* covered much ground but cannot give answers to all our questions. There is nothing wrong with attempting to answer them ourselves, of course, as long as we remember that they are our answers, not Plato's. It is possible that the difficulties in finding a consistent interpretation of Plato's soul are due to inconsistencies in Plato's theory, our own inability to properly appreciate the text, or

³⁹ *Rep.* 437d7-e7.

⁴⁰ *Rep.* 573d6-7.

⁴¹ *Rep.* 573c8-9.

that some arguments were offered to cajole or persuade the conventionally minded rather than further Plato's philosophical argument. This may be shown in the contrast between Books IV and VIII-IX: Book IV explains Plato's psychological theory which provides the basis for his argument that the just soul is happiest, but the cases of the unjust men in Books VIII and IX may have acted as more persuasive evidence in favour of the just life. It is important to remember that a primary function of the *Republic* was to demonstrate that it really is to our advantage to be just. Plato may have been more concerned with that in all possible ways open to him, than in ensuring that they were consistent.

6. The Spirit

I have up to this point neglected the unique role that Spirit plays in the soul, and as the Combination Model above shows, its part is of the utmost importance to the tripartite soul. As stated above, the spirited part is the seat of emotions such as anger, indignation and courage, and is said to be concerned with honour and the image of the individual. It is the part of the soul that benefits from the comprehensive educational programme described in Book III. Spirit does not recognise and desire the good in the same way as Reason, but can be trained to aspire to the good. Plato says that ‘it is the energy and initiative[thumos] in their nature that may make them uncivilised...if you treat it properly it should make them brave, but if you overstrain it, it turns them tough and uncouth, as you would expect’⁴². When the Spirit is exercised and develops to the right degree it supports the rule of Reason in the soul and the soul is therefore just. And when Spirit supports Desire the soul is unjust. In other words, a ‘proper adjustment produce[s] a character that is self-controlled and brave...and maladjustment one that is cowardly and crude’⁴³. So when Spirit isn’t cultivated by education it sides with Desire and rules by brute force; ‘he becomes an unintelligent philistine, with no use for reasoned discussion, and an animal addiction to settle everything by brute force’⁴⁴. So when Spirit is untrained it rules by force with Desire, and when it is trained it supports the conclusions of the ‘reasoned discussion’ of Reason as ruler. Plato’s discussion of the possible outcomes of the trained or untrained Spirit also supports the theory that the just and unjust souls operate in different manners, with Reason ruling through persuasion and Desire through strength. His description of Spirit also shows its pivotal role in the soul. If it is the case that the adjustment of Spirit explains the nature of the whole soul then it is clearly Spirit that Reason must communicate and develop a just soul with.

It is because the Spirit is so important that Plato devotes so much space to the education of the Spirit in Books II and III. He does not explicitly claim that early

⁴² *Rep.* 410d6-9.

⁴³ *Rep.* 411a3-6.

⁴⁴ *Rep.* 411d7-e1.

education is for the thumos alone, but he does make statements that suggest this. When explaining his definition of courage as the special virtue of the Auxiliary class in his city-state he says:

Our city is therefore brave too in virtue of a part of itself. That part retains in all circumstances the power to judge, on the basis laid down by our lawgiver in its education, what and what sort of things are to be feared.⁴⁵

I will discuss this definition of courage in the following chapter, but for the moment what is interesting is that the auxiliaries are able to be courageous because of the education of the 'lawgiver'. This education of the spirited part is also attested to in Book IV, when Plato is trying to distinguish Spirit from Reason in the soul. Here he claims that children 'are full of spirit as soon as they're born; but some never seem to acquire any degree of reason and most of them only at a late stage'⁴⁶. This also shows that, as the reason doesn't develop until later, the educational programme discussed in Books II and III are designed for the development of the Spirit; As Angela Hobbs says: 'the fact that the thumos is present before reason has fully developed makes it a key player in early emotional training'⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ *Rep.* 429b8-c2.

⁴⁶ *Rep.* 441a9-b1.

⁴⁷ Hobbs, A., *Plato and the Hero*, p.58-9.

7. The Immortal Soul

The greater part of this chapter has been devoted to the discussion of the soul in Book IV of the *Republic*. However, the issue of the soul's immortality is not broached at this point but in Book X. Given the lengthy arguments in Book IV to convince us of the tripartite nature of the soul, it is somewhat surprising to find that this does not describe the soul's 'true nature'⁴⁸. The soul's 'true nature' is in fact simpler than the discussion of the tripartite soul would have us believe; the soul is unitary in its genuine form. Is Plato changing his mind about the theory he has spent so much time arguing for? It is perhaps more plausible to suggest that the tripartite soul accurately depicts what he believes to compose the mortal soul, whereas what will live on is simply the rational part. This leads to the further problem of how this change occurs, and in what way the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul are lost on death.

So why have these two sections of the *Republic* appeared so contradictory to one another? Once he thinks he has argued for the immortality of the soul he then claims:

Nor should we believe, either, that in its essential nature the soul is diverse and variable and full of internal conflicts...we were thinking just now of the soul as composed of a number of parts which do not fit perfectly together. In that case it could hardly be immortal.⁴⁹

The idea here is that anything that is composite can in principle be taken apart, therefore it cannot be immortal in the sense of being indestructible. So it appears that the tripartite soul that the psychological and political structure is based on is thus only concerned with the finite mortal life; the tripartite structure does not apply to the immortal 'real self'. Does this then mean that the virtues as described in relation to the parts of the soul do not exist in the immortal soul, or that we must understand them in a different way? For the greater part of the *Republic* the virtues have been so closely entwined with the tripartite model that it difficult to appreciate what this will mean for the immortal soul.

⁴⁸ *Rep.* 612a3.

⁴⁹ *Rep.* 611b1-6.

The initial problem when attempting to unravel this apparent difficulty is how we are to understand the change that the soul undergoes on the death of the individual. I will consider two possible interpretations that have at least some support in the *Republic* or other relevant works. Firstly I will examine the idea that the change from mortal to immortal requires two parts of the soul – Desire and Spirit – to somehow disappear on death. In this case the tripartite soul could then be considered an accurate description of the mortal soul, but the immortal soul would be what is left after it sheds ‘all the rocks and shells which...encrust it in wild and earthly profusion’. The relevant section in the *Republic* runs from 611a10-612a6, the most relevant passages are:

[1] We have described truly enough the soul as we at present see it. But we see it in a state like that of Glaucus the sea-god, and its original nature is as difficult to see as his was after long immersion had broken and worn away and deformed his limbs, and covered him with shells and seaweed and rock, till he looked more like a monster than what he really was. This is the sort of state we see the soul reduced to by countless evils.⁵⁰

And,

[2] Think how its[the soul's] kinship with the divine and immortal and eternal makes it long to associate with them and apprehend them; think what it might become if it followed this impulse whole-heartedly and was lifted by it out of the sea in which it is now submerged, and if it shed all the rocks and shells which, because it feeds on the earthly things that men think bring happiness, encrust it in wild and earthly profusion.⁵¹

The simplicity of this interpretation is perhaps what gives it its appeal. If the soul is complex when housed in a living mortal but simple after death then the parts which are not characterised by the love of knowledge that we can see in [2] characterises the true soul will somehow disappear on death. These parts are of course Desire and Spirit. The two descriptions of the soul are then consistent with one another and can be examined separately for what we can learn about the mortal or the immortal soul.

⁵⁰ *Rep.* 611c6-d6.

⁵¹ *Rep.* 611e1-612a2.

The problem with this interpretation is perhaps just as simple. Plato persistently says in many of his dialogues that the soul is immortal, and more importantly, argues for it immediately before the section being considered. If the soul is immortal then in what way could two thirds of it be mortal? Given that Plato says these two parts are considerably bigger than their more rational companion then would he have really argued that *the soul* is immortal when what he really meant was a small part of it is immortal? As T.M.Robinson says in his article 'Soul and Immortality in Republic X' regarding the description of Glaucus the sea-god:

to call these unwelcome accretion the two 'lower' parts of the soul, however, seems to me less plausible than to see them as blemishes necessarily resulting from any association with the body and the bodily.⁵²

Another problem with the idea that the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul somehow dissipate on death is that there would be no point in punishment after death if only the reasoning part of the soul survived. The lower parts of the soul would have been the parts that motivated immoral behaviour that would deserve punishment but if they no longer exist then to what extent can the immortal soul be considered responsible for the mortal soul's actions? These problems can be defused with a different understanding of what happens when a person dies which I will discuss next.

The second interpretation I will consider takes into account this point made by Robinson that we can gain a more plausible account of the immortal soul by considering how it is affected by being embodied. This is the idea that perhaps Plato meant that the whole soul somehow persists after death. This, in turn, could be understood in a further two ways: that the whole soul persists in the sense that the Reason, Spirit and Appetite persist, or that the whole soul persists but as it is no longer embodied it is not complicated (i.e. made complex) by conflicting desires. The first of these is clear enough and needs no further explanation, the second I will explain further below. The evidence for such a view is unfortunately not found in the

⁵² Robinson, T.M., 'Soul and Immortality in Republic X', p.147.

Republic, but in the *Phaedrus*. In that dialogue Socrates likens the soul to a charioteer and his horses:

To begin with, our driver is in charge of a pair of horses; second, one of his horses is beautiful and good and from stock of the same sort, while the other is opposite and has the opposite sort of bloodline.⁵³

Later he informs us what these horses and the charioteer are representing:

The horse that is on the right...is a lover of honour with modesty and self-control; companion to true glory, he needs no whip, and is guided by verbal commands alone. The other horse is a...companion to wild beasts and indecency, he is shaggy around the ears – deaf – and just barely yields to horsewhip and goad combined.⁵⁴

This description of the soul as a charioteer and horses is clearly a reference to the tripartite soul of the *Republic*, with the charioteer as Reason, and the horses as Spirit and Desire. While the ordinary people have difficulty controlling their horses, at least one of which is wild, the gods have no difficulty as their horses and charioteer are themselves all good, and can ascend to heaven without releasing the horses. This seems to imply that the soul in its three parts can potentially ascend to heaven as long as all three parts are 'good'. This is not the case in the *Phaedrus* however, and it is unlikely that it was intended to be in the *Republic* either. Even those of a philosophic nature in the *Phaedrus*, who have a well-disciplined Spirit and are able to control the horses well enough to experience as much as is possible of the truth, cannot actually gain access to that place while tied to the wild horse of desire. This evidence is not enough therefore to distract us from the quite explicit claim in the *Republic* that the immortal soul cannot be composed of parts. If the whole soul cannot persist in its tripartite nature then in what other way can the whole soul live on?

This interpretation places great importance on the effect the body can have on the nature of the soul. C.D.C.Reeve argues that any interpretation of the section on the

⁵³ *Phaedrus* 246b1-4.

⁵⁴ *Phaedrus* 253d4-e5.

immortality of the soul must include an understanding of how the soul is affected by its integration with the body. He says:

appetitive and spirited desires are the result of embodiment – the “maiming” referred to at 611c1-2. A disembodied psyche would not need food, drink, sex, money, or the approval of other.⁵⁵

Glaucus the sea-god has been ‘broken and worn away and deformed’ by mortal desires. This deformation is a consequence of having desires within the soul that are focussed on the transitory realm that the body inhabits rather than the reality of the forms. These desires for things concerned with the body or with the approval of others can conflict with the proper desire for knowledge which is the basis for the argument for the division of the soul in Book IV. Thus the existence of the, to some extent, unavoidable mortal desires leads to us not seeing its true nature, and as Plato says in [2] above, the soul being separated from these ‘earthly things’ means that its appearance is no longer deformed by association. Plato does use the fact that we can have conflicting desires to argue for the tripartite soul, so if we no longer had the kind of desires that would conflict (i.e. appetitive vs. rational) there would be no reason to think that the soul was anything other than unitary.

If it is the case that the soul has appetitive and spirited parts in virtue of having appetitive and spirited desires, parts which somehow merge into the rest of the soul when those desires disappear, then the soul could be understood as unitary during life but with desires that can be grouped together. This gives a different light to the idea of the soul having parts; the parts in this case would not literally exist, but would be a convenient way of describing how the soul has inclination that can be generalised about. Although this would give Plato’s tripartite and immortal soul a more modern explanation, and provide a good explanation of how the soul can be complex during life and unitary after death, it does not seem to fit wholeheartedly with the character of Plato’s theory. When discussing the tripartite soul he does appear to genuinely mean ‘parts’ and not simply be using the term to simplify his theory. However, I find it

⁵⁵ Reeve, C.D.C., *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato's Republic*, p.161.

difficult to dismiss this interpretation altogether as it does provide us with a more plausible understanding of the tripartite soul.

Plato himself does not appear to be always confident about the tripartite theory or the idea that the soul will be unitary after death. At the end of the section devoted to the immortal soul Plato says that after death 'one really could see its [the soul's] true nature, composite or single or whatever it may be'⁵⁶. And in the *Phaedrus* he says:

To describe what the soul actually is would require a very long account, altogether a task for a god in every way; but to say what it is like is humanly possible and takes less time. So let us do the second in our speech.⁵⁷

Perhaps then we should take these descriptions of the soul with a pinch of salt. If the descriptions we find of the soul in the *Republic*, both mortal and immortal, are views that Plato was not completely sure of that might mean that he was aware of the inconsistencies but not sure of which theory was wrong. It could also mean he was using the theory of the tripartite soul in order to explain and argue for certain other opinions, such as the possibility of akrasia and the foundations of his Republic.

⁵⁶ *Rep.* 612a3-4.

⁵⁷ *Phaedrus* 246a2-5.

8. Conclusion

The arguments given for the tripartition of the soul in Book IV are interesting and challenging but are, I think, flawed. However, the theory that the soul has three parts is still a very psychologically appealing one. Positing this theory has provided Plato with a means to express the more complex psychological activities that the early dialogues do not accept, such as the direct influence of our irrational desires or emotional feelings on our behaviour. The spirited part of the soul has been shown to have a pivotal role in this new soul, a role that will help us to understand Plato's ideas about courage and fear in the following two chapters.

Chapter 5: Republic 2 – Virtue

Contents

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1. Introduction

In this chapter I will look at courage in the *Republic*. Plato's interpretation of courage in the *Republic* is importantly different from those discussed in the *Laches* and the *Protagoras*, and the difference between them is informative to the debate concerning the development of Platonic thought. In the *Laches* and the *Protagoras* we see definitions of courage such as courage as knowledge and courage as endurance, in the *Republic* Plato offers us a combination of these two ideas. In the *Republic* courage becomes knowledge of what should be feared and the ability to stick to that knowledge and act in accordance with it; knowledge mixed with a kind of endurance. However, Plato does not simply provide us with one definition of courage in the *Republic*. The Auxiliaries and the Guardians exhibit a different virtue due to the difference in their souls and therefore provide two conceptions of the virtue of courage. The courage of the Guardians is closer to the virtue as understood in the early dialogues, or what could be referred to as the Socratic idea of the virtues as knowledge without emotion. In this chapter I will look at the role of education in the development of courage; the issue of having two definitions of courage – how they relate and to what extent they help us to answer a familiar problem for courage; introduce the idea that for Plato the virtues are beneficial to the agent; and, consider why Plato believed at this stage that courageous behaviour is always good and finally examine whether this is a plausible view.

2. Courage in Republic IV

The main definition of courage in the *Republic* is given in Book four:

We call an individual brave because of this part of him, I think, when he has a spirit which holds fast to the orders of reason about what he ought or ought not to fear, in spite of pleasure and pain.¹

What is initially striking about such a definition is the absence of knowledge as a key element. The picture we are given of the virtues in the *Laches* and *Protagoras* is what has been called an intellectual view of virtue. The definition given by Nicias in the *Laches* and by Socrates in the *Protagoras* is one which considers courage to be a kind of knowledge – in that case, knowledge of what should be feared. As we shall see in the section below, knowledge is still the important element in the courage of the philosopher-kings but the demotic virtue of the Auxiliaries does not require it.

How character develops is an important element in the *Republic*, and one that Plato gives much emphasis. In Book III Plato discusses the role of early education in the ethical development of people's personalities. It is this early education that is so influential on the development of courage in the Auxiliary class. The latter stages of education outlined in the *Republic* are only for those who are preparing to be Guardians and so will not be experienced by the class that is supposed to be the *guard dogs* of the state. In order to understand the courage of the Auxiliary further, I will next look at the comprehensive system of education set up to prepare them for their role in the state.

¹ *Republic*. 442b11-c3.

3. Education

It is to Plato's credit that he was the first to appreciate the influence of early education on the future adult within a psychological and philosophical theory. At the beginning of his discussion of this issue he says that:

the first step, as you know, is always what matters most, particularly when we are dealing with those who are young and tender. That is the time when they are easily moulded and when any impression we choose to make leaves a permanent mark.²

It is due to the strength of this belief that Plato sets forward such stringent proposals for education in his *Republic*. He strongly believed that children should not be subjected to images of vicious or disgraceful behaviour for fear that they will emulate it. It could be argued that in this he goes far too far, and that what matters to the development of the individual is that the people closest to them provide them with positive models to imitate. However, his discussion of this topic, particularly his various references to Achilles, help to illuminate his concept of the spirit, his definition of courage, and also his metaphysical and moral theory as a whole.

To Plato, Achilles is the embodiment of the Spirit out of control. The fighting men of his *Republic* will be resolute and courageous, but subservient to the rulers, who have more wisdom than them, and always do what they have been taught is right. Achilles is insolent, wilful, self-obsessed and proud, more concerned with his 'honour' than with the good of the army and generals for which he fights:

the message is plain: Achilles' thumos is in a state of complete insubordination to reason and in consequence he displays nothing but arrogance towards his rightful masters, whether mortal or divine.³

² *Rep.* 377a11-b2.

³ Hobbs, A., *Plato and the Hero*, p.202. This seems to be how Plato interprets Achilles' behaviour. It is a different question whether Plato's interpretation of the character as depicted in the *Iliad* is correct. For a discussion of the Homeric Achilles see A. MacIntyre, 'After Virtue', London, Duckworth, 1981, p.121-30.

By disobeying Agamemnon and not fighting, he risks the loss of a nine-year war, and certainly the lives of many men. It is understandable, then, why Plato chooses Achilles as an example of how a military man ought not to behave. His attitude and behaviour show how an unruly thumos can be damaging to the mental state of the individual and the people that rely on them. Plato may at times misrepresent Achilles' actions to enforce his point, but given his status in the Greek World, Plato's criticisms of him articulately show what attitudes would need to be changed to achieve Plato's *Republic*.

The warrior Achilles provides the perfect example of how children should not develop, and Plato's choice of example reinforces the idea that this early stage of education is predominantly important for the thumos, as it is the seat of warrior-like qualities. Plato's summation of successful early education is given at 401d5-402a5:

For rhythm and harmony penetrate deeply into the mind and take a most powerful hold on it, and, if education is good, bring and impart grace and beauty, if it is bad, the reverse. And moreover the proper training we propose to give will make a man quick to perceive the shortcomings of works of art or nature, whose ugliness he will rightly dislike; anything beautiful he will welcome gladly, will make it his own and so grow in true goodness of character; anything ugly he will rightly condemn and dislike. Even when he is still young and cannot understand the reason for so doing, while when reason comes he will recognise and welcome her as a familiar friend because of his upbringing.⁴

Christopher Gill has described this kind of early education as the development of pre-reflective understanding which relies on a pre-rational harmonization of the psyche that is reliant on the surrounding community to properly enforce⁵. This harmonization of the soul of the Auxiliaries and future Guardians does not depend on rational appreciation of the beautiful and the ugly, but is geared towards training the young to accept certain beliefs and to have the parallel feelings. So the courageous Auxiliaries will be trained to have correct beliefs about what should be feared, and therefore how they should behave, which should be backed up by the right emotional response to fear-inducing situations.

⁴ *Rep.* 401d5-402a5.

⁵ Gill, Christopher, 'Ethical Reflection and the Shaping of Character: Plato's Republic and Stoicism'.

The education of the Guardians discussed in Book VII has a different focus to the education discussed in Book III. The Guardians are trained to witness the reality of how things really are. The similes of the sun and the cave, and the analogy of the divided line describe the truths that the philosopher will be able to comprehend and how they will grow to know such truths. Having such knowledge of how things really are will mean that they will never err in their assessment of what is the good, and therefore of what is best for them. I will consider the ethical difference between the Guardians and the Auxiliaries below, and the emotional difference between them in the following chapter.

4. Courage as beneficial or useful to the agent

To return to Achilles, we may feel more sympathetic towards him than Plato does; considering his importance to the Greeks, Agamemnon is perhaps unwise in treating him so badly. Nevertheless, Achilles does appear to behave recklessly in a time of war, but it must be remembered that he is labouring under the pressure of a destiny he is unable to avoid, that promises his early death. So Achilles does not only exemplify the case of the Spirit running amok, but he also exhibits the tragic nature of the Homeric world, a nature that is essentially anti-Platonic. For Homer, and for Achilles, what is noble, what brings one *arete*, is not always beneficial to the individual; Achilles may fight and win honour in battle, but he will die young and live in the 'hateful chambers of decay that fill the gods themselves with horror'⁶. This distinction between what action is in the best interest of the character personally and what is morally the right thing to do can be seen as characteristic of Homer and the tragedians. We may not understand Agamemnon's actions when he sacrifices Iphigenia for a fair wind but the Greeks at the time would have appreciated the idea that this is what he should have done for the sake of the city. It is, however, clearly not in his own interests to sacrifice the life of his beloved daughter. For Plato's ethics and the conception of the just soul, and for courage in particular, this cannot be the case, he must deny the possibility of the tragic; in other words he must deny that it is possible to do what is morally best and suffer for it as a personal loss⁷.

Plato clearly cannot accept the tragic point of view. The whole message of the *Republic* is that it is in our interest to be virtuous. The good man therefore cannot meet with real disaster. Plato's grand metaphysical thesis of the permanence of the Forms and the transience of the physical world supports his stance against the tragic, and gives fluency to his psychological and ethical theories. Plato leaves his metaphysical foundations to the second half of the *Republic*, but it is really this section that forms the foundation for the entire work. When Plato is asked if those

⁶ Homer, *Iliad*, Book XX, 64.

⁷ It could be argued that the death of Socrates exhibits both these things, but Socrates says that he does not think that death is harmful to him, see *Phaedo* 62+.

who ‘love looking and listening’⁸ can be distinguished from ‘philosophers in the true sense’⁹ as described by Plato, he replies:

Then what about the man who recognises the existence of beautiful things, but does not believe in beauty itself, and is incapable of following anyone who wants to lead him to a knowledge of it? Is he awake, or merely dreaming? Look; isn’t the dreaming simply the confusion between a resemblance and the reality which it resembles, whether the dreamer be asleep or awake?...Then what about the man who, contrariwise, believes in beauty itself and can see both it and the particular things and that in which they share...we can rightly call his state of mind one of knowledge; and that of the other man, who holds opinions only, opinions.¹⁰

So the thing itself, in other words the Form, is distinguished from the particular things that we perceive, and being able to distinguish between them is the difference between having knowledge and opinion. I will not discuss the argument presented at 477-479 and the connection Plato makes between his epistemology and his metaphysics, but rather, as stated above, the connection between the latter and his ethical theory.

It is the Form of the Good that provides Plato with his explanation of why the tragic view in Homer is not correct, as:

the good therefore may be said to be the source not only of the intelligibility of the objects of knowledge, but also of their being and reality, but is beyond it, and superior to it in dignity and power.¹¹

So the ultimate cause of all particular good things and all particular beautiful or noble things is the Form of the Good. An act could not partake of what is noble without also partaking of what is good. Plato gives further support for this idea at 505b1-4:

do you think there’s any point in possessing anything if it’s no good? Is there any point in having all other forms of knowledge without that of the good, and so lacking knowledge about what is good and valuable.¹²

⁸ *Rep.* 476b5.

⁹ *Rep.* 476b2.

¹⁰ *Rep.* 476c2-d8.

¹¹ *Rep.* 509b6-9.

¹² *Rep.* 505b1-4.

Desmond Lee's translation here translates 'kalos' as 'valuable', but the meaning is clear; the Form of the Good enables us to have knowledge of what is both 'good' and 'valuable', or noble. However, perhaps more conclusive evidence comes earlier, in Book V, when Plato is dismissing the notion that women exercising naked will be ridiculous when he says that 'it is and will always be the best of sayings that what benefits us is fair, what harms us shameful'¹³.

It is this denial of the tragic act that provides Plato with support for his concept of virtue in the *Republic* and in particular for his conception of courage as doing what you know should not be feared. This is because if doing what is courageous is both the right thing to do and beneficial to the agent then why should it be feared? But is Plato correct in his belief that doing the right things is always beneficial to the agent, particularly when we are discussing a virtue such as courage? Courage is typically exemplified in situations where there could be loss of life, and how could someone who dies doing a courageous act be benefited? Given Plato's psychological model discussed in the previous chapter it is clear why courage would be *good* for someone. To briefly summarise, the preferred model of the tripartite soul discussed above shows that the spirited part of the soul, and courage as its primary characteristic, is very important for having a unified soul; it is the spirited part of the soul that acts as a kind of intermediary between the reasoning and desiring parts and determines which part rules by lending its substantial power to either of the two other parts. If the spirited part is properly trained then it will side with the rational part and the soul as a whole will be courageous, if on the other hand it has been given poor training and example it will side with desire and the soul will be weak-willed and insatiable. We can see then that the state of the spirited part is of primary importance to the state of the entire soul.

An understanding of this centrally important role of courage also enables us to appreciate the relevance of having a unified soul. A particularly Socratic element in

¹³ *Rep.* 457b4-5.

the *Republic* is the idea that our true selves are represented by our rational part, as we see when Plato discusses the separation of the soul with the body after death¹⁴. If our rational parts are our true selves then it is only by acting in accordance with our rational element that we are able to really be ourselves. If we are only ourselves when we are able to act in accordance with what we believe then courage is relevant to our welfare in a special way – it is only by being courageous that we can unify our souls and be who we really are, or act in accordance with how we genuinely think about things. My analysis in the previous chapter shows how important courage is to the psychological health of the individual, and that Plato had an appreciation of the relevance of the virtue of courage.

In the *Republic* Plato divides things that are good into three categories. The three categories are:

(i). Do you agree that there is one kind of good which we want to have not with a view to its consequences but because we welcome it for its own sake? For example, enjoyment or pleasure, so long as pleasure brings no harm and its only result is the enjoyment it brings.¹⁵

(ii). And is there not another kind of good which we desire, both for itself and its consequences? Wisdom and sight and health, for example, we welcome on both grounds.¹⁶

(iii). And there is a third category of good, which includes exercise and medical treatment and earning one's living as a doctor or otherwise. All these we should regard as painful but beneficial; we should not choose them for their own sake but for the wages and other benefits we get from them.¹⁷

(i) is the category of things that are good in themselves but not as a means to anything else; (ii) is the category of things that are both good in themselves and for their consequences; (iii) is the category of things that are only good for their consequences. Courage to Plato, like the specified virtue of wisdom, would be included in category

¹⁴ See Chapter 4, Section 7.

¹⁵ *Rep.* 357b7-11.

¹⁶ *Rep.* 357c1-3.

¹⁷ *Rep.* 357c5-d1.

ii) – what is good for us in itself and also for its consequences¹⁸. But maybe courage isn't something that will always be a good for us in either the short-term or the long-term. Unlike Plato, many would think that courage is not something which is necessarily beneficial to us in some way (either in itself or for its consequences) but that it is a quality that is usually useful to us and often beneficial but not necessarily so. It may be useful to us in the sense that sometimes we need to show courage in order to get what we want, as being courageous may be a useful trait when we need to stand up for ourselves to our Boss or even the schoolyard bully. However it is something that may also get us into more serious trouble. A courageous person may sometimes find themselves in dangerous or even life threatening situations as a result of their courage, which will not be of benefit to them.

¹⁸ Plato's explanation of why we should want courage for its own sake is provided by the fundamental importance of the virtues to a healthy soul.

5. The Virtue of the Philosopher-Kings

In Book IV we get the argument for the division of the soul into three parts, and the ideal dynamic between these parts:

The reason ought to rule, having the wisdom and foresight to act for the whole, and the spirit ought to obey and support it...when these two elements have been so brought up, and trained and educated to their proper function, they must be put in charge of appetite, which forms the greater part of each man's make-up and is naturally insatiable.¹⁹

However, it is to Book IX that we must look to discover how the different parts relate to different personality types. Each part is said to have its own particular pleasure, 'and similarly its own desires and its own governing principles'²⁰. The soul is therefore dominated by one of the three parts and is motivated by the particular pleasure of that part:

That is why we divide men into three basic types, according to whether their motive is knowledge, success or gain.²¹

As a result of these ideas we come to a familiar problem in Plato. If the virtuous soul is, as described above, one where Reason rules, why is anyone other than those ruled by Reason able to be virtuous, as they do seem to be? This is a particularly pertinent question for the virtue of courage as it is the only one of the virtues originally said to reside in a single part and a part of the soul other than Reason – the Spirit.

The Philosopher rulers exemplify proper Platonic virtue. After a lengthy education they will necessarily have all four cardinal virtues: justice, courage, temperance and wisdom. Is it then the case that the rulers and only the rulers can be fully virtuous? It is certainly the case that the rulers have something that the other citizens do not have; they are the gold in the city, a metaphor that shows their value in the state. Given that the discussion of the early education also involves the Auxiliary class, it is to the role and education described in Books VI and VII that are most informative about the

¹⁹ *Rep.* 441e4-442a8.

²⁰ *Rep.* 580d9-10.

²¹ *Rep.* 581c3-4.

unique status and abilities of the rulers – as this section discusses them alone. The simile of the cave and the analogy of the divided line show us that the rulers alone have access to knowledge of what really is, instead of belief of the transitory, sensory world around us. As the other classes are unable to grasp the existence of the forms they are unable to have knowledge as one cannot have knowledge of what is constantly in flux. It is this knowledge that makes the rulers special and guarantees that they will always behave virtuously:

We know that if a man's desires set strongly in one direction, they are correspondingly less strong in other directions, like a stream whose water has been diverted into another channel...So when the current of a man's desires flows towards the acquisition of knowledge and similar activities, his pleasure will be in things purely of the mind, and physical pleasures will pass him by – that is if he is a genuine philosopher and not a sham.²²

The essential difference between the Philosopher Rulers and the Auxiliaries and Producers is thus that only the Rulers can have knowledge. This being the case, does it follow that only the Rulers can have virtue, in other words, is knowledge a necessary component of virtue for Plato in the *Republic*? This question will have a considerable impact on the virtue of courage as it is supposed to be the characteristic virtue of the Auxiliary class, who are capable of belief but not knowledge. In Book IV Socrates says of the definition of courage given there that if you 'accept it as a definition of the ordinary citizen's courage'²³ then you won't be far wrong. The definition of courage in Book IV does not include knowledge so should we conclude that the ordinary citizen's virtue could be based on belief, whereas the virtue of the Rulers is based on knowledge?

Much of the recent work on virtue in the *Republic* has focussed on the idea of demotic virtue – the virtue of the lower classes. In the more interesting articles that have been written on this matter – by David Sachs, Richard Kraut and George Klosko²⁴ – there has been a tendency to disregard some of the key elements of the *Republic* and give

²² *Rep.* 485d6-e2.

²³ *Rep.* 430c3.

²⁴ Sachs, David, 'A Fallacy in Plato's Republic'; Kraut, Richard, 'Reason and Justice in Plato's Republic'; Klosko, George, 'Demotike Arete in the Republic'.

too much attention to the modern distinction between normativity and non-normativity, which does not appear in the text. Whilst finding intriguing ways of clarifying the role of virtue in the *Republic* these three articles are all guilty of insulating their views from the influence of the Platonic belief that what really distinguishes the rulers from the rest of the population is that they have knowledge.

Kraut and Klosko have approached the question of an ordinary kind of virtue by thinking directly about how that would work in the tripartite soul. Inspired by Sachs' article which claims that the tripartite soul does not discount the possibility of the internally virtuous person doing unjust acts – because the soul of the virtuous person is ruled by reason and he does not believe that a rational person would necessarily always do the right thing – Kraut considers two different ways in which the soul could be said to be ruled. Kraut argued that the soul could be dominated normatively or non-normatively. Non-normative rule would be where the dominating part of the soul rules purely in virtue of that part being in control; in other words, reason would rule over appetite 'if a person is faced with a choice between a and b, has an appetite to do b, but decides to do a, then reason rules over appetite if he does a'²⁵. This kind of rule would be exemplified by strong-willed behaviour – where you desire to do one thing but are able to go against that because of your beliefs. Normative rule is when the dominating part of the soul rules in virtue of the values of that part of the soul. In this case, reason would rule if a person wanted to and decided to do the morally right thing, appetite would rule if a person were driven by their desires, and spirit would rule if driven by honour. Although this distinction does generate some interesting points we should be wary of whatever conclusions are drawn from this analysis as the distinction between normative and non-normative rule is not made explicit in the *Republic*. Plato does not discuss different ways which reason could be said to rule the soul of the just man, we are simply expected to understand the idea of a part of the soul ruling the others. Such a distinction may be used to study the notion of a tripartite soul but it will not help us to understand what Plato meant in his theory of one.

²⁵ Kraut, Richard, 'Reason and Justice in Plato's Republic', *Exegesis and Argument* p. 208.

There is enough in the *Republic* to generate a reasonably secure understanding of the dynamics of the tripartite soul in relation to virtue. The thorny issue of ordinary virtue as opposed to the virtue of the rulers is less in need of modern distinctions than one would think given recent research. The Philosopher Rulers have virtue proper, virtue based on knowledge and they can thus be depended on to behave correctly on all occasions. The Auxiliaries, as Plato says in Book IV, have ‘ordinary citizen’s courage’, which is presumably based on the correct belief instilled in them from the Rulers; they are able to ‘safely keep the opinion inculcated by the established education about what things and what kind of things are to be feared’²⁶. When the Auxiliaries do something courageous they could have the correct organisation of the soul – reason is in control of the soul and spirit is obeying the dictates of Reason and controlling the appetites – and the only way of distinguishing them is that they do not have knowledge. However, the Auxiliaries cannot be relied upon to always act appropriately as the Rulers can be as they are without the guarantor of knowledge. Even the most thoroughly inculcated belief may be lost under pressure²⁷.

Plato gives support to two different definitions of courage in the *Republic*, the first of the Auxiliary class and the second of the Guardians. The Guardians are those who can always be relied upon to do the right things as they have fail-safe knowledge of what really should be feared. The Auxiliaries on the other hand have only belief. The relevant difference between the Guardians and the Auxiliaries could then be that the courage that is based on knowledge is always reliable, whereas the courage that is based on belief is not. However, it could be argued, contrary to this idea, that the difference between the Guardians and the Auxiliaries is not that the Auxiliaries will sometimes fail to do the courageous thing but simply that their type of courage is based on belief rather than knowledge. But, even though it is true that the essential difference between the Guardians and the Auxiliaries is an epistemological one, given the importance laid on knowledge in the *Republic* this difference must surely amount to something significant. If the difference did not have any impact whatsoever on the internal experience of the agent or their behaviour then why should we take knowledge so seriously? Plato says that knowledge is something reliable and that

²⁶ *Republic* 429c8-10.

²⁷ See *Meno* 97-98.

belief is not, so perhaps we can assume from this that the courage of the Guardians is consistent, whereas the Auxiliaries will not always be able to act on their belief of what is truly to be feared, and will sometimes abandon their beliefs under pressure.

Gill believes that one way of understanding the difference between the knowledge of the Guardians and the beliefs of the Auxiliaries is in terms of justification:

The beliefs of the well-trained auxiliary (such as, that under appropriate circumstances death is not to be feared) are justified because they form part of a structured set of beliefs that she has been habituated to regard as serious and worthy of respect, the coherence of which she (pre-reflectively) recognizes. The philosopher retains these beliefs, but on the basis of an additional justification, provided by the systematization and grounding of such belief through dialectical analysis, which converts that into understanding *why*.²⁸

It is precisely this difference – that of the Guardians understanding *why* – that turns the belief of the Auxiliaries into knowledge for the Guardians and makes their cognitive state so reliable. If a child were to know why it were so important that they do not go out late on their own then they would I imagine be not so keen to do so. When we know the *why* of things we can see for ourselves the true importance of certain rules or explanations and we are much more likely to act accordingly. Similarly, the Guardians know that virtue is always beneficial and therefore will never waver in their resolve to be virtuous.

What will this mean for the structure of the soul? One possible explanation is that while both the Guardians and the Auxiliaries are ruled by Reason, and helped by Spirit, the control enforced over the Appetite is different. In a soul where the rational part is in full control the mortal appetites are greatly weakened and so being virtuous is no longer a conflict between different desires but a genuine harmony of the parts of the soul. This picture is perhaps somewhat similar to the virtuous man as conceived by Socrates in the early dialogues – a man whose rationality is in full control and who

²⁸ Gill, Christopher, 'Ethical Reflection and the Shaping of Character: Plato's Republic and Stoicism', p.201.

receives no distraction from the interference of desires or emotions²⁹. The Auxiliary will also have a soul that is ruled by reason in that the correct beliefs will have been installed by the system of education. This system of education will also ensure that they will have a properly developed thumos which will enable them to resist the temptations laid down by the appetitive part of the soul, rather than experience the quietening of the Appetite that the truly virtuous man will witness.

Given this picture of the souls of the Guardian and the Auxiliary the difference between their types of courage is evident. The Guardians undergo the early education as a preliminary to the intellectual training they will later go through. This training strengthens their reasoning part to such an extent that they comprehend the reality of the forms and gain knowledge of the good. This knowledge of the *why* means that they achieve true harmony in their souls and no longer need to struggle with conflict between the parts. The Auxiliaries, on the other hand, have not developed the rational part of their soul but instead have installed the correct beliefs in it; the focus in the auxiliaries is on their *thumos*, which gives it the strength to resist the appetite³⁰. The thumos then does not play such an important role for the Guardians as it does for the Auxiliaries. These organisations of the two kinds of virtuous souls shows how the philosopher is closer to the ideal that will be reached on death, as they have succeeded in controlling and quietening the mortal desires and affects of the appetite and the spirit as discussed in the previous chapter.

The Auxiliaries receive the education discussed in Section 3 above whereas the philosopher rulers have both the education outlined in Book III but also the far more extensive version in Books VI and VII. Given that Plato does describe the courage defined in Book IV as courage we should take him at his word and assume that it is. However, the courage of the philosopher rulers is clearly different from that of the Auxiliaries. We are therefore presented with two, not necessarily contradictory,

²⁹ It may be the case that Plato does include the emotion of fear in his definition of the virtue of courage, but I will consider in the next chapter to what extent this 'fear' can really be considered an emotion.

³⁰ I do not mean to suggest that the only difference between knowledge and true belief is an appreciation of why something is the case, but just that this is a difference.

courage virtues in the *Republic*, that are differentiated by the possession of either knowledge or belief of what should be feared.

The problems that beset these two definitions are both shared and unique. A problem that both definitions must face is the challenge that maybe not all courageous actions need be good actions – perhaps bad courage is possible – and one that I will look at in the next section. Also, the courage of the philosopher rulers appears to be without passion or emotion to such an extent it may make the whole idea of the purest kind of courage impossible. I will consider this problem in the following chapter on the emotions in the *Republic* and other Platonic dialogues. Fortunately they may also be some advantage to the dual-definition offered in the *Republic* in that it may help us to understand the issue of supererogation with regard to courage. This I will also look at in the next section.

6. Courage Continued

Plato evidently believed that courage cannot be misused. This poses problems however, because it may seem obvious that there is such a thing as bad courage. The idea that the other three virtues named in the *Republic* – justice, temperance and wisdom – are good things is thus more acceptable than the idea that courage must always be good. What of the cool-headed burglar who must scale a dangerously high wall and avoid the vicious dogs in order to get at the jewels? If this man is not exhibiting courage then how are we to describe his ability to overcome such obstacles? The idea that an act cannot count as courageous unless it is virtuous seems like an arbitrary stipulation when we consider such examples. Outwardly the only difference is that Platonic courage is a good state of the soul that will only lead to good acts. The courage of the burglar may also come from the rational part within him overcoming the desire to run away, even though this part has become corrupted. The burglar may also have a unified soul if his desires obey the orders of his reason and spirit, but to Plato, and perhaps to most people, the burglar is not a virtuous man.

There is also the issue of the Auxiliaries suffering under incorrect belief. It is a strange fact that two soldiers in Plato's *Republic* could have the same dynamic within their soul, behave in the same manner and act in accordance with their beliefs as to what is the most damaging action to them (i.e. by doing the alternative), but one could be acting courageously and the other not. This is due to the fact that one of the soldier's beliefs are correct and the other incorrect. If both soldiers are driven towards honour and act in accordance with what they believe to be right, the conclusion that one is courageous because he was lucky enough to be brought up with the right values whereas the other was not seems to be far too dependent on luck rather than personal moral fibre.

The Platonic idea that when one acts rationally one necessarily acts virtuously underpins the belief that courage is always a good thing in the *Republic*. In chapter 7 on the *Laws* I will show that this belief does change, and a kind of dual-understanding of courage comes into play. Perhaps Plato realised that the Achilles he so fervently

rejected as an example of virtuous behaviour in the *Republic* does have some right to be called courageous, and if this is the case perhaps courage need not always be a virtue.

Courage has presented another serious problem to the most prevalent ethical view of the recent centuries. Courage has often been thought to be something that we cannot expect from the ordinary good person – that it requires something more. This idea can be quite problematic to an ethical theory attempting to define courage as part of a general understanding of what makes someone an ethical person. For the Kantian who adheres to the belief that doing one's duty is the right thing to do how are we to understand actions that are so often considered to be beyond the call of duty? For Plato, who believes that the virtues are internal states as opposed to duties or certain kinds of behaviour, the problem of supererogation (something being beyond the call of duty) never appears; courage is never supererogatory, it is simply a part of being a good person. This means that the issue of supererogation is different from the one facing the Kantian. For Plato, and for Aristotle, ethics are not primarily deontological – it is concerned with goodness and virtue rather than duty and rights. This means that Plato or Aristotle can't have a concept of supererogation as 'going beyond duty'. A virtue ethicist who sees virtue primarily as a disposition to behave or feel in different ways can make a distinction between ordinary virtue and superhuman virtue as Aristotle does. But Plato's account of the virtues seems to leave no room for such degrees of virtuousness. In the *Republic*, the virtues are understood as certain states of the soul, and are all required for a virtuous soul and therefore a virtuous person; 'virtue is a fixed ideal which can, in principle, be achieved, but not surpassed'³¹.

Plato therefore may not have to deal with the problem of supererogation but his expectations of the rulers in his *Republic* are problematic in a different way. For Plato the virtuous person always does the virtuous act in any given situation because the virtuous act is precisely what the virtuous person does. So one cannot go beyond virtue. Plato's philosopher rulers are expected to be ideal human beings who always

³¹ *Ibid.*

do the right thing and never falter. It is perhaps over-demanding to expect any human being to behave in such a way given that we are susceptible to emotions and desires. However, Plato arguably believed that emotions and desires do not affect his ruling class – they are above such mortal affects. In the next chapter I will look at Plato's view of the emotions and consider whether such an ideal is possible or even desirable.

7. Conclusion

As we have seen in chapters 2 and 3, the early dialogues (particularly the *Laches*) focus on two definitions of courage – courage as knowledge and courage as some kind of endurance. In the *Republic* Plato's definition includes both of these ideas. Courage is knowledge of what is truly to be feared, but it is also the ability to endure and stick to this belief. The definition given in the *Republic* certainly has a few things going for it. The common modern idea that courage is simply the overcoming of fear does no work in explaining how and why some people are able to act courageously. If a woman runs into a burning building to save a child it is clear from her behaviour that she have not been prevented from action by her fear, and someone informing you of such does not help you to understand the phenomenon. Plato's definition of courage on the other hand also helps us appreciate why the courageous individual acts as she does; we can all understand how someone could be driven by a greater fear of the alternative. The necessary ability to act according to your beliefs about what is most dangerous is less self-explanatory, but the extensive coverage that Plato gives to education in the *Republic* tells us how this ability will come about.

The definition of courage that appears in Book IV based on belief rather than knowledge and intended for the Auxiliary class does not face all the same damaging problems as the definition when applied to the Rulers. The Auxiliary class is fallible and therefore may not always do the right thing, which is much more in keeping with what we know of human behaviour, whereas the Rulers will *always* act in accordance with their knowledge of what is right. The most critical problem that both types of courage face is that they are restricted to only good behaviour. Unfortunately this leaves all the examples of people behaving in ways we would commonly consider courageous but that are excluded from Plato's definition. If the stipulation that courage is always a good is simply a result of the Greek tradition then where the boundary comes is not philosophically reliable. The fact that Plato himself allows the behaviour of the mercenary in battle to be a type of courage in the *Laws* shows that this was a genuine issue for him.

The *Republic's* definition of courage includes the two definitions considered in the early dialogues – courage as knowledge and courage as endurance. By combining these two ideas the *Republic* does avoid some of the problems with each separate definition encountered in previous chapters. The two types of courage in the *Republic* – the Rulers' and the Auxiliaries' – seem to depend more on one of the separate definitions from the early dialogues. The emphasis of the Rulers' courage is certainly on knowledge – they are said to transcend the other parts of the soul to some extent. The Auxiliaries on the other hand – who never attain full knowledge – must rely on the endurance of their Spirit to enable them to stick to the beliefs that have been instilled in them. Although both endurance and knowledge are to some extent included in the Rulers' and Auxiliaries' courage, the definition of courage as knowledge of what is right plus the ability to stick to that belief cannot be properly appreciated by either of these two instantiations. It does not help us to understand what is meant by courage in the everyday world – a world that is not run like Plato's *Republic*.

However, the definition given in the *Republic* is to some extent a more successful one than the ones already considered however it still has its pitfalls. It suffers from the apparently arbitrary stipulation that bad courage does not exist – or courage put to bad ends. This also unfortunately means that if the belief of the Auxiliary is incorrect the behaviour will not be courageous, which seems incongruous to the modern reader. The definition of courage given in the *Republic* is therefore a positive progression from the early dialogues, but it has not successfully eradicated all of the problems such a definition will face.

Chapter 6: Republic 3 – The Emotions

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1. Introduction

I am taking Plato's definition of courage in the *Republic* to be when someone's soul:

has a spirit which holds fast to the orders of reason about what he ought or ought not to fear, in spite of pleasure and pain.¹

In this definition of courage fear takes an important role. This fact alone is not necessarily surprising, but it is the place that Plato gives to fear that is the cause for concern. He claims that courage is doing that which is not most to be feared, by which he means the morally wrong option. He does also recognise the existence of fear of other things, but as he believes that damage to the body is of less importance than damage to the soul, this is the fear that must be ignored. This definition raises important questions about how Plato thought of the emotions. Firstly, did Plato think that you actually had to *feel* fear at the prospect of the morally wrong action, or just believe that it was more dangerous to yourself? Secondly, what can be learnt from his conception of fear about what Plato believed constituted the emotions in general?

Is describing a situation as dangerous a different thing from feeling fear in that situation? It could be argued that driving a car at 100 miles per hour is dangerous, but that does not alone ensure that we will have the appropriate fearful response; we may feel simply exhilarated or numbed by such speed. So perhaps it is the case that some situations we would describe as dangerous *and* feel fear towards, and others we would merely describe as dangerous. Given this how are we to determine the connection between the attribution of 'dangerous' to a situation, or the belief that it is dangerous, and the emotion of fear? This is an important question for Plato's theory of courage as he expects his courageous citizens to know that the immoral option should be feared. This seems like a strange requirement of virtue as we would commonly expect the courageous person to do the brave thing because they are motivated by the belief that it is the right thing to do, rather than the belief that the alternative is more dangerous.

¹ Rep. 442c1-3.

One of the interesting and potentially enlightening questions that can be asked of Plato's theory of the emotions is whether he believed that they are cognitive, by which I mean that they were necessarily based on beliefs. Cognitivism about emotion is similar to what Peter Goldie refers to as the belief-desire account². What they have in common is that the emotions can be explained in reference to beliefs and desires alone, and that no mention of the phenomenological experience of emotion is necessary. This theory is associated with the work of Donald Davidson³. If we consider the case of the hoplite on his way to war, who is fearful of the upcoming combat, a proponent of the *belief-desire account* such as Davidson would explain the fear of the Hoplite as the perceptual belief that the situation is dangerous, and his desire not to be put in danger. This kind of cognitivism, and cognitivism in general, provides no essential place for the phenomenology of emotion. In fact, it could be said that these theories arose in response to the flaws of the feelings-based explanations of the emotions which were more prevalent at the beginning of the twentieth century. This means that if cognitivism were indeed consistent with the essence of Plato's theory then the feeling of fear towards the morally wrong action would consist of an account of the beliefs and desires of the individual. The 'established education' referred to in the above definition would then have to inculcate an appreciation of what *should* be feared, i.e. the appropriate beliefs and desires, and an ability to avoid such actions without worrying about the *feeling* element of emotions.

Cognitivism would give Plato the advantage of not restricting courage to people who had the feeling element of fear at the morally dangerous option. If one is to subscribe to a cognitive interpretation of Plato's theory, then this means that the example of the woman running into the burning building to save the child would not have to be reconciled with the idea that she was impelled partly by the *feeling* element of fear of the alternative. However, as I shall argue, the relationship between the beliefs of the individual and her emotions is not as simple as the cognitivist account suggests.

² Goldie, P., *The Emotions: A philosophical Exploration*.

³ Davidson, D., *Essays on Actions and Events*.

2. How Early Education affects the Emotions

At the beginning of the discussion of the first stage of education in the *Republic* Plato says:

What kind of education shall we give them then? We shall find it difficult to improve on the time-honoured distinction between the physical training we give to the body and the education we give to the mind and character.⁴

This initial statement shows that the education was not simply a matter of imparting knowledge but was intended to shape the soul (or ‘mind and character’) as well. And the importance of this early stage cannot be underestimated:

And the first step, as you know, is always what matters most, particularly when we are dealing with those who are young and tender. That is the time when they are easily moulded and when any impression we choose to make leaves a permanent mark.⁵

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, this stage of education is supposed to train the future Guardians and Auxiliaries to have the right emotional response to the stories and music that they hear and to respond correctly to new situations and stimulus. The censorship that their education is to receive is to shield them from any improper examples that might encourage them to respond wrongly. It is clear that this stage of the education process targets the emotions of the students involved, but what is less clear is whether their rational capacity is supposed to be influenced by this early process of whether the training of beliefs comes later. If Plato does not think that the beliefs of the students must be trained along with their emotions then their beliefs cannot constitute the emotions, as in this case the emotions would be developed before the beliefs associated with them.

⁴ *Rep.* 376e2-5; ‘psyche’ here translated as mind and character.

⁵ *Rep.* 377a11-b2.

The position in the *Protagoras* is an explicit commitment to the tenets of cognitivism.

Here Plato claims:

Now, no one goes willingly towards the bad or what he believes to be bad; neither is it in human nature, so it seems, to want to go toward what one believes to be bad instead of the good. And when one is forced to choose between one of two bad things, no one will choose the greater if he is able to choose the lesser...If what I have said up to now is true, then would anyone be willing to go toward what he dreads, when he can go toward what he does not?...For it was agreed that what one fears one holds to be bad.⁶

It is clear that at this stage Plato's theory of emotion is strongly cognitive; he believes that fear or dread has an evaluative element – literally 'an expectation of something bad'⁷. We fear what we believe to be bad for us, and that may be physical harm or damage to our soul. He continues: 'Both the courageous and the cowardly, go toward that about which they are confident; both the cowardly and the courageous go toward the same thing'⁸. What they go towards is dependent on whether they have 'wisdom about what is and is not to be feared'⁹; if they do not they are cowardly and ignorant, and if they do they are courageous and wise. So we fear what we believe to be bad for us, and courage is the wisdom to know what that is. In the *Protagoras* Plato is saying that the cowardly and the courageous feel fear, and it is a cognitive fear for both types, but that the cowardly are getting the assessment of what is worse for them wrong. Therefore Socrates is committed to a cognitive interpretation of the emotions in the *Protagoras*, and Plato is not supporting the existence of non-rational emotions.

To return to the *Republic*, at the beginning of the educational process it looks as if those selected for the training will be taught to have the right emotional response before they develop the appropriate belief, and that it is only later that the right beliefs will come along to support this emotional state.

⁶ *Prot.* 358d1-e7.

⁷ *Prot.* 358d8-9.

⁸ *Prot.* 359e1-3.

⁹ *Prot.* 360d3.

This stage of education is crucial. For rhythm and harmony penetrate deeply into the mind and take a most powerful hold on it, and, if education is good, bring and impart grace and beauty, if it is bad, the reverse. And moreover the proper training we propose to give will make a man quick to perceive the shortcomings of works of art or nature, whose ugliness he will rightly dislike; anything beautiful he will welcome gladly, will make it his own and so grow in true goodness of character; anything ugly he will rightly condemn and dislike, even when he is still young and cannot understand the reason for so doing, while when reason comes he will recognize and welcome her as a family friend because of his upbringing.¹⁰

However, we can see from the definition of courage that it is supposed to result from the first stage of education that by the end of the process the correct beliefs are in place. For example, Plato claims that those who are to be brave must have the right beliefs about death and the after-life:

But what if they are to be brave? Must we not extend our range to include something that will give them the least possible fear of death? Will anyone who in his heart fears death ever be brave?...And will anyone who believes in terrors in the after-life be without fear of death, and prefer death in battle to defeat and slavery.¹¹

And:

One good man does not think death holds any terror for another who is a friend of his...and so he would hardly mourn for him as if he had suffered something terrible.¹²

In order to shape people to be courageous they must be made to believe that death is not a bad thing, for themselves or their loved ones. They must not make too much of death, like Achilles does when he says:

Do not make light of death, illustrious Odysseus...I would rather work the soil as a serf on hire to some landless impoverished peasant than be king of all these lifeless dead.¹³

¹⁰ *Rep.* 401d4-402a5.

¹¹ *Rep.* 386a4-b4.

¹² *Rep.* 387d5-9.

¹³ *Odyssey* Book XI 487-491, trans E.V. Rieu, Penguin, and partially quoted in *Rep.* 386c6-8.

This stage of education does involve both the emotions and the beliefs of the children involved, but this does not mean that the emotions are necessarily based on the beliefs. In fact, it is clear in the passage 401d4-402a5 that inculcating the right emotional response is of primary importance in the young and that the attention to the reason for these feelings is explained later. Although this creates a distinction between emotions and beliefs I do not think it would be fair to conclude from this that Plato believed that young children were incapable of beliefs – there is nothing to support that quite extreme thesis. What I think can be learnt from his discussion of education in Book III is that we can influence the emotions without dealing with the beliefs, even if the child may have relevant beliefs about the objects of emotion. Plato says that a child may be trained to like what is beautiful and condemn what is ugly – in other words have the right emotional response – before he recognizes the reason. This does not exclude the very likely possibility that this child will already have a belief about such things but that they do not have the rational capacity to be taught to reason with these beliefs at this stage of their education. As it is the case that Plato believed that emotions can be affected directly and that we do not need to work on the beliefs of the child in order to change their emotions he is clearly not advocating a cognitivist approach to the emotions in the same sense as in the *Protagoras* since the *Republic* seems to imply that feelings may be prior to judgements. This marks a change from the position expressed in the *Protagoras* which was clearly cognitivist. I will continue my discussion of the role of fear in Plato's definition of courage with the understanding that for Plato the emotions are not simply beliefs.

To return to the passages above (*Rep.* 386a4-b4 & 387d5-9), what is suggested by these two passages from the *Republic* is that having no fear of death and the belief that death is not to be feared are in some way separable but connected and that the belief component of the courageous person is essential to the theory. What Plato is saying is that if we have the belief that the after-life holds terrors for us and our friends and family then we will fear death and consequently be unable to be brave. There is therefore, as Christopher Gill

claims, 'a close and direct connection between what people believe and what they feel'¹⁴. Thus the educational syllabus is designed to create a dynamic of the soul in which there is this close relationship between emotions and beliefs.

The emotions are the first focus of the program, as we can see from the opening section on early education. However, it is perhaps not particularly relevant whether the emotions are to be shaped before the beliefs become involved or not. Children's beliefs are certainly crucial to their development into virtuous adults and are involved from early on in the process if not from the beginning. The role of these beliefs, when they are correct, is to reinforce the proper emotional response that the children have been trained to have through the right literature and music, but presumably the ideal model that Plato is aiming for is a situation where the correct beliefs and the correct emotional response are mutually reinforcing each other.

The discussion of the importance of eradicating the fear of death gives us an example of how someone can become vicious. If the belief, which Plato believes is incorrect, that death is something to be feared and the after-life is a bad place is encouraged and supported by the stories that children are told then this will consequently impact on the emotional response we have towards situations that might bring about our death. We will overestimate the threat of death and therefore make the wrong choice on the battlefield. In this case it is the beliefs that are playing the pivotal role in determining the state of the soul – if children can be taught that death is not a bad thing then they will not fear it.

This can also work in the opposite direction, with the emotions having a direct impact on the beliefs of the individual. Evidence for this can be found in Book IV; after arguing for

¹⁴ Gill, Christopher, 'Ethical Reflection and the Shaping of Character: Plato's Republic and Stoicism', p. 206.

the division of the soul into three parts Plato describes the correct alignment of the soul as follows:

The reason ought to rule, having the wisdom and foresight to act for the whole, and the spirit ought to obey and support it...and this concord between them is effected, as we said, by a combination of intellectual and physical training, which tunes up the reason by a training in rational argument and higher studies, and tones down and soothes the element of “spirit” by harmony and rhythm.¹⁵

If the spirited part of the individual is soft and undeveloped then the soul will presumably be high-strung and over-anxious, whereas if it is overdeveloped, as in the timocratic man in Book IX, the soul becomes overambitious, angry and unruly. Neither the over-developed nor the under-developed thumos will lead to courage, as a courageous person is someone who follows the dictates of Reason whilst overcoming the influence of Desire. The under-developed thumos will not result in the person being courageous because the spirited part of the soul will not be able to control the appetitive part and its desire to run away from conflict or other threatening situations; a cowardly person is someone whose spirit cannot hold ‘fast to the orders of reason about what he ought or ought not to fear, in spite of pleasure and pain’. The cowardly person is thus ruled by the appetitive part of the soul as the thumos is not able to exert the control it needs to in order to keep the desires in check. In this case the coward could either be an akratic personality – still retain the correct beliefs but be unable to act on them – or it may be the case that the fear from the thumos affects the beliefs of the rational part so that all three parts are in incorrect agreement as to what they should do.

To show that the beliefs of the agent can be affected by his emotions, Plato explains the process of how we change our mind in Book III of the *Republic*:

¹⁵ *Rep.* 441e4-442a3.

I think the discarding of a belief is either voluntary or involuntary – voluntary when one learns that the belief is false, involuntary in the case of all true beliefs...people are involuntarily deprived of true opinions...by theft, magic spells, and compulsion.¹⁶

By “the victims of theft” I mean those who are persuaded to change their minds or those who forget, because time, in the latter case, and argument, in the former, takes away their opinions without their realising it...The “victims of magic,” I think you’d agree, are those who change their mind because they are under the spell of pleasure or fear.¹⁷

These two quotations present the view that when we change our mind from a false belief to a correct one we do so freely and voluntarily. However, when we change our mind from a correct belief to a false one it happens involuntarily because of various insidious means; we are ‘victims of magic’ if this happens as a result of fear or pleasure. This fear is different from the appropriate fear that we should feel towards what is immoral, as that could never result in us losing hold of a correct belief. This fear results in us wrongly discarding a belief and changing our mind about a certain state of affairs when we should have kept hold of our original belief.

Beliefs and emotions therefore have a two-way causal relationship; they both can have an impact on the other. Belief and emotions do not always have a causal impact of course, as one of the aims of the *Republic* was to explain akratic action, so there must be cases where a person’s beliefs and desires are in conflict and it is not resolved by either the loss of the belief or the cessation of the emotion. The early stage of education is to develop the right kind of beliefs and desires so that they are in consensus rather than conflict, as conflict can lead to the loss of the correct belief, which is the worst possible outcome for the agent. The aim of this stage is to create a character type that is as stable as it can be given the so far limited training, however, as beliefs are susceptible to the effects of the emotions and desires it cannot be an altogether stable character type that is created. Given that beliefs are not wholly reliable when it comes to the affects of ‘theft, magic spells,

¹⁶ *Rep.* 412e9-413b1, trans. G.M.A.Grube, rev. C.D.C.Reeve, *Plato: Complete Works*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indiana, 1997.

¹⁷ *Rep.* 413b3-c1, trans. G.M.A.Grube, rev. C.D.C.Reeve, *Plato: Complete Works*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indiana, 1997.

and compulsion', the Auxiliary who receives this education but not the latter stage cannot always be relied upon to do the virtuous action.

What can this tell us about the role of fear in the courage of the Auxiliaries? The definition cited above tells us that the Spirit must hold fast to what he has learned about 'what he ought or ought not to fear'¹⁸. What Plato does not specify is whether the feelings that the Auxiliary ought to have are the feelings that they actually do have due to the education they have undergone. However, Plato places much importance on the early educational process which is primarily focused on training the emotions. This fact suggests that when Plato says that courage is the ability to hold fast to the beliefs about what ought and ought not to be feared he means that the Auxiliaries will be trained to have the right cognitive and emotional response. In other words Plato may expect his Auxiliaries not only to have the correct belief about what should be feared but also experience the feeling of fear of what should be feared. Given that the beliefs of the Auxiliaries are not impervious to their emotions it is easy to assume that it will be necessary for the emotions to be in agreement with their beliefs. The alternative to this might mean that the Auxiliaries would in fact be very unreliable characters and would frequently be influenced by fear of the wrong kind of thing – fear of physical danger and death. The interconnection of beliefs and emotions seems to support the idea that the Auxiliaries would indeed feel the appropriate fear that will both support and rely on the correct belief that the immoral action is the most dangerous.

However, Plato has said how he will deal with the interconnection of beliefs and emotions when it comes to courage. The belief and emotional state that he clearly thought were paramount for a courageous person are the belief that death is not something to be afraid of and the state of not actually feeling fearful of it. These are the responses that Plato thinks it is particularly important to work on in his Auxiliaries and Guardians. He also defines courage as sticking to the right belief of what *should* be feared rather than

¹⁸ *Rep.* 442c2.

describing the courageous person as someone who feels fear of the right thing and sticks to that. This is a crucial point for Plato's theory as his theory would be a lot less plausible if it included the idea that we can be trained to feel afraid of the immoral act. The idea that we can be trained to appreciate the value of a piece of music or an epic poem is not a controversial claim; those who have been brought up with an understanding of literature and music may well be those who can discern the difference between what is good and bad in those fields, even if this is not always the case. This may even be true of the emotions in general as well – if we are brought up surrounded by the attitude that spiders are cuddly, friendly insects then we will probably not develop a fear of them. It may also be the case that we can be trained to feel no fear of death. If we are brought up in a culture that tells you that the after-life is a pleasant place to be and that the act of dying is nothing to fear then the lack of fear of death would be understandable. Even if we allow Plato these points it is difficult to support the idea that we can be trained to actually *feel afraid of not* running into the burning building to save the child. I think it is therefore all the more likely that Plato did not believe that the auxiliaries and rulers will actually feel afraid of the immoral action but they will believe or know that it is what they should feel afraid of and given the fear of death has been eradicated they are impelled by their belief and not held back by their emotions.

Plato's theory is much more convincing when seen in this light, and what's more the example of Socrates supports this reading. In the opening pages of the *Phaedo*, Phaedo himself begins to describe to Echeocrates the scene of Socrates' death. He says:

I had no feeling of pity, for the man appeared happy both in manner and words as he died nobly and without fear.¹⁹

Socrates shows that he has the right emotional response to the prospect of dying when he says:

¹⁹ *Phaedo* 58e1-3.

I should be wrong not to resent dying if I did not believe that I should go first to other wise and good gods, and then to men who have died and are better than men who are here.²⁰

Socrates does not fear death and so he make his mind up about what is the right thing to do without influence from his emotions. Without the impact of fear on his decision process he is able to make his decision in the *Crito* about whether he should stay or not based only on the relevant arguments:

The only valid consideration...is whether we should be acting justly in giving money and gratitude to those who will lead me out of here, and ourselves helping with the escape, or whether in truth we shall be acting unjustly in doing all this. If it appears that we shall be acting unjustly, then we will have no need at all to take into account whether we shall have to die if we stay here and keep quiet, or suffer in another way, rather than be unjust.²¹

Socrates is surely Plato's ideal model of courageous behaviour in the face of certain death. He behaves rationally and unemotionally – he feels no fear of death or fear of running away – he simply acts on the basis of the conclusions of rational argument.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 63b5-8.

²¹ *Crito* 48c7-d5.

3. How Later Education affects the Emotions

The second stage of education is much more thorough and concerned with producing the ideally virtuous character. Before Plato turns to a description of this process of higher learning he gives his interlocutors a general description of the Philosopher Rulers:

You will remember that we said that they must love their country, and be tested both in pleasure and pain, to ensure that their loyalty remained unshaken by pain or fear or any other vicissitude; those who failed the test were to be rejected, but those who emerged unscathed, like gold tried in the fire, were to be established as rulers and given honours and rewards both in life and after death.²²

Those who were able to stick to their beliefs after the first program of education are to be allowed to continue in their training and eventually become Rulers if they are successful. The second stage of education is aimed at producing a very different result from the early schooling in literature and music; the rulers are to learn about what is unchanging – the forms. When considering what men should ‘study if their minds are to be drawn from the world of change to reality’²³ Plato dismisses the earlier education by saying:

That...was the complement of their physical education. It gave a training by habituation, and used music and rhythm to produce a certain harmony and balance of character and not knowledge; and its literature, whether fictional or factual, had similar effects. There was nothing in it to produce the effect you are seeking.²⁴

The first stage of education is designed to inculcate the right beliefs and emotional response in the Guardians and Auxiliaries of the city. This latter stage is designed to enable the Rulers to appreciate the truth of the beliefs that have been ingrained in them throughout their lives. The character or organisation of the soul that they will achieve will be the best possible dynamic of the soul that is possible for a mortal human being. The rulers will have knowledge which will mean that they will never deviate from the path of virtue:

²² *Rep.* 503a1-7.

²³ *Rep.* 521d4-5.

²⁴ *Rep.* 522a5-10.

Haven't you noticed that opinion without knowledge is always a poor thing? At the best it is blind – isn't anyone who holds a true opinion without understanding like a blind man on the right road?²⁵

The knowledge that they obtain cannot be affected by emotion or desire, which makes it superior to belief in terms of virtue. Presumably there will be similarities between the emotional life of the Auxiliaries and the Rulers, even if the emotions are without the same motivational affect that they can have on the actions of the Auxiliaries. The Rulers as well as the Auxiliaries are expected to have eradicated the fear of death and what might face them in the after-life – they did after all experience the same early education. The education that only the future Rulers will undergo will produce knowledge, and is the essential difference between the Rulers and Auxiliaries. As I have argued in the previous chapter, knowledge as opposed to belief is impervious to interference and can be relied upon always to ensure virtuous action.

So are the rulers expected to be completely emotionless? From the discussion of the family structure in the *Republic* it would seem as if the rulers will still be expected to have the right feelings as well as knowledge. Plato believes that it is important that the citizens of his *Republic* will experience their emotions as a community and that this fact will bind them together closely as a cohesive unit. He says that the structure of the society:

will prevent the dissension that starts when different people call different things their own, when each carts off to his own private house anything he can lay hands on for himself, and when each has his own wife and children, his own private joys and sorrows; for our citizens, whose interests are identical and whose efforts are all directed so far as is possible towards the same end, feel all their joys and sorrows together.²⁶

²⁵ *Rep.* 506c7-10.

²⁶ *Rep.* 464c6-d6.

All the citizens will be expected to feel things together, which would support the idea that that the Rulers are not unemotional rational beings who have in some way cut themselves off from the lower two parts of the soul and are only guided by Reason.

The ideal courage of the Rulers is thus similar to the courage of the Auxiliaries except for the fact that for the Rulers it is based on knowledge rather than belief and is thus more reliable. Both the Auxiliaries and the Rulers will, through their extensive emotional training, have no fear of dying or the after-life, and will be able to correctly identify which course of action is most damaging to them. It seems likely that neither class will feel afraid of the option they identify as being the most dangerous, as the eradication of the fear of death and the correct belief as to what they should do will be enough. Plato could quite easily have phrased his definition of courage in a different way that would have made it clear that the fear of death would be replaced by a fear of doing what is immoral but he did not, and his definition states that courage is holding on to the correct belief about what *should* be feared, and he makes no mention of actually feeling this fear. As Plato does not explicitly state his position on this matter it is difficult to conclusively argue for one particular interpretation of his theory at this point. It is perhaps more likely that he did not consider this part of the theory in depth, which could mean that he did not consider whether the courageous individual would feel fear of the immoral action, or that he believed he would but did not think through the consequences of such a belief.

4. Conclusion

The first and second stages of the educational process in the *Republic* are designed to create virtuous individuals. The first stage is focussed on directing and altering the emotions so that the top two classes will have the right emotional response and that the correct beliefs are inculcated. The second stage is focussed solely on the intellectual development of the Rulers and will be their journey to the acquisition of knowledge. This knowledge will ensure that they will behave virtuously, unlike the beliefs of the auxiliaries which will not always ensure right action²⁷. So both groups should feel no fear of death after this first stage and will be able to identify which action is the moral one and therefore which action is potentially the most damaging. As I have said, it is likely that both groups will also not be required to actually feel afraid of the option that they have identified as the most potentially damaging, but they will be expected to make the logical connection that as it is the most potentially damaging it is what should be feared. Thus Plato may not have had the unrealistic expectation that after the right training we will feel afraid of not going in the burning building to save the child but that by correctly identifying this course of action as what should be feared we are half way to being courageous – if it is coupled with the lack of fear of death then we are all the way there.

It could perhaps be argued that when Plato says that courage is partially the correct belief about what should be feared, he would surely expect his Rulers to actually feel this fear as they are the personification of perfect virtue, and that their emotions would surely always be in agreement with their knowledge in every case. If this were true it would create a significant problem for Plato as it would seem strange to say that actually feeling afraid of running away from battle is a requirement of courage. It may be possible that some people could actually feel afraid of doing what is immoral but is it a reasonable requirement? However, even though the Rulers will have ideal virtue based on knowledge and would know that in the appropriate situation they should feel this fear they will not ever find themselves in this situation due to the state of their soul. Fear is an

²⁷ See *Meno* 97-8, and *Rep.* 412e-413c.

emotion that arises in us when we feel that the dreaded thing is a possibility. I do not fear a tiger charging into the room where I am working because I do not consider it to be a possibility. If I were wandering alone around a tiger populated area of India on the other hand, my fear would very likely be rather pronounced. Likewise for the Rulers, they will not feel fearful of what should be feared because the state of their souls means that such action is not a possibility, therefore they will never actually experience such fear. However, if this is the explanation of why the Philosopher Rulers do not necessarily feel fearful of the immoral action, it does not include the Auxiliaries as they might on occasion do what is immoral.

A close analysis of Plato's detailed discussion of education in Book II shows that a cognitivist theory of the emotions is not a plausible interpretation of Plato's theory in the *Republic*. When Plato refers to fear he is not simply referring to the belief that something is dangerous to us but he is referring to an actual feeling. The courageous person is then perhaps fearless in Plato's eyes, given that we do not fear death or physical harm and we do not actually fear what we should fear. It may be the case that there are many examples of people who act in a way we would consider courageous but who openly admit to being terrified of death. This does not act as evidence against Plato's theory of courage as he does not include the lack of fear of death in his definition of courage, but it is used to explain in what way you can train people to be courageous. It is surely the case that those who do not fear death will be all the more likely to risk their lives in a courageous deed if they also have the right beliefs. Plato's theory then is still in a sense the overcoming of fear – a common interpretation of courage – it is just that the overcoming happens separately from the act of courage. The Auxiliaries are trained to overcome their fear of death and physical harm before they even come face to face with a situation that requires courage. The consequence of this theory is the idea that those who feel afraid of death or pain at the moment when they are put in a situation where they can potentially show courage will not count as courageous in the fullest sense of the word (I am sure that many courageous people would freely admit to having such feelings of fear). This is surely not the case and it is a problem for Plato's theory.

Chapter 7: Courage in the *Laws*

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1. Introduction

To briefly summarize what I have argued in previous sections: In the early dialogues Plato is interested in the idea that courage is knowledge of the right thing to do, but thinks that it is insufficient. In the *Republic* he includes the idea suggested by Laches (in the *Laches*) that another element, such as some kind of endurance, plays a part. As I have argued earlier, the Socratic position that virtue is knowledge seems to include the idea that our feelings will be in agreement with our knowledge of what is best – so the courageous person will *feel* afraid of the morally worse action. This suggestion in the early dialogues that our emotions will be in agreement with what we know is not very convincing – there is no argument why we *feel* fear of running away from battle. In the *Republic* Plato comes up with a psychological explanation of how we are to train ourselves (our emotions) in order to have a well-ordered soul that will ensure that our emotions and beliefs agree – but is no longer committed to a cognitive interpretation of the emotions. Although this does provide a better explanation of how our emotions could be in agreement with our reason I do not think it is a convincing theory.

The question of to what extent Plato changed his mind between writing the *Republic* and the *Laws* has recently attracted much attention. There are three general theories regarding this question – the Consistency Theory, the Weak Consistency Theory and the Inconsistency theory. Supporters of the Consistency Theory, which can also go under the name of the Unitarian position, believe that there is no inconsistency between the *Republic* and the *Laws*, and that Plato did not change his mind about any of the issues discussed in the period between them. We find evidence of this position in Cicero, who claimed that the *Laws* described the laws of the *Republic*¹. This position also has support from modern day readers of Plato such as Glenn Morrow, who believes that the *Laws* fills in the blanks left in the *Republic* about the legal workings of the city-state. He claims that ‘the *Laws*...does not involve a break with the earlier dialogues, but rather a development

¹ Cicero, *De Legibus* 2.6.14.

of what they imply'². The Inconsistency Theory takes the opposite position and claims that Plato developed his theories and changed his mind in the time between writing the *Republic* and the *Laws*. This position is well supported by Gregory Vlastos: 'We see Plato rehabilitating in the *Laws* many of the democratic rights he had wiped out in the *Republic*. Though he does not discuss the earlier theory, does not allude to it in any way, we can be certain he has abandoned it'³. The Weak Consistency Theory falls somewhere in between these two positions and proponents of this theory can differ as to what extent they think the two pieces are consistent. I will argue for a version of the Weak Consistency Theory in this chapter; a version which sees Plato changing his mind about certain aspects of the *Republic*, but that keeps the ideals he had from the earlier dialogue intact.

Before I go on to discuss the relevance of Plato's view of courage in the *Republic* and the *Laws* to the issue of the continuity of his thought, I would like to look at a few of the key areas that have been addressed by those discussing this question. I hope that a more general discussion of whether Plato changed his mind will help us to understand his view on the virtues in the *Laws*, and help to explain the apparent differences in his comments on courage.

² Morrow, G., *Plato's Cretan City: a historical interpretation of the Laws*, p. 577.

³ Vlastos, G., 'The Theory of Social Justice in the Polis in Plato's Republic', pp.36-37.

2. The Artisan Class

I would firstly like to raise an issue which has been surprisingly ignored by most commentators on this issue. When discussing the issue of continuity most of the attention given has been focused on the question of the Philosopher Kings. Whether Plato has rejected the rule of philosophy in the *Laws* has attracted much debate. This is a question that I will discuss below, but I think that there is a more striking difference between the *Republic* and the *Laws* that I will discuss first – the disappearance of the production class from the citizenry of the state. Plato claims that:

After these remarks, our law on the subject should run like this, with Heaven's blessing: God is now re-establishing and re-founding Magnesia, and no inhabitants who holds one of the 5,040 hearths must ever, willingly or otherwise, become a retailer or a wholesaler, or perform any service whatever for private individuals who are not his equals in status, with the exception of those services that a free man will naturally render to his father and mother and remoter ancestors, and to all free persons older than himself.⁴

Apart from farming, the citizens of Magnesia are not allowed to do any of the jobs previously attributed to the Production class of the *Republic*⁵. These jobs will now be taken over by slaves and foreigners. The focus of the *Laws* is then on the two remaining classes of the *Republic* – the Guardians proper and the Auxiliaries. This expulsion of the majority of the lowest class from full citizenship in the *Laws* is I think the most significant change from the *Republic* to the *Laws*, and cannot be explained away by saying that in the *Laws* the artisans of the *Republic* would just have had different jobs. The fact is, if we examine the state in the *Republic*, in the light of the framework of the *Laws*, over a third of the population would no longer be citizens – a change in status that could not be underestimated in the ancient Greek world.

⁴ *Laws* 919d2-e2.

⁵ As farming was one of the most important occupations previously done by the productive class of the *Republic*, its continued relevance to the citizens in *The Laws* might give the impression that a significant function of the lowest class was retained. However, the citizens of Magnesia will be farm managers and will not be heavily involved with the day to day work as that would not leave them sufficient time for their political duties.

Why did Plato take the significant step of denying citizenship to the artisans of the *Republic*? By asking such a question I do not mean to imply that I consider the *Laws* to be a revision of the *Republic*, a claim that would put me firmly in the Inconsistency Theory camp, because I certainly do not. However, I believe that the differences between the two dialogues can help us to understand each of them separately, and appreciate the importance of certain elements within the framework of each individual state. The evidence often given against the belief that the *Laws* is a revised version of Plato's ideal city is the fact that he appears to list his states in order of perfection, and is worth quoting in full:

Reflection and experience will soon show that the organization of a state is almost bound to fall short of the ideal. You may, perhaps – if you don't know what it means to be a legislator without dictatorial powers – refuse to countenance such a state; nevertheless the right procedure is to describe not only the ideal society but the second and the third best too...So let's follow this procedure now: let's describe the absolutely ideal society, then the second best, then the third.⁶

The description of the ideal state soon follows:

You'll find the ideal society and state, and the best code of laws, where the old saying 'friends' property is genuinely shared' is put into practice as widely as possible throughout the entire state. Now I don't know whether in fact this situation – a community of wives, children and all property – exists anywhere today, or will ever exist, but at any rate in such a state the notion of 'private property' will have been by hook or by crook completely eliminated from life...It may be that gods or a number of the children of gods inhabit this kind of state: if so, the life they live there, observing these rules, is a happy one indeed. And so men need look no further for their ideal: they should keep this state in view and try to find the one that most nearly resembles it.⁷

The ideal society described in the second passage is commonly assumed to be the society of the *Republic*, the society of the *Laws* the 'second best'. If the *Laws* are describing Plato's second best society, second to the *Republic*, then there would be no reason to think that Plato has changed his mind about the organization of the state in the *Republic* –

⁶ *Laws* 739a3-b4.

⁷ *Laws* 739b9-e2.

he would just be offering an inferior alternative in the *Laws*. I think it is a fair assumption that Plato is referring to the city as described in the *Laws* as the second best society. After the brief description of the best ideal society the discussion of the second best is clearly part of the main body of the text describing Magnesia. However, whether the first society is referring to the society of the *Republic* is more questionable.

André Laks bases his theory of the continuity of the Platonic corpus on his reading of these passages. He believes that the ‘ideal society’ is a reference to the *Republic* and that the two societies from the *Republic* and the *Laws* are both possible and consistent in that the *Republic* is a discussion of a city of gods or a number of the children of gods, and that the *Laws* describes the ideal city of men⁸. Although Laks’ discussion of the idea of what Plato means by ‘possibility’ is interesting and enlightening, I think Laks’ main thesis suffers from a misreading of this passage of the *Laws*. As much as there are similarities between the *Republic* and the ideal state described in the *Laws*, it is clearly not the same. It is not the same because of the omission discussed above – the ideal society mentioned in the *Laws*, as well as the *Laws* itself, ignores the artisan class.

In the above passage in the *Laws* Plato undeniably refers to elements from the *Republic*; the idea of having ‘a community of wives’ and ‘children’ has echoes of the organization of coupling and child rearing from the earlier dialogue. It could be argued that the elimination of the existence of private property was one that occurred in the *Republic* only in relation to the ruling and military classes, and not the artisan class. If this were the case then it would show that the description of the ideal state in the *Laws* was not a reference to the *Republic* as it was but to some new conception where all citizens held things in common. However, the idea that only the Rulers and Auxiliaries were intended to live communistically was questioned by Aristotle:

⁸ Laks, A., ‘Legislation and Demiurgy: On the Relationship Between Plato’s *Republic* and *Laws*’.

But what of the arrangements of the constitution as a whole, and how do they affect participant members? In the absence of any positive statement by Socrates it is very hard to say. Certainly the bulk of the other citizens will make up almost the entire population of the state; but no decision was taken as to whether the farming class are to have communal or individual private possession, whether of property or of wives and children.⁹

If it were the case that Plato was undecided about whether the Artisan class was to share in the communistic life-style, he could very well have been referring to the *Republic* in his description of the ideal state in the *Laws*. Mayhew argues that Aristotle is right in his assessment of Plato as being unclear about the details of the lowest class:

A consideration of some key passages from the *Republic* shows that the question of how the lower class is to live (and particularly, whether the lower class is to live communistically) has not been fully or clearly answered by Plato's Socrates and that Aristotle is therefore justified in thinking it unresolved.¹⁰

Mayhew's argument for Plato believing that children should be held in common is the most persuasive. After Plato introduces the Myth of the Metals¹¹, which is supposed to provide a metaphysical religious justification for the separation of people into classes, he says:

If any child of a Guardian is a poor specimen, it must be degraded to the other classes, while any child in the other classes who is worth it must be promoted to the rank of Guardian.¹²

For Plato's system to work, the Guardians need to be able to assess all the children of the state in order to decide which class they should be in. This suggests that all children will be, initially, educated together away from their biological parents. I do not think Plato's system of education and fluidity between classes can be accomplished without children being held in common in all classes.

⁹ Aristotle, *Politics* 1264a11.

¹⁰ Mayhew, R., *Aristotle's criticism of Plato's Republic*. For others who hold this position see Mayhew p.129.

¹¹ *Rep.* 415a-d.

¹² *Rep.* 423d1-4.

A good case can be made for women being held in common within their class in the *Republic*. Plato begins his discussion of women and the structure of the family by arguing that although women will on the whole be less capable than men, they will also be suited to all professions¹³. It is on the basis of this idea that Plato then concludes that the family must be abolished. If women are to fulfil their role as Guardians, Auxiliaries or Artisans they must be committed to that profession, and cannot therefore be responsible for the running of a house. Although Plato discusses the dissolution of the family in relation to the Guardians and Auxiliaries only, this may be because his primary interest is with those two groups, as if it will follow for them that women having the same jobs as men means a rejection of the traditional family structure, why would it not for the Artisans? Plato gives no reason why the same argument would not be used for the women of the lowest class, and so I think it is more befitting for Plato's utopia to support the idea of both women and children being held in common.

However, there is a good case for the claim that Plato does not support the idea of property being held in common by all classes in the *Republic*. This is not just because he makes claims in the *Republic* that would be inconsistent with the Artisans not having private ownership, but because it would contradict the justification for the separation into classes in the first place. Mayhew admits that there are passages in the *Republic* that make it difficult for him to support the Aristotelian idea that Plato is undecided about the communism of property. For example when Plato is discussing the Guardians (which I assume here included the Auxiliaries as well) he says:

They must be told that they have no need of mortal and material gold and silver, because they have in their hearts the heavenly gold and silver given them by the gods as a permanent possession, and it would be wicked to pollute the heavenly gold in their possession by mixing it with earthly, for theirs is without impurity, while that in currency among men is a common source of wickedness. They alone, therefore, of all the citizens are forbidden to touch or handle silver or gold...If they acquire private

¹³ *Rep.* 455c-e.

property in land, houses, or money, they will become farmers and men of business instead of Guardians.¹⁴

If 'they alone...are forbidden to touch or handle silver and gold' then others in the community must be allowed to; in other words, the Artisans are allowed silver and gold. The final statement of this passage is also particularly relevant. If the Guardians were to be allowed private ownership, then they would not be Guardians, but farmers or men of business. The lower class is characterized by their desires, most of which I will argue cannot be fulfilled and will ultimately be the downfall of the analogy and of the Artisan class itself, but some will necessarily be fulfilled, as this is one of the ways the Artisans are differentiated from the other classes.

The evidence suggests that Plato was in support of women and children being held in common for all classes, but that some restricted form of private ownership was allowed to the Artisans¹⁵. However how is Plato to hold these two positions? If people are not to live in family units are they to live in communal housing as the others classes do. If this is the case then what use is private ownership to them? Perhaps they will be allowed certain luxuries that gold and silver can buy them over and above their living situations. If this is what Plato intended then we have to question the equality of the advantages bestowed on the Artisan class. Plato claims that he is not interested in only making one class happy, but is concerned with the whole state – if that is the case then he appears to have balanced it somewhat in favour of the Guardians and Auxiliaries. Perhaps Plato did not think through the consequences of the arguments given for communism of wives and children in the higher classes, and did not mean that communism of property should be applied throughout his state. If it were the case that the Artisans could retain control over their private lives as well as private property then at least the Artisans would have some significant advantages in comparison with the other classes which would make their acceptance of such of system more understandable. In this case Plato is guilty at the very

¹⁴ *Rep.* 416e4-417b1.

¹⁵ I say restricted because Plato specifies that no one should be allowed to be too rich or too poor. *Rep.* 421d-422a.

least of not making his position clear and not being aware that the position he took on communism in the higher classes – such as the argument given for having women in common – would have an impact on the lives of the lowest class. Alternatively, if he did believe in communism throughout the state, then this compounds a more fundamental problem that already exists in the *Republic* that I will discuss below – that the characteristics of the artisan class provided by the analogy of soul to state are not fully taken into account, which undermines the assertion that all the citizens in the *Republic* will be content. I think that there is enough evidence to conclude that Plato still intended the Artisans to have access to money, even if it is not possible to draw a similar conclusion concerning women and children. Therefore Aristotle may have been right about Plato not making his position clear about wives and children, but his point was not right when applied to property. This is because Plato describes his best state in the *Laws* as one where there would be a ‘community of wives, children and all property’, which in fact cannot happen in the *Republic*. Thus there is enough evidence for the idea that the *Republic* does not fulfill the criteria for the first society briefly described in the *Laws*.

Due to this important difference (that communism is not widespread in the *Republic* but is said to be in the ideal state in the *Laws*) we cannot safely attribute this description of an ideal state to the state of the *Republic*. However, that this is not a clear reference to the *Republic* is interesting. The fact that Plato creates such a list, which places the political organization of the *Laws* in second place, second place to one very similar to the one of the *Republic*, does show that the *Laws* is not an adaptation of the society of the *Republic*. The description of the ideal society in the *Laws* does, on the other hand, show that Plato has changed his mind about what would be part of his ideal society. To return to the question of the removal of the Artisans from the citizenry of the *Laws*, it may be the case that Plato describes his ideal state in the *Laws* as one where all things would be held in common because he is only referring to the upper two classes that this would have been relevant to. Therefore Plato may have been committed to the idea that the working class did not deserve to be citizens both in the *Laws* and in his brief new formulation of his ideal state. Plato is at no point explicit as to why such a large part of the population from

the *Republic* is shut out of the *Laws*, so we can at best hypothesise about what would encourage him to make such a move. To do this we need to look back at the *Republic* and consider what there is about that dialogue that would have motivated him to take such a step.

The state of the *Republic* is made up of three separate parts – the Rulers, Auxiliaries and the Artisans. Each of these classes have their own motivations, according to which part of the soul they are associated with, and their own rewards from the organization of the city. The Rulers have the philosophical, or intellectual, fulfillment of doing the good thing and do not need to concern themselves with issues of protecting the city or providing basic human necessities such as food and clothing; the Auxiliaries receive the reward of honour that the *thumos* longs for and do not need to bother with either intellectual pursuits that they are not suited to, or the mercantile business of the Artisan class; and the Artisans are allowed the physical rewards of ownership and also the safety of being protected by the other two classes, and do not need to bother with the jobs specific to the two other classes. Justice in the state is when each of these groups is doing what is expected of them because of their class.

The three pieces fit together and rely on each other for the benefits they get from the organization of the city. If any one class from this state were to be removed for any reason the other two classes could not continue as they were; they rely on each other for the benefits they get from the arrangement. However, how is this state ever to come about? At the beginning of Book VII of the *Republic* Adeimantus challenges Socrates to show the practicality of his state:

But it seems to me, Socrates, that if we let you go on like this you will forget that you still have to show that the state we have described is a practical possibility, and if so how.¹⁶

¹⁶ *Rep.* 471c3-5.

Socrates appears to change his mind on the issue of how possible the ideal state from the *Republic* is. At 502, Socrates also says: ‘The conclusion seems to be that our proposed legislation, if put into effect, would be the ideal, and that to put it into effect, though difficult, would not be impossible’¹⁷. However, in his response to Adeimantus’ challenge he responds that the important thing is getting as close as we can to the ideal, as if the ideal itself were not possible. And at the end of Book IX Socrates’ interlocutor says the philosopher will enter politics ‘in the society which we have been describing and which we have theoretically founded; but I doubt that it will ever exist on earth’, to which Socrates replies: ‘perhaps...it is laid up as a pattern in heaven, where he who wishes can see it and found it in his own heart. But it doesn’t matter whether it exists or ever will exist’¹⁸. It may be that Plato’s view of the possibility of his ideal state evolved during the process of writing the *Republic*.

Before analyzing this issue it is important to consider what Plato could mean by ‘possible’ when he considers whether the ideal state is indeed possible. There are two ways in which the term ‘possible’ can be understood in Plato, and much hinges on an awareness of the different ways in which Plato could be using this term. In one sense Plato is using the term *possible* to mean *could possibly happen, or capable of existing or happening*. This is similar to the philosophical sense of *logical possibility* which we distinguish from other modal terms such as *necessary* and *contingent*. However, it is different in the sense that Plato is not appealing to all things possible in this strong sense. When he says that his state is possible he means possible for us, as we are, not that we could have developed in such a way that the state of the *Republic* would have been possible for us. I will refer to this strong use of the word as *literal possibility*. The alternative reading of the word *possible* is one which is also commonly used, which refers to things that are in some way likely or *possible* given the actual situation; in other words, it is *possible* given the world as it is. I will refer to this use of the term as *common possibility*. To give an example to clarify the difference ways in which Plato could be

¹⁷ *Rep.* 502c8-10.

¹⁸ *Rep.* 592a9-b4.

using the term possible, imagine the following situation. When discussing who will be elected Prime Minister in the next general election someone says to you that ‘it is possible that David Beckham will be Prime Minister’, and someone else says ‘it is impossible that David Beckham will ever be Prime Minister’. The two people who had made these claims may not actually be disagreeing with one another, and the reason they may not disagreeing is essentially what I am appealing to in my above distinction. It is of course possible that David Beckham will be Prime Minister – if he won enough votes in an election then he would be elected to office. However, given what we know about David Beckham it is so highly unlikely that he would be elected most people would be inclined to contradict the former of the two statements – that it is possible that David Beckham will be Prime Minister. I think Plato uses this word in both these senses when he is discussing the possibility of the state of the *Republic*. It can therefore appear that he says at different times that his ideal state is both *literally possible* and *literally impossible*, which creates the confusion, even though what he means is that his state is *literally possible*, but needs the preconditions that are so unlikely that it is *commonly impossible*. So when Plato says that he doubts ‘it will ever exist on earth’ he referring to the fact that his ideal state is very unlikely, and therefore practically commonly impossible. However, when he claims that it is not impossible for his state to come about he means that it is literally possible. If read in this way Plato is neither contradicting himself, nor wavering¹⁹, but is simply making two separate claims.

Unfortunately, Plato adds a further complication to the way the word ‘possible’ can be used. He appears to have a looser conception of *literal possibility* than we would commonly have. He asks Adeimantus:

Does practice ever square with theory? Is it not in the nature of things that, whatever people think, practice should be less close to truth than theory...Then don’t insist on my showing that every detail of our description can be realized in practice, but grant that we shall have met your demand that its realization should be possible if we are able to find the conditions under which a state can most closely approximate to it.²⁰

¹⁹ As Julia Annas claims he is in *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, p. 185.

²⁰ *Rep.* 473a1-b2.

Now this is not leading us towards *common possibility* which would assess whether the ideal state was possible under the present conditions, or the conditions set by Plato. This is a weakening of *literal possibility* that allows Plato to say that his state is *literally possible* even if what is literally possible is not an exact representation of his description. I think it is important to note that even though I think that this is a good explanation of the apparent inconsistencies in the *Republic* of Plato's claims of possibility and impossibility, I do not mean to imply that this remained his view for the rest of his life. In fact, what I will argue below is precisely the opposite – that Plato did indeed change his view on the possibility of such a subservient class, and that is why it was not included in either the brief reformulation of the ideal state in the *Laws*, or the state described in the *Laws* at length.

After a reassessment of the idea of *possibility* Plato goes on to describe the basic condition of the ideal state, the Philosopher-Kings:

there will be no end to the troubles of states, or indeed, my dear Glaucon, of humanity itself, till philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers.²¹

This is the precondition of the ideal state of the *Republic* – until Rulers are philosophers this ideal state without discord or strife will not be possible. The next two books of the *Republic* are devoted to the education of the Philosopher Ruler, and the different subjects of study they are to devote themselves to. We can now see a difficulty for Plato. His ideal city depends on the philosophical rule of the Guardians proper, without which the harmony of the state cannot be achieved, but without the state constructed as it is in the *Republic* those with the potential to be Philosopher Rulers will not be given their extensive education committed to making them into ideal rulers. So, when it comes to the question of how to actually bring such a state about, Plato has caught himself in a catch 22. Therefore, I think that Plato's state is *literally possible* because he believes that it is

²¹ *Rep.* 473d1-4.

not contrary to human nature to be able to have a state set up in such a way, but that it is *commonly impossible*, because the conditions necessary for bringing such a state about are themselves dependent on the existence of such a state.

So if the possibility of such a state actually existing is dependent on the interconnection on the three parts, which in turn is what makes it impossible to bring such a state into existence, then Plato needed to make some changes to the construction of his ideal state if it were to be more *commonly possible*. So given the above discussion on the dependence of each of the three parts on one another, why were the Artisans for the chop and not the other two parts? André Laks answers his own question 'In what sense exactly is man in the *Politeia* a god and in the *Laws* a man?' with this insightful passage:

Within man, the soul's irrational part, that is, appetites and pleasures, is not taken into account in the *Politeia*. Now this assertion is in a way obvious, but on the other hand paradoxical. It is obvious because the return to private property in the *Laws* gives satisfaction to the lower part of the soul and because the subordination of the magistrates to the law is supposed to prevent the corruption of supreme power into tyranny under the appeal of pleasures. But it is also paradoxical, because the divided nature of the soul is the great principle of the *Republic*.²²

Even though I am not in agreement with Laks that the question he sets himself is a relevant one, the response is a response to many more questions than the one posed. One of the jobs done so successfully by the *Republic* was the explanation of akrasia that the divided soul provides. So in that sense, the inclusion of the lower soul is paramount in the *Republic*. However, as Laks points out, the dialogue, famous for introducing the appetites, also fails to take their full implication into account, a position I will argue for below. Plato eradicated the Artisan class as opposed to either of the other classes from the state in the *Laws* due to a belated acceptance of the impossibility of them happily fulfilling their role in the *Republic*. This means that Plato changed his mind about the *literal possibility* of the ideal state of the *Republic* at some point between writing it and

²² Laks, A., 'Legislation and Demiurgy: On the Relationship Between Plato's Republic and Laws', p.217.

writing the *Laws*, and he therefore replaced his ideal with one that excluded them in the *Laws*.

What were the problems with the lowest class of the *Republic* that Plato may have become aware of that inspired him to make such changes in the *Laws*? One of the important features of the *Republic*, and the *Laws*, is the significance Plato places on harmony within the soul. Plato even goes so far as to say that the right harmony of notes can encourage people to have a harmony within their souls²³. In Book IX of the *Republic* Plato memorably describes man as a composite of a man, a lion, and a many-headed beast, each part representing the different parts of the soul. He describes the just man as someone who:

Ought to say and do all we can to strengthen the man within us, so that he can look after the many-headed beast like a farmer, nursing and cultivating its tamer elements and preventing the wilder ones growing, while he makes an ally of the lion and looks after the common interests of all by reconciling them with each other and with himself.²⁴

Plato frequently mentions the need to be gentle with the savage part of ourselves; he is not a proponent of violently suppressing our less virtuous appetites and desires. Harmony is also described as what someone will have in their soul if they have the virtue of 'sôphrosunê', which can be translated as 'temperance', 'self-control', or 'moderation'. In the *Republic* 'sôphrosunê' is described as 'a kind of order, the mastery of certain kinds of pleasures and desires'²⁵. So 'sôphrosunê' is the ability to create order, or harmony, in a soul. What I would like to discuss is how this translates to the city, and more specifically, whether the classes can be harmonized in such a way as to produce the society of the *Republic*.

²³ The discussion of the right kind of music in Republic Book II.

²⁴ *Rep.* 589a8-b5.

²⁵ *Rep.* 430e6-7.

The appetitive part of the soul, and the Artisan class of the state, are seen as a threat to the unity of the soul and state. The correct organization of the soul and state is where this part is weakened. In the soul the lowest part of the soul will presumably acquiesce because of the improved happiness of the soul as a whole, of which it is a part. How will this work in the state. Are we to follow the analogy through in the same way and say that the happiness of the state as a whole will mean the improved happiness of each part? The analogy doesn't appear to work in this way, as the connection between the parts of the soul is obviously much stronger than those of artisan to Philosopher-King. The improved atmosphere and success of the state may make living conditions better and provide protection from external threats but is this going to be enough for the largest class of the *Republic*? As André Laks says:

If the members of the third class are necessary to the city insofar as they produce the common goods, and gladly perform this function in exchange for the advantage of having their life secured, why should they ever dissent? This rather idyllic view of the Platonic city cannot be the whole story, though. For whereas if it is true that the producers' need for security is guaranteed, there will be no reason for them to dissent on this ground, it is also true that the producers' needs are by no means reducible to security alone, at least if the analogy between the city and the soul is to hold.²⁶

The Artisan class is characterized by its counterpart in the soul – the Appetite. In the soul the appetites are many and varied, and can be ones that are in need of weakening or eradication or ones that should be encouraged. These desires are not only focused on a sense of security, and so, if the analogy is going to hold, neither will the desires of the Artisan class. Are we supposed to believe that all the other desires experienced by the class that is characterized by having desires, will be overwhelmed by the need for security and a limited amount of ownership as discussed above? If the state of the *Republic* were constantly under attack this might be a possible explanation, but Plato clearly says that it will not be. The incentives given to the Artisan class will just not be enough to guarantee their support for the state as a whole.

²⁶ Laks, A., 'Legislation and Demiurgy: On the Relationship Between Plato's Republic and Laws', p.219.

Perhaps Plato would have responded to this problem by reminding us what he said about the appetites of the soul:

I think, then...that we may venture to conclude that if our desire for gain and our ambition will follow the guidance of knowledge and reason, and choose and pursue only such pleasures as wisdom indicates, the pleasures they achieve will be the truest of which they are capable, because truth is their guide, and will also be those proper to them – for isn't what is proper to a thing what is best for it?²⁷

In other words, the Artisans will get the satisfaction of their desires, desires which are best for them, even if they are not their strongest desires. If the desires that are best for them, or 'proper to them', will be satisfied, then why would they have any reason to rebel against a system that provides that for them? The problem with this response is the fact that the people of the Artisan class will still not have the things that they desire most. They may have what is best for them, but that is characteristically a different thing for the people of this class, and if it were the case that they always wanted what was best for them, then they would have been promoted to a higher station in the life of Plato's utopia. The fact is their subjective desires will still not be satisfied, even if they continually get what is best for them throughout their life. They will not be content with the satisfaction of desires they are supposed to feel, but actually do not, or do so slightly that it would never take the place of their real desires. Given that this is arguably the main problem with the state in the *Republic*, and also the element that Plato expels from Magnesia, it is fair to hypothesize that Plato was aware of this problem too.

The fact that Plato changes his idea of the ideal state when he writes the *Laws* is important not only for his political philosophy but also for his ethics. If the *Republic* is no longer the ideal then we may expect a new account of the virtues in the *Laws*. I have shown above that Plato's position on issues such as communism has changed, and that the class division has also altered. Therefore, we should not expect the virtues in the *Laws* to be the same as they were in the *Republic*.

²⁷ *Rep.* 586d4-e2.

3. Virtue in the *Laws*

It has often been argued that Plato's ethical views in his last work have developed from the utopian dreams of the *Republic* into a more pragmatic conception of virtue in his later life. This is a very plausible interpretation of what is going on in Plato's later philosophy. In the *Laws* virtue is accessible to those people without knowledge of what is truly to be valued, but with true belief gained through right instruction from law and the inclination to act in accordance with this true belief. Plato says:

His survey completed, the author of the legal code will appoint guardians (some of whom will have rational grounds for their actions, while others rely on "true opinion"), so that all these regulations may be welded together into a rational whole, demonstrably inspired by considerations of justice and self-restraint, not of wealth and ambition.²⁸

This means that the Guardians do not need knowledge to rule because they no longer need knowledge for virtue - true belief is now sufficient. Virtue is then not dependent on knowledge but instead requires a balance between judgement and desire. As Stalley puts it, 'In the *Laws*...the suggestion seems to be that the citizens can become virtuous if only their desires and passions are disciplined in such a way that they obey the law as a matter of habit'²⁹. This view is supported by passages such as:

When a man thinks something is fine and good, but loathes it instead of liking it, and conversely when he likes and welcomes what he believes is wicked and unjust. I maintain that this disaccord between his feelings of pleasure and pain and his rational judgement constitutes the very lowest depth of ignorance...So when the soul quarrels with knowledge or opinion or reason, its natural ruling principles, you have there what I call 'folly'. This applies both to the state in which people disobey their rulers and laws, and to the individual, when the fine principles in which he really believes prove not only ineffective but actually harmful... You see, my friends, without concord, how could you ever get even a glimmer of sound judgement?³⁰

And also:

²⁸ *Laws* 632c4-d1.

²⁹ Stalley, R., *An Introduction to Plato's Laws*, p.9.

³⁰ *Laws* 689a5-d6.

I maintain that the earliest sensations that a child feels in infancy are of pleasure and pain, and this is the route by which virtue and vice first enter the soul. (But for a man to acquire good judgement, and unshakable correct opinions, however late in life, is a matter of good luck: a man who possesses them, and all the benefits they entail, is perfect.) I call 'education' the initial acquisition of virtue by the child, when the feelings of pleasure and affection, pain and hatred, that well up in his soul are channelled in the right courses before he can understand the reason why. Then when he does understand, his reason and his emotions agree in telling him that he has been properly trained by inculcation of appropriate habits. Virtue is this general concord of reason and emotion.³¹

If Plato did indeed lower the necessary requirements for virtue in the *Laws* to the right emotion accompanied by the right response guided by law then it seems right to infer as Bobonich does that:

At least some non-philosophers are capable of valuing virtue for its own sake, that is, are capable of believing that virtue is good for its own sake and of desiring virtue for its own sake.³²

This is a claim that clearly illuminates the difference between the *Republic* and the *Laws*. In the *Republic* it is the philosopher ruler who embodies virtue, his soul being ruled by Reason, which is supported by a well-trained Spirit and obeyed by the Desires. The inherent problems in the design of virtue and the state in the *Republic* (discussed in the previous section) must have been visible to Plato as the alterations he makes in the *Laws* respond directly to those incurable maladies. We can assume that he was aware at some later point that his assurances that the state was designed for the happiness of all three classes were unfounded, as the lowest class could not possibly have been satisfied with the arrangement. To follow the analogy Plato makes in the *Republic* between state and soul, it can also be assumed that he realized that the soul does not function in the way depicted in that dialogue; more specifically, that the desires cannot be so easily dealt with.

³¹ *Laws* 653a5-b8.

³² Bobonich, C., *Plato's Utopia Recast*, p.90.

Plato did change his mind about virtue between writing the *Republic* and the *Laws*: he changed his mind about the possibility of controlling the worst element within us. He also appears to have changed his mind about the best elements within us as well, and the lack of ability of most people to actually obtain such qualities. Therefore I think Plato changes his mind about the possibility of a content and supportive Artisan class and about the possibility of attaining the virtue of the philosopher rulers (I will give support for this assertion in the following section). However, I do not think that Plato has altogether changed his mind about his ideals of state. He may have become more pessimistic about the Philosopher Rulers, but that doesn't mean that he is no longer a supporter of a more aristocratic ideal, he does, it must not be forgotten, refer to the *Laws* as the second best type of city. I am in agreement with Stalley when he says:

Wherever Plato addresses himself to matters of practical politics he advocates the supremacy of law, a doctrine worked out in great detail in the *Laws*. This is entirely compatible with his doctrines at the theoretical level. If, as the *Statesmen* suggests, law embodies decisions of the community taken after careful consideration, the rule of law may be the closest ordinary men can come to the rule of knowledge. So the *Republic* and the *Laws* can be seen as complementary to one another.³³

Before I move on to discuss the implications of the changes Plato has made to the virtue of courage, I would like to consider a further significant difference between the early and middle dialogues and the *Laws*. In the early dialogues Socrates is seen as the role model for those aspiring to virtue. He is to some extent the inspiration for the ideas embodied in the early/middle dialogues, and also the spokesman for Plato's own philosophical ideas. However, when we come to the *Laws*, not only is Socrates no longer the mouthpiece through which Plato wishes to communicate, he is no longer the role model set up for his readers to follow. In Book IV, when Plato is discussing the difficulty of bringing about a situation where such a state as the one they are discussing could happen he says that what they need is:

³³ Stalley, R., *An Introduction to Plato's Laws*, p.21.

A situation in which an inspired passion for the paths of restraint and justice guides those who wield great power. The passion may seize a single supreme ruler, or perhaps men who owe their power to exceptional wealth or high birth; or you may get a reincarnation of Nestor, who, superior as he was to all mankind for the vigour of his speech, is said to have put them in the shade even more by his qualities of restraint. In Trojan times, they say, such a paragon did exist, but he is certainly unheard of today. Still, granted someone like that did in fact exist in the past or is going to in the future, or is alive among us now, blessed is the life of this man of moderation, and blessed they who listen to the words that fall from his lips. And whatever the form of government, the same doctrine holds true: where supreme power in a man holds hands with wise judgement and self-restraint, there you have the birth of the best political system, with laws to match³⁴

Nestor is an understandable choice as a role model for Plato. He clearly exhibits the four cardinal virtues; he is wise and just in his advice to Agamemnon and Achilles; shows his support for temperance by advising others to be so; and shows courage on the battle field. However, I do not think he was Plato's choice in the *Laws* for this reason only. Nestor is an example of a virtuous man who also involves himself with politics. Unlike Socrates, Nestor contributes to the discussions of the powerful when they are working out what should be done. In the *Laws* Plato makes the virtues accessible to those other than philosophers, and Nestor provides an extraordinary example of the common man. He may not be a philosopher, but that is not now necessary. What Plato is concerned with in the *Laws* is the kind of person who will get involved, but not let power or influence go to his head. Socrates is famous for challenging those in power by questioning them and their ideals, but not for challenging them in a way that would actually affect legislation or the structures of power. Plato is here interested in a man who is prepared to risk sully himself with politics as well as being a man of words.

³⁴ *Laws* 711d7-712a3.

4. Courage and the Soul

The striking difference between the *Republic* and the *Laws* is that in the *Laws* Plato seems to be more interested in the kind of virtue that is obtainable by the population at large. In the *Republic* the divine virtues are inaccessible to the majority, if not all of the population, whereas the Auxiliaries are capable of more human virtues. The fact that only the Philosopher Kings can be genuinely virtuous does limit the possibility of people capable of genuine virtue existing in an ordinary state significantly. The fact that such a theory means that it is highly unlikely that anyone will be virtuous does not necessarily mean that the theory is wrong but, as discussed above, to limit the meanings of such words so that they no longer designate any actual person is problematic. I will argue that the *Laws* changes the picture of virtue from the one of the *Republic* in two ways. Firstly, genuine virtue appears to be no longer dependent on knowledge, but is now also open to those with only true belief. Secondly, Plato accepts a further type of ‘lesser’ courage which explains certain types of behaviour previously not covered by the two kinds of virtue in the *Republic*. Thus, in the *Republic* we have two kinds of virtue, the divine and the human, whereas in the *Laws* we lose the higher demands of the virtue of the Philosopher Rulers, but a new one is added – that of the mercenary soldier in the case of courage.

The *Laws*, being a practical work, focuses more on how courage is to be obtained. Plato’s final work follows the general trend I have outlined from the view of courage as simply knowledge of what should be feared in the early dialogues, to the later addition of a non-cognitive element such as habituation through education in the *Republic*. In the *Laws*, knowledge is no longer necessary for virtue, as true belief is sufficient, and the emphasis on education is still an important theme in the process of becoming courageous. I will argue that Plato made courage accessible to those of the populace who are not virtuous. There are still elements left from the utopian *Republic*, but the more demanding commitments of that dialogue have been replaced with more pragmatic compromises

with the real world. Also, Plato has appeared to accept in the *Laws* that other kinds of fearlessness, like that of the mercenary, may also be considered to be a kind of courage.

As the *Laws* is a more practical work, questions of how the soul is constituted and the psychological underpinning of our actions are not explicitly answered. This has commonly been assumed to mean that Plato has either rejected the tripartite soul of the *Republic* or is just no longer as interested in such issues. However, just because this issue is not addressed as explicitly as in the *Republic* does not mean it was not in Plato's mind when he wrote the *Laws*. In fact, I think the discussion in Book 1 shows that Plato was aware that his ideas about the soul could not be left behind even though the *Laws* is more directly relevant to political and legal issues. The *Laws* begins with the introduction of the question of the proper aim of the law. Both Cleinias and Megillus believe that the laws of the state should be focused on warfare. Cleinias says:

All these Cretan practices have been developed for fighting wars, and that's precisely the purpose I think the legislator intended them to serve when he instituted them...In this, I think, he censured the stupidity of ordinary men, who do not understand that they are all engaged in a never-ending lifelong war against all other states.³⁵

What role does Cleinias's approach play in establishing Plato's current position on the metaphysics of the soul? He goes on to agree that this could also be said of towns and individual people as well as cities: 'not only is everyone an enemy of everyone else in the public sphere, but each man fights a private war against himself'³⁶. The Athenian disagrees, and shows in the following discussion that he believes that the law should not aim at 'victory' over other states, villages or parts of the self, but at finding a compromise between these conflicting parts³⁷. As he was in the *Republic*, Plato is still concerned with the idea of creating a harmony between groups – bringing them to some kind of agreement – rather than the destruction of one part for the sake of another. So whether Plato has sacrificed the tripartite model for a different one, which is perhaps suggested by

³⁵ *Laws* 625d7-e8.

³⁶ *Laws* 626d9-11.

³⁷ *Laws* 627-9.

the illustration of man as a puppet of the gods³⁸, the ideal state of the soul is still one of persuasion – but how this is achieved has changed. Given the problems that came out of the depiction of the Artisan class in the *Republic*, by the time of the *Laws* Plato is not using the analogy of soul to state. He has not shifted his view of the soul so as not to include the desires, but he has expelled the part of the state that represented the appetitive part of the soul. As he is not relying on the analogy of state to soul, we cannot necessarily infer anything about Plato's later metaphysical ideas about the soul from the structure of the state in this dialogue.

The lack of a specific metaphysical model of the soul in the *Laws* may be why the descriptions given of courage³⁹ appear to have become more vague than those of the *Republic*. In the *Republic*, courage was said to reside in the thumos, even though it was also the case that only the true philosopher was able to be genuinely courageous, because genuine virtue required wisdom. Will the picture change because of the absence of the tripartite model and a greater awareness of the influence of the desires?

The closest Plato gets to giving a definition of courage in the *Laws* is in Book I. He says:

[Athenian] But what is to be our definition of courage? Are we to define it simply in terms of a fight against fears and pains only, or do we include desires and pleasures, which cajole and seduce us so effectively...[Megillus]Yes, I think so – the fight is against all these feelings.⁴⁰

This doesn't at first glance appear to be a complete definition. I assume that Plato means that courage is not simply the fact that there is conflict between on the one hand fear, pain and pleasure and some other element of the individual on the other. The definition implies that Plato thought that courage is the ability to overcome these fears, pains and pleasures. What must also strike the reader as strange is the reference to courage having

³⁸ *Laws* 644d+.

³⁹ I will argue that temperance also suffers for the same reason.

⁴⁰ *Laws* 633c8-d7.

to overcome pleasures as well as fears and pains. Is it not temperance that must deal with the irrational desires and find some way of assuaging them? Trevor Saunders appears to think that we should not interpret this passage as a sign of confusion between courage and temperance. In the summary of his translation he says:

Spartan and Cretan laws, then, excel in making a man resist fear, but they fail when it comes to resisting the temptations of pleasure; they give a man courage, but not self-control.⁴¹

But can this really be an accurate summary of the above statement? Let us look at the context in which the definition of courage is given. The Athenian is trying to convince Megillus and Cleinias that the laws should not only aim at strengthening the city and preparing it for war. He wants his two interlocutors to explain how the laws of their respective cities aim at all the virtues⁴², given that they have said that the proper aim of the law is to instill the whole of virtue, and not just courage. Once he has asked them to explain this he refers the discussion back to courage and asks in what way the cities are able to encourage the development of this virtue. Once they have given a few examples of the institutions set up to this end the Athenian suggests the definition we get at 633c8-d7. This definition appears to include the fight against pleasures as well as fears and pains, which are said to pose the greater threat to character and reputation than succumbing to fears. Given that pleasures do pose a greater threat the Athenian wonders why the laws of the cities they are discussing do not have methods set in place to enable the citizens to strengthen their resolve against such temptations. Then the Athenian says:

Well then, Cleinias and our friend from Sparta, let's turn to the next item we put on the agenda: after courage, let's discuss self-control. We found, in the case of war, that your two political systems were superior to those of states with a more haphazard mode of government. Where's the superiority in the case of self-control?...when men investigate legislation, they investigate almost exclusively pleasures and pains as they affect society and the character of the individual. Pleasure and pain, you see, flow like two springs released by nature. If a man draws the right amount from the right one at the right time, he lives a happy life.⁴³

⁴¹ Saunders, T., in his notes to *The Laws*, p.20.

⁴² *Laws* 632d1-5.

⁴³ *Laws* 635e4-636e1.

What appears to be Saunders' interpretation of this section of the *Laws* may be due to the fact that the discussion moves from what the Cretan and Spartan states do in order to instil courage to what they don't do to encourage temperance, and that the discussion appears to conflate them in the middle. The Athenian might have been including what one would normally think of as temperance – the ability to withstand the allures of pleasure – within the discussion of courage in order to lead his companions on to a discussion of another virtue which is just as important (if not more so) than courage and one they have excluded as an aim of their administration. The idea that this section of the *Laws* is discussing courage and self-control and not conflating the two can also find support from the later discussion of courage and the explanation of the role that pleasure can play in that virtue.

To do this, let us first look at what Plato says about the cultivation of courage through the use of drinking parties:

Tell me: can we conceive of two roughly opposite kinds of fears?... when we expect evils to occur, we are in fear of them, I suppose?...And we often fear for our reputation, when we imagine we are going to get a bad name for doing or saying something disgraceful. This is the fear which we, and I fancy everyone else, calls 'shame'... These are the two fears I meant. The second resists pains and the other things we dread, as well as our keenest and most frequent pleasures ... The legislator, then, and anybody of the slightest merit, values this fear very highly, and gives it the name 'modesty'. The feeling of confidence that is its opposite he calls 'insolence', and reckons it to be the biggest curse anyone could suffer, whether in his private or public life.⁴⁴

And also:

So this fear not only safeguards us in a lot of other crucial areas of conduct but contributes more than anything else, if we take one thing with another, to the security that follows victory on war. Two things, then, contribute to victory: fearlessness in the face of the enemy, and fear of ill-repute among one's friends... Every individual

⁴⁴ *Laws* 646e4-647b1.

should therefore become both afraid and unafraid, for the reasons we have distinguished in each case.⁴⁵

This conception of courage is clearly very different from the definition of courage in the *Republic*; Plato now has two kinds of fear as motivational sources to explain courageous behaviour. Whereas in the *Republic* there was only the knowledge of what should be feared (the fear of pain or death was supposed to be eradicated in both the courage of the auxiliaries and the rulers), in the *Laws* Plato has included the normal fear of pain, and the second is the fear of disgrace⁴⁶ – a less cerebral explanation of why the courageous person is not tempted to flee. Plato now has a new explanation to give us about why some people are courageous and others not. The courageous person is educated in such a way as to be able to resist the fear of pain and death, presumably by becoming accustomed to dangerous situations like in the Spartan system, which explains why he stands and fights the enemy. The second strand of the explanation – why he is not tempted away – is the fear of disgrace, and the ability to withstand such fear Plato calls modesty. The ‘great advantages this kind of fear secures’ are presumably that the citizens of Magnesia will fear doing what in this state as decided by law will cause disgrace; thus it is this kind of fear that the law relies on to keep people in line.

Pleasure then does have a specific role to play in the virtue of courage, but it is not the same as the role it fulfils in temperance. A temperate person is able to overcome the lure of the pleasures or to have such an ordered soul that such things are no longer desired. The courageous person must identify what pleasures must be resisted by having the appropriate knowledge or belief of what pleasures would bring disgrace if indulged in. Having identified those pleasures they must then have the appropriate fear of disgrace which drives them to do the right thing according to law. If we put together what the original definition says about fear and what the inclusion of pleasure in that definition really means, the conception of courage that is produced is one that requires two kinds of

⁴⁵ *Laws* 647b3-c2.

⁴⁶ It could be argued that this is present in the *Republic* as well. It may be true that it is not necessarily absent but it is also not explicitly included.

fear. Plato appears to acknowledge that the courageous person will need to be able to overcome fears of pain and death, but that they will also fear the disgrace of not acting courageously.

So the difference in this conception of courage from the one given in the *Republic* is the role of fear. As I have shown, the aim in both the *Republic* and the *Laws* is to create a harmony between knowledge or judgement and the desires. In the *Republic* the unrealistic psychological model underestimates the influence of these desires and the position taken in that dialogue is consequently undermined. For example, courage in the *Republic* is an appropriate ascription of dangerousness to the immoral option, in other words, knowledge of what should be feared. There is no special role given to a natural fear of pain or death within the virtuous individual in that dialogue⁴⁷. In the *Laws* the definition given at 633 shows that Plato accepts that it is likely that these fears will be present in a courageous person, and thus part of courage is the ability to overcome them. However, Plato is still concerned with the harmony between judgement and desire in the *Laws* – the virtuous individual is after all supposed to love what he thinks is ‘fine and good’⁴⁸. We will see in section 6 that the harmony model of virtue is not consistent with the idea of courage being partly the ability to ignore certain feelings.

Another interesting change from the definition in the *Republic* is that there is no mention of knowledge in this definition. In the previous dialogues I have looked at knowledge plays either a singular or important role in the definition of courage. As stated above, Plato has decided that knowledge is unnecessary for virtue at the end of his philosophical career, and that true belief will be sufficient for the kind of courage he is here discussing. There is significant evidence for the view that knowledge is no longer necessary for virtue in the discussions about courage in this dialogue. The Athenian claims that the communities of his interlocutors, Sparta and Crete, expose their young citizens to fearful

⁴⁷ See the discussion on courage in the *Republic* in chapter 5.

⁴⁸ *Laws* 689a6.

and painful situations in order to make them brave, as they believe that if this is not done it would be the case that ‘when it came to pains and fears, your legislator reckoned that if a man ran away from them on every occasion from his earliest years and was then faced with hardships, pains and fears he could not avoid, he would likewise run away from any enemy who had received such training, and become their slaves’⁴⁹. The fact that the Athenian claims that the Spartan system *can* instill courage in a person, a system that did not accompany this rigorous physical endurance with intellectual training, also contributes to the idea that Plato has changed his mind about courage requiring such a stringent intellectual element as knowledge. This suggests that Plato no longer believed in the ideal of the philosopher’s virtue, and now accepts that the *Republic* set unrealistic standards for people.

If knowledge is no longer necessary for virtue then the virtue of the philosopher rulers – which required knowledge – is presumably not included in the *Laws*. However, it could be argued that the virtue of the philosophers has not been weakened for the *Laws*, but still exists alongside the more human virtue. It does not take centre stage, as it does in the *Republic*, because it is not the focus of the dialogue. What has been called the Dependency Thesis by Christopher Bobonich could be called on to support this view⁵⁰. The Dependency Thesis says that we can only benefit from ‘human’ goods, such as wealth, health, and attractiveness, if we have the ‘divine’ goods, the virtues wisdom, courage etc. The use of the word ‘divine’ in this description is what causes the difficulty for the idea that the virtue of the philosopher rulers has been left behind. The divine virtues are so called because of their affinity with what is godlike. Could the more accessible virtues of the *Laws* possibly be described as god-like? I argued above that when Plato refers to the best city in the *Laws* he is not describing the actual city of the *Republic*, but something very similar to it. Thus, the elements described as playing a part in this state were parts of the *Republic*, but not all of those have been included. He says:

⁴⁹ *Laws* 635c1-6.

⁵⁰ *Laws* 631b-e.

It may be that gods or a number of the children of gods inhabit this kind of state: if so, the life they live there, observing these rules, is a happy one indeed.⁵¹

Here he is referring to the philosopher kings of the *Republic* as being the ‘children of gods’. So those who are capable of genuine virtue – virtue based on knowledge – are semi-divine because they have an element of what is divine in them. So when Plato refers to the divine virtues in the *Laws*, could it be that he is still committed to the idea that for genuine virtue you need the knowledge of the Philosopher King?

The problem for this view comes about if we take the reference to ‘divine’ virtue to mean the higher virtue of the *Republic* in the context of the Dependency Thesis. Firstly, Plato does not include the humanly accessible virtues of the *Laws* in the category of the lesser goods. He lists the lesser goods as what would have commonly been thought to be goods by the Greeks at that time – health, wealth, attractiveness and strength. If he were claiming that the benefit of the human virtues such as courage and temperance were dependent on the divine virtues he surely would have listed them as being more important than health and attractiveness. Secondly, if it were the case that Plato was positing (at least) two kinds of virtue in the *Laws*, one divine and one human, and including them in the Dependency Thesis, it would be claiming that one would only benefit from the human virtues if one had the divine virtues. This would mean that Plato wrote his longest dialogue mainly about the kind of virtue he didn’t believe would benefit people without the higher virtue. I do not find this a plausible explanation. The *Laws* is written about a real type of virtue that is accessible to the populace of Magnesia – why would he commit so much time to it if he didn’t believe it to be beneficial?

A further alteration in Plato’s conception of courage is made explicit at the end of the *Laws* when Plato states his new position on the possibility of children and animals being courageous:

⁵¹ *Laws* 739d6-8.

Here's the question for you to put to me: "why is it that after calling both by the single term 'virtue', in the next breath we speak of two 'virtues', courage and wisdom?" I'll tell you why. One of them, courage, copes with fear, and is found in wild animals as well as human beings, notably in the characters of very young children. The soul, you see, becomes courageous by a purely natural process, without the aid of reason. By contrast, in this absence of reason a wise and sensible soul is out of the question. That is true now, has always been true, and always will be true; the two processes are fundamentally different.⁵²

This reference to animals and children is an interesting point of comparison between the early and middle dialogues and the *Laws*. In the *Laches* Nicias takes the position of Socrates that virtue is knowledge and claims that children and animals cannot be courageous⁵³, therefore there appears to be a considerable difference between the *Laches* and the *Laws* on this subject. In the *Republic* Socrates takes the position that animals, and in that case slaves as well, cannot be brave. After explaining that the 'nature and upbringing' of the military class would enable them to 'preserve through everything the correct and law-inculcated belief about what is to be feared and what isn't', Plato says:

I imagine that you would not regard mere uninstructed judgement, such as an animal or slave might have on these matters, as being in accordance with law, even if right, and that you would use some other name for it.⁵⁴

The animals and slaves can have correct beliefs about what should be feared, but it only contributes to courage if they have had the proper upbringing and know why these things are genuinely to be feared. However, in the *Laws* courage can be instilled by a natural process and the right education is not a necessary component.

The inclusion of the behaviour of animals and children into the cases covered by the term 'courage' has a considerable impact on the meaning of this virtue for Plato. Children and animals can behave in a way he previously categorized as simply fearless or rash, as they do not have the right knowledge about what is the right thing to do. In the *Laws* their

⁵² *Laws* 963e1-11.

⁵³ *Laches* 197a-b.

⁵⁴ *Rep.* 430b5-8.

behaviour is considered to be courageous but they do not have a 'wise and sensible soul' as they have not yet, or will never have the right influences. Does this then mean that Plato now thinks that one can be courageous whilst doing some thing immoral? When discussing the work of Tyrtaeus they refer to his position on the:

hordes of mercenaries who are ready to dig their heels in and die fighting, most of whom, apart from a very small minority, are reckless and insolent rogues, and just about the most witless people you could find.⁵⁵

The Athenian says he could not deny 'the courage of those soldiers'⁵⁶, so it appears that Plato now believes that these mercenaries can display courage regardless of what or who they are fighting for. Like children and animals, mercenary soldiers can be courageous 'by a purely natural process' which does not rely on any particular cognitive state. If this kind of courage is completely divorced from reason then in what way can it be considered a virtue?

Plato's position has clearly changed significantly from the *Republic*. Courage can not only be exhibited by animals, children – those without developed rationality – but also by mercenaries – who will by no means be necessarily doing the right thing. I do not think that it can be the case that Plato was simply vacillating about the necessary conditions for virtue. Given the description of the mercenaries as 'witless' it would be hard to accept that Plato believed witless mercenaries were capable of a virtue. What can be concluded from the comments made about courage in the *Laws* is that the only essential element in all cases of courage is the ability to overcome the conflict with fear, pain and pleasure – which reflects the definition given at 633c8-d5. What distinguishes the courage of the mercenary and the courage of the virtuous citizen is that the virtuous citizen will be courageous in conjunction with having true belief or knowledge. It is only by having this true belief or knowledge that the tendency towards courageous behaviour can be considered a virtue.

⁵⁵ *Laws* 630b4-8.

⁵⁶ *Laws* 629e9-10.

5. The Dependency Thesis

So how is the relationship between virtuous and non-virtuous courage to be understood? If we are to consider courage as including acts that we would commonly describe as fearlessness, or the ability to withstand frightening situations, and not only those which are governed by knowledge or true belief, is there anything in the *Laws* to help us understand how these two types of behaviour both referred to by Plato as courage relate to one another? Fortunately, Plato does comment on the issue of how ‘human’ goods are related to ‘divine’ goods in the *Laws* – a distinction that I think will be helpful in understanding how the apparently disparate nature of the witless mercenary, children and animals and the noble soldier can both be described as courageous.

In the *Laws* Plato says:

Benefits fall into two classes, “human” and “divine”. The former depend on the latter, and if a city receives the one sort, it wins the other too – the greater include the lesser; if not, it goes without both. Health heads the list of the lesser benefits, followed by beauty; third comes strength, for racing and other physical exercises. Wealth is fourth – not “blind” wealth, but the clear-sighted kind whose companion is good judgement – and good judgement itself is the leading “divine” benefit; second comes the habitual self-control of a soul that uses reason. If you combine these two with courage, you get (thirdly) justice; courage itself lies in fourth place. All these take a natural precedence over the others, and the lawgiver must of course rank them in the same order. Then he must inform the citizens that the other instructions they receive have these benefits in view: the “human” benefits have the “divine” in view, and all these in turn look towards reason, which is supreme.⁵⁷

This passage raises a general problem about why the so-called human goods lack value in the absence of the virtues. It also implies that courage as well as the other virtues is a necessary condition of our deriving any benefit from the human goods. However, the fact that Plato lists courage as the fourth divine virtue may suggest that he had some reservations about it. Christopher Bobonich sees this passage as embodying the

⁵⁷ *Laws* 631b7-d5.

‘Dependency Thesis’⁵⁸, a doctrine which in his view Plato held throughout his life. An understanding of this thesis is therefore essential to our understanding of the role of courage in the *Laws*.

So, the ‘Dependency Thesis’ is the idea in the *Laws* that the commonly held good things in life are dependent on being virtuous. What isn’t made clear here is in what way health, beauty, strength and wealth are dependent on the virtues. Plato clearly cannot mean that something as common as physical health cannot exist in a state that is lacking in virtue; surely a person can have physical health or wealth and be unjust. It would be an obviously erroneous claim, if that were the claim that Plato was making. However, Plato is making a more complicated and challenging claim. The idea is that these commonly held good things would only benefit a person if he was also virtuous. The clarification however, does not make clear in what way, and why a person will only be benefited by health if they are virtuous. I would firstly like to look at Vlastos’ and Bobonich’s interpretation of this theory before turning to my own interpretation of how this theory should be understood.

i. Vlastos’ Interpretation

Firstly, it is important to note that when Vlastos discusses what he calls the Sufficiency Thesis, he is talking about the views of Socrates in the early dialogues. Even though his interpretation is of a different period of Plato’s work it can still contribute to the understanding of this idea in the *Laws*. To what extent Plato’s views have changed is also of course an interesting issue. The primary importance of virtue in the life of the happy man is prevalent throughout Plato’s work. That the rational man will at the same time know what is in his best interests and realise that the right thing to do is the morally right thing to do is an idea Plato never relinquishes. It forms a connection between what is in a person’s self-interest and what is moral that he assumes or argues for in most of the dialogues. The idea in the *Laws* that the human goods depend on the divine goods for

⁵⁸ Bobonich, Christopher, *Plato’s Utopia Recast*.

their value – an idea that appears in many of the other dialogues – attempts to explain to us how the virtues relate to the other things in life commonly conceived of as good.

Vlastos defines the three possible positions that people could be taking in regard to the relationship between virtue and happiness. The second and third position he discusses as ones that Plato might be taking on this issue. They are:

(1) ‘the relation is constitutive, but only partly so; they hold that virtue is a principal, but not the only, thing desirable for its own sake.’⁵⁹

(2) ‘the relationship is constitutive *in toto*; for them virtue is happiness – the only thing that makes life good and satisfying.’⁶⁰

Even though there is some apparent evidence in the early dialogues that Plato’s position was closer to (2), a position Vlastos calls the Identity Thesis because virtue is identified with happiness, Vlastos states that not only is there evidence that Plato does not hold this position but the fact that he would be facing serious problems with the theory if he did weighs against it. The Identity Thesis does not explain why non-moral choices could be genuinely meaningful to us. Vlastos’ example of the vomit-covered bed illustrates this point perfectly. He asks you to imagine that you are staying the night in a room with two beds, one clean and fresh and the other covered in vomit. If the Identity Thesis were the case and that happiness is only a matter of doing what is moral and so choices which do not have a moral component cannot be said to effect our happiness in any way, then we would be equally happy sleeping in either bed. This is a conclusion that is intuitively very hard to accept. Due to this consequence of the Identity Thesis it is clear that any interpretation of the idea of human virtues depending on divine virtues would have to find a way of making non-moral choices as meaningful as they clearly are to us.

⁵⁹ Vlastos, G., *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, p.204.

⁶⁰ Vlastos, G., *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, p.204.

Vlastos concludes that the position described in (1) is what Plato actually thought about this issue. Vlastos believes that the non-moral goods can still be goods, but that they are significantly inferior to moral goods:

Keeping virtue in its place as the sovereign good, both necessary and sufficient for happiness, let us allow happiness a multitude of lesser constituents in addition to virtue. Everything on Socrates' list of non-moral goods would come in under this head. In disjunction from virtue each would be worthless. But when conjoined with virtue (i.e. when used virtuously) they would enhance happiness in some small degree...all of those non-moral mini-components of happiness would be incremental in some small way if conjoined with virtue.⁶¹

A problem with Vlastos' interpretation is that he doesn't explain why it is the case that regarding non-moral goods 'in disjunction from virtue each would be worthless'. I think it is a good point that non-moral goods can have a greatly reduced effect on a person's happiness, but he does not explain why these much less significant goods could not make a tiny difference when not accompanied by virtue. Bobonich fills in this blank in Vlastos' theory by claiming that what Vlastos means by moral virtue is moral knowledge. So the explanation for why non-moral goods cannot be good in disjunction from virtue is that it is moral knowledge that makes them good for someone:

What Vlastos seems to mean by 'moral virtue' is 'moral knowledge,' i.e. knowledge of the moral values at stake in the circumstances of choice...Given this identification of moral virtue with moral knowledge, the claim that moral virtue is what makes all goods good for their possessor is equivalent to the claim that moral knowledge is what makes all the Dependent Goods valuable.⁶²

Bobonich describes two problems with Vlastos' interpretation. The first is a point about moral knowledge. Bobonich claims that 'in the *Euthydemus* and the *Meno*, Plato claims that Dependent Goods are dependent on people's knowledge of the good, i.e. on their knowledge of what is good or bad for themselves all things considered'⁶³. His reading of Vlastos would mean that Vlastos was misreading this knowledge as only moral knowledge and not a more general kind of knowledge of moral and non-moral options.

⁶¹ Vlastos, G., *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, p. 216.

⁶² Bobonich, C., *Plato's Utopia Recast*, p. 138.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

The second problem concerns the immoral man. If it were the case that moral knowledge determined the value of non-moral goods then those without moral knowledge would have no reason to distinguish between non-moral alternatives such as the clean or dirty bed.

The fact that Bobonich describes his reading of Vlastos as what Vlastos 'seems to mean' show that it is not taken directly from his work. It is understandable that Bobonich has assumed that by 'moral virtue' Vlastos really means 'moral knowledge' as Vlastos was writing about the early dialogues where virtue is said to be knowledge. He has simply replaced virtue with what it is said to be in the early works of Plato. However, Vlastos does not explicitly say this himself, and it is an assumption that this is what he really means. The thrust of Vlastos' argument in *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* is that he does not think that the Identity Thesis is an accurate representation of Plato's thought and that non-moral goods can affect, although only slightly, a person's quality of life. That he doesn't fully explain the connection between moral and non-moral goods is perhaps an omission but I do not think we are entitled to read into the work a conclusion that he doesn't himself argue for. Also, the main problem with this assumption is I do not believe that it is the only way of filling in the gap left by Vlastos. I will discuss an alternative below after I have looked at Bobonich's attempt to explain the Dependency Thesis.

ii. Bobonich's Interpretation

Firstly Bobonich classes the greater and lesser goods from 631b-d as Independent and Dependent Goods, where Independent Goods are the virtues, and Dependent goods are the lesser goods – health, wealth etc. The virtues are good independently of any other factor, whereas for the lesser goods to benefit a person they must necessarily have the greater goods. Bobonich roots his interpretation of this issue in the importance Plato places on knowledge. Bobonich claims that a good explanation of the Dependency Thesis must fulfil the following four conditions:

(1) Virtue must be necessary for benefiting from any Dependent Good, not only those Dependent Goods that are instances of 'moral value'.

(2) Virtue must be genuinely necessary for benefiting from any Dependent Good and a good explanation must make clear why it is necessary.

(3) Virtue must be an Independent Good.

(4) The feature of virtue that makes it an Independent Good is essential to explaining why virtue is a source of value for the Dependent Goods.⁶⁴

By focusing on (2) he thinks 'we can make knowledge a genuinely necessary condition of benefit by making the agents' knowledge itself partially constitutive of their benefiting'⁶⁵. The idea is that in order for us to benefit from Human, or Dependent, Goods we must be aware that we have them and have 'a positive attitude towards them'⁶⁶. He then continues that:

The idea that such an awareness of a Dependent Good and a belief about its goodness are partially constitutive of benefiting from the Dependent Good is very plausible. How could a Dependent Good benefit me, if I am unaware that I have it or I perceive it as a great evil?⁶⁷

Bobonich also acknowledges the importance of including the idea that what is appreciated about the Dependent Good is what is genuinely good about it (this is in order to exclude such cases as someone who appreciates their intelligence because it enables them to make others feel inferior).

⁶⁴ Bobonich, C., *Plato's Utopia Recast*, pp. 145-6.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Bobonich himself brings up a possible problem for his theory, and I think rejects it too quickly. He says:

We might be concerned that we are attributing to Plato a far too subjective account of the good. Specifically, this interpretation makes the benefit people receive, that is, what is good for them, depend on their attitudes or beliefs. Thus on one prominent contemporary account of what is objectively good for a person, Plato is not an objectivist about the goodness of Dependent Goods. On an 'Objective List' conception of well-being, things are good or bad for people, independently of their attitude towards them. But we cannot avoid denying that Plato is an objectivist in this sense. Simply by making the goodness of Dependent Goods depend on the agent's virtue, Plato makes their goodness depend on the agent's beliefs about and desires for the good. The Dependency Thesis is just inconsistent with making the benefit of Dependent Goods independent of the agent's attitude towards them.⁶⁸

I think Bobonich's interpretation fails on two counts. Firstly, he misunderstands the nature of the Dependent Goods. They are not subjectively, but conditionally good, and under certain circumstances, objectively good, by which I mean, when they are good they are objectively good. Secondly, he fails to recognise the role that Dependent Goods play in Plato's moral theory – Dependent Goods are not only conditionally good, but also instrumentally good; they are good or bad because of the effect they may have on the individual. I will be referring to some important distinctions in this discussion. They are: subjective and objective goods, ends and means, and conditional and unconditional goods. I am taking subjective goods as goods which are 'relative to the person' and as 'varying among individuals'⁶⁹, objective goods will therefore be those which are not relative to the person. I am taking goods which are good as ends as ones that are valuable as things in themselves, whereas things which are good as means are valuable for their instrumental effect⁷⁰. Unconditional goods are goods which do not rely on any other condition for their goodness, whereas conditional goods require some further condition be met in order for them to be good. These distinctions can easily be conflated, and this

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Korsgaard, C., 'Two distinctions in Goodness'.

⁷⁰ I am not here committing the mistake that Korsgaard discusses in her paper, although I do think that for Plato things which are good as an end will also be intrinsically good. However, Korsgaard takes things good as means and ends as things that we *value* as means or ends. Plato believes that things can be valuable as means and as ends but not necessarily because we value them in that way.

can unfortunately lead to a misunderstanding of the problems in some theories of the good.

Bobonich's account relies on the idea that for Plato human goods are dependent on the attitudes and beliefs of the individual. As he points out, this means that Plato thought that the goodness of health, wealth etc., relies on how the individual feels about such things, which also means that this goodness is subjective – depending on the attitude of an individual person. Bobonich accepts that this may seem like an unlikely interpretation of a philosopher known for his belief in objective value. He attempts to dissolve this problem for his interpretation by claiming that Plato clearly *is* a subjectivist about the goodness of human goods, as they are conditional on the moral status of the individual. I think this is a mistake on Bobonich's part. Plato says that human goods are in some way dependent on virtue, and that we cannot benefit from human goods without first being virtuous. What he does not claim, and I think it would have been surprising if he had, is that human goods are dependent on the subjective personal appreciation of the appropriate quality of the Dependent Good by a virtuous person. I think Bobonich is here assuming that all conditional goods are necessarily subjective goods. It may be true that all things we think of as subjectively good are also conditionally good, as to say that something is subjectively good we mean that its goodness relies on whether the condition of a person's positive attitude to it is fulfilled. However, the conditions under which something can be conditionally good do not just make reference to a person's attitudes to it.

Let's consider an example in order to make this distinction clearer. Imagine someone who is committed to his or her exercise regime. They get up at 7a.m. every morning in order to run around the park. The fact that this person is running is a conditionally good thing – if they are exercising sensibly and improving their overall standard of health, and not pushing themselves so hard that they injure themselves, then it is a good thing. It is conditional on doing it in such a way that will benefit the person and not injure them. If

in fact it is not being done sensibly then it is not a good thing. Whether it is a good thing or not is conditional on the way in which it is done and the effect it is having on the body of the person concerned. However, whether this exercise regime is good or not is not in any way dependent on whether the individual believes it to be or has a certain attitude to it. Thus we can see that there is a legitimate difference between the issue of whether Plato is being a subjectivist or objectivist about human goods, or whether he believes they are conditionally or unconditionally good.

It is clear that with regard to the conditional-unconditional distinction Plato believes that human goods are conditional, and conditional on being virtuous. The goodness of conditional goods is dependent on certain conditions being satisfied, which in Plato's case would be having the virtues. We can see from the example above that just because Plato is committed to the idea that human goods are conditional does not mean that he also believes them to be subjectively good. Therefore it is clear that Bobonich is wrong when he denies that 'Plato is an objectivist in this sense', and goes on, 'simply by making the goodness of Dependent Goods depend on the agent's virtue, Plato makes their goodness depend on the agent's beliefs about and desires for the good. The Dependency Thesis is just inconsistent with making the benefit of Dependent Goods independent of the agent's attitude towards them'. On the contrary, it is simply the case that Plato can make human goods dependent on the virtues without also making them dependent on the agent's belief about what is good for them.

I think Bobonich's interpretation would also entail an unfortunate consequence for Plato if this were indeed what he meant. Consider two people, one moral and the other immoral who are both healthy, something Plato considers to be the primary human good in his description of the Dependency Thesis. I assume that when Plato says that when a city 'accepts the greater goods' it 'acquires the lesser along with them, but one which refuses them, misses both', he does not mean that a person who is not virtuous cannot be healthy, but they cannot benefit from being healthy, therefore they are not benefiting from a

'good'. So the virtuous person is healthy and benefits from it, whilst the non-virtuous person is healthy but doesn't benefit from it. What Bobonich is proposing is that the reason the non-virtuous person does not benefit from being healthy is that they do not appreciate what is genuinely good about health. Can it be true that a virtuous and non-virtuous person appreciates health for essentially different reasons?

There is, however, something plausible about the idea that you need to appreciate what is genuinely valuable about something in order to benefit from it. Perhaps it could be argued that if the moderately well-off, healthy, attractive, strong person cannot appreciate what is genuinely valuable about such qualities and how much better their life is than the poverty-stricken, ill, ugly weakling then they will not really benefit from such advantages. If we are not aware of the good things that we have, or what is really good about them how can we benefit from them? However, the case of health is still problematic. It may be possible that a person of perfect health might not appreciate and benefit from their health because they do not understand why it is valuable – i.e. that it allows you to involve yourself actively in worthwhile pursuits. But what would happen if this person became ill and therefore lost the standard of health they were so used to? They would probably think that in retrospect they did not fully appreciate what was so wonderful about being healthy. However, I also imagine it would be common to think that it had been something valuable that had been taken away and that now they were at a disadvantage, even though it may be that in illness that they can really appreciate what was valuable about health. So benefiting from health does not necessarily go hand in hand with having an appreciation of what is genuinely valuable about health.

iii. An alternative interpretation

I think it is important to state what a good interpretation of this theory should be able to do. Firstly it should be able to explain why there is a relationship between the virtues and the commonly held human goods, such that a person and a state can only have the latter if they have the former. Secondly, it should be able to take into account the fact that it is

possible for non-moral goods to impact on a person's life whether they are a moral person or not, such that it is legitimate within the theory to prefer the clean to the dirty bed.

An alternative way of understanding the idea of dependency in the *Laws* is by considering the role that the human goods can play in making a person virtuous or not. It is clear that Plato thinks that the human goods are significantly less important for happiness than virtue. He frequently claims that the only consideration we should have when making a decision is whether it is the right thing to do. However, as stated above, this theory also must be able to make sense of making choices between two non-moral options. I think the subjectivity of Dependent Goods is dependent on the effect they can have on the individual, and that is why they are sometimes good and sometimes bad. A human good such as wealth is bad for the immoral person not because they appreciate it for the wrong reason (even though they might), but that it contributes to their belief that the immoral life is the superior one, and will therefore not wish to change. Wealth is a good for a moral person because it also contributes, although much less than virtue, to their standard of living. Commonly held good things will make the life someone is living more comfortable and therefore the person is less likely to wish to change it. This interpretation makes sense of the claim that Dependent Goods really are bad for unjust people, and Dependent Bads really are good. Otherwise this claim is quite difficult to support. Bobonich claims that:

Plato need not (and I think does not) hold that every Dependent Good is bad for an unjust person; what he should hold is that no Dependent Good benefits a person apart from virtue. This is true if either the Dependent Good is bad for the unjust person or if it is simply not good for them. Nor should Plato hold that a Dependent Bad is actually good for an unjust person; nothing is good for an unjust person.⁷¹

But Plato quite explicitly says that:

⁷¹ Bobonich, C., *Plato's Utopia Recast*, pp. 126-7.

Look here, now: my position is quite clear. Although so-called evils are in fact evil for the just, they are good for the unjust; and so-called 'goods', while genuinely good for the good, are evils for the wicked.⁷²

I do not think we can ignore such an explicit claim, and I think it is to the detriment of Bobonich's theory that it cannot explain it and therefore must reject it.

The role of punishment in the *Gorgias* can also lend support to this interpretation. Punishment is something that is commonly held to be a bad thing for the individual, whether they are guilty of the crime they are being punished for or not. In the *Gorgias* Plato argues with Polus not only that it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong, but also that those who do wrong would be benefited by being punished:

You claim that nothing could be worse for a criminal than paying the penalty for his crimes, whereas I claim that he's worse off if he doesn't pay the penalty.⁷³

Plato draws an analogy between physical health and injustice; he says that we take people to doctors when they are unwell and judges when they commit a wrongdoing. He then makes the unacceptable jump to the claim that: 'Medicine relieves us of illness, and the administration of justice relieves us of self-indulgence and injustice'⁷⁴. Punishment, like medical treatment, is there to help us with different problems, some curable and others not. The fact that punishment can have such an effect on the soul of the individual suggests that Plato believed that we could be changed by things that happen to us as well as things that we do.

Punishment is something which is considered to be a human 'bad'; it is something that most people would commonly wish to avoid regardless of whether they have committed some kind of crime or not. Plato argues that this commonly held view is actually an

⁷² *Laws* 661d1-4.

⁷³ *Gorgias* 476a6-8.

⁷⁴ *Gorgias* 478a17-b2.

erroneous one, and that a guilty person would be benefited by being punished, and therefore should seek it out. At the end of the dialogue when discussing the judgment after death, he claims that the 'promiscuity, sensuality, brutality and self-indulgence' of the unjust man would have

Distorted the harmony and beauty of his soul. When he sees a soul in this state, he immediately dispatched it to prison, where it will undergo the appropriate treatment. What is appropriate? As long as the person inflicting the punishment is justified in doing so, then every instance of punishment should either help its recipient by making him a better person or should act as an example for others... Those who are benefited by being punished (whether the agents of punishment are divine or human) are those whose faults are curable.⁷⁵

So punishment is something that is good for you if you are immoral because it helps you to escape that immorality that is bad for you. Although Plato is arguing for the beneficial nature of punishment from a more psychological perspective in the *Gorgias* the similarity of the idea to the dependency thesis in the *Laws* is clear. Punishment, like ill health and poverty, is seen by Plato as an opportunity to change what the person considers to be a good way of life. In the *Gorgias* punishment is supposed to help the unjust individual realize the genuine error of his ways.

We can see the same attitude to punishment coming through in the *Laws* as well. In Book IX Plato says:

If a man is caught thieving from a temple and is a foreigner or slave, a brand of his misfortune shall be made on his face and hands, and he shall be whipped, the number of lashes to be decided by his judges. Then he shall be thrown out beyond the boundaries of the land, naked. (Perhaps paying this penalty will teach him restraint and make him a better man: after all, no penalty imposed by law has an evil purpose, but generally achieves one of two effects: it makes the person who pays the penalty either more virtuous or less wicked.)⁷⁶

⁷⁵ *Gorgias* 525a6-b10.

⁷⁶ *Laws* 854d1-e2.

He goes on to say that if a citizen were convicted of a crime as serious as sacrilege against 'gods, parents, or society' he would have to be killed as his 'case is already desperate'. At 862c8-e4 Plato says that death must be the punishment for those who cannot be cured. This is same conception of punishment that we find in the *Gorgias* – those who can be cured will be appropriately punished; those who cannot be cured will be sentenced to death or held up as an example for others.

It is clear from this discussion of punishment that Plato believed in the efficacy of human goods on the more important beliefs and commitments of people. People can be changed by the things that happen to them, as punishment can change a person from believing that wrongdoing is beneficial to seeing the error of his ways. Therefore the human goods referred to in the *Laws* are dependent on the divine virtues because without the virtues they can be positively hurtful. The bad man who grows rich will be confined in his wickedness; if on the other hand he becomes poor he may see the error of his ways. What comes out of this discussion is the issue of whether Plato was right in listing courage as one of the divine virtues, since it can be bad for us when not directed by reason. In this way courage appears to have more in common with health and wealth rather than justice and wisdom.

6. Courage continued

This discussion of the Dependency Thesis can possibly help us to understand Plato's conception of courage in the *Laws*. Abilities, such as being able to stand up for yourself and fight your enemies or in situations of battle where you are in danger, are positive traits. So, we can understand why such a quality is a human good; it is a characteristic one would prefer to have than not to have. However, in Plato's ethical scheme, such a characteristic would only be beneficial to someone if they also possessed knowledge or true belief of what things were worth fighting for. If they did indeed possess this knowledge or true belief then their courage would be a good thing for them and be described as a 'divine' virtue. However, if the individual in question was ignorant of the good then having such a character trait would not be beneficial for them, for it would encourage them to believe that the life of the fighter, whoever or whatever they were fighting for was a positive thing, with rewards of the lifestyle to support this view.

The problem with interpreting Plato's view of courage in the *Laws* in this way is that he at no point says that courage can be both a Dependent and an Independent Good, so we are left with the conclusion that it is a Dependent Good. Considering this is quite a considerable change of view we would imagine that Plato would discuss it in greater depth, or at least make some explicit reference to it. Is the explanation that the *Laws* is a practical work and not so directly concerned with discussing ethics a plausible solution to this problem? I am not so sure. Even though it is true that Plato is not as concerned with defining and discussing the virtues in the same depth as he was in the *Republic*, it does not seem probable that he would allow such an about face to go uncommented on. A further consequent of this apparent separation of courage into the virtuous and the non-virtuous is the status of virtuous courage. Plato has stated that courage as a virtue is, like the other virtues, independent – it requires nothing further to value it as good. The human goods, on the other hand, rely on the virtues in order to determine whether they are good or bad for the individual. However, it appears that even courage as a virtue is not an

Independent Good because it relies on also having the virtue of wisdom. It is becoming clear that Plato's conception of courage is a particularly troubling one.

There is another, perhaps more serious consequence of Plato's concept of courage as a virtue. As stated above, virtue in the *Laws* can be seen as an agreement between what one values and what gives one pleasure:

When a man thinks something is fine and good, but loathes it instead of liking it, and conversely when he likes and welcomes what he believes is wicked and unjust. I maintain that this disaccord between his feelings of pleasure and pain and his rational judgement constitutes the very lowest depth of ignorance.⁷⁷

The idea in the *Laws* that virtue is an agreement between our judgement and our desires does not fit well with courage as a virtue. If courage is an overcoming of fear then how can it also be some kind of concord with them? If I am right to assume that virtue is when 'reasoned judgement' and what one 'loves and enjoys' find some harmony, then how is Plato's version of courage to fit into this conception? The person with the virtue of courage would then have to be someone who, for example, judges that it is right to go into battle, and that the idea of battle also gives him pleasure. That seems more akin to bloodthirstiness than virtue. Even if this ethical theory of virtue being found in a harmony between judgement and desire does not lead to courage being bloodthirstiness – for example if this harmony could be created by someone simply not having fear or feeling happy about the gore of battle – it still relies on the idea that virtue is not the overcoming of the desires but some kind of agreement with them. What about the man who hates fighting, but overcomes his fears and charges in for the sake of his family and state driven by the knowledge that his is a worthy cause? He would have courage as a virtue according to the definitions of courage given in the *Laws* but according to the overall ethical position he has the same human courage as the witless mercenary or animals⁷⁸. It is not possible to interpret the *Laws* in such a way that this confusion does not occur.

⁷⁷ *Laws* 689a5-10.

⁷⁸ See *Laws* 630b4-8 & 963e1-11.

Plato's concern with harmony in the *Laws* has created a particular problem with his new concept of courage.

7. Conclusion

As I stated above, Plato has not pursued the Socratic search for definitions and essential qualities. This is perhaps a shame, as given the diversity of the behaviour now encompassed by the term courage, we are left to ask what it is that makes all types of courageous behaviour fall under the same term. We now know that the courageous person can be both knowledgeable (or at least have true belief), and ‘witless’ or pre-rational like children, and is an appropriate term to describe both people and animals⁷⁹. Let us return to the definition of courage Plato gives us in the *Laws*:

[Athenian] But what is to be our definition of courage? Are we to define it simply in terms of a fight against fears and pains only, or do we include desires and pleasures, which cajole and seduce us so effectively? They mould the heart like wax – even the hearts of those who loftily believe themselves superior to such influences...[Megillus] Yes, I think so – the fight is against all these feelings.⁸⁰

Courage is therefore the conflict with – and presumably the ability to overcome – fear, pain, pleasure and seduction. Plato no longer explains this ability in terms of the Socratic belief that it is what someone knows that counts; it is not necessarily a quality that someone can only have if they have the right kind of education or upbringing. Human courage, as separate from courage as a virtue, is a character trait that can be found in those who don’t have knowledge or true belief; as Plato says ‘the soul...becomes courageous by a purely natural process’⁸¹. There is no reason to think that for those who have developed courage by a ‘purely natural process’ that some form of relevant education was needed in order to instil such a temperament, as I doubt Plato believed that the witless mercenary, or indeed an animal, had the right kind of education to instill courage. Courage then appears to be a character trait that can be found in either the virtuous or the non-virtuous, and it is exhibited through the kind of actions that overcome fear, pain and pleasures, and it is not necessarily of benefit to the individual. However, a difficulty arises when we try to incorporate this definition of courage within Plato’s

⁷⁹ *Laws* 963e, 630b.

⁸⁰ *Laws* 633c8-d7.

⁸¹ *Laws* 963e6-7.

general ethical scheme in the *Laws*. As I have argued above⁸², in the *Laws* Plato thinks the virtues are a harmony in the soul, but he also says that courage is a struggle between two things. Regardless of what two things they may be, this definition of justice does not sit comfortably with the idea that the virtues are a kind of harmony.

It is difficult to determine how successful Plato's conception of courage is in the *Laws* due to the confusion surrounding it. It is clearly a problematic virtue for Plato. It does in some respects seem like a development from the view in the *Republic* as it no longer excludes the behaviour of children and animals that we would intuitively think of as courageous. The removal of the necessity of knowledge for virtue also seems like a positive development, as the fact that virtue now depends on either knowledge or belief makes it a far more accessible virtue and again seems to respond to what our intuitions tell us about it. However, the confusion created by the contrast between Plato's general ethical theory of harmony and the specific definition he gives us of courage cannot be explained away. The change in Plato's approach to courage should have been taken into account when writing about the general ethical theory he puts forward in the *Laws*. In order to write a coherent dialogue he would have to have reconsidered his position on the virtues as a whole so that courage could have been included in the overall picture created.

However, maybe it simply was not possible to change his definition of courage in such a way and still retain his ethical theory in a recognizable form. By allowing courage to be a description of behaviour which was not for the good he loses the special relationship between the virtues and the force of his ethical theory. At the end of the *Laws* Plato again struggles with the unity of the virtues and the specific difficulty facing him is instructive. He says:

When we said there were four species of virtue, obviously the very fact that there were four meant that each had to be thought of as somehow distinct from the others...yet in fact we call them all by a single name. We say courage is virtue, wisdom is virtue, and

⁸² See section 6, and the *Laws* 689a+.

the other two similarly, on the ground that really they are not several things but just one – virtue...It's not hard to explain how these two 'virtues' and the rest differ from each other and how each has acquired a different name. The real problem is this: why, precisely, have we described both of them (as well as the others) by this common term 'virtue'?⁸³

The challenge Plato believes now faces him is not how to explain that the virtues are four, but in what way they can be one. How indeed, can the virtues be one if one of the individual virtues can describe the irrational behaviour of the mercenary? The struggle to incorporate a more reasonable conception of courage in his overall ethical theory has created serious problems for Plato. I do not think that he uses wisdom and courage by accident in the above section, for it is courage with the absence of wisdom that has created so many difficulties for Plato.

⁸³ *Laws* 963c9-d8.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

A common and straightforward way to define courage is as the capacity to overcome fears in order to carry out one's chosen aims. As argued in Adkins, this would obviously be vital in a warrior society such as the one described in the Homeric poems. However, it is a characteristic that is also essential to any form of morality. Without the courage to act in accordance with your beliefs, you would not be able to act morally in situations where there is something to fear. In which case the timid person would not have a clearly defined personality as what they believe and what they do would not be consistent. A problem with an account of courage that sees it as always being a good is that although courage may be a necessary condition of moral goodness it is not necessarily a good in itself. After all, a wicked man may also need courage in order to carry out his aims. So although courage is regarded by the Greeks and by most other societies as a very important virtue, it is not a good in itself. Kant expounded this point in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* when he identified courage as a conditional good:

Intelligence, wit, judgement, and the other talents of the mind, however they may be named, or courage, resolution, perseverance, as qualities of temperament, are undoubtedly good and desirable in many respects; but these gifts of nature may also become extremely bad and mischievous if the will which is to make use of them, and which, therefore, constitutes what is called character, is not good... There are even some qualities which are of service to this good will itself and may facilitate its action, yet which have no intrinsic unconditional value, but always presuppose a good will, and this qualifies the esteem that we justly have for them and does not permit us to regard them as absolutely good.¹

Kant correctly identified the fact that courage may be used for good or for ill, depending on the character of the individual – a point that was picked up by Plato at the end of his life.

¹ Kant, I., *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p.138.

The main point to come out of this concentrated study of courage in Plato has been how problematic this virtue was to Plato, partially due to the fact that he persisted in seeing it necessarily as a good until *The Laws*. The difficulties in assuming that courage is necessarily a good thing are apparent in the *Laches* and *Protagoras*. Laches' account of courage as endurance is on the right lines but the problem for Plato is that endurance is not always a good thing. In the *Protagoras* and the *Laches*, Plato explores the cogency of the Socratic idea that the virtues are simply knowledge. That not all kinds of knowledge could fulfil this role is missed or omitted in the *Protagoras*, and this leaves the reader dissatisfied with the discussion; *how could Plato expect us to agree with the idea that those who do dangerous activities with knowledge of the practicalities are necessarily braver than those who attempt such deeds untrained?* This omission is rectified in the *Laches*, but even though the Socratic position is considered with more sophistication than in the *Protagoras*, courage still eludes the writer's attempts to explain it as part of a unified ethical theory. From the discussion in the *Laches* it becomes clear that Plato requires some kind of moral knowledge for the identification of virtue with knowledge but the theory is still flawed because how knowledge of the good will help to overcome fear is not explained.

As I argued in Chapter 3, the evidence suggests that Plato did not think any feeling element of fear was necessary for his definition of courage at that point, in fact as Socrates exemplified the ideal courageous individual it seems that rational emotionless decision making is what is required. Such a cognitive based theory dismisses the possibility of: firstly, pre-rational children, and non-rational animals acting courageously; secondly, those with mistaken beliefs (and therefore without knowledge) of the right thing to do; and thirdly – and perhaps most importantly – those who do experience the feeling of fear but act courageously anyway. People who are able to *feel the fear and do it anyway* would certainly have a case for arguing that their courage is even more praise-worthy as they have more to contend with but still do what they think is the right thing. And even if it is not more praise-worthy, it surely still counts as courageous behaviour. Plato could perhaps have responded to such criticisms by simply accepting that children,

animals, those with mistaken views and people who feel fear are not courageous, regardless of what our intuitions may be – intuitions can be wrong. However, the problem with the cognitive theory in the early dialogues is not just that it dismisses such candidates for the description of ‘courageous’, but that the theories offered in the dialogues I have looked at are flawed. The *Protagoras* is based on a version of hedonism that does not work, and implies that courageous people must take pleasure in doing brave deeds (which is surely an unfair requirement), does not clarify what kind of knowledge that is required and ultimately ends with both Protagoras and Socrates appearing to be committed to ideas that contradict their previous statements. The *Laches*, on the other hand, may clarify certain unclear issues left over from the *Protagoras* but still concludes with the problem that if virtue is knowledge then we have no good way to distinguish them from one another.

The *Republic* makes some changes to the picture. In Chapter 6 I demonstrated the importance of courage for Plato’s new psychological model. As courage is the defining characteristic of the spirited part of the soul, and the allegiance of the spirited part determines the health of the tripartite soul, it holds a pivotal role in the *Republic*. In the following two chapters I look at courage and the emotions. Although Plato does still believe that the courageous individual will be in some way *emotionless* – particularly in this case being without fear, particularly of death – he does acknowledge the role that the emotions can play in making us the kind of people that we are, and thus leaves the cognitivism of the early dialogues behind. The emphasis he places on the emotional development of children is perceptive and a considerable intellectual step forward in the study of human psychology. The fact that the *Republic* states that the training of emotion is important could be said to not sit happily with the idea that courageous people were to Plato fearless – after all he does not say that the early emotional education is intended to eradicate the emotions. I have shown that it is likely that the Philosopher Rulers were expected to be fearless, and only have an understanding of what should be feared without experiencing this fear. This interpretation is the most plausible open to us as the Philosopher Rulers will not contemplate doing what should be feared, and it is a truism

that we do not fear the dangerous options we know we have no intention of taking. The courage of the Auxiliaries however is harder to interpret. They will only have the early stage of the education process, and will not develop knowledge and therefore appreciate the real reasons for their beliefs. Their emotions will surely have a greater role to play in their behaviour because of this and this may mean that Plato intended the Auxiliaries to be trained to actually experience fear at the immoral action. If this is indeed what Plato intended it would unfortunately make his theory far less convincing. We simply do not experience fear in such a way.

Thus we learn from the *Republic* that Plato believes that for the Philosopher Rulers not only must the fear of death be eradicated but also that no other fear will be experienced as part of their courage. However, the ideal Philosopher Rulers may always be courageous but given that they will in all likelihood never be instantiated by any actual human being is it really a relevant depiction of a kind of courage? The Auxiliaries are perhaps expected to not be completely fearless, but it is not fear of the danger they are going towards that is supposed to frighten them. The fear that Plato may think they experience is fear of doing what is immoral *instead of* physically dangerous. The idea that people can be trained to experience fear in this way does not conform to our attitudes about human psychology. If the Auxiliaries, like the Rulers, are actually intended to be fearless then they face the same difficulty. It is also probable that Plato was at this point or soon after beginning to realise that the traditional idea that courage was necessarily a good thing was actually not set in stone. If courage was a good thing, and by this Plato meant good for the individual, then what of those who die in their first battle? Plato's tripartite soul can explain why courage is beneficial internally but why would this entail a good life²? Courage is not the kind of virtue that is always good for the agent, even if it might always have some kind of utilitarian benefit to the society of which you are part. The main problem with the two accounts Plato gives of courage in the *Republic* – the courage of the Rulers and the courage of the Auxiliaries – is that in real life we do not have the political framework of the *Republic*. So without Philosopher Rulers or Auxiliaries in the Platonic

² Plato does not use the promise of the afterlife as a necessary reason for behaving morally.

sense no one is really courageous. On a more positive note, Plato's theory does not have to deal with the issue of supererogation when defining courage – he simply sees courageous behaviour as necessary in the same way as being just or temperate. This solution however, seems to disregard the fact that courageous behaviour should perhaps not always be expected by the virtuous person.

In the *Laws* Plato changes his mind about courage. Perhaps due to the difficulty of how to define the apparently courageous behaviour of those not primarily driven by Reason or Spirit, in the *Laws* Plato accepts the actions of the mercenary soldier, children and animals as brave. However, he unfortunately does not take the step of recognising that courage is only good on condition that it is used for the right ends. The division of goods into divine and human – the latter being of no value without the former – gives us an insight into Plato's ethical theory but does not help to understand courage. It might seem that courage ought to be classified as a human good (a quality which is of great value when accompanied by wisdom but is of no value or is even harmful without it) but Plato persists in treating it as a divine good. Thus Plato's final work follows the general trend I have outlined from the view of courage as simply knowledge of what should be feared in the early dialogues, to the later addition of a non-cognitive element such as habituation through education in the *Republic*. In the *Laws*, knowledge is no longer necessary for the central kind of virtue, as true belief is sufficient, and the emphasis on education is still an important theme in the process of becoming courageous. This widening of the scope of courage seems to fit in with our intuitions about the ability of those not driven by good intentions to be brave. However, the fact that courage is something special – a quality not necessarily found in the ordinarily virtuous individual – is never acknowledged in Plato's work, and is an oversight on his part.

In the *Laws* Plato accepts that fear of danger, physical damage or death may be present in the courageous individual. The definition given at *Laws* 633 shows that Plato accepts that it is likely that these fears will be present in a courageous person, and thus part of courage

is the ability to overcome them. However, as Plato's general ethical theory in the *Laws* is concerned with the harmony between judgement and desire how is this to be squared with the idea of courage as the overcoming of fear? Plato's ideas about courage have changed, but not in the same way as his overall theory, and so they are at variance with one another. At the end of Plato's final work he is still concerned with how the unity of the virtues is to be understood, as he is at a loss as to how courage and knowledge could be one. Indeed, as courage is no longer always a virtue that question would present serious problems for Plato. Thus Plato does not succeed at any point in providing a wholly adequate account of courage.

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