INHABITING THE EPISTEMIC FRAME OF MIND: PLATO'S *PROTAGORAS*
AND THE SOCRATIC DENIAL OF AKRASIA

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Socrates is said to have thought that what is responsible for seeming cases of akrasia is ignorance. He also seems to have freed himself, in his own life, from the distinctive kind of inner resistance that plagues the akratic. But if ignorance is responsible for seeming cases of akrasia, how, if at all, does this ignorance differ from other kinds of ignorance? And how could *Socrates* have possessed the kind of serene self-control that according to one plausible reconstruction of his own views could only belong to a person with the kind of *knowledge* that Socrates claimed not to have? In this dissertation I try to shed light on these questions and on Plato's *Protagoras* by presenting my own Socratic-Platonic account of akratic behavior and tracing the correspondences between my account and Plato's text—the whole text, not just the most relevant part of it (352a-359a). The core idea of my account is the concept of a knowledge-oriented mode of thinking, feeling, and acting: the 'epistemic frame of mind'. To fail to inhabit this frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life is, I suggest, to suffer from a kind of ignorance, while to fully inhabit this frame of mind with regard to this activity, though it is not yet to possess the kind of knowledge that properly governs a human life, is nevertheless to free oneself from the kind of inner resistance that plagues the akratic.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In memory of Heda Segvic

1.   INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I present an account of akratic behavior and argue that its ingredients are to be found throughout Plato's *Protagoras*. Before I explain what I mean by my talk of 'ingredients', let me first say what I mean by 'akratic behavior'.

People are sometimes described as acting against their knowledge of what is best or as acting against their belief about what is best. Somebody may be described, for example, as staying in bed though he knows that it would be best for him to get out of bed, or as having more to eat though he believes that it would be best for him to stop eating. The cause of such behavior is commonly supposed to be some sort of inner state of executive weakness ('weakness of the will', 'akrasia',[1] etc.), and it is commonly with reference to this state that the behavior itself is named ('episode of akrasia', 'case of akrasia', or simply 'akrasia'). But such names, descriptions, and explanations are not accepted by everyone, for not everyone admits that people sometimes act against their knowledge of what is best or against their belief about what is best, let alone that such behavior is attributable to a lack of executive virtue; Socrates, for one, appears to have thought that such descriptions were based on a misunderstanding. Yet even people like Socrates who find fault with the common descriptions can agree that they are attempts (in their view unsuccessful ones) to pick out a kind of erring behavior that really exists and that is worth distinguishing from other kinds of erring behavior.[2] How might one refer to this sort of behavior without thereby endorsing the common accounts of it? Perhaps the clearest way would be to

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[1] Lit., lack of power or might, lack of self-control.

[2] I use the word 'kind' in a loose sense here, not in the sense of a well-defined natural class.

speak of 'seeming episodes of akrasia' or 'apparent displays of weakness of the will';

alternatively, one might speak of 'akratic phenomena', leaving it open whether any such

phenomena are actual cases of akrasia. For stylistic reasons (which I hope outweigh the potential

for confusion), I will speak instead of 'akratic behavior', by which I mean the same thing as I

meant just now by those other expressions.[1] By 'akratic behavior', in other words, I mean that

kind of erring behavior which is *commonly described* as action against one's knowledge or belief

about what is best and *commonly attributed* to a lack of executive virtue—it being left open

whether such descriptions and explanations are correct.

The account of akratic behavior that I will present in this dissertation is a Socratic-

Platonic account in the following sense: it leaves no room for action against one's knowledge of

what is best, and much of its conceptual structure is borrowed from Plato and Socrates. It is not,

however, the same as the account of akratic behavior presented by Socrates in the *Protagoras* (at

352a-359a, what I call the 'section on akrasia'[2]), nor do I believe that through the medium of the

Protagoras Plato is obliquely presenting a separate account of akratic behavior distinct from

Socrates' account and identical with my own. Nevertheless, because I happen to have developed

my account of akratic behavior almost as much to help make better sense of the *Protagoras* as to

help make better sense of akratic behavior—for over the past several years I happen to have

pursued these two goals in tandem—my present understanding of akratic behavior bears the

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[1] According to this usage, Socrates admits that there is such a thing as akratic behavior but denies that there are episodes or cases of akrasia.

[2] The word *akrasia* does not occur in Plato's *Protagoras,* though Socrates does use related words to describe akratic behavior (e.g., *kratêthênai* at 352c5, *kratoumenous* at 352e2). Forms of the word *akrasia* (*akrasia, akratia, akrateia*) as well as agent-noun forms (*akratês, akratôr*) do occur in Plato and Xenophon (e.g., *Gorgias* 525a; *Timaeus* 86d; *Critias* 121a; *Mem.* I. v. 2; *Mem.* III. ix. 4; *Mem*; IV. v. 4-11), but not until Aristotle, it seems, does the word get fixed as a 'technical' term in philosophy.

marks of extended contact with the *Protagoras,*[1] while my present understanding of the

Protagoras in turn bears the marks of several years of thinking about akratic behavior. This

partly explains what I mean when I say that 'ingredients' in my account of akratic behavior are

to be found throughout Plato's *Protagoras.*[2]

What, then, is my account of akratic behavior, and how does it differ from Socrates'

account? Most of the rest of this chapter is a response to this question. Near the end of the

chapter I state the aim of the dissertation and explain its unusual shape. I end the chapter by

summarizing the section on akrasia (352a-359a) and the *Protagoras* as a whole. In chapter 2 I

present my account of akratic behavior more fully. In chapter 3 I analyze the section on akrasia

and its immediate context and trace the connections between my account and this section. In

chapter 4 I survey the entire dialogue and argue that ingredients in my account of akratic

behavior are to be found throughout the *Protagoras.*

1.1. The core of my account

1.1.1. The Socratic denial of akrasia

It is not clear whether Socrates denied that anyone ever acts against his *belief* about what

is best (i.e., whether there is such a thing as 'belief-akrasia'), but it is quite clear that he did deny

that anyone ever acts against his *knowledge* of what is best (i.e., that there is such a thing as

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[1] And with Plato's other works, particularly the *Republic.*
[2] I discuss this topic further in section 1.2.

'knowledge-akrasia').[1] The strongest evidence we have is Plato's *Protagoras*, near the end of

which Socrates says:

> Come, my good Protagoras, uncover some more of your thoughts: how are you in regard to
> knowledge (*epistêmê*)? Do you share the view that most people take of this, or have you some
> other? The opinion generally held (*dokei de tois pollois*) of knowledge is something of this sort—
> that it is no strong or guiding or governing thing; it is not regarded as anything of that kind, but
> people think that, while a man often has knowledge in him, he is not governed by it, but by
> something else—now by passion, now by pain, at times by love, and often by fear; their feeling
> about knowledge is just what they have about a slave, that it may be dragged about by any other
> force. Now do you agree with this view of it, or do you consider that knowledge is something
> noble and able to govern man, and that whoever learns what is good and what is bad (*eanper
> gignôskê[i] tis tagatha kai ta kaka*) will never be swayed by anything to act otherwise than as
> knowledge bids, and that intelligence (*tên phronêsin*) is a sufficient succor for mankind?[2]

When Protagoras answers,

> Not only does it seem just as you say (*hôsper su legeis*), Socrates, but further, it would be
> shameful indeed for me above all people to say that wisdom and knowledge (*sophian kai
> epistêmên*) are anything but the most powerful forces (*kratiston*) in human activity,[3]

Socrates agrees with him:

> Well *and truly* spoken. . . . Now you know that most people will not listen to you *and me* but say
> that many, while knowing what is best, refuse to perform it, though they have the power, and do
> other things instead.[4]

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[1] Cf. Aristotle's discussion of this distinction at *EN* 1145b-1146a (Aristotle seems to have thought that Socrates denied belief-akrasia generally, not just knowledge-akrasia in particular). I assume throughout that anyone who *knows* that it would be best to do x also *believes* that it would be best to do x, and that therefore anyone who acts against his knowledge of what is best also acts against his belief about what is best. It follows that a general denial of belief-akrasia includes the specific denial of knowledge-akrasia. (I discuss the knowledge/belief distinction further in chapter 3.)

[2] 352a-c (W. R. M. Lamb's translation, Loeb Classical Library).

[3] 352cd (Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell's translation).

[4] 352d, emphases added (W. R. M. Lamb's translation).

Later, when 'the many' (*hoi polloi*) are being reminded of this earlier point, Socrates describes himself, together with Protagoras, as having denied knowledge-akrasia:

> You asked it, if you remember, when we [Protagoras and I] were agreeing that there is nothing stronger than knowledge, and that knowledge, wherever it may be found, has always the upper hand of pleasure or anything else; and then you said that pleasure often masters even the man of knowledge, and on our refusing to agree with you, you went on to ask us: Protagoras and Socrates, if this experience is not "being overcome by pleasure," whatever can it be, and what do you call it?[1]

Other evidence in Xenophon and Aristotle[2] suggests that on this point, at least, no distinction need be drawn between the historical Socrates and the Socrates in the *Protagoras*: one may simply say that according to *Socrates*, people who take themselves to be acting against their knowledge of what is best do not in fact possess the knowledge they think they possess, but on the contrary, what is responsible for their akratic behavior is a kind of ignorance. Up to this point my account of akratic behavior is the same as Socrates'.

When one goes on to ask whether there is a distinctive sort of ignorance that causes akratic behavior and, if so, how this kind of ignorance differs from the various kinds of ignorance that make people go wrong in other ways, then it is no longer clear what Socrates thought. It is true that in the *Protagoras* Socrates leads 'the many' to see that by their own admission akratic behavior is due to the lack of a "measuring art" (*metrêtikê technê*).[3] But Socrates leaves it an open question what exactly this *technê* is,[4] and he also never indicates that he himself endorses all the claims he leads the many to accept. We are ultimately left to wonder

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[1] 357c.
[2] See *Mem.* III. ix. 4-5 and *EN* 1145b, 1147b (cf. *Magna Moralia* 1200b). At *EN* 1145b Aristotle seems to have the *Protagoras* in mind, since he uses an image that Plato uses at *Prot.* 352c, but surely this was not his only source.
[3] See 357d (*epistêmês endeia[i] . . . kai ou monon epistêmês, alla . . . metrêtikês*).
[4] 357b: "Well, the nature of this art or science [lit., '*what* art or science this *is*'] we shall consider some other time (*hêtis men toinun technê kai epistêmê estin hautê, eis authis skepsometha*) . . . ."

whether Socrates distinguished a kind of ignorance that he thought was responsible for akratic behavior in particular, and if he did, what kind he thought it was.

It is here that my account of akratic behavior departs from the one endorsed by Socrates in the *Protagoras*. Strictly speaking, my account does not contradict what Socrates plainly asserts in his own voice in this dialogue (which is not very much); but on topics on which Socrates is silent or noncommittal, I say something definite, and in this respect my account does differ from his. Specifically, I acknowledge the existence of a kind of belief-akrasia (it is unclear, as I said, whether Socrates did or not), and I give answers to two questions that I said are left open by Socrates: "What is the ignorance that causes akratic behavior?" and "How, if it all, does this ignorance differ from the kinds of ignorance that cause other sorts of erring behavior?"

My account of akratic behavior also differs from a 'Socratic' account of akratic behavior recently set forth by Terry Penner.[1] According to Penner's account, what rids the human soul of its akratic flutterings is the conversion of true opinions into knowledge.[2] While Penner's account has much to recommend it, it fails to make sense of the fact that the historical Socrates, whom our sources represent as possessing a kind of serene self-control, evidently managed to free himself from the distinctive kind of inner resistance that plagues the akratic, even as Socrates

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[1] In "Socrates on the Strength of Knowledge: *Protagoras* 351B-357E," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (79), 1997, pp. 117-149. I discuss Terry Penner's account in chapter 3.

[2] Penner, as one would expect, makes much of that passage in the *Meno* (97d-98a) where such a process of conversion is described: "[T]rue opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good; but they are not willing to remain long, and they escape from a man's mind, so that they are not worth much until one ties them down by (giving) an account of the reason why . . . . After they are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge, and then they remain in place. That is why knowledge is prized higher than correct opinion, and knowledge differs from correct opinion in being tied down." (G. M. A. Grube's translation.) Penner relates this passage to a part of the *Protagoras* (356de) in which there is a similar description: "Now if our welfare consisted in doing and choosing things of larger dimensions, and avoiding and not doing those of small, what would be our salvation in life? Would it be the art of measurement, or the power of appearance? Is it not the latter that leads us astray, as we saw, and many a time causes us to take things topsy turvy and to have to change our minds both in our conduct and in our choice of great and small? Whereas the art of measurement would have made this appearance ineffective, and by showing us the truth would have brought our soul into the repose of abiding by the truth, and so would have saved our lives." (W. R. M. Lamb's translation, Loeb Classical Library.)

also claimed, apparently sincerely, not to have acquired the kind of knowledge that Penner has in mind. How, according to Penner's 'Socratic' account, could Socrates himself have done what he did? My account has its own set of weaknesses, but one of its strengths, I think, is that it makes sense of this fact about Socrates.

1.1.2. The epistemic frame of mind

I present my account of akratic behavior more fully in chapter 2, but let me now present its core idea: inhabiting the 'epistemic frame of mind'.

If somebody told you his eyes were failing, handed you a set of surgical instruments, and asked you to do him the favor of healing his eyes, how would you react? If you believed that you were an eye doctor, perhaps you would actually try to heal this person's eyes. Otherwise, it is likely that the very thought of *you* sticking sharp objects into somebody's eyes would make you wince. You would refuse to do this man this 'favor,' explaining that you are not qualified, that this is an activity that calls for an expert's knowledge, that anyone but an expert would almost certainly botch the job. Imagine now that somebody carrying surgical instruments walks up to you and says that he intends to heal *your* eyes. What will you do? You will probably panic and not let this person get anywhere near your eyes. If he manages to grab your arm and tries to hold you still, the better to 'heal' you, you will struggle hard to free yourself. But if this same person approached you in a hospital, and you were convinced that he was an eye doctor who knew what he was doing, you might well let him touch your eyes without offering any resistance.[1]

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[1] Cf. *Lysis* 207d-210d. See esp. 209e-210a: "[I]f [the Great King's] son had something the matter with his eyes, would he let him meddle with them himself, if he considered him to be no doctor (*mê iatron hêgoumenos*), or would he prevent him? He would prevent him. But if he supposed us to have medical skill (*hêmas de ge ei hupolambanoi iatrikous einai*), he would not prevent us, I imagine, even though we wanted to pull the eyes open and sprinkle them

All of which is to say that you already *inhabit the epistemic frame of mind* when it comes to the activity of operating on people's eyes. With regard to this activity you already *think* and *feel* and *act* in a characteristic mode: you think that only people who possess a certain kind of knowledge are qualified to engage in this activity; you are alarmed at the thought that a layman, whether you or anyone else, engage in this activity without the guidance of an expert's knowledge; and you will take action, if you can, to stop this from happening.

A person may inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to some activity without possessing the knowledge that properly governs that activity. The activity just mentioned was itself a good illustration of this, but let me use a new example. To consider training horses to be an activity that only people who possess a certain kind of knowledge are qualified to engage in; to be alarmed at the suggestion that a layman try to tame a horse without an expert's guidance; to take action, when possible, to prevent this from happening—to think and feel and act in these ways is not yet to possess a horse trainer's knowledge. On the other hand, someone who did not inhabit this mode of thinking, feeling, and acting would also not possess a horse trainer's knowledge. For the knowledge of caring for horses presumably involves a combination of intellectual, affective, and practical dispositions, e.g., being aware that extreme heat or cold harms horses, being alarmed at the thought that a horse may be exposed to such danger, being disposed to act so as to stop this from happening, etc.; and if these sorts of dispositions are part of a horse trainer's knowledge, surely it is also part of a horse trainer's knowledge to be aware that *ignorant treatment by human beings*[1] harms horses, to be alarmed at the thought that a horse may be exposed to such treatment, and to be disposed to act so as to stop this from happening— in other words, to inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the treatment of horses.

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with ashes, so long as he believed our judgment to be sound (*hêgoumenos orthôs phronein*). That is true." (W. R. M. Lamb's tranlsation, Loeb Classical Library.)

[1] I.e., treatment not guided by a horse trainer's knowledge.

Thus inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind, though not a sufficient condition for possessing a horse trainer's knowledge, does seem to be a necessary condition. In general, inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind with regard to some activity, though not a sufficient condition for possessing the knowledge that properly governs that activity, is at least in certain cases a part of that knowledge. And in those cases where it is a part of that knowledge, failure to inhabit the epistemic frame of mind is a failure of *knowledge*, i.e., a kind of ignorance.

Consider a boy who already inhabits the epistemic frame of mind with regard to certain activities (taking care of human bodies, training horses, building ships) but not yet with regard to the activity of living a human life. As the boy walks through his native city, he marvels at the success of its various artisans and professionals in their specialized fields, then compares their excellent work in these fields with his own lackluster efforts to become a better person. It occurs to him that maybe there is an *art* of living a human life, i.e., a kind of expert knowledge that properly governs a human being's life as a whole, just as there is an expert knowledge that governs each of the crafts of the city's professionals, and that maybe it is for lack of this knowledge that he is not as fine a human being as he would like to be. The thought sticks in his mind, for whatever reason, and over the years this way of thinking becomes second nature to him. By the time he is an adult, he firmly believes that living a human life is an activity that cannot be engaged in well without the guidance of a certain kind of knowledge; he is distressed by the thought that he and other people are living their lives without the help of such knowledge; and he does what he can to fix this situation. In other words, he fully inhabits the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life. Yet neither he nor anyone else, as far as he can determine, possesses the knowledge in question; indeed, the thought that he is

continually bungling a job that calls for an expert's knowledge fills him with a kind of philosophical queasiness. Nevertheless, he tries hard to 'learn on the job', living in accordance with what he thinks are the best ideas he has had to date, never losing track of the fact that these ideas do not amount to knowledge, and never giving up the search for better ideas that come closer to knowledge.

The person I have just described underwent a kind of conversion. If living a human life is indeed the sort of activity that a certain kind of knowledge properly governs, then at the beginning of this conversion process, this person was ignorant in the following sense: he lacked the knowledge that properly governs the activity of living a human life. What is more to the point, he had not yet learned to approach this activity in the way in which he had already learned to approach building ships and training horses—though he himself was neither a shipbuilder nor a trainer of horses—i.e., he had not yet learned to inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life. But if inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind with regard to this activity is *part of the knowledge* by which this activity is to be governed, then this person's failure in his youth to inhabit this frame of mind with regard to this activity was itself a kind of ignorance. Let us call this kind of ignorance (i.e., failure to inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to an activity that is properly governed by knowledge) *ignorance$_e$*, and let us call the other kind of ignorance (i.e., failure to possess the knowledge that properly governs an activity) *ignorance$_k$*.[1] Before his conversion began, this person suffered not only from *ignorance$_k$* but from *ignorance$_e$*.[2] By the end of the process, though he continued to suffer from *ignorance$_k$*, he no longer suffered from *ignorance$_e$*. That is, though he continued to lack the

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[1] In this case and in similar cases, whoever suffers from *ignorance$_e$* necessarily also suffers from *ignorance$_k$*, since in these cases *ignorance$_e$* is itself a special kind of *ignorance$_k$*.
[2] That is, with regard to the activity of living a human life. With regard to the activities of training horses and building ships, he suffered from *ignorance$_k$* but had already been cured of *ignorance$_e$*.

knowledge that properly governs the activity of living a human life, he had come to fully inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to that activity.

What does such a person have to show for having rid himself of *ignorance*$_e$? In what sense is he closer than he was before to living a good human life? On first thought it can seem that he is no closer at all, for just as curing oneself of *ignorance*$_e$ with regard to the activity of swimming in the sea leaves one no more skilled at swimming than one was before, so curing oneself of *ignorance*$_e$ with regard to the activity of living a human life might be thought to leave one no more skilled at living than one was before. Yet there seem to be two senses in which such a person is closer to living a good human life. First, think of a plant that possesses a heliotropic instinct, i.e., an instinct to bend and grow towards the light. While it is true that the mere possession of such an instinct does not by itself make the plant more vigorous, and that if the plant were trapped in a pitch-dark cellar, even the strongest heliotropic instinct would do it no good, nevertheless, if its location does permit it to increase its time in the sun, this instinct is the very thing that will cause the plant to get more sun and grow more vigorously. Similarly, while it may be true that being free of *ignorance*$_e$ with regard to the activity of living a human life does not by itself make a person more skilled at the details of living, and that if one were utterly in the dark about how to live and had no hope of learning, being free of *ignorance*$_e$ would do one little good, nevertheless, if a person can make progress towards knowledge of how to live, the fact that he is free of *ignorance*$_e$—and therefore devoted to 'bending' and 'growing' towards knowledge—will be the very thing that causes him to live a better life, i.e., a life that is governed by thoughts that come closer to knowledge.

But apart from its worth as a means to acquiring knowledge of how to live, inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life seems itself to be partly constitutive of what it is to live a good human life. There seems to be something intrinsically good about trusting the guidance of knowledge so deeply that all other rival guides—instincts, appetites, social mores, etc.—can be put, as it were, on hold while one freely considers whether the promptings of each are or are not in accord with the dictates of knowledge. Making such judgments, of course, would be quite a bit easier if one actually possessed the knowledge in question; but even a person who merely inhabits the epistemic frame of mind without possessing this knowledge is still a free follower of knowledge, if a nearly blind one, and not a slave to any other guide. Perhaps it is this freedom more than anything else that constitutes what such a person "has to show" for having rid himself of *ignorance$_e$*.

This, then, is the core of my account of akratic behavior, though not the account itself. Having distinguished *ignorance$_e$* from *ignorance$_k$*, however, I may now present a simple formulation of that account:

> There are many different kinds of akratic behavior,[1] and different factors are responsible
> for different kinds, but what is chiefly responsible for typical instances of akratic
> behavior is a kind of *ignorance$_e$*, i.e., a certain kind of failure to inhabit the epistemic
> frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life generally and, in
> particular, with regard to the activity of thinking about what is good.

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[1] E.g., the passionate, helpless kind displayed by Medea in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (VII.17-21: *excute virgineo conceptas pectore flammas, / si potes, infelix. si possem, sanior essem; / sed trahit invitam nova vis, aliudque cupido, / mens aliud suadet: video meliora proboque, / deteriora sequor!*), which is different from the perversely willful kind described in Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* ("What about all those millions of incidents testifying to the fact that men have *knowingly,* that is in full understanding of their own best interests, put them in the background and taken a perilous and uncertain course not because anybody or anything drove them to it, but simply because they did not choose to follow the appointed road, as it were, but wilfully and obstinately preferred to pursue a perverse and difficult path . . . ?" [Jessie Coulson's Penguin translation, p. 29]).

I describe this kind of *ignorance*$_e$ in greater detail in chapter 2, where (as I have said) I will present my account of akratic behavior more fully. For now, I will simply back up some of the claims I have already made, while raising further questions which will have to be answered later.

I said that according to Socrates, no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best, and that to this extent my account is the same as Socrates' account. I also said that unlike the account presented by Socrates in the *Protagoras*, my account of akratic behavior specifies a kind of ignorance that is responsible for akratic behavior, as distinguished from other kinds of ignorance responsible for other sorts of erring behavior. I said in addition that while it is unclear whether Socrates denied that anyone ever acts against his belief about what is best, my account explicitly makes room for a kind of belief-akrasia. Finally, I said that unlike a similar 'Socratic' account of akratic behavior presented by Terry Penner, my account makes sense of the fact that the historical Socrates, without ever having acquired the knowledge of how to live well, evidently made himself immune to the kind of inner resistance that plagues the akratic. I will address each point in order.

According to my account of akratic behavior, no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best. For by 'knowledge of what is best' I mean the knowledge of how it would be best to continue to live one's life; and such specific knowledge seems to me to imply a more general knowledge, namely the knowledge that properly governs the activity of living of a human life. Moreover, just as part of what it is to possess the knowledge that properly governs the activity of taking care of human bodies—a physician's knowledge—is to (fully) inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to this activity, so it seems to me that part of what it is to possess the knowledge that properly governs the activity of living a human life is to (fully) inhabit the

epistemic frame of mind with regard to this activity. If so, to *know* what it would be best for one to do (and therefore to possess the knowledge that properly governs the activity of living a human life) is already to (fully) inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life. But to inhabit this frame of mind with regard to this activity is to believe that living a human life is an activity that cannot be engaged in well without the guidance of a certain kind of knowledge, to be alarmed at the thought that human lives are being led without the help of this knowledge, and to act so as to help people lead their lives in accordance with this knowledge—and of course in one's own life *to act in accordance with this knowledge* if one possesses it.[1] So whoever possesses the knowledge that properly governs the activity of living a human life will never act against this knowledge. In other words, no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best.

Someone might object that the foregoing argument does not differ substantially from the following conditional statement: "If the phrase 'knowledge of what is best' means 'the kind of mental state against which it is impossible to act,' then no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best." It is clear, I hope, that my argument and this statement do differ significantly; but where exactly does the difference lie? Both, after all, employ a definition of 'knowledge of what is best' according to which it is impossible to act against this knowledge; in both, in other words, everything depends upon the definition of this phrase. Here is where I think the difference lies: whereas the conditional statement does not point out a familiar kind of mental state which people already recognize as real and are already inclined to call 'knowledge', my argument does. Most people already recognize that eye doctors and horse trainers and other such experts possess a particular set of cognitive-affective-practical traits that marks them out as the experts they are,

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[1] Note that whereas workers in other technical fields are sometimes not engaged in their professional activities, no living human being is ever not engaged in the activity of living a human life.

and most people are already inclined to call such a set of traits a kind of knowledge. Moreover, most people can follow me when I peel away part of this kind of knowledge to reveal the part that I am most interested in: inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind. That is, most people know first-hand what it is like in certain contexts to trust nothing but the guidance of an expert's knowledge. Unlike 'the kind of mental state against which it is impossible to act', the epistemic frame of mind is not some abstract construct pulled out of thin air, but a humanly possible mode of thinking-feeling-acting which many people do in fact inhabit with regard to certain activities. In relating this frame of mind to the activity of living a human life I am simply inviting people to extend their current ways of thinking about horse trainers, shipbuilders, etc., to human beings in general. In this respect, of course, I am following Socrates.[1]

When I said that unlike Socrates I specified a *kind* of ignorance that is responsible for akratic behavior, and that I distinguished it from the kinds of ignorance that are responsible for other sorts of erring behavior, I had in mind *ignorance_e*, failure to inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to an activity that is properly governed by knowledge, as opposed to *ignorance_k*, failure to possess this knowledge. *Ignorance_k* is responsible for a wide range of erring behavior, but in my view it is specifically *ignorance_e* that is chiefly responsible for typical cases of akratic behavior. It might be objected that akratics tend to show remorse, i.e., that they tend to say after the fact that they 'should have' acted otherwise. If, as I claim, akratics fail to inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity in question and therefore do not

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[1] Cf. *Gorgias* 491a [Callicles speaking to Socrates]: "I believe, on my soul, you absolutely cannot ever stop talking of cobblers and fullers, cooks and doctors, as though our discussion had to do with them." Cf. also *Symposium* 221e-222a [Alcibiades speaking of Socrates]: "His talk is of pack-asses, smiths, cobblers, and tanners, and he seems always to be using the same terms for the same things; so that anyone inexpert and thoughtless might laugh his speeches to scorn. But when these are opened, and you obtain a fresh view of them by getting inside, first of all you will discover that they are the only speeches which have any sense in them; and secondly, that none are so divine, so rich in images of virtue, so largely—nay, so completely—intent on all things proper for the study of such as would attain both grace and worth (*tôi mellonti kalôi kagathôi esesthai*)." (W. R. M. Lamb's translations, Loeb Classical Library.)

view *the knowledge that properly governs the activity* as the standard against which their actions are to be judged, what standard are they using when they say that they 'should have' done otherwise, and why do they fail to live up to this standard? Moreover, people who take themselves to be acting not only against their best judgment but against their knowledge of what is best would seem to pose an even greater problem for my account. Do *they* not inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity in question? If not, why do they claim that they 'knew' what to do and that they 'should have' let themselves be guided by knowledge? If this epistemic 'ought' is not arising from the epistemic frame of mind itself, where is it coming from? These are among the questions I will have to answer after more ground has been covered. Let me say for now, however, that there is a difference between being an *inhabitant* of the epistemic frame of mind and being a mere *sojourner*, and that this distinction goes some of the way towards answering all of these questions.[1]

I said that I make room for a kind of belief-akrasia, i.e., a kind of action against one's belief about what is best, and I said "a kind" because there is another kind that I do not allow. According to my account, whoever fully inhabits the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life but fails to possess the knowledge that properly governs this activity will try his best to live in accordance with whatever he believes come closest to knowledge. If this turns out to be his father's advice, he will not act against his father's advice; if it is his 'divine sign', he will not act against his divine sign[2]; if it is his own independent

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[1] Note my repeated use of the phrase '(fully) inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind'.

[2] Cf. *Crito* 46b (Socrates speaking): "[F]or I am not only now but always a man who follows nothing but the reasoning which on consideration seems to me best (*hôs egô ou monon nun alla kai aei toioutos, hoios tôn emôn mêdeni allôi peithesthai ê tôi logôi, hos an moi logizomenôi beltistos phainêtai*)." Cf. also *Apology* 40a-c: "[A] wonderful thing has happened to me. For hitherto the customary prophetic monitor (*hê gar eiôthuia moi mantikê hê tou daimoniou*) always spoke to me very frequently and opposed me (*enantioumenê*) even in very small matters, if I was going to do anything I should not (*ei ti melloimi mê orthôs praxein*); but now . . . this thing which might be thought, and is generally considered, the greatest of evils (*eschata kakôn*) has come upon me; but the divine sign (*to tou theou sêmeion*) did not oppose me (*emoi . . . ênantiôthê*) either when I left my home in the morning, or when I

opinion (where this remains unchanged by someone else's warning or advice), he will not act against his opinion. And of course whoever *knows* that it would be best for him to do something, and therefore also believes that it would be best for him to do it, will not act against this belief of his, since (as I have already explained) he will not act against his knowledge. In short, no one who fully inhabits the epistemic frame of mind will ever act against his belief about what is best. Yet it is consistent with my account of akratic behavior to allow that someone who fails to inhabit this frame of mind with regard to this activity *may* act against his belief about what is best. Thus according to my account, supposed cases of knowledge-akrasia are really only cases of belief-akrasia, if that,[1] and all cases of belief-akrasia involve beliefs about what is good that do *not* arise or have their home within the epistemic frame of mind. Roughly speaking, this is the kind of belief-akrasia that my account makes room for.[2]

Finally, I said that my account of akratic behavior makes sense of the fact that Socrates, though he never acquired the knowledge of how to live well, evidently rid himself of the distinctive kind of inner resistance that plagues the akratic. According to my account, a certain psychic serenity may be achieved by curing oneself of *ignorance_e*, even as one continues to suffer from *ignorance_k*. Someone who fully inhabits the epistemic frame of mind places his trust in the guidance of knowledge—or, failing that, in whichever 'guide' he thinks comes closest to knowledge—and at least when he believes that he can see where this guidance is pointing him,

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came here to the court, or at any point of my speech . . . . What then do I suppose is the reason? I will tell you. This which has happened to me is doubtless a good thing (*agathon*), and those of us who think death is an evil (*kakon*) must be mistaken. A convincing proof of this has been given me (*mega moi tekmêrion toutou gegonen*); for the accustomed sign (*to eiôthos sêmeion*) would surely not have opposed me (*ou . . . esth' hopôs ouk ênantiôthê an moi*) if I had not been going to meet with something good (*ei mê ti emellon egô agathon praxein*)." (Harold North Fowler's translations, Loeb Classical Library.)

[1] It may be that someone who takes himself to be acting against his knowledge of what is best is not even acting against his belief about what is best, for he may be mistaken about what it is that he really believes.

[2] Again, more ground will need to be covered before I can be more precise.

such epistemic trust makes for a kind of serene self-control. It seems to me that this was true of Socrates.

1.2.   The aim and shape of this dissertation

The aim of this dissertation is to shed light on Plato's *Protagoras* and on akratic behavior. Given this aim, I might have decided to give my thesis either of two shapes: I might have written an interpretation of the *Protagoras* in which I primarily shared my thoughts about the text and incidentally shared my thoughts about akratic behavior; or I might have written a treatise on the philosophical problem of akrasia in which I primarily shared my thoughts about akratic behavior and incidentally shared my thoughts about the *Protagoras*. In the former case I would mainly have tried to show that my reading of the *Protagoras* was correct, illuminating, worth taking seriously, etc.; in the latter I would mainly have tried to show that my account of akratic behavior was true, interesting, worth taking seriously, etc. But I have decided not to give my thesis either of these shapes. In order to explain what shape I have decided to give it and why, I will need to employ a rather odd analogy, whose aptness I hope will excuse its eccentricity.

Imagine, if you will, a pen, an inkwell, and half of a large bivalve seashell with irregular contours on its inner surface. Person A scrutinizes the inner surface of the shell and points out interesting patterns and details, while person B uses the inkwell and pen to make a fairly good pen-and-ink drawing (say, of a reclining nude) on a piece of paper. Person C then uses all three items as follows: like person A, he scrutinizes the contours of the shell and notices interesting features, and like person B, he makes a pen-and-ink drawing that would be a pretty good work of art in its own right if reproduced on a flat piece of paper; but instead of using paper, he makes his

drawing on the inner surface of the shell itself, using the contours he sees in the shell to help him arrive at a good idea for a drawing, and fitting the lines of his drawing to those contours as best he can—thereby engaging in a hybrid activity that combines the activities of persons A and B but that also has its own standard of success. It is true that person C will not succeed at this hybrid activity if he does not succeed at its component parts: viz., (a) noticing interesting patterns and details on the inner surface of the shell and (b) creating a drawing that could stand tolerably well on its own, i.e., on a flat surface. Still, the success of person C at his chosen activity does not depend chiefly on the sum of these parts, but rather on how well he can combine them, that is, on how closely and creatively he can fit the lines of his pen-and-ink drawing to the contours of the shell.

Somewhat analogously, and there are many respects in which the analogy fails, a person might scrutinize Plato's *Protagoras* and notice interesting patterns and details in it (cf. activity (a)), while someone else, without once picking up the *Protagoras,* might create his own account of akratic behavior (cf. activity (b)). Many philosophers who write on akrasia, of course, do engage with the *Protagoras* to some degree, and many interpreters of the *Protagoras* think seriously for themselves about the philosophical problem of akrasia. But to combine the two activities to some degree is not necessarily to do what I have done. What I have tried to do is to notice interesting features of Plato's text, to use these features to help me arrive at ideas for an account of akratic behavior that is true, interesting, and worth taking seriously in its own right, and to try all the while to make this account correspond as closely as possible to the features of Plato's text that I have noticed (cf. person C's 'hybrid' activity).

To engage in this activity well is to submit one's thoughts to a discipline that I believe sharpens one's sense of the text while improving one's understanding of part of its subject

matter, by forcing one to think creatively about the connections between the two and in the process think more carefully and sensitively about each one individually. It is possible, of course, to be sloppy about it—to fail to keep criticizing one's own philosophical thoughts so as to bring them closer to the truth, to fail to keep rereading Plato's text so as to prevent oneself from finding things in it that are not there, etc. Ideally, however, the result of engaging in this activity well is a plausible and interesting account of akratic behavior whose most distinctive aspect is how closely and creatively its contours fit the contours of Plato's *Protagoras,* an account, in other words, whose most distinctive aspect only becomes apparent when the account is superimposed upon the text.

It is because I think that this is the activity in which I have engaged over the past several years that I have chosen to argue primarily, not that my account of akratic behavior is true, interesting, etc., nor that my reading of the *Protagoras* is correct, illuminating, etc., but rather that materials for the creation of my account are to be found throughout the text. If in the process I fail to show that my thoughts about akratic behavior are plausible, interesting, etc., and that my thoughts about the *Protagoras* are accurate, illuminating, etc., I will have failed to achieve my aim, for my aim (as I said at the start of this section) is to shed light on the *Protagoras* and on akratic behavior. I do believe, however, that in the course of laying out my account and tracing the correspondences between it and Plato's text, I will shed light on both these things, even as I also highlight the fact that my account and the *Protagoras* combine to make 'shell art.'

I said that there were many respects in which the shell analogy fails. One of them is this: A shell is a natural object, while the *Protagoras* is an elaborate human artifact. It is one thing to take a natural object and turn it into a work of art; it is something else to take what is already a

finished work of art and presume to superimpose one's own artwork upon it. Nevertheless, one might imagine a collaborative-minded artist who is very good at creating shell-like objects (say, out of porcelain) that are works of art in their own right but that also lend themselves to being taken up by someone else who carefully studies their contours, uses them to help him arrive at a good idea for a drawing, and tries to fit his drawing to those contours as best he can. The final 'shell art' would be the result of a kind of artistic collaboration, which could conceivably span thousands of years. Similarly, one might imagine a collaborative-minded philosophical author who is very good at creating texts that are philosophical works of art in their own right but that also lend themselves to being taken up by someone else who carefully studies their features, uses them to help him arrive at good philosophical thoughts of his own, and tries all the while to fit his thoughts to those features as best he can, rendering himself more sensitive to the nuances of the text while refining his understanding of the subject matter in question. Whether or not he conceived of himself in this way, Plato seems to me to have been such an author. If the primary aim of this dissertation is to shed light on the *Protagoras* and on akratic behavior, its secondary aim is to promote this kind of approach to Plato's works.

1.3.   The structure of the *Protagoras*

I end this introductory chapter by summarizing the section on akrasia (352a-359a) and the *Protagoras* as a whole. This should help prepare the way for chapter 3, in which I trace the connections between my account of akratic behavior and the section on akrasia, and for chapter 4, in which I argue that ingredients in my account are to be found throughout the *Protagoras*.

1.3.1.   The section on akrasia (352a-359a)

The section on akrasia may be divided into three parts. In the first part (352a-353b) Socrates asks Protagoras whether in his opinion people ever act against their knowledge of what is best. When Protagoras says he thinks this never happens and Socrates agrees, Socrates adds that most people do not believe the two of them but say that many people do act against their knowledge of what is best and that they do so because they are overcome by pleasure or anger or fear or some other emotion. Socrates persuades Protagoras to help him imagine how the two of them would demonstrate to these objectors ('the many') what is really responsible for the behavior commonly (and, according to Socrates and Protagoras, incorrectly) described as action against one's knowledge of what is best.

In the second part of the section on akrasia (353c-357e) Socrates and Protagoras imagine how this demonstration would go, Socrates taking the lead and doing almost all of the argumentative work. The crucial premise in the demonstration, a premise which the many are led to accept, is that the good is the pleasant (it has been much debated by scholars whether Socrates himself accepts this premise).[1] The conclusion of the demonstration is that *by their own lights* the many must agree that what is responsible for the behavior commonly described as action against one's knowledge is ignorance.[2]

In the third part (358a-359a) Socrates questions Protagoras, Prodicus, and Hippias (all three at once)[3] about the pleasant and the good, akratic behavior, and fear, in preparation for the

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[1] See for instance Donald J. Zeyl's "Socrates and Hedonism: *Protagoras 351b-358d*," Terrence Irwin's *Plato's Ethics*, pp. 85-92, Charles Kahn's *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue,* pp. 210-257 (esp. p. 240), and Martha Nussbaum's *The Fragility of Goodness,* pp. 89-121 (esp. pp. 109-110). I believe, with Zeyl and Kahn, that Socrates does not accept this premise.

[2] As I have said, the exact nature of this ignorance is left unspecified.

[3] It is debatable whether Protagoras is among the group of people giving answers at this point, and in particular, whether he himself accepts the version of hedonism agreed to here by Prodicus "and the others" (358b2-3). I feel

final discussion between himself and Protagoras about how courage is related to the rest of virtue. It is only in this third part that action against one's *belief* is even mentioned, all previous talk about akratic behavior having been about action against one's knowledge.[1]

1.3.2.   The dialogue as a whole

The *Protagoras* begins with a short introductory frame in which a nameless Friend questions Socrates about his relationship with Alcibiades and about his encounter with Protagoras earlier that morning. The rest of the *Protagoras* is Socrates' narration of the earlier events of the day.

Early in the morning, shortly before dawn, Socrates' young friend Hippocrates knocks on his door and begs him to accompany him to Callias's house to help persuade Protagoras (who is staying with Callias during a visit to Athens) to teach Hippocrates. Socrates asks Hippocrates who he takes Protagoras to be that he is so eager to study with him. Hippocrates is led to see that he does not know what kind of teacher Protagoras is and that in rushing to study with him he is staking his soul in a risky gamble. Light having dawned, Socrates and Hippocrates proceed to Callias's house.

Once inside, Socrates and Hippocrates approach Protagoras, and after others have been gathered together to hear the exchange, including the sophists Hippias and Prodicus, Socrates

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the pull of both sides of this question, and I do not believe that a burden of proof lies on one side or on the other. Nevertheless, I am strongly inclined to believe, together with Adam and Adam and numerous other interpreters, that Protagoras is agreeing here with Prodicus and Hippias. (Cf. Adam and Adam, p. 188: "Throughout this chapter all the Sophists reply.")

[1] The words used for 'believe' in this section are *oiesthai* (358b7, c7, d1) and *hêgeisthai* (twice at 358e5, recalled at 359d2, d5). *Doxa* ('opinion') occurs at 358c4, while *prosdokia* ('expectation') is used at 358d2. The explicit distinction drawn in the *Meno* (96eff.) between *doxa alêthês* or *orthê doxa* ('true opinion', 'correct opinion') and *epistêmê* ('knowledge') is not drawn in the *Protagoras*. C. C. W. Taylor suggests in his commentary (pp. 202-3) that at the time of writing the *Protagoras* Plato may have "not yet arrived at a clear distinction between true belief and knowledge."

asks Protagoras what Hippocrates can expect to receive from becoming Protagoras's pupil. Protagoras claims, after some prodding by Socrates, that he teaches the art that makes men good citizens.[1] Socrates cites evidence suggesting that this kind of goodness or virtue cannot be taught, and he challenges Protagoras to show that it can. Protagoras meets the challenge in a brilliant speech.[2] Genuinely impressed, Socrates praises Protagoras and says that he is now convinced that virtue is teachable—except for one small point, "which Protagoras will of course easily explain away . . . ."[3]

Socrates' one small point unfolds into a long discussion between him and Protagoras about the relation between the parts of virtue and the whole of virtue. The discussion begins with an examination of the relations between justice and piety, temperance and wisdom, and temperance and justice, but the question of the relation between courage and the rest of virtue— in particular, between courage and wisdom—comes to dominate the inquiry. At a turning point in the discussion, Protagoras claims that some people are most unjust, most impious, most immoderate, most unwise, and yet eminently courageous. Socrates then tries to make Protagoras admit that this is impossible. He makes two distinct attempts to lead Protagoras to agree that courage is wisdom. The first is a somewhat embarrassing failure, though not a wasted effort; Socrates prepares the ground for his second attempt by questioning Protagoras about two things: the relation between the good and the pleasant, and whether a person ever acts against his knowledge of what is best. This is the beginning of the section on akrasia.

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[1] The 'civic' or 'political' art: *hê politikê technê* (319a).
[2] Sometimes called the 'Great Speech' in secondary literature.
[3] 328e. Paul Friedländer, commenting on a similar passage in the *Charmides* (154de), writes: "When Socrates misses a 'small point,' it is always the decisive thing." (Friedländer, Paul, *Plato: An Introduction*, p. 47.)

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By the end of the section on akrasia, Socrates has secured agreement from Prodicus, Hippias, and (in my opinion) Protagoras[1] that the pleasant is the good and that no one ever acts against his belief about what is best. Armed with these two premises, Socrates leads Protagoras to the conclusion that courage is wisdom. Protagoras is forced to admit that, from what has been agreed, it seems to him that what he claimed earlier, namely, that some people are most unwise and yet very courageous, is impossible. An awkward tension is relieved, some gracious final remarks are made, and Socrates leaves. Thus the *Protagoras* begins with a conversation between Socrates and a friend, slips into Socrates' narration of the earlier events of the day, and ends at the point in this narration where Socrates leaves Callias's house, soon to run into said friend.

I have purposely omitted two important complications, in part because they interrupt the flow of the dialogue's main discussion, in part because I think they are very important and ought to be saved for last. The first is that in the middle of the dialogue, just about exactly halfway through the text, the main discussion nearly falls apart.[2] Protagoras and Socrates cannot agree on a set of dialectical ground rules, and Socrates decides that he will leave. Only through the efforts of several members of the audience, including Alcibiades, Prodicus, and Hippias, is the discussion revived. The second complication is that when the discussion resumes, it does not pick up where it left off. The roles of questioner and answerer are reversed—Protagoras, who had been being questioned by Socrates, now asks Socrates questions—and the topic of conversation shifts from the relation between the parts of virtue and the whole of virtue to the compositional merits of a poem by Simonides, a poem which concerns the imperfection of human goodness. After the poet has been dubiously defended and interpreted by Socrates, with

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[1] See above, p. 22, n. 3.
[2] 334-335. This 'breakdown' interrupts the examination of the relation between temperance and justice.

help from Prodicus, the dialectical roles are again reversed and the discussion about the relation between the parts of virtue and the whole of virtue is resumed.

George Grote called the *Protagoras* "one of the most finished and elaborate of all the dialogues: in complication of scenic arrangement, dramatic vivacity, and in the amount of theory worked out, it is surpassed by none—hardly even by the *Republic*. Its merits as a composition are indeed extolled by all the critics . . . ."[1] A. E. Taylor wrote: "If there is any Platonic dialogue which can challenge the claim of the *Symposium* to be its author's dramatic *chef d'œuvre* it is the *Protagoras* . . . ."[2] When in the *Protagoras* Socrates says of Simonides' poem, "[I]t is a work of very elegant and elaborate art; but it would take too long to detail all its beauties,"[3] one is tempted to apply these words to the work in which they occur.

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[1] One such critic, according to Grote, had this to say: "Als aesthetisches Kunstwerk ist der Dialog Protagoras das meisterhafteste unter den Werken Platons." (Grote, George, *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, vol. I, p. 198. The critic cited is Joseph Socher.)

[2] Taylor, A. E., *Plato: The Man and His Work*, p. 235.

[3] 344b.

2.   A FULLER PRESENTATION OF MY ACCOUNT

In chapter 1 I presented the core idea of my account of akratic behavior: inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind. In this chapter I introduce two other frames of mind (the 'animal' and 'manly'), describe the epistemic frame of mind more fully, specify what kind of *ignorance$_e$* I think is chiefly responsible for typical cases of akratic behavior,[1] and render my account more intelligible by presenting a framework made up of conceptual genera to which the parts of my account belong as species.[2] In chapters 3 and 4 I will go on to argue that ingredients in my account are to be found throughout the *Protagoras*. The present chapter has two main parts. In Part One I present the abovementioned framework. In Part Two I present my account of akratic behavior more fully.

2.1.   Part One: Conceptual framework

2.1.1.   Performances

The first piece of the framework is the idea of a *performance*.[3] By this I mean a kind of human activity that is to some degree observable, that can be judged to have been done better or worse, that tends when done well to inspire others to emulate the performer, and whose good execution typically requires some sort of training. Paradigmatic examples are athletic, musical, and dramatic performances at which crowds of people gather who witness and evaluate the performances. Another example is the 'performance' of a human being living his or her entire

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[1] By *ignorance$_e$* I mean failure to inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to an activity that is properly governed by knowledge; by 'akratic behavior' I mean that kind of erring behavior which is *commonly described* as acting against one's knowledge or belief about what is best, whether or not such descriptions are correct. See chapter 1, pp. 10-11 and 1-2, respectively.

[2] This framework also serves to help the reader understand how certain key concepts (e.g., *aretê*, the teachability of *aretê*) are used in the *Protagoras*.

[3] This is the English word that I think comes closest to the idea that I want to pick out; it is not a perfect fit.

life. While this is not as obvious an example, it is a human activity (if you allow the word

'activity' to be stretched this far) that can to some extent be observed by other people, that can be

judged to have been done better or worse, that tends when done well to inspire imitation, and

whose good execution does seem to require some sort of training (e.g., learning a human

language).

Witnesses to a footrace may agree that one runner ran best; theater critics may disagree

over whether this or that actor's performance was better. But in addition to asking "How good

was this particular performance which I have just witnessed?", one may also ask with respect to

each kind of performance: "What counts as a good performance of this kind?"[1]   There may be a

dispute as to who crossed the finish line first, though all may agree that to cross this line first is

to do well in a footrace. As for the example of a human 'life-performance', it is possible to

disagree over whether some person has lived a good life ("Has Socrates lived well?" the jury

asked itself) as well as over what counts as a good life-performance ("What is it to live well?"

asked Socrates).

One way in which a person may decide to judge a certain kind of performance is by

singling out the *one thing* that in his opinion makes or breaks a performance of that kind.[2]   This

method of judging is clearly not always appropriate; sometimes there is no single thing on the

basis of which a performance of some kind is to be judged good or bad (or better or worse)

overall. And even when there is, one may need to split the general question into a cluster of

questions: "What is the one aspect of this kind of performance that matters most?"; "What is the

one aspect of this kind of performance that must be good if the whole performance is to be

good?"; "What is the one aspect of this kind of performance whose goodness ensures the

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[1] Indeed, one typically needs at least a rough answer to the second question before one can answer the first.
[2] E.g., *how much it makes people laugh* may be said to make or break a comic performance.

goodness of the performance?"; "What is the one aspect of this kind of performance that distinguishes it as the kind of performance it is?", etc.

In addition to receiving praise from critics, great performances also inspire the next generation of performers. A young fan at a sporting event may think to himself: "So-and-so is great; I want to be like So-and-so." He will be curious to know what it takes to be able to play like this athlete, exactly what skills he will need to acquire and how best to acquire them. Many young men in 5th-century Athens presumably thought to themselves: "Pericles is a great man; I want to be like Pericles." Such young men would naturally have been eager to learn what it took to speak the way Pericles spoke and to act as Pericles acted, or more generally, what it takes to live the way 'good people' live and to be as 'good people' are—whether this is mainly a matter of natural gifts, the result of painstaking practice, a kind of knowledge transmitted by teaching, or something else.[1]

One way in which master performers describe to performers-in-training what it takes to bring off a good performance is by singling out the *one thing* that in their opinion is the key to performing well. A violinist giving a master class may name the one thing that in her opinion is the key to playing the violin well; less generous performers may jealously guard such information. But there is usually no single secret to a performer's success, and even when there is, one needs to separate several related questions: "What is the one ingredient most directly responsible for a good performance of this kind?"; "What is the one ingredient that must go into a performance of this kind if the whole performance is to be successful?"; "What is the one

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[1] Cf. the opening lines of Myles Burnyeat's essay "Aristotle on Learning to Be Good": "The question 'Can virtue be taught?' is perhaps the oldest question in moral philosophy. Recall the opening lines of Plato's *Meno* (70a): 'Can you tell me, Socrates—can virtue be taught, or is it rather to be acquired by practice? Or is it neither to be practiced nor to be learned but something that comes to men by nature or in some other way?' This is a simple version of what was evidently a well-worn topic of discussion."

ingredient whose inclusion ensures a good performance?"; "What is the ingredient most often omitted by mediocre performers?", etc.

The 'one thing' which an experienced critic might name as the mark of a good performance is not to be confused with the 'one thing' which an experienced performer, when speaking to his students or apprentices, might identify as the key to performing well. A young child at a baseball game who knows almost nothing about baseball may hear his older brothers referring to certain pitchers as good pitchers. The child does not yet understand the role that pitchers play in the game and so does not yet know the criteria by which pitchers are to be judged good or bad. He may therefore ask his brothers: "What makes a pitcher a *good* pitcher?" And his brothers may answer: "Getting batters out." Here an ignorant spectator asks a question with a view to becoming a better judge of a certain kind of performance, and experienced critics identify the one thing that in their opinion is the mark of a good performance of that kind. Consider now a mediocre minor-league pitcher who knows that something separates good pitchers from pitchers like him, though he does not know what that 'something' is. Using the very same words as the child, he may ask a veteran pitching coach: "What makes a pitcher a *good* pitcher?" But here a different question is being asked, and the answer will differ accordingly: "If I had to pick one thing," the coach may reply, "I'd say strong legs." Whereas in the earlier case an ignorant spectator asked a question with a view to becoming a better judge of a certain kind of performance and was told what the mark of a good performance was, in this case a performer asked a question with a view to becoming a better performer of a certain kind, and an experienced performer named the one thing that in his opinion is the key to bringing off a

good performance of that kind.[1] Applying this distinction to the case of living a human life

yields the following pair of questions: (1) "What, if anything, is the single criterion to which

judges of human lives must look in order to judge of their goodness?"; (2) "What, if anything, is

the key ingredient the presence or possession of which effectively enables a person to lead a

good life?"

These two questions seem to me to encapsulate fairly well the basic ancient Greek

concept of human virtue or goodness (*aretê*). While reading a Platonic dialogue it is often worth

asking oneself whether the characters in that dialogue, when they speak of the *aretê* of a human

being, have question (1) or (2) in mind. In the *Euthyphro*, for example, Socrates speaks in the

following way about piety (or rather, at this point in the dialogue, the idea of 'the pious' or 'the

holy' [*to hosion*]):

> Tell me then what this aspect (*tên idean*) is, that I may keep my eye fixed upon it and employ it as a
> model (*hina eis ekeinên apoblepôn kai chrômenos autêi paradeigmati*) and, if anything you or anyone
> else does agrees with it, may say that the act is holy, and if not, that it is unholy.[2]

Here it seems that of the two questions distinguished above, question (1) is much closer than

question (2) to what Socrates has in mind.[3] At 190ab in the *Laches*, by contrast, Socrates speaks

about virtue as follows:

> [I]f we happen to know of such and such a thing that by being joined to another thing it makes this
> thing better (*hoti paragenomenon tôi beltion poiei ekeino hôi paregeneto*), and further, if we are
> able to get the one joined to the other, we obviously know the thing itself on which we might be

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[1] In distinguishing between the child's question and the minor leaguer's question I do not mean to imply that one can
know the answer to one while being wholly ignorant of the answer to the other. When it comes to most kinds of
performances, a good *performer* will also be a good *judge* of that kind of performance (though the best performer
will not necessarily be the best judge). Likewise, when it comes to certain kinds of performances (e.g., translating
Greek into English), one needs to be a fairly good performer in order to be a good judge.

[2] *Euthyphro* 6e (Harold North Fowler's translation, Loeb Classical Library).

[3] Though here, of course, Socrates is focusing on piety in particular, not virtue as a whole.

consulting as to how it might be best and most easily acquired. . . . If we happen to know that sight joined to eyes makes those eyes the better for it (*hoti opsis paragenomenê ophthalmois beltious poiei ekeinous hois paregeneto*), and further if we are able to get it joined to eyes (*poiein autên paragignesthai ommasi*), we obviously know what this faculty of sight is, on which we might be consulting as to how it might be best and most easily acquired. . . . And do you know, Laches, that at this moment our two friends are inviting us to a consultation as to the way in which virtue may be joined to their sons' souls (*tin' an tropon tois huiesin autôn aretê paragenomenê tais psuchais*), and so make them better (*ameinous poiêseien*)? —Yes, indeed. —Then our first requisite is to know what virtue is (*ho ti pot' estin aretê*)?[1]

In this passage, though it is not the goodness of human lives but the goodness of people themselves that is being emphasized, it seems that question (2) is closer than question (1) to what Socrates has in mind. I do, however, think that Socrates also has something like question (1) in mind here, or at least in the surrounding context, and that in general, when characters in Plato's 'early' dialogues attempt to answer questions such as "What is courage?" or "What is virtue?", they are thinking along the lines of questions (1) and (2) simultaneously, perhaps without distinguishing the two.[2]

Two questions that *are* explicitly distinguished by characters in Plato's dialogues are "What is human virtue?" and "How is human virtue acquired?"[3] This distinction is drawn in the *Laches* passage cited above:

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[1] *Laches* 190ab (W. R. M. Lamb's translation, Loeb Classical Library).

[2] Here I owe a heavy debt to Terry Penner's essay "The Unity of Virtue," *Philosophical Review*, 1973. It is worth observing further (here I owe a separate debt to James Allen) that Plato's own metaphysical theorizing raises the possibility that the answers to my two "What is F?" questions could ultimately be the same. Cf. *Phaedo* 100c-e [Socrates speaking]: "I no longer understand or recognize those other sophisticated causes, and if someone tells me that a thing is beautiful because it has a bright colour or shape or any such thing, I ignore these other reasons—for all these confuse me—but I simply, naively and perhaps foolishly cling to this, that nothing else makes it beautiful other than the presence of, or the sharing in, or however you may describe its relationship to that Beautiful we mentioned, for I will not insist on the precise nature of the relationship, but that all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful. That, I think, is the safest answer I can give . . . ." (G. M. A. Grube's translation.)

[3] Or, "What is courage?" and "How is courage acquired?", etc.

"Then our first requisite is to know what virtue is? For surely, if we had no idea at all what virtue actually is (*aretên . . . to parapan ho ti pote tungchanei on*), we could not possibly consult with anyone as to how he might best acquire it (*hopôs an auto kallista ktêsaito*)?"[1]

It is also drawn at the start of the *Meno*, where after Meno asks whether virtue is acquired by teaching, by practice, or in some other way, Socrates replies that he is so far from knowing how virtue is acquired, he does not even know what virtue is [here Socrates speaks in the voice of a fellow Athenian]:

"Stranger, you must think me a specially favoured mortal, to be able to tell whether virtue can be taught, or in what way it comes to one (*eite didakton eith' hotôi tropôi paragignetai . . .*): so far am I from knowing whether it can be taught or not, that I actually do not even know what the thing itself, virtue, is at all (*auto, ho ti esti to parapan aretê . . .*)."[2]

And of course this distinction is drawn in the *Protagoras* itself, where the questions "Is virtue teachable?" and "What is the nature of virtue?" are pursued consecutively.[3] For the sake of clarity, we might distinguish these three questions: (1) "What is the one criterion by reference to which human behavior is to be judged good?"; (2) "What is the key ingredient responsible for the production of good human behavior?"; (3) "How is this ingredient acquired?" To the first two corresponds the question "What is virtue (*aretê*)?" To the third corresponds the question "Is virtue a teachable thing (*didakton*)?"

2.1.2.   Approaches

The next piece of the framework is the idea of an *approach*. By this I mean a way or mode of engaging in an activity. Paradigmatic examples are the different ways of moving from

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[1] 190bc.

[2] *Meno* 71a (W. R. M. Lamb's translation, Loeb Classical Library). Cf. *Meno* 86de: "Had I control over you, Meno, as over myself, we should not have begun considering whether virtue can be taught (*eite didakton eite ou didakton hê aretê*) until we had first inquired into the main question of what it is (*ho ti esti . . . auto*). But . . . I will yield to your request—what else am I to do? So it seems we are to consider what sort of thing it is (*poion ti estin*) of which we do not yet know what it is (*ho ti estin*)!"

[3] See 329b-d; 360e-361a; 361c.

place to place: by walking, by running, by swimming; the breaststroke approach, the backstroke approach, the crawl approach, etc. A performer may try to improve his performance either by switching to a more effective approach or by doing a better job within his current approach (e.g., a person who is using the 'walking' approach to get from A to B may try to improve his performance either by walking faster or by starting to run). Not all approaches are as easy to detect as running or walking. Some professional storytellers use the 'memorization' approach to telling a story, others use the 'improvisation' approach, but the average child will probably not spot the difference. Indeed, certain approaches depend for their success on eluding detection, e.g., the 'sleight-of-hand' approach to performing a magic trick.

An approach may be nothing more than a default mode, i.e., a way of behaving that one automatically falls back on in lieu of a self-consciously adopted approach. A person who reverts to a default mode may not be aware of the mode as such, or of the possibility of other modes. The sloppiest, most unreflective approaches tend to be default modes (though by no means are all default modes devoid of careful thinking). Such sloppy 'approaches' lie at one end of the spectrum, on the other end of which lie self-consciously adopted, systematic, orderly approaches commonly called 'methods'. Of these the most systematic, most self-consciously adopted, and most reliably successful might be called *technical* methods, roughly what the ancient Greeks called *technai*.

To the many young men who wished to rise to the top of Greek society and live successful lives, different 'wise men' seemed to provide different technical means to this end. Hippias of Elis offered one approach, Protagoras of Abdera another, and these two 'wise

men' or sophists attracted and competed for adherents.[1] Socrates also attracted adherents, both

foreign and Athenian,[2] and though he did not profess to know about the most important matters

and emphatically denied that he was a 'wise man,' he seemed to certain people to have mastered

a peculiar philosophical approach to life superior to any sophist's approach.

Drawing on our previous distinctions, we might distinguish the questions "What *is* a

successful life?" (i.e., "What are the criteria by reference to which a human life is to be judged

successful?") and "How, practically speaking, does one manage to *live* such a life?" In the story

'The Three Little Pigs' each pig decides to build a house. We might distinguish the questions

"What *is* a suitable house?" and "How does one manage to *build* such a house?" Each pig

answers the second question differently. Each, in other words, adopts a different approach—the

'straw' approach, the 'stick' approach, the 'brick' approach—to the same activity, building a

suitable house. But how do they answer the first question? Do they all agree from the start that

a suitable house is a house that keeps out wolves? If so, the first two simply choose the wrong

means to their end. But if the first two pigs do not start out thinking that a suitable house is a

house that keeps out wolves, their primary problem is not an inadequate approach but an

inadequate conception of the goal of their activity. Perhaps one lesson to be learned from the

story is that people often go wrong in failing to criticize and improve their own conceptions of

the goals of their activities. The 5th-century sophists and Socrates adopted different approaches

to the activity of living a human life. Unlike such men as Hippias and Protagoras, however,

Socrates never thought that he *knew* what a good or successful human life was. If Socrates'

adherents were right and he had really found a path to successful living that surpassed all the

sophists' approaches, this may have been because of his continual efforts to correct his own and

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[1] Cf. *Protagoras* 318de, where Protagoras compares his own approach favorably with that of people like Hippias.
[2] Cf. *Phaedo* 59bc, *Theaetetus* 150b-151b.

others' conceptions of what it is to live well. Of course, these very efforts were themselves a central part of his approach to living.

2.1.3.   Hybridization

Different approaches may be combined in a *hybrid* approach. A pitcher may adopt a hybrid approach to throwing a baseball in which different approaches—the fastball approach, the curveball approach, the slider approach—are adopted from pitch to pitch. Certain kinds of approaches can be put into each other's service. Consider a person who adopts the 'checklist' approach to grocery shopping, the 'improvisation' approach to playing the flute, and the 'imitation' approach to spending a day: that is, someone who makes a list of the various things he wants to do while at the grocery store and, as he does each one, checks that item off; who has little idea what he will play when he picks up his flute, making up the music as he goes along; and who models the way he spends his day after somebody else's way of spending a day. If grocery shopping and playing the flute are part of how this person spends his day, then in this case, the checklist approach and the improvisation approach are being put into the service of the imitation approach (when the person sees his role model shopping for groceries with a shopping list, he, too, adopts this approach to grocery shopping; when he hears his role model improvising on the flute, he, too, plays the flute in this way). But another person might adopt the improvisation approach to grocery shopping (buying whatever seems good to him at the time, without having planned what to buy), the imitation approach to playing the flute (imitating the style of some other flutist), and the checklist approach to spending his day (composing a list of the various things he wants to get done in the course of the day, and as he does each one, checking that item off). A third person may adopt the improvisation approach to spending his day, making up the order of his activities as the day unfolds, even as he also adopts the checklist

and imitation approaches to certain individual activities during the day. Thus a hybrid approach combining these three approaches may have any one of them as its chief or 'ruling' approach.[1]

A hybrid approach that is more organized than a totally chaotic jumble of approaches but not so organized as to exhibit clear lines of authority between component approaches or to have a single 'ruling' approach into whose service the other approaches are put, may be called a 'semi-organized hodgepodge' approach. A person who adopts such a hybrid approach to the activity of living a human life may be said to adopt a 'semi-organized hodgepodge' approach to life.

2.1.4. Resistance

The last piece of the framework is the idea of *resistance*. By this I mean any kind of hindering force that makes it hard for a performer to move smoothly or easily towards his goal. Often a performer does not know where it is coming from or how it is arising; he only knows that something is impeding him. When he encounters resistance, a performer has at least three options. He can (1) give up; (2) continue using his current approach; (3) ask himself whether the resistance might be due not to the nature of the work itself but to his approach to the work. A person who is trying to loosen a nut on the wheel of a car but accidentally twisting the nut in the wrong direction would do best to reconsider his approach. If option (3) does not occur to this person, and he either persists in his current approach or gives up, he may be said to suffer from a distinctive kind of ignorance: the ignorance of a person who fails to realize that the resistance he is encountering is due to his own wrongheaded approach.[2]

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[1] Cf. the idea, developed in Plato's *Republic,* that depending on an individual's inner 'constitution' (aristocratic, timocratic, oligarchic, etc.), any one of the three parts of his soul (appetitive, spirited, rational) may be put in charge of the government of his whole person (see, e.g., 550b, 553cd).

[2] Cf. William James's illustration of the essential difference between the mechanical and the mental: "Blow bubbles through a tube into the bottom of a pail of water, they will rise to the surface and mingle with the air. Their action may . . . be poetically interpreted as due to a longing to recombine with the mother-atmosphere above the surface. But if you invert a jar full of water over the pail, they will rise and remain lodged beneath its bottom, shut in from the outer air, although a slight deflection from their course at the outset, or a re-descent towards the rim of the jar

2.2.   Part Two: My account

2.2.1.   General remarks

An episode of akratic behavior, however else one is to describe it, is an episode in a larger performance: the living of a human life. Of the many ways in which a person may fall short of living a good human life, one distinctive way is to live an 'akratic life', i.e., a life shot through with akratic behavior. If to live a good human life is to bring off a good performance of a certain kind, to live an akratic life is to fail in a distinctive way to bring off a good performance of that kind. People who agree that there is such a thing as living a good human life, or, in some episode within one's life, behaving well, may disagree over what it is, exactly, to live or behave in this way. Similarly, people who agree that there is a distinctive way of falling short of living a good human life ('living an akratic life'), or, in some episode within one's life, of falling short of behaving well ('behaving akratically'), a way of falling short which is commonly described as acting against one's knowledge of what is best—people who agree on this may disagree over what it is, exactly, to live or behave in this way. Some may think that the common descriptions of akratic behavior are correct, i.e., that people who engage in it really are acting against their knowledge of what is best or against their best judgment, whereas others may believe that these descriptions are inaccurate. Those who disagree over what it is for a human being to behave well are likely also to disagree over what is responsible for the production of good human behavior.

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when they found their upward course impeded, would easily have set them free. . . . Suppose a living frog in the position in which we placed our bubbles of air, namely, at the bottom of a [pail] of water. The want of breath will soon make him also long to rejoin the mother-atmosphere, and he will take the shortest path to his end by swimming straight upwards. But if a jar full of water be inverted over him, he will not, like the bubbles, perpetually press his nose against its unyielding roof, but will restlessly explore the neighborhood until by re-descending again he has discovered a path round its brim to the goal of his desires." (William James, *The Principles of Psychology,* Harvard University Press, 1983 (1890), p. 20.) Cf. the image used by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* §309: "What is your aim in philosophy?—To shew the fly the way out of the fly bottle." (G. E. M. Anscombe's translation.)

Similarly, those who disagree over what it is to behave akratically are likely also to disagree over what gives rise to akratic behavior. Some may say that what makes people act akratically is that they are overcome by an emotion such as anger or fear, whereas others may say that what makes people act akratically is a kind of ignorance. As the range of what may properly be classified as akratic behavior is wide and varied, so the range of causal factors responsible for the production of akratic behavior is wide and varied. Nevertheless, a person might attempt to single out the 'one thing' that is chiefly responsible for typical instances of akratic behavior. What follows is such an attempt.

2.2.2. Frames of mind

I said in chapter 1 that the core idea of my account of akratic behavior was the concept of the epistemic frame of mind, and I briefly explained what I meant by that. In order to present my account more fully, I need to explain what I mean by a *frame of mind* in general, to introduce two other frames of mind, and to describe the epistemic frame of mind in greater detail.

By 'frame of mind' I mean a mode of thinking-feeling-acting. To inhabit a frame of mind with regard to some activity is to think, feel, and act in a characteristic mode with regard to that activity. A frame of mind is thus an approach—i.e., a way of engaging in an activity—that involves a person's thoughts and feelings and actions. Within a given mode of thinking-feeling-acting, i.e., within a given frame of mind, certain ways of thinking, feeling, and acting will be part of the repertoire, others will not; certain patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting will be common, others rare. Ways or patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting that are common in one frame of mind will be rare in another, while in a third they may be unthinkable, beyond the pale,

etc. Normally, a frame of mind has its own internal logic or inner cohesiveness that tends to 'detain' its occupants and resist their efforts to leave, at least when it comes to those particular activities with regard to which they have grown accustomed to moving within that particular frame of mind.[1] But it is almost always possible to lift oneself out of a frame of mind (with regard to some activity) or to be lifted out by someone else, sometimes quickly, sometimes only over a number of years.[2] It is worth distinguishing degrees to which a person inhabits a frame of mind; someone who *to some extent* thinks, feels, and acts in a characteristic mode with regard to some activity is a person who *to that extent* inhabits a particular frame of mind with regard to that activity.

Some frames of mind, in addition to being inhabitable with regard to specific activities within a human life and with regard to the activity of living a human life, may also be put into each other's service, three examples being what I call the 'animal', 'manly', and 'epistemic' frames of mind.[3] These three modes correspond fairly closely to the three parts or 'forms' of the soul distinguished by Plato in the *Republic*[4]: *to epithumêtikon* (the 'appetitive'), *to thumoeides* (the 'spirited'), and *to logistikon* (the 'rational'). A person who mainly inhabits the animal frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life corresponds fairly well to a person who in Plato's parlance is 'ruled' by the appetitive part of his soul; a person who mainly inhabits the manly frame of mind (with regard to the activity of living a human life) corresponds fairly well

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[1] Someone, for example, may have grown so accustomed to occupying a 'competitive' frame of mind with regard to the activity of playing some game that whenever he plays the game, even in a context where he thinks it inappropriate to act and feel and think competitively, he finds it hard to keep himself from falling into this frame of mind.

[2] Cf. the process of conversion undergone by the boy described in chapter 1, pp. 9-10.

[3] Each is better thought of as an extended family of modes, but for simplicity's sake I will speak of each one as if it were a single rigid mode.

[4] 435e: "Is it not, then, . . . impossible for us to avoid admitting this much, that the same forms and qualities (*eidê te kai êthê*) are to be found in each one of us that are in the state?" 439e: "These two forms (*eidê*), then, let us assume as actually existing in the soul. But now the Thumos or principle of high spirit, that with which we feel anger, is it a third, or would it be identical in nature with one of these?" 442bc: "Brave, too, then, I take it, we call each individual by virtue of this part (*toutôi tôi merei*) in him . . . ." 442c: "But wise by that small part (*tôi smikrôi merei*) that ruled in him and handed down these commands . . . ." (Paul Shorey's translation, Loeb Classical Library.)

to a person who is ruled by the spirited part of his soul, etc. There are, however, certain differences. Whereas Plato sometimes speaks of parts of the soul as little agents, I make no use of 'homunculus' talk; on my account there is always only the same whole human being inhabiting different frames of mind with regard to different activities. Second, whereas in Plato's scheme all human beings possess an appetitive part, a spirited part, and a rational part in roughly the same proportions (i.e., in every human being the appetitive part is the largest and the rational part the smallest, whatever exactly that means), and there seems to be a single relevant sense in which one part may be said to be the 'ruling' part, in my scheme different people inhabit the animal, manly and epistemic frames of mind to very different degrees with regard to different activities, and there are as many different senses in which one frame of mind may be said to be the 'ruling' frame of mind in a given person as there are different activities in which that person engages. For example, when it comes to the activity of building ships, a person's 'ruling' mode of thinking-feeling-acting may be the epistemic frame of mind, but when it comes to the activity of fighting at sea, his 'ruling' mode may be the manly frame of mind.[1] Third, whereas Plato sometimes speaks as if the appetitive, spirited, and rational parts of the human soul were the only parts there were, or at any rate the most important,[2] and that human beings fall into three natural classes corresponding to this division, I do not wish to suggest that my three frames of mind have some privileged status, that they are, for instance, the three primary modes from which all other modes of thinking-feeling-acting are derived, let alone that every person possesses either an 'animal', 'manly', or 'epistemic' nature and that a natural human hierarchy is founded on this

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[1] There is, however, a privileged sense in which the frame of mind that a person mainly inhabits *with regard to the activity of living a human life* may be said to his 'ruling' frame of mind.
[2] It should not be forgotten that in certain passages in the *Republic* (e.g., 435d, 443de [. . . *kai ei alla atta metaxu tungchanei onta* . . .], 612a) Plato represents his tripartite scheme as a convenient simplification of the whole truth about the human soul.

basis. I do think that inhabiting each of these three frames of mind is an important part of what it

is to be human, but that is the most I will claim for them in this respect.

I will not cite passages from the *Republic* to prove that my three frames of mind

correspond to Plato's three parts of the soul, since my arguments do not depend on this. I will

cite many passages from the *Protagoras,* however, in order to show that my three frames of mind

correspond to distinctions drawn in the *Protagoras*.[1] To the extent that I succeed in showing

this, and to the extent that the reader is independently inclined to think that what I call the

animal, manly, and epistemic frames of mind correspond fairly closely to the parts of the soul

distinguished in the *Republic*, to that extent I will have shown that distinctions drawn in the

Protagoras reappear in the *Republic* and are used there to delineate three 'forms' of the soul, and

that this incidentally supports the idea that the account of akratic behavior in the *Republic* is not

as sharp a departure from the *Protagoras* as has commonly been thought.[2] Whether or not I

persuade you of this, it is not my aim to do so; my aim, as I have said, is to shed light on the

Protagoras and on akratic behavior by tracing the connections between my account of akratic

behavior and the *Protagoras*, not between the *Protagoras* and the *Republic.*

2.2.2.1.   The animal frame of mind

The person who mainly inhabits the *animal* frame of mind thinks, feels, and acts in a

primitive, childish way.[3] He tends to behave in accordance with appetite, instinct, and habit.[1]

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[1] I do this mainly in chapters 3 and 4.

[2] Others have argued for similar points in recent years. See, for example, Gabriela Roxana Carone, "*Akrasia* in the *Republic*," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (vol. xx), Summer 2001, pp. 107-148. Cf. also Heda Segvic, "No One Errs Willingly: The Meaning of Socratic Intellectualism," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (vol. xix), Winter 2002, pp. 2-45.

[3] Rather than add the qualification 'with regard to some activity within a human life' or 'with regard to his life as a whole,' I will simply speak of the person who inhabits this frame of mind generally, though some of what I say will

He has a hard time ignoring his bodily sensations and impulses; these, more than anything else, tend to set his agenda. He lacks discipline, but his behavior is not totally irregular: because he is a creature of habit, he tends when once in the habit of doing something a certain way to continue to do it that way, for better or worse. He is definitely not good soldier material: he does not hold up well under rigorous, painful ordeals; he frightens like a child; he is easily discouraged; nothing is stronger in him than his instinct to save his own skin. Though he is not incapable of listening to reason, his thinking, like his conduct, is undisciplined and prone to fall into ruts. Showy appearances impress him, underlying realities tend to escape his notice. In other words, he is easily fooled.

For the sake of concreteness, consider a person who inhabits this frame of mind with regard to the activity of eating. Such a person will be guided by hunger, taste, and habit in deciding which things to eat. He will eat and eat until he feels like stopping; he will eat whichever foods he likes the taste of; although he lacks the self-discipline required for most diets, when he has gotten used to eating a certain food in a certain context, he will tend to want to continue to eat that food in that context. During hard times, he will not hold up well if deprived of the foods he has grown used to eating. All else being equal, he will tend to go for whichever

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only directly apply to the person who inhabits this frame of mind with regard to his life as a whole. This is also how I will describe the other two frames of mind.

[1] "Why habit?" one may ask, especially if one is thinking of Plato's appetitive part of the soul. People of all ages and descriptions often do what they do simply because they are in the habit of doing it. But whereas older people know how to question the authority of habit and regularly demand from themselves a better reason for their actions than 'I happen to be in the habit of doing this,' very young children have not yet learned to step back from habit in this way. Also, if one wishes to change the behavior of a one-year-old child (e.g., alter his sleeping patterns), it will not work to try to reason with him or to praise and blame him; one must habituate him. If changing a human being's behavior by reasoning with him may be said to correspond in Plato's scheme to the rational part of the soul, whereas changing a human being's behavior by praising or blaming him may be said to correspond to the spirited part of the soul, changing a human being's behavior by habituating him may perhaps be said to correpond to the appetitive part of the soul. In any case, Plato seems to be operating with some such hierarchy of modes of human influence in the following passage from the *Laws*: "[B]ut our lawgiver will reverse the appearance by removing the fog, and by one means or another—habituation, commendation, or argument (*ethesi kai epainois kai logois*)—will persuade people that their notions of justice and injustice are illusory pictures . . . ." (663bc; R. G. Bury's translation, Loeb Classical Library.)

foods are dressed up in the most attractive ways, regardless of what they are, or how sick they make him later. He will tend not to learn from his gastronomic mistakes. Those who sell and advertise food will find in him an easy victim.

2.2.2.2.   The manly frame of mind

Much of what the person who inhabits the *manly* frame of mind thinks, feels, and does may be attributed to his eagerness to prove to himself and to others that he is a man, whatever that happens to mean in his society.[1] Typically, he strives to have the qualities of a good soldier: courage, discipline, physical and mental toughness, a 'warrior' mentality, obedience to his superiors, a strong sense of camaraderie, etc. He tries to be extremely loyal to his friends; he tends to be harsh towards his enemies. He also tends to be quite hard on himself and even to hate himself; he is a fighter of internal and external battles.[2] He cares about how other people think of him and treat him: he fears rejection; he wants to be respected as an equal; he dreams of being admired. He routinely pegs others as his inferiors, equals, or superiors (in this or that respect) and despises, respects, or envies and admires them accordingly. He possesses a strong sense of honor and shame. He is ambitious and highly competitive. Intellectually, he strives to

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[1] I speak of a man specifically, as opposed to a grown-up in general, because of the stereotypically masculine character of this frame of mind, not because it is limited to males; it isn't.

[2] Cf. *Laws* 626de:

> ATHENIAN: And must each individual man regard himself as his own enemy? Or what do we say when we come to this point?
> CLINIAS: O Stranger of Athens, . . . you have made the argument more clear by taking it back to its starting-point; whereby you will the more easily discover the justice of our recent statement that, in the mass, all men are both publicly and privately the enemies of all, and individually also each man is his own enemy.
> ATHENIAN: What is your meaning, my admirable sir?
> CLINIAS: It is just in this war, my friend, that the victory over self (*to nika[i]n auton hauton*) is of all victories the first and best while self-defeat (*to . . . hêttasthai auton huph' heautou*) is of all defeats the worst and the most shameful. For these phrases signify that a war against self exists within each of us (*hôs polemou en hekastois hêmôn ontos pros hêmas autous*).

(R. G. Bury's translation, Loeb Classical Library.)

bring to his studies the same soldierly qualities he admires in general: discipline, rigor, perseverance, etc. He likes to belittle and ridicule those who he thinks are less "in the know" than he, and he tends to accept unquestioningly the judgment of those who he thinks know more than he does. Out of a sense of shame, he typically tries to conceal his ignorance; when he is the target of rational criticism, he tends to react as if he were being attacked; he hates the embarrassing, awkward feeling of being at a loss intellectually. If he loves knowledge, it is mostly because of the sense of power and mastery knowledge provides. As for power in general, he considers it a mark of inferiority to be in the power of others and a mark of superiority to have others in one's power. He takes pride in his ability to be a good soldier and follow orders, but he would prefer to be the one who gave the orders. If he is a typical ancient Greek, he acknowledges the authority of the gods over human affairs, but he wishes he could elevate man to the position of highest authority in the universe; he is grateful to Prometheus for helping human beings take a step in this direction.[1]

Again, consider the person who inhabits this frame of mind with regard to the activity of eating. Such a person will fear being laughed at or criticized for his immature choice of foods or for his inelegant table manners. He will want to eat what adults eat, or what the members of the highest social classes eat, and he will try to copy their manner of eating. In doing so, he may find himself eating foods he does not like the taste of, but which he thinks are finer foods than those he does like the taste of. Among his fellow soldiers on campaign, when food is scarce, he will try to show that he can cope with hunger "like a man." In short, whichever ways of eating are associated with being grown up or socially superior, these are the ways in which he will try to eat.

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[1] The figure of Prometheus plays an important role in the *Protagoras*. See 320d-322a, 361cd.

2.2.2.3. The epistemic frame of mind

Whether it is a question of how to think, feel, or act, the guiding ideal of the person who inhabits the *epistemic* frame of mind is knowledge. He is conscious that many of the horrible things that happen to human beings could be prevented by the guidance of knowledge. When he sees ignorant people engaging in certain activities (e.g., raising children, ruling a political community) and causing all sorts of unnecessary damage, he is filled with revulsion and tries hard to put these activities under the guidance of knowledge. When knowledge is unavailable, he tries to make it available, whether by bringing in outside experts, if such are to be found, or by trying himself and encouraging others to discover the knowledge first-hand. While the 'manly' person strives to have all the qualities of a good soldier, the 'epistemic' person strives to have all the qualities of a true lover of wisdom. Like Socrates, he is attracted to people in whom knowledge seems to be present, and he devises ways of testing to see whether knowledge really is present in them.[1] If he thinks that a person does not have the knowledge he claims to have, he tries to point this out to the person and make him admit he was wrong, believing that in this way he will either set this person on the path to knowledge or uncover some misunderstanding of his own. The mistake he fears most is falsely thinking that *he* knows something important. His nightmare is to confront a bad situation in which people's very lives or souls are in jeopardy, think that he knows how to come to the rescue, persuade those involved that he knows what he is doing, take control of the situation, and—through ignorance of his own ignorance—make matters worse.

The inhabitant of the epistemic frame of mind is also a reconciler and composer (as in the phrase 'compose a quarrel'), both between people who are at odds and between intrapersonal

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[1] Cf. *Apology* 21b-23c. Cf. also *Theaetetus* 150bc, 151cd.

elements that are in tension (e.g., beliefs, feelings, words, deeds). He regularly juxtaposes parts of a supposed whole and asks how well they fit, in the intellectual sphere and in life in general. As the 'manly' person is good soldier material, so this person is good manager material: his passion for fitting things together and making sure they cohere, which serves him well in his search for knowledge, also makes him suited to the manager's job of taking in hand a group of people and organizing them into a cooperative unit so as to bring out the best in them. But although he is suited to be a superintendent (*epistatês*),[1] he is very reluctant to serve as one if he does not have the knowledge (*epistêmê*) that is proper to the job.[2]

The epistemic frame of mind is also a 'self-correcting' frame of mind. Not only do its inhabitants try to correct their thoughts, feelings, and actions so as to make themselves less ignorant, they also tend to become aware of the very mode of thinking-feeling-acting which they inhabit and to ask themselves whether this frame of mind itself might not stand in need of correction. There might be said to be different *versions* or *specific modes* of the epistemic frame of mind, some cruder, some more refined, through which people progress as they become increasingly expert inhabitants of this general mode of thinking-feeling-acting. The self-correcting, self-improving nature of this frame of mind is itself largely responsible for the confidence its long-term inhabitants have in it.

As for the person who occupies the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity of eating, his first step is to ask himself, "What is the knowledge that properly governs this activity?" He will be cautious about the foods he puts into his mouth and will seek out those

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[1] *Epistatês*, LSJ, II, 2: "*one who is set over, chief, commander . . .*"; III, 2: "*overseer, superintendent*, in charge of any public building or works . . . ."; III, 3: "*governor, administrator . . . .*"
[2] Cf. the last sentence of the previous paragraph.

who seem to him to be experts in this field.[1] If he can find no experts, he will attempt to eat in

accordance with his best ideas to date, whichever in his view come closest to knowledge. As he

reflects upon his eating habits, he may discover that 'animal' and 'manly' ways of eating are

deeply ingrained in him and that they are partly at odds with what seems to him, from an

'epistemic' point of view, to be the ideal way to eat. He may ask himself: "How might I best

reconcile these different approaches to eating?" He may attempt to assign to each approach its

proper role in an epistemically-governed hybrid approach. If he does so, however, he will not

lose sight of the fact that he does not yet have the knowledge that properly governs the activity of

eating, nor will he stop trying to acquire this knowledge.

2.2.2.4.   The 'semi-organized hodgepodge' frame of mind

I said earlier that any one of these three frames of mind may be put into the service of any

other, and I have just suggested that a person who inhabits the epistemic frame of mind with

regard to the activity of eating might include the animal and manly frames of mind in an

epistemically-governed hybrid approach to this activity. How might the *epistemic* frame of mind

be put into the service of the *manly* frame of mind? Consider a spirited youth who wants to

become an admired and powerful man in his city. He has noticed that in many fields of human

activity, those who practice long and hard and approach their work 'scientifically' are able to

gain a competitive edge. When he hears of a 'wise man' who teaches an art that makes people

clever at speaking and enables them to get ahead in public life, he is very excited and strongly

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[1] Cf. *Protagoras* 314a: "When you buy victuals and liquors you can carry them off from the dealer or merchant in separate vessels, and before you take them into your body by eating or drinking you can lay them by in your house and take the advice of an expert whom you can call in, as to what is fit to eat or drink and what is not, and how much you should take and when . . . ." (W. R. M. Lamb's translation, Loeb Classical Library.)

desires to study under this man. Even though he has hardly any idea who this 'wise man' is, he rushes to entrust his soul to him.[1] Here is a person who in a rash and 'manly' way wishes to utilize painstaking care (*epimeleia*) and technical or 'scientific' knowledge (*epistêmê*).   In other words, here is a person who wishes to put the epistemic frame of mind into the service of the manly frame of mind.[2]

Consider now a person who with regard to the activity of living a human life inhabits a 'semi-organized hodgepodge' frame of mind that combines the animal, manly, and epistemic frames of mind, borrowing more from the first two, less from the third, but who, unlike the 'epistemic' man, is not so introspective as to be conscious of these frames of mind as such. A skilled conversation partner (e.g., Socrates) should be able to lead this person to think and answer questions in accordance with the mentality of any one of these component frames of mind without the person's noticing that his present answers conflict with the answers he would give if he were questioned along different lines.[3] But while this person's approach is a 'hodgepodge' hybrid in which no one approach is the 'ruling' approach, it is not utterly disorganized. In certain contexts an 'animal' mode of thinking-feeling-acting tends to dominate; in others, a 'manly' mode; and in a few contexts, an 'epistemic' mode. It is in other words a *semi-organized* hodgepodge frame of mind.

2.2.3.   Different modes of thinking about what is good

I said in chapter 1 that what is chiefly responsible for typical instances of akratic behavior is a certain kind of failure to inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity of

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[1] Cf. *Protagoras* 310-314.
[2] One might imagine similar examples of how the animal frame of mind can be put into the service of the manly frame of mind, how the epistemic frame of mind can be put into the service of the animal frame of mind, etc.
[3] In chapter 3 I describe the exchange between Socrates and 'the many' (*hoi polloi*) in these terms.

living a human life generally and, in particular, with regard to the activity of thinking about what is good.[1] Let me now describe four modes of thinking about what is good that correspond to the animal, manly, epistemic, and 'semi-organized hodgepodge' frames of mind, respectively. In this way I wish to show that people's beliefs about what is best are different *kinds* of things, according to the different frames of mind in which they function. In particular, I wish to make it clear that of the four frames of mind discussed here, it is only in the epistemic frame of mind that beliefs about what is best are formed and revised chiefly with a view to *knowledge*; and it is only in this frame of mind that the guidance of knowledge—or, when that is unavailable, whatever is thought to come closest to knowledge—reliably controls the person's behavior.

2.2.3.1.　The 'animal' mode of thinking about what is good

When forming and revising his beliefs about what is good, a person who mainly inhabits the animal frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life will generally consult his personal tastes and inclinations. What agrees with him, he will generally deem 'good,' and what disagrees with him, for whatever reasons, he will generally deem 'bad.' If he likes to play with a certain toy, he will be inclined to think it good to play with it. When forming or revising his beliefs, he does not tend to ask himself: "Do others also think that this is good? Am I alone in thinking so? Am I wrong?" If he does revise a belief about what is good, it is usually as a result of comparing his own tastes with each other. If he has liked every banana he has ever tasted, then tastes a mushy one and does not like the taste of it, he may qualify his old belief ("Eating bananas is good") with a proviso (". . . so long as they aren't too mushy"). He is also capable of following simple chains of reasoning and revising his beliefs in the light of such reasoning. If he thinks that it would be bad to go to bed before his brothers do, but worse to go

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[1] See chapter 1, p. 12.

to bed without being told a story, then when he is informed that unless he goes to bed before his brothers do there will be no story told to him tonight, he is capable of concluding that it would be good for him, under the circumstances, to go to bed before his brothers do. This is about as logically rigorous as his practical thinking gets. He lacks both the ability and the patience for long-term means-end reasoning. He does not try to organize his various likes and dislikes into a single coherent system. And when he finds himself in danger, he does not tend to resort to careful, deliberate thinking about how best to save himself.

Luckily for him, he typically has people who take care of him and do a lot of this sort of thinking for him. If he seems to them to lack important beliefs about his own welfare, they step in with *their* beliefs and manage his life accordingly. They try to make the world in which he moves as foolproof as possible, so that whenever he acts on a dangerous whim, something or other—a locked gate, a cap on a bottle of pills, a pair of arms that swoops him up in the nick of time—saves him from danger. Understandably, such a person is slow to develop his own habit of thinking about what is good in a careful, deliberate manner and of living his life in accordance with his own well-formed and well-revised beliefs about what is best.

Indeed, this person's 'beliefs' about what is best, such as they are, have little authority over his actions. He does sometimes use them to guide his behavior, but it does not take much to make him disregard his belief or change it to suit a new feeling of his. "What, then," someone might object, "do such beliefs amount to? If they are largely based on feeling in the first place and give way or change when stronger feelings oppose them, do they themselves, as opposed to the feelings, have any effect on the person's actions? If not, isn't it superfluous to speak of this person's 'beliefs'?" It is true that the action-guiding role played by the 'animal' person's beliefs about what is best is far less authoritative than that played by more fully rational people's beliefs

about what is best. Nevertheless, even the 'animal' person is able, if not always willing, to follow simple lines of practical reasoning and act in accordance with them. Though he tends to disengage from rational conversations when he finds them difficult or upsetting, he does have some ability, as well as some inclination, to engage in such conversations, and he does sometimes use their conclusions to guide his behavior. Still, this person is only beginning to learn to use his beliefs about what is good as 'epistemically-minded' people use theirs. If one prefers to reserve the word 'belief' for cognitive states that function in more fully rational mental modes, what this person has may be said to be something less than belief.

2.2.3.2.   The 'manly' mode of thinking about what is good

When forming and revising his beliefs about what is good, a person who mainly inhabits the manly frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life will generally ask himself, "What do *other* people think is good?" He will be afraid that his belief about what is good is immature or shameful, and if he thinks that it is, he may try to revise it to fit the social standards he respects. He may wait for his superiors to let it be known what they think is best, then say that he agrees with them. This person often finds himself 'believing' things that he himself would otherwise not be inclined to believe, but which he thinks are finer and nobler than the things he is inclined to believe on his own. Not only will there be a gap between what he believes and what he says he believes, it will also by no means be clear to this person just what he believes and what he only says he believes. Many of this person's beliefs about what is best will be 'half-hearted' beliefs, though he himself may not recognize them as such.

Although such a person is capable of subtle practical reasoning and may even be proud of how clever he is, his intellectual curiosity and capacity for doubt go only so far. If he feels very

strongly that something is shameful and bad, he will cling to this belief, all arguments to the contrary notwithstanding. Like the 'animal' person, he too has a threshold of personal comfort past which he will say: "This conversation is over."[1] But unlike the 'animal' person, he typically views reason as something respectable. He thinks that forming and revising one's beliefs in accordance with reason is, at least in certain areas of belief-formation, the intellectually honorable thing to do. He also wishes to be favorably judged when others inspect the relation between his beliefs as he has stated them and his actions. Harmonizing his words (*logoi*) and his deeds (*erga*) is for him a point of honor.[2] Unless he has great confidence in his integrity, however, he will fear running into a Socrates, somebody who regularly exposes people's failure to live in accordance with their own beliefs about what is best or most important. Instead of wanting to achieve such integrity for its own sake (in which case he might actively seek out a Socrates), the 'manly' person wants to achieve *enough* of it not to be embarrassed when he is forced to give an account of his life.

Although his desire to fit his beliefs to his actions is less absolute than it might be, the 'manly' person is eager to live in accordance with standards and rules. He tends to think of the virtuous man as a kind of obedient soldier or law-abiding subject. As it is not normally the job of a subordinate to question the judgment of a superior, so the 'manly' person is not in the habit of asking himself: "Are my superiors *correct* in thinking this best, and if so, *why* is it best?" He does not spend much time entertaining such thoughts, for he knows that he is surrounded by people who threaten to treat him badly if he does not meet their standard of behavior. He knows that if he seems to such people to think, feel, and act more or less in accordance with that

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[1] Cf. the end of the *Euthyphro* (15e): "Some other time (*eis authis*), Socrates. Now I am in a hurry and it is time for me to go." Cf. also the end of the *Protagoras* (361e): "We shall pursue the subject on some other occasion (*eis authis*), at your pleasure: for the present, it is time to turn to another affair." (Loeb Classical Library translations.)
[2] Cf. *Laches* 188c-e and ancient Greek literature in general.

standard, life will be much easier for him than if he does not. Under such pressure,[1] he is not

inclined to call into question prevailing ideas about what is best, carefully inquire into what *is*

best, and act in accordance with the results of such inquiries—unless, of course, this very sort of

inquisitiveness is itself admired by people he respects.

2.2.3.3.   The 'epistemic' mode of thinking about what is good

The person who fully inhabits the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity of

living a human life will form and revise his beliefs about what is good with a view to *knowing*

what is good. Yet when he asks himself how exactly to go about doing this, he may realize that

in addition to being no expert when it comes to living a human life, he is also not an expert when

it comes to making progress in revising his beliefs about what is good. As he searches for clues,

he may wonder: "Being rigorous in a field like mathematics or geometry is one thing, but what

counts as being rigorous in such a delicate matter as thinking about what is good?" Although he

may wrestle with this question without ever finding the answer, he will in the meantime have

settled into 'epistemic' habits of belief-formation. He will attempt to reconcile and organize his

beliefs about what is good, juxtaposing beliefs that would otherwise remain segregated, asking

how well they cohere, and trying to impart greater integrity to his system of beliefs. He will be a

relentless editor of his beliefs about what is good, ever on the lookout for mistakes and making

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[1] Cf. *Republic* 492b-d [Socrates speaking to Adeimantus]: "'[Is it] not rather the very men who talk in this strain who are the chief sophists and educate most effectively and mould to their own heart's desire young and old, men and women?' 'When?' said he. 'Why, when,' I said, 'the multitude are seated together in assemblies or in court-rooms or theatres or camps or any other public gathering of a crowd, and with loud uproar censure some of the things that are said and done and approve others, both in excess, with full-throated clamour and clapping of hands, and thereto the rocks and the region round about re-echoing redouble the din of the censure and the praise. In such case how do you think the young man's heart . . . is moved within him? What private teaching do you think will hold out and not rather be swept away by the torrent of censure and applause, and borne off on its current, so that he will affirm the same things that they do to be honourable and base (*phêsein te ta auta toutois kala kai aischra einai*), and will do as they do (*kai epitêdeusein haper an houtoi*), and be even such as they (*kai esesthai toiouton*)?' 'That is quite inevitable (*pollê . . . anangkê*), Socrates,' he said."

corrections where needed, even as he also questions the trustworthiness of his own editorial judgment. He will also try not to be fooled by people who *seem* to know what is best. When he meets such people, he will test their seeming knowledge by the best tests he knows, checking at the very least for consistency. He will clearly distinguish the question "Do the people I respect approve of this?" from the question "Is this good?" He will also try to be on guard against according undue weight to the pleasure or pain that something brings. While remaining open to the possibility that the good is the pleasant, he will clearly distinguish the questions "Is this pleasant?" and "Is this good?"

As for the relation between his beliefs and his actions, the defining characteristic of the person who fully inhabits the epistemic frame of mind is *complete trust in the guidance of knowledge,* accompanied by a more or less radical mistrust of every other form of guidance. Accordingly, this person will not, so far as is in his power, act otherwise than as knowledge dictates. If knowledge is unavailable, he will try to follow, albeit somewhat warily, that form of available guidance which in his opinion comes closest to knowledge. Yet the further removed he is from the guidance of knowledge, the muddier the relationship between his beliefs and actions gets. Like the 'manly' person, he may not know quite what he believes; he may have 'half-hearted' beliefs; he may simply not have an opinion. Nevertheless, to the extent that he has a clear belief about how best to proceed, and to the extent that he considers this to be the closest thing he has to knowledge, to that extent he can be counted on to act in accordance with this belief.

2.2.3.4. The 'semi-organized hodgepodge' mode of thinking about what is good

The person who inhabits the abovementioned 'semi-organized hodgepodge' frame of mind with regard to his life as a whole will think about what is good in a partly coherent combination of 'animal', 'manly', and (to a lesser degree) 'epistemic' ways, no one approach being the 'ruling' approach. It would be wrong to think of this person as forming his beliefs about what is good now in an 'animal' manner, now in a 'manly' manner, now in an 'epistemic' manner, occupying distinctly different modes from situation to situation. It would also be wrong to think of him as consistently forming his beliefs about what is good in a single 'blended' mode. This person's 'hodgepodge' mode of thinking about what is good falls somewhere between these extremes, as does the relation between his beliefs and his actions.

2.2.4. A fuller formulation of my account

I said in chapter 1 that the akratic fails to inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activities of living a human life and of thinking about what is good. I did not, however, say which frame of mind he does inhabit. In this chapter I have described a 'semi-organized hodgepodge' frame of mind in which no one approach is the 'ruling' approach and which borrows more from the animal and manly frames of mind than from the epistemic. Having described this hybrid frame of mind, I may now present a fuller formulation of my account:

> There are many different kinds of akratic behavior, and different factors are responsible for different kinds, but what is chiefly responsible for typical instances of akratic behavior is that the akratic inhabits the abovementioned 'semi-organized hodgepodge' frame of mind, rather than the epistemic frame of mind, with regard to the activity of living a human life generally and, in particular, with regard to the activity of thinking about what is good. Moreover, what keeps the typical akratic stuck in his rut is his ignorance of the fact that the psychic resistance he encounters during episodes of

akratic behavior is due to his own wrongheaded approach to life. In other words, if what is immediately responsible for akratic behavior is a kind of ignorance, what is responsible at a deeper level is ignornance of this ignorance, i.e., ignorance of the fact that one inhabits an inherently ignorant frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life and that one ought to be trying to cure oneself of this ignorance. Put briefly, it is a 'semi-organized hodgepodge' form of $ignorance_e,$ coupled with ignorance of this ignorance, that typically lies at the root of akratic behavior.

As for what akratic behavior *is,* it is certainly not action against one's knowledge of what is best, since no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best.[1] Nor is it action against one's *belief* about what is best—if by 'belief' about what is best is meant 'epistemic' belief, i.e., the kind of belief possessed by a person who fully inhabits the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activities of living a human life and of thinking about what is good. For to the extent that such a person has a clear belief about how best to proceed, and to the extent that he considers this to be the closest thing he has to knowledge, to that extent he can be counted on to act in accordance with this belief (for this again is part of what it is to inhabit this frame of mind).[2] No, typical cases of akratic behavior are rather cases of acting against a 'semi-organized hodgepodge' belief about what is best, i.e., the kind of belief possessed by a person who inhabits a 'semi-organized hodgepodge' frame of mind with regard to the activities of living a human life and of thinking about what is good.

Let me apply this abstract formulation to the concrete situation of a person who is lying in bed, feeling like not getting out of bed, but thinking that he should get out of bed. I will assume that the person in question is able to get out of bed and that getting out of bed in this particular situation is in fact the best thing to do. For the sake of completeness, I will walk the reader through this situation four times over, once each for the four frames of mind distinguished above.

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[1] As I have already said, part of what it is to possess such knowledge is to fully inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life, and part of what it is to fully inhabit this frame of mind with regard to this activity is to try wholeheartedly to act in accordance with such knowledge if one possesses it. See chapter 1, pp. 13-15.
[2] See above, p. 55.

2.2.4.1.   The 'animal' form of akratic resistance

A person who mainly inhabits the animal frame of mind with regard to the activities of living a human life and of thinking about what is good, and who finds himself lying in bed, feeling like not getting out of bed, but believing that he should get out of bed, will perhaps have formed this belief in the following way. He might have been told the night before that there was to be an early morning contest between two great athletes, and that his father and older brothers were going to go into town to see it and were willing to take him with them if he got up in time to go. The prospect of a sporting event and a trip into town delighted him, and, being an 'animal' person who tends to form beliefs about what is good in accordance with his personal tastes and inclinations, he formed the 'animal' belief that it would be good to get up early the following morning.

Now it is morning, and the boy is lying in bed remembering what had been said the night before and believing that it would be best for him to get up now. But he is also very sleepy, and because he inhabits a frame of mind in which he tends to focus on his bodily feelings and impulses, his thoughts drift towards the immediate pleasure of going back to sleep. Yet when he rolls over to go back to sleep, he experiences a kind of inner resistance, for he is still attracted by the thought of going into town and seeing the athletes, and he knows that if he does not get up soon, he will miss his chance. On the other hand, when he moves to get up, he also experiences inner resistance, this time in the form of a desire to go back to sleep. This inner tension between a bodily impulse and an 'animal' belief about what is good—a belief based on personal tastes and elementary means-end reasoning—is an example of the 'animal' kind of akratic resistance. For in this case everything operates within the animal frame of mind: what makes it hard for the

person to go in one direction is an 'animal' desire to get more sleep, and what makes it hard for him to go in the other direction is a belief about what is good that was formed, functions, and is open to revision within the animal frame of mind.

This tension may resolve itself in one of three ways. The person may change his mind to suit his immediate bodily feeling (i.e., decide that it would not, after all, be best to get out of bed, but that it would be best to get more sleep) and act in accordance with this new belief; or he may retain his old belief, let it guide him, and lift himself out of bed; or he may simply let himself fall back asleep without either having changed his behavior to suit his belief or having changed his belief to suit his behavior. The crucial fact is that this person's beliefs about what is good are based for the most part on personal tastes, do not stand up well to contrary bodily impulses, and in any case are not the primary means by which the person's life tends to be guided.[1]

2.2.4.2. The 'manly' form of akratic resistance

A person who mainly inhabits the manly frame of mind with regard to the activities of living a human life and of thinking about what is good, and who finds himself lying in bed, feeling like not getting out of bed, but believing that he should get out of bed, will perhaps have formed this belief in the following way. His friends might have been getting increasingly interested in the art of public speaking, and his father might have been expressing hopes recently that his son would soon become a leading man in the city, and it might have been that because this person is not inclined to call into question prevailing ideas about what is best, especially not when expressed by people he knows and respects, he had concluded that of course it would be good for him to become an effective public speaker and a man to reckon with in city affairs. Moreover, he might have been told the night before that a famous 'wise man' was in town, a man

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[1] Such a person's life tends to be guided, as I have said, by other people who care for him and do much of his thinking for him.

who people said was able to make his students clever speakers and powerful figures in public life. Again, not being inclined to question what seems to be common knowledge, and being a fairly good means-end reasoner, this person might have concluded that it would be best for him to meet this 'wise man' and learn his techniques, and that the best way to do so would be to get up before dawn, go to the house of an older friend (himself a sort of public intellectual), and ask him to take him directly to this 'wise man' before he left town and to help persuade him to take him on as a student.

When this young man wakes up before dawn, he is still extremely sleepy and he feels like staying in bed; yet he also retains his belief from the night before, and he tells himself that if ever he wants to become somebody, he needs to get up right now. Like the 'animal' person, this person experiences tension between his bodily feeling and his belief: when he moves to get out of bed, he meets resistance in the form of a desire to go back to sleep, and when he lies back down to go back to sleep, he meets resistance in the form a belief that it would be best to get up. But unlike the 'animal' person, his beliefs about what is good are 'manly' beliefs and are therefore bound up with notions of honor and shame; his belief that it would be best to get up is more or less the same as his belief that it would be shameful to remain in bed. This person's beliefs about what is good are also tied more closely than the 'animal' person's to thoughts about what others say is good. In forming beliefs about what is good, this person looks to something less subjective and more stable than his own inclinations and tastes: he looks to what is generally approved, in word or in deed, by people he respects in his community. Accordingly, when this person encounters resistance in the form of a desire to go back to sleep, he will probably not change his belief to fit this feeling, since nothing about his personal feeling changes the fact that preferring sleep to self-advancement is generally frowned upon by the people he knows and

respects. If he does give in to his sleepiness, he will most likely keep his belief unchanged, castigating himself and feeling ashamed of himself for not 'conquering' it. He will also be upset at having acted against his belief about what is best, for as I have said, it is a point of pride with 'manly' people that their actions harmonize with their beliefs.[1]

It is therefore much more likely that this person will act in accordance with his belief and force himself to get out of bed. In doing so, however, he will probably exaggerate the worthlessness of his desire to sleep and the certainty of his belief—he may call it knowledge— that he ought to get out of bed. Such exaggeration may help motivate him to get up, but it also reveals a deficiency in his mode of thinking-feeling-acting. Unlike the person who fully inhabits the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activities of living a human life and of thinking about what is good, the inhabitant of the manly frame of mind does not chiefly form his beliefs about what is good with a view to knowledge, nor does he completely trust knowledge as a guide to life. Rather, he has his favored views about what is good, and if a thought occurs to him that threatens to keep him from carrying out those views (e.g., the thought that sleep is important for health, the thought that maybe the life of a politician is not for him), he will be tempted to dismiss it or ignore it, even though by welcoming and working through such thoughts he might learn more about what it would be best for him to do. Yet some of the thoughts that this person attempts to dismiss will keep pressing into his consciousness, since some will have a basis in reality, and realities do not normally leave a person alone just because he has dismissed some thought about them. Hence even if this person never acts against his belief about what is best, i.e., even if he is completely continent, he will probably still suffer from a 'manly' form of akratic resistance. That is, he will probably suffer from a kind of psychic tension that is caused

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[1] Though as I have also said, they tend to care about this harmony not for its own sake but in order to avoid embarrassment (see p. 53).

by his unwillingness to learn the whole truth about what is good. He may always overpower such resistance, but as long as there are portions of reality that he refuses to face and as long as these realities make it hard for him to retain his views and act upon them, he will not rid himself of it.

2.2.4.3. 'Epistemic' freedom from akratic resistance

I have suggested that the person who fully inhabits the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activities of living a human life and of thinking about what is good will be free of what I call 'akratic resistance'. But just because a person is free of akratic resistance does not mean that he is free of all tension between his beliefs and his feelings. If, for example, an 'epistemically-minded' person is woken up before dawn by a loud knocking at his door, it is entirely possible that he will be pulled in one direction by the thought that he ought to find out what the matter is, and in another by a desire to get more sleep. What makes this person different from the people just discussed is that he completely trusts the guidance of knowledge, not just as a guide to his thoughts but also as a guide to his feelings and actions, and that he always thinks and feels and acts in accordance with this guidance as far as he can. Accordingly, if he finds himself momentarily torn between a thought and a desire, he will do what he is accustomed to do whenever he experiences psychic tension, whether between two beliefs, two desires, or a belief and a desire: he will try to reconcile the opposing elements so as to bring his thoughts and feelings closer to knowledge. As he tries to make his thoughts agree with each other and with the truth when he has two contradictory beliefs, so if he has opposing beliefs and desires, he will try to join his thoughts and feelings into a coherent system that accords as far as possible with the knowledge that properly governs the activity of living a human life.

Even if he is a long-time inhabitant of the epistemic frame of mind, this is not an easy task. For one thing, he almost certainly does not possess the knowledge that properly governs human lives, so it is not as if it is simply a matter of bringing himself into line with something he already clearly sees. Nor does he have time to deliberate carefully in this case; he has to think fast. In addition, while it is true that his feelings are closely interwoven with his thoughts and that changes in the way he thinks will affect the way he feels, he does not have total control over his feelings—or over his thoughts, for that matter. Finally, there is no guarantee that he will arrive at a clear idea of what it would be best for him to do, let alone come to *know* what is best. To fully inhabit the epistemic frame of mind is not necessarily to have a clue about where knowledge points in a given case; sometimes the 'epistemically-minded' person is simply at a loss. Nevertheless, as far as he is able in the time that he has, he will ask himself what 'the one who knows' would do,[1] settle on what he thinks is a good answer, and (again, as far as he is able) bring his thoughts, feelings, and actions into line with it.

Suppose that in the present case he does form a clear idea about how to proceed: it would probably be best, he thinks, to find out what is the matter. One thing he will do in this case is make whatever physical movements are called for. Another thing he will try to do is reconcile his feelings to his beliefs. If he can, he will redirect the course of his feelings to harmonize with his belief that it would be best not to sleep right now. But if he cannot rid himself of his desire to go back to sleep, he will accept this fact and factor it into his future thinking about what it would be best for him to do. In any case, he will not let this desire guide his actions, rather than his belief about what is best, so long as he takes this belief to be the closest thing he has to knowledge.

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[1] Cf., e.g., *Crito* 48a (*ho epaïôn . . . ho heis*).

The crucial fact about this person is that he has complete trust in the guidance of knowledge, trust which itself comprises an essential set of tendencies to think and feel and act. Insofar as he can harmonize his beliefs and desires so as to accord with the guidance of knowledge, he will, but if some recalcitrant thought or feeling resists his efforts, he will not let this bother him more than it has to, nor will he close his mind to the possibility that this feeling or thought may be pointing him towards a part of the truth that he does not currently recognize. In this respect he is unlike the 'manly' person, who tends, as I have said, to distort or stifle the truth in order to facilitate the execution of his favored ideas about what is best. The policy of the 'epistemically-minded' person, by contrast, who genuinely wishes to *know* what is best, is to acknowledge and sort through whatever thoughts or feelings he has in an effort to bring all of his thoughts and feelings closer to knowledge. It is this knowledge-seeking, knowledge-trusting openness to the contents of one's own mind and to the whole truth about what is good that I think endows a person with that certain sort of "psychic serenity" which I earlier suggested could be achieved by curing oneself of *ignorance$_e$,* even as one continues to suffer from *ignorance$_k$*.[1]

2.2.4.4.   The 'semi-organized hodgepodge' form of akratic resistance

Imagine that you are a person who inhabits a 'semi-organized hodgepodge' frame of mind with regard to the activities of living a human life and of thinking about what is good, and that you are lying in bed, feeling like not getting out of bed, but thinking that you should get out of bed. You will perhaps have formed this belief in the following way. You might have reasoned the night before that in order to do all the work you need to do today, you would have to get up early. Doing this work is important, you sometimes think to yourself, in part because of the people who will be hurt if you do not do it, in part because of the credit you will bring to

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[1] See chapter 1, pp. 17-18.

yourself if you do it well (and the blame you will incur if you do not), in part because this work 'puts food on the table,' i.e., provides you with your animal necessities and other bodily comforts and conveniences. When your alarm clock goes off, however, though you believe that it would be best to get out of bed, you do not feel like getting out of bed. Indeed, your feeling of sleepiness and your desire to get more sleep may well translate into a belief that it would be *good* to stay in bed. For like the 'animal' person, you have a tendency to sometimes form beliefs about what is good on no other basis than personal taste and inclination, and besides, you may have other reasons for thinking that it would be good to stay in bed (e.g., legitimate health concerns). Unlike the 'animal' person, however, you will not be so easily led to abandon your belief that it would be best for you to get out of bed, for your process of forming and revising your beliefs about what is best, unlike the 'animal' person's, is largely based on ideas about what would be responsible and what irresponsible, what mature and what childish, etc. Indeed, unlike any of the three people described above, you will feel confusedly torn, not just between a bodily sensation and a belief about what it would be good to do, nor just between one 'animal' belief about what is good and another 'animal' belief about what is good, but between an 'animal' belief about what is good and a 'manly' belief about what is good—or rather, a *tendency* to form 'animal' beliefs about what is good and a *tendency* to form 'manly' beliefs about what is good. There may also be an 'epistemic' aspect to your thinking. You may think to yourself: "Let me reason this out. Apart from how I feel, or what I think others would think of me if I acted in this way or that, what would *in fact* be the best thing to do?" But if this thought occurs to you, you do not sustain the line of thinking for long; it is not, after all, your primary mode of thinking about what is best.

In short, you will experience little, if any, of the psychic serenity enjoyed by the 'epistemically-minded' person. On the other hand, you will experience much of the akratic resistance that the 'animal' and 'manly' people experience, since you largely inhabit their frames of mind with regard to the activities of living a human life and of thinking about what is good. But the most distinctive kind of akratic resistance that you will experience is the 'semi-organized hodgepodge' kind, i.e., the kind of akratic resistance that comes from being torn between 'animal' and 'manly' ways of thinking, feeling, and acting and from not being wholly committed to inhabiting any one frame of mind, least of all the epistemic frame of mind.

2.2.5.   Questions from chapter 1

I end my presentation of my account of akratic behavior by answering two questions that were left unanswered in chapter 1.

Question 1: "If, as I claim, akratics fail to inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life and therefore do not view *the knowledge that properly governs this activity* as the standard against which their actions are to be judged, what standard are they using when they say that they 'should have' done otherwise, and why do they fail to live up to this standard?"

Answer: When typical akratics show remorse, they are primarily using a 'manly' moral standard. But when a person inhabits the manly frame of mind with regard to the activity of thinking about what is good, it will often not be clear to him just what he believes and what he only says he believes, or just what he firmly believes and what he believes half-heartedly. Moreover, if an akratic inhabits the 'semi-organized hodgepodge' frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life, then in addition to inhabiting a manly frame of mind with

regard to this activity, he also inhabits an animal frame of mind—and neither approach 'rules' the other. Accordingly, one should not be surprised if the typical akratic fails to live up to his own 'manly' standard.

Question 2: "What about people who take themselves to be acting not just against their belief but against their knowledge of what is best? Do *they* not inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity in question? If not, why do they say that they 'knew' what to do and that they 'should have' let themselves be guided by knowledge?"

Answer: Part of what it means to inhabit the abovementioned 'semi-organized hodgepodge' frame of mind with regard to some activity is to *partially* occupy the epistemic frame of mind with regard to that activity. According to my account, typical akratics inhabit this 'hodgepodge' frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life and therefore do *to some extent* occupy the epistemic frame of mind with regard to this activity. To the extent that they do, they genuinely believe that they 'should have' let themselves be guided by knowledge (if indeed they think that knowledge was available to them). But to the extent that they do not, they will have no trouble acting against what they think is the guidance of knowledge. Moreover, depending on which frame of mind one inhabits with regard to the activity of thinking about what is good, one will have a more or less strict conception of what it is to *know* what is best. To the person who mainly inhabits the manly frame of mind with regard to this activity, to 'know' what is best may mean little more than to know what one's parents and other respectable people *say* is best, while to the person who mainly inhabits the animal frame of mind with regard to this activity, 'knowledge' of what is best may be even easier to come by: it may simply be a matter of consulting one's personal tastes and being sure about one's own likes and dislikes. One should therefore not be surprised if a person who is not a true inhabitant of the epistemic

frame of mind (with regard to the activity of living a human life) nevertheless says that he knew what to do and that he should have let himself be guided by knowledge.

3.   THE SECTION ON AKRASIA AND ITS IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

In chapters 1 and 2 I presented my account of akratic behavior; in the remaining two chapters I superimpose this account upon Plato's *Protagoras*.[1] In the first part of this chapter I describe and explain the section on akrasia (352a-359a) and its immediate context (349a-352a; 359a-360e); in the second part I trace the correspondences between my account and this section. In chapter 4 I argue that ingredients in my account of akratic behavior are to be found throughout the *Protagoras*.

3.1.   Part One: Analysis of text

Immediately enveloping the section on akrasia (352a-359a) is what I call the 'courage-wisdom section' (349a-360e), that part of the *Protagoras* which begins when Protagoras is brought to say (revising his initial view[2] in light of Socrates' earlier questions[3]) that many people are most unwise, yet most courageous, and which ends when he is forced to admit that, to judge from what has been agreed, this seems to him to be impossible. If one thinks of the section on akrasia as the kernel of a larger nut, the courage-wisdom section is the nut, and if one wants to make good sense of the section on akrasia, one must understand this larger section. It is a good idea, moreover, to approach this portion of Plato's text with certain distinctions in mind. This, then, is my plan for Part One: I will draw some preliminary distinctions, I will explain in general terms what Socrates seems to me to be trying to do in the courage-wisdom section, and I will

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[1] See chapter 1, p. 20.
[2] 330ab.
[3] 330c-334c.

analyze what Socrates actually does in this section, discussing first the 'shell' (349a-352a; 359a-360e) and then the 'meat' (352a-359a).

3.1.1. Preliminary distinctions

3.1.1.1. Three pairs of value terms

In the *Protagoras*, as in other Platonic dialogues, each of three pairs of value terms is at certain times distinguished from and at certain times lined up with one or both of the others: *agathon, kakon* (good, bad); *kalon, aischron* (beautiful, ugly; or, noble, shameful); *hêdu, aniaron* (pleasant, painful).[1] *Agathon/kakon,* like our 'good/bad', is the most abstract and flexible of the three pairs: it can be used to express the idea that something serves or thwarts one's self-interest, as well as to express the idea that something is good or bad for the community, or good or bad absolutely; the idea that some food is beneficial or corrupting to the body, as well as the idea that some habit or practice is beneficial or corrupting to the soul; the idea that someone is good or bad at some particular occupation, as well as the idea that he is a good or bad person.[2] *Agathon* is the standard adjective corresponding to the noun *aretê* (goodness, virtue). *Kalon/aischron,* though somewhat less all-purpose than *agathon/kakon,* is also fairly flexible: it can be used to express the idea that someone is physically attractive or repulsive, as well as to express the idea that some action is noble or base. Of the three adjective pairs, it is the one most closely tied to notions of praise, blame, honor, and shame and, in general, to what I called in chapter 2 the 'manly' frame of mind. *Hêdu/aniaron* is the most immediately sensual pair of terms: while its range does extend from bodily pleasure and pain to spiritual joy and sorrow, and while it can be

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[1] What follows is a brief discussion of the differences between these terms. For a more detailed discussion, see K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle*, pp. 51-3 and 69-73 especially.
[2] Cf. the use of *agathos* and *kakos* in Simonides' poem (339b1, 344c4, 344d8, 344e7-8, 346c3) and in Socrates' interpretation of it (esp. 345a1-c3).

used to refer to an objective quality about which a person may be mistaken (e.g., the sweetness of honey), it is the one of these three pairs that is most tightly bound to subjective sense experience.[1]

Most children, whether ancient Athenian or modern American, whether taught to use the words *agathon, kalon, hêdu* or the words *good, beautiful, pleasant,* are sufficiently familiar with but also sufficiently confused about these three pairs of value terms that they are inclined at times to unite each pair with each of the others, but also at times to set each pair at odds with each of the others, depending on the "diet" of examples they are fed[2]; and many such children turn into adults who retain these inclinations. Someone who is skilled at asking questions can easily exploit this kind of confusion, as Socrates does, I think, in the courage-wisdom section.[3]

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[1] The following passage from Plato's *Laws* illustrates some of these differences in range of use and meaning (though the view expressed by the Athenian at the end is far from the conventional ancient Greek view):

ATHENIAN: . . . Granted that a man is brave, strong, handsome (*kalos*), rich, and can satisfy every passion of a lifetime, do you deny that, if he is an unjust and arrogant man (*adikos . . . kai hubristês*), his life must inevitably be dishonorable (*ex anangkês aischrôs an zê[i]n*)? Or possibly you would go so far as to concede the dishonor (*to ge aischrôs*).

CLINIAS: Readily.

ATHENIAN: And inevitably [bad], too (*to kai kakôs*)? Would you allow that?

CLINIAS: No, that is not to be so readily admitted (*ouk an eti touth' homoiôs*).

ATHENIAN: And, further, unpleasant (*to kai aêdôs*) and inexpedient for himself (*mê xumpherontôs autôi*)?

CLINIAS: How can we possibly carry concession to that pitch?

ATHENIAN: How? Apparently only by the intervention of a god to produce a concord as complete as our present discordance. For my part, dear Clinias, I find it even more certain that these truths are beyond question than that Crete is an island. (661e-662b, A. E. Taylor's translation.)

[2] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §593: "A main cause of philosophical disease—a one-sided diet: one nourishes one's thinking with only one kind of example."

[3] To illustrate this point and to help prepare the reader for what is to come, I offer this made-up exchange between a Socrates-like questioner and an answering child:

When your head or stomach hurts, does that mean that something bad has happened to your body, or something good? —Something bad. When you hit your brother on the head or punch him in the stomach, hard enough to make him cry, what do your parents say: that you've done something good, or something bad? —Something bad. So whether it's you who's feeling pain or somebody else, pain goes together with badness? —Right. And pleasure goes together with goodness? —Yes. When your father makes you eat your vegetables, or when your mother makes you get a shot at the doctor's, do you like it? —No, I hate it. It pains you? —Yes. Then since pain goes together with badness, when your father tells you to eat your vegetables, he must say something like this: "Eat your vegetables, they're *bad* for you." Isn't that what he says? —No, he says the reverse; he says they're *good* for me. Well, but when your mother takes you to the doctor's, surely *she* doesn't tell you that the painful shot you're getting is for your own *good*? —But that's just what she *does* say. Then do you still think that pain goes together with badness? —No, maybe not.

3.1.1.2. Two pairs of questions

A simpler set of distinctions may be drawn between the questions "What is courageous behavior?" and "What is responsible for courageous behavior?" and between the questions "What is akratic behavior?" and "What is responsible for akratic behavior?" Each pair of questions may be derived from a general pair of questions which I distinguished in chapter 2: "What is a good performance of this kind?" and "What is responsible for a good performance of this kind?" I think that the kind of performance in question, in the case of both courageous and akratic behavior, is the living of a human life. And whereas to live a courageous life—or, in some episode within one's life, to behave courageously—is to excel in a distinctive way at this kind of performance, to live an akratic life—or, in some episode within one's life, to behave akratically—is to fail in a distinctive way at this same kind of performance.

3.1.1.3. Two ways of thinking about courageous behavior

Later I will argue that the courage-wisdom section may be usefully viewed as an attempt by Socrates to lead Protagoras out of a somewhat confused and largely 'manly' way of thinking about courageous behavior and into an 'epistemic' way of thinking about it. But all I wish to do

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Well, then, if painful things are sometimes good for you, *why* are they good for you? For instance, are painful shots good for you because they make you sick, or because they keep you healthy? —Because they keep me healthy. And why don't you want to get sick? Is it because it's very painful to be sick? —Yes, that's why. So being sick is bad because it's very painful? —Yes. More painful than getting a shot at the doctor's, or less? —More painful. So painful shots are good for you because they prevent something even more painful? —That's right. Then might pain go together with badness after all? —I don't know.

This conversation focuses on the relation between two pairs of terms, 'good/bad' and 'pleasant/painful'. Similar conversations might be imagined involving the other two relations, between 'good/bad' and 'noble/shameful' and between 'noble/shameful' and 'pleasant/painful'. Cf. *First Alcibiades* 115aff.

now is to distinguish these two ways of thinking about courageous behavior. Each way involves distinctive ways of answering the pair of questions distinguished above: "What is courageous behavior?" and "What is responsible for courageous behavior?" I begin with the somewhat confused, largely 'manly' way.

Someone who thinks in this way will readily agree that courage is a praiseworthy quality that has to do with fear and confidence. The courageous man, in virtue of his courage, goes confidently forward to meet what the coward shrinks from in fear, and he is to be highly regarded because of his courage. What counts as courageous behavior? Is it any old confident going-forward to meet what most people fear to meet, or are there further limitations? Here the person who thinks in this way is of two minds. On the one hand, he is inclined to say that any case in which a person boldly goes where most of us are too afraid to go is a case of courageous behavior. Thus a temple-robber, in the very act of robbing a temple, would on this view demonstrate courage, since he would be boldly committing an act which most of us are too afraid to commit. Indeed, on this view, part of what makes the robber so manly and brave (and deserving of qualified praise)[1] is that while most other people are held back by a fearful sense of shame at the thought of committing unjust and impious acts, the robber, if he has any social fears, is 'man' enough to override them.[2] On the other hand, the person who thinks in this somewhat confused way about courageous behavior will *also* be inclined to say that courage is inherently noble and beautiful (*kalon*) and that any case of bold behavior which is not *kalon,* however rare or gutsy, is not a case of courageous behavior. Thus if unjust acts are ignoble and ugly, they cannot, on this view, be courageous. But while the person who thinks in this way will want to deny that courage is ever directly responsible for a person's acting against *to kalon* (the

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[1] E.g., "I will say this for him, the man has guts."
[2] Cf. *Gorgias* 494d, where Socrates suggests that because Callicles is *andreios* (courageous, manly) he will not be held back by a sense of shame, as were Gorgias and Polus.

noble), he may agree that courage sometimes makes a person act against his best interests, i.e., against *to agathon* (the good). He may, for instance, say that when Achilles sacrificed his life to avenge Patroclus, he acted nobly and beautifully, but against his best interests. Indeed, on this view, part of what makes Achilles' behavior so brave is that he was willing to act against his own good for the sake of the noble.

As for the question "What is responsible for courageous behavior?", the person who thinks in this way will probably say that it is a kind of psychic toughness, something that enables one to persevere in the face of pain or fearful things. On the one hand, he will be inclined to say that it involves an ability to override one's sense of shame so as to bring oneself to violate a social taboo. On the other hand, he will be inclined to say that it implies a proper upbringing which makes a person able to distinguish between the noble and the shameful, together with a passionate commitment to the noble which is strong enough to override one's desire for the pleasant or for the good (if ever either one of these conflicts with the noble).

Consider now a person who thinks of courageous behavior in an 'epistemic' way. Like the person just mentioned, he, too, will agree that courage is a praiseworthy quality that has to do with fear and confidence. And like this other person, he will find something in fearless rogues which he is tempted to call courage, even as he is also tempted to say that acting courageously is incompatible with acting unjustly, though compatible with acting against one's best interests. Unlike the abovementioned thinker, however, the 'epistemic' thinker will call these ways of thinking into question and notice how they conflict. He will also try hard to arrive at a single, coherent account of courageous behavior. And he will test how well his own understanding of courage measures up to the knowledge of courage. In addition to trying to fit his best thoughts

about courageous behavior together with each other, he will also try to fit his best thoughts about

courage together with his best thoughts about the other human virtues, e.g., justice and wisdom.

He will be troubled by the conclusion that a courageous man's behavior is sometimes at odds

with a just man's behavior, or that a wise man's behavior is sometimes at odds with a courageous

man's behavior. As he works his way towards a coherent account not just of the courageous man

but of the wholly or truly good man, "in hands and feet and mind foursquare,"[1] he will try to

refute such conclusions.

How will the person who thinks in this way about courage (and who inhabits an

epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life) address the question:

"What is responsible for courageous behavior?"? Since he thinks of the activity of living a

human life as properly governed by knowledge, he assumes that if courage is a human virtue,

i.e., if to live courageously is to succeed in some way at living a human life, then courageous

behavior must be a kind of knowledge-guided behavior. Courage may turn out to be an

executive virtue, but if so, it will only count as a *virtue* so long as it is under the guidance of

knowledge; take this guidance away, and whatever courage-like state may remain will not be a

virtue, if what is meant by a virtue is something that can be counted on to give rise to good

human behavior. Assuming courage is a virtue in this sense (this person will think), a

courageous man's behavior must at least in part be thanks to his knowledge of how to live well.

3.1.1.4. The bare courageous act and the feeling of confidence

When trying to account for each small step that Socrates takes in the courage-wisdom

argument,[2] it helps to distinguish between the bare act performed by the courageous person and

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[1] Simonides' words, cited at 339b.
[2] E.g., at 360ab.

the courageous feeling with which he performs it. Consider a situation in which the courageous thing to do is to pick up a spider. One person walks right up to the spider and confidently picks it up; another person is afraid of the spider, hesitates as he approaches it, but somehow brings himself to pick it up; a third person is so frightened by the spider that he refuses to touch it. While the first two people should be distinguished from the third person, they should also be distinguished from each other. Protagoras and Socrates, at any rate, appear to think that the courageous person does not just perform some bare courageous act but performs it readily, confidently, even eagerly.[1]

3.1.1.5.   Two ways of thinking about akratic behavior

Later I will argue that the demonstration to the many (353c-357e) may be usefully viewed as an attempt by Socrates to lead the many out of a common, confused way of thinking about akratic behavior and into a more 'epistemic' way of thinking about it. Now, however, I simply wish to distinguish these two ways of thinking. Each involves distinctive ways of addressing the pair of questions distinguished above: "What is akratic behavior?" and "What is responsible for akratic behavior?" Let me begin with the common, confused way of thinking.

Someone who thinks in this way will readily agree that akratic behavior is action against one's knowledge of what is best. On this view, the akratic agent knows what it would be best to do (e.g., remain at his post), is able to do it, but feels like doing something else instead (e.g., fleeing) and gives in to this feeling. The person who thinks in this way about akratic behavior, when asked what kinds of things he calls good, will answer differently, depending on the kinds of examples he has in mind. If put in mind of a narrow set of examples, he may say that what he

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[1] Consider in particular Protagoras's use of the word *itas* ('eager') at 349e3, which is recalled by Socrates at 359c1-3 and 359d. The use of *itas* at 359d1ff. harks back to the use of *hekôn* ('willingly, readily') at 358c7 and *hekonta* (a form of *hekôn*) at 358e6.

calls good are certain tangible things whose desirability is obvious to him, e.g., bodily health and material wealth. If put in mind of a wider set of examples, he may name certain other things, e.g., justice and wisdom, which he has heard other people praise highly and call very good, and which he himself calls good as well, in part because he trusts these people's judgment, in part because the goodness of these things is partly perceptible even to him. Yet unlike health and wealth (he may add), he does not care about these things as much as he should. Given the narrower set of examples, the person may agree that the best action is the one that most effectively brings the agent what he in fact desires most, and that the akratic acts akratically either because he does not clearly *see* or *know* what is best (which contradicts this person's own description of akratic behavior) or because he is somehow *compelled* to act against his knowledge (which also contradicts this person's description of akratic behavior). Given the wider set of examples, however, the person may be led to say that the best action is the one that will bring the agent what he ought to desire most deeply, whether or not he does, and that the akratic acts akratically because he does not care about goodness as much as he should.

Consider now a person who thinks of akratic behavior in an 'epistemic' way and who inhabits an epistemic frame of mind with regard to his life as a whole. Like the person just mentioned, he will agree that there is a distinctive kind of erring behavior which is commonly described as acting against one's knowledge of what is best. Unlike this other person, it will occur to him that there must be something wrong with this description, if indeed the knowledge in question is the sort of knowledge that properly governs the activity of living a human life. For how, he will ask, can a person with such knowledge fail to inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life? And how can a person who inhabits this frame

of mind with regard to this activity fail to act in accordance with this knowledge of his? No, if

the akratic fails to do what is best (he will argue), the problem must be either inability or

ignorance. Since *ex hypothesi* the problem is not inability, the problem must be ignorance.

3.1.2.   What Socrates is trying to do

3.1.2.1.   The courage-wisdom section

What is Socrates trying to do in the courage-wisdom section? Just before the section

begins, Socrates assures Protagoras that the only reason he is conversing with him is that he

wants to examine well (*diaskepsasthai*) those things with respect to which he, Socrates, is at a

loss (*ha autos aporô*).[1] Immediately after the courage-wisdom section, Socrates reassures

Protagoras that he asks all the questions he asks for no other reason than that he wants to

examine (*skepsasthai*) the truth about matters relating to virtue (*pôs pot' echei ta peri tês aretês*)

and also what virtue itself is (*ti pot' estin auto, hê aretê*).[2] The particular question that Socrates

focuses on in this section is how courage is related to the rest of virtue and, in particular, to

wisdom. If Socrates is telling the truth, his aim in the courage-wisdom section is to examine this

question along with Protagoras.

But there are various ways in which two people might conduct a joint examination; in

what way does Socrates wish to conduct the present one? He seems to me to view the situation

in something like the following terms. He, Socrates, has been granted the right to ask questions,

and it is his responsibility and privilege to lead the inquiry in the way that seems best to him.[3]

As for the object of inquiry, he knows that his own way of thinking about it, though the product

of years of careful thinking, is unsatisfactory; and he supposes that Protagoras's way, though

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[1] 348c5-7.
[2] 360e6-8.
[3] See 348c1-4, 351e3-11, 353b1-5.

probably also unsatisfactory, is the product of even more years of careful thinking.[1] When

Socrates discovers that Protagoras's way of thinking about the relation between courage and the

rest of virtue is very much at odds with his own, he decides that the best way to lead the inquiry

will be to try, by asking questions, to lift Protagoras out of his own accustomed way of thinking

about courageous behavior and lead him into a more Socratic way of thinking about it. Such an

attempt, which involves, as it were, a rubbing together of two distinct ways of thinking about the

same issue, is likely either to turn up flaws in Socrates' way of thinking while corroborating

Protagoras's, or else to corroborate Socrates' way of thinking while turning up flaws in

Protagoras's. Or it may turn up flaws on both sides.

Whether or not this is an accurate characterization of Socrates' approach to the inquiry, it

is at least in the spirit of his comments to Protagoras at 348de, directly before the courage-

wisdom section:

> I hold that there is a good deal in what Homer says—
>
>> When two go together, one observes before the other;
>
> for somehow it makes all of us human beings more resourceful in every deed or word or thought;
> but if one observes something alone, forthwith one has to go about searching until one discovers
> somebody to whom one can show it off and who can corroborate it (*hotôi epideixêtai kai meth'*
> *hotou bebaiôsêtai*). And I also have my reason for being glad to debate with you rather than with
> anyone else; it is that I regard you as the best person to investigate in general any matters that a
> sensible man may be expected to examine, and virtue in particular. Whom else should I choose
> but you?"[2]

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[1] Cf. 320b: "I therefore, Protagoras, in view of these facts, believe that virtue is not teachable: but when I hear you speak thus, I am swayed over (*kamptomai*), and suppose there is something in what you say (*oimai ti se legein*), because I consider you to have gained experience in many things (*pollôn men empeiron gegonenai*) and to have learnt many (*polla de memathêkenai*), besides finding out some yourself (*ta de auton exêurêkenai*)."

[2] 348de; cf. also 320b. More evidence that Socrates conceives of this conversation as one in which both he and Protagoras are being put to the test may be found at 331c, 333c, and 348a.

If it is true that Protagoras and Socrates enter the conversation each with his own characteristic way of thinking about courageous behavior, and that Socrates is trying to ask the sort of questions that will lead Protagoras out of his own way of thinking and into a more Socratic way, what are these two ways of thinking? In section 3.1.1.3, I distinguished two ways of thinking about courageous behavior, one of which I called a somewhat confused, largely 'manly' way, the other of which I called an 'epistemic' way. It seems to me that Protagoras enters the conversation predisposed to think about courageous behavior in the first of these two ways and that Socrates enters the conversation predisposed to think about courageous behavior in the second way.

Specifically, Protagoras appears to me to be inclined to think that courageous behavior is compatible with injustice; that courageous behavior is inherently noble and beautiful; that injustice is shameful and ugly; that courageous behavior is therefore *incompatible* with injustice [note the confusion]; that courageous behavior is compatible with acting against one's best interests (e.g., sacrificing one's life for the sake of a noble cause); that what is responsible for courageous behavior, namely, courage, is a kind of psychic toughness that enables one to persevere in the face of pain or fearsome things; that such toughness could come from nature alone, since even some beasts seem to have it; and that courage essentially involves an ability to distinguish the noble from the shameful, an ability which presumably requires a proper upbringing, or at any rate something more than mere nature, so that, in fact, courage *cannot* come from nature alone [again, note the confusion]. Socrates, on the other hand, appears to enter the conversation already inclined to try to arrive not only at a unified account of courage that integrates our best thoughts about courageous behavior, but also at a unified account of human virtue that integrates our best thoughts about good human behavior generally; to be troubled by

the assertion that a courageous man's behavior is sometimes at odds with a just man's behavior, or that a wise man's behavior is sometimes at odds with a courageous man's; to try to refute such assertions; and to think that courageous behavior, whatever else it is, must be a kind of knowledge-guided behavior and that therefore what is responsible for courageous behavior must be a kind of knowledge.

If, as I suggest, Socrates is trying in the courage-wisdom section to lead Protagoras out of his largely 'manly' way of thinking about courageous behavior and into an 'epistemic' way of thinking about it, the better to discover flaws in these two ways of thinking, then with regard to the question "What is courageous behavior?", Socrates is trying (among other things) to lead Protagoras to reject the claim that a courageous man's behavior is sometimes at odds with a just man's behavior, or with a wise man's behavior, and to embrace the claim that a courageous man's behavior can never be at odds with a perfectly good man's behavior. And with regard to the question "What is responsible for courageous behavior?", Socrates is trying (among other things) to lead Protagoras to embrace the idea that what makes courageous people act courageously is a kind of knowledge.

Assuming that Socrates is in fact trying to do this, what obstacles lie between him and his goal? Consider two moves that Protagoras could make in an effort to resist an 'epistemic' way of thinking about courageous behavior. The first has more to do with the question "What is courageous behavior?" and may be expressed in this way: 'Courageous people boldly go for what is nobler (*kallion*). But what is nobler is sometimes worse [for the agent] (*kakion*). Since prudence, i.e., wisdom, always recommends against a course of action that is worse [for the agent], courageous behavior is sometimes at odds with wisdom.' The second move has more to

do with the question "What is responsible for courageous behavior?" and may be expressed in this way: 'Even if it is true that courageous people boldly go not only for what is nobler but always also for what is better [for them], and that cowards are unwilling to go for this same thing, surely cowards sometimes *know full well* that they are choosing the worse of two available alternatives, for surely one common form of cowardly behavior is to act against one's knowledge of what is best, overcome by a feeling of fear. If so, knowledge, i.e., wisdom, is not enough to guarantee courageous behavior; so courage is not wisdom.'[1]

One way in which Socrates might block these two moves is by broaching the subject of akratic behavior and leading Protagoras to agree that no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best (a denial of knowledge-akrasia) and that no one ever willingly goes for what he thinks is bad (a version of a denial of belief-akrasia). If no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best, then it is not the case that cowards sometimes "know full well" that they are choosing the worse of two available alternatives, and so the second move is blocked. As for the first move, Protagoras claims at 349e that courageous men eagerly go for what the many fear to go for; but if no one ever willingly goes for what he thinks is bad, then in eagerly going for what the many fear to go for, courageous people are not going for what they think is bad, but rather, presumably, for what they think is good. So either (i) courageous people are *mistaken* in believing that their course of action is good [for them], or (ii) their course of action really is good [for them]. Since (i) is unpalatable,[2] it seems that one must accept (ii). Yet if courageous behavior is good [for the agent], it would seem to be recommended by prudence, i.e., wisdom.

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[1] Cf. Charles Kahn's *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, p. 239.

[2] It is one thing to think that the courageous man purposely acts against his own best interests, for the sake of the noble. This has a noble ring to it. It is another thing to suggest that what keeps the courageous person acting as he does is his ignorance of what is good for him.

So courageous behavior would not appear to be at odds with wisdom, after all; so the first move is blocked.

To summarize: I have suggested that in the courage-wisdom section Socrates is trying to lead Protagoras out of a largely 'manly' way of thinking about courageous behavior and into an 'epistemic' way, the better to examine the relation between courage and the rest of virtue, and that in particular, he is trying to lead Protagoras to embrace the ideas that a courageous man's behavior can never be at odds with wisdom and that what is responsible for courageous behavior is a kind of knowledge. I have mentioned two moves that Protagoras can make to resist this attempt. And I have said that one way in which Socrates can block these moves is by leading Protagoras to agree that no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best and that no one ever willingly goes for what he thinks is bad. In short, I have suggested that given Socrates' aims in the courage-wisdom section, he has ample reason to lead Protagoras into a discussion of akratic behavior.

3.1.2.2.   The demonstration to the many

It is one thing to account for the fact that Socrates decides to discuss akratic behavior; it is another to account for the peculiar form that this discussion takes. Almost as soon as the section on akrasia begins, Protagoras freely concedes that no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best, thereby arming Socrates with a premise that can block the first move mentioned above. One might expect that at this point Socrates would proceed to a direct attempt to lead Protagoras to agree that no one ever willingly goes for what he thinks is bad, so as to secure for himself a premise that can block the second move mentioned above. But what Socrates actually

does is try to justify and explain to an imagined group of people ('the many') the very statement that Protagoras has just endorsed, viz., that no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best. Why bother doing this? When Protagoras asks Socrates a similar question at 353a, Socrates answers: "I fancy . . . that this will be a step towards discovering how courage is related to the other parts of virtue."[1] How is one to understand this answer?

If Socrates' aim in the courage-wisdom section were merely to refute Protagoras's claim that some people are most unwise yet most courageous, it seems to me that he could have taken a much shorter route to his goal and could have skipped entirely the demonstration to the many. I think it would have sufficed to lead Protagoras to concede two things, both of which Protagoras appears to be already inclined to concede: one, that no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best; two, that noble actions are good.[2] Having obtained these concessions, Socrates could proceed to argue that the coward, in refusing to fight in a noble war in which courageous people eagerly fight, fails to choose not only the nobler but also the better of two available options.[3] Yet if the coward *knew* that this was his better option, he would not fail to choose it, since no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best. So if the coward had knowledge of the good and the bad, he would not behave in a cowardly manner. What makes cowards cowardly, then, is lack of knowledge, i.e., ignorance. From this point on, the argument could proceed as it does in fact proceed in the *Protagoras*: 'Surely *cowardice* is also what makes

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[1] 353b1-3: *Oimai . . . einai ti hêmin touto pros to exeurein peri andreias, pros talla moria ta tês aretês pôs pot' echei.*

[2] Cf. Protagoras's denial of knowledge-akrasia at 352cd: "Not only does it seem just as you say, Socrates, but further, it would be shameful indeed for me above all people to say that wisdom and knowledge (*sophian kai epistêmên*) are anything but the most powerful forces (*kratiston*) in human activity." Cf. as well Protagoras's reaffirmation at 359e that all noble actions are good: "[Socrates:] Then if it is honourable, we have admitted, by our agreement, that it is also good; for we agreed that all honourable actions were good. [Protagoras:] True, and I abide by that decision [more literally: 'You speak the truth, and ever does it seem to me to be so (*alêthê legeis, kai aei emoige dokei houtôs*)']."

[3] One might well protest against this move from 'noble' and 'good' to 'nobler' and 'better', but when Socrates makes a similar move at 359e-360a, Protagoras does not protest.

cowards cowardly; so cowardice must be ignorance. But since wisdom is the opposite of ignorance, and courage the opposite of cowardice, courage must be wisdom.'

Why not take this shortcut? If Socrates' aim in the courage-wisdom section were merely to refute Protagoras, I cannot think why he would fail to take it, assuming he notices it. But if, as I have suggested, Socrates is trying throughout this section to lead Protagoras into a more 'epistemic' way of thinking about courageous behavior, then Socrates' decision to linger over the denial of knowledge-akrasia, and to demonstrate to the many what is really responsible for akratic behavior, makes strategic sense. Rather than directly interrogate Protagoras about courageous behavior, which Socrates tries to do too quickly and crudely in the first courage-wisdom argument,[1] Socrates could enlist Protagoras's help in leading the many down an 'epistemic' line of thought; and as the many are being led down this path, an 'epistemic' way of thinking about human behavior would be sinking in with Protagoras all the while.

But apart from where he wants to lead Protagoras, in what direction, exactly, does Socrates hope to lead the many (placing ourselves now, as Socrates places Protagoras, in the make-believe situation in which this question makes sense)? Recall my distinction between two ways of thinking of akratic behavior, one of which I called a common, confused way, the other of which I called an 'epistemic' way.[2] It seems to me that the many are inclined to think about akratic behavior in the first of these two ways, that Socrates is inclined to think about it in the second way, and that Socrates' immediate aim at this point in the text is to lead the many out of their accustomed way of thinking about akratic behavior and into a way that (imperfectly) approximates his own.

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[1] 349e-351b.
[2] See above, section 3.1.1.5.

Specifically, the many seem to me to be inclined to think that akratic behavior is what it is commonly described to be, namely action against one's knowledge of what is best; that the good things in life are nothing other than those tangible things whose desirability is obvious to them, e.g., bodily health and material wealth; that the good things in life *also* include such possessions as justice and wisdom, whose goodness is partly perceptible to them, partly beyond them[1]; that the best action is the one that will most effectively bring the agent what he in fact desires most; that the best action is the one that will bring the agent what he *ought* to desire most, whether or not he does; that what is responsible for akratic behavior is any one of a number of emotions; that such emotions operate on the akratic by clouding his judgment [incompatible with the idea that the akratic clearly sees or knows what is best]; that such emotions compel the akratic to act as he does [incompatible with the idea that the akratic acts freely]; that what is responsible for akratic behavior is that the akratic does not care for goodness as much as he should. As for Socrates, he seems to be inclined to think that there is a distinctive kind of erring behavior which is commonly described as acting against one's knowledge of what is best; that this description must be incorrect, since knowledge of the good and the bad is presumably the very sort of knowledge that properly governs the activity of living a human life, and anyone who had such knowledge (so long as he took himself to be living a human life) could never act against it; that what is responsible for akratic behavior must be a kind of ignorance.

If, as I suggest, Socrates is trying to lead the many out of their accustomed way of thinking about akratic behavior and into a way that approximates his own, what obstacles must

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[1] I find no textual support for this, but it seems to me to be a plausible assumption about the average ancient Athenian. Cf. Aristotle's remark in Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1095a): "Ordinary people identify [happiness] with some obvious and visible good, such as pleasure or wealth or honor—some say one thing and some another, indeed very often the same man says different things at different times: when he falls sick he thinks health is happiness, when he is poor, wealth. At other times, feeling conscious of their own ignorance, men admire those who propound something grand and above their heads . . . ." (H. Rackham's translation, Loeb Classical Library.)

he surmount? There are at least two: one, the fact that until the many are disabused of the idea that akratic behavior is action against one's *knowledge* of what is best, they will only laugh at the suggestion that what is responsible for akratic behavior is *ignorance*[1]; two, the fact that the many, if fed the wrong set of examples, will be inclined to recognize a gap between what is best and what is most pleasant, and that once this gap is recognized, it will provide a basis for saying that the akratic finds something attractive other than the good and that on this account he is sometimes moved to act against his knowledge of the good. An obvious way to approach the first obstacle is to begin by showing the many that their own way of thinking of akratic behavior is incoherent, only then proceeding to reveal that what is responsible for akratic behavior is ignorance. And the obvious way to approach the second obstacle is to offer the many the sort of examples that will lead them to close the gap between the good and the pleasant.

3.1.3. What Socrates does

3.1.3.1. First courage-wisdom argument (349b-351b)

When Protagoras tells Socrates at 349d that he will find many people who are most unjust, most impious, most immoderate, and most unwise (*amathestatous*), and yet surpassingly courageous (*andreiotatous de diapherontôs*), Socrates is very surprised.[2] This claim is at odds with his own way of thinking about courageous behavior. For Socrates evidently distinguishes between merely bold behavior, e.g., that of a daring rogue, and the kind of bold behavior that is in keeping with the whole of virtue, justice and wisdom included. While Socrates appears to want to reserve the term 'courageous' for the latter kind of behavior, Protagoras seems happy (at

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[1] Cf. 357d: "If on the spur of the moment (*ei men oun tote euthus*) we had replied, "Ignorance," you would have laughed us to scorn (*kategelate an hêmôn*). . . ."

[2] Socrates informs the company later (359b6): "His answer caused me great surprise at the moment (*kai egô euthus tote panu ethaumasa tên apokrisin*)."

this point, at least) to apply the term 'courageous' to the bold behavior of a thief. And so it is natural for Socrates to ask, by way of clarification, "By the courageous, do you mean [the] bold, or something else? (*poteron tous andreious tharraleous legeis ê allo ti;*)".[1] In asking this question Socrates seems to me to be trying to determine whether by 'courageous' Protagoras means nothing finer or nobler than 'bold'. While it soon becomes clear that Protagoras does distinguish between the courageous and the bold (he thinks the former is a subset of the latter) and that he takes himself to have been asked by Socrates only whether the courageous are bold, not whether the bold are courageous (nor whether by 'courageous' he means nothing finer or nobler than 'bold'),[2] at this point Protagoras simply says: "And eager, too, [to go] for what the many are afraid to go for" (*kai itas ge . . . eph' ha hoi polloi phobountai ienai*).[3] It is at this point, the point at which Protagoras says *kai itas ge,* that Socrates, quoting these very words, will resume his line of questioning after a long hiatus, i.e., after the section on akrasia.[4]

When Socrates does resume this line of questioning at that later point, he soon refutes Protagoras; here, however, he fails to refute. If Socrates was hoping to lead the inquiry in such a way as to turn up flaws either in his own way of thinking or in Protagoras's way of thinking, here is one place where he seems to turn up a flaw in his own way of thinking—or at any rate, where he tries to lead Protagoras too hastily and crudely to assimilate cases of courageous behavior to cases of knowledge-guided behavior. But rather than examine the inadequacies of the argument, let me point out certain respects in which this first courage-wisdom argument, though inadequate, prepares the way for the second.

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[1] 349e2.
[2] See 350c6-d2.
[3] 349e3.
[4] 359b7ff.

Almost immediately after Protagoras has said, in effect, that people can act most shamelessly and yet most courageously, Socrates establishes a link between the courageous and the noble (*to kalon*). Socrates leads Protagoras to agree that every part of virtue is a noble thing (*kalon*)[1] and to imply in one of his answers that any claim that would make courage out to be something shameful (*aischron*) must be mistaken.[2] Thus already in the first courage-wisdom argument Socrates leads Protagoras away from the view that courage is compatible with injustice, impiety, intemperance (assuming that this, too, is necessarily shameful), and ignoble ignorance (e.g., the ignorance that leads foolish laymen to dive confidently into wells), while leading him closer to the 'epistemic' thought that a courageous man's behavior must be in keeping with justice, wisdom, and the whole of virtue.

Another thing that Socrates does to pave the way for the second courage-wisdom argument is establish a link, albeit not as close a link as he would like, between wisdom and confidence. Through a series of questions about expert divers, etc., Socrates leads Protagoras to agree that those who have knowledge (*hoi epistêmones*) in some area of activity are more confident in that area than those who do not (*tôn mê epistamenôn*).[3] Protagoras is put in mind of the fact that there is something about knowledge that lends knowers a feeling of confidence, and although he resists it now, he will later be forced to accept the conclusion that what lends the courageous man *his* feeling of confidence is also a kind of knowledge.

A third thing that Socrates leads Protagoras to do at this point is distinguish between noble and shameful feelings of confidence, as well as between the noble and shameful sources of those feelings. Courage is a source of noble confidence in the courageous man, whereas

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[1] 349e3-8.
[2] 350b5.
[3] 350a6-7.

foolishness or madness is a source of shameful confidence in the madman or fool.[1] This

distinction helps prepare the way for a decisive move in the second courage-wisdom argument:

the step to the conclusion that what causes cowards, over-bold men, and mad fools (*hoi deiloi kai*

hoi thraseis kai hoi mainomenoi) to feel ignoble confidence in their pursuit of things that are bad

[for them] is their ignorance of what is bad and good, i.e., their ignorance of what is and what is

not to be feared.[2]

One final thing that emerges from the first courage-wisdom argument is that Protagoras's

way of thinking about courageous behavior is somewhat confused. We learn from Protagoras's

opening assertion at 349d (that some people are most unjust, etc., and yet exceedingly

courageous) that he is inclined to think that courageous behavior is compatible with injustice.[3]

But we later learn that he is also inclined to say that courage is something noble (*kalon*), as is

justice and the rest of virtue,[4] and that shameful bold behavior cannot be deemed courageous,

since that would make courage out to be something shameful (*aischron*).[5] Protagoras thus seems

to be somewhat confused about whether courageous behavior is compatible with injustice, and

hence about what is responsible for courageous behavior: whether, for example, nature alone

might make a person courageous, or whether courage necessarily involves the kind of moral

education without which human beings cannot distinguish the just from the unjust.[6] I say this in

support of my suggestion in section 3.1.2.1 that Protagoras enters this conversation inclined to

think about courageous behavior in the somewhat confused way described in section 3.1.1.3.

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[1] 350b6, 351b1.
[2] 360bc.
[3] Indeed, we learn this already at 329e, where Protagoras asserts that many people are courageous but unjust (. . . *polloi andreioi eisin, adikoi de . . .*).
[4] 349e.
[5] 350b.
[6] Note the ambiguity of *kai* ('and'? 'or'? 'and/or'?) in Protagoras's comment at 351b: *andreia de apo phuseôs kai eutrophias tôn psuchôn gignetai.*

3.1.3.2. Second courage-wisdom argument, beginning and conclusion

Beginning (351b-e)

The second courage-wisdom argument, though more successful than the first, itself begins with a failure. Socrates tries to get Protagoras to agree that pleasant things—in respect of their pleasantness, leaving aside whatever else they may contain or bring—are good, and that painful things are likewise bad.[1] Protagoras initially concedes that a person who lives out his life pleasantly has lived well, but he hastens to add that living pleasantly is good *provided that* the person in question take pleasure in noble things (*tois kalois*).[2] He also twice refuses to commit himself to the claim that pleasant things, in respect of their pleasantness, are good, or as Socrates puts it the second time, that pleasure itself is a good.[3] Protagoras says instead that there are some pleasant things that are not good and others that are good, some painful things that are not bad and others that are bad, and a third class of pleasant and painful things that are neither good nor bad.[4] Protagoras, in other words, refuses to close a common-sensical gap between the pleasant and the good that Socrates is clearly trying to get him to close. In this sense Socrates fails.[5]

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[1] 351c4-6, 351e1-3.

[2] 351b6-c2. Protagoras's response distinguishes him from the many, who will later (silently) agree that it is enough for them to live their lives out pleasantly and without pain (355a2ff.). Later still, Protagoras himself will agree that all actions that promote living painlessly and pleasantly are fine (*kalai*) (358b3-6).

[3] 351e2-3.

[4] 351d; cf. 351c3, where Socrates says that "the many" (*hoi polloi*) call some pleasant things bad and some painful things good.

[5] Why would Socrates be trying to get him to close this gap at this point? One possibility is that Socrates is already trying to lead Protagoras to say that what makes the coward boldly go for that which he goes for is ignorance (from which conclusion it follows that courage is wisdom). Socrates may reason that so long as Protagoras can be led to agree that the coward boldly goes for what is worse [for him], the only thing that blocks the desired conclusion is the notion that cowards might knowingly pass up what is better (or, less bad) for what is more pleasant (or, less painful). Yet if Socrates can make Protagoras narrow the gap between the pleasant and the good—whether by identifying the two or by agreeing that all pleasant things, qua pleasant, are good, and that the only reason why people ever opt for them is that they are good—this will discredit the notion that cowards sometimes knowingly pass up what is better for what is more pleasant.

What he does succeed in doing, however, besides gauging roughly where Protagoras stands on the question "What is the relation between the pleasant and the good?",[1] is sounding certain notes which he will sound again at later points in the argument. In particular, Socrates here raises the question of how the pleasant is related to the good, a question he will raise again in the demonstration to the many. He also here establishes a link between pleasure or pain and living a whole human life; at the start of this part of the argument, it is not just pleasure and pain that Socrates focuses on, but pleasure or pain as experienced over the course of an entire life.[2] A connection between the pursuit of pleasure (and the avoidance of pain) and living one's life as a whole will play an important role in the demonstration to the many.[3] Finally, at one point in this part of the argument Socrates elicits a response from Protagoras which refers to all three of the value terms—*agathon*, *hêdu*, *kalon*—that I distinguished early in this chapter:

> And, I suppose, to live pleasantly is good (*to . . . hêdeôs zê[i]n agathon*), and unpleasantly, bad (*to aêdôs kakon*)?
> Yes, he said, if one lived in the enjoyment of honourable things (*tois kalois*).[4]

Here the terms are somewhat at odds, but they will come together when Socrates questions all three sophists at once, and they will be powerfully reunited in the concluding stage of the argument.[5]

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[1] Cf. 352a6-8.

[2] Cf. 351b3-c2, and in particular b6-7: *ti d' ei hêdeôs bious ton bion teleutêseien; ouk eu an soi dokei houtôs bebiôkenai;*

[3] Cf. 355a2-3 and the occurrences of *bios* between 356d and 357a. Perhaps to emphasize this point, Plato makes Protagoras refer to all the rest of *his* life at 351d: "I think it safer for me to reply, with a view not merely to my present answer but to all the rest of my life (*pros panta ton allon bion ton emon*) . . . ."

[4] 351bc.

[5] At 358b3-5 and 360a3-5, respectively.

Conclusion (359a-360e)

I have now discussed one 'half shell' of the courage-wisdom section (349a-352a). Before examining the meat of the nut (the section on akrasia), let me briefly discuss the other half shell (359a-360e).

By the end of the section on akrasia, Protagoras has endorsed the following six claims: (1) that no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best[1]; (2) that no one ever willingly goes for what he thinks is bad[2]; (3) that the pleasant is [the] good[3]; (4) that noble actions are good[4]; (5) that what a person fears, he believes to be bad[5]; and (6) that when he (Protagoras) says that 'being weaker than oneself' (*to hêttô einai hautou*) is nothing other than ignorance (*amathia*), what he means by 'ignorance' is having false opinions and being mistaken about matters of great importance.[6] Socrates now, as I mentioned before, picks up his earlier line of questioning at the point where Protagoras had said that courageous men are not only bold but

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[1] 352c4-d3.
[2] 358c6-d4.
[3] The Greek at 358b6-7, as at 358a5 (where the same phrase occurs in indirect statement), is *to hêdu agathon estin* (literally, "the pleasant is good"), not *to hêdu to agathon estin* ("the pleasant is the good"). But it appears from his response at 360a3 that Protagoras takes himself to have agreed at this earlier point, not only that that which is pleasant is good, but also that that which is good is pleasant. (Cf. C. C. W. Taylor's commentary, pp. 208-9.) For a Platonic passage where the construction (*to* + adjective$_1$ + adjective$_2$) must amount to (*to* + adjective$_1$ + *to* + adjective$_2$), consider *Euthyphro* 10d12-13: "So the god-beloved is not [the] holy, Euthyphro, nor is the holy [the] god-beloved, as you say, but this is different from that (*Ouk ara to theophiles hosion estin, ô Euthuphrôn, oude to hosion theophiles, hôs su legeis, all' heteron touto toutou*)." Burnet observes, "Socrates is not, of course, denying that *theophiles* may be predicated of *to hosion*. Strictly he ought to have said *oude to hosion to theophiles*, in order to show that he means to deny that the subject and predicate are convertible. But the usage of the language does not demand this when the meaning is perfectly clear from the context, as here." (*Plato:* Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito, edited with notes by John Burnet, p. 129.) The meaning in our passage from the *Protagoras* is *not* "perfectly clear from the context," which is why I have placed the second 'the' in brackets.
[4] 358b5-6.
[5] 358e4-359a1.
[6] 358c1-6.

eager, too (*kai itas ge*), to go for what the many are afraid to go for.[1] Recalling this earlier

answer, Socrates stops speaking to Prodicus and Hippias and starts speaking again to Protagoras:

> . . . I asked him whether by the brave he meant "bold." Yes, he replied, and impetuous [=eager]
> (*ho de, kai itas g' ephê*). Protagoras, I said, do you remember making this answer?[2]

When Protagoras says that he does, Socrates proceeds to lead him step by step to the conclusion

that courage is wisdom, making use of the six claims above. In order to show what work is done

by claims (1) and (2) in this argument (the most important of the six for my purposes), I present

below a summary of Socrates' line of reasoning.

'Courageous men do not eagerly go for what they themselves consider fearful [i.e., for

what they fear], for if they did, this would mean that they eagerly went for what they thought was

bad [by (5)], and nobody willingly, let alone eagerly, goes for what he thinks is bad [by (2)]. On

the contrary, courageous men go for what inspires them with confidence. But so do cowards.

How, then, do they differ? For one thing, courageous men are willing to go to war, whereas

cowards are not. In cases where courageous men are willing to go to war, going to war is a noble

thing. But if it is a noble thing to do, it is also a good thing to do [by (4)]. Indeed, it would even

seem to be a pleasant thing to do [by (3), if the bracketed 'the' is included].[3] So it would seem

that cowards, in refusing to go to war, are refusing to go for (*ienai epi*) the nobler, better, more

pleasant course of action. Yet they cannot do this knowingly [by (1)].[4] As for feelings of

confidence and fear [which are also an essential part of what it is to be a courageous man or a

coward], courageous men feel noble and good feelings of confidence and fear, whereas cowards

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[1] 349e3.

[2] 359bc.

[3] C. C. W. Taylor suggests (on pp. 208-209 of his commentary) that 'pleasant' here should be construed in the sense of "contributing to a life in which pleasure predominates."

[4] Or, alternatively, by the following reasoning: By refusing to go to war, cowards get the shorter end of all three 'sticks' that anyone ever might care about. So they must not realize what they are doing; otherwise, why would they do it?

feel base feelings of confidence and fear. In other words, whereas courageous men feel confident in doing things that are in fact noble and good, cowards (and rash men and madmen) feel confident in doing things that are in fact base and bad [for them]. [Since what a person fears to do, he believes to be bad, it is presumably the case that what a person feels confident in doing, he believes to be good. At any rate, it is clear that cowards' feelings of fear and confidence do not square with the goodness and badness of their actions, and it is therefore safe to say that their feelings of fear and confidence reveal that they have false opinions and are mistaken about the goodness and badness of their actions. This, then, is surely a case of having false opinions and being mistaken about matters of great importance.] So cowards feel confident in doing things that are bad [for them] through nothing other than ignorance [by (6)]. [It has thus been shown (i) that it is because they do not realize what they are doing that cowards do what they do and refuse to do what they refuse to do, and (ii) that it is because they are ignorant of the badness of what they are doing and of the goodness of what they refuse to do that cowards feel what they feel. In other words, ignorance has been shown to be responsible both for the choices that cowards make and for the feelings associated with these choices.] So what makes cowards cowardly is nothing other than ignorance: specifically, the ignorance of what is and what is not to be feared. But what makes cowards cowardly is also nothing other than *cowardice*. So cowardice is the ignorance of what is and what is not to be feared. Courage, on the other hand, is the opposite of cowardice. And wisdom concerning what is and what is not to be feared is the opposite of ignorance of what is and what is not to be feared. So courage is the wisdom of what is and what is not to be feared.'

Protagoras refuses to agree or disagree with this final step ("Finish it yourself," he says to Socrates).[1] He does, however, obligingly admit that to judge from what has been agreed (a carefully self-distancing qualification), what he had asserted at first—that some people are most unwise, yet most courageous—now seems to him to be impossible.[2]

3.1.3.3.   The section on akrasia (352a-359a)

Although I have already suggested why Socrates, given his aims in the courage-wisdom section, would want to lead Protagoras to agree that no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best and that no one ever willingly goes for what he thinks is bad, and although I have already shown how Socrates employs these claims in the final stage of the courage-wisdom argument, I have not yet described the route by which Protagoras is led to endorse these claims. That route is the section on akrasia.

The section on akrasia, as I said in chapter 1, may be divided into three parts. In the first part (352a-353b) Socrates and Protagoras agree that no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best; Socrates tells Protagoras that 'the many' (*hoi polloi*) do not believe them but say that many people act against their knowledge of what is best, overcome by pleasure or anger or fear or some other emotion; and Socrates and Protagoras agree to imagine how the two of them would demonstrate to the many what is really responsible for the behavior commonly described as acting against one's knowledge of what is best (i.e., what is really responsible for akratic behavior). In the second part (353c-357e) Socrates and, nominally, Protagoras demonstrate to the many that by their own lights what is responsible for akratic behavior is a kind of ignorance. In the third part (358a-359a) Socrates questions the three sophists, Protagoras, Hippias, and

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[1] 360d8.
[2] 360e3-5.

Prodicus, securing their agreement to the claim that the pleasant is [the] good, to the denial of belief-akrasia, and to certain other claims about fear.

First Part: Denial of knowledge-akrasia (352a-353b)

How does Socrates lead Protagoras to agree that no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best? He does so by asking a single long question, prefaced by a medical analogy. As a doctor, after examining his patient's face and forearms, might ask his patient to uncover his chest and back, so Socrates, having seen how Protagoras stands with respect to the good and the pleasant, now asks Protagoras to reveal how he stands with respect to knowledge (*pôs echeis pros epistêmên*).[1] In other words, Socrates is asking Protagoras to 'strip' for him intellectually, a characteristic Socratic request, charged with certain 'manly' associations (being socially exposed, judged by others, found to have flaws that one is normally able to hide from view, etc.).[2] And what could be a more intimate part of one's intellect to reveal than one's knowledge (or ignorance) of knowledge itself? For Protagoras, of course, the matter is not just personal, but also professional. Protagoras presents himself to the world as a seller of knowledge; and as a

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[1] 352ab.

[2] Cf. *Charmides* 154dff: "Then Chaerephon called me and said—How does the youth strike you, Socrates? Has he not a fine face? —Immensely so, I replied. Yet if he would consent to strip, he said, you would think he had no face, he has such perfect beauty of form. . . . —By Heracles! I said, what an irresistible person you make him out to be, if he has but one more thing—a little thing—besides. What? said Critias. If in his soul, I replied, he is of good grain. And I should think, Critias, he ought to be, since he is of your house. Ah, he said, he is right fair and good in that way also. Why then, I said, let us strip that very part of him and view it first, instead of his form . . . ." (Loeb Classical Library translation) Cf. also *Theaetetus* 145b: "SOCRATES: But what if he praised the mind of either of us for virtue and wisdom? Wouldn't it be worth while for one of us, when he heard that, to do his best to inspect the one who'd been praised, and for the other to do his best to show himself off? THEAETETUS: Definitely, Socrates. SOCRATES: Well then, Theaetetus, now is the time for you to show yourself off, and for me to look on . . . ."; 162b: "SOCRATES: And if you went to the wrestling rings in Sparta, Theodorus, would you think it proper to watch other people who were stripped, some of them with rather inferior physiques, and not take your own clothes off and show your figure? THEODORUS: Why do you think not, if they'd give in to me and accept my persuasion? Just so, I think I'm going to persuade you now to let me watch . . . ."; 169a: "THEODORUS: It isn't easy to avoid saying something when one's sitting with you, Socrates. I was talking nonsense just now, when I claimed that you'd let me keep my clothes on and not make me take them off . . . ." (John McDowell's Oxford translation.)

cheesemonger is expected to know cheese, and as a fishmonger is expected to know fish, so a seller of knowledge is expected to know knowledge. But not only would it be bad business for Protagoras to come across as not knowing knowledge, it would also be bad business for him to come across as failing to think very highly of knowledge. Effective salesman praise their wares, even (sometimes) when the praise is undeserved.[1] So when Socrates presents Protagoras with a choice between describing knowledge as (A) something strong (*ischuron*),[2] leading (*hêgemonikon*), ruling (*archikon*; *hoion archein tou anthrôpou*),[3] noble (*kalon*),[4] and sufficient to rescue the one who has it (*hikanên . . . boêthein tôi anthrôpôi*),[5] or (B) like a slave (*hôsper peri andrapodou*),[6] dragged about (*perielkomenês*) by various emotions,[7] which is how 'the many' (*hoi polloi*) view it,[8] Protagoras can hardly choose (B). Perhaps had Socrates simply asked, "Does anyone ever act against his knowledge of what is best?", this would have served as well as the elaborate question he does ask, for perhaps Protagoras really does think that no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best. But by framing his question in 'manly' terms, from the image of the doctor to the image of the degraded slave, Socrates all but forces Protagoras to deny the existence of knowledge-akrasia. As Protagoras himself says, "it would be shameful indeed (*aischron*) for me above all people to say that wisdom and knowledge (*sophian kai epistêmên*) are anything but the most powerful forces (*kratiston*) in human activity."[9]

Socrates thus scores his first significant success in the courage-wisdom section; having stumbled twice before, he now leads Protagoras to take a major step in an 'epistemic' direction.

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[1] Cf. 313dff.
[2] 352b4.
[3] 352c4.
[4] 352c3.
[5] 352c6-7.
[6] 352c1.
[7] 352c2.
[8] 352b1-2.
[9] 352d (Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell's translation).

But while Protagoras and Socrates have just agreed that no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best, it is by no means clear that have they done so on the basis of similar reasoning. Socrates' denial of knowledge-akrasia is rooted in what I have called his 'epistemic' way of thinking. Might Protagoras base his on a more 'manly' way of thinking, as the wording of his answer leads one to suspect? If so, might Protagoras be brought around to think of akratic behavior in an 'epistemic' way? A good way to find out would be by leading Protagoras through an 'epistemic' justification of the very claim that he himself has just endorsed, and asking him what he thinks of it. Socrates *could* try to do this directly, presenting his own demonstration and asking Protagoras what he thinks of it at each step. But he could also take an indirect approach: he could 'team up' with Protagoras, presenting a joint demonstration to the people to whom it is more natural to give one, namely the many people who disagree with them. The hope would be that as 'the many' were being led down an 'epistemic' line of thought about akratic behavior, an epistemic way of thinking about human behavior would be sinking in with Protagoras all the while. Then, when the demonstration was over, Socrates could turn to Protagoras and ask, "Do I seem to you to speak the truth?" By that time, Protagoras might not only endorse an epistemic claim about knowledge-akrasia, he might also endorse an epistemic way of arguing for it.

Who, then, is the author of the demonstration to the many? On the one hand, Socrates frequently speaks as if he and Protagoras are presenting this demonstration together, both at the beginning and at the end.[1] On the other hand, in addition to the obvious fact that Socrates does virtually all of the argumentative work, the demonstration itself is immediately preceded by the words "I, for my part, would speak to them as follows" (*eipoim' an egôge pros autous hôdi*);[2]

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[1] 352e5-6: *ithi dê met' emou epicheirêson peithein tous anthrôpous kai didaskein* . . . ; 353a4: *Ô Prôtagora te kai Sôkrates* . . . ; 353c3-4: *peirasometha gar humin egô te kai Prôtagoras phrasai* . . . . ; 353c9: *egô te kai su*; 357b7-c1: *tên apodeixin hên eme dei kai Prôtagoran apodeixai peri hôn êresth' hêmas*; 357cd, *passim*.
[2] 353c3, my translation.

and in the middle of the demonstration Socrates often reverts to the first person singular.[1] I think

that the right thing to say is that while Socrates conceives of the demonstration as a joint answer

which he and Protagoras would give to the many, it is *his idea* of what that joint answer would

be. Thus immediately after saying, "I, for my part, would speak to them as follows," Socrates

continues, "'Listen up: Protagoras and I will try to show you.'"[2]

Second Part: The demonstration to the many (353c-357e)

What is the demonstration to the many a demonstration of? Here it will help to recall the

distinction between the questions "What is akratic behavior?" and "What is responsible for

akratic behavior?"[3] What Socrates and Protagoras are ultimately trying to demonstrate to the

many is that what is *responsible* for akratic behavior is ignorance; but in order to do this

persuasively, they must first refute the many's description of what akratic behavior *is,* together

with their explanation of what is responsible for akratic behavior. The many describe akratic

behavior as action against one's knowledge of what is best. The many's explanation of akratic

behavior is that the akratic is 'defeated' or 'worsted' by pleasure, anger, fear, or some other

emotion. Why must Socrates and Protagoras engage in refutation first? Earlier, I mentioned two

obstacles that Socrates needs to surmount in this part of the text.[4] The first was that until the

many are disabused of the idea that akratic behavior is action against one's knowledge of what is

best, they will probably just laugh at the suggestion that what is responsible for akratic behavior

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[1] 354e3: . . . *ei me aneroisthe* . . .; e5: *Sungignôskete moi, phaiên an egôge*; 355a5: *phêmi*; 356c2: *phaiên*; 356c4: *tode moi apokrinasthe, phêsô.*

[2] 353c3-4, my translation. A further complication is that just before the climax of the 'refutative' stage of the demonstration, Socrates resorts to the device of an 'insolent questioner' who does the refuting for him, while he, for his part, joins the many in their role as answerers. Cf. Vlastos (1969), pp. 79-80: "[T]he prosecutor is that 'insolent fellow,' Socrates' rude-spoken *alter ego*, called in here as in the *Hippias Major* (286cff.) to rub the opponent's nose into the dirt . . . ."

[3] Cf. Gerasimos Santas's distinction between the *phenomenon* of weakness and *explanations* of weakness ("Plato's *Protagoras* and Explanation of Weakness," p. 5 and p. 12).

[4] See section 3.1.2.2, final paragraph.

is ignorance.[1] This appears to be the reason why the demonstration comes in two stages, a

'refutative' stage (353c1-356c3) in which the many's own account of akratic behavior is shown

to be absurd, followed by a 'constructive' stage (356c4-357e8) in which it is shown that what is

responsible for akratic behavior is a kind of ignorance.[2]

A. Refutative stage (353c-356c)

What, exactly, is the many's own account of akratic behavior? It is stated a number of

times, in a variety of ways, but perhaps the clearest formulation comes near the middle of the

demonstration, when Socrates restates the many's position as follows:

> [Y]ou say that often a person, knowing that the bad things [in question] are bad (*pollakis*
> *gignôskôn ta kaka hoti kaka estin*), nevertheless does them (*homôs prattei auta*), it being open to
> him not to do them (*exon mê prattein*), [because he is] driven and stricken by pleasures (*hupo tôn*
> *hêdonôn agamenos kai ekplêttomenos*). And again, conversely, you say that the person, knowing
> the good things (*gignôskôn ho anthrôpos t'agatha*) [i.e., the things that it would be good to do], is
> unwilling to do them (*prattein ouk ethelei*), on account of being worsted by the pleasures of the
> moment (*dia tas parachrêma hêdonas, hupo toutôn hêttômenos*).[3]

In order to appreciate the transformation undergone by this account in the course of the

demonstration, it helps to distinguish between the many's account of akratic behavior *in the*

spirit in which it is first put forward and their account of akratic behavior *as reworked by*

Socrates' questioning.

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[1] See 357d (also cited above): "If on the spur of the moment (*ei men oun tote euthus*) we had replied, "Ignorance,"
you would have laughed us to scorn (*kategelate an hêmôn*). . . ." Cf. Socrates' remark that "it is not easy to
demonstrate (*ou radion apodeixai*) what that is which you call being weaker than pleasures" (354e6-7, my
translation).

[2] John Burnet, in the OCT, divides the demonstration to the many into three long paragraphs. What I am calling the
'refutative' stage corresponds to the first two of these, and the 'constructive' stage corresponds to the third.

[3] 355ab, my translation.

The text is silent on the question what line of thinking lies behind the many's initial account of akratic behavior (i.e., the thinking in the backs of their minds before Socrates starts asking them leading questions), but perhaps a developed version of it would run somewhat as follows: 'Sometimes the better (*to beltion*) and the more pleasant (*to hêdion*) are at odds with each other. Both matter to the akratic, but he tends to regard *to beltion* more highly (i.e., he praises it more, considers it more *kalon*, etc.). On the other hand, he tends to be attracted more strongly by *to hêdion*; when faced with a choice between *to beltion* and *to hêdion,* he tends to feel a stronger pull in the direction of *to hêdion,* and he tends to go along with it. The akratic therefore often finds himself in the position of criticizing himself for passing up *to beltion* in favor of *to hêdion*; he passes it up because he feel himself more strongly attracted by *to hêdion,* and he criticizes himself (considers himself to have made a poor choice, to have done something regrettable, etc.) because he holds *to beltion* in higher regard.[1] Accordingly, a feeling of shame typically accompanies, or at any rate follows, akratic behavior.' The many themselves have presumably not thought through their position this carefully, but the spirit in which their account of akratic behavior is initially put forward seems to me to fit this line of thinking better than it does the hedonistic line of thinking down which Socrates is soon to lead them.

Recall what I said was the second obstacle that Socrates needs to surmount in this part of the text: that the many, if offered the wrong set of examples, will be inclined to recognize a gap between what is best and what is most pleasant, and that if this gap is recognized it will provide a basis for saying that the akratic finds something attractive other than the good. Recall as well my early observation that most children, whether taught to use the words *agathon*, *kalon*, *hêdu* or

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[1] Cf. Gary Watson's distinction (in "Free Agency") between valuing and desiring. Cf. as well Harry Frankfurt's distinction between first-order and second-order desires. The akratic may be said to desire pleasure more than he desires goodness, even as he *desires that he desired* goodness more than pleasure. The first-order desire would explain why he passes up *to beltion* in favor of *to hêdion*; the second-order desire would explain why he considers himself to have made a poor choice.

some other similar set of terms, are inclined at times to line each pair up with each of the others, but also at times to set each pair at odds with each of the others, and that many such children grow up to be adults who retain both inclinations. I think that this description fits 'the many' in this text. For on the one hand, the opposition of the pleasant and the good in their own account of akratic behavior, together with Socrates' earlier remark to Protagoras that the many call some pleasant things bad and some painful things good, suggests that the many are inclined to set the pair 'good/bad' at odds with the pair 'pleasant/painful'.[1] On the other hand, their answers to Socrates' questions during the demonstration reveal that they are also inclined to line up 'good' with 'pleasant' and 'bad' with 'painful', agreeing, when pressed, that the two pairs of terms pick out one and the same pair of qualities. It seems to me that Socrates surmounts the second obstacle by feeding the many the kind of examples that will lead them only in this second direction.

In his initial question about knowledge-akrasia Socrates, as we saw, made liberal use of 'manly' language. At the beginning of the demonstration to the many, such language is conspicuously absent.[2] Socrates first suggests such examples as being 'overcome' by food, drink, and sex so as to do bad things, then asks the many, "In what sense do you call them bad (*ponêra*)?"[3] Had they been given a chance to respond straightaway, the many *might* have mentioned such things as shame and ugliness, i.e., they might have spoken in 'manly' terms. But Socrates does not let them go down this path.[4] Without waiting for an answer, he presents the

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[1] 351c: "You don't mean to say that you, too, like the many, call some pleasant things bad and some painful things good (*mê kai su, hôsper hoi polloi, hêde' atta kaleis kaka kai aniara agatha*)?" (My translation.)
[2] Cf. Kahn, pp. 237-8.
[3] 353c9. Socrates shifts between *ponêra* and *kaka* in this section without any obvious shift in meaning. *Ponêron* is used in the discussion with Hippocrates at 313 both in the sense of 'corrupting or bad for the body' and in the sense of 'corrupting or bad for the soul'.
[4] It also helps, of course, that they are not there and that he and Protagoras are supplying answers for them.

many with a choice between two alternatives, one of which is clearly unacceptable, the other of which cashes out *ta ponêra* in terms of such things as sickness and poverty.[1] Socrates soon leads the many to reduce talk of what is bad to talk of what is painful.[2] On the other side, Socrates appeals to health, physical fitness, salvation of the *polis* (i.e., avoiding being killed or enslaved by invaders), rule over others, and wealth as the sort of things with reference to which the many call painful things good.[3] Why would Socrates, of all people, list such a vulgar set of goods? Because he needs examples of 'goods' whose goodness will clearly be seen by the many to be reducible to pleasure. Justice and piety, however good he or the many may think them to be, will not do.

Socrates makes no distinction here between what is good or pleasant for the agent and what is good or pleasant for others. He leaves out cases where the agent's act inflicts obvious pain on others but not on himself, even in the long run (e.g., unpunished theft), as well as cases where the agent's act provides obvious pleasure for others but not for himself, even in the long run (e.g., fixing someone else's leaky roof, without compensation). This sort of omission is common not just in Plato, but in ancient moral philosophy in general. It is also quite convenient for Socrates here, since he wants to lead the many to agree that by "pleasant but bad" they just mean "pleasant in the here-and-now but painful in the long run [for the agent]" and that by "painful but good" they just mean "painful in the here-and-now but pleasant in the long run [for the agent]," and cases of unpunished theft or thankless volunteer work do not obviously fit this mold.[4]

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[1] 353d: *nosous te . . . kai penias kai alla toiauta polla . . .* ; 353e: *nosous poiounta anias poiei, kai penias poiounta anias poiei;*
[2] See 353e-354a.
[3] 354b3-5: *hugieiai te . . . kai euexiai tôn sômatôn kai tôn poleôn sôtêriai kai tôn allôn archai kai ploutoi;*
[4] It is also worth noting that at 354c and again at 354d Socrates proceeds on the assumption that determining whether something is good or bad overall is simply a matter of looking to the overall balance of pleasure and pain.

The pleasant and the good have now been equated. The many have agreed that they are two different names for the same thing, and so it seems legitimate to Socrates to substitute the one for the other (likewise with the painful and the bad). But it is through such substitution that the many's account of akratic behavior is shown to be absurd. What had not been patently absurd before the substitution becomes so afterwards.[1]

The result of the first substitution is this: "Somebody does bad things, knowing that they are bad, without having to do them, because he is defeated by—*the good* (pl.)!"[2] What exactly is the absurdity here? There is no scholarly consensus on this question, nor do I pretend to know the answer.[3] Here, however, is my take on it: Although the statement quoted above has something of an absurd linguistic ring to it, it is not itself absurd when considered apart from its context.[4] There is nothing absurd in the idea that a person could be led to do something that he knows has some bad in it, attracted by the *good* in it. On the contrary, this often happens.[5] Yet the akratic, by definition, makes a poor choice, a choice that is to be regretted—in other words, he 'errs'.[6] But in what sense does he err? That is, according to what standard do we deem his choice a poor one? Is it that the akratic passes up something honorable for something shameful? That is certainly one standard one might use, and *hêttômenos* (the word I translate as 'defeated')

Balancing, weighing, and other kinds of measuring are not discussed in these passages, but their relevance to the discussion is already evident.

[1] 354b: "The absurdity of all this will be manifest if we refrain from using a number of terms all at once, such as pleasant, painful, good, and bad; and as there appeared to be two things, let us call them by two names—first, good and evil, and then later on, pleasant and painful."

[2] 355d1-3, my translation.

[3] See C. C. W. Taylor, pp. 181-186, for a useful summary of some opposing views. Taylor himself maintains (p. 185) that "the argument for the incoherence of the common view is not complete until 357e." I disagree; I think it is effectively done by 355e and definitely done by 356c.

[4] Cf. C. C. W. Taylor, p. 183: "The [ill-mannered] questioner exclaims mockingly about the manifest absurdity of the thesis that one could do bad things through being overcome by good things (for how could the good by itself cause one to do anything bad?), and then sets about demonstrating the incoherence which underlies this *prima facie* absurdity." Cf. also earlier on p. 183: "[T]he context strongly suggests that the absurdity of the view in question is not *merely* asserted, as something obvious, but is intended to be shown by some argument."

[5] Vlastos (1969) explains this well (pp. 81-2).

[6] Cf. 355d.

is certainly a word with 'manly' overtones. But the very ideas of the noble and the shameful, as we have seen, are conspicuously absent at this point in the discussion. What, then, is it with reference to which we say that the good that the akratic gets is not worth the bad that he gets? Nothing else but relative quantity.[1] The akratic must be getting *lesser* goods (i.e., pleasures) at the cost of *greater* evils (i.e., pains), and it must be on that account that we say that he erred. In other words, when we describe the akratic as 'defeated' instead of 'victorious,' it must be this that we are saying.[2] By hypothesis, however, the person in question has knowledge of the good and the bad, so not only must he be getting lesser goods at the cost of greater evils, he must *know* that this is what he is getting. What could possibly be prompting him to make this choice? The many's answer is, his overpowering desire for the good. But surely his desire for the *good,* coupled with his *knowledge* of the good, would prompt him to make the opposite choice, not the one that he makes. The account is absurd, as one will also see if one makes the reverse substitution.

Objection: The 'pleasant in the here and now' differs from the 'pleasant in the future.' Both matter to the akratic, but the former tends to attract him more strongly. Thus even though the akratic knows that he is choosing to get lesser pleasures at the cost of greater pains *in the long run*, he does so anyway because he is defeated by what is *immediately* more pleasant.[3]

Response: Time surely can make a difference. The same food, for example, may furnish you with more or less pleasure depending on when you eat it. That is fine, you can and ought to factor time in; but in factoring it in, will the coins that you are counting be in any other units than pleasure and pain? In other words, if a person is more strongly attracted by instant gratification than by delayed gratification, can it be for any other reason than that he thinks that the one is

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[1] A hint of this idea had already been dropped at 354cd.
[2] 355e2-3: *Dêlon ara . . . hoti to hêttasthai touto legete, anti elattonôn agathôn meizô kaka lambanein.*
[3] A simple form of this objection comes at 356a.

more pleasant than the other? The thing to do, it seems, is simply to weigh whatever makes a difference to the relative quantities of pleasure and pain—which as we have seen includes time—and then to choose whichever course of action is determined to be the more pleasant.[1] [End of refutation.]

Is there an implicit denial of belief-akrasia already in the refutative half of the demonstration to the many? I think there is. For Socrates might just as well have argued at the end of his refutation, "The akratic *believes* (correctly) that he is getting lesser goods at the cost of greater evils. What could possibly be prompting him to make this choice? Your answer is, his desire for the good. But surely his desire for the good, coupled with his correct belief about the better and the worse, would prompt him to make the *opposite* choice, not the one that he makes. The account is absurd." Notice, however, that if there is an implicit denial of belief-akrasia here, it is not made unconditionally, but depends, like the rest of the demonstration, on the hedonistic moral-psychological model that the many have been led to accept.[2]

Finally, recall my earlier comment about the connection drawn at 351b between the pursuit of pleasure and living one's life as a whole. Socrates seems to be arguing on the assumption that people have a strong sense of temporal integrity and that their desire for pleasure of course expresses itself as a desire to live a pleasant *life*. In his question at 355a Socrates seems to imply that if the many think that the good is nothing other than the pleasant and that the bad is nothing other than the painful, it must then be enough for them to *live their life out* pleasantly and without pain.[3] In other words, Socrates seems to be assuming that what a person

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[1] See C. C. W. Taylor, pp. 187-9, for a careful consideration of the objection and response.
[2] Contrast this with Protagoras and Socrates' unconditional denial of knowledge-akrasia.
[3] 354e-355a: "But it is still quite possible to retract, if you can somehow contrive to say that the good is different from pleasure, or the bad from pain. [Or i]s it enough for you (*ê arkei humin*) to live out your life (*katabiônai*)

considers good is directly linked to what he thinks constitutes or contributes to a good life. If this is what Socrates thinks, it should perhaps not surprise us that once the many have agreed to identify 'pleasant' and 'good', Socrates feels entitled to construe 'pleasant' in the sense of "contributing to a life in which pleasure predominates."[1]

What has been shown by the end of the refutative stage, I think, is that the many, as spoken for by Protagoras and Socrates, are able to be led to accept a moral-psychological picture of themselves that makes their explanation and description of akratic behavior seem absurd. It has not been shown that this picture is accurate, nor have Socrates and Protagoras done what they said they would try to do, i.e., show the many what is actually responsible for akratic behavior.

B. Constructive stage (356c-357e)

It was agreed in the refutative stage that what determines whether a given choice of good things together with bad things is a poor choice (a choice that is to be regretted, etc.) is whether the bad things outweigh the good things, i.e., are greater, more numerous, etc.[2] But it is only now that Socrates starts talking about perspectival illusion. The many are led to agree that sometimes our perspective on things—our being nearer to this thing and farther from that thing—makes them *appear* to be greater or smaller, thicker or thinner, more or less numerous, or louder or softer than they really are.[3]

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pleasantly, without pain? If it is, and you are unable to tell us of any other good or evil that does not end in pleasure or pain, listen to what I have to say next. . . ." (W. R. M. Lamb leaves the *ê* at the start of the second sentence untranslated. I prefer to translate it because of the logical connection I think it implies.)

[1] C. C. W. Taylor, pp. 208-9.

[2] Often, of course, one is faced with a choice between a variety of mixed bags, and it is a mistake to choose anything but the best mixed bag, even if some of the less-than-ideal bags contain more good than bad. Here we are presumably to imagine a situation in which one has only two options: accepting or rejecting *this* mixed bag.

[3] 356c5-8.

Socrates next asks the many what the thing that saves our life (*sôtêria . . . tou biou*) would be if, contrary to fact, our 'doing well' (*to eu prattein*) depended on our choosing bigger magnitudes rather than smaller.[1] Note the construction *estin en tini,* which sometimes takes an infinitive.[2] This construction was used earlier in the demonstration: **en toutôi eisin** *pasai hai apodeixeis* ("on this point hang all our conclusions").[3] And it occurred even earlier in Socrates' discussion with Hippocrates: *ho de peri pleionos tou sômatos hêgê[i], tên psuchên, kai **en hôi** pant' **estin** ta sa ê eu ê kakôs prattein, chrêstou ê ponêrou autou genomenou* ("your soul, which you value much more highly than your body, and on which depends the good or ill condition of all your affairs, according as it is made better or worse").[4] Now, at 356d, we are being asked to imagine a scenario in which our doing well (i.e., our faring well, our being happy) depends on our choice of large and our avoidance of small magnitudes (*Ei oun **en toutôi** hêmin **ên** to eu prattein, **en tôi ta men megala mêkê kai prattein kai lambanein, ta de smikra kai pheugein kai mê prattein***).[5] And the question Socrates asks is this: In such a scenario, what would evidently be the thing that would 'save' our life [*tis an hêmin sôtêria ephanê tou biou;*], i.e., ensure that we fare well?[6] Socrates continues to use the construction *estin en tini* and words related to the Greek root *sôs* ("safe and sound," "alive and well") in subsequent lines, twice in close connection with each other.[7] Compare a passage from Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus,* a passage

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[1] 356c8-d3.
[2] See LSJ's entry for εν, A. I. 6.
[3] 354e7-8.
[4] 313a6-9. Contrast Hippocrates' use of this construction at 310d8-9.
[5] 356c8-d3.
[6] 356d3.
[7] 356e2: *kai **esôsen** an ton bion*; 356e3-4: *hêmas tên metrêtikên **sôzein** an technên*; 356e5-6: *ei **en tê[i]** tou perittou kai artiou hairesei hêmin **ên** hê **sôtêria** tou biou* ("if the saving of our life depended on the choice of odd or even"); 356e8-9: ***esôizen** hêmin ton bion*; 357a5-7: *epei de dê **hêdonês** te kai lupês en orthê[i] tê[i] hairesei ephanê hêmin hê **sôtêria** tou biou ousa* ("since we have found that the salvation of our life depends on making a right choice of pleasure and pain").

which may well have been familiar to Plato, in which the construction *estin en tini* is used together with a form of the word *sôtêr* (Oedipus is speaking):

> Teiresias, you are versed in everything . . . .
> You have no eyes but in your mind you know
> with what a plague our city is afflicted.
> My lord, in you alone we find a champion,
> in you alone one that can rescue us (*sôtêra*).
> . . . Do not begrudge us oracles from birds,
> or any other way of prophecy
> within your skill; save yourself and the city,
> save me . . . .
> We are in your hands (*en soi gar esmen*) . . . .[1]

Why such dramatic language at this point in the demonstration? Evidently, Socrates is trying to make the many feel that they are in a life-or-death situation,[2] that they therefore need to be very careful about the choices they make, and that it is imperative that they follow the most trustworthy guide they can find—in this case, as Socrates will soon point out to them, a kind of 'measuring' knowledge. The link made in the *Protagoras* between finding oneself in a perilous situation and looking to knowledge as one's savior anticipates the following passage from the *Theaetetus,* in which Socrates is speaking in an apostrophe to, of all people, Protagoras:

> [T]here isn't anyone who doesn't believe that he's wiser than others in some respects, whereas others are wiser than him in other respects. In the greatest of dangers (*en ge tois megistois kindunois*), when people are in trouble on campaigns, or in diseases, or at sea, they treat the leading men in each sphere like gods, expecting them to be their saviours (*sôtêras sphôn*

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[1] Lines 300-314 (David Greene's translation, University of Chicago Press).
[2] Cf. how Socrates speaks to Hippocrates about his decision to study under Protagoras (313a-c); Socrates makes it out to be a matter of spiritual life or death.

prosdokôntas), because they're superior precisely in respect of knowledge (*tôi eidenai*).[1]

Socrates next sharpens his question by presenting the many with a choice between two alternatives. We are supposing, counterfactually, that our welfare in this life depends on choosing larger and avoiding smaller magnitudes. In making such choices, which is the guide that will lead us to safety: the power of appearance (*hê tou phainomenou dunamis*) or the measuring art (*hê metrêtikê technê*)? When he describes the operation of the power of appearance, Socrates recalls the answers that the many gave a moment ago (at 356c) about perspectival illusion. This kind of illusion makes the same things seem (at different times, from different perspectives) bigger or smaller (or thicker or thinner, etc.) than they are. Socrates now says that the power of appearance makes us change our minds, regret what we did a minute ago, waver and vacillate, etc.[2] The power of appearance, in other words, is what is responsible for perspectival illusion. The art of measurement, by contrast, does the following three things: (i) it strips the appearance of its authority (lit., it renders it 'without authority': *hê de metrêtikê akuron men an epoiêse touto to phantasma*), (ii) it makes clear what the truth is (*dêlôsasa de to alêthes*),

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[1] 170ab, John McDowell's Oxford translation. Compare as well this passage from the *Euthydemus* (Socrates is speaking to Cleinias):

   Well, then, suppose you were on a campaign, with which kind of general would you prefer to share both the peril and the luck—a wise one, or an ignorant?

   With a wise one.

   Well, then, supposing you were sick, with which kind of doctor would you like to venture yourself—a wise one, or an ignorant one?

   With a wise one.

   And your reason, I said, is this, that you would fare with better fortune in the hands of a wise one than of an ignorant one?

   He assented. (279e-280a; W. R. M. Lamb's translation, Loeb Classical Library.)

[2] 356d3-7: "Is it not the [power of appearance] that leads us astray, as we saw (*hêmas eplana*), and many a time causes us to take things topsy-turvy (*kai epoiei anô te kai katô pollakis metalambanein tauta*) and to have to change our minds (*kai metamelein*) both in our conduct and in our choice of great or small (*kai en tais praxesi kai en tais hairesesi tôn megalôn te kai smikrôn*)?"

and (iii) it gives rest and peace to the soul (*hêsouchian an epoiêsen echein tên psuchên menousan epi tôi alêthei*) through doing (i) and (ii).[1]

The word I have translated 'without authority' is *akuron*. LSJ lists the following meanings: "*without authority*, opp. to *kurios*, hence, I. of laws, sentences, etc., *invalid, unratified, obsolete . . .* II. of persons, *having no right or power . . .* 2. of things, ακυροτερα κρισις *less trustworthy* decision . . . ." What Socrates seems to be trying to say with this word at this point is that although the appearance in question remains, complete with its urgent call ("Believe me, follow me!"), the agent has come to the realization "I don't have to listen to you; you have no authority over my choices," and so is able to brush it away or calmly ignore it, as one might ignore a 'No Trespassing' sign that one knows to be invalid. Yet the agent in this case has only been able to recognize the unauthoritativeness and untrustworthiness of the power of appearance because he has grown to trust, and to consider to be authoritative, another source of guidance, namely the art of measurement. In other words, the agent has escaped from under the sway of an old guide by growing to trust a new one.[2]

How is this idea of learning to trust a new guide connected to the idea of knowledge? Consider a student who tentatively guesses the answer to a geography question but then loses confidence and goes with another answer instead. When informed that the answer he went with is wrong, but that his first guess was right, the student may say, "I *knew* it!" "Yes," his teacher might reply, "you may have had the answer in mind, all right, but you didn't know it. If you had known the answer, you would have trusted it and gone with it." Socrates appears to share this

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[1] 356d7-e2. Cf. the discussion of perspectival illusion and the saving power of measurement in Book X of the *Republic* (602c-603a): that which in us "puts its trust in measurement and reckoning (*metrôi ge kai logismôi pisteuon*)" is a distinct part of the soul, so Socrates leads Glaucon to agree, from that which "opines in contradiction of measurement (*para ta metra . . . doxazon*)". In the *Protagoras,* by contrast, there is no talk of parts of the soul.

[2] Cf. *Euthyprho* 7bc, where people are described as agreeing to settle disputes about numbers, magnitudes, and weights by resorting to the decisions rendered by [the arts of] arithmetic, measurement, and weighing, respectively. In this case, the peace made possible by the common recognition of an authority to settle certain kinds of disputes is contrasted with the enmity and anger that arise when no such common authority is recognized.

basic conception of knowledge. For him it is not enough to possess a set of true notions about how it is best to behave, to esteem these notions highly, or even to consider them (in some flimsy way) to be true. Rather, for Socrates, part of what it is to have knowledge is to understand the truth in such a way that one feels 'safer' or more confident going with it than going with any other alternative, and that one actually does go with it, whatever other feelings may be running through one at the time.[1] In a classroom setting this may mean feeling confident enough to stick by one's original answer; in a military setting it may mean feeling confident enough to stay at one's post.

Socrates describes the knowledgeable person as having a calm and serene soul, abiding in the truth (*menousan epi tôi alêthei*).[2] I have suggested that this truth-oriented serenity involves a deep kind of trust or confidence. Recall the first courage-wisdom argument, in which wisdom was linked to a feeling of confidence. Socrates seems to me to be saying here, as he was hinting there already, that a deep, perhaps even the deepest source of feelings of boldness or confidence is a kind of 'epistemic' trust, i.e., a kind of trust that a person can tap into only from within a knowledge-oriented frame of mind.

In order to have such serenity, must one succeed within a knowledge-oriented frame of mind and actually acquire knowledge, or is it possible within this frame of mind to achieve such serenity with something less than knowledge? A person who occupies the epistemic frame of mind but does not have knowledge will clearly not have the kind of serenity that comes from grasping the truth. Whereas the *sophos*[3] is at rest in this respect, the *philosophos*[4] is restless.

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[1] In other words, knowledge on this view ensures correct *action,* not just correct *choice.* Cf. *EN* 1111b (Book III, ch. 2), where Aristotle says that the *akratês* acts not as he chooses to act but as he desires to act.
[2] 356e1-2.
[3] I.e., the one who knows.
[4] I.e., the one who fully inhabits the epistemic frame of mind but does not know.

Nevertheless, the latter may be said to share with the former a deep trust in the epistemic approach, and this itself may bring a certain kind of psychic serenity.

After the many agree that it is the measuring art that would 'save' us in such a case,[1] a second counterfactual question is asked: If our salvation in life depended on our choice of the odd or the even, what would save our life?[2] The many agree that it would be a kind of measuring (*metrêtikê*) knowledge (*epistêmê*), namely arithmetic (*arithmêtikê*).[3]

Having asked the many to imagine two unreal situations in which they would approach their decisions with great care, with a view to their life as a whole, trusting in a measuring art to save their life, Socrates now leads them to see that they ought to apply exactly this kind of approach to the situation in which they actually find themselves.[4] The saving of their life, Socrates tells the many, has appeared to them to depend on the correct choice of pleasure and pain, and the standard of correctness here, as the many themselves have agreed, is nothing other than relative quantity. Therefore, the guide that the many should trust to lead them to safety is evidently a guide that renders authoritative judgments on questions of relative quantity, i.e., some sort of 'measuring' guide. But any such guide must surely be a kind of art (*technê*) or knowledge (*epistêmê*).

Now the many are finally ready to hear the answer to their original question. Their question was: 'What do *you* (Protagoras and Socrates) say is responsible for akratic behavior?' The answer is: 'Ignorance (*amathia*),'[5] or 'The greatest ignorance (*amathia hê megistê*).'[1]

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[1] 356e.
[2] 356e-357a.
[3] 357a.
[4] Cf. Adam and Adam's note on 357a (p. 187): "*eien—epei de dê*. The MSS read *epeidê de*, but after *eien* Plato regularly uses *de dê* in coming to the *application* of a train of reasoning or illustrations . . . ." This emendation is accepted by Burnet.
[5] 357d1.

The reasoning here is not fully spelled out. Here is how I understand it: The many have agreed that akratic behavior is a kind of erring or 'going wrong' with respect to one's choices of pleasures and pains (i.e., good things and bad things). The many have also effectively agreed that 'faring well' in life consists in making correct choices of pleasures and pains.[2] What is more, the many have come to see that because the standard of correctness in this case is nothing other than relative quantity, the guide that will lead them to 'fare well' in life must be a kind of 'measuring' knowledge. Assuming, then, that the possession of knowledge necessarily involves having confidence in and being willing to follow the guidance of knowledge (recall my 'classroom' example), it seems clear that anyone who possesses this particular kind of measuring knowledge will make correct choices of pleasures and pains. Whoever fails to make such choices must not possess this kind of knowledge. But the akratic is a person who typically fails to make correct choices of pleasures and pains. So the akratic must not have this kind of knowledge; if he had it, he would not behave akratically. Now if the possession of some thing (e.g., knowledge) prevents a certain kind of behavior (e.g., akratic behavior), the lack of that same thing may be said to be in some sense responsible for the behavior. It is in this sense that lack of knowledge, i.e., ignorance, may be said to be responsible for akratic behavior.[3]

In an addendum to the demonstration, Socrates tells the many that the reason why they fare badly (*kakôs prattein*) in private and in public life is because they falsely think that what is

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[1] 357e2.

[2] Assuming, that is, that the circumstances of one's life are not so bleak that no matter what choices one makes, one will not fare well.

[3] C. C. W. Taylor says that Socrates' argument "commits the fallacy of denying the antecedent": "[E]ven if consistently correct choice requires the employment of a technique, it does not follow that incorrect choice . . . implies failure to employ a technique, since it may equally well consist in failure to act on the result which is reached by correct employment of the technique." (p. 192) I think that my earlier talk of the possession of knowledge as essentially involving confidence in and willingness to 'go with' the guidance of knowledge allows me to reject this view of the argument.

responsible for their erring behavior is something other than ignorance (*to oiesthai allo ti ê amathian einai*), i.e., because they are living under the false impression that the solution to their practical problems is not a teachable thing (*hôs ou didaktou ontos*).[1] If what is immediately responsible for akratic behavior is the lack of a certain kind of 'measuring' knowledge, what keeps the akratic stuck in his rut is his failure to try to acquire this kind of knowledge. And the reason why he fails to try is that he does not realize that what is responsible for akratic behavior is the corresponding kind of ignorance. In other words, if what is immediately responsible for akratic behavior is a kind of ignorance, what is responsible at a deeper level is ignorance of (or, ignorance of the significance of) this ignorance.

Third Part: Socrates questions the sophists (358a-359a)

In the abovementioned addendum, Socrates phrases his conclusion in such a way as to flatter the sophists. Because the many falsely think that the solution to their practical problems is not a teachable thing nor a kind of knowledge, Socrates says, they do not go themselves and they do not send their children to go to the people who profess to teach this knowledge, specifically Protagoras, Prodicus, and Hippias; what the many really ought to be doing is learning from and paying money to these sophists.[2] Socrates thus charms the sophists "by appealing, so to speak, to their pocketbook."[3] After the demonstration is over and Socrates gives them an opening to take issue with what has been said, not one of them says: "That's not the explanation *I* would give of akratic behavior. Would you like to hear how *I* would explain it?"[4] On the contrary, all three sophists, including Protagoras, indicate that what Socrates has said seems "marvelously

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[1] 357e.

[2] 357e. Patrick Coby (*Socrates and the Sophistic Enlightenment*, p. 162) calls this "heavy-handed flattery".

[3] Kahn, p. 242.

[4] Cf. the point where, after Socrates has given his explanation of Simonides' poem, Hippias wants to give *his* explanation (347ab).

true" to them (*huperphuôs edokei hapasin alêthê einai ta eirêmena*).[1] Socrates' strategy appears

to have worked. He has 'teamed up' with Protagoras in leading the many down an epistemic line

of thought about akratic behavior; an epistemic way of thinking about human behavior has been

sinking in with Protagoras all the while; and now that Socrates has turned to ask Protagoras (and

the others), "Do I seem to you to speak the truth?", Protagoras is ready to endorse not only a

Socratic claim about the impossibility of knowledge-akrasia but also a Socratic way of arguing

for it.[2]

   But what, exactly, is it that seems true to the sophists? The phrase "the things that had

been said" (*ta eirêmena*) is vague. Is it that the sophists think that this is how one ought to

demonstrate to the many what is responsible for akratic behavior? Is it that they think that the

hedonistic moral-psychological model accepted in the course of the demonstration accurately

simulates the many's own psychology? Or is it that the sophists think that this model fits all

people, including the noble and virtuous (*kaloi kai agathoi*)? This last option seems like the

right one. Not only will the sophists soon endorse a kind of hedonism, they will also go on to

call all actions noble (*kalai*) that promote a life lived painlessly and pleasantly (*epi tou alupôs

zên kai hêdeôs*).[3] And Protagoras and Socrates will then proceed to apply this moral-

psychological model to the coward and courageous man alike.

   I said before that by the end of the section on akrasia Socrates has led Protagoras to

endorse the following six claims: (1) that no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best;

(2) that no one ever willingly goes for what he thinks is bad; (3) that the pleasant is [the] good;

(4) that noble actions are good; (5) that what a person fears, he believes to be bad; and (6) that

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[1] 358a.
[2] The flattery didn't hurt, either.
[3] 358b.

when 'being weaker than oneself' is said to be nothing other than ignorance, what is meant by 'ignorance' is having false opinions and being mistaken about matters of great importance. By the end of the demonstration to the many, Socrates has secured Protagoras's agreement to the first of these six. It is in the exchange with the sophists that Socrates leads Protagoras, along with Hippias and Prodicus, to endorse the other five claims. With almost no argumentation, and in quick succession, Socrates secures their agreement to claims (3), (4), (6), (2), and (5). Claim (2) is most important for my purposes.

Socrates leads up to (2) by securing the sophists' agreement to a pair of related claims: one, that if the pleasant is [the] good, then no one who knows or believes (*oudeis oute eidôs oute oiomenos*) that there are better (doable) things than the things he is [used to] doing (*alla beltiô einai ê ha [e]poiei, kai dunata*),[1] then does those things (i.e., persists in doing them) (*epeita poiei tauta*), it being open to him to do the better ones (*exon ta beltiô*)[2]; two, that 'being weaker than oneself' (*to hêttô einai hautou*) is nothing other than ignorance (*amathia*) and that 'being stronger than oneself' (*kreittô heautou*) is nothing else but wisdom (*sophia*).[3] The idea that 'being weaker than oneself' is ignorance and 'being stronger than oneself' is wisdom is derived directly from the demonstration to the many, but the idea that no one ever acts against his *belief* about what is best was never raised explicitly in the demonstration. And yet it certainly does seem as if Socrates is presenting the denial of belief-akrasia here as if it were nothing new. What sense are we to make of this?

One way to try to make sense of it is by considering how claim (2) is used in the conclusion of the courage-wisdom section. Socrates apparently foresees that a claim of the form

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[1] Burnet accepts Heindorf's emendation from *epoiei* to *poiei*, but I fail to see why the present tense is to be preferred to the imperfect.
[2] 358b6-c1.
[3] 358c1-3.

'no one ever willingly goes for what he thinks is bad' would be a useful premise in the final argument. Yet he also realizes that the demonstration to the many was about knowledge, not belief. So in the hopes of exploiting the sophists' good cheer, he slides from 'knows' to 'knows or believes' without drawing attention to what he is doing, making sure to end his question with the old opposition of ignorance (*amathia*) and wisdom (*sophia*). When the sophists fall for this, Socrates is emboldened to frame another question exclusively in terms of belief:

> Then surely . . . no one willingly goes after evil or what he thinks to be evil (*epi ge ta kaka oudeis hekôn erchetai oude epi ha oietai kaka einai*); it is not in human nature, apparently, to do so—to wish to go after what one thinks to be evil in preference to the good (*epi ha oietai kaka einai ethelein ienai anti tôn agathôn*) . . . .[1]

Charles Kahn appears to think that the *only* sense to be made of this shift is that it is just such a ploy, "a cunning stratagem designed to serve the more fundamental purpose of the argument, namely, to equate virtue with knowledge . . . and demonstrate the unity of the virtues."[2] Kahn goes so far as to say that Socrates himself does not stand behind this denial of belief-akrasia: "I suggest that Socrates is here deluding the sophists with a rationalist theory of choice, just as he has deluded them with Laconic philosophy in the interpretation of Simonides' poem . . . . He is no more committed to . . . the rationalist decision theory than he is to the virtuoso interpretation of Simonides' poem."[3] Presumably Kahn would explain away the subsequent line "We were all agreed on all these points (*hapanta tauta sunedokei hapasin hêmin*)"[4] either by pointing out that an insincere endorsement by Socrates here is no more troubling than his outrageous statements about Laconic philosophy at 342aff., or else by pointing out that twice already in this dialogue Socrates has raised the possibility that a member of the present company might have made an

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[1] 358cd.
[2] Kahn, p. 238.
[3] Ibid., p. 242.
[4] 358d4.

insincere response as a way of testing (*apopeirasthai*) someone else.[1] While I agree with Kahn

that the move from knowledge-akrasia to belief-akrasia is an effective dialectical ploy, I would

prefer, if possible, to make sense of this denial of belief-akrasia as more than *just* a ploy.

C. C. W. Taylor suggests that 'belief' here may mean 'true belief' and that at the time of

writing the *Protagoras* Plato may not have distinguished clearly between true belief and

knowledge:

> [T]he previous argument has said nothing whatever about the impossibility or otherwise of acting
> against one's belief about, as distinct from one's knowledge of, the best thing to do. Hence if
> Plato intends here merely to represent the sophists as accepting something which has already been
> agreed by the common man, he is seriously mistaken. The mistake is readily explicable if (a)
> Plato has true belief exclusively in mind and (b) when writing the *Protagoras* he had not yet
> arrived at a clear distinction between true belief and knowledge. Both hypotheses are plausible;
> (b) is not excluded by 356d-357a, where the contrast is not between knowledge and true belief, but
> between scientific knowledge and confusion produced by uncritical reliance on perceptual data.[2]

Gregory Vlastos, by contrast, suggests that this passage

> could scarcely have been meant to suggest that in the absence of knowledge true opinion would do
> as well for the purposes of Socrates' thesis. What it probably means is that we cannot act contrary
> to what we believe *when we do have knowledge*. If it did mean more than this, we would not
> know what weight to attach to the claim; we would have to treat it as dogma unsupported by
> argument, since all Socrates attempts to prove in the argument he has just concluded is that we
> cannot act contrary to our *knowledge* of good.[3]

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[1] 341d8 (*apopeirasthai*); 349c8-9 (*apopeirômenos*).
[2] C. C. W. Taylor, pp. 202-3.
[3] Vlastos (1969), p. 72-3.

In a paper entitled "Socrates on the Strength of Knowledge: *Protagoras* 351b-357e"[1]

Terry Penner has proposed yet another reading of this passage. Penner says that while Socrates

thinks that

(1)   no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best

and that

(2)   no one ever acts against his belief about what is best,

he does not hear claim (1) in such a way as to make it a consequence of claim (2). This

contradicts what Penner calls the "Direct Corollary View," a view which he says has gone

largely unchallenged in the literature. According to the Direct Corollary View, Socrates

understands claim (1) to follow from claim (2), by the following reasoning. If somebody knows

something, he also believes it; so if somebody knows that it is best for him to do some thing, he

also believes that it is best for him to do that thing. This means that if someone acts against his

knowledge of what is best, he also acts against his belief about what is best, and that therefore if

(2) no one ever acts against his belief about what is best, (1) no one ever acts against his

knowledge of what is best.[2]

Against the Direct Corollary View, Penner argues that a temporal distinction ought to be

drawn between two kinds of belief-akrasia and between two kinds of knowledge-akrasia. There

is, on the one hand, belief- or knowledge-akrasia of the *synchronic* variety ("synchronic belief-

akrasia," "synchronic knowledge-akrasia"), which is action against one's cognitive state (belief

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[1] *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (79), 1997, pp. 117-149.
[2] In other words, the impossibility of belief-akrasia implies the impossibility of knowledge-akrasia. Cf. my introductory chapter, p. 4, n. 1.

or knowledge) "at the instant of action".[1] On the other hand, there is belief- or knowledge-akrasia of the *diachronic* variety ("diachronic belief-akrasia," "diachronic knowledge-akrasia"), which is action against one's cognitive state (belief or knowledge) throughout most, but not necessarily all, of the time containing "the period of immediately prior deliberation, the moment of action, and the period of immediate retrospect and regret or satisfaction at what one has done."[2] Penner thinks that Socrates denies diachronic knowledge-akrasia while allowing diachronic belief-akrasia; he also thinks that Socrates denies both types of synchronic akrasia.[3]

On Penner's view, if claim (1)—no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best—and claim (2)—no one ever acts against his belief about what is best—were offered to Socrates for his approval, he would endorse them both; but if pressed to say precisely what he took to be being denied in each, he would make clear (albeit not in Penner's terminology) that it is *diachronic* knowledge-akrasia that he takes to be being denied in claim (1) and *synchronic* belief-akrasia that he takes to be being denied in claim (2). Remember that according to Penner, claim (1) as Socrates hears it is not a 'direct corollary' of claim (2). The proposition that no one acts against the knowledge (of what is best) that he has throughout most of the period

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[1] Penner, *op. cit.,* p. 121.

[2] Ibid., pp. 121-2.

[3] To understand better what Penner means, imagine a motorist driving a car along a highway and believing for miles that it would be best to take Exit 9. As the motorist nears Exit 8, still thinking it would be best to take Exit 9, he panics and thinks suddenly that maybe Exit 8 is better and, not having time to deliberate further, takes Exit 8. A few moments later he sees his mistake: it would have been best to take Exit 9. As I understand Penner, this is a case of diachronic belief-akrasia, for while the motorist acts in accordance with his cognitive state at the moment of action (viz., the belief that it would be best to take Exit 8), he acts *against* the cognitive state that he has throughout most of the period immediately surrounding the action (viz., the belief that it would be best to take Exit 9). Penner thinks that Socrates acknowledges this kind of akratic behavior. One may change this into a case of diachronic knowledge-akrasia by supposing that the motorist not only believes but *knows* that taking Exit 9 is best, then somehow loses this knowledge at the critical juncture, believing for a moment that it would be best to take Exit 8 and taking it, only to regain his former knowledge a few moments later. If such sudden, short-lived loss of knowledge strikes one as impossible, one sees, according to Penner, what Socrates saw: that there is no such thing as diachronic knowledge-akrasia. To change this into a case of synchronic belief-akrasia, suppose that even though *at the moment of action* the motorist believes that it would be best to take Exit 9, something that it is in his power to do, he intentionally takes Exit 8 anyway, flying in the face of his own cognitive state. Substitute "knows" for "believes" and it becomes a case of synchronic knowledge-akrasia. Penner thinks that Socrates denies the existence of both these kinds of akratic behavior.

immediately surrounding his action (but not necessarily at the moment of action) does not logically follow from the proposition that no one acts against the belief (about what is best) that he has at the moment of action.

Penner's distinction provides a plausible explanation of the emphasis on knowledge in the akrasia section of the *Protagoras* and of the ambiguous stance on belief-akrasia. Knowledge is emphasized because only knowledge makes a person immune to diachronic akrasia; mere belief cannot do this for one. The ambiguous stance on belief-akrasia reflects the view that of the two kinds of belief-akrasia, synchronic and diachronic, one is impossible, the other possible. What Penner's account does not do, as I have already pointed out, is make sense of the apparent fact that Socrates managed to rid himself of the kind of inner resistance that plagues the akratic, without, however, acquiring the relevant knowledge.

One strength of my account, as I have also already said, is that it does make sense of this fact. Another virtue of my account, I think, is that it makes its own sense of what Terry Penner's account explains so neatly, viz., the emphasis on knowledge in the akrasia section of the *Protagoras* and the ambiguous stance on belief-akrasia. According to my account, knowledge is to be privileged over belief in a discussion of akratic behavior because it is knowledge, not belief, that is the governing ideal of the epistemic frame of mind, and it is this frame of mind that is the key to ridding oneself of what I call 'akratic resistance'. As for the ambiguous stance on belief-akrasia, I make sense of this ambiguity in much the same way as Penner does: by distinguishing between two kinds of belief-akrasia, one of which is possible, the other of which is impossible. But whereas on Penner's account it is possible to act *diachronically* against one's belief about what is best, though impossible to act *synchronically* against it, on my account it is possible to act (synchronically) against a 'non-epistemic' belief about what is best, though

impossible to act (synchronically) against an 'epistemic' belief about what is best. This way of making sense of the passage is perhaps most closely akin to the reading of Gregory Vlastos. Whereas Vlastos proposed that the belief against which it is impossible to act be understood as that of a person with *knowledge,* I propose that this belief be understood as that of a person who fully inhabits a *knowledge-oriented* frame of mind.

3.2.   Part Two: Correspondences between my account and this section

Before I relate my account of akratic behavior to this part of the text, let me briefly restate it. I have drawn a distinction between different modes of thinking-feeling-acting, one of which I have called the 'epistemic frame of mind', another of which I have called the 'semi-organized hodgepodge frame of mind' (largely a combination of the 'animal' and 'manly' frames of mind). I have said that a person who fully inhabits the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activities of living a human life and of thinking about what is good will never act against his belief (which is of an 'epistemic' form) about what is best, while the person who inhabits the 'semi-organized hodgepodge' frame of mind with regard to these activities may act against his belief (which is of a 'non-epistemic' form) about what is best. I have suggested, in addition, that typical akratic behavior is chiefly due to *ignorance$_e$*, i.e., failure to fully inhabit the epistemic frame of mind (with regard to the activity of living a human life); and I have also spoken of the failure to recognize that one *ought* to inhabit this frame of mind (with regard to this activity). I will now relate my account of akratic behavior to the section on akrasia and its immediate context, first by discussing some ways in which it does not seem to fit this part of the text, then by discussing some ways in which it does.

3.2.1.   Incongruities

One way in which my account of akratic behavior seems not to fit this part of the text is that while talk of 'frames of mind' is essential to my account, none of the characters in the *Protagoras* speak about frames of mind, let alone about the 'epistemic', 'manly', 'animal', or 'semi-organized hodgepodge' frames of mind. It may be true that Plato's dramatizations of the dialogue's characters exemplify these frames of mind, and that Socrates may be usefully understood as trying to lead certain characters out of one frame of mind and into another, but this does not amount to an explicit recognition in the *Protagoras* of frames of mind as such. If Socrates speaks *from within* the epistemic frame of mind, he does not speak explicitly *about* it, nor does he speak about other frames of mind. Another way in which my account of akratic behavior seems not to fit this part of the text is that while I distinguish between different kinds or 'forms' of belief (beliefs of an 'epistemic' form, of a 'manly' form, etc.), Socrates draws no such distinction. He does distinguish stable knowing from volatile believing, but that is as close as he comes. Also, while I explicitly make room for a kind of belief-akrasia, Socrates does not (though he also does not rule it out categorically in his own voice). Finally, if Socrates privately thinks that akratic behavior is due to a combination of different kinds of ignorance—failure to excel within the epistemic frame of mind, failure to inhabit this frame of mind fully, failure to recognize that one ought to inhabit this frame of mind—he is content to leave this unsaid and to lump these different kinds of failure together under the general label of 'ignorance'. By contrast, my account depends essentially upon the distinction between failure *within* and failure *to dwell in* the epistemic frame of mind.

3.2.2.   Congruities

One way in which my account of akratic behavior does harmonize with this part of the text is that the three pairs of value terms that figure so prominently in this part of the dialogue (*hêdu/aniaron, kalon/aischron,* and *agathon/kakon*) imply three different sources of motivation that correspond fairly well to the animal, manly, and epistemic frames of mind. It is only through a careful manipulation of these value terms—making heavy use of 'manly' language in order to lead Protagoras to deny knowledge-akrasia, omitting all such language when leading the many to endorse a vulgar form of hedonism, uniting all three value terms in the final courage-wisdom argument—that Socrates is able to carry his line of questioning to its conclusion. Indeed, the three most prominent characters in this part of the dialogue—Socrates, Protagoras, and 'the many'—roughly correspond to the epistemic, manly, and animal frames of mind, respectively. The many are depicted as the lowly, childish mass of mankind who are easily led to agree that all they really care about are pleasure and pain; Protagoras is depicted as a person who looks down on the many with a superior air, responds strongly to 'manly' language, and insists that courage or manliness (*andreia*), the manly virtue *par excellence,* is not a kind of knowledge; while Socrates is portrayed by Plato as pushing for an epistemic unification of all three values—pleasant, noble, and good—and of the five conventionally-recognized human virtues, all of which he wishes to identify with a single kind of knowledge.[1] Consider in addition that the many do not normally see themselves as ultimately caring only about the total balance of pleasure over pain in their lives as a whole, but that this is something Socrates must bring them to see. If, as I earlier argued, Socrates is able to lead the many in this hedonistic direction only on account of their moral-motivational confusion, a confusion which also makes it possible for a

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[1] Cf. 361a7-b2.

skillful questioner like Socrates to lead them down a 'manly' path, where honor and shame are most prominent, then the many themselves may be said to inhabit what I have called a 'semi-organized hodgepodge' frame of mind.

Another way in which my account of akratic behavior harmonizes with this part of the text is that although Socrates does not explicitly distinguish *ignorance$_e$* from *ignorance$_k$,* he does suggest that both are involved in akratic behavior. Not only does Socrates clearly state that knowledge (*epistêmê*) will prevent the kind of flip-flopping that characterizes certain kinds of akratic behavior,[1] he also says that part of the many's problem is that they do not even occupy a knowledge-oriented frame of mind with regard to their problem:

> Accordingly "to be overcome by pleasure" means just this—ignorance in the highest degree (*amathia hê megitstê*), which Protagoras here and Prodicus and Hippias profess to cure. But you, through supposing it to be something else than ignorance (*dia to oiesthai allo ti ê amathian einai*), will neither go yourselves nor send your children to these sophists, who are the teachers of those things—you say it cannot be taught (*hôs ou didaktou ontos*); you are chary of your money and will give them none (*kêdomenoi tou arguriou kai ou didontes toutois*), and so you fare badly both in private and in public life (*kakôs prattete kai idia[i] kai dêmosia[i]*).[2]

The reference to the sophists here is clearly tongue-in-cheek, but if one replaces the playful 'You ought to be paying money to the sophists' with its earnest Socratic equivalent, 'You ought to be spending your days in the pursuit of wisdom,'[3] Socrates' overall diagnosis begins to look somewhat like mine: Akratics "fare badly" not just because they lack *epistêmê*, i.e., not just because they fail *within* the epistemic frame of mind (insofar as they may be said to inhabit it),

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[1] See 356de. Cf. Terry Penner's discussion of this passage, *op. cit.*

[2] 357e2-8.

[3] Cf. the end of the initial appeal to Cleinias in the *Euthydemus* 282a-d. Cf. esp. 282cd: "How good of you to relieve me of a long inquiry into this very point, whether wisdom is teachable or not teachable! So now, since you think it is both teachable and the only thing in the world that makes men happy and fortunate, can you help saying that it is necessary to pursue wisdom (*anangkaion einai philosophein*) or intending to pursue it yourself (*autos en nôi echeis auto poiein*)?" (W. R. M. Lamb's translation, Loeb Classical Library.)

but also because they do not even try to acquire *epistêmê*, i.e., because they do not even (fully) *inhabit* this frame of mind. As for failing to realize that one *ought* to inhabit the epistemic frame of mind (with regard to a given activity), that is included here, too. The many do not try to acquire *epistêmê,* because they falsely think that what will fix their problem is not a teachable thing (*didakton*) and that therefore *epistêmê* will not help them.[1]

Another implied distinction between inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind and actually possessing knowledge may be found in the first courage-wisdom argument. Socrates speaks of people who dive boldly into wells on account of their knowledge. He also speaks of people who dive boldly into wells on account of their radical ignorance; Protagoras calls them mad. The people who are obviously inbetween are those who recognize that this is an activity that is properly governed by knowledge but do not take themselves to have that knowledge, and so approach the activity with a healthy sense of 'epistemic' fear. Like the expert divers, such people inhabit the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity of diving, but like the 'mad' divers, they lack the knowledge that properly governs the activity.

Consider as well the distinction that Socrates draws between the measuring art and the power of appearance. Someone who uses the measuring art as his guide to making choices in life will carefully assess the pros and cons of each of his options, make the necessary calculations, and act in accordance with the results. He will try to live a knowledge-guided life, and he will succeed. What about the person who uses the power of appearance as his guide? Will *he* assess the pros and cons of each of his options, make careful calculations, and act in accordance with the results which he thinks come closest to knowledge? In other words, does the person who uses the power of appearance as his guide to his choices in life possess the meticulous knowledge-oriented habits of thinking, feeling, and acting that characterize an

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[1] Recall the terms in which the many state their original claim: many people often act against their *epistêmê*.

inhabitant of the epistemic frame of mind? If so, Socrates has failed to describe the typical akratic, who surely does not have these habits. If not, Socrates' contrast between the measuring art and the power of appearance is not so much a contrast within the epistemic frame of mind as a contrast between an epistemic and a non-epistemic frame of mind.

Finally, consider what Socrates is trying to bring the many themselves to see. Socrates is trying to make the many realize that the only thing they ultimately care about is maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain over the course of their lives as a whole; that the best way to do this is by calculating relative quantities of pleasure and pain by means of a measuring art; and that what they therefore ought to do is place all their trust in the guidance of this art, i.e., this technical knowledge. Is this the kind of argument that Socrates would bother making to people who already inhabited a knowledge-oriented frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life? Or is the intended effect of this argument precisely to bring the many to inhabit this frame of mind with regard to this activity? If so, this suggests that one of the things that Socrates thinks is responsible for the many's misunderstanding of akratic behavior—and, not incidentally, for their own akratic behavior—is their failure to inhabit an epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life.

4.   THE *PROTAGORAS*

In chapter 3 I traced some correspondences between my account of akratic behavior and the section on akrasia. I will now relate my account to the *Protagoras* as a whole. In the first part of this chapter I argue that ingredients in my account are to be found throughout the dialogue *excluding the section on Simonides' poem* (338e-348a). In the second part I argue that ingredients in my account are to be found throughout this section. Why set aside the section on Simonides' poem for separate treatment at the end? Of all the sections in the *Protagoras* the section on Simonides' poem is the one whose *raison d'être* is the hardest to explain and whose omission would seem to do the least damage to the dialogue as a whole. Yet some of my most telling evidence lies in this section, and if I mixed it in with the rest of my evidence, my whole argument might seem to depend on a weird or inessential part of the dialogue. By making a strong enough argument in the first part of this chapter without yet bringing in evidence from this section, I can forestall this misimpression. Also, discussing this section separately at the end will help impress upon the reader just how important a section it is and just how well it meshes with my account and with the rest of the *Protagoras*.

4.1.   Part One: The *Protagoras* minus 338e-348a

4.1.1.   Three pairs of portraits

Central to my account is the distinction between an 'epistemic' mode of thinking-feeling-acting and certain kinds of 'non-epistemic' modes. Where may one find similar distinctions in the *Protagoras?* One place is in the three pairs of portraits sketched in succession over the course of the dialogue: (1) the double-portrait of Alcibiades and Protagoras (309a-310a); (2) the

more detailed double-portrait of Hippocrates and Socrates at Socrates' house (310a-314c); (3) the complex double-portrait of Protagoras and Socrates at Callias's house (314c-362a). A reader of the *Protagoras* will naturally ask how these two vignettes and this third longer scene fit together. One thing that unites them, I believe, is a common contrast between 'epistemic' and 'non-epistemic' ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.[1]

4.1.1.1. Alcibiades and Protagoras

Two aspects of the dialogue's opening frame are somewhat peculiar: (1) the description of Alcibiades as young enough to retain the bloom of youth and fill men with erotic desire but old enough to have a beard and be considered a 'man' himself[2]; (2) the fact that Socrates has just experienced something strange (*atopon . . . ti*): while conversing with Protagoras[3] he was led to ignore Alcibiades and at times forget all about him.[4] First consider aspect (1). Even as the nameless Friend expresses an interest in the erotic 'hunting' (*kunêgesiou*) of Alcibiades, he also seems to be warning Socrates, as a friend to a friend, that Alcibiades is past the age where it is socially appropriate to be openly in love with him. The sexual interest is characteristically 'animal'; the warning, with its sensitivity to social norms and to the distinction between boy and man, is characteristically 'manly.' Now consider aspect (2). Here a distinction is drawn between being attracted to what a beautiful, rich, aristocratic teenager has to offer and being attracted to what a wise man has to offer. Socrates' heedlessness of Alcibiades' charms when a far more 'epistemically-attractive' person is present resembles the dismissiveness with which members of

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[1] By the time we reach the third pair of portraits there is no longer a straightforward correspondence between the contrasting ways and the contrasting characters; 'epistemic' and 'non-epistemic' ways are intertwined in both Protagoras and Socrates.

[2] 309a1-2: *. . . apo kunêgesiou tou peri tên Alkibiadou hôran;* 309a3-5: *kalos men ephaineto anêr . . . anêr mentoi, ô Sôkrates, hôs g'en autois hêmin eirêsthai, kai pôgonos êdê hupopimplamenos.* See also 309b1-2: *. . . hos ephê chariestatên hêbên einai tou <prôton> hupênêtou, hên nun Alkibiadês echei;*

[3] A detail which is later divulged between 309c1 and 309d2.

[4] 309b7-9.

the Athenian assembly (when dealing with a matter they consider to be technical) are said to

brush away the advice of anyone who they think lacks the requisite knowledge, "no matter how

handsome and wealthy and well-born he may be (*k'an panu kalos ê[i] kai plousios kai tôn*

gennaiôn) . . . ."[1] As in this later passage, so in the present one we have at least the germ of a

distinction between inhabiting an 'animal-manly' frame of mind, in which the sexy, wealthy,

noble Alcibiades seems more beautiful, and inhabiting an epistemic frame of mind, in which the

(seemingly) wise Protagoras seems more beautiful. As for Socrates' nameless friend, a similar

distinction seems to be being suggested in his case: he goes from speaking about Alcibiades in an

'animal-manly' way to eagerly wanting to hear about a conversation with the 'wise' Protagoras.[2]

4.1.1.2. Hippocrates and Socrates

The contrast in the dialogue's second scene between Hippocrates and Socrates is almost

too striking. Hippocrates knocks violently on Socrates' door before sunrise,[3] full of manly spirit

and passionate excitement (*tên andreian kai tên ptoiêsin*),[4] in such a way as to prompt Socrates

to ask him, first, whether he has some bad news to report,[5] and then a little later whether he has

been wronged in some way.[6] Hippocrates, in other words, is exhibiting the kind of spirited

behavior typical of people who are spreading urgent news or who are filled with righteous

anger.[7] Add to this Hippocrates' red-faced admission[8] that he would be ashamed to present

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[1] 319c3-4. This account of an immunity to the power of appearance itself resembles Socrates' later description of the person who possesses the art of measurement (356de).
[2] See 309c13-310a6.
[3] 310a9-b1: . . . *eti batheos orthrou . . . tên thuran têi baktêria[i] panu sphodra ekroue . . . .*
[4] 310d2-3.
[5] 310b5: *mê ti neôteron angelleis;*
[6] 310d4: *môn ti se adikei Prôtagoras;*
[7] Cf. Paul Revere's predawn behavior on April 19, 1775.
[8] 312a2: *kai hos eipen eruthriasas . . . .*

himself before the Greeks as a sophist,[1] along with Socrates' later suggestion that what is motivating Hippocrates to associate with Protagoras is a desire to "gain consideration in the city" (*ellogimos genesthai en tê[i] polei*),[2] and the portrait that emerges is of someone in the grip of the manly frame of mind.

Whereas Hippocrates is vehement and spirited, Socrates is cautious and deliberate. He persuades Hippocrates with good reasons to linger awhile at his house[3]; he speaks of deliberating for days with friends and family about whether one ought to entrust one's body to some doctor[4]; he talks about consulting an expert before consuming any food or drink bought from a peddler[5]; and he believes that Hippocrates, in rushing to entrust his soul to a person of whom he is almost wholly ignorant, is staking his life in a foolish gamble.[6] Socrates is depicted here as thinking that certain activities (the consumption of food, the care of the body, the care of the soul) ought ideally to be governed by the knowledge proper to each and that any other guide cannot be trusted. He is portrayed, in short, as a model inhabitant of the epistemic frame of mind. In this second scene, then, as in the first, there is a contrast corresponding to my distinction between 'epistemic' and 'non-epistemic'[7] ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

4.1.1.3. Protagoras and Socrates

In by far the most elaborate scene of the dialogue Plato takes the character who occupied the 'epistemic' side of the first scene's double-portrait (Protagoras) and shows him interacting with the character who occupied the equivalent place in the second scene (Socrates). Both men

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[1] 312a5-7: . . . *ouk an aischunoio eis tous Hellênas sauton sophistên parechôn; —Nê ton Dia, ô Sôkrates, eiper ge ha dianooumai chrê legein.*
[2] See 316bc.
[3] 311a.
[4] 313a.
[5] 314a.
[6] 312b7-c2; 313a-c; 313e5-314a1.
[7] In this case, specifically 'manly'.

appear as champions of the intelligent, careful approach to human affairs; both men also come across as partly under the sway of the manly frame of mind.[1] Of the two, however, it is Protagoras (as I will now try to show) who is more caught up in the manly frame of mind and Socrates who is more deeply rooted in the epistemic.

From his 'Great Speech' alone[2]—a brilliant, logical, convincing response to a difficult challenge—it is apparent that Protagoras, though he does not know all that he thinks he knows, possesses many mental traits conducive to the acquisition of knowledge. Among these is his smart cautiousness. Protagoras tells Socrates that sophists run the risk of becoming the object of public ill-will, and that sophists must therefore be careful (*chrê eulabeisthai*)[3]; indeed, he says, it was for this reason that earlier sophists, among them Homer and Hesiod, attempted to disguise their true profession.[4] But Protagoras takes what he says is a better precaution (*eulabeian . . . beltiô*): he openly confesses that he is a sophist.[5] This counterintuitive strategy, together with other precautions against suffering anything terrible on account of admitting that he is a sophist (*kai allas pros tautê[i] eskemmai, hôste . . . mêden deinon paschein dia to homologein sophistês einai*),[6] has worked well for Protagoras. He has managed to survive into old age as a practicing sophist.[7]

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[1] Protagoras is also portrayed as exhibiting certain 'animal' tendencies. Cf. in particular his profit-motive, as brought to mind at 310d6-8, 311d1-4, 313cff., 328bc, 349a3-4, and 357e7. Cf. as well his uneasy relationship to hedonism. But as Plato seems to focus on the 'epistemic'/'manly' distinction, so will I.

[2] 320c-328d.

[3] 316d1.

[4] 316d3ff.

[5] 317b3-6.

[6] 317b6-c1.

[7] 317c1-2. Cf. the self-consciously safe and prudent answer Protagoras gives at 351cd: "I cannot tell, Socrates, . . . whether I am to answer, in such absolute fashion as that of your question, that all pleasant things are good and painful things bad: I rather think it safer (*asphalesteron*) for me to reply, with a view not merely to my present answer (*ou monon pros tên nun apokrisin*) but to all the rest of my life (*alla kai pros panta ton allon bion ton emon*), that some pleasant things are not good, and also that some painful things are not bad . . . ."

Another thing that makes Protagoras an 'epistemic' man is the fact that he assigns a central place to knowledge in human life. Protagoras makes it his business to persuade young men that in order to succeed as citizens they need a kind of technical expertise, an expertise which he himself can transmit to them. Indeed, he agrees with Socrates that no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best; he says that it would be shameful for him of all people to deny that wisdom and knowledge (*sophian kai epistêmên*) are "the most powerful forces in human activity" (*kratiston . . . tôn anthrôpeiôn pragmatôn*).[1]

But despite such genuinely epistemic leanings, Protagoras is partly caught up in the manly frame of mind. After comparing himself favorably with such early 'sophists' as Homer, Hesiod, and Simonides, he makes Socrates think that he wants to show off in front of his present-day rivals Prodicus and Hippias.[2] Protagoras casts a glance at Hippias (*kai hama eis ton Hippian apeblepse*) as he says that whereas *other* sophists would mistreat Hippocrates by dragging him back into arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, and other arts, *he* will give him nothing else but what he has come for.[3] In a later display of professional competitiveness, Protagoras describes himself as excelling all others in the ability to assist someone in becoming a fine, upstanding man (*diapherontôs an tôn allôn anthrôpôn onêsai tina pros to kalon kai agathon genesthai*) and as more than worthy of the fee which he charges (*kai axiôs tou misthou hon prattomai kai eti pleionos*).[4] This boast provides the fuel for an ironic roasting by Socrates:

> . . . I regard you as the best person to investigate in general any matters that a sensible man may be expected to examine, and virtue in particular. Whom else should I choose but you? Not only do you consider yourself a worthy gentleman, like sundry other people, who are sensible enough

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[1] 352cd (Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell's translation).

[2] 317c: ". . . I suspected that he wished to make a display before Prodicus and Hippias (*hupôpteusa . . . boulesthai auton tôi te Prodikôi kai tôi Hippia[i] endeixasthai*), and give himself airs on the personal attachment shown by our coming to him (*kai kallôpisasthai, hoti erastai autou aphigmenoi eiêmen*) . . . ."

[3] 318d7-e5.

[4] 328b1-5.

themselves, but cannot make others so; but you are both good yourself and have the gift of making others good. And you are so confident of yourself (*houtô pepisteukas sautôi*) that, while others make a secret of this art, you have had yourself publicly proclaimed to all the Greeks with the title of sophist, and have appointed yourself preceptor of culture and virtue (*seauton apephêsas paideuseôs kai aretês didaskalon*), and are the first who has ever [deemed himself worthy of exacting] (*axiôsas arnusthai*) a regular fee for such work.[1]

Protagoras apparently conceives of the present discussion as a contest of words (*agôna logôn*) in which his reputation is in danger of being tarnished.[2] When he senses that things are not going well for him in the debate, he starts to lose his temper.[3] He tries more than once to avoid answering Socrates' questions,[4] and when he is forced to answer,[5] he sometimes does so only grudgingly.[6] After the argument is over, even as he generously compliments the person who has just made him look bad, Protagoras again betrays a tendency to focus on reputation by saying he would not be surprised if Socrates came to be one of those men who are 'held in account' for their wisdom (*tôn ellogimôn . . . andrôn epi sophia[i]*).[7] It seems that for Protagoras, it is good to be wise, but it is *very* good to be *known* for one's wisdom.

Yet if Protagoras is partly caught up in the manly frame of mind, is he any more caught up in it than Socrates? When Protagoras accuses Socrates of asking his questions out of a love of victory, the charge is not a groundless one.[8] Whereas the followers of Protagoras are extremely

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[1] 348d-349a (Loeb Classical Library translation, my substitution in brackets).
[2] See 335a4-8: "Socrates, I have undertaken in my time many contests of speech (*agôna logôn*), and if I were to do what you demand, and argue just in the way that my opponent (*ho antilegôn*) demanded, I should not be held superior to anyone (*oudenos an beltiôn ephainomên*) nor would Protagoras have made a name among the Greeks (*oud' an egeneto Prôtagorou onoma en tois Hellêsin*)."
[3] 331e6-332a4; 333e1-5; 335a9-b1.
[4] 333d1-3; 348b1-2; 360d6-8.
[5] See especially 348bc, where Alcibiades shames Protagoras into agreeing to be questioned again by Socrates.
[6] 333b3-4 (*mal' akontôs*); 338e3-4 (*panu men ouk êthelen, homôs de ênangkasthê homologêsai erôtêsein . . . .*); 348c3-4 (*mogis*); 360d3-4 (*panu mogis entautha epeneusen*); cf. also 335b1-2 (*ouk ethelêsoi hekôn einai apokrinomenos dialegesthai*).
[7] 361e.
[8] 360e.

careful not to be an impediment to him,[1] Socrates appears to relish being just such an

impediment. He is not afraid to get 'personal' with Protagoras[2]; he does not refrain from asking

the kind of pointed question that makes it embarrassingly obvious that Protagoras has worked

himself into an inconsistent position.[3] Even some of his ostensible compliments are

transparently ironic.[4] Gregory Vlastos writes:

> [Socrates] is not a wholly attractive figure in this dialogue. His irony, so impish in the *Hippias Major,* breathtaking in its effrontery in the *Hippias Minor,* somber, even bitter, yet under perfect control, in the *Euthyphro,* seems clumsy, heavy-handed here. His fulsome compliments to Protagoras, continued after they have lost all semblance of plausibility, become a bore. . . . [H]is handling of Protagoras is merciless, if not cruel. The steel-trap quality of his arguing might be excused by the infinite importance he attaches to its method and results. . . . But when the job is done and the mortal stab has been delivered, is it necessary to make the victim himself give one more twist to the knife?[5]

But for all his pugnacious audacity, the Socrates of the third scene of the *Protagoras* (not

to mention the Socrates of the second scene) is a less 'manly' and more 'epistemic' figure than

Protagoras. Whereas Socrates twice assures Protagoras, apparently sincerely, that his only

motive in this debate is that of the honest inquirer,[6] Protagoras fails to return the sentiment. On

the contrary (as previously noted), he suggests by word and deed that he regards this

conversation as a contest.[7] Consider also Socrates' change to a gentler tone of voice at 333e:

> Here Protagoras seemed to me to be in a thoroughly provoked and harassed state (*tetrachunthai te kai agôniân*), and to have his face set against answering (*paratetachthai pros to apokrinesthai*): so

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[1] 315b2-8: "[W]hen I saw their evolutions I was delighted with the admirable care they took (*hôs kalôs êulabounto*) not to hinder Protagoras at any moment by getting in front (*mêdepote empodôn en tôi prosthen einai Prôtagorou*); but whenever the master turned about and those with him, it was fine to see the orderly manner in which his train of listeners split up into two parties on this side and on that, and wheeling round formed up again each time in his rear most admirably."
[2] Cf. 319a8-10, 333c.
[3] Cf. 333a, 360c-e.
[4] In addition to 348e-349a, which I cited just now, cf. 335bc.
[5] Vlastos, 1956, pp. xxiv-xxv.
[6] 348c5-7; 360e6-8.
[7] Cf. especially 335a.

> when I saw him in this mood (*epeidê oun heôrôn auton houtôs echonta*) I grew wary
>
> (*eulaboumenos*), and went gently with my questions (*hêmera êromên*).[1]

Does *Socrates* ever get visibly upset, so as to give *Protagoras* occasion to soften the tone of *his*

voice? Consider as well that after a lengthy discussion, full of bends and turns, Socrates is still

"most anxious" (*pasan prothumian echô*) to continue the investigation into what virtue is (*tên*

aretên hoti estin) and whether or not it is teachable.[2] Protagoras, for his part, though he praises

Socrates' "zeal" (*Egô men, . . . ô Sôkrates, epainô sou tên prothumian*), does not wish at present

to pursue the matter further.[3] And when one does look back to the purely 'epistemic' portrait of

Socrates in the second scene, together with the decidedly 'non-epistemic' portrait of sophists in

that same scene[4] (portraits which are surely meant to color the subsequent scene), Socrates

emerges as more 'epistemically-minded' and less 'manly' than Protagoras. At any rate, it is safe

to conclude that in this third pair of portraits, as in the first two, distinctions are to be found that

are akin to my distinction between 'epistemic' and 'non-epistemic' modes of thinking-feeling-

acting.

4.1.2.   Living a human life

My account of akratic behavior does not just involve a distinction between epistemic and

non-epistemic frames of mind; it also involves the idea of inhabiting a frame of mind with regard

to the activity of living a human life. Likewise, in addition to the distinctions that resemble my

distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic frames of mind, one of the main ideas in the

Protagoras is that a cautious, clever, methodical approach, as opposed to an impulsive, intuitive

one, is the key to success *in life*. This idea finds expression in at least four places: (1) in the

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[1] 333e2-5.
[2] 361c.
[3] 361d7-8; e6.
[4] See especially 313c-314a.

promise of success held out by sophists like Protagoras to young men like Hippocrates; (2) in Protagoras's myth about early humanity; (3) in the demonstration to the many; (4) in Socrates' own ideas concerning the care of the self.

4.1.2.1.   The sophist's promise

To young men like Hippocrates, it seems, success in life is largely a matter of coming to be 'held in account' by one's fellow man (*ellogimos genesthai en tê[i] polei*).[1] The great danger in life is that one will make a poor showing in front of others and be looked down upon as a nobody. According to this view, salvation for a human being is the art of impressing his fellows and winning them over, primarily through spoken words. Hippocrates appears to think that the key to his own success is to become a wise (*sophos*) or clever speaker and that the way in which to do so is by studying under Protagoras.[2] Michael Frede observes:

> [Young men like Hippocrates] seem somehow aware that a traditional education is insufficient to
> deal with the problems a citizen of Athens faces in the second half of the fifth century. They sense
> that traditional ways are inadequate, that one must approach problems in an enlightened, rational
> way, and that there should be a special competence, an expertise, in dealing with them.[3]

Hippocrates apparently thinks that he needs a kind of *technê* or *epistêmê* in order to succeed in life. He says, perhaps with some exaggeration, that he is ready to part with all his money and property in order to get it.[4] Here, then, is one place where the idea that an 'epistemic' approach is the key to success in life crops up in the *Protagoras*.

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[1] 316c1. This is Socrates' phrase.
[2] Cf. 310e5-7 (*alla gar, ô Sôkrates, pantes ton andra epainousin kai phasin sophôtaton einai legein*); 310d5-6 (*monos esti sophos, eme de ou poiei*); 312d5-7 (*Ti an eipoimen auton einai, ô Sôkrates, ê epistatên tou poiêsai deinon legein;*).
[3] Introduction to Hackett edition of *Protagoras,* p. xii.
[4] See 310de.

4.1.2.2. Protagoras's myth

According to Protagoras's myth, the great danger facing the earliest human beings was extinction.[1] Epimetheus, through lack of careful planning, had given so many powers to preserve the non-rational animal species that there was nothing left for man.[2] What ultimately saved our skin (which at this point was virtually all that we had to protect us) was technical knowledge.[3] "[W]isdom in the arts together with fire (*tên entechnon sophian sun puri*),"[4] stolen for us by Prometheus, gave people a means of material sustenance,[5] while another *technê,* the 'political' or 'civic' art, enabled us to live together in cities and win the war against the beasts.[6] In other words, whereas other things save other animals' lives, what saves *our* life is wisdom.[7] Here, then, is another version of the same idea: that an 'epistemic' approach is the key to success in life—in this case, the life of the species.

4.1.2.3. The demonstration to the many

If to early human beings success meant survival, while to such men as Hippocrates success means making a name for oneself, to most people (according to Socrates and Protagoras) success means living out one's life as pleasantly and painlessly as possible.[8] And as animal instinct was an inadequate guide to primitive man, while a conventional Greek education is an

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[1] 322c1: "So Zeus, fearing that our race was in danger of utter destruction (*Zeus oun deisas peri tôi genei hêmôn mê apoloito pan*) . . . ."
[2] 321b6-c3. Cf. 320e3: " . . . for preservation (*eis sôtêrian*)."
[3] Cf. 321c5-6: ". . . naked, unshod, unbedded, unarmed (*gumnon te kai anupodêton kai astrôton kai aoplon*) . . . ."
[4] 321d1-2.
[5] 321d4 (*bion*) ; 322a1 (*biou*); 322b3 (*trophên*).
[6] Cf. 322b: "[A]lthough their skill in handiwork (*hê dêmiourgikê technê*) was a sufficient aid in respect of food, in their warfare with the beasts it was defective; for as yet they had no civic art (*politikên . . . technên*), which includes the art of war (*hês meros polemikê*). So they sought to band themselves together and secure their lives by founding cities. Now as often as they were banded together they did wrong to one another (*êdikoun allêlous*) through the lack of civic art (*tên politikên technên*), and thus they began to be scattered again and to perish."
[7] Cf. the use of *sôtêria* at 321c8. Cf. also 321a1 (*esôizen*), 321b6 (*sôtêrian*), 322b6 (*sôizesthai*).
[8] Cf. 355a2-3: "Is it enough for you to live out your life (*katabiônai ton bion*) pleasantly, without pain?"

inadequate guide to Hippocrates, so the power of appearance (*hê tou phainomenou dunamis*) is not a sufficiently trustworthy guide for the masses.[1] In order to get what they want in life, the many, too, need technical knowledge, in their case a measuring art (*metrêtikê technê*).[2] It is specifically their *life* that Socrates says this knowledge will save.[3] Again, the idea is that the key to success in life is the adoption of an 'epistemic' approach.

4.1.2.4. Socratic care of self

In his demonstration to the many Socrates talks as if the chief thing to avoid in life were the failure to maximize pleasure and minimize pain; but when speaking to Hippocrates and sounding more like himself, Socrates talks as if the chief thing to avoid in life were the corruption of one's soul.[4] Socrates warns Hippocrates that the success or failure of everything else that belongs to him depends on the goodness or badness of his soul (*tên psuchên, en hôi pant' estin ta sa ê eu ê kakôs prattein, chrêstou ê ponêrou autou genomenou*), and that therefore he must think long and hard, in consultation with friends and family, about to whom or to what he will entrust the direction of his soul.[5] In such deliberations it is good to ask such basic questions as these: "What is it for a human soul to be in good condition?" ("What is *aretê?*"); "How, practically speaking, are human souls brought into good condition?" ("Is *aretê* a teachable thing, or is it acquired in some other way?"). It is just such questions as these, of course, that habitually occupy Socrates. Indeed, Socrates himself says at the end of the dialogue that spending time investigating these matters is a way in which he takes forethought "over [his] life as a whole":

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[1] 356d4.
[2] See 357a5-b4.
[3] Cf. 356d3 (*biou*); e2 (*bion*); e6 (*biou*); 357a1 (*bion*); a7 (*biou*).
[4] The two thoughts are not necessarily incompatible.
[5] 313a-c.

> . . . I would like us, having come this far, to continue until we come through to what virtue is in itself (*tên aretên hoti estin*), and then to return to inquire about whether it can or cannot be taught (*eite didakton eite mê didakton*), so that Epimetheus might not frustrate us a second time in this inquiry . . . . I like the Prometheus character in your story better than Epimetheus. Since I take promethean forethought over my life as a whole (*promêthoumenos huper tou biou tou emautou pantos*), I pay attention to these things (*panta tauta pragmateuomai*), and if you are willing . . . I would be pleased to investigate them along with you.[1]

In this final example, as in the first three, we find the idea of a prudent, intelligent approach (the 'promethean' or 'epistemic' approach) applied to the activity of living a whole human life. But whereas in those cases the approach was applied in the service of some independently determined conception of the goal of the activity (becoming a famous statesman, perpetuating the species, experiencing maximum pleasure), in this case it is used to call those very conceptions into question and to help us reach a better understanding of what the goal in life really is.[2] I said in chapter 2 that one might speak of different *versions* of the epistemic frame of mind, some cruder, some more refined, through which people progress as they learn to inhabit this general mode of thinking-feeling-acting.[3] Socrates' application of the epistemic frame of mind to the activity of living a human life may in this sense be said to be less crude or more 'pure' than the others just mentioned.

4.1.3.   Thinking about what is good

In addition to the idea of inhabiting a certain frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life, my account of akratic behavior also involves the idea of inhabiting this or that frame of mind with regard to the activity of forming and revising one's beliefs about what is

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[1] 361cd (Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell's translation).
[2] Cf. chapter 2, section 2.1.2, final paragraph.
[3] Section 2.2.2.3, third paragraph.

good. Granted that there are distinctions drawn in the *Protagoras* that mirror my distinction

between epistemic and non-epistemic approaches to living, does the *Protagoras* also contain

something like a distinction between different approaches to thinking about what is good?

4.1.3.1.   The discussion at Callias's house

Consider first the mode and subject matter of the discussion at Callias's house. Clearly

one reason why Callias and his guests are so eager to witness this conversation—a debate

between two brilliant thinkers both of whom are also highly entertaining speakers, one a sort of

rising star,[1] the other the current doyen of Greek intellectuals,[2] held in front of a prestigious

gathering of other wisdom-loving men[3]—is because they think it promises to be great philosophy

and great theater.[4] Indeed, it is hard to name another place in Plato's works where the

conversational modes of competitive spectacle and philosophical inquiry are more exquisitely

combined. As for subject matter, the topic throughout the discussion (except when the

discussion itself is the topic) is human goodness (*aretê*). In other words, engaging in this

discussion is itself an example of thinking (out loud) about what is good. On the one hand, then,

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[1] Cf. 361de: "I approve your zeal, Socrates, said Protagoras, and the way you develop your arguments (*tên diexodon tôn logôn*) . . . . Indeed, I have told many people how I regard you—as the man I admire far above any that I meet, and as quite an exception to men of your age; and I say I should not be surprised if you won high repute for wisdom."

[2] Cf. 317c: "And yet many long years have I now been in the profession, for many in total are those that I have lived: not one of you all, but in age I might be his father (*oudenos hotou ou pantôn an humôn kath' hêlikian patêr eiên*)" ; cf. also 320c: ". . . but shall I, as an old man speaking to his juniors (*hôs presbuteros neôterois*) . . . ."

[3] Cf. Hippias's comment at 337d: "[W]e . . . being the wisest of the Greeks (*sophôtatous de ontas tôn Hellênôn*), and having met together for the very purpose in the very sanctuary of the wisdom of Greece (*kai kat' auto touto nun sunelêluthotas eis auto to prutaneion tês sophias*), and in this the greatest and most auspicious house of the city of cities . . . ." See also 314bc: "[P]rotagoras is not the only one there; we shall find Hippias of Elis and . . . Prodicus of Ceos, and numerous other men of wisdom besides."

[4] Cf. 317d: "Then do you agree, said Callias, to our making a session of it, so that we may sit at ease for our conversation? The proposal was accepted: and all of us, delighted at the prospect of listening to wise men (*asmenoi de pantes hêmeis, hôs akousomenoi andrôn sophôn*), took hold of the benches and couches ourselves . . . ." Cf. also 335d: ". . . Callias laid hold of my arm with his right hand, and grasped this cloak of mine with his left, and said: We will not let you go, Socrates; for if you leave us our discussions [will not be the same] (*ouch homoiôs hêmin esontai hoi dialogoi*). I beg you therefore to stay with us, for there is nothing I would rather hear than an argument between you and Protagoras (*egô oud' an henos hêdion akousaimi ê sou te kai Prôtagorou dialegomenôn*). Come, you must oblige us all." (W. R. M. Lamb's translation, my emendation in brackets).

the conversation's participants are engaging in the activity of thinking about what is good, while on the other, the conversation's mode is a cross between philosophical inquiry and competitive spectacle. Already one can see at least the hint of a distinction between 'epistemic' and 'non-epistemic' ways of approaching the activity of thinking about what is good.

But it is one thing for a conversation to occupy a certain mode; it is another for the conversation's participants to be aware of the mode as such and to ask explicitly, "What will be the mode of our discussion?" Remarkably, this is just what happens halfway through the *Protagoras*: the topic of conversation shifts from human goodness to the mode of the present discussion itself. Socrates distinguishes a brief way and a long way of answering questions (*brachulogia* vs. *makrologia*) and requests that Protagoras limit himself to the brief way.[1] Protagoras presses Socrates to make his request more precise,[2] then refuses to comply with the request. He would never have become the famous sophist that he is, he says to Socrates, had he allowed his opponents to fix the mode of discussion.[3]

It is only with help from the minor characters that the dispute is resolved. After Callias has had his say,[4] Alcibiades displays a keen understanding of the nature of the dispute,[5] while

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[1] 334c7-d5; 334e4-335a3; 335b7-c2. Cf. 328e-329b, where Socrates uses the image of brazen vessels that ring like bells to illustrate a distinction between answering a question at interminable length and answering it briefly. Cf. also *Gorgias* 449c, 461d.

[2] 334de: "Well, what do you mean by short answers? he asked: do you want me to make them shorter than they should be?

Not at all, I said.

As long as they should be? he asked.

Yes, I said.

Then are my answers to be as long as I think they should be, or as you think they should be?"

[3] 335a: "Socrates, . . . if I were to do what you demand, and argue just in the way that my opponent demanded (*hôs ho antilegôn ekeleue me dialegesthai, houtô dielegomên*), I should not be held superior to anyone nor would Protagoras have made a name among the Greeks."

[4] 335d (cited above); 336b: "[Y]ou must see that Protagoras is quite justified in asking for the same right to argue his points in the manner he chooses (*dialegesthai hopôs bouletai*) as you yourself are." (B. A. F. Hubbard and E. S. Karnofsky's translation.)

[5] 336b8-d2: "Socrates admits that long speeches are beyond him (*mê meteinai hoi makrologias*), and concedes to Protagoras on that score. But when it comes to dialectical discussion (*tou de dialegesthai*) and understanding the give and take of argument (*logon te dounai kai dexasthai*), I would be surprised if he yields to anyone. Now, if Protagoras admits that he is Socrates' inferior in dialectic (*phauloteros einai Sôkratous dialechthênai*), that should

Critias, for his part, criticizes Alcibiades for the competitive way in which he has defended Socrates,[1] reminding the company that contentious support for one side or the other is out of place in a discussion of this kind.[2] As for Prodicus and Hippias, each draws an explicit contrast between different forms of discussion; indeed, Hippias uses the very word *eidos* to refer to a 'form' of speaking, while Prodicus comes close to drawing a Platonic distinction between eristic and philosophy.[3] But perhaps the most incisive distinction between different forms of speaking is drawn by Socrates himself:

> Otherwise what is to be our mode of discussion (*tis ho **tropos** estai tôn dialogôn*)? For I thought that to hold a joint discussion (*to suneinai . . . allêlois dialegomenous*) and to make a harangue (*to dêmêgorein*) were two distinct things.[4]

By allowing so many of his characters to make so many remarks about the mode of the discussion, and by placing these remarks at the center of his dialogue, Plato seems to me to be advising his reader to attend not just to the different beliefs that a person might hold or express about human goodness but also to the different modes of thinking and conversing within which such beliefs are held and expressed.

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be enough for Socrates (*exarkei Sôkratei*). But if he contests the point, let him engage in a question-and-answer dialogue (*dialegesthô erôtôn te kai apokrinomenos*) and not spin out a long speech every time he answers (*mê eph' hekastê[i] erôtêsei makron logon apoteinôn*), fending off the issues because he doesn't want to be accountable (*ekkrouôn tous logous kai ouk ethelôn didonai logon*), and going on and on until most of the listeners have forgotten what the question was about (*apomêkunôn heôs an epilathôntai peri hotou to erôtêma ên hoi polloi tôn akouontôn*) . . . ." (Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell's translation.)

[1] 336e1-2: *Alkibiadês de aei philonikos esti pros ho an hormêsê[i] . . . .*

[2] 336e2-3: "It is not for us to contend (*sumphilonikein*) on either side for Socrates or for Protagoras . . . ."

[3] Prodicus says at 337a6-b3: "I on my part . . . call upon you to accede to our request, and to dispute (*amphisbêtein*), but not to wrangle (*erizein*), with each other over your arguments (*peri tôn logôn*): for friends dispute with friends, just from good feeling (*amphisbêtousi men gar kai di' eunoian hoi philoi tois philois*); whereas wrangling is between those who are at variance and enmity with each other (*erizousin de hoi diaphoroi te kai echthroi allêlois*)." Hippias says at 338a: "[Y]ou, Socrates, must not require that precise form of discussion (*to akribes touto **eidos** tôn dialogôn*) with its extreme brevity (*to kata brachu lian*) . . . ; nor must you, Protagoras, let out full sail . . . and so escape into the ocean of speech . . . ."

[4] 336b1-3.

As for the distinction between 'epistemic' and 'non-epistemic', the dispute over dialectical ground rules in the *Protagoras* is essentially a dispute over whether the conversation at Callias's house will be a knowledge-oriented conversation, the goal of which is to arrive at a true understanding of the matters in question, or a display-oriented conversation, the goal of which is to cut a superior figure in front of an audience.[1] *Makrologia* better suits the latter, *brachulogia* better suits the former. In other words, not only does Plato distinguish in this dialogue between different ways of approaching the activity of thinking about what is good; he distinguishes specifically between what I call 'epistemic' and 'non-epistemic' ways of approaching this activity. Thus in the mode and subject matter of the discussion at Callias's house lies the seed of an idea at the heart of my account of akratic behavior: that beliefs about what is good that have their home in an 'epistemic' mode of thinking about what is good and beliefs about what is good that have their home in a 'non-epistemic' mode, quite apart from any differences in propositional content, are importantly different in kind.

4.1.3.2.   Moral education in the Great Speech

Consider as well the contrast between Protagoras's description of the traditional course of a Greek youth's moral education[2] and the richest moral-philosophical sections of the *Protagoras* itself. The kind of thinking about what is good that Protagoras says is instilled in youths by traditional Greek education is in many ways a 'manly' kind of thinking. It involves accepting as good what one's superiors tell one is good,[3] admiring the 'manly' heroes of old as models of

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[1] No one puts it quite this way, but compare Socrates' distinction at 336b, Prodicus's distinction at 337ab, Protagoras's accusation at 360e, Socrates' statements of purpose at 348c and 360e, and Socrates' observation of Protagoras at 317cd.

[2] 325c-326e.

[3] 325d3-5: "This is just, that is unjust; this is noble, that is shameful; this is pious, that is impious—do these, don't do those! (*to men dikaion, to de adikon, kai tode men kalon, tode de aischron, kai tode men hosion, tode de anosion, kai ta men poiei, ta de mê poiei*)." (My translation.)

virtue,[1] and letting the laws and customs of one's city be one's guide to moral conduct.[2] It does

not involve inquiring philosophically into what it is about good conduct that makes it good.

Moreover, the educational system achieves its results through a combination of physical force

and social pressure, playing on a young person's fear of being treated harshly by others.[3] By

contrast, the kind of thinking about what is good exemplified in the richest philosophical sections

of the *Protagoras* itself is an 'epistemic' kind of thinking.[4] Here, then, is another way in which

'epistemic' and 'non-epistemic' modes of thinking about what is good are distinguished in the

Protagoras.

4.1.4.   Merely inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind

In my account of akratic behavior I distinguish between merely inhabiting the epistemic

frame of mind and actually possessing knowledge. In addition to a distinction between

'epistemic' and 'non-epistemic' ways of thinking, does the *Protagoras*'s author also draw this

'intra-epistemic' distinction? One simple answer is "Yes, of course, he draws it in the character

of Socrates." And surely this is right, for Plato does depict Socrates as inhabiting a knowledge-

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[1] 325e-326a: "[T]he children . . . are furnished with works of good poets to read as they sit in class . . . : here they meet with many admonitions, many descriptions and praises and eulogies (*pollai men nouthetêseis . . . pollai de diexodoi kai epainoi kai engkômia*) of good men in times past (*palaiôn andrôn agathôn*), that the boy in envy (*zêlôn*) may imitate them and yearn to become even as they."

[2] 326cd: "[T]he city next compels them (*anangkazei*) to learn the laws and to live according to them as after a pattern, that their conduct may not be swayed by their own light fancies (*hina mê autoi eph' hautôn eikê[i] prattôsin*), but just as writing-masters first draw letters in faint outline with the pen for their less advanced pupils, and then give them the copy-book and make them write according to the guidance of their lines, so the city sketches out for them the laws devised by good lawgivers of yore, and constrains them to govern and be governed according to these (*kata toutous anangkazei kai archein kai archesthai*)."

[3] Cf. 325d: "If he readily obeys,—so; but if not, they treat him as a bent and twisted piece of wood (*hôsper xulon diastrephomenon kai kamptomenon*) and straighten him with threats and blows (*euthunousin apeilais kai plêgais*)." Cf. also 326de: "[The city] punishes anyone who steps outside these borders (*hos d' an ektos bainêi toutôn, kolazei*), and this punishment . . . is called a Correction (*euthunai*)."

[4] The demonstration to the many (353c-357e) is perhaps the clearest example of this.

oriented frame of mind with regard to the activity of living a human life,[1] even as he also depicts

him as lacking and actively seeking the knowledge that properly governs this activity.[2] Through

his dramatic portrayal of Socrates, then, Plato may be said to distinguish between merely

inhabiting a knowledge-oriented frame of mind and actually possessing knowledge. Still, it

would be nice if there were also some specific phrase in Plato that at least partially captured the

distinction between 'inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind' and 'possessing knowledge'. Is

there some such phrase, or are we forced to conclude that while Plato did grasp this distinction, it

was only through his dramatic portrayal of characters that he chose to or was able to express it?

There is no piece of Platonic terminology in the *Protagoras* that corresponds exactly to

'inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind with regard to ———'. There is, however, a form of

words that corresponds to it partially: *oiesthai ——— en technê[i] einai,* 'to think that ———

[is an activity whose success] depends on technical knowledge'.[3] This phrase is used in

connection with the more common phrase *oiesthai* [or *hêgeisthai*] ——— *didakton einai* ('to

think [or hold, consider, believe] that ——— is a teachable thing/a thing taught'), and it occurs

in Socrates' description of the Athenian assembly.[4] Socrates says that members of the assembly

call in experts to advise them when it comes to technical city projects:

> Now I observe, when we are collected for the Assembly, and the city has to deal with an affair of
> building (*peri oikodomias ti*), we send for builders to advise us on what is proposed to be built;
> and when it is a case of laying down a ship (*peri naupêgias*), we send for shipwrights; and so in all
> other matters which are considered learnable and teachable (*kai t'alla panta houtôs, hosa
> hêgountai mathêta te kai didakta einai*) . . . .[5]

[1] As I have already suggested, this comes out most clearly in the early conversation between Hippocrates and Socrates.
[2] See, e.g., 348cff. and 360eff.
[3] See 319c7-8. This is yet another example of the construction I discussed in chapter 3, p. 108: *estin en tini.*
[4] 319b-d.
[5] 319bc.

Although the people who call in the experts do not themselves possess the knowledge in question, this does not seem to make them any less confident in dismissing anybody they consider to be a layman who is trying to advise them on a matter they consider to be technical:

> [B]ut if anyone else, whom the people do not regard as a craftsman (*hon ekeinoi mê oiontai dêmiourgon einai*), attempts to advise them (*epicheirê[i] autois sumbouleuein*), . . . they merely laugh him to scorn and shout him down (*katagelôsi kai thorubousin*), until either the speaker retires from his attempt, overborne by the clamour, or the tipstaves pull him from his place or turn him out altogether (*auton aphelkusôsin ê exarôntai*) . . . . Such is their procedure in matters which they consider professional (*peri . . . hôn oiontai en technê[i] einai*).[1]

Here we have a clear example of people who firmly believe that something is the province of a kind of technical knowledge but who do not believe that they themselves possess the knowledge in question.

I said that this phrase "partially" corresponds to my idea of inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind, because inhabiting this frame of mind is not just a matter of holding certain views, or of thinking certain thoughts, but a matter of thinking and feeling and acting in certain ways. The phrase *oiesthai ——— en technê[i] einai* refers only to the 'thinking' part of inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind, not (or at least not directly) to the 'feeling' and 'acting' parts. Even so, when it is combined with Socrates' lively description of the scornful laughter and forced removal of an assembly member (cf. the 'feeling' and 'acting' parts of my concept), this phrase comes pretty close to serving my purpose.

I think, then, that there are distinctions drawn in the *Protagoras* that roughly correspond to my distinction between inhabiting a knowledge-oriented frame of mind with regard to some activity and possessing the knowledge that properly governs that activity. In light of this and all the other evidence presented so far in this chapter, I think it is fair to conclude, ignoring now the

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[1] 319c.

section on Simonides' poem, that ingredients in my account of akratic behavior are to be found throughout the *Protagoras*.

4.2. Part Two: The section on Simonides' poem (338e-348a)

Before attempting to relate my account of akratic behavior to the section on Simonides' poem, I will provide a brief sketch of the section itself.

When the section on Simonides' poem begins, an agreement has been reached: Protagoras will ask Socrates questions and Socrates will try to make his answers exemplify *brachulogia*; then, when Protagoras is done asking questions, Socrates will once again question Protagoras, who in turn will give brief answers.[1] Protagoras decides to question Socrates about poetic composition in general and about a poem by Simonides in particular, a poem whose theme appears to have been the imperfection (difficulty, fragility, rarity) of human goodness.[2] Socrates soon finds himself in the position of having either to explain away a seeming contradiction in Simonides' poem or to take back one of his previous answers. He turns to Prodicus for help, in order (as he tells his nameless Friend) to buy some time.[3] Two explanations follow, both of which Protagoras rejects. Socrates then sets out an explanation of his own, based on a distinction between 'becoming' (*genesthai*) and 'being' (*einai*),[4] prefaced by a fanciful account of archaic philosophy, and supported with a far-fetched reading of the entire poem. After being praised for

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[1] See 338c6-e5. See in particular 338d1-3 (*egô de apokrinoumai, kai hama peirasomai autôi deixai hôs egô phêmi chrênai ton apokrinomenon apokrinesthai*) and 338e4-5 (*kai epeidan hikanôs erôtêsê[i], palin dôsein logon kata smikron apokrinomenos*).

[2] Although much of the poem is quoted, some lines are left out. We know the poem only through the *Protagoras*. Cf. Adam and Adam, p. 194: "Plato is seldom careful to make his quotations accurate, and the perverse exposition of the meaning of this particular poem is hardly calculated to increase our confidence in his verbal accuracy here. Nevertheless, Plato is our sole authority for the poem in question . . . ."

[3] 339e3-5.

[4] *Emmenai* is used for *einai* in the poem. See, e.g., 339c4-5, 344c4.

this display, Socrates recommends that he and Protagoras leave off poetic analysis and return to

testing each other directly in a common search for the truth.

      Why include this section at all? What does it add to the rest of the dialogue, other than a

change of pace and comic relief? And why this particular poem? Why choose a text that

emphasizes the difficulty and imperfection of human goodness, rather than one that touches more

directly on the unity or teachability of virtue? In the *Meno* (95d-96a) Socrates quotes a pair of

passages from Theognis, one suggesting that virtue is teachable, the other that it is not.[1] Why not

pick a pair of fragments such as these? And why *this* interpretation of the poem? Why the two

false starts? Why the elaborate preface about the Spartans and Spartanizers? Why depict

Simonides as attacking Pittacus's saying throughout the poem in an attempt to win fame for his

wisdom?[2]

     I will not attempt to answer these questions here, nor will I attempt to give a

comprehensive account of this section. In keeping with my plan, I will merely try to point out

links between this section and my account. In particular, I will try to show (1) that some of the

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[1] See especially 96a3-4: "You notice how in the second passage he contradicts himself on the same point (*autos hautôi . . . peri tôn autôn t'anantia legei*)?" (W. R. M. Lamb's translation, Loeb Classical Library.)

[2] Questions such as these have been receiving more scholarly attention in recent years. A tendency to characterize the section on Simonides' poem as little more than entertaining parody has given way to an interest in demonstrating its hidden significance. For an example of the former tendency, cf. A. E. Taylor, p. 251: "I think we should take the whole of this long interlude as intended mainly to be humorous 'relief,' a gay picture of the manners of cultivated Athenian society in the later years of the Periclean age, and not much more." For examples of the newer interest, cf. Dorotea Frede, "The Impossibility of Perfection: Socrates' Criticism of Simonides' Poem in the *Protagoras*," *Review of Metaphysics,* (39), 1986; Raphael Woolf, "The Written Word in Plato's *Protagoras*," *Ancient Philosophy* (19), 1999; Francisco J. Gonzales, "Giving Thought to the Good Together: Virtue in Plato's *Protagoras*," in *Retracing the Platonic Text*, 2000; and Wolfgang-Rainer Mann, *The Discovery of Things*, 2000, pp. 75-107. Mann writes (p. 92, n. 24): "This entire part of the dialogue . . . is something of a puzzle. Since Socrates ends the discussion by saying that they ought to dismiss the interpretation of poetry, and since a great deal of his exegesis of the poem seems far-fetched, commentators have frequently thought that the whole episode is to be regarded as a parody of the Sophists' educational program, a reductio ad absurdum of one of their favorite instructional devices— the interpretation of poetry. It seems that because this is the general view of the passage, readers of the dialogue often neither look for, nor expect to find, anything of serious philosophical interest here. The implied dichotomy between parody and serious philosophy is surely much too primitive." Mann adds that he discusses this section more fully in his forthcoming *Fighting with Words: Dialectic and Eristic in Plato's Protagoras and Euthydemus*.

distinctions drawn in this section correspond to my distinction between 'epistemic' and 'manly'

ways of thinking, feeling, and acting; (2) that other distinctions drawn in this section correspond

to my distinction between 'epistemic' and 'non-epistemic' modes of thinking about what is

good; (3) that the distinction drawn in this section between 'becoming' (*genesthai*) and 'being'

(*einai*), together with the related distinction between the human and the divine, is akin to my

distinction between merely inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind with regard to the activity of

living a human life and actually possessing the knowledge that properly governs this activity.

4.2.1.   'Epistemic' vs. 'manly'

Three contrasts in this section each correspond fairly well to my distinction between

'epistemic' and 'manly' ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Two are drawn by Socrates, the

first in his description of the Spartans and Cretans, the second in his characterization of

Simonides; the third is drawn by Plato in his representation of Socrates.

4.2.1.1.   Spartans and Cretans

Socrates says that what seems to be responsible for the Spartans and Cretans' political

success—indeed, what they purposely lead others to think is responsible—is their fighting (*to

machesthai*) and 'manliness' (*andreia*),[1] but that what is actually responsible is wisdom

(*sophia*).[2] Spartan and Cretan citizens associate with the numerous sophists who secretly live in

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[1] 342b4-5. *Andreia* is Socrates' standard word for the full-fledged virtue of courage. At 310d1-2, however, Socrates attributes *andreia* to Hippocrates (*kai egô gignôskôn autou tên andreian kai tên ptoiêsin*), hardly a possessor of 'the knowledge of what is and what is not to be feared' (360d). 'Manliness' or 'manly spirit' seems a better translation here, as in the present passage.

[2] 342ab: "[B]ut the people . . . make pretence of ignorance (*schêmatizontai amatheis einai*), in order to prevent the discovery that it is by wisdom (*sophia[i]*) that they have ascendancy over the rest of the Greeks . . . ; they prefer it to be thought that they owe their superiority to fighting and valour (*tôi machesthai kai andreia[i]*), conceiving that the revelation of its real cause would lead everyone to practice this wisdom (*hêgoumenoi, ei gnôstheien hôi perieisi, pantas touto askêsein, tên sophian*). In Book VIII of the *Republic* Socrates identifies the 'spirited' or timocratic constitution with the constitutions of Sparta and Crete (544c). In the *Laws*, a dialogue in which an elderly Athenian

their midst; all the citizens, male and female, learn from the sophists; the citizens love wisdom.[1]

The Spartans are so effective at concealing the secret of their success that the people who most

admire them and try hardest to imitate them—the 'Spartanizers' (*hoi lakônizontes*)—go about it

all wrong: rather than philosophize, they merely dress in Spartan clothes and engage in violent

physical exercise, failing to match the success of the Spartans, and maiming themselves in the

process.[2]

    This curious description may be reexpressed in the terms of my conceptual framework.[3]

The Spartans and Cretans are able to bring off a certain kind of *performance*: achieving political

dominance. Certain other Greeks are so impressed by this performance that they want to imitate

it. They ask themselves, "How can *we* be as successful as the Spartans? What is responsible for

their excellent performances?" But the Spartans are jealous of this information[4]: they know that

the secret to their success is a philosophical approach, but they delude other Greeks into thinking

that their success is due to an unintellectual virile approach. In other words, the Spartans trick

the Spartanizers into adopting a 'manly' approach to the activity in question, when what is really

called for is an 'epistemic' approach. Accordingly, the Spartanizers fail to move smoothly and

easily towards their goal, as witnessed by their broken ears, black eyes, etc. That is, they

encounter *resistance,* and they do not know what is causing it. Perhaps the Spartanizers will be

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converses with a Spartan and a Cretan, the Athenian redescribes the laws of Sparta and Crete as having been directed not at fostering military valor—as Megillus (the Spartan) and Clinias (the Cretan) say—but at fostering the whole of human virtue, of which wisdom, he says, is the chief or guiding part (630d-632d).

[1] 342a7-b1; d1-2; e5-7.

[2] 342bc: "So well have they kept their secret that they have deceived the followers of the Spartan cult in our cities (*tous en tais polesi lakônizontas*), with the result that some get broken ears by imitating them (*hoi men ôta te katagnuntai mimoumenoi autous*), bind their knuckles with thongs, go in for muscular exercises, and wear dashing little cloaks, as though it were by these means that the Spartans were the masters of Greece (*hôs dê toutois kratountas tôn Hellênôn tous Lakedaimonious*)."

[3] Chapter 2, Part One.

[4] Cf. 327ab, where Protagoras speaks of craftsmen who refuse to share their trade secrets with potential competitors: "[N]o one now thinks of grudging or reserving his skill in what is just and lawful as he does in other expert knowledge (*tôn dikaiôn kai tôn nomimôn oudeis phthonei oud' apokruptetai hôsper tôn allôn technêmatôn*); for our neighbors' justice and virtue, I take it, is to our advantage, and consequently we all tell and teach one another what is just and lawful . . . ."

smart enough to ask themselves, "Are we continuing to fail because we are not trying hard enough along the lines of our current approach, or is it that we need to change our approach?" But if they fail to realize that it is their misguided approach that is responsible for their problems, and that "the Spartan cult (*to lakônizein*) is much more the pursuit of wisdom (*philosophein*) than of athletics (*philogumnastein*),"[1] then the Spartanizers may be said to suffer from the "distinctive kind of ignorance" mentioned in chapter 2, i.e., the ignorance of a person who fails to realize that the resistance he is encountering is due to his own wrongheaded approach.[2]

Socrates' diagnosis of what is wrong with the Spartanizers resembles my diagnosis of what is wrong with the typical akratic. Both the Spartanizer and the akratic adopt a 'non-epistemic,' largely 'manly' approach to the activity in question; both fail to realize that what they need to do is adopt a better approach, not try even harder along the lines of their current approach; and both end up struggling against unnecessary resistance as a result.

4.2.1.2.   Simonides

Consider how Simonides is characterized by Socrates:

> Then Simonides, ambitious to get a name for wisdom (*hate philotimos ôn epi sophia[i]*), perceived that if he could overthrow this saying (*ei katheloi touto to rêma*), as one might some famous athlete (*hôsper eudokimounta athlêtên*), and become its conquerer (*kai perigenoito autou*), he would win fame himself amongst men of that day (*autos eudokimêsei en tois tote anthrôpois*). Accordingly it was against this saying (*eis touto oun to rêma*), and with this aim (*kai toutou heneka*), that he composed the whole poem as a means of covertly assailing and abasing this maxim (*toutôi epibouleuôn kolousai auto hapan to a[i]sma pepoiêken*) . . . .[3]

This is a portrait combining one-upmanship, desire for fame, and athletic imagery, all characteristically 'manly' elements. But it is also a 'wisdom-oriented' portrait: Simonides is

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[1] 342e5-7.
[2] Section 2.1.4.
[3] 343bc.

ambitious (*philotimos,* 'honor-loving') specifically with regard to wisdom (*epi sophia[i]*). He is

trying to outdo an older rival, but that rival is a wise man,[1] and Simonides is trying to outdo him

in point of wisdom. And even as Socrates describes Simonides as being vehemently intent on

refuting and reproaching his opponent,[2] he reads into Simonides' poem some of his own most

'epistemic' views ('Virtue is knowledge'; 'No one errs willingly').[3] Like the larger discussion in

which it occurs, Socrates' characterization of Simonides is an uneasy union of 'manly' and

'epistemic' elements.

4.2.1.3.   Socrates

I argued in Part One that while conversing with Protagoras, Socrates is somewhat caught

up in the manly frame of mind, even as he also inhabits the epistemic frame of mind. In arguing

for this claim I did not help myself to any evidence from the section on Simonides' poem, yet

this section contains some of the strongest evidence. Observe how Socrates reacts when he

seems to the audience to have been refuted:

> This speech of his won a clamorous approval from many of his hearers (*eipôn oun tauta pollois*
> *thorubon pareschen kai epainon tôn akouontôn*); and at first I felt as though I had been struck by a
> skilful boxer (*hôsperei hupo agathou puktou plêgeis*), and was quite blind and dizzy (*eskotôthên te*
> *kai ilingiasa*) with the effect of his words and the noise of their applause."[4]

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[1] 339c3-4: "Nor does the saying of Pittakos / have, in my view, the ring of truth, though spoken by a wise man
(*kaitoi sophou para phôtos eirêmenon*) . . . ." (Andrew Miller's translation in *Greek Lyric,* Hackett, 1996.) At 343a
Pittacus is included in a list of the Seven Sages.

[2] 344b: "[L]et us go over its general outline and intention, which is assuredly to refute Pittacus's saying (*hoti pantos*
mallon elengchos esti tou Pittakeiou rêmatos), throughout the ode." 345d: "[A]nd in this vehement tone (*houtô*
sphodra) he pursues the saying of Pittacus (*epexerchetai tôi tou Pittakou rêmati*) all through the poem . . . ." 346e-
347a: "Hence I should never reproach you, Pittacus, if you would only speak what is moderately reasonable and
true. But as it is, since you lie so grievously about the greatest matters with an air of speaking the truth (*sphodra gar*
kai peri tôn megistôn pseudomenos dokeis alêthê legein), on this score I reproach you (*dia tauta se egô psegô*)."

[3] Cf. 345b5, 345d9-e4.

[4] 339d10-e3.

Socrates describes himself, perhaps ironically, as having been thrown into a different state of mind, a state of mind in which he cannot see clearly or find his bearings. From within this altered state of consciousness Socrates experiences what has just taken place in characteristically 'manly' terms: 'A violent act of athleticism directed against me has won my opponent vociferous praise from the crowd.' If an author wished to dramatize the experience of slipping suddenly into the manly frame of mind, it would be hard to compose a more perfect description.

Consider as well two passages in which Socrates uncharacteristically masks a lack of sure-footedness:

> Then do you think the second agrees with the first?
> So far as I can see, it does, I replied (at the same time, though, I was afraid there was something in what he said [*kai hama mentoi ephoboumên mê ti legoi*]). Why, I asked, does it not seem so to you (*atar, ephên egô, soi ou phainetai*)?[1]

> Then—to tell you the honest truth (*hôs ge pros se eirêsthai t'alêthê*)—in order to gain time for considering the poet's meaning (*hina moi chronos engenêtai tê[i] skepsei ti legoi ho poiêtês*), I turned to Prodicus . . . .[2]

Normally Socrates pretends to be *less* dialectically capable than he actually is.[3] Here it certainly looks as if, for fear of coming off badly in the debate, he is pretending the opposite. Now, it may be that Socrates is purposely going out on a 'manly' limb in order to achieve a larger 'epistemic' goal (e.g., protecting Hippocrates from Protagoras). But presumably Socrates could have found a graceful way of confessing that he did not have a ready answer. As for the first passage, Socrates might have adapted a line of his own from an earlier point in the dialogue:

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[1] 339c7-9.
[2] 339e3-5.
[3] Cf. 334cd, where Socrates calls himself "a forgetful sort of person," a comment which Alcibiades later dismisses (336d) as playful pretence.

> I . . . believe that virtue is not teachable [substitute: 'that Simonides does not contradict himself']: but when I hear you speak thus, I am swayed over (*kamptomai*), and suppose there is something in what you say (*oimai ti se legein*) . . . .[1]

That Socrates behaves as he does suggests to me that (with regard to the activity of conversing with Protagoras) he has at this point fallen more fully under the sway of the manly frame of mind.

But in the very section in which he comes across as most 'manly' and out of character, Socrates also expresses his most 'epistemic' and characteristically Socratic views about knowledge.[2] Thus the section on Simonides' poem only strengthens the case for a claim made in Part One of this chapter: that while conversing with Protagoras, Socrates is somewhat caught up in a manly frame of mind, even as he also inhabits a knowledge-oriented frame of mind.[3]

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[1] 320b4-6.

[2] As I noted just now, he attributes these views to Simonides (345b5, 345d9-e4).

[3] Patrick Coby, among others, has pointed out several similarities between Socrates and Pittacus and between Protagoras and Simonides ("Protagoras has so much in common with Simonides that it may be warranted . . . to treat Simonides as a surrogate for Protagoras"—Patrick Coby, *Socrates and the Sophistic Enlightenment,* p. 111). But few scholars seem to have noticed that Simonides is in some sense standing in for Socrates and that Pittacus is in some sense standing in for Protagoras. Protagoras, like Pittacus, is an older 'wise man' whose reputation for wisdom is already established. Socrates, like Simonides (at the time of writing his poem, according to Socrates), is a younger man who has yet to make much of a name for himself. Socrates says (343c1) that Simonides is "ambitious to get a name for wisdom (*hate philotimos ôn epi sophia[i]*)". Protagoras says (361e4-5) to Socrates, "I say I should not be surprised if you won high repute for wisdom (*ei tôn ellogimôn genoio andrôn epi sophia[i]*)." In the final line that Socrates puts into the mouth of Simonides (346e-347a) it is hard not to hear a Socratic rebuke of Protagoras: "Hence I should never reproach you, Pittacus, if you would only speak what is moderately reasonable and true. But as it is, since you lie so grievously about the greatest matters with an air of speaking the truth (*sphodra gar kai peri tôn megistôn pseudomenos dokeis alêthê legein*), on this score I reproach you (*dia tauta se egô psegô*)." For what it is worth, both 'Simonides' and 'Socrates' start with *sigma,* while 'Protagoras' and 'Pittacus' start with *pi*. It is probably going too far to claim that just as Simonides is attacking a famous dictum of Pittacus's, so Socrates (and through him, Plato) is attacking a famous dictum of Protagoras's (e.g., his 'man-measure' dictum, quoted by Socrates in the *Theaetetus*, 152a: "Man is the measure of all things: of the things which are, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not."). Nevertheless, the idea is not as far-fetched as it seems. At 361ab, when the personified 'upshot' (*exodos*) of the argument is charging Socrates with self-contradiction (cf. Simonides' seeming self-contradiction), it says that Socrates has been trying to show that "all things are knowledge" (*panta chrêmata estin epistêmê*). This, as Adam and Adam point out, is something of an exaggeration, "as if Socrates held επιστημη to be the αρχη of the universe . . . ." (Adam and Adam, p. 192). C. C. W. Taylor writes that this "is surely intended to recall, and to signify Plato's rejection of Protagoras's famous dictum 'Man is the measure of all things' (*pantôn chrêmatôn metron estin anthrôpos*)." (C. C. W. Taylor, p. 214.) Whether or not this supposed allusion exists in the *Protagoras,* there *is* an allusive passage in the *Laws* (716c) that is clearly intended to recall, and to signify Plato's rejection of, this dictum: "Now, God is the measure of all things (*ho dê theos hêmin pantôn*

To summarize: In light of Socrates' description of the Spartans and Cretans, his characterization of Simonides, and his own behavior, it is fair to say that multiple distinctions in this section correspond to my distinction between 'epistemic' and 'manly' ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

4.2.2.   Modes of conversing about what is good

I think that in the section on Simonides' poem there are two distinctions that clearly correspond to my distinction between 'epistemic' and 'non-epistemic' modes of thinking about what is good. I will first discuss the more specific distinction and then the more general one.

Even though the *makrologia/brachulogia* debate has already been resolved in his favor before this section begins, Socrates cannot help putting in another good word for *brachulogia.* He praises Spartan brevity at 342de,[1] and at 343b he explicitly says that a sort of Spartan *brachulogia* (*brachulogia tis Lakônikê*) was the mode or style (*tropos*) of doing philosophy

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chrêmatôn metron) in a sense far higher than any man could be, as the common saying affirms (*kai polu mallon ê pou tis, hôs phasin, anthrôpos*)." (Benjamin Jowett translation.) And the supreme elevation of god over man that characterizes this passage also characterizes Simonides' poem and Socrates' interpretation of it (cf. the crucial line, quoted twice by Socrates, "God alone can have this privilege" [341e, 344c]). So might it actually be true that just as Socrates views Simonides' poem as a "work of very elegant and elaborate art" whose "intention [is] assuredly to refute Pittacus's saying, throughout the ode" (344b), so Plato views the *Protagoras* as a work of elaborate art whose intention is to refute Protagoras's saying? The obvious objection is that Plato does indeed present an extended refutation of Protagoras's 'man-measure' dictum in the *Theaetetus*, but that no such refutation is to be found in the *Protagoras*. But although it is true that Protagoras's radical relativism is conspicuously absent in the *Protagoras* (not even at 333e-334c do we get a real example of it), his broadly 'man-oriented' approach to thinking and conversing about human goodness, as contrasted with Socrates' 'knowledge-oriented' approach, is on display throughout the dialogue. In this sense the *Protagoras* might possibly be viewed as an extended indictment, not of the subtle metaphysical-epistemological theory that lies behind Protagoras's famous dictum, but of its 'manly' or 'man-oriented' spirit. (I have benefited greatly from discussing this topic with Paul Muench.)
[1] 342d6-e4: "[I]f you choose to consort with the meanest of Spartans, at first you will find him making a poor show in the conversation; but soon, at some point or other in the discussion, he gets home with a notable remark, short and compressed (*brachu kai sunestrammenon*)—a deadly shot that makes his interlocutor seem like a helpless child (*hôste phainesthai ton prosdialegomenon paidos mêden beltiô*)."

favored by such men as the Seven Sages.[1] Indeed, Socrates says that his description of Spartan

brevity is meant to demonstrate that Spartans "have the best education in philosophy and

argument (*pros philosophian kai logous arista pepaideumenai*)."[2] If, as I have argued, Socrates'

distinction between *brachylogia* and *makrologia* in the debate over dialectical ground rules

(334c-338e) is essentially a distinction between an 'epistemic' and a 'non-epistemic' mode of

conversing about what is good, then Socrates' recollection of the same distinction here is one

more example of a distinction between 'epistemic' and 'non-epistemic' modes of thinking about

what is good.

Now for the more general distinction. When this section begins, the roles of questioner

and answerer have been reversed and Protagoras is in the driver's seat. But because of the

agreement to stick to *brachulogia* and because the only person who can now give long, evasive

answers is Socrates, there is good reason to expect a conversation in a broadly Socratic mode.

Indeed, one might expect Protagoras to grill Socrates in just the same way in which Socrates had

been grilling him. Instead, Protagoras turns what had been a direct investigation of virtue itself

into a discussion of the compositional merits of a poem about virtue, thus shifting the

conversation—albeit still within the general mode of *brachulogia*—into a less Socratic 'sub-

mode' more to his liking. As Protagoras puts it, his line of questioning will be *about* the same

thing as before (*peri tou autou men peri houper egô te kai su nun dialegometha*), namely virtue

(*peri aretês*); the "only difference" will be that the discussion will have been carried over into the

field of poetry (*metenênegmenon d' eis poiêsin· tosouton monon dioisei*).[3] Protagoras thus

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[1] 343b3-5: "To what intent do I say this? To show how the ancient philosophy had this style of laconic brevity (*hoti houtos ho tropos ên tôn palaiôn tês philosophias, brachylogia tis Lakônikê*) . . . ." Socrates mentions the Seven Sages at 343a.

[2] 342d4-6.

[3] 339a3-6. This is not, of course, the "only difference." Cf. Friedländer, p. 23: "[W]hen Protagoras claims that the poem deals with the subject under discussion, the obvious objection is that it does indeed deal with *aretê* but not with the questions of whether it is 'teachable' or whether it is 'one'."

comes close to saying: 'The *subject matter* of our discourse will remain the same. The *mode* alone will change.'

If the whole discussion of Simonides' poem may be seen as an exercise in a different mode of conversing about human goodness, is it a 'non-epistemic' mode? Recall the end of this section (347b-348a), where Socrates explicitly criticizes the mode of literary criticism itself. Socrates compares this way of conversing and the way in which he would prefer to converse to two different ways in which people might associate (*suneinai,* 'be together') at drinking-parties. Vulgar and uneducated people, he says, pay large sums of money to be diverted at their gatherings by the alien voice of a flute, whereas noble and well-educated dinner guests associate directly with each other by means of their own voices.[1] Socrates says that rather than distracting themselves by conversing about what some poet meant, something which cannot be 'put to the proof' (*ho adunatousi exelenxai*),[2] he and Protagoras should deal directly with each other, testing each other in turn as they inquire into the truth of some matter.[3] If the mode of poetic analysis is better suited to impressing a sophisticated audience and testing how clever a student of poetry somebody is,[4] Socrates' preferred mode of conversing seems better suited to testing how well people's characters square with their thoughts about human goodness, and to testing how well these thoughts measure up to the standard of knowledge.[5] When viewed in these terms, the

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[1] 347cd.

[2] 347e6-7.

[3] 348a1-6: "[M]en of culture . . . prefer to converse directly with each other (*autoi d' heautois suneisin di' heautôn*), and to use their own way of speech in putting one another by turns to the test (*en tois heautôn logois peiran allêlôn lambanontes kai didontes*). It is this sort of person that I think you and I ought rather to imitate; putting the poets aside, let us hold our discussion together in our own persons (*autous di' hêmôn autôn pros allêlous tous logous poieisthai*), making trial of the truth and of ourselves (*tês alêtheias kai hêmôn autôn peiran lambanontas*)."

[4] Cf. 338e6-339a1: "I consider, Socrates, that the greatest part of a man's education (*andri paideias megiston meros*) is to be skilled in the matter of verses (*peri epôn deinon einai*) . . . ."; 341e8-342a2: "But I should like to tell you what I take to be Simonides' intention in this ode, if you care to test my powers (*ei boulei labein mou peiran hopôs echô*), as you put it, in the matter of verses (*peri epôn*) . . . ."

[5] Cf. *Laches,* 187e-188c (Nicias speaking): "You strike me as not being aware that, whoever comes into close contact with Socrates and has any talk with him face to face, is bound to be drawn round and round by him in the

entire section on Simonides' poem, from Protagoras's introduction of a literary-critical mode of

conversing to Socrates' harsh critique of this mode, looks like one long contrast between

'epistemic' and 'non-epistemic' modes of thinking and conversing about what is good.[1]

4.2.3.   Being and becoming

I will now try to show that the distinctions drawn in the section on Simonides' poem

between 'becoming' (*genesthai*) and 'being' (*einai*) and between the human and the divine are

akin to my distinction between merely inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind and actually

possessing knowledge. In order to do this, I need to explain how I understand the

'being/becoming' distinction.

Michael Frede and Wolfgang-Rainer Mann, among others, have observed that the

distinction drawn in this section between 'becoming' (*genesthai*) and 'being' (*einai*) is rooted in

a fairly common Greek idiom, in accordance with which the phrase 'become + [adj.]' means

roughly 'display the kind of behavior that a [adj.] person would display.'[2] On this reading, the

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course of the argument—though it may have started at first on a quite different theme—and cannot stop until he is led into giving an account of himself (*eis to didonai peri hautou logon*), of the manner in which he now spends his days (*hontina tropon nun te zê[i]*), and of the kind of life he has lived hitherto (*kai hontina ton parelêluthota bion bebiôken*); and when once he has been led into that, Socrates will never let him go until he has thoroughly and properly put all his ways to the test (*basanisê[i] tauta eu te kai kalôs hapanta*). . . . [I]n fact, I knew pretty well all the time that our argument would not be about the boys if Socrates were present (*ou peri tôn meirakiôn hêmin ho logos esoito Sôkratous parontos)*, but about ourselves (*alla peri hêmôn autôn*)."

[1] For an interesting discussion of Socrates' critique of literary criticism and how it may be reconciled with Plato's own presentation of the *Protagoras* to a reading public, see Raphael Woolf, "The Written Word in Plato's *Protagoras*," *Ancient Philosophy,* 19 (1999), pp. 21-30.

[2] See Michael Frede's "Being and Becoming in Plato," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy,* Supplementary Volume, 1988, pp. 37-52, esp. pp. 46-8. Cf. his introduction to the Hackett edition of Plato's *Protagoras*, 1992, p. xiii: "The curious phrase "becoming good," as we can see from, for example, its repeated use in Thucydides (II, 87, 9; III, 64, 2 and 4; VII, 77, 7), refers to the kind of behavior a virtuous person would display, where it is left open, or even questioned, whether in the case at hand it actually is produced by virtue. When, in his speech (320c ff.), Protagoras claims that, and explains how, all Athenians teach virtue, what he largely seems to have in mind is a kind of conditioning which, by threat or lure, manages to make people, by and large, exhibit the kind of behavior thought admirable. But this, at best, constitutes "becoming good," rather than being good." See also Wolfgang Mann, *The Discovery of Things,* pp. 104-5: "[I]f we look at various Greek authors more closely, we find that 'becomes' is used rather frequently in the sense of 'display', 'manifest', 'take on a role', or 'act in a certain way', and so on"; p. 101: "[F]rom the fact that a soldier performs brave acts, we cannot conclude that he *is* brave or good (where this is to be

phrase 'to become good' (in some context, in some respect, at some time) should be understood here roughly in the sense of 'to display the kind of behavior that a good person would display' (in that context, in that respect, at that time). The idiom implies a gap between truly possessing some attribute and displaying the kind of behavior that someone who truly possessed that attribute would display, though its use does not necessarily suggest that the person in question does not truly possess the attribute in question. In other words, to say that a man 'became good' in battle is not necessarily to suggest that he merely acquitted himself well on the battlefield without actually *being* a good man. That said, when someone uses the phrase 'become good' in explicit opposition to the phrase 'be good', as Socrates does in this section, there is this further suggestion.

But what does Socrates mean by *being* good, as opposed to merely displaying the kind of behavior that a good person would display? The answer ought to line up with what Socrates says is the critical point of Simonides' poem: that when it comes to goodness, to 'become' is human, to 'be,' divine. While a human being can, with difficulty, *become* good, *being* good is not a human possibility: "Only a god could possess that prize (*theos an monos tout' echoi geras*)."[1]

But if 'being good' is something that could only apply to a god, what could be meant by 'being good'? Consider the following two possibilities:

(A) possessing the knowledge (*epistêmê*) of how to live well and living in accordance with this knowledge;

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understood as something like: is the sort of person who does brave acts *because* he is brave or virtuous; or is the sort of person who does them *in the way* the brave or virtuous person would do them; and, perhaps, is the sort of person who will be brave and good in *all* circumstances, from *all* points of view)." Cf. also Adam and Adam, p.164: "[B]y *andr' agathon men genesthai alatheôs* [Simonides] meant only 'that a man should prove himself truly good', i.e., quit himself like a perfect man: compare Hdt. VII 224 *Leônidês—piptei anêr genomenos aristos*, ... The usage is thoroughly idiomatic."

[1] 341e2 (Andrew Miller's translation in *Greek Lyric*, Hackett, 1996). See also 344bc.

(B) possessing the quality 'goodness' as a constitutive part of one's being, i.e., being *essentially* good.[1]

On the one hand, I am inclined to accept reading (B), since in his exegesis of Simonides, Socrates talks as if (A) is *not* out of the reach of human beings. Socrates suggests that learning (*mathêsis*) makes a person good (i.e., enables a person to display good behavior?)[2] and that no human being can remain in a state of 'having become good' (i.e., continue indefinitely to display good behavior?),[3] in part because *epistêmê* is never a *secure* human possession,[4] in part because *epistêmê* does not make a human being infinitely resourceful (e.g., there will always be certain adverse conditions in which even the expert steersman cannot save his ship or in which the expert farmer cannot save his crop).[5] Such talk suggests that while (A) is difficult and precarious for a human being, it is possible. By contrast, (B) is humanly impossible: not even the most

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[1] It is this second sense of 'being good' that Wolfgang-Rainer Mann suggests Plato is reaching for in this context, albeit inchoately. Mann glosses (I) '*X* is *Y*' and (II) '*X* becomes *Y*' as follows (p. 77):

"(I) '*X* is *Y*' is true, because being *y* is (part of) what being *x* is; or alternatively, because *x* is *y* in virtue of its own nature.

(II) '*X* is *Y*' is true, because *x* is *y*, even though being *y* is *not* (part of) what being *x* is; or alternatively, because *x* is *y*, but *not* in virtue of its own nature."

Cf. Mann's reformulation on p. 97: "The general distinction, then, that Socrates is gesturing towards is the following. On the one hand, there is taking on (at some time or in some circumstances) certain characteristics or features. But these features are not constitutive of the thing whose features they are; for the thing could just as well lack them—for example, at other times or in other circumstances. On the other hand, there is having features or characteristics in such a way that the thing whose features they are could not just as well lack them."

[2] 345a.

[3] 344b8-c2: *genomenon de diamenein en tautê[i] tê[i] hexei kai einai andra agathon . . . adunaton kai ouk anthrôpeion . . . .*

[4] Cf. 345b, where Socrates suggests that time (*chronos*) or hard labor (*ponos*) or sickness (*nosos*) or some other such thing can deprive a person of *epistêmê.*

[5] 344de: "A great storm breaking over a steersman will render him helpless (*ton kubernêtên megas cheimôn epipesôn amêchanon an poiêseien*), and a severe season will leave a farmer helpless (*geôrgon chalepê hôra epelthousa amêchanon an theiê*), and a doctor will be in the same case . . . [S]o that when an irresistible mischance (*amêchanos sumphora*) overthrows him who is resourceful, wise, and good (*eumêchanon kai sophon kai agathon*), he cannot but be bad." Cf. James Allen, "Failure and Expertise in the Ancient Conception of an Art," in *Scientific Failure*, edited by Tamara Horowitz and Allen I. Janis, 1994, pp. 81-106.

idealistic believer in the perfectibility of human nature would seriously entertain the idea that human beings are *necessarily* good *in virtue of* their nature.

On the other hand, I think that (B) is a bit too 'metaphysical' for the present context[1] and that perhaps (A), or something very much like (A), will do after all. For Socrates' reading of Simonides' view might be reformulated in this way: 'While it may be possible for a human being to acquire knowledge of how to live well and so *become* good, no human being can rest secure in his possession of this knowledge and thereby *be* good. On the contrary, human 'possession' of knowledge, if that is the right word for it, is a continuous struggle to remind, renew, and repair oneself, a kind of endless maintenance job.[2] Now, this is surely not the way in which the gods possess knowledge. To possess it as *they* do—without danger of loss, without anxious care—is not a human possibility.' One might also point to passages in other Platonic dialogues in which Socrates seems to put (A) quite out of the reach of mere human beings. I summarize these passages as follows: 'No human being whom I have yet met has seemed to me to possess the knowledge of how to live well. If ever I met such a person, I would be inclined to call him a god, or else to classify him as an altogether different sort of person, related to the rest of us as a living man is to the dead.'[3]

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[1] Socrates says nothing in the *Protagoras* about being 'necessarily' or 'essentially' good. Cf. Mann, p. 98: "[T]he *Protagoras* passage cannot represent a fully worked-out presentation of Plato's later thoroughgoingly metaphysical distinction between being and becoming."

[2] Cf. *Symposium* 207d-208b, where Diotima suggests that while *epistêmê* may be said to save the life of a human being, it is a human being's own *meletê* ('painstaking care') that saves his *epistêmê*. Cf. also *Laws* 732b.

[3] See *Apology* 23ab: "[B]ut the fact is, gentlemen, it is likely that the god is really wise (*tôi onti ho theos sophos einai*) and by his oracle means this: 'Human wisdom is of little or no value (*hê anthrôpinê sophia oligou tinos axia estin kai oudenos*).' And it appears that he does not really say this of Socrates, but merely uses my name, and makes me an example, as if he were to say: 'This one of you, O human beings, is wisest (*houtos humôn . . . sophôtatos estin*), who, like Socrates, recognises that he is in truth of no account in respect to wisdom (*egnôken hoti oudenos axios esti tê[i] alêtheia[i] pros sophian*).' (Harold North Fowler's translation, Loeb Classical Library.) See also *Meno* 99e-100a: "At the moment, if through all this discussion our queries and statements have been correct, virtue is found to be neither natural nor taught (*oute phusei oute didakton*), but is imparted to us by a divine dispensation without understanding (*theia[i] moira[i] paragignomenê aneu nou*) in those who receive it, unless there should be somebody among the statesmen capable of making a statesman of another (*ei mê tis eiê toioutos tôn politikôn andrôn hoios kai allon poiêsai politikon*). And if there should be any such, he might fairly be said to be among the

Though it is hard to determine just what is meant when Socrates speaks here of 'being good,' as opposed to 'becoming good,' I will assume that he means either (A) or something very much like (A): securely possessing the knowledge of how to live well and living in accordance with this knowledge, as opposed to displaying (in some context, in some respect, at some time) the kind of behavior that would be displayed (in that context, in that respect, at that time) by someone who had (secure) knowledge of how to live well. Having offered a rough interpretation of the 'being/becoming' distinction, I will now attempt to show what is already, I hope, partly visible: that the distinctions drawn in the section on Simonides' poem between 'becoming' and 'being' and between the human and the divine are akin to my distinction between merely inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind and actually possessing knowledge.

When laying out my conceptual framework in chapter 2, Part One, I distinguished between a good performance of some kind and the different approaches by which a person might attempt to bring off a good performance of that kind. This was, roughly speaking, a distinction between a certain kind of behavioral display and the different ways in which one might try to produce such a display. Later I focused on a special kind of performance—the living of a good human life—and described three different approaches by which a person might try to bring off this kind of performance: (1) by inhabiting the animal frame of mind (sc. with regard to the activity of living a human life); (2) by inhabiting the manly frame of mind; (3) by inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind. Each of these approaches may (in certain contexts, in certain respects, at certain times) enable a person to display the kind of behavior that a good human being would

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living what Homer says Teiresias was among the dead—'He alone has comprehension; the rest of us are flitting shades.' In the same way he on earth, in respect of virtue, will be a real substance among shadows (*hôsper para skias alêthes an pragma eiê pros aretên*)." (W. R. M. Lamb's translation, Loeb Classical Library.) Cf. *Phaedrus* 278cd.

display (in that context, in that respect, at that time). In other words, each approach may enable a person to *become* good to some degree. The ideal approach to 'becoming good' is, of course, by 'being good' (i.e., as I understand it, by securely possessing knowledge of how to live well and living in accordance with this knowledge). So long as one remains human, however, the 'being good' approach is not an option. What, then, is the best approach available to human beings? The Platonic answer, presumably, is whichever approach allows us to 'become' good in a way that *most closely approximates* 'being' good, i.e., that comes closest to securely possessing the knowledge of how to live well and living in accordance with this knowledge.

Which approach is that? I think it is the 'epistemic' approach, for two reasons. For one thing, a person who is self-consciously oriented towards living a life that is guided by knowledge is, all else being equal, more likely to make the kinds of observations and self-corrections that will lead him ever closer to living such a life than someone who is not self-consciously trying to live such a life.[1] Second, even when a person who adopts a 'non-epistemic' approach to his life ends up leading a life that in other respects bears a close resemblance to a life that is guided by knowledge, the fact that he is not self-consciously oriented towards this goal will always constitute an essential lack of resemblance between him and the person whose life is guided by knowledge, whereas even when a person who adopts an 'epistemic' approach to his life ends up leading a life that in other respects does not bear a close resemblance to a life that is guided by knowledge, the fact that he *is* self-consciously oriented towards the goal of a knowledge-guided life will always constitute an essential point of resemblance. Recall the passage from Plato's *Laws* in which two types of doctor are contrasted: the free doctor, who approaches the activity of healing in an 'epistemic' manner, and the slave doctor, so-called, who by years of empirical observation as a free doctor's assistant has developed an ability to treat patients tolerably well by

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[1] Cf. my comparison to a heliotropic plant in chapter 1, p. 11.

'non-epistemic' imitation.[1] On the one hand, it seems that as an experienced slave doctor may treat more patients more successfully than a person in the early stages of learning to be a free doctor, so an experienced person who adopts a 'non-epistemic' approach to his life may do better at 'becoming good' than a relatively inexperienced person who adopts an 'epistemic' approach to his life. On the other hand, as a promising first-year medical student whose approach to his studies is properly 'epistemic' already bears an essential resemblance to the free doctor that is not shared by the slave doctor, so a person who adopts an 'epistemic' approach to his life already bears an essential resemblance to a wholly good (i.e., perfectly knowledgeable) being, a resemblance which is not shared by a person who adopts a 'non-epistemic' approach. In this respect, at least, the 'epistemic' approach is better than 'non-epistemic' approaches at enabling human beings to 'become good' in a way that most closely approximates to 'being good.'

But there is also a simpler way in which the distinctions drawn by Socrates between 'becoming' and 'being' and between the human and the divine may be said to be akin to my distinction between merely inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind and actually possessing knowledge. Actually possessing knowledge is to *being* (and to divinity) as merely inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind is to *becoming* (and to humanity). On the one hand, there is the ideal, on the other, the creature who strives towards the ideal: (i) on the one hand, knowledge, on the other, the 'epistemically-minded' person who strives towards knowledge; (ii) on the one hand, divinity, on the other, the human being who strives to be like the god; (iii) on the one hand, *being* good, on the other, the creature whose best imitation of being good is to *become* good (to some degree, in some respect, at some time). The analogy only extends so far, but there is enough similarity here, I think, as well as enough substance in my previous observations, to justify the claim that the distinctions drawn in the section on Simonides' poem between 'becoming' and

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[1] *Laws* 720a-e.

'being' and between the human and the divine are akin to my distinction between merely inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind and actually possessing knowledge.

4.2.4.   Conclusion

Given that the section on Simonides' poem contains multiple distinctions that resemble my distinction between 'epistemic' and 'manly' frames of mind, others that resemble my distinction between 'epistemic' and 'non-epistemic' modes of thinking about what is good, and two more distinctions (between 'becoming' and 'being' and between the human and the divine) that are akin to my distinction between merely inhabiting the epistemic frame of mind and actually possessing knowledge, I think it is fair to conclude that ingredients in my account of akratic behavior are to be found throughout this section. And so I think that it is also fair to conclude, combining this result with the conclusions of the first part of this chapter and of the second part of chapter 3, that ingredients in my account of akratic behavior are to be found throughout the *Protagoras*.

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