

THE RIDICULOUSNESS OF
BEING OVERCOME BY PLEASURE:
PROTAGORAS 352 B 1–358 D 4

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1. Introduction

SOCRATES' celebrated denial of *akrasia* in *Protagoras* precisely criticizes the condition commonly conceived as knowingly being overcome by pleasure, i.e. knowledge-*akrasia*-through-pleasure. The critique crucially employs the argument form *reductio*. The argument and its immediate context are structured as follows:

- 352 B 1–353 B 6 debate over the power of knowledge
- 353 C 1–354 E 2 determination of popular commitment to ethical hedonism
- 354 E 3–355 C 1 introduction to the *reductiones*
 - 355 C 1–E 3 first use of *reductio* with commentary
- 355 E 4–356 C 3 second use of *reductio* with commentary
- 356 C 4–357 E 8 intellectualist explanation of *akrasia*
 - 358 B 3–D 4 introduction of the principle that no one willingly does bad.

In the first *reductio*, given ethical hedonism and the following description of the weakness of being overcome by pleasure,

(W1) A man willingly¹ performs an act, knowing it to be bad,² because he is overcome by pleasure (*Prot.* 355 A 7–B 1),

Socrates redescribes 'pleasure' in (W1) as 'goodness', viz.:

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¹ That is, the agent can freely choose to pursue or avoid the act.

² That is, while that act contains aspects of both goodness and badness, on balance the act contains more bad than good.

(W₂) A man willingly performs an act, knowing it to be bad, because he is overcome by goodness. (*Prot.* 355 D 1–3)

Socrates then suggests that (W₂) is ridiculous (*γελοῖον*) and comments on (W₂).

In the second *reductio* Socrates redescribes 'bad' in (W₁) as 'painful', viz.:

(W₃) A man willingly performs an act, knowing it to be painful, because he is overcome by pleasure. (*Prot.* 355 E 5–356 A 1)

And Socrates comments on (W₃).

This paper examines why Socrates thinks the popular conception of *akrasia* is ridiculous, in other words, why Socrates rejects the popular conception of *akrasia*. Several anglophone scholars discussed this question between 1964 and 1980.³ Since then, it has been relatively neglected, although Penner is a notable exception,⁴ and Weiss has something to say on the matter.⁵ Previous interpreters focus on the ridiculousness of (W₂) in particular. Their views—excluding Taylor's, which is broadly consistent with Gallop's⁶—may be summarized in chronological order as follows:

³ D. Gallop, 'The Socratic Paradox in the *Protagoras*' ['Paradox'], *Phronesis*, (1964), 117–29; G. Santas, 'Plato's *Protagoras* and Explanations of Weakness' ['Explanations'], *Philosophical Review*, 73 (1966), 3–33, repr. in Santas, *Socrates: Philosophy in Plato's Early Dialogues* (London, 1979), 195–217, 318–23; G. Vlastos, 'Socrates on *Acrasia*' ['*Acrasia*'], *Phoenix*, 23 (1969), 71–88; C. Taylor, *Plato: Protagoras* [*Protagoras*] (Oxford, 1976; rev. edn. 1990); M. Dyson, 'Knowledge and Hedonism in Plato's *Protagoras*' ['Knowledge'], *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 96 (1976), 32–45; G. Klosko, 'On the Analysis of *Protagoras* 351b–360e' ['Analysis'], *Phoenix*, 34 (1980), 307–22. Taylor, *Protagoras*, 181–6, helpfully summarizes the views of his predecessors.

⁴ T. Penner, 'Socrates on the Strength of Knowledge: *Protagoras* 351B–357E' ['Strength'], *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 79 (1997), 117–49.

⁵ R. Weiss, 'Hedonism in the *Protagoras* and the Sophist's Guarantee' ['Hedonism'], *Ancient Philosophy*, 10 (1990), 17–39. D. Russell, 'Protagoras and Socrates on Courage and Pleasure: *Protagoras* 349d *ad finem*' ['Courage'], *Ancient Philosophy*, 20 (2000), 311–38, thinks the argument is deliberately fallacious, but, at n. 23, approvingly cites the explanation in Santas, 'Explanations'. See also M. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1986), 109–17, although her treatment is not well engaged with the secondary literature.

⁶ Taylor, *Protagoras*, 182; and *ibid.* 185–6: '[Gallop's view] should be accepted as broadly correct . . . Gallop is right in his central contention that the argument for the incoherence of the common view is in establishing his thesis that wrong choice of pleasures and pains cannot occur otherwise than through error, and that having done so, he does not trouble to make explicit the contradiction in the common view to which he calls attention.'

Gallop: (W₂) is logically impossible. Precisely, (W₂) implies a self-contradiction; it amounts to saying that one may know a course of action to be bad, yet take it needlessly because one does not know it to be bad.⁷

Santas: (W₂) is psychologically impossible. Precisely, (W₂) contradicts the thesis of psychological hedonism, that humans seek to maximize pleasure.⁸

Vlastos: (W₂) is psychologically impossible. Precisely, (W₂) implies that one would knowingly choose the smaller of available goods.⁹

Dyson: (W₂) is 'silly', but Socrates does not explain why.¹⁰

⁷ Gallop, 'Paradox', 119: 'Let "X" be the compound assertion that Socrates undertakes at 355A to prove absurd. X may be regarded as a conjunction of two expressions, "P" and "Q". P says that a man knows evil things to be evil; and Q says that he does these evil things because he is overcome by pleasure. Socrates argues in effect: "Q entails the denial of P. Hence to assert X is to assert both P and not-P. Hence X is absurd".'

⁸ 'What Socrates has shown is that on the assumption of hedonism (ethical and psychological), one explanation of weakness commonly given by the masses, "overcome by pleasure", reduces to absurdity in the sense that (once we make the substitutions allowed by ethical hedonism and interpret "overcome" in the sense indicated) it contradicts the very principle of psychological hedonism that is universally employed by hedonists in the explanation of behavior.' Note that this citation is derived from the reprint of Santas's article in *Socrates: Philosophy in Plato's Early Dialogues* (London, 1979), 207. Klosko, 'Analysis', develops a position similar to Santas's, as he explicitly indicates at 307. The fundamental difference is that Klosko identifies the introduction and consequently implicit operation of the egoistic principle of psychological hedonism earlier in the discussion than Santas does. Klosko, especially at 313–14, argues that this principle is introduced and operative when Socrates establishes the popular commitment to ethical hedonism at 353 C 1–354 E 2: 'Not only is Egoism [=psychological hedonism] undoubtedly assumed here, but it is taken to be such an obvious truth that it is not mentioned and remains a tacit assumption.'

⁹ Vlastos suggests that the ridiculousness of (W₂) lies in the following claim: (V) So it is clear, he will say, that this is what you mean by 'being defeated', taking the greater evils in exchange for the fewer goods. Vlastos, 'Acrasia', 83, writes: 'Just what is there, then, in [(V)] that could be thought to do this? Nothing but the fact that here the *refutand* has been shown to entail that the man would choose the smaller good, knowing it to be the smaller. This is what Socrates takes to be so rank an impossibility that to confront his adversaries with this consequence of their thesis is to leave them speechless, utterly crushed.'

¹⁰ 'What is it precisely that is absurd about this proposition, or about its equivalent with the second substitution? . . . It is immediately felt to be fatuous at 355c–d3, but no logical inconsistency is spelled out' ('Knowledge', 32). 'What is it that is absurd? Merely that, on a very simple level, the popular thesis is silly. One cannot explain why a man who can do something good does something which he knows is bad, by saying that he is overcome by good. The essential element of conflict has been obliterated. There is another linguistic aspect too: the verb "overcome", *ἡττῶμενος*, appropriate to the reprehensible conditions in moral contexts, is ludicrous when

Weiss: (W₂) is psychologically impossible. Precisely, good/pleasure cannot 'cause someone to choose bad/pain'.¹¹

Penner: (W₂) is psychologically impossible. Precisely, diachronic-knowledge-*akrasia* is impossible.¹²

In accordance with their various positions, these interpreters variously locate the grounds of Socrates' view that (W₂) is ridiculous. Dyson and Weiss suggest that the ridiculousness of (W₂) is 'felt' or recognized immediately upon the redescription of (W₁) as (W₂). For Santas, the ridiculousness of (W₂) is revealed once Socrates has commented on (W₃) at 356c 3. For Gallop, Taylor, and Penner, the ridiculousness of (W₂) is not fully clarified until Socrates has presented his intellectualist explanation of weakness at 357e 8. In Vlastos's case, the ridiculousness of (W₂) is not fully clarified until after Socrates has introduced the principle that no one willingly does bad at 358d 4.¹³

This paper argues that Socrates' conception of the ridiculousness of the popular conception is made explicit through Socrates' comments on (W₂). There Socrates explains that

combined with "by good", *ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ*. There is nothing so rarified here as logical inconsistency, not one that is spelled out anyway' (36). Note that in a recent discussion R. Woolf, 'Consistency and *Akrasia* in Plato's *Protagoras* ['Consistency'], *Phronesis*, 47 (2002), 224–52, assumes without argument that Socrates does not make explicit the contradiction that (W₂) entails. In this respect his position is akin to Dyson's. On the other hand, Woolf proceeds to claim at 225 that this is 'an aspect of the argument that scholars have sometimes noted but never, I think, properly considered'. What Woolf means is that it is noteworthy that scholars have not commented on the 'fact' that Socrates does not explain the ridiculousness of (W₂). This is remarkable since the alleged fact is in contention and since the explanation of the ridiculousness of (W₂) has been at the centre of the discussion of the argument since the mid-1960s.

¹¹ 'For if pleasure is identical to good, we have to say that a person can know that *x* is bad/painful and still choose *x* because overcome by good/pleasure—how ridiculous! How can good/pleasure cause someone to choose bad/pain?' ('Hedonism', 23). 'The absurdity arises as soon as the substitution of "good" for "pleasure" is made. . . it is not delayed. See Dyson 1976' (n. 41). Note that D. Sedley's view, in 'Platonic Causes', *Phronesis*, 43 (1998), 114–32, is related to Weiss's. Sedley argues that Plato is committed to the view that opposites cannot cause opposites. Accordingly, it is metaphysically impossible for goodness to cause badness: '*Protagoras* 355d: that people should do what is bad because they are overcome by what is good is "ridiculous" (*γελοῖον*). (That the talk of being "overcome by" something states the *cause* of the behaviour in question has been made explicit back at 352d8, *αἴτιον*, and 353a1, *διὰ ταῦτα*)' (117).

¹² Penner, 'Strength', *passim*.

¹³ Taylor, *Protagoras*, 185, claims that for Vlastos the ridiculousness of (W₂) emerges at 355e 3. Weiss, 'Hedonism', n. 41, claims that Vlastos 'locates the absurdity at 356c3'.

(T) Being overcome by goodness implies that the quantity of goodness on balance of the akratic action is greater than the quantity of badness on balance. However, by definition the quantity of the badness on balance of the akratic action is greater than the quantity of goodness on balance. Thus, the popular conception is ridiculous because it is self-contradictory.

'*Reductio*' is typically used to refer to *reductio ad absurdum*. But there are other kinds of *reductio*: *reductio ad impossibile*, *ad falsum*, *ad ridiculum*, and *ad incommodum*. In fact, the phrase *reductio ad absurdum* is sometimes liberally used to refer to these other forms. Strictly speaking, however, *reductio ad absurdum* entails self-contradiction, whereas *reductio ad impossibile* entails impossibility, *ad falsum* falsehood, *ad ridiculum* implausibility, and *ad incommodum* anomaly. Santas, Vlastos, Weiss, and Penner ought, therefore, to claim that Socrates' critique employs *reductio ad impossibile*, not *reductio ad absurdum*. My view, like Gallop's, maintains that Socrates employs *reductio ad absurdum*.

The popular view holds that *akrasia* occurs often; indeed, the frequency of putative *akrasia* is repeatedly emphasized. Socrates too thinks that there is some kind of common weakness. Following his *reductiones*, he therefore proceeds to give his own explanation of *akrasia*. This is based on the view that agents often misjudge, precisely mismeasure, the relative quantities of goodness and badness of their actions as a result of their propinquity to and distance from these aspects of the action. Finally, following this explanation, Socrates introduces the principle that no one willingly does bad. Given ethical hedonism, which remains operative throughout the discussion, this principle implies that it is psychologically impossible knowingly to do bad. Ultimately, then, Socrates' critique presents two different reasons for rejecting the popular conception of *akrasia*. The first argues that the concept of being overcome by pleasure is ridiculous because self-contradictory. The second suggests that knowingly doing bad is psychologically impossible.¹⁴

In sum, this paper is largely concerned with the form of Socrates'

¹⁴ This duality of reasons to some extent explains why commentators have located Socrates' explanation of the ridiculousness of (W₂) at various places. My claim is that Socrates' explanation of the ridiculousness of (W₂) *per se* is made explicit in his comments on (W₂). But because Socrates agrees with the many that some sort of weakness is common and because Plato's intent is to explain this weakness as well as

critique at 354 E 3–358 D 4. This specifically includes the kind of *reductio* Socrates employs and more generally the way that the *reductio* relates to the intellectualist explanation and introduction of the principle that no one willingly does bad that follow. In the course of explaining the form of Socrates' critique—indeed, in order effectively to explain the form of Socrates' critique—the paper will also do the following. The inadequacies of the alternative interpretations of the ridiculousness of (W₂) will be shown. The function of the introduction and discussion of (W₃) within the *reductio* will be clarified. A number of troublesome philological points within the passage will be resolved, including the meanings of ἀξίον and its cognates within the *reductio*, τὸ ἐγγύς καὶ τὸ πόρρω at 356 B 2, and the verbal adjectives ληπτέον and πρακτέον at 356 B 4, 8, C 1. Finally, it will be explained why, although Socrates begins his argument by focusing on knowledge-*akrasia*, he concludes his argument by including belief-*akrasia*.

2. Socrates' comments on (W₂)

Following the redescription of (W₁) as (W₂), Socrates says that an arrogant interlocutor will laugh at (W₂) and say:

What a ridiculous thing you are saying, that someone does bad things, knowing that they are bad, and not having to do them, because he is overcome by good things. (*Prot.* 355 D 1–3)

In other words, this passage expresses that (W₂) is ridiculous. I suggest that the arrogant interlocutor and Socrates find (W₂) ridiculous in virtue of the concept of being overcome by good things and that the immediately subsequent passage 355 D 3–E 3, in which Socrates comments on the *reductio*, explains why (W₂) is ridiculous as such. In contrast, Dyson and Weiss,¹⁵ who claim that the ridiculousness of (W₂) is immediately evident and not explained, are obliged to clarify the function of the following discussion of (W₂). Neither addresses this point.¹⁶

to reject the popular explanation of it, the psychological impossibility of knowingly doing bad is subsequently introduced.

¹⁵ See also Woolf, 'Consistency'.

¹⁶ In fact, Weiss does not present an argument for her position. As an explanation of the immediately evident ridiculousness of (W₂) she merely poses the following

The passage 355 D 3–E 3 begins with a question:

'Is this,' [the arrogant interlocutor] will ask, 'in your judgement [ἐν ὑμῖν],¹⁷ with the good things not being worthy [ἀξίων] of conquering the bad things, or worthy?' (*Prot.* 355 D 3–4)

rhetorical question: 'How can good/pleasure cause someone to choose bad/pain?' ('Hedonism', 23). It might be answered that one can choose a painful operation in order to restore one's health. To this, Weiss perhaps would object that Socrates means quite the opposite, namely being compelled by a lesser good to pursue a course of action that on balance yields a greater bad. But then Weiss would be offering an explanation or the beginnings of an explanation of (W₂) that is not immediately evident. In short, Weiss needs to clarify what is evidently ridiculous about goodness/pleasure causing someone to choose badness/pain. While Dyson states that Socrates does not explain the silliness of (W₂), he does proceed to offer an explanation for the silliness of (W₂). Accordingly, then, the explanation Dyson offers must be one that is obvious in the light of Socrates' redescription of (W₁) as (W₂). Dyson makes the two points cited in n. 10 above: (i) 'One cannot explain why a man who can do something good does something which he knows is bad, by saying that he is overcome by good. The essential element of conflict has been obliterated'; and (ii) 'the verb "overcome", ἡττώμενος, appropriate to the reprehensible conditions in moral contexts, is ludicrous when combined with "by good", ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ'. (ii) strikes me as dubious. Imagine that Alcibiades was tempted to betray Athens to Sparta, but on reflecting on his ties of citizenship and friendship and ultimately finding himself overcome by a deep sense of loyalty and patriotism, he decided against betrayal. One might say here that the good overcame the bad or that the bad was defeated by the good in him. The main problem with (i) is not that it cannot be fashioned into a plausible explanation for the intuitively evident ridiculousness of (W₂). For example, Dyson suggests that the popular account of weakness itself entails a conflict. I presume this is between the strength of knowledge to motivate one course of action, which is good, and the strength of pleasure to motivate a contrary course of action, which is bad. On the redescription of (W₁) as (W₂), the conflict becomes 'obliterated', then, because being overcome by the good suggests choosing the good course of action, yet being overcome by the good actually results in the bad choice of action. I would prefer to say that the essential elements that characterize the conflict become conflated so that the conflict becomes unintelligible. However, Dyson does not explain why Socrates proceeds at 355 D 3–E 3 to comment on (W₂) and to do so in precisely the way that he does. (Consider Taylor, *Protagoras*, 183: '[the ridiculousness of (W₂)] is not merely asserted, as something obvious, but is intended to be shown by some argument'.)

¹⁷ The phrase ἐν ὑμῖν has puzzled some commentators. It is questionable what ἐν means and to whom ὑμῖν refers. Vlastos, 'Acrasia', n. 28, suggests that the pronoun refers to the many who maintain that pleasure may overpower knowledge. This is consistent with the arrogant interlocutor's immediately preceding statement, whose addressee is in the second-person plural (λέγετε, *Prot.* 355 D 1). Moreover, as Vlastos rightly notes, 'If the reference were to a struggle between good and [bad] in the agent's soul the pronoun would have been in the third person singular.' Furthermore, Vlastos claims that ἐν should be taken in the sense of *before one's tribunal*. Compare *Gorg.* 464 D 5: 'if a baker and a doctor had to compete before children [ἐν παισίν]'. Closer to home, B. Manuwald, *Platon: Protagoras* (Göttingen, 1999), 408, compares it with *Prot.* 337 B 4–5: 'you, the speakers, will be esteemed by us [ἐν ἡμῖν]'. Compare also *Laws* 916 B 5, and *Soph. Ant.* 459, 925; *OC* 1214; *OT* 677.

One interpretative difficulty with the arrogant interlocutor's question is the adjective *ἀξίων*. Specifically, it is unclear what it means to ask whether the good things are *worthy* of conquering the bad things or vice versa. The adjective implies that the good things have a certain value. Accordingly, I take the question to ask whether the value of the good things is superior to the value of the bad things. The answer given to this question is that the good things, namely the pleasures by which the akratic is allegedly overcome, are *not* worthy of conquering the bad things:

Clearly we will reply that they [viz. the good things] are not worthy [of conquering the bad things], for then [*γάρ*] he who we say is overcome by pleasures would not have erred [*ἐξημάρτανεν*]. (*Prot.* 355 D 4–6)

This passage explains that the value of the good things is inferior to the value of the bad things because if the value of the good things were superior to the value of the bad things, then the action would not be an error. In other words, the action *qua* error is understood to contain more badness than goodness on balance.

It is made explicit in the following passage that the relative worth or value of good and bad things is indeed understood in terms of their relative quantities:

And in what sense . . . are the good things unworthy of the bad things or the bad things unworthy of the good things? Can it be otherwise than that the ones are greater and the others smaller, or that the ones more and the others less? We will not be able to say anything other than this. (*Prot.* 355 D 6–E 2)

In short, this passage confirms that the akratic action on balance contains a larger quantity of badness than goodness. Consequently, it is concluded:

'Then it is clear', he will say, 'that this being overcome of which you speak is the taking of greater bad things in exchange [*ἀντί*]'¹⁸ for lesser good things.' (*Prot.* 355 E 2–3)

At this point, commentary on (W₂) ceases and Socrates turns to (W₃). I suggest that the reason why commentary on (W₂) here ceases is that the self-contradiction has now been fully revealed. The original claim was that the agent was overcome by good things.

¹⁸ On this translation of *ἀντί*, see J. Stokes, 'The Argument of Plato, *Protagoras* 351b–356c', *Classical Quarterly*, 7 (1913), 100–4.

It has been explained that being overcome by good things implies that the quantity of good things is superior to the quantity of bad things. But by definition the akratic agent erred, and this implies that his action contains a greater quantity of bad things than good things. Thus, the popular conception is self-contradictory, and so ridiculous.

3. Socrates' comments on (W₃)

In the introduction to the *reductiones* Socrates says:

It will be clear that these things are ridiculous if we do not use many words at once, pleasant and painful, good and bad.¹⁹ But since these things appeared to be two, let us speak of them using two words, first good and bad, and then in turn pleasant and painful. (*Prot.* 355 B 3–C 1)

Thus, after Socrates has commented on (W₂), he redescribes 'bad' in (W₁) as 'painful'. In other words, he expresses (W₃), and then at 356 A 1–C 3 he comments on (W₃). Clearly, then, Socrates regards his treatment of (W₃), as well as (W₂), as part of the critique of the popular conception. Accordingly, an explanation of the critique should incorporate Socrates' comments on (W₃).

Given the redescription of (W₁) as (W₃), it should follow that the agent knowingly takes greater pains in exchange for lesser pleasures. This does follow; Socrates speaks of the pleasure as unworthy of defeating the pain (*Prot.* 356 A 1), and he explains the unworthiness in terms of relative quantities (*Prot.* 356 A 1–5).

But at this point Socrates considers a potential objection: in estimating the value of a course of action, it is not merely the respective sum quantities of pleasure and pain that count, but also the relative temporal propinquity to and distance from the agent in the present of the pleasure and pain (*Prot.* 356 A 5–7). The objection suggests that although a course of action may be more painful than pleasant on balance, the immediacy of the pleasure vs. the remoteness of the pain may count in favour of pursuing the action. Socrates anticipates the potential objection in the following remarks:

[Does the immediately pleasant differ from the remotely pleasant or painful] in anything other than pleasure and pain? There is no other distinction. But like a man good at weighing, once you have assembled the pleasures

¹⁹ Since the use-mention distinction is not employed, I will not import it.

and the pains and set on a scale the near and the distant, tell me which ones are greater.²⁰ For if you weigh pleasures against pleasures, the greater and the more are always to be chosen; whereas if you weigh pains against pains, the smaller and fewer should be chosen [ληπτέα]. And if you weigh pleasures against pains and the pleasures exceed the pains, be it the remote exceeding the near or the near exceeding the remote, that course of action should be taken [πρακτέον]. But if the pains exceed the pleasures, then they should not be done [πρακτέα]. (Prot. 356 A 7–C 1)

Socrates here asserts that the agent's temporal relation to pleasures and pains does not affect the value of the pleasures and pains. Rather, the value of pleasures and pains depends only on their relative magnitudes. Thus, the relative quantities of pleasures, aggregated from those both near and remote, and pains, aggregated from

²⁰ There has been some question over the Greek here: ἀλλ' ὡσπερ ἀγαθὸς ἰσάναι ἀνθρώπος, συνθεῖς τὰ ἡδέα καὶ συνθεῖς τὰ λυπηρά, καὶ τὸ ἐγγὺς καὶ τὸ πόρρω στήσας ἐν τῷ ζυγῷ, εἰπέ πότερα πλείω ἐστὶν (Prot. 356 A 8–B 3). Gallop writes: 'Socrates' position throughout this passage must be that nearness or remoteness in time do not affect the size of pleasures and pains, and therefore should not affect the agent's choice. But the words in 356b2, καὶ τὸ ἐγγὺς καὶ τὸ πόρρω στήσας ἐν τῷ ζυγῷ, are somewhat difficult. It would be easiest to take τὸ ἐγγὺς καὶ τὸ πόρρω in apposition to τὰ ἡδέα and τὰ λυπηρά in the previous line. But in that case we should expect τὰ ἐγγὺς and τὰ πόρρω as in b7 below. If, on the other hand, τὸ ἐγγὺς and τὸ πόρρω are to be translated (with W. R. M. Lamb, Loeb edition) "nearness" and "remoteness", and Socrates means that these are separate factors to be thrown into the balance along with pleasures and pains, he might seem to be contradicting his contention that the time factor is irrelevant. However, there need be no contradiction. He must mean (unless the words are in apposition) that when calculating the size of pleasures and pains, due allowance should be made for their nearness and remoteness, since these will cause them to seem larger or smaller than they really are. Temporal factors are relevant in estimating their real size just because they affect their apparent size. This, of course, is quite different from saying that a near pleasure should *ipso facto* count for more than a remote one, the very antithesis of Socrates' view' ('Paradox', n. 8; and see Taylor, *Protagoras*, 190, who cites Gallop approvingly). Gallop surely is correct that Socrates believes the apparent size of the pleasures and pains does not necessarily reflect their actual size and as such should not dictate choice; however, Gallop's interpretation of καὶ τὸ ἐγγὺς καὶ τὸ πόρρω cannot be right. Note that the pronoun and adjective in the relative clause πότερα πλείω ἐστὶν are plurals: 'which ones are more'. So Socrates cannot mean that one should assemble all pleasures, near and remote, into one aggregate and all pains, near and remote, into one aggregate and compare these, for in that case only one aggregate will be more. Therefore, I suggest that τὸ ἐγγὺς and τὸ πόρρω refer to each of four aggregates of near and distant pleasures and pains. Once one knows the magnitude of each of these four aggregates, one will know not simply whether the action is on balance more pleasant or painful, but more precisely how its pleasures and pains are distributed and related. This interpretation is further strongly supported by the following sentence in which Socrates speaks of comparing the weights of near and remote pleasures and comparing the weights of near and remote pains, as well as the aggregates of near and remote pleasures and near and remote pains.

those both near and remote, should guide one's course of action. I emphasize that Socrates' is not simply a dogmatic assertion that the agent's temporal relation to the pleasures and pains does not affect the values of those pleasures and pains. His point implies the distinction between the objective and the subjective values of things. In other words, he will grant an objector that a proximate pleasure may seem more attractive to an agent than a remote pleasure. But, again, the actual values of the proximate and remote pleasures are independent of their temporal relations to the agent.

The verbal adjectives ληπτέα, πρακτέον, and πρακτέα in the preceding passage have been a source of controversy. Precisely, it is controversial whether they should be taken as implying prudential obligations and so as meaning *should be taken* and *should be done* or whether they should be taken as implying psychological necessity and so as meaning *must be taken* and *must be done*. The significance of the dispute is that if they are taken in the latter sense, then they can be employed as evidence that psychological hedonism implicitly operates throughout the *reductio*. For example, Santas maintains the psychological-necessity interpretation of the adjectives and argues that the sense of the *reductio* emerges with Socrates' comments on (W3): knowingly preferring less goodness/pleasure to more badness/pain is inconsistent with psychological hedonism.²¹

Gallop and Taylor defend the prudential-obligation interpretation. Gallop argues that after the imperative εἰπέ at 356 B 3 'it is natural to read [the verbal adjectives] as gerundives, specifying what ought to be done' ('Paradox', 128). This evidence is not persuasive. The command to calculate the quantities of pleasure and pain is perfectly compatible with either a prudential-obligation or a psychological-necessity interpretation of the verbal adjectives.²²

²¹ 'Explanations', 30–1.

²² Taylor more cautiously argues that since 'the imperative "say" suggests that Socrates is setting out a procedure to be followed . . . it is somewhat less plausible to take Socrates here to be asserting the impossibility of knowingly choosing the lesser aggregate of pleasure' (*Protagoras*, 190). Again, the reason is unpersuasive. The imperative implies that the agent is obliged to calculate quantities of pleasure and pain, and the obligation here is prudential; it will pay to calculate correctly. But psychological hedonism is perfectly compatible with this obligation. The agent *ought to calculate well* since he *may* miscalculate and he *will* choose the course of action he perceives to be more pleasurable. Weiss also cites Gallop in defence of the prudential interpretation. She adds that perhaps 'additional support may be gleaned from the frequent talk of "salvation" in this passage, suggesting that choosing the more pleasant alternative is something we surely *ought to do*' ('Hedonism', n. 45). Once again,

Taylor offers seemingly more compelling grounds. He claims 'not to have discovered any clear instance of the use of this construction to signify a universal psychological necessity, where it is literally impossible for the agent to act otherwise'. Furthermore, he claims that 'in all the Platonic uses of the adjectives *lēpteos* and *prakteos* recorded by Ast, the context is one where a course of action is recommended' (*Protagoras*, 190).²³ Among Platonic dialogues that are generally accepted as authentic and aside from the instances here in *Protagoras*, Brandwood lists two instances of *ληπτέων*: *Phileb.* 34 D 2, 61 A 5;²⁴ and six instances of *πρακτέων*: *Crito* 46 B 3, 47 B 9; *Gorg.* 499 E 4, 7, 506 C 8, *Rep.* 457 A 9.²⁵ The adjectives *ληπτέα* and *πρακτέα* occur only here in *Protagoras*.²⁶ The instances of *ληπτέων* and the instances of *πρακτέων* in *Crito* and *Republic* conform to Taylor's position. Not so the instances of *πρακτέων* in *Gorgias*. At *Gorg.* 499 E 1 ff. Socrates and Callicles have the following exchange:

SOCR. . . . aren't some pains good and others bad too?

CALL. Of course.

SOCR. Must we not then choose [*αίρετέων*] and pursue [*πρακτέων*] the good pleasures and pains? . . .

CALL. Certainly.

SOCR. Yes, for Polus and I both thought, if you recall, that all things must be done [*πρακτέων*] for the sake of good things. (*Gorg.* 499 E 1-7)

In his last remark Socrates is referring to his first argument with Polus concerning whether orators do what they desire. Precisely, Socrates is referring to the following statement:

And so, it is for the sake of the good that those who do all these things [viz. the despots who execute, exile, and confiscate property] do them. (*Gorg.* 468 B 7-8)

Moreover, this conclusion depends upon the following previously derived conclusions: people desire the good as an end and act for the sake of the good (*Gorg.* 467 C 5-468 B 4). In this passage these claims in fact operate as psychological axioms.²⁷ Accordingly, when

this is compatible with the psychological-necessity interpretation; the obligation may fall only on calculating well.

²³ Taylor here mistakenly cites Gallop as maintaining the psychological-necessity interpretation.

²⁴ See also *Epin.* 991 C 7.

²⁵ See also *Clit.* 408 E 1; *Def.* 411 D 7 (twice); *Demod.* 382 A 1, 3.

²⁶ See also the instances of *πρακτέα* at *Demod.* 381 E 6; *Eryx.* 394 A 1.

²⁷ Their correct interpretation is, of course, highly controversial; see K. McTighe,

at *Gorg.* 506 C 7-9 Socrates elicits Callicles' assent to the proposition that one must pursue (*πρακτέων*) the pleasant for the sake of the good, this proposition also conforms to these psychological axioms. There is, then, Platonic evidence outside of *Protagoras* of the use of the verbal adjectives in contexts of psychological necessity. Therefore, Taylor's reason for the prudential-obligation interpretation is poor.

Since Gallop's and Taylor's arguments fail, the question arises how the interpretation of the verbal adjectives is to be decided. Clearly we must look to the broader context of the argument. Scholars such as Santas and Vlastos readily point to the Socratic principle that no one willingly does bad, which features in the discussion immediately following Socrates' intellectualist explanation of *akrasia*, and which in the context of the discussion implies psychological hedonism.²⁸ In contrast, Taylor rightly notes that *up to the point in the argument where the verbal adjectives occur*, psychological hedonism has not been introduced (*Protagoras*, 189). Indeed, in view of the argument up to this point, Socrates could not reasonably expect the verbal adjectives to be understood otherwise than according to the prudential-obligation interpretation. On *this* ground, I submit that the prudential-obligation interpretation is the correct one.²⁹

'Socrates on the Desire for Good and the Involuntariness of Wrongdoing: *Gorgias* 466a-468e', *Phronesis*, 29 (1984), 193-236; T. Penner, 'Desire and Power in Socrates', *Apeiron*, 24 (1991), 147-202; H. Segvic, 'No One Errs Willingly: The Meaning of Socratic Intellectualism', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 19 (2000), 1-45. Elsewhere I have defended the position that Plato intended to advance the view that all people desire particular objects or courses of action that they believe to be good, whether or not these objects or courses of action actually are good. See e.g. D. Wolfsdorf, 'Desire for Good in *Meno* 77b2-78b6', *Classical Quarterly*, forthcoming (2006).

²⁸ See Vlastos, 'Acrasia', 83-5.

²⁹ This conclusion, then, also undermines Santas's interpretation of the *reductio*. See Taylor, *Protagoras*, 189-90, and Weiss, 'Hedonism', n. 45, who reject Santas's interpretation for the same reason. For his part, Vlastos suggests that (W₂) is not ridiculous *qua* self-contradiction: 'To get anything like a self-contradiction out of [(W₂)] we would have to understand it to mean: [(W_{2.1})] Knowing that Y is the worse option, the agent chooses it because of his desire for *good* (i.e., for good as such)' ('Acrasia', 82). Rather, Vlastos argues that (W₂) is to be interpreted as: (W_{2.2}) Knowing that Y is the worse option, the agent chooses it because of his desire for goods, that is, the goods of the moment. Thus, Vlastos writes: 'There is no contradiction [i.e. self-contradiction] in "I choose this action, knowing it to be bad on the whole, because I want this particular good (which I can only get by choosing this action)"' (82). Instead, the ridiculousness of (W₂) lies in: (W_{2.3}) One knowingly chooses the smaller of two goods. Vlastos describes this as an impossibility in so far as it contradicts the Socratic tenet that all men desire to live well, that if one wants X more than Y, one will choose X rather than Y, and that if one knows that X is

In view of this conclusion and the preceding remarks on the content of Socrates' comments on (W₃), the function of (W₃) within the critique emerges as follows. In the commentary on (W₂), Socrates explains that (W₂) is ridiculous because being overcome by pleasure implies both that the quantity of goodness of the akratic action on balance is greater than the quantity of badness, but also the contrary. In the commentary on (W₃), Socrates adds that the agent's temporal relation to goodness or pleasure and badness or pain does not affect the value and so magnitude of the goodness or badness. As such, this point addresses a potential objection to Socrates' explanation of the ridiculousness of (W₂). It also serves as preparatory to Socrates' subsequent intellectualist explanation of *akrasia*, for it introduces the concept of the agent's temporal relation to the good and bad aspects of the action. Although Socrates maintains that the value of the good and bad aspects of the action does not depend upon the agent's temporal relation to them, he does argue that an agent's estimation of the value of the good and bad aspects of the action may be affected by his temporal relations to them.³⁰

better than Y, one will want X more than Y (83-4). As Taylor, *Protagoras*, 184, has rightly observed, Vlastos's reason for rejecting (W₂) as a self-contradiction contains a simple error, namely that Socrates does not distinguish between being overcome by *pleasure* or *good as such* and being overcome by *particular pleasures* or *goods*. Throughout his analysis of the condition of being overcome by pleasure, Socrates uses the singular ἡδονή and the plural ἡδοναί interchangeably (singular at 358 D 8, 353 A 3, 355 C 3-4; plural at 352 E 7-353 A 1, 353 C 2, 355 A 8-B 1, 355 B 3, 356 A 1). Admittedly, this does not refute Vlastos's claim that (W₂) is ridiculous in so far as it implies (W_{2.3}) and (W_{2.3}) contradicts other Socratic psychological tenets. But it does require that Vlastos identify other evidence for taking (W₂) as ridiculous as such. Since evidence for the Socratic psychological tenets to which Vlastos refers is not explicit in *Protagoras* until after Socrates' explanation of the principle that no one willingly does bad, Vlastos must admit that the ridiculousness of (W₂) and (W₃) does not emerge until 358 D 4.

³⁰ Socrates' introduction and discussion of (W₃) do not, then, *per se* serve to explain the ridiculousness of (W₂). Again, the ridiculousness of (W₂) is clarified once Socrates has commented on it at 355 E 3. In contrast, Taylor argues that the ridiculousness of (W₂) cannot emerge at 355 E 3 since (W₃) is not presented as an independent thesis from (W₂) and Socrates proceeds to discuss (W₃) at 355 E 4-356 C 3. However, we have seen now that Socrates' discussions of (W₂) and (W₃) serve different functions. Likewise, Gallop fails to appreciate that Socrates' treatments of (W₂) and (W₃) serve different functions. Gallop claims that the 'analysis (356a1-5) [of (W₃)] is equally inconclusive' and that '[W₃] is treated much as [(W₂)] was treated above, presumably in order to reduce it to some such expression as "taking greater pains in exchange for lesser pleasures" . . . But, as before, there is no self-evident [ridiculousness] in saying that a man knows painful things, yet takes greater

4. Socrates' explanation of *akrasia* and the principle that no one willingly errs

In the course of his critique, Socrates describes the popular conception of *akrasia* in the following terms:

. . . the masses think that often [πολλάκις] when a person has knowledge, the knowledge does not rule him, but something else does, sometimes passion, sometimes pleasure, sometimes pain, occasionally love, and often fear . . . (Prot. 352 B 5-8)

Most people . . . say that many men [πολλοὺς], who know what the best thing to do is and are able to do it, are unwilling to do it and do something else . . . They say [the reason for this is] that they are overcome by pleasure or pain or by one of those things by which I was just saying that agents are overpowered when they act. (Prot. 352 D 5-E 2)³¹

The many do not claim that whenever a person with knowledge is tempted to act on account of pleasure, pain, or the like, knowledge is always overpowered. Such a view is highly counter-intuitive and so could hardly represent popular opinion. Rather, the many suggest that *akrasia* occurs often and that many people experience it.

In contrast, Socrates commits to the proposition in the following question:

Do you agree with this view of knowledge, or do you consider that knowledge is something fine and able to govern a person and that if ever [εάνπερ] someone knows what is good and bad, he will not be overpowered by anything so as to do anything other than those things that his knowledge commands? (Prot. 352 C 2-6)

pains in exchange for lesser pleasures' ('Paradox', 120-1). Regarding Socrates' comments on (W₂), Gallop claims that by 355 E 3 it is 'far from clear' that the ridiculousness of (W₂) has been established. He suggests that at 355 D 3-E 3 Socrates explains (W₂) as 'taking greater evils in exchange for lesser goods' and claims that it is not 'obviously [ridiculous] to say that a man knows evils, yet takes greater evils in exchange for lesser goods. Nor does Socrates claim that this is [ridiculous]. He simply abandons the first analysis [of (W₂)] at this point without comment (355e4) and starts on the second analysis [i.e. of (W₃)]' (120). It is true that Socrates does not claim (W₂) to be ridiculous following his comments on (W₂), but then he does not claim the popular conception to be ridiculous at any point after he initially states that it is, and *a fortiori* not at 357 E 8 ff., at which point Gallop claims the ridiculousness of the popular conception to be fully revealed. In so far as Gallop's 'evils' are understood as things bad for oneself, I insist that it is puzzling that a man would knowingly freely choose from two courses of action the course worse for himself.

³¹ See also 353 C 5-8 and 355 A 6-B 1.

According to Socrates, and Protagoras who agrees with him, the many are wrong in thinking that knowledge-*akrasia*-through-pleasure occurs often. But since Socrates and Protagoras claim that knowledge is never overcome by pleasure, they owe the many an explanation of what in fact does occur often, which the many misconceive.³² Following his remarks on (W₃), Socrates proceeds to supply this explanation.

Socrates' account, of course, is that, contrary to popular opinion, the man who acts akratically does not have knowledge. It is not the actual quantity of the goodness or badness of the action on balance that motivates the man, but the perceived (or more precisely, misperceived) quantity. By analogy with visual perception, Socrates suggests that the propinquity to the agent of the good aspect of the action makes the good aspect appear greater than it is. Likewise, the remoteness from the agent of the bad aspect makes the bad aspect appear smaller than it is. Consequently, in akratic action, there is no conflict between knowledge's authority and pleasure's attraction. Instead, being overcome by pleasure is explained as a form of ignorance:

You [the many] said that pleasure often [πολλάκις] overpowers a person who has knowledge. But when we disagreed with you, you proceeded to ask us: 'Protagoras and Socrates, if this condition is not being overcome by pleasure, what on earth can it be, and what do you claim that it is? Tell us.' If at that point we had right away said 'Ignorance', you would have laughed at us. But now if you laugh at us, you will be laughing at your very selves. (*Prot.* 357 C 4-D 3)

More precisely, then, the ignorance of the akratic agent consists of having beliefs about the quantities of the good and bad aspects of the action, which are false on account of the agent's failure to distinguish apparent from real value. Socrates explicitly states this point following his intellectualist explanation of *akrasia*:

Do you agree, then, that ignorance is this: having a false opinion [ψευδῆ δόξαν] and being deceived in matters of great value? (*Prot.* 358 C 4-5)

He then introduces his principle that no one willingly does bad as follows:

(S₁) Then it must be the case . . . that (i) no one willingly pursues bad things [ἐπι τὰ κακά] or things that he thinks are bad [ἐπι ἃ οἶεται

³² The request for this explanation is first expressed at 353 A 4-6.

κακά], (ii) nor, it seems, is it in human nature to want to pursue things that one thinks are bad [ἐπι ἃ οἶεται κακά] in preference to good things. And whenever one is forced to choose one of two bad things, no one will choose the greater when he is able to choose the lesser. (*Prot.* 358 C 6-D 1)³³

(S₁(i)) contains the disjunction of not pursuing bad things or things one thinks are bad. This disjunction echoes a remark of Socrates' shortly preceding:

(S₂) If pleasure is good . . . then no one who knows [εἰδώς] or believes [οἰόμενος] there are other things he can do that are better than those he is doing persists in his action when he is able to do the better things. (*Prot.* 358 B 7-C 1)

(S₂) implies that people always pursue the course of action they know or believe to be best, which is equivalent to the principle in (S₁) that no one willingly does bad. The disjunction in (S₂) of knowing or believing there to be a better course of action is to be explained in view of Socrates' preceding intellectualist explanation of *akrasia*. Socrates has argued that weakness is false belief. Thus, there will be people who pursue courses of action that they know, and therefore truly believe, to be good and people who pursue courses of action that they falsely believe to be good.

The explanation for the disjunction in (S₁(i)) is to be explained similarly. Not pursuing 'bad things or things one thinks are bad' should be understood as not pursuing things one *knows* are bad or things one *falsely* thinks are bad. In other words, the first disjunct, not pursuing 'bad things', is expressed as such precisely because Socrates has in mind the agent who knows: since the knowledgeable agent's belief is true, the things that he does not pursue in the belief that they are bad in fact are bad. Furthermore, since each disjunct in (S₁(i)) implies pursuing things one thinks (or believes) are bad, in (S₁(ii)) Socrates simply employs the one form, not pursuing 'things one thinks are bad'. Here, then, not pursuing 'things one thinks are bad' should be understood as not pursuing things one *truly or falsely* thinks are bad. In short, in this passage immediately following his intellectualist explanation of *akrasia*, Socrates introduces the psychological principle that everyone desires and pursues what he believes is good.

According to this view, Socrates' denial of *akrasia* and commit-

³³ I have added the roman numerals to facilitate exegesis.

ment to the principle that no one willingly errs are corollaries. Penner calls this 'the direct corollary view' (DCV). And, according to DCV, he claims, the explanation of the ridiculousness of (W₂) should be complete by 355 E 3—as, on my interpretation, it is.³⁴ But Penner rejects DCV and claims that the explanation cannot be complete until 357 E 8 ('Strength', 127).

Penner argues against DCV as follows. The principle that no one willingly does bad implies that one never acts contrary to what one, at the moment of action, *believes* to be the best option open to one. Furthermore, since knowledge implies belief, one never acts contrary to what one, at the moment of action, *knows* to be the best option open to one ('Strength', 118). Accordingly, denial of knowledge-*akrasia* is a trivial consequence of denial of belief-*akrasia*. On this view, knowledge is strong because belief is strong. However, since Socrates identifies knowledge and excellence, Socrates should, instead, maintain that knowledge is strong and belief is weak ('Strength', 120–1). Consequently, Penner attempts to distinguish knowledge *qua* strong from belief *qua* weak as follows:

Let us suppose that strength does not reside simply in our automatically acting on the basis of what we believe or know *synchronically*, that is, at the instant of action . . . [Let] us rather suppose that strength resides in our acting on the basis of what we believe or know *diachronically*, that is, throughout most of the period of coming to decide and acting. That is, let us take strength to consist in our ability to *hold onto* our perspective on the situation throughout the temporal context of the action, and the period of immediate retrospect and regret or satisfaction at what one has done—holding onto that perspective in spite of the different aspects of the situation to which we may be successively exposed. ('Strength', 121–2)

Accordingly, Penner concludes, 'knowledge is strong and belief is weak because knowledge is stable throughout the temporal context of the action, while belief is inherently likely to waver' ('Strength', 123).

³⁴ 'Strength', 127. It should be noted, however, that Penner's account of the compatibility of the *reductio* and the principle that no one willingly does bad differs from mine as follows. Penner claims that by 355 E 3 (W₂) is explained as ridiculous in so far as it contradicts psychological hedonism. In other words, (W₂) is ridiculous in so far as one who knows what is best chooses 'to do something else for the sake of something less good overall, which contradicts the proposition that no one voluntarily errs'. On my interpretation, as we have seen, Socrates does not require any psychological principle to reveal the ridiculousness of (W₂).

Socrates' appeal to the skill of measurement and specifically to the role that this skill plays in correctly interpreting the information of appearances produced from different perspectives might seem to support Penner's position, but this connection is specious. As we have seen, Socrates' critique of the popular conception reveals *akrasia* to be ignorance, where ignorance is understood as false belief. The dichotomy, then, emerges between knowledge as strong because true and ignorance as weak because false. Throughout the critique of *akrasia* strength is regarded as something good. Contrast this with the stubbornness of conviction, which may well be a bad thing. The distinction in *Meno* between knowledge and true belief explains the value of knowledge on the grounds of its stability. But in *Protagoras* the distinction between knowledge and true belief does not figure in any significant way. According to the popular conception of *akrasia*, knowledge can be weaker than the attraction of pleasure. But in his critique of this view Socrates does not argue the contrary, that knowledge is always stronger than the attraction of pleasure. Instead, he dispenses with the view of competing psychological forces altogether, and claims that a man is always governed by his belief of what is best. No one, he claims, willingly does bad. So this is as much true of the knowledgeable agent as the ignorant, i.e. falsely believing, agent. What distinguishes the knowledgeable from the ignorant agent, rather, is that the knowledgeable one will actually succeed in doing what is best for himself.

5. Humour in *Protagoras*

There is evidence that Plato's *Protagoras* was influenced by Eupolis' comedy *The Flatterers*, which won first prize at the Dionysia in 421. Fragments and comments on the play indicate a symposiastic scene at Callias' house with Alcibiades and Protagoras in attendance. Athenaeus writes that 'Plato's marvellous *Protagoras*, in addition to attacking numerous poets and sophists, outdramatizes even Eupolis' *Flatterers* in its treatment of Callias' lifestyle' (Ath. 11, 507 F 4–6).

In *Protagoras* Plato employs humour in many ways. Protagoras' claim to be able to teach excellence in private and public affairs

laughably contrasts with the setting and characters of the dialogue.³⁵ In the series of speeches encouraging Socrates to remain and continue his discussion with Protagoras (336 D 6–338 B 1) Plato parodies the various sophists' styles of discourse. The episode devoted to Simonides' ode is a romp of outrageous interpretation. And the final movement of the dialogue, although devoted to serious arguments regarding the relation between courage and knowledge, is peppered with comedy.

In the first of the two arguments for the identity of courage and knowledge (349 E 1–350 C 5) Socrates reasons that courage is knowledge because both are fine confidence. Protagoras objects (350 C 6–351 B 2) that there are multiple sources of confidence, nature coupled with good nurture of the soul, skill (*τέχνη*), craziness, and rage. Courage is derived from the first, but fine confidence derived from skill is not courage. In making this point, Protagoras uses the analogy of power and strength. As courage is a kind of fine confidence, strength is a kind of fine power. Strength is derived from nature coupled with good nurture of the body. But power is also derived from knowledge, craziness, and rage. Power derived from knowledge is also fine, but it is not strength.³⁶ As we have seen in this paper, in the second argument for the identity of courage and knowledge in which *akrasia* is criticized, Socrates crucially employs, with Protagoras' permission, the claim that knowledge is strength, the very claim that Protagoras rejects in response to Socrates' first argument.

A central result of Socrates' intellectualist explanation of *akrasia* is, as he says, that our well-being depends upon the skill of measurement. The importance of such a skill and the distinction between subjective and objective values that it assumes, arguably, ludicrously contrasts with Protagoras' famous man-is-the-measure dictum.³⁷

Following Protagoras' admission that knowledge is strength, Socrates attempts to elicit Protagoras' commitment to ethical hedonism. The attempt fails, and instead of arguing with Protagoras on this point, Socrates gains Protagoras' permission to employ ethi-

³⁵ See D. Wolfsdorf, 'The Historical Reader of Plato's *Protagoras*', *Classical Quarterly*, NS 48 (1998), 126–33.

³⁶ See D. Wolfsdorf, 'Courage and Knowledge in *Protagoras* 349e1–352b2', *Classical Quarterly*, forthcoming (2006).

³⁷ This suggestion is admittedly speculative since the Protagorean dictum is never explicitly mentioned in the dialogue.

cal hedonism in the argument as representative of the view of the masses. Protagoras wonders why the view of the masses should concern them, but Socrates insists that it will be useful in examining the relation between courage and knowledge. At the conclusion of his critique of *akrasia* Socrates reports the following exchange that he had with the sophists:

Being overcome by pleasure is the greatest ignorance, for which Protagoras here says he is a doctor, as do Prodicus and Hippias . . . And so I ask you both, Prodicus and Hippias, along with Protagoras, for the argument pertains to you two as well, whether you think what I am saying is true . . . They all thought that what I had said was absolutely true. Then do you agree, I said, that pleasure is good and pain bad? And let me entreat Prodicus here to spare us his division of terms, for whether you say pleasure or delight or joy, excellent Prodicus . . . reply to the intent of my question. At this Prodicus laughed and consented, as did the others. (*Prot.* 357 E 2–358 B 3)

The sophists agree with Socrates' critique of *akrasia*. Socrates' critique should be welcome to them precisely because, as Socrates suggests, the identification of *akrasia* with ignorance promotes business. Socrates' rejection of the popular conception of *akrasia* involves the masses' commitment to ethical hedonism, but Socrates' subsequent intellectualist explanation of *akrasia* does not require ethical hedonism. Thus it is ridiculous, especially in view of Protagoras' previous defiance of ethical hedonism, that all the sophists now commit to it. Their commitment is explicable in part as a result of their enthusiasm for Socrates' refutation of the masses. Furthermore, when he asks Prodicus to overlook the subtle distinctions between pleasure, delight, and joy, Socrates employs humour to endear the position to the sophists. In accepting ethical hedonism, however, the sophists align themselves with the masses. As such, the laugh is on them, and Socrates' comment to the masses shortly before this exchange—'but now if you laugh at us, you will be laughing at your very selves'—can also be read as foreshadowing.

It has been argued, of course, that in *Protagoras* Socrates and Plato also endorse ethical hedonism. Currently, the majority of commentators now reject this position,³⁸ and I strongly agree with them. The internal evidence from *Protagoras* against Platonic en-

³⁸ See Russell, 'Courage'; M. McCoy, 'Protagoras on Human Nature, Wisdom, and the Good: The Great Speech and the Hedonism of Plato's *Protagoras*', *Ancient*

dorsement of ethical hedonism is itself strong. And indeed, when one considers Plato's broad attack on democracy and his conception of philosophy as politics throughout the early dialogues, it becomes clear that ethical hedonism is anathema to his entire philosophical project.

As Plato makes clear in *Gorgias*, the political leaders of Athens, i.e. the demagogic orators who were largely derived from the upper classes, catered to the people and therefore—for Plato, appallingly—were actually led by the people. Their political influence fundamentally depended on their rhetorical abilities, and it was the need for rhetorical training to which the sophists principally responded. Sophists, masses, and demagogues were thus complicit in corrupting the city-state and, as Calicles characterizes Socrates' diagnosis, turning life in Athens utterly upside down (*Gorg.* 481c 1–4).

The critique of *akrasia*-through-pleasure can easily be generalized to other forms of *akrasia*. For example, being overcome by fear is explicable as mistaking the quantity of future pain on balance of a course of action. But the choice of *akrasia*-through-pleasure is itself explicable on the grounds that Plato believed that—practically, whether or not theoretically—the many were committed to the identity of goodness and pleasure. In other words, the many were motivated to maximize pleasure. The sophists who ultimately commit to ethical hedonism may do so because they are swept up in the success of Socrates' vindication against the masses of the authority of knowledge. But at the same time, it is deeply ironic and funny that the political craft (πολιτική τέχνη) Protagoras claims to teach, and which among other things is supposed to enable Hippocrates to be most politically powerful in speech and action, is precisely the pseudo-knowledge, characterized as flattery in *Gorgias*, that is enslaved and dragged about by the pleasure of the people. Who knows whether Athenaeus caught this joke? But in so far as Plato, in composing *Protagoras*, was stimulated by Eupolis, his view of

Philosophy, 18 (1998), 21–39; S. Hemmenway, 'Sophistry Exposed: Socrates on the Unity of Virtue in the *Protagoras*', *Ancient Philosophy*, 16 (1996), 1–23; Weiss, 'Hedonism'; D. Zeyl, 'Socrates and Hedonism: *Protagoras* 351b–358d', *Phronesis*, 25 (1980), 250–69; L. Goldberg, *A Commentary on Plato's Protagoras* (New York, 1983), 67, 116–18; Klosko, 'Analysis', 129. A recent defence of Plato's commitment to ethical hedonism is G. Rudebusch, *Socrates, Pleasure, and Value* (Oxford, 1999), but I find his attempt to reconcile *Protagoras* and *Gorgias* by appeal to modal pleasure textually unsupported.

the complicity between the sophists, masses, and orator-politicians of the upper class gives a new spin to the identity of the flatterers.

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THE PORTRAIT OF SOCRATES IN PLATO'S SYMPOSIUM

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1. Introduction

PLATO's dialogues offer us numerous portraits of Socrates. Some of these are dramatic depictions that show us Socrates in conversation with various interlocutors. Others are descriptions of Socrates, sometimes presented by others, sometimes by Socrates himself. One of these descriptive portraits occurs in Plato's *Symposium*. The portrait is complex, being made up of several contributions from several different characters. The relation between these various portraits is complicated. I believe that, taken together, they constitute a coherent description, when certain perspectival differences and other internal features of the individual portraits are taken into account. Thus, I shall speak in this paper of 'the portrait' of Socrates in the *Symposium*, rather than of multiple portraits. I cannot prove, beyond what I say here, that the various portraits amount to a coherent whole. Nor can I establish that the portrait is coherent in every detail. Still, I believe it is consistent in its main elements.

I am interested in this portrait for two reasons. First, I find it interesting in its own right. It is a central element in one of the most important Platonic dialogues, and on those grounds alone worthy of serious study. Second, I think it has a serious claim to be an

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