The Discipline of Virtue:
Knowledge and the Unity of the Virtues in the *Protagoras*

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Abstract. I argue that in the *Protagoras* the Unity Thesis is best interpreted as the claim that the virtues are unified insofar as they are each constituted by the same kind of psychological power: knowledge. I show that the thesis, so interpreted, has practical implications for deliberations about how to become virtuous, and I identify a false assumption that underlies standard interpretations of the thesis.

Keywords: Plato, Unity of Virtue, knowledge, virtue, *Protagoras*

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1. Introduction

The *Protagoras* contains a sustained examination of the nature of virtue and in particular of the thesis that the virtues are all one (the Unity Thesis).[1] The focus of this article will be the following two questions. First, why does Socrates develop the Unity Thesis in the *Protagoras*? Second, how should we interpret the Unity Thesis (that is, what does it mean to say that the virtues are all one)? Scholarship on the Unity Thesis in the *Protagoras* tends to focus on the second question in isolation from the first. However, I think that in order to provide a good interpretation of the Unity

[1] My label for the thesis is taken from Vlastos (1972, 418, n. 6).

Thesis, we must begin by explaining why Socrates introduces the thesis in the context of his conversation with Protagoras.[2]

I shall argue that Socrates' development of the Unity Thesis in this dialogue is inspired by an unclarity in Protagoras' earlier defense of the teachability of virtue. Over the course of Protagoras' defense, it becomes clear that he is torn between two competing accounts of the nature of virtue. One account is strongly intellectualist and holds that the psychological power responsible for every kind of virtuous action is the power of knowledge; the other is moderately non-intellectualist and holds that virtue, as a whole, is constituted by a number of distinct powers, only one of which is knowledge.[3] Socrates' discussion of the unity of the virtues is in the service of defending the strong intellectualist account of virtue that Protagoras introduces but fails to adequately defend.

This account of Socrates' motivation for discussing the unity of the virtues provides us with an answer to my second question. If Socrates' goal in this discussion is to defend strong intellectualism about virtue, then the Unity Thesis is best interpreted as the claim that one kind of psychological power is responsible for all varieties of virtuous action and behavior. More specifically, the Unity Thesis is best interpreted as the claim that *knowledge* (and not some other

[2] In what follows, I will often attribute views (and thoughts and words) to Socrates and Protagoras. However, I should emphasize that in so doing I am not assuming that the views of the characters in Plato's *Protagoras* represent the views of historical figures. The problems inherent in trying to reconstruct the views of the historical Socrates on the basis of Plato's dialogues are well-known (see, e.g., Dorion (2010)). The goal of this article is to reconstruct the philosophical views that the *characters* of the *Protagoras* espouse.

[3] Here and in what follows "virtuous action" refers to actions due to the exercise of fully possessed virtue. For the purposes of this paper, I set aside the issue of whether some actions may be virtuous in the sense that they are in accordance with virtue without being accomplished through the exercise of virtue. The central issue is whether genuinely virtuous actions are due to the exercise of a single kind of power (knowledge) or whether they are due to the exercise of different kinds of powers.

The word "power" is a translation of the Greek word "δύναμις," a word that Protagoras himself uses in his speech. What exactly Plato means by "power" or "δύναμις" is an important and difficult question, but I take it that, at the very least, powers that belong to animals or human beings are things in virtue of which they are able to engage in certain kinds of actions or behaviors or in virtue of which they have certain features. See section 3.1 and following for more discussion of this point. For discussion of δύναμις in Plato generally, and in the *Laches* and *Protagoras* specifically, see Wolfsdorf (2005).

non-epistemic power(s)) is the psychological power responsible for virtuous action and behavior. I call this interpretation of the Unity Thesis "Homogeneity."

My interpretation of the Unity Thesis and Socrates' motivation for developing it shows that the scholarly debate over how to interpret the Unity Thesis in the *Protagoras* has gotten off on the wrong foot. Underlying this debate is the assumption that Socrates' discussion contains an account of how the *knowledge(s)* that constitute or are identical with the virtues are related to one another. That is, the standard interpretations of the Unity Thesis assume that Socrates not only defends the view that the virtues are all knowledge or kinds of knowledge, but that he also defends a particular view of how the virtue-knowledges are related to one another (for example, that the virtue-knowledges are mutually entailing forms of knowledge or that they are the very same knowledge, discipline, or skill).[4] I argue that the assumption made by the standard interpretations is mistaken. According to my interpretation of the dialogue, Socrates' goal is to show that the virtues are unified or one insofar as they are all constituted by the power of knowledge. He neither defends, nor is he dialectically obliged to defend, a more detailed account of how the virtue-knowledges are related to one another.

If Socrates does not defend a detailed account of the relationship between the virtue-knowledges, why does he go to the trouble of deciding between the strong intellectualist and the mild non-intellectualist models at all? To answer this question, we have to think back to the practical context in which the discussion with Protagoras is embedded. The action of the dialogue begins when Hippocrates shows up at Socrates' doorstep and requests that Socrates introduce him

[4] Cf. Ferejohn (1984, 382) for a similar assessment of the debate (though Ferejohn does not object to the shared assumption). Throughout the paper, I use "virtue-knowledges" as a convenient shorthand for "the knowledge(s) that constitute the virtues."

to the great Protagoras, whose wisdom Hippocrates craves for himself (310a8-e5).[5] Under the influence of Socrates, Hippocrates comes to see that his potential alliance with Protagoras is a matter that deserves careful thought and, more generally, that he should deliberate about the best way of bringing his soul into good condition before submitting himself to putative educators (313a-c). Socrates' focus on the competing models of virtue emphasizes that the process of becoming virtuous may be less straightforward than Hippocrates has been imagining. The question Hippocrates faces is not merely *which* teachings he ought to learn (and from whom) but whether virtue, as a whole, is the sort of thing that can developed solely through teaching and learning. If each of the virtues is a form of knowledge, then Hippocrates could correctly judge that learning is the best way to acquire virtue for himself. However, if knowledge is only one part of virtue, then Hippocrates will need to avail himself of more than just the help of a teacher. He will also need people and institutions that will help him cultivate the non-epistemic dispositions responsible for the other virtues. In either case, getting clear on whether virtue is better conceptualized in terms of the strong intellectualist or the mild non-intellectualist model plays an important role in guiding attempts to cultivate virtue in oneself or in others.

Before beginning, I should make two brief remarks. The first concerns my understanding of the relationship between the virtue-knowledges and other forms of knowledge. Throughout the article, I frequently compare the virtue-knowledges to crafts (forms of knowledge) like shoemaking and house-building. I also frequently claim that Socrates is interested in exploring the possibility that the virtues are forms of knowledge because he wants to know whether the virtues are teachable. The status of the craft analogy in the dialogues is a matter of much scholarly dispute,

[5] Strictly speaking, this is not the beginning of the dialogue. The dialogue opens with a frame narrative in which Socrates is portrayed as reporting the conversations he has with Hippocrates and Protagoras to a friend. For helpful discussion of the significance of the frame, see Gonzalez (2014, 34-35).

but my claims here are consistent with a variety of approaches to understanding the role of the craft analogy.[6] In developing the comparison between the virtue-knowledges and the crafts, I do not mean to imply that the virtue-knowledges are straightforwardly kinds of crafts, nor that the virtues (if they are forms of knowledge at all) can be taught in exactly the same way as other forms of knowledge are. There may well turn out to be important differences between the virtue-knowledges and other forms of knowledge. What is important for me is that the virtue-knowledges (if there are any) and other forms of knowledge are alike insofar as they are all kinds of knowledge and insofar as their status as knowledge ensures that they can all be taught.[7]

The second remark concerns my treatment of Socrates' own position in the dialogue. I focus on Socrates' development of the Unity Thesis and the relevance of that thesis for the teachability of virtue, but Socrates also provides a number of arguments *against* the teachability of virtue at the beginning of his discussion with Protagoras. The fact that Socrates (and Protagoras) end up defending theses that contradict their original positions is noted at the end of the dialogue (361a5-b5), and the switch in positions motivates Socrates to insist that they must continue the investigation into the nature of virtue before they can reach a settled view about whether or not virtue can be taught. The dialogue's tenuous conclusion, combined with Socrates' earlier arguments against the teachability of virtue, means that we cannot claim that Socrates definitely holds the view that he defends in the discussion of the unity of the virtues. Nevertheless, I think we can say that the position Socrates defends over the course of the discussion is one that he is genuinely interested in exploring and one that he would endorse if he could find an adequate argument for it.

[6] For a useful example of the nature of the scholarly dispute, see Roochnik (1986).

[7] I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pushing me to be clear about my position on this issue.

Because the standard approach to the Unity Thesis is so entrenched in the literature, I begin with a brief survey of the main interpretations of the Unity Thesis and identify what I take to be a problematic assumption that is common to them (section 2). Next, I argue that these parts of the *Protagoras* show that what motivates and structures Socrates' defense of the Unity Thesis is Protagoras' introduction of competing accounts of virtue (section 3). I then show that the context of the discussion provides strong evidence for my Homogeneity interpretation of the Unity Thesis and against the standard interpretations of the thesis (section 4). In the final main section, I examine each of the central arguments Socrates gives for the unity of the virtues. I conclude that these arguments clearly support Homogeneity, but that they are neutral on the very issue that the standard interpretations are trying to settle, namely, the question of how the virtue-knowledges are related (section 5).

2. Interpretations of the Unity Thesis

At the beginning of the discussion that introduces the Unity Thesis, Socrates gives Protagoras a number of alternatives to choose between in an effort to help him make his account of virtue more precise. First, Socrates asks whether the virtues are parts (μόρια) of virtue, which is itself one thing (ἕν τι), or whether the virtues are merely names (ὀνόματα) of a thing that is itself one (τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἑνὸς ὄντος) (329c7-d1). When Protagoras takes the first alternative, Socrates presses him to specify the kind of parts he is talking about: are the virtues parts of virtue in the way that mouth, nose, eyes, and ears are parts of the face; or are they more like the parts of gold (329d4-8)? When Protagoras again picks the first option, Socrates introduces a third distinction: are the parts of virtue such that a man can come to have one without any of the others or are they such that if someone has one of them that person necessarily has them all (329e2-4)? Again, Protagoras takes the first

option, and Socrates spells out the implications of Protagoras' position. He argues that Protagoras has committed himself to a particular version of the face analogy, according to which each of the virtues has its own power (δύναμις) and is entirely different from the others (330a3-b2).[8] Protagoras assents to this description of his position, and Socrates immediately embarks on a series of arguments that take up most of what remains of the dialogue.

The first of Socrates' options, that the virtues are names of one and the same thing, is one instance of what I am calling the Unity Thesis.[9] The thesis also makes appearances in Socrates' later arguments, which focus on showing that two virtues are one or that one virtue is another.[10] Interpretations of the Unity Thesis fall into three major interpretative camps. Some scholars, most notably Terry Penner, have taken it to mean that the virtues are identical with a single kind of knowledge (knowledge of good and bad) (Strict Identity).[11] Others have taken it to mean that the virtues all consist in the same kind of knowledge (knowledge of good and bad) but that they can be differentiated from one another by context or application (Application). Nicholas Smith and Thomas Brickhouse are prominent proponents of this view.[12] Still others (e.g. Richard Kraut and

[8] I quote this passage in full and analyze it in more detail in section 3.2.

[9] Socrates mentions this option again at 349b1-3.

[10] Here, for the sake of completeness, are the remaining remarks about the unity of the virtues in the *Protagoras*: 331b4-5: Justice and holiness are "the same or as similar as possible" (ταὐτόν γ᾽ ἐστιν δικαιότης ὁσιότητι ἢ ὅτι ὁμοιότατον). 333b4-6: "Temperance and wisdom would be one [acc. to the argument]" (ἓν ἂν εἴη ἡ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἡ σοφία) and "justice and holiness are pretty much the same thing" (ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἡ ὁσιότης σχεδόν τι ταὐτὸν ὄν). 349b1-3: Wisdom, temperance, courage, justice, and holiness are "five names for one thing" (πέντε ὄντα ὀνόματα, ἐπὶ ἑνὶ πράγματί ἐστιν). 350c4-5: "Wisdom would be courage [acc. to the argument]" (ἡ σοφία ἂν ἀνδρεία εἴη). 360d4-5: "The knowledge [=σοφία] of what is and is not terrible is courage" (ἡ σοφία ἄρα τῶν δεινῶν καὶ μὴ δεινῶν ἀνδρεία ἐστίν). 361b1-2: "All matters—justice and temperance and even courage—are knowledge" (πάντα χρήματά ἐστιν ἐπιστήμη, καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἡ ἀνδρεία). All translations are mine, based on the Burnet OCT (Plato 1903).

[11] Penner (1973). Clark (2015) also belongs to this camp, though he allows that the virtues, although the same psychological state, have different definitions (458). See also Hartman (1984).

[12] Brickhouse and Smith (1997). Brickhouse and Smith's helpful example of the Application view is knowledge of triangulation, which can be put to work in surveying or in navigating. Whether one is surveying or navigating depends, not on what one knows, but one how one uses the relevant knowledge (2010, 164). A version of this view is also

Gregory Vlastos) have interpreted the Unity Thesis as the claim that virtue is a composite of distinct but mutually entailing kinds of knowledge (Mutual Entailment).[13]

Despite their differences, these interpretations all share a common assumption. Each of them assumes that Socrates, in his discussion with Protagoras, defends a particular account of how the virtue-knowledges are related to one another. They take Socrates' defense of the Unity Thesis to be a defense of unity as interpreted by one of Strict Identity, Application, or Mutual Entailment. The idea that Socrates gives an account of the structure of the virtue-knowledges in the *Protagoras* is what I will call the "Core Assumption." One of my central claims in what follows is that the Core Assumption is mistaken.

3. Protagoras' Competing Conceptions of Virtue

Proponents of the standard interpretations generally assume that Socrates holds some (or all) of the options that Protagoras rejects in the opening exchange: namely, the claims that (a) the virtues are names of some one thing (the Unity Thesis); that (b) the parts of virtue stand to each other and to the whole of virtue as the parts of gold stand to each other and the whole of gold (the gold analogy); and that (c) you can't have a single virtue without having them all (the one/all claim).[14] They then interpret the Unity Thesis in light of the combination of theses that they are willing to attribute to Socrates. Thus, for example, Penner claims that Socrates endorses only the Unity

defended by Cooper (1999, 89), Ferejohn (1984) and (1982, 15-17), Irwin (1977, 62), O'Brien (2003, 103), and Woodruff (1976, 105 and 109).

[13] Kraut (1984, 261-262) and Vlastos (1972, 424-425).

[14] What I am calling "the one/all claim" also gets called the Biconditionality Thesis in the literature, following Vlastos (1972, 424). But since the Biconditionality Thesis is now associated with Vlastos's interpretation of the Unity Thesis and since some of those who reject Vlastos's interpretation still think their accounts are consistent with one interpretation of the one/all claim, I will be using a more neutral label ("the one/all claim") in what follows. Thanks to Nicholas Smith for making this issue salient to me.

Thesis on the grounds that the Unity Thesis is inconsistent with the gold analogy and the one/claim (since both of the latter appear to allow that virtue has parts). This allows Penner to defend a very strong reading of the Unity Thesis (i.e. Strict Identity).[15] By contrast, proponents of Application and Mutual Entailment attribute all three of the claims that Protagoras rejects to Socrates and develop correspondingly moderate interpretations of the Unity Thesis.[16]

The idea that we can piece together Socrates' view from the options rejected by Protagoras is problematic because all of the theses presented—included those standardly attributed to Socrates—are embedded in questions. The initial formulations of the Unity Thesis, the gold analogy, and the one/all claim are each introduced as one of two claims that Protagoras is invited to choose between. The only other time the Unity Thesis is formulated in this way (as a claim about the virtues being names of one thing), it is also in the form of a question;[17] the gold analogy never makes another appearance; and the one/all claim is alluded to only once more and then by Protagoras.[18] The presentation of the sets of options is designed to elicit Protagoras' own view

[15] See n. 11 above.

[16] Application holds that the Unity Thesis is consistent with the gold analogy. The analogy merely emphasizes that the parts of virtue consist in one and the same knowledge. The Unity Thesis is also consistent with one interpretation of the one/all claim because anyone who has one of the virtues has them all, insofar as she possesses the very knowledge in which each of the virtues consists. (See Brickhouse and Smith (1997, 322-323). Importantly, Brickhouse and Smith deny that a given virtuous action must express *all* the individual virtues (i.e. must be an instance of courage, temperance, and piety as well as an instance of justice). Which virtue an action in fact instantiates will depend on context and how the relevant knowledge is applied.)

Mutual Entailment places the greatest weight on the one/all claim and thus takes the virtues to be a unity in the sense that they are (merely) coextensive. As Vlastos puts it, "the class of temperate persons and the class of wise persons are one and the same class" (Vlastos (1972, 478)). The coextensiveness of the classes of virtuous people explains why Socrates endorses the one/all claim, since it ensures that anyone who possesses a single virtue will possess them all. Furthermore, the fact that the virtues are merely coextensive and not identical makes Socrates' endorsement of analogies like the gold analogy (according to which virtue has parts) consistent with his commitment to the Unity Thesis. The virtues, although coextensive, are distinct insofar as they are each a different kind of wisdom.

[17] At 349b1-3, when Socrates invites Protagoras to restate his position following a digression, Socrates asks whether Protagoras thinks the virtues are five names for one thing or whether he thinks each virtue has its own οὐσία and δύναμις.

[18] Asked to restate his position regarding the relationship among the virtues, Protagoras claims that courage is extremely different from the other virtues on the grounds that "many men are extremely unjust, unholy, intemperate,

about the structure of the virtues. The mere fact that Socrates articulates the options for Protagoras does not commit him to defending any of them. Thus, if we want to know what kind of view Socrates undertakes to defend in this dialogue, we should not begin by simply assuming that he is defending one or more of the theses Protagoras rejects at the beginning of their discussion. Instead, we should begin with a closer look at the issues and questions that prompt Socrates to embark on this discussion of the nature of virtue.[19, 20]

and ignorant, but exceedingly courageous" (349d6-8). It might be thought that 360d8-e2 contains a further reference to the one/all claim, this time from Socrates, but I argue below (section 5) that it is not an instance of this claim.

[19] Politis (2012, 227-232) has argued that the discussion of the unity of the virtues does not contain an account of the *nature* of virtue. While Politis is certainly right that Socrates does not explicitly raise the question of what virtue is, Socrates does claim at the end of the dialogue that the purpose of the discussion has been to investigate the nature of virtue: "I asked all these things for no other reason than that I wished to examine how things are with respect to virtue and what it—virtue—in fact is" (οὔτοι, ἦν δ᾽ ἐγώ, ἄλλου ἕνεκα ἐρωτῶ πάντα ταῦτα ἢ σκέψασθαι βουλόμενος πῶς ποτ᾽ ἔχει τὰ περὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς καὶ τί ποτ᾽ ἐστὶν αὐτό, ἡ ἀρετή, 360e6-8). Politis is in the minority on this issue. For example, Manuwald (1999, 442) claims that the questions about the unity of the virtues contain within them a question about the nature of virtue. See also Politis (2012, 227, n. 19) for references to defenders of the majority view.

[20] I am not the first to notice that Socrates does not explicitly endorse any of the options that he gives Protagoras. However, scholars have often relied on this observation as part of an argument for a purely dialectical reading of Socrates' position in the *Protagoras*. Allen (1970, 99) argues that Socrates introduces the first two alternatives—and attempts to commit Protagoras to the first—for polemical reasons. According to Allen, Socrates' *only* aim is to show that Protagoras does not know what virtue is. See also Hartman (1984), who argues that the face and gold analogies that Socrates compels Protagoras to choose between are both (by Socrates' own lights) inadequate as models of virtue, although Hartman also thinks that they shed important light on how Socrates is thinking about the relationship among the virtue-knowledges. O'Brien (2003, 59-82, esp. 66-67 and 82) defends at length the view that Socrates does not actually endorse any of the options, though O'Brien then goes on consider what the discussion might tell us about Socrates' conception of the structure of the virtue-knowledges. For dialectical readings of the dialogue that focus on Socrates' discussion of hedonism, see McCoy (1998), Russell (2000), and Weiss (1990).

Although I agree that Socrates' arguments are partly intended to show that Protagoras does not know what virtue is, and so partly dialectical, I also think that Socrates is committed to giving the best arguments he can to show that virtue is one and, in particular, that all the virtues are knowledge. This is because finding out whether the virtues are all knowledge has practical implications for how we go about becoming virtuous. Thus, I take Socrates in the *Protagoras* to be developing a positive view about the nature of virtue, though I shall remain neutral on whether or not this view is one that he endorses in other dialogues. I am grateful to an anonymous journal referee and to Christopher Moore for pushing me to clarify the relationship between my interpretation and dialectical readings of the *Protagoras*.

3.1 Protagoras' Great Speech

Early in Socrates' conversation with Protagoras, Socrates asks Protagoras to say what it is that he provides his students and in particular what he makes them better in (318b1-d4). Protagoras responds that he teaches good judgment (εὐβουλία, 318e5-319a2). Socrates glosses Protagoras' subject as "the political skill" (τὴν πολιτικὴν τέχνην, 319a4), and before long he and Protagoras identify the skill in question with virtue (ἀρετή).[21] Thus, we should understand Protagoras as claiming that he is capable of teaching virtue, where that is taken to be an expertise or form of knowledge that enables one to make good judgments about personal and political matters.

Protagoras' identification of virtue as an expertise takes a clear stand on the question of what psychological power is responsible for virtuous action: that power is knowledge. Moreover, insofar as Protagoras accepts the *identification* of his expertise with virtue, he accepts that virtue is *entirely* a form of knowledge. If this is true, teaching and learning would be appropriate means of becoming good or virtuous, as Protagoras claims they are. But Socrates is not yet convinced. His first move is to challenge the claim that virtue is teachable by providing empirical evidence that suggests this is false (319b4-320b5). Protagoras' Great Speech constitutes Protagoras' response to Socrates' challenge, and I shall argue that it contains an important ambiguity regarding the nature of the

[21] Socrates introduces the word ἀρετή at 319e2, and Protagoras picks up this language at 322d7. Adkins (1973, 6) has argued that Protagoras equivocates on the referent of political skill, claiming that by the end of Protagoras' speech, the term refers not to an administrative skill, but to "an assemblage of co-operative moral excellences" (cf. Nathan (2017) for a similar assessment of Protagoras' treatment of virtue). Adkins treats Protagoras' confusion as one about the kinds of behaviors and actions that count as manifestations of the skill Protagoras claims to teach. However, as I shall argue, Protagoras is not conflicted about which kinds of actions his students will be able to perform, but what the psychological source of those actions is. More generally, I do not think there is serious disagreement between Socrates and Protagoras about which actions count as virtuous. The real disagreement is over what psychological state enables the virtuous person to perform those actions.

psychological power responsible for virtuous action.[22] It is this ambiguity that prompts Socrates to embark on the discussion of the unity of the virtues.

Protagoras' presupposition about the nature of virtue (i.e. that it is an epistemic power) is borne out by the beginning of his Great Speech. Protagoras treats virtue as a special kind of power, analogous to the powers that enable other animals to (e.g.) run swiftly or move heavy objects. In his retelling of the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus, Protagoras claims that Prometheus and Epimetheus were charged by the gods with "arranging and distributing suitable powers (δυνάμεις) to each [of the mortal creatures]" (320d4-6; cf. 323c1). Examples of such powers are speed (τάχος) and strength (ἰσχύς) (320d8). Protagoras introduces technical wisdom (τὴν ἔντεχνον σοφίαν, 321d1)[23] and political skill (πολιτικὴν τέχνην) as counterparts of the powers that nonrational animals have. Technical wisdom is responsible for the activities and behaviors associated with fulfilling basic human needs (food, shelter, and the like) and encompasses a variety of diverse skills (e.g. shoemaking and housebuilding). Political skill, for its part, is responsible for the activities and behaviors associated with establishing and maintaining social relations, or life in a *polis*, as Protagoras repeatedly puts it.[24] Political skill is thus specially connected to the individual virtues, in particular justice, temperance, and holiness.[25] Hence, the first part of Protagoras' response to Socrates identifies the psychological source of virtuous action as a form of knowledge.

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[22] Kerferd (1953, 45) also claims that Protagoras has failed to make clear what he takes virtue to be. But Kerferd does not say whether he thinks the unclarity concerns the nature of the power in which virtue consists (epistemic vs. non-epistemic) or the relationship among the virtues, all of which are assumed to consist in knowledge.

[23] Also called "the fiery skill" (τὴν ἔμπυρον τέχνην, 321e1-2) and "the demiurgic skill" (ἡ δημιουργικὴ τέχνη, 322b3).

[24] Protagoras claims that before they came into possession of political skill, human beings tried and failed to live together in πόλεις (322b6); he attributes to Zeus the assertions that "no πόλις would come to be, if only a few people had a share [of political skill] as they do of other arts" and that "one who is not capable of partaking in shame and right is to be put to death, just as if he were a plague on the πόλις" (322d2-5); and he argues that partaking in or having a share of political virtue is a requirement for being "among men" (323c2).

[25] Cf., e.g., 323a1-2, a6-7, and b2 for mentions of temperance and justice; see 324a1 for an allusion to holiness as a political virtue. Courage is palpably absent from this discussion, but there is a good reason for its absence, which I will explain below, n. 34.

Protagoras implies that he holds a similar view of virtue at the end of his speech, where he draws a lengthy comparison between expertise in flute-playing and virtue. The upshot of this comparison is supposed to be that the teaching of virtue will be subject to exactly the same limitations that the teaching of flute-playing is subject to (327a4-328a8).[26] But the comparison also suggests that Protagoras thinks virtue is entirely a form of knowledge. This is the view Protagoras *should* have if he holds that virtue is teachable. For, as we learn at the end of the dialogue, "if virtue were anything other than knowledge, . . .clearly it would not be teachable" (361b3-5).[27] But Protagoras is not as committal as he at first appears to be.

The second part of Protagoras' response focuses more directly on the teachability of virtue. In it Protagoras broadens the range of psychological powers that might be responsible for virtuous action:

> And next I will endeavor to demonstrate that they [the Athenians] do not think that it [virtue] comes to be present to those to whom it comes by nature nor automatically but that it is teachable and arises through care. (323c5-8)[28]

In this passage, Protagoras treats nature and spontaneity as the contrast cases for teaching. By drawing the contrast in this way, Protagoras is able to help himself to a much wider range of social practices as evidence for the teachability of virtue. In particular, he is able to treat *any* deliberate cultivation of virtue in someone as evidence that virtue can be taught. For example, Protagoras takes the fact that the Athenians punish people for their failure to act virtuously to show that the

[26] I.e., sometimes even good flute players have children who are not very good flute-players (even though flute-playing is clearly an expertise!) and so it's only to be expected that some virtuous people will have children who are less virtuous than they are (even though virtue is an expertise).

[27] εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἄλλο τι ἦν ἢ ἐπιστήμη ἡ ἀρετή. . .σαφῶς οὐκ ἂν ἦν διδακτόν.

[28] ὅτι δὲ αὐτὴν οὐ φύσει ἡγοῦνται εἶναι οὐδ᾽ ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου, ἀλλὰ διδακτόν τε καὶ ἐξ ἐπιμελείας παραγίγνεσθαι ᾧ ἂν παραγίγνηται, τοῦτό σοι μετὰ τοῦτο πειράσομαι ἀποδεῖξαι.

Athenians think virtue is the sort of thing that can be acquired through care (ἐξ ἐπιμελείας), practice (ἀσκήσεως), and teaching (διδαχῆς) (323c8-e3, cf. 324a5, b6, c4-5).

However, although broadening the scope of the practices under consideration makes it easier for Protagoras to argue that the Athenians think virtue is acquirable through some kind of broadly educational process, it does nothing to show that virtue is acquirable through *teaching*, as opposed to one of the other social practices (e.g. care or practice) that he identifies in this part of his speech. Furthermore, if virtue does turn out to be acquirable through one of those other means, there is some reason to think that it is therefore *not* teachable (and therefore not knowledge). At the beginning of the *Meno,* Meno distinguishes between three distinct ways in which virtue might be thought to be acquired.

> Socrates, are you able to tell me: is virtue teachable? Or is it not teachable but acquirable through practice? Or is it neither acquirable through practice nor learnable but comes to men by nature or in some other way?" (70a1-4)[29]

Meno's description of the candidate means suggests that they are mutually exclusive. If something is teachable, it is not acquirable through practice, and vice versa.

By introducing the possibility that virtue is acquirable through practice, care, teaching, or some combination thereof, Protagoras suggests three different views of what virtue is. First, virtue might be wholly constituted by knowledge (strong intellectualism). Second, it might be constituted by *both* epistemic and non-epistemic psychological powers (mild non-intellectualism). Or, third, it might consist wholly in non-epistemic psychological powers (strong non-intellectualism). But, according to Socrates, virtue is teachable only if the intellectualist view is correct. If the strong

[29] ἔχεις μοι εἰπεῖν, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἆρα διδακτὸν ἡ ἀρετή; ἢ οὐ διδακτὸν ἀλλ᾽ ἀσκητόν; ἢ οὔτε ἀσκητὸν οὔτε μαθητόν, ἀλλὰ φύσει παραγίγνεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἢ ἄλλῳ τινὶ τρόπῳ;

non-intellectualist view is true, then virtue is not teachable at all (though it might be acquirable through care and/or practice), while if the mild intellectualist view holds, then only certain individual virtues will be teachable (whichever ones are constituted by or identical with forms of knowledge knowledge).

As I have said, Protagoras' remarks at the beginning and end of his speech suggest that he holds strong intellectualism, but at various points he also betrays non-intellectualist sympathies. In the first place, his presentation of the myth is unclear on a crucial point. When explaining how men acquired political skill, Protagoras treats "shame" (αἰδώς) and "a sense of right" (δίκη) as synonyms for "political skill" (322b8-cd1).[30] However, as others have pointed out, it is not clear why shame and a sense of right should count as skills or kinds of knowledge at all.[31] If these are indeed the states responsible for temperate, just, and pious behavior, then we might think that the psychological source of the virtues is not knowledge at all but some non-epistemic power or powers.[32]

Protagoras' later discussion of a typical Athenian education also suggests that he inclines toward a non-intellectualist model of virtue. Protagoras claims that Athenians teach their children virtue throughout their children's lives. Adults first do this in the years prior to formal schooling,

[30] See Kerferd (1953, 43) for discussion (and defense) of this point.

[31] Cf. Adkins (1973, 5), though Adkins goes on to say that it is more plausible to think of δίκη as a skill, given its connection to justice. Scolnicov (1988, 22-23) is so impressed by the reference to shame and right that he concludes that Protagoras simply rejects the assumption that virtue must be knowledge in order to be teachable throughout his Great Speech: "this [political skill] is based not on knowledge, but on reverence and justice, whose psychological source is different from the source of the skill in arts and crafts." I disagree with Scolnicov on this point. As Protagoras' frequent references to virtue as a skill show, he does want to show that virtue is knowledge. But Scolnicov is rightly puzzled by the introduction of shame and right as candidate sources of political skill. See Woodruff (1987, 93) for the more general point that Protagoras' myth fails to explain how exactly the *technai* are acquired.

[32] The *Protagoras* is not the only place where we find a distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic powers. In the *Sophist*, at the beginning of the example case of collection and division (angling), Socrates asks Theaetetus whether the angler is someone who is skilled or someone who is unskilled and who therefore has a different power: πότερον ὡς τεχνίτην αὐτὸν ἤ τινα ἄτεχνον, ἄλλην δὲ δύναμιν ἔχοντα θήσομεν; (*Soph*. 219a) The suggestion is that identifying a person as skilled enables us to say that they have a certain kind of power, while identifying them as unskilled tells us that we have to seek a different power to explain their nature and actions.

teaching (διδάσκοντες) and demonstrating (ἐνδεικνύμενοι) that certain actions and words are virtuous or vicious, and punishing the child when he doesn't obey. Writing and music teachers are additionally charged with seeing to it that children develop a sense of decency (εὐκοσμία, 325d7-e1), that they imitate the appropriate models, and that they exhibit temperance. Even physical trainers help produce virtue (in particular courage) by ensuring that children won't be tempted to acts of cowardice through weakness of body (326b5-c3). After children are done with school, their education continues via law. The city, using laws as a paradigm, constrains people to govern and be governed in accordance with the laws and punishes those who transgress (326c6).

In this passage, Protagoras identifies a number of disciplines and skills that contribute to the production of virtue in young people. Virtue seems to be the product of verbal instruction and corporal punishment in early childhood, of bodily habituation achieved through the mastery of music and physical exercise, and of the emulation of certain ideals or characters. It's true that young people do learn skills and disciplines as part of the educational process, but the virtues they acquire through that process appear to be distinct from the disciplines learned. The virtue of temperance does not consist in musical knowledge, but the process of acquiring musical knowledge can help the student acquire a temperate disposition.[33] And later in the dialogue, Protagoras explicitly denies that courage consists in knowledge. He claims that it is due partly to nature and also to εὐτροφία or good nourishment of the soul (351a3-4).[34]

[33] This not an implausible way to think about the relationship between the learning of standard school subjects and development of virtue. Parents often sign their children up for music classes in the hopes that they'll leave not only having learned (e.g) how to play the violin but also having developed patience and perseverance.

[34] This may explain why courage is missing from Protagoras' earlier discussion of the distribution of powers. He may have already been convinced that courage had a different psychological source from the other virtues. Such a conviction would also explain why Protagoras eventually concedes that four of the virtues are on par with one another but that courage is entirely different from those four (καὶ τὰ μὲν τέτταρα αὐτῶν ἐπιεικῶς παραπλήσια ἀλλήλοις ἐστίν, ἡ δὲ ἀνδρεία πάνυ πολὺ διαφέρον πάντων τούτων, 349d3-5).

Thus, in his Great Speech, Protagoras waffles on the very point that he has set out to defend. If the virtues are not all knowledge, then, according to Socrates, virtue as a whole is not teachable. What Protagoras must show is that virtue is wholly knowledge. However, the more Protagoras says, the less obvious it is that the psychological power responsible for every kind of virtuous action is knowledge. So which is it, Protagoras: Is knowledge the only psychological power responsible for virtuous action or not? This is the question that the discussion of the unity of the virtues is supposed to answer.

3.2 The set-up of the discussion

Following Protagoras' Great Speech, Socrates invites Protagoras to say more about the relationship of the virtues to one another. After getting Protagoras to commit to the view that virtue has parts, and after eliciting from him the view that the parts of virtue are *not* related to one another in the way suggested by the one/all claim, Socrates gets Protagoras to agree to the following gloss of his position:[35]

> "Is each of them [i.e. the parts of virtue] a distinct thing," I said. –"Yes." –"And does each of them have its own power, just as, with the parts of the face, the eye is not the sort of thing the ears are nor is its power the same, nor, in the case of the other [parts of the face], is any of them the sort of thing the others are, either in respect of its power or in other respects? So are the parts of virtue also like this, one part not the sort of thing another

Moss (2014, 301) makes a similar point about Protagoras' non-intellectualism in his Great Speech, though she does not discuss the fact that Protagoras seems genuinely conflicted about whether he is, in the end, an intellectualist or a (moderate or strong) non-intellectualist about virtue.

[35] I disagree with scholars like Ferejohn (1982, 3), who take it that what Socrates must refute is Protagoras' very first statement of his position, i.e. that the virtues are distinct parts of virtue. I think Socrates goes on to make Protagoras' view more precise and that the face analogy, quoted above, is the complete articulation of his position. Thus, it is this statement that we need to analyze if we are to understand what Socrates must refute.

part is, either itself or its power? Or isn't it clear that these things are so, if in fact they resemble the example?" (330a3-b2)[36]

Socrates' articulation of the face analogy in terms of the *powers* of the parts of the face picks up Protagoras' earlier presentation of political skill or virtue as a kind of power. The allusion invites us to read the ensuing discussion of the unity of the virtues as an investigation into what kind or kinds of powers the virtues are. This is just what we should expect, given the preceding analysis of the issues raised by Protagoras' Great Speech. However, Socrates' deployment of the face analogy does more than identify the general theme of the investigation to follow; it also forces Protagoras to choose between the models of virtue that his own speech introduced (strong intellectualism, mild non-intellectualism, and strong non-intellectualism). Protagoras, to his detriment, opts for a mild non-intellectualism.

Look again at the build-up to the face analogy. The third set of options Protagoras is given requires him to take a stand on whether it's possible to have one part of virtue without having the others. This is a key moment in the set-up of the discussion because it gives Protagoras the opportunity to explicitly state what he takes the parts of virtue to be. Socrates has already included justice, temperance, and holiness among the virtues. Now Protagoras obligingly adds two more to the mix. He claims that it is obvious that a person can have one virtue without having them all because "many men are brave (ἀνδρεῖοι) but unjust (ἄδικοι), and, again, many are just (δίκαιοι) but not wise (σοφοί)" (329e5-6). Socrates double-underlines Protagoras' admission:

[36] --ἕκαστον δὲ αὐτῶν ἐστιν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ἄλλο, τὸ δὲ ἄλλο; --ναί. --ἦ καὶ δύναμιν αὐτῶν ἕκαστον ἰδίαν ἔχει; ὥσπερ τὰ τοῦ προσώπου, οὐκ ἔστιν ὀφθαλμὸς οἷον τὰ ὦτα, οὐδ' ἡ δύναμις αὐτοῦ ἡ αὐτή: οὐδὲ τῶν ἄλλων οὐδέν ἐστιν οἷον τὸ ἕτερον οὔτε κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν οὔτε κατὰ τὰ ἄλλα: ἆρ' οὖν οὕτω καὶ τὰ τῆς ἀρετῆς μόρια οὐκ ἔστιν τὸ ἕτερον οἷον τὸ ἕτερον, οὔτε αὐτὸ οὔτε ἡ δύναμις αὐτοῦ; ἢ δῆλα δὴ ὅτι οὕτως ἔχει, εἴπερ τῷ παραδείγματί γε ἔοικε;

> "Well then, are these also parts of virtue," I asked, "—wisdom and courage?" –"Most of all, in my view," he said. "And at any rate wisdom [σοφία] is the greatest of the parts." (330a1-3)[37]

The inclusion of σοφία as one of the *parts* of virtue is extremely important. Protagoras has not been using "σοφία" (unqualified) to refer to a special kind of knowledge or to an individual discipline related to virtue. In his Great Speech, Protagoras uses the word to refer both to the technical wisdom (τὴν ἔντεχνον σοφίαν) that Prometheus steals from Hephaestus and Athena (321d1-2) and, later, to refer to political wisdom (τὴν πολιτικὴν [σοφίαν]: 321d3-5). Here "σοφία", by itself, seems to be a general term for the whole power of knowledge—i.e. the power responsible for skilled action.[38] In order to refer to a specific kind of knowledge, it must be appropriately qualified (as, e.g., political or technical). And even when "σοφία" is used in this more restricted way, it does not necessarily refer to an *individual* discipline or skill. As I mentioned earlier, Protagoras thinks that technical wisdom is itself the source of a variety of more specialized skills: the building of altars and the making of images of the gods; the development of language; and the discovery or invention (εὑρίσκειν) of dwellings, clothing, footwear, furniture, and food (322a3-8).[39]

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[37] ἔστιν γὰρ οὖν καὶ ταῦτα μόρια τῆς ἀρετῆς, ἔφην ἐγώ, σοφία τε καὶ ἀνδρεία; --πάντων μάλιστα δήπου, ἔφη: καὶ μέγιστόν γε ἡ σοφία τῶν μορίων.

[38] For another example of "σοφία" used to refer to technical skills, see Homer, *Il.* 15.410-13 (thanks to **[redacted]** for directing me to this passage). For the more general point that ancient wise men (*sophoi*) were said to be wise in virtue of possessing a variety of special kinds of knowledge, including some technical skills, see Nightingale (2001, 24-28).

[39] It is an interesting question how, precisely, individual skills like shoemaking are supposed to be related to technical wisdom. Is this a genus-species relationship? Determinable-determinate? Some alternative? The text does not give us enough evidence to develop a more precise account, so I will remain neutral on the issue here. Thanks to **[redacted]** for suggesting these alternatives.

Because Protagoras has been using "σοφία" as a general term for the power of knowledge, his audience is licensed to interpret his inclusion of σοφία among the virtues as an inclusion of knowledge in general. And this is in fact how Socrates interprets it. Just moments after Protagoras assents to the implications of the face analogy, Socrates makes one final point, substituting "ἐπιστήμη" for "σοφία,": "None of the other parts of virtue is such as knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is, nor such as justice or courage or temperance or holiness is" (330b3-6).[40] Protagoras accepts the substitution without comment. But now see what happens. If all the parts of virtue have entirely different powers and if wisdom/knowledge is a part of virtue, then courage, temperance, justice, and holiness must all have or consist in (different) *non-epistemic* powers; none of them can be a kind of knowledge at all.

Thus, when pushed to clarify his position on the nature of virtue, Protagoras backs away from his earlier endorsement of strong intellectualism, according to which all the virtues are knowledge, and adopts the considerably weaker view that knowledge (of some form or other) comprises only one part of virtue. This is the view that Socrates undertakes to refute in the ensuing arguments.

One advantage of my overall interpretation of the set-up of the discussion is that it is supported by the claims that the personified argument makes at the end of the dialogue (361a5-b5). The argument says that in their discussion of the unity of the virtues Protagoras and Socrates have reversed their original positions: Protagoras is now arguing against the thesis that he undertook to defend in his Great Speech, while Socrates is now defending the thesis he had earlier called into question (namely, that virtue is teachable). According to my interpretation of the face analogy, this is precisely what has happened. Although he just devoted an entire speech that was supposed to

[40] οὐδὲν ἄρα ἐστὶν τῶν τῆς ἀρετῆς μορίων ἄλλο οἷον ἐπιστήμη, οὐδ᾽ οἷον δικαιοσύνη, οὐδ᾽ οἷον ἀνδρεία, οὐδ᾽ οἷον σωφροσύνη, οὐδ᾽ οἷον ὁσιότης.

show that virtue is teachable because it is, as a whole, a kind of skill or knowledge, Protagoras has now committed himself to the view that knowledge is *not* responsible for four of the varieties of virtuous behavior and consequently to the view that virtue, as a whole, is *not* teachable.[41] By contrast, Socrates, who earlier claimed that virtue was not teachable (because it was not knowledge), is now arguing that all the virtues are kinds of knowledge.

4. The Unity Thesis and Homogeneity

The context of the discussion of the Unity Thesis—both the broader context provided by Protagoras' speech and the immediate context provided by the set-up of the discussion—shows that the central point of contention between Socrates and Protagoras is whether the virtues are all knowledge. I have argued that Protagoras' speech problematizes this issue by suggesting three different models for virtue (only one of which requires all the virtues to be knowledge). I have also argued that the position Protagoras later reverts to under pressure is a mild intellectualism that leaves him unable to show that virtue, as a whole, is teachable. Socrates' response is to defend Protagoras' position for him. He tries to show that mild intellectualism is false by arguing that strong intellectualism about virtue is true.

At the beginning of this article, I claimed that understanding Socrates' motivation for introducing the Unity Thesis would help us interpret that thesis. We are now in a position to return to this interpretative question. When Socrates claims that the virtues are all one, and when he goes on to argue that one virtue is another, what does he mean? Given the set of issues that Protagoras

[41] Woolf (1999, 27) has argued that Socrates is being uncharitable to Protagoras here, since Protagoras (on Woolf's view) has claimed only that is knowledge a part of virtue, not the whole of it. I agree that during the discussion of the unity of the virtues and at points in his Great Speech, Protagoras does endorse (or appear to endorse) this view. But, as I have argued (in section 3.1 above), the view Protagoras sets out to defend is the view that virtue *is* a form of knowledge. This is what his speech tries (but fails) to establish, and it is with respect to this thesis that he later contradicts himself.

and Socrates are focused on, an answer immediately suggests itself. What Socrates needs to show in this discussion, and what Protagoras has just denied, is that each of the virtues is a form of knowledge. If Socrates can show this, he will have succeeded where Protagoras failed. But to claim that each of the virtues is constituted by knowledge just is to ascribe a certain kind of unity or oneness to them. Ultimately, the same power (knowledge) is the source of each kind of virtuous action and behavior. Thus, the evidence suggests that the Unity Thesis is best interpreted as the claim that the virtues are unified insofar as they are all forms or a form of knowledge; that is, Homogeneity is the best interpretation of the Unity Thesis in this dialogue.

What proponents of the standard interpretations would like to know about virtue is something that Socrates simply does not tell us in the *Protagoras*. Socrates does not elaborate on the structure of the virtue-knowledges by arguing that they are all a particular kind of knowledge (as on Strict Identity or Application) or by showing that they are specially related kinds of knowledge (as on Mutual Entailment). But this is not a failure on Socrates' part.[42] He remains focused on the issue at hand, which is to show that, contra Protagoras, the virtues do possess unity insofar as they are all constituted by knowledge.

My interpretation is further supported by the end of the *Protagoras*, where the personified argument comes on stage to describe what Protagoras and Socrates have done. The argument says that Socrates has been "trying to show that all things (πάντα χρήματα)—justice and temperance and even courage—are knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), which is the best way for virtue to be seen to be teachable" (361b1-3). This description of Socrates' project leaves entirely open what kind(s) of

[42] Burnyeat (1971, 227-228) faults Socrates for showing only that some *kind* of power is responsible for virtue. Burnyeat claims that Socrates is committed to isolating "a single power running through and explaining all the ways *the* brave man might characteristically behave in various situations" (227, emphasis Burnyeat's). My claim is that Burnyeat's assessment of what Socrates has shown is the correct one. But he is wrong to think that Socrates has fallen short of his goal. By identifying knowledge as the source of virtuous action, Socrates has identified a single kind of power responsible for virtuous action, and this was precisely what he set out to do.

knowledge justice, temperance, and courage are or consist in and how they related to one another *qua* knowledge. Instead, it emphasizes that Socrates' goal has been to establish that knowledge is the power responsible for all forms of virtue.

In the remainder of this section and in the following section, I address two responses a proponent of one of the standard interpretations might make to my proposal. The first response is this. Faced with my reading of the set-up of the discussion, the proponent might try to shore up the Core Assumption by showing that Socrates' refutation of Protagoras *requires* Socrates to defend a particular view of how the virtue-knowledges are related. This strategy would require the proponent to re-interpret Protagoras' position in such a way as to show that Protagoras himself takes a stand on how the virtue-knowledges are related. For if Protagoras *is* committed to such an account—for example, if he thinks that the virtues are not all the same kind of knowledge but entirely different kinds of knowledge—then Socrates would need to respond by defending a different account of how those virtue-knowledges are related, one that is inconsistent with the account Protagoras favors (for example, Socrates might argue that the virtues are all the same kind of knowledge).[43]

The face analogy *can* be read in such a way as to commit Protagoras to a particular account of how the virtue-knowledges are related.[44] According to this interpretation of the analogy,

[43] Strictly speaking, Socrates would have one other option available to him. He could refute Protagoras by arguing that the virtues are *not* all kinds of knowledge. But if Socrates also wants to defend the teachability of virtue, this is clearly not a viable option.

[44] To my knowledge, no one has explicitly defended such an interpretation of the face analogy. Brickhouse and Smith come closest to it when they say that Socrates picks the gold analogy as an analogy for the structure of virtue "because he wishes to distinguish clearly his own view from one that allows the individual virtues to be different pieces of knowledge" (Brickhouse and Smith (1997, 321, n. 25)). This suggests that Brickhouse and Smith think the face analogy corresponds to the view that the individual virtues are different pieces of knowledge. However, my argument does not depend on the presence of this interpretation in the literature. My claim is that *this* is the interpretation required to defend the Core Assumption: if it fails (and I am about to argue that it does), then the Core Assumption remains undefended.

Protagoras presupposes that virtue, as a whole, is knowledge, and he takes virtue, as a whole, to be analogous to the face. Thus, to say that the parts of virtue are entirely different from each other is just to say that each part of virtue is an entirely different kind of knowledge from the others. Protagoras is committed to the view that the individual virtues are related to political skill (the whole of virtue) in the way that (in his Great Speech) the individual *technical* skills seemed to be related to technical wisdom: shoemaking and architecture are both kinds of technical wisdom, but shoemaking cannot be reduced to housebuilding, and one can be a good shoemaker without being a good carpenter. In order to refute Protagoras' position, Socrates would need to take a stand on just how the knowledges that constitute virtue are related to one another. In particular, he would need to show that their relationship is stronger and closer than the one Protagoras attributes to them.[45]

This interpretation of Protagoras' position is problematic for two reasons. First, it attributes to Protagoras the assumption that each of the virtues is a form of knowledge. However, as I argued above (section 3.2), this is precisely what Protagoras is led to deny when he includes *sophia* as one of the parts of virtue. Thus, the present interpretation gets the terms of the face analogy wrong. Second, if Protagoras actually held the position the interpretation attributes to him, there would be no need for Socrates to roll out his counter-arguments. For by presupposing that virtue, as a whole, is knowledge, Protagoras would be presupposing the very thing that Socrates says he needs the discussion to prove, namely, that virtue is teachable.[46]

[45] Notice that even if this interpretation were correct it would not tell us *which* of the standard interpretations Socrates should ultimately defend. Showing *either* that the virtues are mutually entailing kinds of knowledge *or* that they are identical with the same kind of knowledge would yield an account of the relationship among the virtues that is stronger than the one Protagoras envisions according to this interpretation of the face analogy.

[46] Socrates introduces the discussion of the unity of the virtues by claiming that if anyone can convince him that virtue is teachable, Protagoras can. He adds, however, that there is still something preventing him from accepting Protagoras' argument. In particular, Protagoras needs to explain more precisely how the virtues are related to one another (329c2-d1). The dialogue ends on a similar note. Socrates claims that he conducted the whole discussion only in order to settle the question of whether or not virtue is teachable (360e6-361a3). Even the personification of the argument notes that

The proponent of the standard interpretations cannot show that Socrates is dialectically obliged to defend a specific account of the structure of the virtue-knowledges. However, she might still argue that Socrates *in fact* goes on to defend one of the views proposed by the standard interpretations. Perhaps when we look at the counter-arguments Socrates actually develops over the course of his refutation we will find clear evidence for one of the interpretations discussed above. Here is an even more pointed way to put the objection: none of the standard interpretations of the unity thesis is *inconsistent* with my claim that Socrates' aim is to show that all the virtues are knowledge. Perhaps Socrates plans to refute Protagoras *by* showing that the virtues all are/consist in/are mutually entailing kinds of the very same knowledge. This is admittedly more trouble than Socrates needs to go to, but he won't undermine his refutation by doing so. Thus, one might hold out hope that one of the standard interpretations of the Unity Thesis survives.

In order to address this objection, we need to look at the arguments that follow the set-up of the discussion. In the following section, I will show that Socrates' arguments do not help us adjudicate among the standard interpretations; that is, the arguments are neutral when it comes to the competing conceptions of the structure of the virtue-knowledges. However, the arguments do all support Homogeneity, since they all make important contributions to Socrates' defense of the thesis that the virtues are all knowledge.

5. Socrates' Unity Arguments

Socrates attempts no less than five different counter-arguments to Protagoras' position. Of those, two concern the relationship between two non-epistemic virtues. What I will call "Argument 1"

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the discussion has implications for whether or not virtue can be taught. She notes that Socrates (in defending the view that the virtues are knowledge) is now supporting the claim that virtue is teachable, while Protagoras (in denying that the virtues are knowledge) is supporting the claim that virtue is not teachable (361a5-b5).

concerns the relationship between justice and holiness (330b8-331b7), while Argument 3 concerns the relationship between justice and temperance (333d1-7). Three of the five arguments directly concern the relationship between one of the non-epistemic virtues and knowledge. Argument 2 (332a2-333b6) concerns the relationship between wisdom and temperance, and Arguments 4 (349e1-351b6) and 5 (358d6-360e5) concern the relationship between courage and wisdom/knowledge.[47] Protagoras interrupts Argument 3 and it is never finished, so, like other scholars,[48] I shall set it aside in what follows.

I begin with Argument 1. Socrates starts by arguing that justice is just and holiness is holy. He then argues that justice is holy and holiness just, and he concludes that

> justice and holiness at least are the same or as similar as possible, and above all justice is the sort of thing that holiness is and holiness the sort of thing that justice is. (331b4-6)[49]

Notice that Socrates waffles on precisely the point the standard interpretations are interested in getting clear on. Are justice and holiness the very same thing (ταὐτόν) or are they (merely) extremely similar (ὅτι ὁμοιότατον)? The former option would suit Strict Identity and Application, according to which the virtues are or consist in the very same kind of knowledge; the latter is

[47] Scholars agree that Socrates discusses the relationship between justice and piety, wisdom and temperance, temperance and justice, and courage and wisdom. They also agree that there are distinct arguments corresponding to the first three pairs of virtues. However, there is some divergence when it comes to carving up the discussion of the relationship between courage and wisdom. Vlastos treats the discussion of courage and wisdom as a single argument (1972, 415, n. 1), while Penner (1973, 49) recognizes three separate arguments within this stretch of text. The precise way one carves up the arguments does not matter for my central claim. For divisions of the discussion similar to mine see Allen (2006, 7), Cooper (1999, 85, n. 11), Denyer (2008, 124, 130, 132, 174, 197), and Gaiser (1959, 42, n. 12).

[48] Cf. Penner (1973), who never even mentions this argument.

[49] ἤτοι ταὐτόν γ᾽ ἐστιν δικαιότης ὁσιότητι ἢ ὅτι ὁμοιότατον, καὶ μάλιστα πάντων ἥ τε δικαιοσύνη οἷον ὁσιότης καὶ ἡ ὁσιότης οἷον δικαιοσύνη.

convenient for Mutual Entailment, according to which the virtues are closely related but nonetheless distinct kinds of knowledge.[50]

This argument doesn't rule out any of the standard interpretations, but neither does it support one of those interpretations over the others. And this makes good sense on the view I am proposing. Socrates' goal is to refute Protagoras' claim that the virtues are entirely different from one another because they are not all knowledge. Argument 1, then, is an important first step in the project. If successful, it would show that at least two of the virtues are similar in non-trivial ways. Insofar as Socrates' interlocutors (and Plato's readers) find themselves agreeing that justice is holy or holiness just, they should also be inclined to say that justice and holiness do bear a striking resemblance to one another (contra Protagoras), and they should wonder what the basis of that resemblance is. Socrates has not shown that justice and holiness are similar because they are both epistemic powers, but this is one possible explanation for their resemblance, one that may become more persuasive as Socrates develops his other arguments.[51]

Argument 2, as I have said, addresses the relationship between temperance and wisdom. Socrates gets Protagoras to agree that wisdom (σοφία) is the opposite (ἐναντίον) of ignorance (ἀφροσύνη); that what is done in a particular way is done by means of its corresponding power;[52]

[50] It is worth noting that proponents of Strict Identity and Application usually grant that Argument 1 does not support their interpretations of the Unity Thesis (extreme similarity does not imply identity). For this assessment of Argument 1, see Cooper (1999, 81), Denyer (2008, 124-127), Penner (1973, 49), and Vlastos (1972, 421-424). For a contrasting view, see Clark (2015, 447).

[51] Protagoras, perhaps rightly, remains unpersuaded by the argument. He insists that whatever similarities the two virtues can be said to have, they are not significant enough to undermine his claim: "Justice does resemble holiness in a way (τι)," Protagoras says, "for anything at all resembles another in some way or other." He goes on: "It's not right to call things having a certain similarity 'similar' if they have but a small similarity, nor is it right to call things having a certain dissimilarity 'dissimilar' [if they have but a small dissimilarity]" (331e2-4). In my view, Protagoras' response signals to us readers that Argument 1 is not a particularly strong one. As Protagoras notes, Socrates has not yet shown that the similarities are as significant as he makes them out to be.

[52] See Penner (1973, 51) for a defense of the view that this is an argument about the powers (or states of soul) by means of which people behave in certain ways.

and that each thing has only one opposite. He then tries to show that temperate behavior can be attributed to wisdom on the grounds that temperate behavior is the opposite of ignorant behavior (τὸ ἀφρόνως πράττειν). The result is supposed to be that the person who behaves temperately must do so by means of the opposite of ignorance (i.e. wisdom). But since temperate behavior can also be attributed to temperance, and since each thing has only one opposite, it turns out that, according to this argument, "temperance and wisdom would be one" (ἓν ἂν εἴη ἡ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἡ σοφία; 333b4-5).

The upshot of the argument is supposed to be that the very same power is responsible for temperate as for wise behavior. In particular, Socrates claims that the power ordinarily labelled "temperance" is "one" with the power ordinarily labelled "wisdom" or "σοφία." If "σοφία" here refers to the knowledge of good and bad, this second argument would be strong evidence for Strict Identity or Application. Its conclusion would be that temperance is identical with the knowledge that σοφία is, namely, knowledge of good and bad. However, as I pointed out in the previous section, Socrates and Protagoras have *not* been using "σοφία" in this restricted way. Instead, "σοφία" has been used to refer to knowledge quite generally. Thus, although the views that the virtues are identical with or constituted by the very same kind of knowledge are consistent with the conclusion Socrates draws here, the conclusion itself does not get us all the way to either Strict Identity or Application. Socrates' argument shows that the psychological power responsible for temperance is knowledge (the same power that is responsible for a whole variety of skilled action), but it does not show that temperance is identical with or constituted by a particular knowledge, skill, or discipline (e.g. knowledge of good and bad).

What about Mutual Entailment? Its defenders claim that the power responsible for temperate behavior is distinct from the power responsible for wise behavior, but they also hold that the

powers responsible for temperate and wise behavior are both epistemic. It seems to me that there are two ways proponents of Mutual Entailment could go when it comes to Argument 2. First, they could interpret the argument as showing that the person who acts wisely will also be one who is capable of acting temperately.[53] When Socrates says that temperance and wisdom are one, he means that one and the same person possesses the (distinct) epistemic powers of temperance and wisdom. The trouble with this interpretation is that Socrates' focus is on the *powers* of temperance and wisdom, not on the person who possesses them. He really does seem to be saying that the same power is responsible both for temperate and wise action, not just that anyone with one of the powers will have the other. A second problem with this strategy is that it presupposes that the powers in question are both epistemic (albeit distinct). If Socrates is *assuming* that temperance and wisdom are both epistemic powers, he is begging the question against Protagoras.

Alternatively, proponents of Mutual Entailment could concede that when Socrates says that temperance and wisdom are one he just means that wisdom/knowledge is the power responsible for temperate behavior, but still insist that this leaves open the possibility that the power of knowledge can be differentiated or further specified into distinct kinds of knowledge. But to concede this is already to concede the central point. My point is not that Socrates *cannot* develop his account of the structure of virtue in this way. My point is that this argument does not show that Socrates is a proponent of Mutual Entailment *rather than* a proponent of Strict Identity or Application.

A similar analysis applies to Argument 4, Socrates' first argument for the unity of courage and wisdom (349e2ff). Socrates establishes that by "courageous men" Protagoras means "bold

[53] This is the line Vlastos takes (1972, 435-438). Note that Vlastos does not think that every instance of virtuous action must instantiate *all* the virtues: "a man who has five distinct dispositions which *may be* concurrently exercised *need not* be exercising all five on each occasion on which he exercises one" (italics Vlastos's (1972, 423, n. 25)). My use of the word "capable" above reflects this nuance of Vlastos's account.

men" (349e2). He then identifies two different possible sources of bold (and so of courageous) action: madness and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη),[54] and he gets Protagoras to admit that all courageous action must be accomplished through knowledge, since if those actions were accomplished through madness they would no longer be fine. Once again, we find Socrates trying to establish that knowledge or wisdom is the power responsible for a particular kind of virtuous behavior, in this case, courageous behavior. But, here too, "knowledge" turns out to be used quite broadly to refer to the source of a variety of skilled activities (including diving and horse-riding: 349e8-350a4). It is a further question whether courage is properly identified with a particular kind of knowledge or wisdom and (if so) whether the knowledge with which courage is identified is the whole of virtue or one of its proper parts.

Protagoras' objection to the argument provides further evidence that the target claim concerns the unity of knowledge and courage at this general level. Protagoras objects that the fact that he calls courageous men bold does not show that courage and boldness are identical but only that courage is correlated with boldness. That only correlation is at stake, Protagoras says, is shown by the fact that "boldness arises in men from skill (ἀπὸ τέχνης) and from anger and from madness, just as power does, whereas courage arises [in men] from nature and good nourishment of their souls" (351a7-b3). Protagoras' concern is not that courage has turned out to be a specific kind of knowledge but that it has turned out to be knowledge at all.

In Argument 5, Socrates first establishes that knowledge or wisdom, considered in the context of virtue, is a kind of measuring skill (μετρητική τις: 357a1) concerned with "the right choice (ὀρθῇ τῇ αἱρέσει) about pleasure and pain", i.e. "goods and bads" (357a6 and d5-6). He then argues

[54] Socrates begins by using "ἐπιστήμη" but puts his conclusion in terms of "σοφία."

that *this* kind of knowledge is the source of courageous behavior. This is because courage turns out to be "the knowledge of what is and is not terrible" (ἡ σοφία τῶν δεινῶν καὶ μὴ δεινῶν)[55] and decisions about what is and is not terrible are decisions about what is bad and what is good (360d4-5). What does Socrates take himself to have established by this argument? We don't have to look far for an answer. At the very end of the argument Socrates tells us (and Protagoras):

> "I'll ask you just one more thing," I [Socrates] said, "Do you still think, as you did at first, that some men are extremely ignorant but extremely courageous?" (360d8-e2)[56]

Socrates clearly expects Protagoras to answer in the negative: there is no one who is both extremely ignorant and extremely courageous. That's because, if Socrates' argument holds, to act courageously just is to exercise a form of knowledge. This is just the conclusion we should expect if Socrates is defending the Homogeneity version of the Unity Thesis.

At this point, however, defenders of the standard interpretations—and especially of Strict Identity and Application—will likely protest. Surely Argument 5 gives us the resources for saying something more about the precise kind of wisdom or knowledge that courage is! In other dialogues, Socrates often individuates knowledges and skills by their objects:[57] different forms of knowledge and skill have different objects. Thus, Socrates' identification of a single kind of object (good and bads/pleasures and pains) for the knowledge of good and bad might lead one to conclude that

[55] Put more literally: courage is "the *wisdom* concerning what is and is not terrible." However, since this expression is a bit inelegant in English and, more importantly, since it may lead to confusion below, I'll talk about "the *knowledge* of what is and is not terrible."

[56] ἕν γ᾽, ἔφην ἐγώ, μόνον ἐρόμενος ἔτι σέ, εἴ σοι ὥσπερ τὸ πρῶτον ἔτι δοκοῦσιν εἶναί τινες ἄνθρωποι ἀμαθέστατοι μέν, ἀνδρειότατοι δέ.

[57] For one prominent example, see *Rep*. 5.477c-e.

Argument 5 provides strong evidence for thinking either that the virtues are all identical with the very same knowledge or that the virtues consist in the same knowledge but can be differentiated by context. For, according to the view Socrates appears to hold elsewhere, there should be a single form of knowledge set over the single class of objects that he has identified, goods and bads.

However, the issue is more complicated than this. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates and Protagoras both allow that kinds of knowledge can be further differentiated into distinct sub-knowledges that share the same, general object. Protagoras' earlier presentation of technical wisdom suggests that a single kind of knowledge, individuated by a single aim or object, may yet turn out to be surprisingly complex. Technical wisdom has a single, general aim (that of sustaining human life),[58] but it comprises a set of distinct skills, each of which accomplishes some part of the general goal: providing clothing or footwear, e.g., or furnishing shelter or food. Socrates has a similar view of the measuring skill. Socrates claims that the measuring skill is concerned with "excess and defect" (ὑπερβολῆς τε καὶ ἐνδείας, 357a1), and he also says that it can be further individuated into mathematics (which concerns excess and defect in relation to the odd and the even, 357a3) and the skill that measures pleasures and pains (knowledge of good and bad). Since mathematics and the knowledge of good and bad are clearly not identical skills, Socrates' discussion of the measuring skill shows that (a) a kind of skill might be subdivided into distinct sub-skills and that (b) those distinct skills might share the same general aim or object (in this case, that of assessing excess and defect).

Once we recognize that kinds of knowledge and objects can be subdivided in this way, a new interpretation of the knowledge of good and bad becomes plausible. Given Socrates' earlier

[58] At 321c7-d1, technical wisdom is described as the "salvation" (σωτηρία) of man. A few lines later, Protagoras notes that the "demiurgic skill" was a help to human beings "in relation to their livelihood" (ἡ δημιουργικὴ τέχνη αὐτοῖς πρὸς μὲν τροφὴν ἱκανὴ βοηθὸς ἦν, 322b3-4).

treatment of the measuring art and Protagoras' treatment of technical wisdom, it is possible that Socrates' considered view is that the goods and bads that he identifies as the objects of the knowledge of good and bad might be subdivided so as to generate independent knowledges set over the different sub-categories of goods and bads. Thus, when Socrates talks about the measuring art that is the salvation of man, he might have in mind a set of different skills tasked with measuring different kinds of goods and bads/pains and pleasures, just as, when Protagoras talks about technical wisdom as the salvation of man, he has in mind a set of different skills, each of which contributes to some aspect of sustaining human life.

A concrete case might be helpful here. When Socrates describes the view of the many regarding goods and bads, he says that they regard certain painful things to be worth doing or enduring only because they result in greater goods (i.e. more or greater pleasures). The list of painful things includes physical exercise, military campaigns, and severe forms of medical treatment; the list of pleasant things to which the painful ones lead includes health, being in a good physical state, saving cities, ruling others, and becoming wealthy (354a4-b5). It is not hard to see that the person who evaluates these pleasures and pains is typically taking them in sets. The pain of the medical treatment is weighed against the pleasures of health. The discomfort of the physical exercise is weighed against the good physical condition that results (possibly together with the chance of winning contests and so money). The dangers of the military campaign are weighed against the pleasures of saving cities and ruling others. But once we recognize that pleasures and pains are evaluated in this way (i.e. in discrete sets), it is easy to see that one might be very good at measuring one set of pleasures and pains and very bad at measuring another. I might know that the pleasures of excelling at my sport outweigh the pains suffered through training, but I might be unable to properly compare the pains of a military campaign with the pleasures of winning. One

reason for my incompetence might be that I don't yet know what the "worth" of the individual experiences is (i.e. how many hedons a victory amounts to and how many dolors will be incurred in the battle itself).[59] Until I know this, I will be unable to decide on which course of action will yield the most pleasure. I am suggesting that this is the sort of view of the relationship between the different virtues (i.e. different knowledges of good and bad) that Socrates might have in mind in the *Protagoras*. The truly virtuous person would need to be able to measure all kinds of pleasure and pain, but acquiring this comprehensive ability would involve learning, one at a time, the individual measuring arts associated with each category of pleasure and pain.[60]

Defenders of Strict Identity and Application generally assume that the measuring art with which the knowledge of good and bad is identified is a single form of knowledge that cannot be further subdivided into independent kinds of knowledge. However, Argument 5, although it leaves open this possibility, does not provide decisive or even clear evidence in favor of this interpretation of knowledge of good and bad. In fact, the dialogue makes salient a possibility that cuts against these interpretations, namely, that kinds of knowledge (like technical wisdom or the measuring art itself) might be further subdivided into independent knowledges. Finally, I should add that this alternative interpretation, while congenial to Mutual Entailment (which requires the virtues to be

[59] I do not mean to commit Plato or Socrates to thinking of pleasure and pain in this Benthamite way. The example of hedons and dolors merely provides a convenient way of showing that the measuring art might be better thought of as a label for a collection of different but closely related skills rather than as a label for a single unified skill that is on par with (e.g.) shoemaking.

[60] It is not certain that Socrates actually endorses the view that goods and bads can be reduced to pleasures and pains. See Zeyl (1980) for a defense of the view that Socrates is *not* a hedonist. See Rudebusch (1999) for a defense of Socrates as a (kind of) hedonist. More recent papers by Moss (2014) and Woolf (2002) also contain illuminating discussions of hedonism and akrasia in the *Protagoras* and their connection to Socratic method (Woolf) and Socratic intellectualism (Moss).

In the case described above, I have assumed that Socrates accepts hedonism, since that seems to me to be the harder case for my view. But if one is inclined to think that Socrates does not endorse hedonism, then it is even easier to argue that goods and bads can be further subdivided into discrete categories and that the person who knows how to evaluate one set of goods and bads might not know how to evaluate another set.

distinct forms of knowledge), also does not provide decisive or clear evidence in favor of it. Even if we were to establish that Socrates does indeed think that knowledge of good and bad can be subdivided into different kinds of knowledge, it would not follow that those knowledges were mutually entailing. For all the model tells us, the knowledges in question might be independent of one another in the way that shoemaking and architecture are.

The *Protagoras* allows for (and indeed encourages) two different ways of conceptualizing the knowledge of good and bad. One of those ways is consistent with Strict Identity and Application. The other is consistent with Mutual Entailment. Neither model straightforwardly entails any of the standard interpretations. Thus, Socrates' central arguments for the unity of the virtues remain neutral on precisely the issue that the standard interpretations are seeking to settle. However, those arguments are clear on one thing: the virtues, contra Protagoras' own view, *are* similar to one another, and what grounds that similarity is the fact that they are all one. Each of the virtues consists in the power of knowledge.

6. Conclusion

Using my reading of the context of the discussion of the Unity Thesis, I have argued that the best interpretation of that thesis is Homogeneity. The standard interpretations (Strict Identity, Application, and Mutual Entailment) cannot show that Socrates is dialectically obliged to develop a more precise account of the structure of the virtue-knowledges, nor do Socrates' arguments for the unity of the virtues favor one of the standard interpretations over the others. By contrast, the context of the discussion shows that Socrates *is* dialectically obliged to argue that the virtues are all one insofar as they are all knowledge, and the arguments he gives in the rest of the dialogue do aim at supporting this thesis.

One of the advantages of my interpretation is that it brings into focus the *level* of the claim that Socrates is interested in defending. In much the same way as he defends the unity of the virtues, Socrates could show that shoemaking, architecture, and farming are all unified in that what enables people to make shoes, build houses, and grow crops is, in each case, a kind of knowledge or skill. Establishing this unity does not yet tell us how to make shoes or houses or how to grow crops, and it certainly does not entail that shoemaking, architecture, or farming are all the very same knowledge or skill, but it does tell us something extremely important. It tells us that it is possible for someone who is a non-expert in these areas to *become* a shoemaker, builder, or farmer and that it is possible for someone to become one of these craftsmen through a *process of learning*. Socrates' defense of the Unity Thesis is in the service of making this kind of point about the virtues. What unifies the virtues is precisely that they are all knowledge. And if this is true, then we know both that it is possible for someone who is not virtuous to *become* virtuous and that it is possible for them to become virtuous in a particular way, i.e. through *learning*.[61]

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