ON THE ANALYSIS OF *PROTAGORAS* 351B–360E

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HAVING SECURED PROTAGORAS' ASSENT to the identity of piety, justice, wisdom, and temperance, Socrates attempts to complete his proof of the unity of the virtues by demonstrating the identity of courage and wisdom. After an initial foray in this direction (the "fourth argument") is countered by Protagoras, who accuses him of committing a simple fallacy (349e1–351b2),[1] Socrates launches into the lengthy and complex final argument of the *Protagoras* (the "fifth argument"). This argument, which contains Plato's fullest single statement of the Socratic paradoxes, has received a good deal of attention in recent years, but its most important segment, Socrates' attempt to prove the non-existence of moral weakness, or *akrasia* (a word not used in the *Protagoras*), is still the subject of much controversy. In particular, there is widespread disagreement about his proofs (a) that the belief of the many—that people perform certain actions, while knowing them to be wrong, though they don't have to do them, because they are "overcome by pleasure"—is absurd; and (b) that the actions are really due to ignorance. In light of this widespread disagreement, these points, which are central not only to the interpretation of the *Protagoras* but to Plato's early dialogues as a whole, deserve to be examined anew.

The position taken in this paper is that Socrates' interpretation of *akrasia* in the *Protagoras* is dependent on a certain view of human motivation, which we may call Egoism—its precise nature is discussed below. In particular, I will argue that Socrates is able to reduce the many's account of *akrasia* to absurdity by showing that it conflicts with the obvious truth of Egoism. While some semblance of this view has been argued before, most notably by Santas,[2] it has recently come under attack by C. C. W. Taylor, in his extremely helpful commentary on the *Protagoras*.[3] The purpose of this paper is to defend the Egoism-view. I will attempt to show not only that Socrates' argument depends upon

[1]This and the other earlier arguments are analyzed (as intentionally fallacious) in my paper, "Toward a Consistent Interpretation of the *Protagoras*," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 61 (1979) 125–142, which includes numerous references.

[2]G. Santas, "Plato's *Protagoras* and Explanations of Weakness," *Philosophical Review* 75 (1966) 3–33 (reprinted in G. Vlastos, ed., *The Philosophy of Socrates* [Garden City, N.Y. 1971] 264–298; all references are to the reprint). Similar positions are taken by G. Vlastos, "Socrates on Acrasia," *Phoenix* 23 (1969) 71–88; and T. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues* (Oxford 1977) 103–108.

[3]C. C. W. Taylor, *Plato's Protagoras* (Oxford 1976) 161–212. Works mentioned in notes 2 and 3 will be cited by author's name below.

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Egoism, but also exactly how he introduces Egoism into his proof and argues for it, and, to point out the crucial dialectical moves through which he is able to prove that *akrasia* is really the product of ignorance. Moreover, it will be seen that the Egoism-view defended here allows a far more plausible reading of the argument as a whole than the other main interpretation yet proffered.

II

This paper takes its stand upon the obvious point that Socrates' arguments concerning *akrasia* must be understood in the context of the fifth argument as a whole and of the *Protagoras* as a whole. In order to understand these facets of the general argument, we must pay special attention to the use to which they are put by Socrates in his debate with Protagoras.[4]

The fifth argument as a whole may be divided as follows:[5]

I prelude (351b3–353b6)[6]
II hedonism-proof (353c1–355a5)
III *akrasia*-proof (355a5–357e8)
IV conclusions (358a1–358d4)
V courage-proof (358d5–360e5).

The two points with which this paper is especially concerned (a and b, above) make up the substance of section III, the *akrasia*-proof, which clearly requires the interchangeability of "pleasure" and "good," which is established in II. What is not always given sufficient attention is the fact that II and III exist in a context. From II and III, a number of conclusions are drawn (in IV), which are utilized in V, the courage-proof, through which Protagoras is finally refuted. Thus sections II and III must be understood as being utilized to establish these conclusions.[7] The most important advantage of the Egoism-view defended here is that it makes sense of Socrates' strategy throughout these early stages of the argument. It shows Socrates as *directly* concerned throughout the hedonism and *akrasia* proofs to establish the conclusions he needs for his courage-proof. (We shall see that one major drawback of the other main interpretation is that it does not depict Socrates doing this, but has him

[4]Cf. B. Manuwald, "Lust und Tapferkeit: Zum gedanklichen Verhältnis zweier Abschnitte in Platons 'Protagoras'," *Phronesis* 20 (1975) 22–50.

[5]Exactly how the argument should be divided is controversial. See Manuwald, *ibid.* 24 n. 10, for an indication of the views of a number of scholars.

[6]For the sake of convenience, 351b3-e7 will be discussed as part of II.

[7]Interpreting II and III in their context makes it clear that the limitations that Santas places on them (266–270) have no warrant.

establishing his important conclusion, fallaciously, at the very end of III.)

The courage-proof is relatively straightforward and can be treated briefly. Socrates proves that courage is wisdom, by first proving that cowardice is ignorance. This is accomplished—as are Socrates' other demonstrations concerning *akrasia*—by construing the moral agent (here the coward or the brave man) as placed in the position of having to choose between two courses of action, both of which entail consequences that are mixed, partly good and partly bad.[8] An example, offered by Protagoras (359e1–4), is choosing whether to go into battle. Both the brave man and the coward feel fear at this prospect, while fear has been defined as an "expectation of evil" (προσδοκίαν . . . κακοῦ, 358d6–7). The brave man and the coward react differently, the former going into battle, the latter not going. What the brave man does is *kalon* (359e4–5). If it is *kalon*, it must be good (*agathon*) (359e5–7; and also pleasant, 360a2–3). Thus the brave man does what is good and the coward what is shameful (*aischron*) and bad (*kakon*; 360b6–7). Presumably, in order to avoid what he fears, the coward chooses the lesser good instead of the greater good. This choice must be accounted for as caused by ignorance (360a4–6, 360b4–7). (Since courage is the opposite of cowardice, what causes courage must be the opposite of what causes cowardice, and so courage is caused by wisdom—and is wisdom: 360c1–d5.)

Socrates is able to conduct this argument smoothly. All points are accepted without controversy. The two crucial—and highly questionable—points on which the argument ultimately rests are accepted by Protagoras as having been established in the earlier stages of the fifth argument. These are:

(i) the "*kalon*-thesis": what is *kalon* is good

and, what is especially important, "Egoism," the basic assertion that individuals pursue what they believe to be good for themselves or beneficial. As we shall see, early in the fifth argument, Socrates is able to secure the agreement of the many to a rough form of Egoism—in a formulation similar to that we have just presented (354c3–5)—and this proves to be crucial to his case.

Egoism is a thesis about human choices, human intentions. Precisely formulated, it is as follows:

(ii) Egoism: any agent who chooses between two goods, p and q, will choose (to get, to do) the one he holds to be greater (better for himself).

We will see that various forms of this basic thesis are utilized by Socrates

[8]As Taylor points out (201), the equivalence of "good" and "pleasant" is not required for the courage-proof.

in his argument. Two are worth mentioning here. First, Egoism has an important corollary:

> (iii) the "ignorance-theorem:" if any agent chooses between goods p and q, with p greater than q, so as to get/to do q instead of p, he does so out of ignorance (he makes a mistake in estimating the relative values of p and q).

The ignorance-theorem, treated as closely connected with Egoism, is also central to the courage-proof.

In addition, Egoism is closely related to another thesis about human motivation, Hedonistic-Egoism, or psychological hedonism. Since it is established in the pleasure-proof that the good is pleasure (or the pleasant),[9] we are justified in substituting "pleasures" for "goods" in our formulation of Egoism, which would give us psychological hedonism (and the substitution would hold for the ignorance-theorem as well).

Thus, for the courage-proof, and for the success of the fifth argument as a whole, Socrates requires that stages I-III of the argument yield the *kalon*-thesis and Egoism. And these are the most important of the conclusions assented to by Protagoras and the company present in IV. It therefore stands to reason that an account of stages I-III according to which it is seen that the establishment of Egoism and the *kalon*-thesis is Socrates' primary concern throughout these sections has a strong presumption of being a correct interpretation—i.e., that an account of the argument must depict Socrates as acting in this way, as a necessary condition for being correct. And so we must explain just how Socrates establishes Egoism and the *kalon*-thesis and their role in the early stages of the argument.

III

Socrates argues for Egoism through a procedure that is at first sight unusual but quite common throughout the early dialogues. He is able to secure the many's assent to it, because it is a position they already hold; Socrates' argument has Egoism for a premise as well as a conclusion. The substance of Egoism is a thoroughly common, thoroughly plausible view about the nature of human choices that is, at least apparently, so obviously true that the many cannot help but believe it. However, the many subscribe to a rough, unsystematic form of Egoism, without being fully aware either of holding this view or of its implications. And so Socrates' strategy throughout the early stages of the argument is to make the many fully conscious of views—and the implications of views—they already hold. An overall strategy such as this is clearly seen in Socrates' hedonism-proof.

[9] For reasons of space, this and other complex but relatively unimportant difficulties of translation cannot be discussed here. They are discussed fully by Taylor.

Socrates argues for the identity of pleasure and good (the hedonism-thesis) in two stages.[10] The precise thesis that he is attempting to establish is not at all clear, and at different stages of the argument, it is given different formulations.[11] The lack of precision here is important to note, as a similar lack of precision is seen in many places throughout the fifth argument as a whole. It is clear, however, that Socrates wishes to establish a relationship between "good" and "pleasure" that will enable him to interchange these terms, in order to effect the *akrasia*-proof in III. To simplify matters, it seems that Socrates wishes to prove that pleasure and only pleasure is good. Thus he must prove by the end of II:

II.1 All pleasure is good, and
II.2 Only pleasure is good.

The fifth argument as a whole begins with the argument for II.1. Socrates secures Protagoras' assent that living pleasurably is living well, and so that pleasure is good (the tacit assumption being that whatever makes for living well is good) (351b3–c1). Protagoras, however, protests that not all pleasures are necessarily good, that only *kalon* pleasures are good (351c1–2). Socrates' argument for II.1 is in reply to Protagoras' objection, but it should be noted that Socrates misinterprets (or misrepresents) this objection as a restatement of the common view of the many that, simply, not all pleasures are good/pains are evil (351c2–3).[12] In arguing that all pleasures are good, Socrates studiously ignores the relationship between "*kalon*" and other moral terms. "*Kalon*" is never mentioned, but later in the argument, Socrates seems to believe that he has established, among his conclusions in IV, the propositions (a) that all pleasures are *kalon*, and (b) that what is *kalon* is good (358b3–6).[13]

Socrates establishes II.1 by showing that instances of what appear to the many to be counter-examples actually confirm it. Things that appear to be bad though pleasant are shown to cause more pain than pleasure, and to be bad for that reason. The opposite is shown to be true of apparently good unpleasant things, and the many are unable to name any respect in which these things are good or bad, other than pleasure and pain (353c3–354c2).

In the course of arguing for II.1, Socrates proves II.2 as well. Because the many are repeatedly unable to name any respect in which things are

[10]Whether Socrates is depicted as sincerely holding this thesis in the *Protagoras* is a question we cannot pursue here; for the views of numerous scholars, see M. J. O'Brien, *The Socratic Paradoxes and the Greek Mind* (Chapel Hill 1967) 138 n. 22.

[11]For example, 351d1–2, 351e2–3, 351e5–6, 354b7–e2, 355a3–5, 355b4–7. See Taylor 168–170, 177–181. Taylor gives an exhaustive discussion of many complicated, though relatively unimportant, difficulties in II that cannot be discussed below.

[12]It should be noted that Protagoras, too, reformulates his objection in this fashion (351c7–d8).

[13]See below, 320–321.

good or bad except in regard to pleasure and pain,[14] Socrates concludes that only pleasure and pain are good and evil. This proposition is stated provisionally; i.e., it holds only as long as the many can name no other good or evil (354e8–355a5). But until they can do so, they are shown to be committed to the thesis that *only* pleasure is good.

As we have said, what especially interests us in the present context is the means through which Socrates establishes the hedonism-thesis. He is able to show that the many subscribe to the doctrine of evaluative hedonism (i.e., that pleasure and only pleasure is good) on the basis of an examination of their deeply held convictions. Though the many believe that some pleasures are bad and some pains are good, Socrates is able to show that this belief represents a confusion on their part. When one *examines* their beliefs, it is seen that they are able to adduce no standard according to which pleasures are bad and pains good other than pleasure and pain. And so when their moral beliefs are analyzed and systematized, the many can be shown to be evaluative hedonists.

Socrates establishes Egoism through a similar strategy. Like evaluative hedonism, it is established upon the basis of what the many *really* believe. Though they appear to believe that Egoism does not hold in all cases, an examination of these special cases will show that they are not really counter-examples: not only can they be construed so as to support Egoism, but the many will be able to present no other explanation.

The examples of situations that seem to refute Egoism are situations of *akrasia*. A situation of *akrasia* is described as consisting of three elements:[15]

*D*1 a man does evil[16]
*D*2 knowing it is evil
*D*3 and he is not compelled to do it

and the many's explanation for his conduct is:

E because he is "overcome by pleasure."

Stage III of the argument is Socrates' *akrasia*-proof, in which he establishes two things: (a) that the many's account of *akrasia* is absurd; and (b) what really happens in ostensible cases of *akrasia*. (a) is proved by showing that the many's view of *akrasia* conflicts with the obvious truth of Egoism; then in (b), situations of *akrasia* are reinterpreted so as to be made consistent with Egoism.

[14]354d1–4, 354d7–e2, 353d6–e1, 353e5–354a2, 354b5–c2.

[15]See 352d6–7, 355a7–8, 355b1–3, 355d1–3; there are also descriptions of *akrasia* in which *D*3 is not made explicit: 352e6–353a2, 353c6–8, 355e6–356a1 (using *D* for "description," and *E* for "explanation").

[16]Twice the agent is described as *wishing* to do evil (not to do the good) οὐκ ἐθέλειν πράττειν, 352d6–7; πράττειν οὐκ ἐθέλει, 355b2). For the importance of this shift, see below, 314–316.

Thus we see that, in his proofs of both evaluative hedonism and Egoism, Socrates begins with the many confused: they hold a doctrine on the one hand, but can name apparent counter-instances on the other. In each case, Socrates shows that the apparent counter-instances can be reduced to conformity with the doctrine. What is interesting to note is that Socrates uses the same counter-instances to establish both doctrines. For both doctrines, Socrates examines an overall situation of *akrasia* (see 353c1–9). Evaluative hedonism is established by showing that, even though what the agent does appears to be pleasant and bad, it is really painful (and so bad). (Then Socrates discusses converse instances.) Egoism is established by showing that, even in this case, the agent can be seen to be doing what he believes to be in his own best interest.

It is possible that one reason Socrates so closely links his proofs of evaluative hedonism and Egoism is the fact that he is not fully aware of the distance between the questions that these two doctrines address. The link between evaluative hedonism and Egoism is found in the form of Egoism that Socrates defends in the fifth argument, Hedonistic-Egoism, or psychological hedonism. A number of commentators note that Socrates makes no clear distinction between evaluative hedonism and psychological hedonism;[17] this is not necessarily to say that he confuses the two, but clearly, Socrates does move from talking about the one to talking about the other, without alerting the reader. This causes some problems in interpreting his arguments.

Psychological hedonism is introduced into the argument, quite in passing, in 354c3–5, in the hedonism-proof. This is the first appearance of Egoism in the argument, and the very off-handedness of its introduction is of some interest.

As we have said, the bulk of the hedonism-proof consists of the reduction of apparent counter-instances to accord with evaluative hedonism. Having completed the two sets of reductions, Socrates interjects the following sentence, before formally drawing his conclusion: "So you pursue pleasure as the good and shun pain as the bad."[18] The inference here (*οὐκοῦν*) clearly has the following structure. Since it has been demonstrated that pleasure is the good and pain the bad, granted the obvious truth (Egoism) that people pursue that which they believe to be good and avoid that which they take to be bad, it follows that people pursue pleasure and shun pain—as the good and the evil. Not only is Egoism undoubtedly assumed here, but it is taken to be such an obvious truth that it is not mentioned and remains a tacit assumption. Only now does Socrates formally conclude (*ἄρα* 354c5) that the many hold pleasure to

[17]J. Sullivan, "The Hedonism in Plato's *Protagoras*," *Phronesis* 6 (1961) 19—20; Vlastos 85 n. 49; Santas 272 n. 12.

[18]For the translation, see Taylor 177.

be the good and pain the evil (354c5–d3). This inference returns us to the context of evaluative hedonism, which II as a whole is designed to establish. The connective between 354c3–5 and the following sentences apparently lies in the fact that psychological hedonism lends some additional support to the truth of evaluative hedonism; i.e., the kind of things that people pursue as good is additional evidence as to exactly what they believe to be good.[19] In any event, Socrates clearly secures the assent of the many that psychological hedonism is a true account of how people behave, in addition to their belief that evaluative hedonism is a true account of what is good and evil.

The psychological hedonism that the many are seen to hold (as a specification of their general belief in Egoism) is the basis for Socrates' proof that their view of *akrasia* is absurd. Socrates begins section III by declaring that the establishment of evaluative hedonism allows the intersubstitution of the words "good" and "pleasant," "bad" and "painful" (355a5–b7). The account of the many, which is declared to be absurd, falls under the description: *D1*: A man does evil *D2*: knowing it is evil *D3*: he is not compelled to do it. And the explanation for this, which, formerly, was *E*: because he is "overcome by pleasure," now reads:

E1: because he is "overcome by good" (355c7–d3)

This is the only substitution necessary for Socrates' refutation of the many's view of *akrasia*.[20]

The precise nature of the absurdity here is controversial. This is largely due to the fact that Socrates does not stop to point it out before continuing with his tasks at hand. The evidence of the dramatic context suggests that the absurdity is developed by 355e4, for, as Vlastos notes, Socrates introduces the ironic device of "an arrogant questioner," who characterizes the position of the many as "ridiculous nonsense" (γελοῖον, 355d1), proceeds to develop an argument against it, and is not heard from after 355e4.[21] Indeed, there is an absurdity contained in 355d1–e4, centering on the conflict between the many's view of *akrasia* and the obvious truth of Egoism.

The arrogant questioner shows that the agent follows the course of action that yields him "fewer good things at the cost of greater evils" (355d3–e4).[22] In addition, in the process of redescribing the situation of *akrasia*, the questioner reformulates the many's explanation for it:

[19]Similarly, 355a2–3 contains an additional test for II.2.

[20]Cf. Taylor 185. The second substitution (355e4–356a1), noted by Taylor, is difficult to explain. Though it need not be read as part of the reduction to absurdity itself, but rather as part of a reinterpretation of *akrasia* as ignorance after the *reductio* has been completed (see below, 317–320), this remains the only one of Taylor's objections to the Egoism-view that is not easily rebutted.

[21]Vlastos 78 ff; the questioner is introduced at 355c2–3 and becomes ὑβριστής at c8.

[22]On the translation of this clause, see J. Stocks, *CQ* 7 (1913) 100–104; Taylor, 186–187.

E2: "It's clear, then, . . . what you mean by being overcome is taking (λαμβάνειν) fewer good things at the cost of greater evils." (355e2–4).

As Santas has shown, "taking" here refers to an intentional act on the part of the agent, and not to any process of receiving goods apart from his intentions. This must be true if *E2* is to function as an *explanation* for the case of *akrasia*, and not merely as a repetition of the former description. And so, in this context, "choosing" would be an accurate translation of *lambanein*.[23]

It seems clear that this interpretation of "overcome" is the crucial move in the argument. In the first place, it yields the absurdity that the arrogant questioner seeks. Putting all of our elements together, the situation is as follows: *D1*: a man does evil (which has been shown to mean "the greater evil") *D2*: knowing it is evil *D3*: he is not compelled to do it *E2*: because he *takes* fewer good things at the cost of greater evils. *E2* has been shown to mean:

E3: because he *chooses* fewer good things at the cost of greater evils
or *E4*: he chooses the lesser good/greater evil.

E4 is simply an explicit statement of the content of *E3*. If we combine *E4* with *D2*—to yield: the agent knowingly chooses the lesser good/greater evil—we have our absurdity. For this clearly conflicts with the obvious truth of Egoism, assented to in 354c3–5.[24]

Socrates' strategy is clear. Egoism is a thesis about intentions, while the many's view of *akrasia* has moral agents behaving in apparent contradiction to Egoism. But the contradiction is only apparent, since,

[23]Santas, 279–280; Taylor agrees (187).

[24]Taylor (185) has no warrant to demand that the absurdity be contained in *E4* alone.

As Taylor convincingly argues (189–190, 182), the much-discussed verbal adjectives in 356bc (λητπτέα, 356b4; πρακτέον, 356b8; πρακτέα, 356c1) should probably be read as (a) *commendatory* rather than as (b) *necessary* (i.e., as implying what one *ought* to do, rather than what one must *as a matter of psychological necessity* do). However, this point is not crucial to the interpretation of the argument as a whole. Taylor is incorrect in assuming that, in order for the *akrasia*-proof to rest upon psychological hedonism, the verbals must bear sense (b), for there is additional evidence of psychological hedonism in the fifth argument, i.e., 354c3–5.

It seems to me that Santas incorrectly interprets the verbals as entailing necessity (280 n. 21). D. Gallop, "The Socratic Paradox in the *Protagoras*," *Phronesis*, 9 (1964) is also most probably wrong in reading them as ambiguous between the two senses (128—129).

As N. Gulley points out (*The Philosophy of Socrates* [London 1968] 210 n. 14), the language used by Socrates is similar to that of Aristotle in a well-known passage in *De Motu Animalium* (701a7 ff.). However, the verbal adjectives used there, in conclusions of the practical syllogism, have a purely *commendatory* sense—as action follows only "unless there is some hindrance or compulsion." The "necessity" of the action described in *EN* 1147a24–31 also holds conditionally.

in describing *akrasia*, the many describe only the agent's observed behavior, without making any reference to his intentions. And so Socrates makes the crucial assumption that the agent's behavior is intentional. It is clear that "overcome" must be interpreted as entailing intentional behavior on the part of the agent, or the contradiction would not develop.

Socrates' assumption that the agent's behavior is intentional carries through the remainder of the fifth argument. Throughout the remainder of the argument, the moral agents Socrates discusses—whether they are described as performing intentional actions or as merely acting—must be understood as acting intentionally.[25] This appears to be the cash value of Socrates' repeated proviso, expressed in *D3*, that the agent is not compelled to perform the action in question.[26] Apparently, if he acts even though he is not forced to, he must be acting intentionally.

There are some difficulties that must be met in defending the view of the absurdity we have outlined. First, it is peculiar that Socrates pauses neither to indicate clearly nor to explain this absurdity. However, this objection is easily countered, for Socrates does not point out any other absurdity either. On *any* reading of the argument, III contains an absurdity that is not pointed out by Socrates. And so the fact that Socrates does not indicate the above absurdity carries no more weight against this interpretation than against any alternative account. Moreover, this is not the only instance in III in which Socrates neglects to identify the conclusion of one of his arguments. For, by the end of III, he is able to assert that the many *have agreed* (ὡμολογήκατε, 357d3) that making a wrong choice of pleasures and pains is caused by ignorance (357d1–6). But not only were the many not clearly seen to agree to this anywhere in the text, but it is not clear either where this agreement took place or exactly how Socrates managed to complete his argument for it.

A more serious objection to our interpretation of the absurdity could, perhaps, be raised in reference to our handling of Socrates' account of what it is to be "overcome." In moving from *E2* to *E4*, we could, perhaps, be accused of unfairly reading into Socrates' argument. However, Socrates clearly does make the moves that we attribute to him. The ensuing paragraphs leave no doubt that he interprets being "overcome by pleasure" as a process of making a *choice* between different amounts of pleasure. The kind of choice he has in mind is one based on a thoroughly

[25]Throughout the remainder of the argument, Socrates uses intentional and non-intentional verbs interchangeably: for example, intentional verbs (forms of ἐθέλω ἰέναι): 358e3, 359e4, 360a1, 360a4; non-intentional verbs (forms of ἔρχομαι and εἶμι): 359c5, 359d6, 359d8, 359e1, 359e3, 359e5, 360a8. Note also the move from ποιεῖ in 358c1 to ἐθέλειν ἰέναι in 358d2 and αἱρήσεται in 358d3. Also see above, note 16.

[26]For references, see above, note 15.

rational process of weighing or calculating, analogous to the kinds of measurement operations applied to such things as weights and numbers, thicknesses and sounds. Thus, in interpreting being "overcome by pleasure" in this fashion, Socrates depicts an agent in the process of being "driven and dazed by his pleasures" (355a8–b1) as making a paradigmatically rational calculation as to how he can maximize his pleasures. This is, to say the least, odd, and Santas is doubtless correct in viewing Socrates' account of "overcome" as a major weakness in the argument.[27]

Thus the movement of Socrates' argument is from (a) being "overcome" to (b) "choosing" to (c) employing the suitable measuring technique. It is to be noted that Socrates never argues for the movement from (a) to (b) to (c). It is true that the many never protest, but they are hardly to be commended for not doing so. Any attempt to defend these moves would be at least difficult and quite probably an impossible task.[28]

Having reduced the view of the many to absurdity, Socrates proceeds to give a new account of *akrasia*. In order to make this phenomenon consistent with Egoism, he argues that the agent does not choose wrongly knowingly, but does so out of ignorance—as the result of a failure of measurement. To make this position plausible, Socrates proceeds to examine a series of measurement operations (356c4–357c1). He argues that the measurement of certain entities is often difficult, because of the occurrence of errors of perspective (356c4–8). But various arts of measurement can overcome "the power of appearance to deceive." In the case of pleasure and pain, a special art of measurement would provide this service (356c8–e4, 357a5–b3). Socrates declares that the precise nature of this art need not be discussed at present, for enough has been granted by the many already to allow the completion of the proof at hand. For, Socrates asserts, addressing them, "you have admitted that it is from defect of knowledge that men err, when they do err, in their choice of pleasures and pains—that is, in the choice of good and evil;" and the knowledge they lack is of the art of measurement (357b5–d7).

Exactly how the many have agreed to this is, as we have said, not clear, but the argument can be reconstructed. It too will be seen to rely on psychological hedonism.

Taylor interprets the argument differently. According to him,[29] through 356c–357d, Socrates has convinced the many that, because of the power of appearance to deceive, making correct choices in regard to pleasures and pains requires the possession of the art of measurement. Thus, if an agent is to make correct choices *regularly*, he must have this art. Now, as Taylor points out, Socrates argues as if he has proved a

[27]Santas 276, 298.
[28]See below, 321–322.
[29]Taylor 191–192.

stronger thesis: if an agent chooses correctly *on any given occasion*, he must possess the measuring art. The move from choosing regularly to any given choice is probably an error on the part of Socrates. He could be taken to be assuming that appearances have so formidable a power to deceive that, unless the agent possessed the requisite knowledge, he would (inevitably?) choose wrongly on every occasion. However, stated in this fashion, this assumption is one that Socrates would undoubtedly repudiate. In any event, we shall set aside the problem of negotiating the gap between choosing correctly on a regular basis and choosing correctly on any given occasion.

Using "C" for ". . . chooses correctly" and "K" for ". . . has knowledge (of the art of measurement)," according to Taylor, Socrates succeeds in proving only $(x)(Cx \rightarrow Kx)$, that to choose correctly (regularly/ever), one must know the measuring art. Socrates' conclusion, however, is that if ever one *chooses wrongly*, he *does not have* the measuring art, i.e., that wrong choices of pleasures and pains are always caused by ignorance. (This is the ignorance-theorem.) Taylor objects to this conclusion as established through the simple fallacy of denying the antecedent; i.e., according to Taylor, Socrates illicitly moves from $(x)(Cx \rightarrow Kx)$ to $(\mathbf{x})(\sim Cx \rightarrow \sim Kx)$ (i.e., from "choosing correctly entails the possession of knowledge" to "choosing incorrectly entails an absence of knowledge"). In practical terms, according to Taylor, the move is fallacious, because the agent's failure to choose correctly does not necessarily imply "failure to employ a technique, since it may equally well consist in failure to act on the result which is reached by correct employment of the technique."[30]

Thus, according to Taylor, Socrates' proof of the ignorance-theorem depends on a simple and obvious fallacy. To make matters worse, according to Taylor, the many's account of *akrasia* is taken by Socrates to be absurd on the basis of a conflict between their description of the agent as simultaneously ignorant (here) and as having knowledge (above, 314–315, esp. *D2*).[31] Thus Socrates' reduction of the view of the many to absurdity also depends on this fallacy. Taylor leaves us with an interpretation of the argument, then, according to which both Socrates' refutation of the many's view of *akrasia* and his reinterpretation of *akrasia* as resting on ignorance depend upon a simple fallacy. And, equally serious, according to this interpretation, Socrates' argument cannot be seen to establish the strong view of Egoism that is asserted in IV and used by Socrates in the courage-proof.[32]

I believe that one significant advantage of the view of the argument

[30] *Ibid.* 192.

[31] *Ibid.* 182, 185–186. This is also the view of Gallop (above, note 24,) 120–122.

[32] Taylor 203; H. von Arnim, *Platos Jugenddialoge und die Enstehungszeit des Phaidros* (Leipzig 1914), for one, holds a similar view (20–21).

defended in this paper is that it enables us to avoid these severe difficulties in Taylor's interpretation. Our view of the argument allows for the establishment of the ignorance-theorem without having to introduce a fallacy, and it also establishes the Egoism asserted in IV.

To recount, Socrates can be seen to establish $(x)(Cx \rightarrow Kx)$ ("choosing correctly entails the possession of knowledge") relatively clearly, but the move to the ignorance-theorem, $(x)(\sim Cx \rightarrow \sim Kx)$ ("choosing incorrectly entails an absence of knowledge"), requires explanation, and Taylor is forced to conclude that the move is effected fallaciously. What is important to see is that psychological hedonism allows Socrates to derive the ignorance-theorem non-fallaciously. In practical terms, it eliminates any possible counter-examples. If our agent possessed the measuring art, he would know how to maximize his pleasure on any occasion. Now, if psychological hedonism were true, he would wish to maximize his pleasures, and there would be no conceivable circumstance under which he would wish to go against the art of measurement. And so all actions that do not maximize the agent's pleasures—understanding "actions" as intentional actions, or actions based on choices—cannot be caused by anything other than ignorance. Knowledge, which has been seen to be a necessary condition for correct choices, would also be a sufficient condition. Psychological hedonism provides a theory of motivation according to which the agent would always choose in keeping with the measuring art.

Granted psychological hedonism, the position that Socrates leaves us with here is closely related to that concerning the possessor of the *techne* of justice in the *Hippias Minor*. The thinly veiled conclusion of that work is that the just man would never abuse his art of justice, because he would never wish to do so.[33] Similarly, the possessor of the art of measurement in the *Protagoras* would always choose properly. And if an individual chooses wrongly, the only possible explanation is that he lacks the measuring art—that he is, in other words, ignorant.

In addition to justifying the establishment of the ignorance-theorem, psychological hedonism justifies the strong statement of Egoism asserted by Socrates in IV. We have seen how Socrates tailors his argument to accomplish this. We have seen that the many have committed themselves to psychological hedonism at 354c3–5, which confronted Socrates with a potential problem. For, in addition to subscribing to psychological hedonism, the many were seen to hold that there are occasions on which agents behave in apparent violation of psychological hedonism. As we have seen, these are instances of *akrasia*. And so by interpreting the

[33]See, e.g., J. Moreau, *La Construction de l'idéalisme platonicien* (Paris 1939) 107–108; J. Gould, *The Development of Plato's Ethics* (Cambridge 1955) 43–44; A. E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and His Work*[6] (1952; rpt. Cleveland 1956) 37-38.

agent's actions that go against his best interests as intentional actions, Socrates is able to show (a) that the many's view of *akrasia* is absurd, and (b) that apparent instances of *akrasia* can be reinterpreted so as not to conflict with psychological hedonism. This train of argument allows Socrates to secure the many's agreement to the strong statement of Egoism assented to in IV, and this is justified on the basis of the fact that the many's major reservation to Egoism was seen to be removed by the argument.

IV

It seems, then, that the view of Socrates' *akrasia*-proof defended above has a number of significant advantages. It allows us to identify the absurdity in the many's view of *akrasia* that is indicated by the arrogant questioner. It allows us to see how Socrates is able to establish the ignorance-theorem (without a fallacy), i.e., how he is justified in moving from $(x)(Cx \rightarrow Kx)$ to $(x)(\sim Cx \rightarrow \sim Kx)$. And it allows us to see exactly how he goes about arguing for the strong view of Egoism that is the most significant of his conclusions in IV.

In light of the fact that our view of the argument has these advantages, I think it is reasonable to prefer it to alternative accounts. And so the conclusion of this paper is that Socrates' *akrasia*-proof must be interpreted as resting heavily on the Egoism/psychological hedonism assented to by the many in 354c3–5.

In closing, I will comment briefly on the two major weaknesses in the fifth argument. This brings us back to the two highly questionable moves on which the courage-proof has been seen to rest (above, 309–310), for, clearly, the two most serious weaknesses in Socrates' argument as a whole are (a) his interpretation of "overcome" and (b) his "proof" of the *kalon*-thesis.

To begin with (b), it has been noted that Socrates does not prove this, and so, at the very least, he is not justified in taking it to be one of his conclusions in IV.[34] It is also worth pointing out that, at least as asserted in the *Protagoras*, the idea that "what is *kalon* is good" rests on a highly questionable network of assumptions.

As we have noted, early in II, Protagoras protests that not all pleasures are good, that only *kalon* pleasures are good. As we have seen, Socrates construes this as the demand to prove II.1, that all pleasures are good. And, in order to do so, Socrates reduces apparent counter-instances to conformity with this doctrine. What is to be noted is that Socrates treats examples of only one type, those in which the agent's long-range

[34]Cf. von Arnim (above, note 32) 19–23; Manuwald (above, note 4) 39–41.

interest (which is to maximize his pleasure) is clearly identifiable.[35] For instance, in the case of a good pain, taking medicine is good though unpleasant, because it clearly produces more pleasure than pain in the long run.

The example discussed in the courage-proof is quite different. In the case of the soldier going into battle, it is not clear that his interest actually lies in fighting. If we assume that, in general, the word "*kalon*" is used by the many in reference to what benefits the community as a whole, what is *kalon* will not be beneficial to the moral agent, unless the individual's interest and society's interest coincide. In obvious cases, such as robbing a bank (and not being caught), it is clear that the agent, in doing what is (at least arguably) in his own interest, is not doing what is *kalon*. The question of exactly what is in the agent's true interest is, of course, a central concern of Platonic/Socratic ethics—as is the question of what is really *kalon*. But, as far as the *Protagoras* is concerned, Socrates has no warrant to assimilate the case of the soldier deciding whether to go into battle to the case of the patient deciding whether to take medicine. In doing this, Socrates argues unfairly; he is guilty of playing on a network of equivocations and ambiguities that lie at the heart of his moral arguments in many of the early dialogues.[36]

The other major weakness in Socrates' argument, which has been noted, is his interpretation of "overcome." In assuming that the person in the process of being overcome *chooses*, and then in assimilating this choice to the kind of decision that is made by the practitioner of a purely technical art of measurement, Socrates makes unjustified, and probably unjustifiable, moves. In order to elaborate upon exactly where Socrates goes wrong, we would have to commit ourselves to some view of what *really* happens to an agent who is "overcome by pleasure," which it is beyond the scope of this paper to do.[37] However, at the very least, it is clear that, even if the agent can be said to *choose*,[38] Socrates seriously misconstrues the nature of this choice. To utilize the distinction sug-

[35]And so certain examples of good pains used by Socrates (warfare, 354a4; and "safety of the city and rule over others and wealth," 354b4–5) are somewhat anomalous, in that their end seems to be the good of the community, not of the individual; cf. Taylor 175.

[36]Of these, we should note the common, equivocal use of the adverb, *eu*, in the phrase, *eu prattein* (in, e.g., *Chrm* 172a1–3; *Grg* 507c3–5); see also the equivocal use of *ophelimon*, *agathon*, and *kakon* in the refutation of Polus in the *Gorgias* (474c–477a; on this, see E. R. Dodds, *Plato's Gorgias* [Oxford 1959] 249–252).

[37]For the philosophical issues involved in moral weakness, see D. Davidson, "How is Weakness of the Will Possible?," in J. Feinberg, ed., *Moral Concepts* (Oxford 1969) 93–113; and G. Mortimore, ed., *Weakness of Will* (London 1971).

[38]Cf. the explication of "choosing" given by T. F. Daveney, *Mind* 73 (1964) 515–526; cf. also the very different explication of being "carried away by pleasure or distracted by passion," in *Timaeus* 86b4–c3 *et seq.*

gested by Mounce,[39] there is an obvious difference between errors made in two different kinds of choices: (a) a choice made under the influence of passion; and (b) one made independently of passion. Socrates clearly assimilates an error made in (a) (e.g., the dieting man, who succumbs to temptation, tells himself that one little pastry won't hurt, and eats it) to the kind of error made in (b) (e.g., an error in "an intricate calculation in higher mathematics"[40]). Whereas the error made in (b) could have been avoided by showing the mathematician where he was going wrong (by providing him with τις ἀριθμητική, 357a3)—which would, presumably, prevent further errors of the same kind in the future—it is not clear that the hedonic calculus alone would have saved our dieting friend—or would save him in the future. Thus, in arguing that an art of measurement alone would conquer *akrasia*, Socrates neglects the role of various psychic forces—desire, passion, emotion—in certain kinds of choices. In addition to the art of weighing pleasures, our heavy friend would require the fortitude to use it.[41] And so, to conclude, in the fifth argument of the *Protagoras*, Socrates can be seen to make the kind of error that historians of philosophy generally attribute to "Socrates." To quote the *Magna Moralia:*

> According to Socrates, all the virtues arise in the reasoning part of the soul, from which it follows that in making the various virtues branches of knowledge, he ignores the irrational part of the soul, and thus ignores passion and the moral character (1182a18–23).[42]

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[39]H. O. Mounce, "Virtue and the Understanding," *Analysis* 28 (1967–68) 11–17.

[40]*Ibid.* 15.

[41]Cf. the definition of courage given in *Republic* 429b7–d1, 430a3–b5, 442b11–c3, 441d1–3.

[42]I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to Mr. Kevin McTighe and to the journal's anonymous readers for their valuable criticisms and suggestions.