

## The Power of Courage in Plato's *Republic*

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Abstract: This paper offers a new interpretation of courage in Plato's *Republic*. Despite the attention that this dialogue has received in the past, scholars have been disinclined to explore the metaphysics of the virtues. I argue that courage is, by its very nature, a δύναμις of the sort described in book 5. In particular, I argue that courage is the power over reason's correct practical deliberations about what one ought to do and that it accomplishes the preservation of these deliberations in the face of appetitive threats. I then explore the implications this has for the moral psychology of the virtuous agent and the question of who can be genuinely courageous.

Key Words: Plato, courage, *Republic*, virtue, moral psychology

This paper offers an interpretation of courage in Plato's *Republic* that gives pride of place to its nature as a δύνάμις—or “power,” as I translate this important Greek term here. I shall argue that courage is conceived of as a power in that dialogue. This is intended as a claim about the nature of courage: it is, by its very nature, a power of the sort described in book 5. Spelling out what this means will offer metaphysical clarity concerning the virtue, but it also promises to have important implications for the *Republic*'s moral psychology. For if courage is a power then it will operate like all powers, and any complete interpretation of how the courageous soul functions will need to be informed by a theoretical discussion of the powers. To the best of my knowledge, no such interpretation currently exists. By offering one here, I hope to shed new light on Plato's account of courage and highlight certain underappreciated features of the psychology of the virtuous agent.

The paper begins in section 1 with an argument that courage is a power. Section 2 turns to book 5's discussion of the powers and its claim that every power is 1) over something(s) and 2) accomplishes something. I present the core of my interpretation by arguing that courage is over reason's correct practical deliberations about what one ought to do and that what it accomplishes is the preservation of these deliberations in the face of appetitive threats. section 3 zooms in on how courage preserves these deliberations to explore the particular role of the spirit and its characteristic affections in expressions of courage. In contrast to much of the recent literature, I argue for an expansive understanding of the desires and emotions that may feature in expressions of courage. section 4 calls attention to some lingering puzzles raised by my account and briefly considers the question of who can be courageous. I conclude by calling attention to the importance of the δυνάμις for Plato's theory of the virtues and beyond.

A natural question to ask about the ethical virtues is what, exactly, they are. Yet scholars have been disinclined to investigate the nature of the virtues in the *Republic*. There has been surprisingly little written on either the metaphysical status of the virtues or on what an investigation into that status might reveal about the dialogue's moral psychology.<sup>1</sup> A century of influential commentaries or reference works have largely skirted these questions.<sup>2</sup> More detailed studies have occasionally touched on the nature of a virtue. A handful of articles, mostly focusing on the relationship between justice and happiness, have drawn attention to the fact that δύναμις-terminology looms large in Plato's treatment of justice. As a rule, though, these articles stop short of clearly defining justice; and, in any case, they do not extend their discussions to the other virtues.<sup>3</sup> To the best of my knowledge, C.D.C. Reeve's *Philosopher-Kings* is the only work that fully addresses the question of the metaphysical nature of the virtues head-on by explicitly, unambiguously and prominently arguing that what it is to be justice is to be a power of the sort described in book 5.<sup>4</sup> Reeve is much to be admired for this feature of his interpretation: he has appreciated the importance of identifying what justice is and realizes that this must matter for how it operates in the human soul.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, however, Reeve does not clearly identify the other virtues as powers and then consider the ethical implications of this fact.

It might be tempting to infer from so much scholarly silence that the *Republic* does not have much to say about the nature of the ethical virtues. This would be a mistake. The evidence of books 1 and 4 makes it quite clear that what it is to be courage is to be a power of a certain sort.

The final pages of book 1 include an abstract account of virtue according to which they are powers. In response to Thrasymachus's claim that the life of injustice is profitable, Socrates offers an argument purporting to show that justice is the *sine qua non* of the happy human life.

The first stage of his argument introduces two foundational concepts that are deployed later: function [ἔργον] and virtue [ἀρετή]. For each subject that has a function, Socrates claims, its function is that “which it alone or finest of all accomplishes” (*Rep.* 353a10–1; see also 352e3–4). Two sorts of examples are given to unpack this claim. The first illustrates subjects that alone accomplish some function. Eyes are the only things that can see, and ears are the only things that can hear; therefore, the function of eyes is to see and ears to hear. What it means for a subject to accomplish something best of all is illustrated by tools designed for particular purposes. Socrates notes that many things can prune grapevines, such as swords or cooking knives, but the pruning knife made for this purpose trims them best of all. For this reason, its function—and its alone—is to prune grapevines. Once Thrasymachus has accepted this account of function, Socrates introduces the second foundational concept, virtue, which is said to be that without which a subject would be unable to perform its function finely (and, later, that by which it performs its function well, *Rep.* 353b16–c2 and 353c5–7). Virtues are, therefore, introduced as dependent upon and derivative of functions. There can be no virtues without functions. Indeed, virtues are nothing other than those entities that enable a subject with a function to perform that function well.<sup>6</sup>

Socrates next proceeds to the second stage of the argument. Thrasymachus agrees that living is a function of the soul. He is then reminded that the two had earlier ‘agreed’ that justice is the virtue of the soul.<sup>7</sup> This is all Socrates needs to plug in the preceding accounts of function and virtue and infer that justice is indispensable for human well-being. By relying on the fact that the soul’s function is to live—and by coyly exploiting a colloquial use of εὖ πράττειν to mean doing well *in life*—Socrates concludes that the just person will live well and be happy, whereas the unjust person will live poorly and be miserable (*Rep.* 353e10–354a4).

The second stage of Socrates's argument moves very quickly, and it is signaled by Plato as problematic. Not only is Thrasymachus unpersuaded, but so are Glaucon and Adeimantus, who later implies that Socrates's argument was overly formal and lacking in substance (*Rep.* 367b3–5 and 367e1–3). But these reservations and criticisms are, so far as I can tell, restricted to the second stage of Socrates's argument.<sup>8</sup> No interlocutor objects to the account of function or virtue presented in the first stage. On the contrary, the detailed examples Socrates gives to explicate these concepts suggest that he really is committed to them. Moreover, the account of virtue introduced here is presupposed as late as book 10.<sup>9</sup> This is crucial for our purposes because the class of powers is by far the best candidate for what plays the role of enabling subjects to accomplish their functions. Consider Socrates's first word on the powers in book 5: "Powers are a class of the things that are which enable us to do whatever we are able to do — and anything else to do what it is able to. For example, I say sight and hearing are among the powers" (*Rep.* 477c1–4).<sup>10</sup> Powers are more or less identified as those entities that enable things to do whatever they are able to do. From this we can construct an argument identifying the virtues as powers. Because powers enable any given thing to do what it is able to do, they enable subjects with functions to accomplish their functions well. Virtues, then, are powers.<sup>11</sup>

We turn now to book 4 and the discussion of courage itself. The textual evidence for thinking that courage in the city is a power is compelling and easy to state. Socrates begins his discussion of the virtue by claiming that the city becomes courageous when its auxiliary class has within it the power that preserves the correct belief about the fearful things (*Rep.* 429b8–c2). Explaining further what he means, Socrates offers an elaborate analogy between dyers, who select and treat white cloth so that it preserves the color with which it is dyed, and those who found cities, who

select and educate auxiliaries so that they preserve correct beliefs. Immediately following this analogy Socrates gives his definition of courage in the city:

Such a δύνάμιν καὶ σωτηρίαν through everything of the correct and lawful belief about fearful and not fearful things I call and set down as courage (*Rep.* 430b3–5).

Though “δύνάμιν καὶ σωτηρίαν” is sometimes translated “power and preservation,”<sup>12</sup> Socrates is not intending to offer a conjunctive definition of courage as both an unspecified power and a preservation of appropriate beliefs. Two points make this clear. First, in the earlier discussion Socrates moves seamlessly from talking about courage as a power that preserves to a simple preservation.<sup>13</sup> This switch would be strange if courage was both a power and, in addition to that, a kind of preservation. Second, Socrates’s elaborate analogy with dyers cannot reasonably be read to support an interpretation of courage as involving two elements. Those who dye clothes do not aim to produce wool that has a power and also preserves colors. Rather, they carefully select raw material and treat it so that it acquires the power to preserve the colors which will make it an attractive piece of clothing. Similarly, the members of the auxiliary class are selected and trained so that they develop the power that will “preserve through everything the belief about the fearful things” (*Rep.* 429b9–c1). As this last passage suggests, the above καὶ is epexegetic. It specifies what the power in question does. The definition at 430b3–5 thus establishes that courage in the city is a power—one that preserves correct beliefs about what is and what is not fearful.

The city-soul analogy strongly suggests that courage in the individual must be the same power, for the central argument of the dialogue relies on the assumption that a virtue is one thing whether in a city or a soul (*Rep.* 368c8–369a4 and 434d1–435a8).<sup>14</sup> But more importantly, the

language used in Socrates's second account of courage is sufficiently similar to the language used in his first to license the conclusion that it, too, is a power. Compare 429b8–c1 with 442b10–c2:

The city is courageous by a part of itself, because [that part] has such a power in it which preserves through everything the belief about the fearful things.

I think we call each person courageous by that part, whenever their spirit preserves through both pains and pleasures the thing prescribed by rational accounts as fearful or not.<sup>15</sup>

Though the word δύναμις is not used in the discussion of courage in the individual, it is important to recall that Socrates freely switches from speaking about courage in the city as the power that preserves to speaking about it as a simple preservation of correct belief. It is not, therefore, entirely surprising that our term does not show up in the much shorter treatment of courage in the individual. Yet in this second discussion Socrates says quite explicitly that the individual is courageous in virtue of the same thing and in the same way as the city [ᾧ δὴ ἀνδρείος ιδιώτης καὶ ὅς, τούτῳ καὶ πόλιν ἀνδρείαν καὶ οὕτως, *Rep.* 441c11–d1]. This leaves little room to doubt that courage in the individual is a power as well.

If final confirmation of this point is needed, it can be found by briefly considering the much lengthier treatment of justice. For, on the reasonable assumption that the cardinal ethical virtues share some fundamental nature, evidence that justice is a power whether it is in a city or an individual will corroborate my claim about courage. Such evidence is easy to find. As in the case of courage, Socrates's discussion of justice in the city is explicit about its status as a δύναμις.<sup>16</sup>

But unlike the case of courage, Socrates says in so many words that the justice of the individual is not only a power but the same power as the justice of the city. Thus, after convincing his interlocutors that his account of justice in the individual is correct, Socrates asks Glaucon: “Are you still searching for justice to be something other than that power [ταύτην τὴν δύναμιν] which produces this sort of individual and city?” (*Rep.* 443b4–7).

Glaucon’s negative answer to this question signals the end of the *Republic*’s investigation into the nature of justice, which began at 368c6–7 with Socrates being asked to explain the τι ἔστι of justice and injustice. At that point in the text, Socrates claims that justice is the same whether it is in a city or a soul (*Rep.* 368c8–389a4). The passage currently under discussion responds to that earlier one by purporting to identify the power (in the singular!) that justice is both in the city and the soul. The fact that justice—the virtue we learn most about in our dialogue—is a power in the city and the individual bolsters the case for thinking the same of courage.<sup>17</sup>

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This section develops the core of my new interpretation. We begin by considering Socrates’s theoretical discussion of the powers in book 5 and, in particular, the two features essential to every power, namely, that they are 1) over something(s) and 2) accomplish something. I then return to some key passages in books 3 and 4 in order to explain what courage is over and what it accomplishes. With these central issues out of the way, I turn in the following section to a more detailed consideration of how courage accomplishes what it accomplishes as well as some implications of my interpretation for the moral psychology of the *Republic*.



Near the end of book 5 Socrates claims that there will be no end to the evils of the city until philosophers rule—a claim so outrageous that he is forced to explain himself. What follows is a well-known argument distinguishing philosophers, who have knowledge [ἐπιστήμη], from the ‘lovers of sights and sounds,’ who have mere belief [δόξα]. Since the argument trades on the fact that ἐπιστήμη and δόξα are powers, Socrates tells us about powers in some detail:

I see neither color nor shape belonging to powers, nor any other of those features had by many other things, looking to which I distinguish for myself some things from others. In the case of powers, I look only to this: what it is over and what it accomplishes. And by reference to this I call each the power it is. What is ordered over the same thing and accomplishes the same thing I call the same power; what is ordered over something different and does something different I call a different power (*Rep.* 477c6–d5).<sup>18</sup>

This is the only passage in Plato’s corpus that explicitly and straightforwardly identifies the definitive features of the powers.<sup>19</sup> We learn that every power is 1) over something(s) and 2) accomplish something. Though strictly speaking these are two distinct criteria, they are so closely linked that Socrates speaks as if they are one.<sup>20</sup> In practice neither can be fully understood without the other. That which a power is over are the objects on which it typically operates; what it accomplishes it typically does to or with respect to those objects. Still, as David Lefebvre has recently pointed out, distinguishing between these two features facilitates an easier specification of the powers, as it is sometimes easier to discern the objects a power operates on and other times easier to identify what it accomplishes.<sup>21</sup> It is pretty clear that ὄψις accomplishes seeing, for example. But it is only with further investigation that we learn

the proper objects of sight are colors, as opposed to shapes or figures.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the object of prophecy is apparently what will be.<sup>23</sup> Yet what it accomplishes is far from obvious.

It is tempting to think that courage must accomplish external courageous activity. It may be up for debate whether the proper objects of the power are war, dangerous situations more generally or something even more capacious, but who would deny that courage accomplishes courageous activity?<sup>24</sup> On this view courage looks and has its objects outside of the agent. However tempting or attractive, this is not Plato's view in the *Republic*. The textual evidence leaves no doubt that the virtue looks inward and has as its objects certain features of our psyche.<sup>25</sup> Thus we would do better to begin with what courage is over rather than what it accomplishes. Consider again Socrates's account of courage in the individual. An individual is courageous, "whenever their spirit preserves through both pains and pleasures the thing prescribed by rational accounts as fearful or not" (*Rep.* 442b10–c2). And now recall the parallel account of courage in the city: "Such a δύνανται καὶ σωτηρίαν through everything of the correct and lawful belief about fearful and not fearful things I call and set down as courage" (*Rep.* 430b3–5). These two central passages say nothing about external courageous activity. Instead, they indicate that Plato conceived of courage as properly and primarily operating upon the correct beliefs imparted through civic education in the case of a city or, in the case of an individual, which I shall focus on below, on the prescriptions issued by the rational soul-part.<sup>26</sup>

We, therefore, need to ask, first, what the beliefs or prescriptions upon which the power of courage operates are, and, second, what the power accomplishes with respect to them. Past commentators have had a hard time answering the first question, though there is a loose consensus that the beliefs and prescriptions must be action-guiding directives of one sort or another. I claim that they are the outcome of reason's practical deliberations or (what I take to be

the same thing) reason's considered judgments about what one ought to do. I admit that talking about beliefs and prescriptions regarding what is or is not fearful is an awkward way to talk about rational judgments about what ought to be done. Certainly, it would be quite natural to assume that the scope of the fearful is much narrower than the scope of what ought to be done in practice. But Socrates is relatively consistent in presenting courage as the virtue that helps the agent accomplish any and all of reason's considered plans, making it—in practice, at least—concerned with whatever reason decides to do.<sup>27</sup> And if this is so, one cannot avoid the conclusion that the scope of courage is much wider than what is thought of as paradigmatically fearful or terrifying.

Two texts are particularly revealing in this context. After completing his argument for the tripartition of the soul, Socrates makes some general remarks about the different soul-parts in a virtuous person. Included in these remarks are a few of the benefits an agent well-educated in the twin arts of gymnastics and music can expect to enjoy. One notable benefit is that their reason [λογιστικόν] and spirit [θυμοειδής] will be able to keep their unruly appetite [ἐπιθυμητικόν] in check. As a result of the cooperative activity of reason and spirit, the individual will be able to fulfill many important tasks, such as effectively responding to external threats. “Then wouldn't the pair also most finely guard against external enemies on behalf of the whole soul and body—with the one deliberating and the other fighting, following its ruler and, by means of courage, completing those things that have been deliberated [τὰ βουλευθέντα]?” (*Rep.* 442b5–8).

This passage gestures toward the natural division of labor that allows reason and spirit to work together. Reason deliberates about what should be done in response to external threats or challenges. And then—and only then<sup>28</sup>—spirit fights so that the individual is ultimately able to realize in practice the things that reason has deliberated upon. What it means for spirit to fight on

behalf of reason's deliberation will be addressed below, but it is worth noting that the fighting appears to be done against the agent's appetite.<sup>29</sup> The idea seems to be that reason needs spirit to fight against the appetite because it is insufficient to hold appetite in check on its own. Likewise, spirit alone is unable to deliberate about what is good for the body and the soul.

In any case, the text clearly implies that spirit's activity is directed towards realizing whatever course of action is good and beneficial for the whole agent. For to the extent that it appropriately subordinates itself to reason and fights to bring reason's deliberations to pass, spirit will inherit reason's goal of serving the body and soul. No restrictions are here placed on when spirit is supposed to support reason's deliberations: spirit is expected to do this quite generally, even in situations that are not paradigmatically fearful or terrifying.<sup>30</sup> Note, too, that Socrates explicitly identifies courage as the instrument that realizes reason's deliberations. If this passage is meant to be compatible with the central discussion of courage in the individual—as it surely is—we must conclude that the correct beliefs and prescriptions preserved by courage extend far beyond what we normally think of as fearful or terrifying. Reason deliberates quite generally on behalf of the whole soul and body, and courage is instrumental to realizing those very deliberations.

Consider now a second passage that offers further support for this general line of thought. At 442c4–7 Socrates says we call an individual, “wise because of that small part which rules in them and prescribes those things [ταύτα], and which, moreover, has the knowledge in it of what is beneficial for each part and the whole, the community of the three parts.” This passage confirms that the rational soul-part makes the prescriptions which the spirit is supposed to preserve, since the only possible referent for the “ταύτα” is the things prescribed as fearful or not at 442c1–2. For present purposes, however, the second half of this sentence is more revealing. Socrates claims that the “small part” has within it the knowledge of what is beneficial for the

three parts of the soul and for the whole composite. It is difficult to imagine that this special knowledge does not inform reason's rule over the soul at the most fundamental level. We are plainly meant to understand that this useful knowledge lies behind the prescriptions reason is said (in this very sentence) to give to the spirit. And if this is so, then the prescriptions to be preserved must express concern for, and ultimately aim at, what is good and beneficial for the whole body and soul. Thus by preserving these prescriptions spirit will, like reason itself, be working towards what is beneficial for the whole body and soul.<sup>31</sup>

But then why does Socrates talk about spirit preserving the things prescribed as fearful or not when they might, according to my view, be better described as prescriptions about what is beneficial or harmful? The answer is that we properly fear whatever will harm us and, therefore, that the fearful things are the bad things that ought to be avoided in practice.<sup>32</sup> Of course, even granting this idiosyncratic understanding of the fearful, one might still wonder why Plato would not just say that courage preserves beliefs or prescriptions about what is harmful and bad, or beneficial and good. I suspect that Plato found the language of fear attractive insofar as it is evocative of a conventional understanding of courage. It is no secret that the *Republic's* account of the virtues is—to put it mildly—quite revisionary. The language of fear may serve as a signal to his readers that this really is the virtue with which they are familiar. But whatever the reason behind the choice of terminology, it should now be clear that the beliefs and prescriptions courage preserves must in one way or another express reason's judgments concerning what ought to be done in practice.

We turn now to the question of what courage accomplishes. This can be addressed by considering a point made by Josh Wilburn in a paper on courage and akrasia in the *Republic*. Wilburn argues that the tripartite psychology developed in our dialogue is not, as is often

thought, a new account designed to show how akrasia is possible but that it is largely continuous with the *Protagoras*'s account of motivation, according to which akrasia is impossible.<sup>33</sup> Though his particular claim about akrasia is controversial and need not be endorsed here, Wilburn is correct to stress that even in the *Republic* Plato presumes that people are generally motivated to act in ways that they know or believe to be best at the moment of action. This presupposition is most palpable in Socrates's discussion of the testing regimen administered to prospective guardians as part of their early education. These tests are not, as one might naturally expect, designed to evaluate whether would-be guardians remember the edifying lessons of their state-sponsored poetry or even how they will respond in certain situations. First and foremost, the tests evaluate the durability of the prospective ruler's belief that they ought to serve the city. As Socrates says, "It seems to me they must be watched at every age to see if they are guardians of this conviction and do not, either through being bewitched or forced, forget and discard [ἐκβάλλουσιν] the belief that they ought to do what is best for the city" (*Rep.* 412e4–7).

Importantly, the belief here in question concerns what these individuals ought to do: it is an action-guiding belief, like the deliberations that guide our confrontations with enemies. If we ask why the tests are designed to ensure that rulers will never abandon this action-guiding belief, the obvious answer is that Socrates assumes those who hold on to this conviction will be motivated to serve the city to the best of their very impressive abilities. This at least lies behind his final assurance that those guardians who pass his testing regimen will act to benefit the city (*Rep.* 414b1–5).

It is, therefore, crucial for the political project of the *Republic* that the prospective guardians never lose their conviction. This motivates Socrates to offer an extended and important discussion about the ways someone might lose or change their beliefs. There are broadly two

ways this might happen: voluntarily or involuntarily. A belief is lost voluntarily upon realizing it is false. Since no one wants to be mistaken, we freely exchange false beliefs for true ones. But we can also lose true beliefs involuntarily in one of three ways: we can lose them by “theft,” which is forgetting a belief or being persuaded it is false (*Rep.* 413b4–8); we can lose them by “force,” which occurs when pain or suffering causes us to change our mind (*Rep.* 413b9–11); or we can lose them by “bewitchment,” when pleasure or fear cause us to change our mind (*Rep.* 413c1–4). Socrates does not provide examples to illustrate these psychological phenomena in action, but the language of theft suggests that a belief simply disappears, which strikes me as a fair description of forgetting. The language of force or bewitchment, however, suggests something more complex and insidious, as if the sheer force of appetite can coopt one’s very thoughts and transform one’s beliefs and motivations.<sup>34</sup> And this does seem to be Socrates’s point. When describing cases of force and bewitchment he indicates that pain, suffering, pleasure and fear can make us “μεταδοξάσαι,” a verb that literally means “change beliefs” (*Rep.* 413b10 and 413c2). The idea is that someone can have such a strong affective experience—say, the intense desire to eat while hungry—that they discard their reasoned belief that they should rush to the city’s defenses and come to believe that they should gorge themselves instead.<sup>35</sup>

Why does this matter? Because it is courage that prevents us from succumbing to force or bewitchment. Indeed, Socrates’s first account of courage quite self-consciously refers back to book 3’s discussion of these phenomena. In the courageous city the auxiliaries preserve their lawful belief through pains, pleasures, desires and fears—and they “do not discard it” [μη ἐκβάλλειν, 429d1]. Note both that pains, pleasures and fears were earlier implicated in force and bewitchment (*Rep.* 413b9–c3) and also that ἐκβάλλειν is the same verb in Socrates’s injunction that prospective rulers be observed so that they do not lose their conviction about

serving the city (*Rep.* 412e4–7). In other words, book 4 informs us that it is because the auxiliaries possess the power of courage that they do not ἐκβάλλειν their appropriate beliefs and experience pernicious μεταδοξάσαι. This same point is emphasized with the analogy between well-dyed clothing and well-trained auxiliaries. The best-natured citizens are to be selected, educated in music and gymnastics and trained so that “their belief about the fearful and other things becomes dyed fast” and, like the color of a well-dyed garment, is not such as to be washed away by the powerful soaps of “pleasure, pain, fear and desire” (*Rep.* 430a1–b3). The fact that Socrates’s official definition of courage in the city follows immediately after this analogy serves to underscore that courage is the very power that can and does prevent pernicious cases of μεταδοξάσαι in the midst of difficult affective experiences.

This points us towards a clear answer about what the power of courage accomplishes: it preserves reason’s judgments about what ought to be done in the face of the difficult affective experiences of pleasure, pain, fear and desire. These experiences have the serious potential to cause humans to change their reasoned beliefs about what they ought to do through the phenomena called force and bewitchment. Our spirit is tasked to help reason by preventing this from happening. And this, in turn, allows us to complete our specification of what power courage is. It is the power ordered over reason’s judgments concerning what ought to be done, and it accomplishes the preservation of those judgments amid difficult affective experiences. Spirit serves as reason’s ally by maintaining reason’s correct judgments about how to act in circumstances where one’s appetite might otherwise lead to inappropriate behavior.<sup>36</sup> In doing so it ensures that the courageous agent will maintain their motivation to act as reason has correctly decided is best for the individual.<sup>37</sup>



The interpretation sketched above is attractive and well supported by the text. The general account of the virtues in book 1 strongly suggests that they are powers, and Socrates explicitly defines courage as a *δύναμις* in book 4. Book 5's theoretical account of the powers can also be fruitfully applied to what we learn about courage in the *Republic*. Moreover, the picture of the virtue that emerges from this interpretation can accommodate many of our pre-theoretical intuitions. Because courage preserves the outcome of reason's deliberations in daunting situations, it follows, for example, that the Platonically courageous agent will never be scared out of their minds and lose their determination to act in dangerous circumstances. Nevertheless, it might seem problematic that I have so far made very little of the emotions, desires and motivations that are associated with the spirit. In a way, this should not really be surprising. Powers first and foremost accomplish something and play a functional role. Any interpretation of courage that takes its nature as a power seriously ought to, therefore, focus on what it accomplishes and what role it plays. Nevertheless, an interpretation of courage that neglected the desires, emotions and motivations characteristic of spirit would be incomplete. The purpose of this section is to address the role of these affections in expressions of courage and to begin to flesh out the psychology of the courageous agent.

We can zoom in on these important issues by exploring how it is that courage accomplishes what it accomplishes. Begin by recalling that appetite is the real problem for reason and its ally. We have already seen that reason and spirit are supposed to watch over their problematic soulmate and stop it from taking over. Plato is not as clear as one would like about the details of how appetite threatens to "overturn the whole of life" (*Rep.* 442a4–b3). But two

later passages suggest that it does this by perverting the rational faculty and making reason come to believe that the objects pursued by appetite are good for the whole soul and should be pursued by the agent.

The strongest evidence for this comes from a speech in book 10 that warns about the dangers of tragedy, including its tendency to make spectators do things that they would normally be ashamed to do, such as publicly pitying or praising unworthy individuals. Socrates explains that there is a particular, inferior part of our soul—almost certainly, the appetite<sup>38</sup>—that is naturally disposed to enjoy poetry (*Rep.* 606a3–7). We are further told that when watching tragedy the best part of our soul may loosen its guard over this inferior soul-part and subsequently allow the agent to give in to outward expressions of pity. When this happens it is because reason comes to “think that [praising and pitying] provide some benefit, namely, pleasure” (*Rep.* 606b3–4). As the mention of benefit here indicates, in these situations reason comes to conceptualize the appetite’s impulse towards pity and praise as genuinely beneficial and worthy of pursuit. In other words, it mistakenly comes to see the activities and goals pursued by appetite as good for the whole soul. A similarly revealing, albeit more pathological dynamic between reason and appetite occurs in the money-loving oligarchic of book 8. Appetite sits high upon their soul’s throne and rules while spirit and reason serve as slaves. In its enslaved condition reason is allowed to consider only “from where a little bit of money will become a lot” (*Rep.* 553d3–4). Yet though the operation of the oligarch’s soul represents an unnatural subversion of the appropriate psychic order, Socrates does not represent this individual as experiencing a schizophrenic state in which their reason wants to consider what is truly best for the whole soul but is dragged kicking and screaming into being an accountant. The point of Socrates’s colorful example is rather to show that the oligarch’s cupidity is so totalizing that their

reason comes to conceptualize money as good for the whole soul. Like the reason of the tragic spectator, it incorrectly thinks that the object desired by appetite is worth pursuing.<sup>39</sup>

These two texts offer concrete cases in which appetite upsets deliberations by corrupting reason into conceptualizing as beneficial for the whole soul those things that appetite itself is impelled towards. But of course, it can equally upset reason's judgments when it is repulsed by something. Recall that book 3 warns about pains or fears causing changes to our beliefs through force and bewitchment (*Rep.* 413d6–e1). The terrors of war may be so overwhelming that I abandon my belief that I should fight to protect my homeland and think instead that I should defect. The pain of imagining Desdemona's betrayal leads Othello to think it would be best to kill the wife that he loves so dearly. These fears and pains, as well as the temptations and pleasures discussed above, are evidently the "soaps" referred to in the first discussion of courage that threaten to wash away our correct beliefs about what we ought to do (*Rep.* 430a5–b3). They operate on a susceptible soul by causing it to think that what the appetite is impelled towards or away from is genuinely good or bad for the agent. Of course, these are precisely the experiences to which the courageous agent is resistant. In them spirit intercedes to preserve the correct beliefs about what ought to be done. And though, once again, Plato is not as clear about how this happens as one would like, the balance of evidence suggests that spirit does this by counteracting and neutralizing the otherwise destabilizing impulses of appetite with its own desires, emotions and motivations.

This is suggested from the analysis of tragedy discussed above. Many people who express pity for tragic heroes would never allow themselves to display similar emotions outside of the theater. Decent people pride themselves on being able to endure their own suffering quietly since this is what a 'real man' does, whereas pitying such suffering is womanly (*Rep.*

605d7–e1). These remarks are revealing because feeling pride, enduring, being manly and looking down on feminine behavior are all emotions or activities associated with highly spirited individuals. Socrates is here indicating that spirited responses will typically prevent decent people from indulging in self-pity. And just a few lines later he also indicates that similar responses would prevent tragic spectators from openly pitying tragic heroes *if* the dynamics of the theater did not lull the best part of their soul into submission. Thus he says that after loosening its guard over appetite reason comes to think that there is “no shame” [οὐδὲν αἰσχρὸν ὄν, *Rep.* 606b1–2] in praising or pitying the hero on stage. Evidently, if the agent were to recognize its behavior as shameful it would never believe that public pity or praise provides some real benefit. In other words, occurrent spirited responses frequently do prevent people from openly grieving their own misfortunes and, in addition, such responses would also prevent people from praising and pitying those on the stage if only they occurred.

This offers fairly direct testimony that shame and the other spirited affections have the power to counteract the pernicious force of appetite and prevent it from corrupting reason into conceptualizing something harmful as good. Other passages, though admittedly sparse, make a similar point.<sup>40</sup> Plato apparently thought that if the lowest part of our soul has the power to upset reason’s deliberations, then the middle part can buttress reason’s deliberations and preserve the correct judgments about what we ought to do. This, I claim, is how the healthy spirit’s desires, motivations and emotions work to overcome the threat of appetite. By neutralizing the destabilizing impulses towards pleasures and temptations as well as those away from pains and fears, the spirit prevents reason from endorsing the activities and ends pursued by appetite.

We are invited to think of the characteristic affections of spirit as a set of psychic forces that press back against the psychic forces of appetite, which sometimes tries to topple reason off

its pedestal.<sup>41</sup> This way of putting things is a little vague, but that is surely intentional. Plato presumably wished to leave open the possibility that different spirited responses may counteract the different threatening impulses that are likely to arise in different situations. It is important to remember that courage preserves reason's judgments about what ought to be done quite generally. This means expressions of courage are likely to vary greatly. On the front lines of battle, a soldier will feel a very intense variety of terror that may constitute a significant threat to their belief that they ought to stand their ground and fight. This will be quite different from the lustful temptation a spouse feels to have a hurtful extramarital affair. A spirited response may be needed for both agents to preserve their correct belief about how they should act in their respective situations, but I can see no reason to expect those responses will be of the same kind or intensity. One hopes that the response required to remain faithful is both qualitatively and quantitatively different from the one required to remain steadfast in the face of imminent death.<sup>42</sup>

A couple of points are worth emphasizing at this juncture. First, Plato takes courage to operate in the face of pleasures and temptations in addition to fears and pains. This is absolutely clear from the central discussions of courage in book 4, and a similar point is made in other dialogues.<sup>43</sup> Yet this fact is often elided or even implicitly denied in scholarly discussions. A second, more interesting point to insist upon is the wide variety of spirited responses that may feature in expressions of courage. Many recent studies seem ideologically opposed to the diversity of spirit's responses. Reacting to earlier commentators who regarded the middle soul-part as a messy agglomeration of disparate emotions and drives, these newer studies have sought to rehabilitate spirit's reputation by identifying an underlying unity to all that spirit does.<sup>44</sup> While this trend has refocused sympathetic attention on an important feature of Plato's psychology, it is not totally unproblematic. It has led several scholars to claim that there is one desire or

motivation—the desire for the *κᾶλον*,<sup>45</sup> avoiding shame<sup>46</sup> or some other aspect of our psychic lives to which the spirit is supposed to give rise<sup>47</sup>—that is fundamental, or at the very least privileged. And this, in turn, has led to claims that this particular desire or motivation plays a dominant role in the psychology of the courageous agent. Consider, for example, what Jessica Moss says:

Reason, recognizing the courageous action as best, pulls the agent towards that action.

Which part of the soul pulls the agent away, dreading the pains of the courageous action? It must be appetite...The outcome of the battle is decided when the third part, spirit, joins its forces with reason in pulling the agent towards courageous action. Why does it do this? It is not motivated by considerations of pain and pleasure, like appetite, nor benefit and harm, like reason. The most compelling explanation is that it finds this action *kalon*, and finds the cowardly, pleasurable alternative shameful.<sup>48</sup>

The interpretation presented above provides grounds for being unsatisfied with tying courage too tightly to a specific desire or motivation. For one thing, singling out one motivation seems perverse in light of the fact that courage is a virtue of the whole spirit. Why shouldn't any or all of the spirit's affective responses be mustered to help it preserve reason's judgments?<sup>49</sup> For another, we have seen no textual basis to privilege certain motivations over others. It is obviously significant that there is no mention of *any* of the spirit's affective responses in either of the central discussions of courage in book 4. And so far as I can tell, the other relevant texts lead us to expect that courageous individuals will call on a wide range of desires, emotions and motivations. The early education described in books 2 and 3 is, for example, designed to

inculcate a range of spirited motivations. To be sure, this includes a sense of shame—and, as we have seen, sometimes shame is required to push back against appetite’s impulses. But it also includes an appropriate respect for gods, parents and peers, a contempt for lamentation and laughter as well as a robust but moderated sense of pride and competitiveness.<sup>50</sup> Thus at other times it may be that an impulse for victory or esteem is needed to overcome appetite’s aversions and to preserve a motivation to do something. Finally, it is worth noting that Plato acknowledges that different people are born with different emotional palates and react differently in different situations. He knows, for example, that some people find it harder to cope with the stresses of terror, whereas others find it harder to deal with the temptations of pleasure.<sup>51</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that such people may also need different motivations to deal with the difficult situations in which they find themselves.

Nor is this pure speculation. Once our eyes are open to the possibility, we start to realize that the examples of courage in Plato’s dialogues come in different flavors. Consider just two—I shall call them hot and cold. By hot courage I mean expressions of courage accompanied by very intense passions, prototypically exemplified by a warrior’s burning desire for victory and honor. The paradigmatic example of hot courage in the ancient world is, of course, Achilles. Though Plato’s attitude towards the hero is not unambiguously positive, on multiple occasions he has his characters admiringly cite Achilles’s courageous action of avenging Patroclus, despite knowing that this would mean he must die.<sup>52</sup> Plato’s own interlocutors provide additional, albeit less quixotic, examples of hot courage. After Laches proves unable to articulate which power courage is, Socrates urges him to endure through further investigation lest courage itself mock him for not enduring courageously. In response, the general gets quite worked up and announces that he is ready to continue because “some love of victory has seized” him and will help him endure

(*Lach.* 194a7–8). Though this is surely meant to be a little amusing, the fervid desire for victory that helps Laches hold fast against Socrates’s elenctic assault could well be a sort of hot courage.<sup>53</sup> Contrast this with the cold courage evinced by the philosopher who does not consider human life to be a great thing and lacks a strong appetitive attachment to almost everything. The paradigm of cold courage in Plato’s dialogues is Socrates himself. Alcibiades admiringly describes a time at the battle of Delium when he calmly retreated while ruthlessly fighting off any enemy that approached, ultimately saving not only his own life but Laches’s as well.<sup>54</sup> But Socrates is not motivated by a desire for victory or glory. So far as I can tell, he is motivated by a very mild variety of prospective shame elicited by the thought of doing something other than what he ought to do.<sup>55</sup>

What matters for courage is not which spirited desires, emotions or motivations are experienced. What matters is that they effectively stop any fears, pleasures, pains or desires from perverting reason’s judgments about what ought to be done.

4

Many other questions remain to be answered. If, for example, courage operates in the face of pleasures in addition to fears, how shall we distinguish it from temperance?<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, complete answers to these questions must wait.<sup>57</sup> My purpose here is to offer a textually compelling and philosophically interesting interpretation of courage—not to resolve every last issue. However, the comparison of the warrior’s hot courage with the philosopher’s cold courage invites one question that I would like to address. Does courage require wisdom? Most scholars answer in the affirmative. They endorse some version of the unity of virtue thesis and claim that



genuine courage requires wisdom.<sup>58</sup> Yet the discussion of the warrior's hot courage might reasonably be taken to imply a negative answer.

In fact, I remain neutral on this question. It seems to me that one can think that courage is a power and that only wise people may truly possess it. However, if the interpretation presented above is correct, some interesting considerations come into view that might lead one to resist the unity of virtue. Consider, in particular, 518d9–519a5, an important passage about the virtues and powers. Socrates distinguishes the virtue of τοῦ φρονῆσαι, which must be wisdom, from the “other” virtues of the soul—presumably courage, temperance and justice. These other virtues are said to come to be in us later and to come from habit and practice. This is contrasted with wisdom, which belongs to the more divine part of our soul that always possesses its δύναμις and becomes beneficial or harmful depending on its orientation [περιαγωγή]. Though much about this passage is perplexing, the salient point for our purposes is that Socrates draws a clear distinction between how we become wise and how we acquire the other virtues. His comments thus raise the interesting possibility that one might be habituated in such a way that one becomes courageous without also being wise.

As it turns out, a good case can be made for thinking that all one needs to be courageous is to have true beliefs as well as habit and practice. Neither the educational regime discussed in books 2 and 3, including the lengthy and detailed discussion of how we change our minds, nor Socrates's initial treatment of courage in book 4 mention knowledge at all. They focus entirely on correct beliefs. It seems that the long and laborious educational regime articulated before book 4 is sufficient to endow certain individuals with the intellectual ability to make or identify correct judgments about what ought to be done. And despite lacking knowledge, these individuals nevertheless possess a psychological power that reliably protects their correct beliefs

from any appetitive challenge the world might throw at them [διὰ παντὸς, *Rep.* 430b3]. As a result, these individuals preserve their motivation to do what they ought to do even in the face of the most terrible fears, pleasures, pains or desires. This is nothing to scoff at. It is a significant—indeed, remarkable—ethical achievement, far beyond what most of us can hope to achieve in our lives.

It is true that the discussion of courage in the individual refers to a knowledgeable rational soul-part. But nothing in this second treatment actually commits Plato to the view that someone can be courageous only if their rational soul-part possesses the special knowledge about what is beneficial for the whole body and soul. Socrates is merely describing what it is for an individual to be wise as well as how that individual's reason issues prescriptions which their spirit preserves. All that follows from this is the obvious point that a wise person can also be courageous. It does not rule out the possibility that someone lacking wisdom may possess courage as well. Indeed, nothing at all from book 4 does. As Wilberding has correctly insisted, "The definition of courage...simply requires that reason's dictates on the objects of fear be preserved, with no indication that the dictating reason must be wise."<sup>59</sup> Or as I would put it, Plato's account of courage simply requires that it reliably preserve correct practical judgments, whether they derive from knowledge or true belief.

One might object that there is still an important difference between those who have knowledge about what they ought to do and those who merely possess correct belief. Those who have knowledge, the thought goes, will be so confident in the accuracy of their judgments that they will be immune to the appetitive threats that assail the rest of us. But this is far from certain. For one thing, the fact that knowledge is said to be over that which completely is [τὸ παντελῶς ὄν, *Rep.* 477a3] raises the old and unresolved puzzle of how genuine knowledge might be

deployed in everyday deliberations. But more importantly, Plato takes it as a brute fact about human nature that (at least in our embodied life) the appetitive part of our soul can never be completely tamed. This is why imitative poetry is so dangerous and can corrupt even the best of us (*Rep.* 605c5–8). It is also why *everyone* has enduring lawless desires that manifest themselves in dreams (*Rep.* 572b2–7). It is not hard to imagine that in extreme circumstances, such as torturous pain or deprivation, even the wise and temperate philosophers would need their spirit to prevent their clamoring appetites from upsetting their rational deliberations. Here it is worth noting that Aristotle’s paradigm of courage, though as undaunted as can be by dangerous warfare, nevertheless remains perturbed by those things which no human could meet with indifference (*EN* III.7, 1115b7–13). Plato seems to agree with this. For in book 2 he claims that the most courageous soul will be least disturbed—but not undisturbed—by external circumstances (*Rep.* 381a3–4).

Of course, those who are wise and courageous will have advantages over those who are merely courageous. Only the philosopher will have access to the world of forms, an intellectual playground that affords superb pleasures.<sup>60</sup> One can even grant that the courage of the wise and courageous individual is more robust and counterfactually reliable than the courage of the merely courageous individual. For all that has been said so far, a deceptive argument might persuade the merely courageous individual to reject one of their correct beliefs and accept a new, incorrect one. That is to say, they might succumb to a sophisticated sort of theft. But this only shows that the courage of the merely courageous individual is fragile in a way that the courage of the completely virtuous agent is not, and that courage must sometimes be protected from intellectual threats. And this, I suspect, is exactly why Socrates constructs a city in which dialectic and

argumentation are not introduced, let alone taught, to prospective rulers until they are 30 (*Rep.* 538c–539a).

To reject the unity of virtue all one must deny is that such advantages as the wise and courageous individual have over the merely courageous individual include a greater or more reliable ability to preserve reason's correct judgments about what ought to be done in the face of pleasures, pains, fears, desires or any other appetitive threat. If both these individuals possess the spirit's power of preservation, neither will experience a pernicious case of appetite-induced *μεταδοξάσαι* described in the previous two sections. And that could well be sufficient to make both agents courageous on a reasonable interpretation of the evidence of the *Republic*.

5

I have offered a new interpretation of courage in Plato's *Republic*. According to this interpretation, courage is the particular power that preserves the result of reason's deliberations about what ought to be done in the face of appetitive threats that might otherwise corrupt reason's judgments. I then explored what such an interpretation implies about the moral psychology of the virtuous agent and the question of who can be genuinely courageous. A number of these implications suggest that current scholarly approaches to courage may need to be reconsidered.

In addition to shedding light on Plato's understanding of one particular virtue, I hope that the spotlight I have placed on courage will cast some residual light on the important and underappreciated role that powers play in the moral philosophy of the *Republic*. In principle, interpretations similar to the one offered here could (and should) be offered for the other virtues,

which we also have good reason to believe are powers. The results would no doubt be as interesting and provocative as the present study.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Curiously, this is not true of other dialogues. Studies of the so-called 'early dialogues' have investigated the metaphysical status of the virtues, and several scholars have suggested that at least some of them are δυνάμεις. The most significant of these studies is Penner, "Unity of Virtue." More recent studies include Clark, "Primary Question;" Clark, "What is F-ness?" Question;" and Wolfsdorf, "Δυνάμις."

<sup>2</sup> One finds very little about the nature of the virtues in Adam's *The Republic of Plato*, either concerning the city, Vol. 1, 223–43, or the individual, 258–68. Annas, *An Introduction*, 109–52, only contains suggestive remarks that are unfortunately left unexplored. Cross and Woosley pass

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over this topic in the relevant chapters of *A Philosophical Commentary*, 94–133. Despite an extended discussion of the *Republic*, Irwin, *Ethics*, 181–243, contains nothing directly on this question. In *Understanding*, 56–106, Santas includes an interesting discussion of the nature of the soul-parts but stops short of saying much decisive about the nature of the virtues. Likewise, White says little that is committal about their nature in *A Companion*, 106–38. One searches in vain for this topic in the indices of Ferrari ed., *The Cambridge Companion* and Santas ed., *The Blackwell Guide*.

<sup>3</sup> Payne, “The Division of Goods,” 59–60; Sachs, “A Fallacy,” 147–9; and White, “The Classification of Goods,” 408–9. In a single footnote of *Moral Theory*, 325–6 n. 8, Irwin concedes that justice may be a power: “To say what justice is is to say what power of the soul it is.” However, this does not seem to inform his interpretation of the virtues at pp. 204–8.

<sup>4</sup> Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings*, 250: “[W]e need to understand what [justice] is set over, and what work it does.”

<sup>5</sup> Though I agree with the broad methodological procedure of first identifying what justice is and then asking why this matters, I do not agree with much of the substance of Reeve’s idiosyncratic interpretation of the dialogue. The nuances of his interpretation cannot be fully addressed here, but I am skeptical of his attempt to map the tripartite structure of the soul onto the epistemology presented in books 6 and 7. As I reject the attempt to bring the *Republic*’s moral psychology so closely together with its epistemology, my understanding of the well-ordered soul—and, consequently, of justice—differs considerably from Reeve’s.

<sup>6</sup> Note the way Socrates introduces the concept. Socrates asks, “οὐκοῦν καὶ ἀρετὴ δοκεῖ σοι εἶναι ἐκάστῳ ᾧπερ καὶ ἔργοντι προστέτακται;” (*Rep.* 353b2–3). The perfect here is quite important: something gets a virtue if it has *already* been assigned a function.

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<sup>7</sup> The backreference is to 350c12–d7, where, on the basis of comparing the just and unjust individual to craftspeople, Socrates argues that justice is wisdom and virtue, whereas injustice is ignorance and vice. Thrasymachus’s ‘agreement’ is at most half-hearted.

<sup>8</sup> In the second stage of his argument Socrates claims the soul has many functions (*Rep.* 353d3–7) and that there is only one virtue of the soul (*Rep.* 353e1–2 and 353e7–8). The first claim is suspect in context because all of Socrates’s other examples in book 1 are of subjects that have only one function. The second is problematic because, as we learn in book 4, there are four virtues of the soul. A different analysis of the argument and its problems can be found in Lycos, *Justice and Power*, 147–53.

<sup>9</sup> Socrates’s claim in book 10 that the virtue of a thing is related to “nothing other than the use to which each thing was made [πεποιημένον] or naturally purposed” [πεφυκός, *Rep.* 601d4–6] clearly alludes to the two kinds of examples offered in book 1 to motivate Socrates’s account of function.

<sup>10</sup> Translations are my own. The Greek is from the OCT (Slings’s 2003 edition for the *Republic*).

<sup>11</sup> One might wonder why virtues are not more explicitly connected with powers in book 1. The answer is that it is not until book 5 that the technical concept of δύναμις is officially introduced and delineated. It would not have been appropriate for Socrates to explain the nature of powers during his argument with Thrasymachus, which serves, at least in part, as an introduction to the difficult material that follows. Nevertheless, through his careful use of examples Plato takes pains to let attentive readers know that the virtues discussed in book 1 are powers. Recall that the two most prominent examples of subjects with virtues are eyes and ears. The virtue of the eyes is sight [ὄψις, *Rep.* 353c3–4], and the virtue of the ears is hearing [ἀκοή, *Rep.* 352e8–10]. It cannot be a coincidence that ὄψις and ἀκοή are the two paradigmatic examples of powers at 477c1–4.

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Bloom’s translation in *The Republic of Plato*, 108.

<sup>13</sup> Compare “δύναμιν τοιαύτην ἢ διὰ παντὸς σώσει” at 429b8 with “σωτηρίαν...τινὰ εἶναι” at 429c5.

<sup>14</sup> Despite this guiding assumption, several scholars have suspected that there must be an important difference between courage in the city and courage in the individual. Socrates goes out of his way to correct Glaucon’s assumption that the account offered at 430b3–5 is the final word on courage: it is, rather, an account of “civic courage” [πολιτικὴν, *Rep.* 430c3–6]. Adam, *The Republic of Plato*, Vol. 1, 231–2; Irwin, *Moral Theory*, 329 n. 26; and Annas, *An Introduction*, 114, all wonder whether the conspicuous use of πολιτικὴν does not indicate that this sort of courage is unique to cities. But Glaucon does not think so. He responds to the account by immediately applying it to individuals and suggesting that those who are correctly educated can achieve this sort of courage (*Rep.* 430b6–9). Socrates responds approvingly, confirming that this sort of courage can, in fact, apply to individuals as well.

<sup>15</sup> The similarities between these two passages are noted and commented upon by Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero*, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Justice is “the power of each to do their own work” [ἡ τοῦ ἕκαστον ἐν αὐτῇ τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν δύναμις, *Rep.* 433d6–8; c.f. 433b7–c2]. I briefly discuss this passage in “Wages of Justice,” 5.

<sup>17</sup> There are good reasons for expecting that the other two ethical virtues discussed in book 4 are δυνάμεις as well. This is especially so for wisdom. Below I will present considerations and some textual evidence suggesting that wisdom in the individual is a power separate and distinct from courage and justice. (Interested readers can also consult Yau’s recent dissertation, *Wisdom*, which argues at length that wisdom is by its very nature a δύναμις.) That three of the four cardinal ethical virtues are clearly identified or implied to be powers in the *Republic* suggests

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strongly that the final virtue, temperance, must also be a power. And, indeed, I think it is, though a lack of space prevents me from arguing this here. In section 4 I will, however, make some suggestive remarks about temperance and how exactly it differs from the power of courage.

<sup>18</sup> My understanding of the powers has been influenced by Lefebvre, *Dynamis*, esp. 229–72.

<sup>19</sup> It is here worth noting an ambiguity (discussed by Lefebvre, *Dynamis*, 259–63) in the way δύναμις-terms are used. As Socrates’s first statement about powers at 477c1–4 indicates, δύναμις-terms may identify capacities. To use a familiar example, ὄψις can (and in that passage, does) refer to the capacity of sight – that is to say, the capacity that enables us to see. But δύναμις-terms can also be used to identify the operation of capacities. Thus ὄψις may also refer to the operation of the capacity of sight, namely, active seeing (e.g. *Rep.* 507d10–e1). This ambiguity helps to explain some peculiarities we have already noted. It lies, for example, behind Socrates’s switch from talking about courage in the city as a power that preserves to talking about it as the preservation itself.

<sup>20</sup> Socrates says he looks towards “this” [ἐκεῖνο], in the singular, before mentioning his two criteria.

<sup>21</sup> Lefebvre, *Dynamis*, 259.

<sup>22</sup> At 507d10–e1 Plato identifies colors as the domain of seeing (cf. *Charm.* 168d9–e1 and *Men.* 76d1–5). This fits well with what we know about Greek optics; see, Smith, “Optics,” 413–27.

<sup>23</sup> *Lach.* 195e89.

<sup>24</sup> This seems to be the view of Wolfsdorf, “Δύναμις,” 338: “The obvious candidate is courageous corporeal action; that is to say, the psychological state of courage enables a person to act courageously.”

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<sup>25</sup> In this respect it is like justice, which also operates on objects within the soul. Consider 443c9–d1: justice is not *περὶ τὴν ἔξω πρᾶξιν* but *περὶ τὴν ἐντός*; cf. 433b7–c2.

<sup>26</sup> In one manuscript (preferred by Adam, *The Republic of Plato*, Vol.1, 260, but curiously not mentioned by Slings) the Greek of the later passage says the individual is courageous when their spirit preserves “the thing prescribed *by reason* [ὕπὸ τοῦ λόγου] as fearful or not.”

<sup>27</sup> The consistent help spirit gives to reason is precisely why it is called reason’s ally at 441e5. Cf. Singpurwalla, “Natural Ally.”

<sup>28</sup> Note that τὰ βουλευθέντα is an aorist passive participle.

<sup>29</sup> At 442a4–b3 reason and spirit are said to guard against appetite filling up with pleasures, growing strong and attempting to rule those things that it is not fit to rule. Our passage follows this one and begins with a pair of inferential particles, suggesting that success at guarding against external enemies is a consequence of checking the appetite.

<sup>30</sup> At 440b4–7 Socrates says that spirit almost never allies with appetite and does what reason says should not be done. This point is occasioned by the discussion of Leontius, who desires to gaze at corpses and is not confronted by anything we would describe as paradigmatically fearful.

<sup>31</sup> Socrates’s treatment of the city likewise suggests that courage should preserve prescriptions that are quite broad in scope. Note that the auxiliary class is said to have a power within it that preserves the belief about fearful things and, additionally, such things “*which the lawgiver prescribed in their education*” (*Rep.* 429c1–2). This addition is important. Because not every last thing in the auxiliaries’ education would have concerned paradigmatically fearful topics, we must assume that they, too, are expected to preserve beliefs that extend beyond the narrow scope of the fearful or terrifying. Indeed, we shall later learn that the things commanded by the lawgiver in this education would be broadly oriented towards the general good of the city. And if

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this is so, then the city's courage also preserves prescriptions that aim at the good of the whole. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer who brought 429c1–2 to my attention.

<sup>32</sup> At *Laches* 198c2–3 Socrates explicitly equates fearful things [τά δεινά] with future bad things, which are precisely those things that cause harm. A similar assimilation of what is fearful with what is bad is found at *Protagoras* 358c6–359a1. That the fearful things are whatever will harm us in the future looks like an 'official' Platonic view, and it is preserved in the *Republic*.

It is worth pointing out that this official Platonic view is a normative one. It is for this reason that I say we properly fear whatever will harm us in the future. Plato is, of course, aware that people do sometimes *feel* afraid or terrified when confronted with objects or situations that threaten no real harm. And he uses the language of fear to describe this psychological phenomenon. (We will even see later that he believes courage is responsible for resisting the destabilizing effects of this feeling of fear. And—curiously—it is supposed to resist the effects of this psychological phenomenon by preserving reason's judgments about what is genuinely fearful). Yet because these things do not threaten real harm in the future, Plato would deny they are genuinely fearful. Those things that are genuinely fearful are the things reason (correctly) identifies as harmful.

<sup>33</sup> Wilburn, "Courage and the Spirited Part," esp. 15-7. Wilburn's view is that agents never act in ways that they know to be bad for them. This leaves open the possibility that someone might act in a way that reason does not explicitly reject or endorse.

<sup>34</sup> Rogers and Hart's classic "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" tells us that the pleasures born of love can take over our thoughts and transform us: "I'm wild again, beguiled again/A simpering, whimpering child again/Bewitched, bothered and bewildered am I." The power of pleasurable experiences to distort thinking was also recognized by the Greeks. In the *Encomium*

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of *Helen* Gorgias uses the nominal form of the verb translated above as bewitch to describe how pleasure can associate with reasoning to produce an “error” of belief (DK82 B11.10).

<sup>35</sup> A complementary account of how pleasure, pain or fear impacts our beliefs about what we ought to do, albeit one localized to the early dialogues, is found in Brickhouse and Smith, “Wrongdoing Damages the Soul,” 348–55.

<sup>36</sup> It is worth emphasizing that I do not claim courage is responsible for the preservation of correct beliefs in any and all circumstances. In particular, I do not claim it prevents one from succumbing to theft—that is to say, to forgetting one’s true beliefs over the slow march of time or being persuaded out of them via argumentation. Other mechanisms are in place to ensure that prospective rulers will not become victims of theft. Ultimately, the guardians’ philosophical natures strengthened by years of theoretical education will do this (*Rep.* 486c–d and 538a–539e).

<sup>37</sup> One might wonder what this implies about external courageous activity. On my view, acting as reason dictates in the midst of strong pleasures, pains, fears or desires *just is* external courageous activity. However, it is important to note that the power of courage neither directly causes this sort of activity nor guarantees its practical success. It guarantees only that the courageous agent will be motivated to act as reason dictates. And even then, it does this in a mediated way, namely, by preserving reason’s motivating judgments.

<sup>38</sup> Though the word “ἐπιθυμητικόν” is not used in this passage, the soul-part in question is said to be “by nature such as to desire” [ἐπιθυμεῖν, *Rep.* 606a6] weeping and wailing. This strongly suggests the appetite is in view. Equally tellingly, Plato’s objections to poetry in book 10 trade on the fact that it problematically appeals to the appetite and its insatiable desire for pleasure. Thus, the final lines of Socrates’s discussion: “if you admit the pleasuring Muse, whether in lyrics or epics, pleasure and pain shall rule in the city rather than law...” (*Rep.* 608c5–7).



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<sup>39</sup> Wilburn, “Courage and the Spirited Part,” 11, also cites the oligarch, along with Socrates’s discussion of manual laborers at the end of book 9 (*Rep.* 509c2–6), to argue that the real threat of appetite is that it will “corrupt or change the agent’s rational judgment.” I am in broad agreement with his analysis of how this happens, though I think he has missed two important pieces of textual evidence. In addition to the passage about tragedy, one should also consider 402e4, where excessive pleasures and pains are said to ruin virtuous behavior by driving us out of our wits.

<sup>40</sup> In response to Leontius’s impulse to stare at the corpses dumped outside of Athens’s walls, he experiences a sort of self-directed anger that fights to prevent his lecherous gaze (*Rep.* 439e5–440a4). Even though it ultimately fails to prevent the unseemly behavior, there is little doubt that this sort of anger is basically healthy and might curtail vicious behavior in others. This explains why Socrates praises the spirit in his post-Leontius commentary: the spirit almost never goes against reason (*Rep.* 440b4–7); the angry, spirited individual will not cease from noble actions (*Rep.* 440d1); and the guardians of the city will be highly spirited (*Rep.* 440d6–7). This all betrays a great deal of confidence that the spirited responses push us away from vicious behavior and towards virtuous behavior.

<sup>41</sup> In conceiving of the spirit’s motivations as psychic forces, I am inspired by other passages where Plato gives mechanistic descriptions of the way a power’s activity is accomplished. We find such an account of seeing at *Tim.* 45c–d. Seeing occurs when an internal fire stretches out into the external world, makes contact with an object and then transmits the motions of the external object through the body to the soul. Accounts such as these provide a supplement to the metaphysical picture of powers developed in book 5 at the level of physical discourse.

<sup>42</sup> My example of a soldier relying on courage to hold their position implies that their fear of death is rooted in the appetite’s impulses. An anonymous referee has asked whether it is fair to

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assume that this fear ultimately derives from the appetite. If not, then it might seem my account of courage is ill-equipped to explain how overcoming the fear of death could be courageous.

This is an important question. In response, I begin by noting that the terror felt by a soldier on the front lines is almost certain to implicate the appetite. The pain one can expect to suffer in warfare is truly horrendous, and the appetite is repulsed by physical pain. In practice, therefore, it might be impossible to disentangle the fear of pain from the fear of death. And, more generally, Plato's discussion of the education given to guardians suggests that the problematic experiences of fear will be occasioned by perceived physical dangers and pains (see esp. *Rep.* 413d6–e5). Nevertheless, the deeper question of whether the fear of death must implicate the appetite remains. I am tempted to claim that at least for the virtuous individual it should. There is considerable evidence that, according to Plato, the good individual has no rational reason to fear death. Indeed, Socrates says so in so many words at *Gorgias* 522e1–3: “No one who is not totally lacking reason and courage fears this thing, dying; it is doing injustice they fear” (cf. *Ap.* 40b8–c1). Sometimes Socrates even speaks as if dying is better than living (e.g. *Phd.* 62a1–9). Of course, this does not imply that in most cases an individual cannot prefer to continue living. One can reasonably want one thing more than another without thinking either is bad. But if it is true that death is not bad, it would mean that death does not merit fear. Any experience of it as fearful would, then, presumably derive from the unruly, non-rational features of our psyche.

<sup>43</sup> See, in particular, *Leg.* 633c8–d4 and 634a6–b6.

<sup>44</sup> Moss, “Shame,” 137–8, is quite explicit about wishing to rehabilitate spirit's reputation. Other important works include Burnyeat, “Tripartition;” Cooper, “Human Motivation;” Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero*, esp. 1–49; Kamtekar, “Imperfect;” Singpurwalla, “Natural Ally;” and Wilberding, “Second-Best Morality.”

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<sup>45</sup> Singpurwalla, “Natural Ally,” esp. 56-64, highlights the desire for the *κᾶλον* as central to the spirit.

<sup>46</sup> Moss, “Shame,” esp. 153-59, gives shame a central place.

<sup>47</sup> Cooper, “Human Motivation,” esp. 12–7, identifies the motivations of competitiveness and the desire for self-esteem as being central to the operation of the spirit.

<sup>48</sup> Moss, “Shame,” 154.

<sup>49</sup> Moss, “Shame,” does allow that some other emotions or drives can be exhibited by the spirit. But if I have understood her view correctly, this is only if they ultimately derive from a more basic impulse towards the *κᾶλον* or away from shame. She claims, for example, “the desire for what is *kalon* can explain the desire for honor and victory...” (155). I see no reason to make the desire for *κᾶλον* fundamental or explanatory of the other affections.

<sup>50</sup> On shame, *Rep.* 378c1 and 396d6; on the rest, 375e8–10, 386a1–4, 38710–388d7, 388e4–389a6.

<sup>51</sup> Socrates makes this point at *Lach.* 191e4–7: “some people are called courageous in pleasures, others in pain, others in appetites and still others in fears.” Though Socrates is here describing how people talk rather than stating his own view, he seems to accept that some of us are just better equipped for coping with certain experiences than others.

<sup>52</sup> *Ap.* 28b–d and *Symp.* 179e–180a. On Plato’s complex attitudes towards Achilles throughout his works, see the thoughtful discussion in Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero*, 175–98 and 199–219.

<sup>53</sup> On the courage required for philosophical discussion, see Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero*, 240–9; cf. Baima and Paytas, *Plato’s Pragmatism*, 120–2.

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<sup>54</sup> *Symp.* 221a–c. In addition to this example, consider Socrates’s cool composure on the day of his death at *Phd.* 116d–118a and his description of the terrible fighting at Potidaea at *Charm.* 153a–d.

<sup>55</sup> At least shame is emphasized in the *Apology*, which I take to be powerful evidence about the character of Socrates. See 17b1–2, 17b3–5, 28b3–9, 28d6–10, 29b6–7, 35a7–3 and 38d6–8.

<sup>56</sup> This difficulty is not unique to my interpretation. Any interpretation that takes seriously the idea that courage functions in the face of pains *and* pleasures—as, I think, any reasonable interpretation must—will face some version of this difficulty. A similar point has been made recently by Baima, “Fighting Pleasure,” 255–73.

<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, some suggestive remarks should be made here. Note, to begin with, that because courage and temperance are different powers, they must be over and accomplish different things. We know what courage is over and accomplishes. It is vital precisely when the appetite is attempting to stage a coup in the soul and revolt against reason. Recall that spirit is tasked with thwarting the appetite when it, “tries to enslave and rule over those things which it is not fit” to rule, i.e. when it tries to “overturn the whole of life” (*Rep.* 442b1–3). This is quite distinct from what we learn about temperance. 442d1–2 claims that in the temperate soul appetite will “agree that [reason] ought to rule and not revolt against it.” That is to say, courage is necessary when the appetites are *already* threatening to cause a serious problem in the soul, whereas temperance typically works to prevent appetite from threatening reason in the first place.

This need not imply that the courageous agent lacks temperance. Plato believes there are limits to what temperance can accomplish vis-à-vis the appetite and that in extreme circumstances the appetite will never accept reason’s rule (more on this below). In such circumstances, the agent will need courage to overcome the impulses of the appetite with the

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spirit's motivations, emotions and desires. Plato may also have thought that it was possible for the appetite to experience an impulse towards an object that the rational soul-part had not yet made any decisions about. Presumably, such impulses would not count as intemperate because they do not actively go against what reason has decided. But if the rational soul-part subsequently discovers or decides that the desired object is problematic, spirited responses may be needed to stop the appetite from perverting reason's rule.

<sup>58</sup> The one notable exception to this consensus is Wilberding, "Second-Best Morality," esp. 360. For an argument that virtue might require false beliefs at times, see Baima and Paytas, *Plato's Pragmatism*, 157–76.

<sup>59</sup> Wilberding, "Second-Best Morality," 360 n.40.

<sup>60</sup> On the pleasures of the philosophical life, see *Rep.* 580d–583a and 583b–587e.

<sup>61</sup> Plenty of people helped me as I worked on this paper. I owe thanks to my friends, teachers and colleagues at Princeton University, many of whom discussed my half-baked ideas when I first began to put pen to paper. I am also grateful to my friends and colleagues in London for reading drafts of this paper. Special thanks to the two anonymous referees from the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* for their critical comments, which forced me to refine my claims and sharpen my points. Finally, I need to thank Josh Wilburn, who talked me through revising this paper, and Sarah Broadie, who encouraged me to work on it before her unfortunate passing.