

The Power of Courage in Plato's Republic

The concept of *dunamis*, or power, as I will translate it here, occupies a foundational place in Plato's philosophy. It is nearly ubiquitous, occurring in almost all the dialogues. At various times it underlies Plato's discussion of names, perception, ruling, cognitive states, replenishment, the crafts and the virtues – to name just a few examples. That ancient sources realized the importance of the concept is reflected by the fact that *dunamis* is one of very few terms to receive two distinct entries in the pseudo-Platonic *Definitions*.¹ Yet it is sorely underappreciated and understudied in contemporary literature. The amount of scholarship devoted to Plato's understanding of powers pales in comparison to the literature on the roughly comparable forms, for example, despite the fact that the forms occupy a prominent place in only a handful of dialogues and *eidos*- or *idea*-language occurs less frequently than *dunamis*-language.² True, it is well known that the concept features in what is arguably Plato's preferred account of being in the *Sophist* and that it plays a central role in Book V of the *Republic*. But even if powers are sometimes recognized as significant, albeit second-rate, players in Plato's metaphysics, their importance for the rest of his philosophy is rarely noted.

No one paper can hope to address this gap single-handedly. Nevertheless, I would like to draw attention to the prominent place of powers in Plato's moral philosophy with a case study from the *Republic*. I shall argue that this dialogue presents courage as essentially a power. This is intended as a claim about the nature of courage: courage is, by its nature, a power of a particular sort. Far from merely offering metaphysical clarity, this claim will have important implications for our understanding of the dialogue's moral theory. For it will follow that courage possesses all of the features essential to powers, which Socrates helpfully lays out in Book V, and thus that at a fundamental level the virtue operates as a power. And if this is correct, then any comprehensive interpretation of courage must accommodate itself to this fact by explaining the value of the virtue with reference to its nature and operation as a power. To the best of my knowledge, no such interpretation has yet been offered. By attempting to offer one here, I hope both to shed new light on Plato's account of courage in his

¹ Out of the nearly 200 terms, only *agathon*, *archê*, *dunamis*, *kairos* and *homonoia* receive two entries.

² According to the TLG database, *dunamis* appears (in all cases and number) 528 times in the Platonic corpus, whereas forms of *eidos* occur 416 times and forms of *idea* only 98 times.

magnum opus and to draw attention to the important role played by the neglected concept of *dunamis* for his philosophy more generally.

My paper falls into two parts. The first part (Section I) makes the case for thinking of courage in the *Republic* as a power, and the second part (Sections II-IV) considers what this means for the dialogue's theory of the virtues and moral psychology. In particular, my analysis will call for a reevaluation of the variety and purpose of spirited desires, emotions and motivations which feature in expressions of courage. Section I begins with a brief discussion of previous scholarly approaches to our dialogue before making the case that courage is a power by considering the evidence of Book I and Book IV. Section II establishes the core of my new interpretation of this virtue by applying Book V's theoretical treatment of the powers to the accounts of courage developed earlier. Section III then completes this interpretation by turning to the place of the spirited affections in the operation of courage. Finally, Section IV turns to consider what my account has to say about the fraught question of who can be courageous. Taken together, I expect the findings of the final three sections both to demonstrate the importance of attending to *dunamis* in the *Republic* and to constitute powerful evidence for the general claim that the concept plays a more central role in Plato's philosophy than is often supposed.

I

A natural question to ask about the ethical virtues is what, exactly, they are. Even so, scholars have been rather reluctant to investigate the nature of the virtues in the *Republic*. Though there is a voluminous secondary literature devoted to the dialogue, there has been surprisingly little written on either the metaphysical status of the virtues as such or on what an investigation of that status might reveal about the dialogue's moral philosophy. A century of influential commentaries or reference works have mostly skirted these questions. One finds very little about the nature of the virtues in James Adam's magisterial work, *The Republic of Plato*;³ Cross and Woosley pass over this topic in the two relevant chapters of their philosophical commentary;⁴ Nicholas White's *Companion to Plato's Republic*

³ *The Republic of Plato: With Critical Notes, Commentary and Appendices* [Commentary] (Cambridge, 1905), 223-43 for Adam's discussion of the virtues of the city; 258-68 for his discussion of the virtues of the individual.

⁴ *Plato's Republic: A Philosophic Commentary* [Commentary] (Macmillan, 1964), 94-133.

says little that is committal about the nature of the ethical virtues;⁵ Julia Annas' *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* contains some suggestive comments, though they are unfortunately left unexplored or defended;⁶ despite an extended and detailed discussion of the *Republic*, Terence Irwin's *Plato's Ethics* offers no explicit insights;⁷ Gerasimos Santas' *Understanding Plato's Republic* includes an extended and admirable discussion of the nature of the soul-parts but stops short of saying anything decisive about the nature of virtues themselves.⁸ Readers will search in vain through the newer *Blackwell Guide to Plato's Republic* or *Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic* for anything on this topic.⁹

More detailed studies have on occasion touched on the nature of the virtues, albeit typically in an oblique manner. One can find a handful of articles, mostly focusing on the relationship between justice and happiness, that have drawn attention to the fact that *dunamis*-terminology looms large in the *Republic's* treatment of justice. These papers contain hints that justice might be or have a power. As a rule, though, these authors stop short of explicitly defining justice in a way that identifies its metaphysical status and, in any case, they do not extend their discussions to the other virtues.¹⁰ In a single footnote of his earlier work, *Plato's Moral Theory*, Irwin seems to concede that justice may be a

⁵ *A Companion to Plato's Republic* (Hackett, 1979), 106-38. At p. 116 White seems to claim that courage is (or perhaps entails?) a disposition, but it is unclear if White takes this to be a claim about courage's essential.

⁶ *An Introduction to Plato's Republic [Introduction]* (Oxford, 1981), 109-52. At pp. 132-3 Annas seems to identify justice as 'a state'. However, she makes little attempt to explain what this means or to identify where in Plato's text justice is so defined.

⁷ *Plato's Ethics* (Oxford, 1995), 181-243.

⁸ *Understanding Plato's Republic [Understanding]* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 56-106. At p. 91 Santas says the virtues are defined as 'affections' of the soul-parts, but he does not clearly explain where Plato identifies them as affections or what it means to be an affection of a soul-part.

⁹ G. Santas (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Plato's Republic* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2006) and G.R.F. Ferrari (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic [Cambridge Companion]* (Cambridge, 2007).

¹⁰ See David Sachs' 'A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*,' *The Philosophical Review* 72.2 (1969), 141-58, esp. 147-9; Nicholas White's 'The Classification of Goods in Plato's *Republic*,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22.4 (1984), 393-421, esp. 408-9; and Andrew Payne's 'The Division of Goods and Praising Justice for Itself in *Republic* II,' *Phronesis* 56.1 (2011), 58-78, esp. 59-60.

power. However, he does so while addressing an interpretive dispute about a passage in Book II and this concession does not seem to substantially inform his own interpretation of justice or the other virtues.¹¹ To the best of my knowledge, C.D.C. Reeve's *Philosopher-Kings* is the only work that explicitly, unambiguously and prominently argues that what it is to be justice is to be a power of the sort described in Book V.¹² It also emphasizes the importance of this later, theoretical account of powers for the moral philosophy of the dialogue. As Reeve says in the case of justice: '[W]e need to understand what it is set over, and what work it does.'¹³ Reeve is much to be admired for this feature of his interpretation. He has seen the methodological importance of identifying what justice is and then investigating what this means for its practical operation in the city and soul.¹⁴ Unfortunately, however, Reeve only fully deploys this methodology during his discussion of justice. Even he does not clearly identify any of the other virtues as powers or ask what they are set over and what work they do.

¹¹ *Plato's Moral Theory [Moral Theory]* (Clarendon, 1977), 325-6, n. 8. Although in this footnote Irwin talks about justice as something which has a *dunamis*, he also says, 'We say what a *dunamis* is by saying what it is set over and what it does, 477c9-d5. To say what justice is is to say what power of the soul it is; that is why the question about its *dunamis* is coupled with the demand to know what it is, 358b4-6.' Nevertheless, he does not attempt to specify what justice is set over or what it does in his own discussion of the virtue at pp. 204-8.

¹² See *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato's Republic [Philosopher-Kings]* (Princeton, 1988), 250-1.

¹³ Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings*, 250.

¹⁴ Though I agree with Reeve's broad methodological procedure, I do not agree with much of the substance of his rather idiosyncratic view. The nuances of his interpretation cannot be fully addressed here, but I am particularly skeptical of his attempt to map the tripartite structure of the soul onto the epistemology presented in Books VI and VII. For Reeve appetite is an instantiation of what he calls 'folk-wisdom', which is somehow coordinate with the bound and unbound prisoners in the cave; spirit is an instantiation of what Reeve calls 'scientific-thought', which is somehow coordinate with the bound day-dwellers who have left the cave; and reason is an instantiation of 'dialectical thought', which is somehow coordinate with the unbound day-dwellers (*Philosopher-Kings*, 251). As I reject the attempt to bring the soul-parts so closely together with the epistemology discussed later in the dialogue, our interpretation of the *Republic* – and, consequently, justice – differ considerably. An indication of my own view on justice can be found in [redacted for anonymity].

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 cardinal virtues. But this would be a mistake. I shall argue in the remainder of this section that it is tolerably clear that what it is to be courage – or any of the other ethical virtues, though are not be my central concern here – is to be a *dunamis* of a certain sort. I begin by discussing the general account of virtue presented in Socrates’ final response to Thrasymachus in Book I and then turn to his explicit statements about courage in Book IV. As indirect support for my central claim, I conclude this section with a brief discussion of the three other cardinal virtues. By showing that the evidence from Book IV indicates that they, too, are powers, the case for thinking of courage as a power is strengthened.

The final pages of Book I include an abstract account of virtue according to which virtue – and, by implication, each individual virtue – is a power. In response to Thrasymachus’ contentious claim that the life of injustice is happier than the life of justice, 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 (352c-353d) proceeds by introducing two important concepts: *function* and *virtue*. The first of these concepts is primary. For each subject that has a function, Socrates claims that its function is that ‘which it alone or best of all accomplishes’ (353a10-1). Two sorts of examples are given to unpack this claim. The first are of subjects that ‘alone’ of all the things in the world can accomplish some function: since eyes are the only things that can see and ears are the only things that can hear, the function of eyes is to see and of ears to hear. What it means for a subject to accomplish something ‘best of all’ is illustrated by a further example. Socrates notes that many things may be capable of pruning grapevines, such as swords, machetes and 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 concept, virtue, which is said to be that without which a subject would not be able to perform its function (or, later, that which enables the subject to perform its function well).¹⁵ It is important to note that virtue is dependent upon and derivative of the concept of a function.¹⁶ There can be no virtues if there are not functions, as virtues

¹⁵ See 353d14-c2 and 353c5-7 respectively.

¹⁶ This is suggested from the way Socrates introduces the concept. Socrates asks, ‘οὐκοῦν καὶ ἀρετὴ δοκεῖ σοι εἶναι ἐκάστῳ ὅπερ καὶ ἔργοντι προστέτακται;’ (353b2-3). The perfect here is quite important: something inherits a virtue if it has *already* been assigned a function. The following

are nothing other than that class of entities which enables a subject with a function to perform their function well.

The second stage of the argument (353d-354a) exploits these two important concepts to show that justice is more profitable than injustice. Socrates first gets Thrasymachus to concede that living is one of the functions of the soul. He then reminds Thrasymachus that they had earlier 'agreed' that justice is the virtue of the soul.¹⁷ By plugging in the preceding accounts of function and virtue, Socrates can argue that justice is indispensable for our well-being because it is that by which the soul fulfills its function of living well, whereas injustice, the vice of the soul, can at best lead to a life lived poorly.

The last steps of Socrates' argument move very quickly, and they are signaled by Plato as problematic. Not only is Thrasymachus totally unpersuaded at the end of Book I, but so are Glaucon and his brother Adeimantus, who later implies that Socrates' argument was overly formal and lacking in substance.¹⁸ But these reservations and criticisms are, so far as I can tell, restricted to the second stage of Socrates' argument – that is to say, to the specific claims Socrates makes about justice, the soul and human happiness.¹⁹ No interlocutor objects to the very detailed and theoretical accounts of function

discussion reinforces the priority of function to virtue, as Socrates proceeds to have Thrasymachus infer from the fact a certain subject has a function that it also has a virtue.

¹⁷ The backreference is to 350c12-d7, where, on the basis of comparing the just and unjust individual to artisans, Socrates concludes that justice is wisdom and virtue, injustice ignorance and vice. It is clear from Thrasymachus' protest that his agreement with this conclusion is at most half-hearted.

¹⁸ I take this to be the implication of Adeimantus' two later requests (367b3-5 and 367e1-3) that Socrates stop making merely theoretical arguments that justice is better than injustice and instead show what justice does and what power it has.

¹⁹ It seems to me that Socrates makes at least two problematic claims in the second step of his argument. First, that the soul has many functions (353d3-7) and second, that there is only one virtue of the soul (353e1-2 and 353e7-8). The first claim is strange because all of Socrates' previous examples are of subjects that have only one function. Plato may even hint that Socrates is wrong to attribute multiple functions to the soul at this point in Book I (N.B. the *ti* at 353d3). The second claim is problematic because, as we learn later, there is not one virtue of the soul but four. Socrates seems to

or virtue developed in the first stage of the argument. On the contrary, they are presupposed in the remainder of the *Republic*. And 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. In fact, when Socrates first explicitly discusses powers in Book V he more or less identifies them as the class of beings that enable things to do whatever they are able to do (477c1-4):

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 (*opsis*) and hearing (*akoên*) are among the powers.²⁰

From this we can construct a plausible argument identifying all the virtues as powers. Since powers enable everything to do what it is able to do, *a fortiori* they are what enable subjects with functions to accomplish their functions. Virtues, then, must be powers.

One might wonder why, if this is the case, virtues are not more explicitly connected with powers in Book I. The answer is that it is not until Book V that the difficult and technical concept of *dunamis* is introduced and delineated. Note that even with the highly sympathetic Glaucon Socrates feels the need to pause their conversation and make a complicated digression into the nature of powers. It would not have been appropriate or effective for Socrates to have done this in his antagonistic and largely non-technical argument with Thrasymachus, which serves, at least in part, as an introduction and protreptic to the difficult work that follows.²¹ Nevertheless, through his careful use of examples

implicitly concede that his final argument against Thrasymachus was too simple when in Book IV he distinguishes the different parts of the soul and the virtues associated with them.

²⁰ Translations are my own, though I have profited from consulting J. Cooper (ed.), *Plato Complete Works* (Hackett, 1997). The Greek is from the OCT (S. Slings' 2003 edition for the *Republic*).

²¹ It is true that powers are invoked in Socrates' argument with Thrasymachus at 351a-352b and, as Verity Harte has recently pointed out, the concept plays a role in Socrates' discussion of the crafts. See her 'Knowing and Believing in *Republic* 5' ['Knowing and Believing'] in V. Harte and R. Woolf (ed.) *Rereading Ancient Philosophy: Old Chestnuts and Sacred Crows* (Cambridge, 2017), 141-62. But in these earlier contexts the stakes are relatively low, and the use of the term is intuitive enough. There is no

Plato does take pains to let attentive re-readers of the *Republic* know that the virtues discussed in Book I are powers. Recall that in Socrates' discussion with Thrasymachus the two most prominent examples of subjects that have functions, and therefore virtues, are eyes and ears. It is quite clear from the discussion that the virtue of the eyes is *opsis* (353c3-4), and, although it is never said explicitly, the virtue of the ears must be *akoê* (352e8-10). It is therefore no coincidence that *opsis* and *akoê* are also the two paradigmatic examples of powers presented at 477c1-4. This is Plato's way of confirming to attentive readers that the virtues of Book I are powers of the sort discussed in Book V.

Some may suspect I have gone too far by identifying the virtues as powers. After all, early in Book II Glaucon asks to hear what power justice *has* in the soul.²² And a similar expression is used once before and once after (351b8 and 588b7-8). These passages could lead one to object to my claim: it's not that the virtues *are* powers, they *have* powers! Two things should be said in response to this objection. First, we should be careful not to give these passages too much weight. When Glaucon expresses his desire to hear what justice is and what power it has, he is implicitly admitting his ignorance about justice. It would be unwise to take his statements as authoritative. It is not until Book IV that he (and we) learn the true nature of justice, and there it is relatively clear that justice is a *dunamis*. Second and more importantly, there is a way of making sense of these statements even though the virtues are powers. It is in fact common for Plato to lapse into a way of speaking that implies powers have powers.²³ This lapse occurs because *dunamis* are essentially active and there is a natural tendency to posit a doer behind any doing. In lieu of any other subject the power is reduplicated, and we get talk of powers having powers. (Compare the tendency of some English speakers to talk as if gravity has or exerts a force that pulls us to the earth.) Thus when characters talk about the that power justice has, they should be understood as asking what the power, justice, does.

explicit attempt to identify the virtues or crafts as powers, and therefore no need to discuss the nature of the powers.

²² At 358b4-6 he asks 'τινα ἔχει δύναμιν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ ἐνὸν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ'.

²³ Adam, *Commentary*, 339, noticed this phenomenon over a century ago in his commentary on Socrates' discussion of *doxa* in Book V. See the following section for further discussion.

We turn now to courage itself. In a helpful article that has influenced the present paper, David Wolfsdorf convincingly argues that in the *Laches* courage is presented as a power of the soul.²⁴ In that dialogue Socrates attempts to answer the definitional question ‘what is courage’ with two generals who are assumed to be experts on the matter, Laches and Nicias. In the first half of the discussion Socrates quickly reveals that he is committed to thinking of courage as a power, and at this point the question guiding the investigation becomes *what* power courage is, not *whether* power is a courage.²⁵ Though Laches fails to answer this question and Nicias is also unable to define courage satisfactorily, it is notable that Socrates suggests that defining justice will consist in correctly specifying which power it is. As I hope to show now, the *Republic* picks up on this line of thought and articulates a definition of courage as a power.

In our dialogue Socrates begins his investigation into courage in the city by getting Glaucon to concede that if courage is going to be found anywhere it will be found in the auxiliaries, the part of the city responsible for making war against external enemies and policing the citizens. He then claims that the city becomes courageous when this part has within it a power that preserves the correct beliefs about the fearful things (429b8-c2). This claim puzzles Glaucon, and this, in turn, leads Socrates to explain in more detail how it is that the city becomes courageous – an explanation which includes an elaborate analogy between dyers, who select and treat white cloth so that it preserves the color with which it is ultimately dyed, and those who found cities, who select and educate auxiliaries so that they will preserve their correct beliefs. Immediately following this analogy Socrates gives his definition of courage in the city (430b3-5):

I call such a *dunamin kai sôtêrian* through everything of the correct and lawful belief about

²⁴ See his ‘*Dynamis* in *Laches*’ [*Dynamis*], *Phoenix* 59 (2005), 324-47, esp. 340: ‘In sum, Socrates believes that courage is a δύναμις of the soul, that is, a psychological state or, more literally, a power.’

²⁵ To help Laches’ attempt to define courage, Socrates raises the helpful analogous concept of quickness and then offers a model definition of it as the power to complete much in a short period of time (192a10-b3). He then calls on Laches to try to offer a similar sort of definition of courage: ‘πειρω δὴ καὶ σὺ, ὦ Λάχης, τὴν ἀνδρείαν οὕτως εἰπεῖν τις οὕσα δύναμις ἢ αὐτὴ ἐν ἡδονῇ καὶ ἐν λύπῃ καὶ ἐν ἄπασιν οἷς νυνδὴ ἐλέγομεν αὐτὴν εἶναι, ἔπειτα ἀνδρεία κέκληται’ (192b5-8).

fearful and not fearful things courage.

Though ‘*dunamin kai sôtêrian*’ is sometimes translated as ‘power and preservation’, Socrates is evidently not intending to offer a conjunctive definition of courage as both a power of an unspecified kind and a preservation of the appropriate beliefs about what is to be feared.²⁶ 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.²⁷ This switch would obviously be illegitimate if courage was a power and, in addition to that, a kind of preservation. Second, Socrates’ 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, in addition to this, preserves colors. Rather, they carefully select raw material and treat it so that it acquires the power to preserve the colors that will eventually make it an attractive and marketable article of clothing. Similarly, the members of the auxiliary class are selected and trained in music and gymnastics so that they develop a power that ‘preserves through everything the belief about the fearful things’ (429b9-c1).

As this last passage hints, the correct way to read the *kai* in ‘*dunamin kai sôtêrian*’ is as epexegetic and explanatory of the sort of power that courage is. As we shall see in what follows, the *kai* in this expression serves the same function as the long genitive expression sandwiched in between *hê...dunamis* in Socrates’ later account of justice. In any case, this definition establishes that courage is a power – more precisely, the power that preserves correct and lawful beliefs in a way to be more fully elaborated in the following section. This is just what it is to be courage.

The city-soul analogy strongly suggests that courage ought to be the same power in the individual as well, as our text is clear that a virtue is one thing whether it be in a city or a soul.²⁸ That being said, some have suspected that there may be an important difference between courage in the city and courage in the individual. For Socrates goes out of his way to correct Glaucon’s assumption that the definition offered at 430b3-5 is the final word on courage. It is, rather, an account only of ‘civic’

²⁶ See, for example, Allan Bloom’s literal translation in *The Republic of Plato* (Basic Books, 1991), 108.

²⁷ Compare, for example, 429b8-c1 with 429c5.

²⁸ Consider Socrates’ discussion regarding his guiding assumption that justice is the same whether it be in a city or a soul (368c8-369a4 and 434d1-435a8).

courage (*politikên andreian*, 430c2-4).²⁹ The conspicuous use of *politikên* raises the possibility that the account of courage offered here may be importantly different from the account of courage in the individual given later. In fact, however, the distinction between civic courage and (what I will here call) unqualified courage cross-cuts the distinction between courage in the city and courage in the individual. The salient difference between unqualified courage and civic courage is supposed to be that the former requires knowledge whereas the latter only requires correct belief.³⁰ But if this is so, then, strange though it may sound, it is possible for both cities and individuals to possess civic or unqualified virtue. This is because both can either know about fearful things or only have correct beliefs about them.³¹

For our purposes this distinction can be left to one side. Our question is whether courage in the city and the individual is the power preserving the correct beliefs or knowledge about fearful things. And fortunately, the language used in Socrates' second account of courage is sufficiently similar to that used in his first account to license this conclusion. Compare, for example, 429b8-c1 with 442b10-c2:

²⁹ John Cooper makes a great deal of this expression in 'The Psychology of Justice in Plato' ['Psychology'], *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14.2 (1977), 151-7 at 152-3.

³⁰ Thus Cooper, 'Psychology', 152, says correct belief makes the auxiliaries of the city brave 'in a qualified sense' but that they are 'far from having the philosopher's pervasive strength of character, that will not let one rest content until one has achieved the fullest possible understanding of what is good for oneself and why it is so.' Others (see Adam, *Commentary*, 231-2; Irwin, *Moral Theory*, 329 n. 26; and Annas, *Introduction*, 114) have wondered whether the designation of 'civic' does not rather indicate that this sort of courage is unique to the city. But Glaucon evidently does not think so. For he responds to Socrates by highlighting the difference between civic courage, which comes about through the education of individuals, from similar conditions found in some animals and slaves (430b6-9). His response clearly implies that the discussion has moved from parts of the city to the individuals who may make up those parts, and so is not restricted to cities (cf. demotic courage in the *Phaedo*, 82a-b).

³¹ Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings*, 239, who accepts and references Cooper's original point, shows that on his analysis a city may in fact be courageous in an unqualified sense if its rulers are wise and have a complete understanding of what is good for the city.

And the city is courageous by a part of itself, because [that part] has such a power in it which preserves through everything the correct belief about the fearful things.³²

And 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.³³

Though the word *dunamis* is not used in the much shorter discussion of courage in the individual, the reader should recall that in the longer discussion of civic courage Socrates freely switched from speaking about courage as the power of preserving to speaking about it as the mere preservation of the correct belief about what ought to be feared. And Socrates elsewhere makes it clear that courage in the individual is in the relevant respects the same as courage in the city (441c11-d1).

We turn now to a brief discussion of the other virtues, as, on the assumption that the cardinal virtues share some fundamental nature, evidence that they are powers will corroborate my claim that courage is a power. At 427e-428a, Socrates articulates a strategy for finding justice in the city. Because the completely good city has four (and only four) virtues, justice may be discovered via a process of elimination: find the other three virtues and the remaining virtue must be justice. Though this strategy has seemed questionable to many,³⁴ it does seem to be the *Republic's* preferred strategy for finding justice in the city. Despite the fact that Socrates ultimately provides a number of ancillary arguments to support his ultimate account of justice, only the argument from elimination is highlighted at the outset of the investigation and alluded to time and time again during the interlocutors' search.³⁵

³² Καὶ ἀνδρεία ἄρα πόλις μέρει τινὶ ἐαυτῆς ἐστι, διὰ τὸ ἐν ἐκείνῳ ἔχειν δύναμιν τοιαύτην ἢ διὰ παντὸς σώσει τὴν περὶ τῶν δεινῶν δόξαν.

³³ Καὶ ἀνδρεῖον δὴ οἶμαι τοῦτω τῷ μέρει καλοῦμεν ἓνα ἕκαστον, ὅταν αὐτοῦ τὸ θυμοειδὲς διασώζη διὰ τε λυπῶν καὶ ἡδονῶν τὸ ὑπὸ τῶν λόγων παραγγελθὲν δεινὸν τε καὶ μὴ.

³⁴ Cross and Woosley, *Commentary*, 104, gave voice to this suspicion in a rather blunt way when they wrote: 'As a procedure [this strategy] leaves so much to be desired that it would be difficult to suppose that Plato intended it to be taken seriously, were it not for the fact he appears to take it seriously himself.'

³⁵ Cf. 429a5-6, 430c8-d8, 432b2-6 and 433b7-c2.

Whatever one may think of this strategy for locating justice in the city, the way in which Socrates proceeds is particularly helpful for our purposes. For after identifying the first three virtues, Socrates argues that he has found something that contributes as much to the overall virtue of the city as wisdom, courage and temperance (433d6-8):

It seems, then, that the power of each doing their own work [*hê tou hekaston en autê ta autou prattein dunamis*] rivals wisdom, moderation and courage in its contribution to the virtue of the city.

Only once he has shown this something rivals the three virtues already identified can Socrates infer that this thing is in the fourth and final virtue, justice.³⁶ Note that in lieu of mentioning the word *dikaiosunê*, which would beg the question about whether he has in fact discovered the final virtue, Socrates is initially forced to proceed by articulating what he thinks justice is: not the name, but the thing itself must be compared to the other virtues and tested as to whether it contributes as much to the overall virtue of the city. For this reason, Socrates must in the above passage be giving a description of what he takes the true nature of justice in the city to be. Justice is the power of each person doing their own work.

Note that Socrates is quite explicit that the justice of the individual is not only a power but the same power as the justice of the city. Once Socrates convinces his interlocutors that his account of justice in the individual passes certain ‘vulgar’ tests and truly deserves to be called justice, he asks Glaucon (443b4-7):

So are you still searching for justice to be something other than that power which produces this sort of individual and city [i.e., the good sort we’ve just described]?³⁷

³⁶ ‘So would you put down justice as rivaling their contribution to the excellence of the city?’ (433d10-1).

³⁷ Ἔτι τι οὖν ἕτερον ζητεῖς δικαιοσύνην εἶναι ἢ ταύτην τὴν δύναμιν ἢ τοὺς τοιοῦτους ἄνδρας τε παρέχεται καὶ πόλεις;

This passage signals the end of the *Republic*'s investigation into the nature of justice, which began at 368c6-7 when Socrates was asked to explain *ti estin* justice and injustice. At that point in Book II Socrates responds by saying that justice is the same whether in the city or soul and by invoking the famous image of justice written in large or small letters. The passage currently under discussion responds to that earlier image by purporting to identify 'the power' (in the singular!) that is justice, whether it be in the city or the soul. Glaucon's unhesitating and confident response to Socrates' question is the final confirmation that justice is by its very nature a power.

The fact that justice is the same power whether it be in the city or individual bolsters the case for thinking that courage is a power, but my claim will be strengthened even further if it can be shown that there is good reason to think of the other virtues are powers as well. Let us move on to consider our third virtue, wisdom. Unfortunately, Socrates does not offer as clear a definition of wisdom as he does of courage. What he tells us instead is where wisdom is located and what makes cities and individuals wise. We are told that the city is wise because of its smallest part, the class of guardians, which has within it the only knowledge that ought to be called wisdom; and that the individual is wise because of its smallest part, the reasoning part, which has within it the knowledge of what is beneficial for the three parts of the soul.³⁸ It is questionable whether either of these should count as definitions, as neither state what, exactly, wisdom is. Certainly, to define wisdom as the knowledge which alone deserves to be called wisdom would be hopelessly circular. Nevertheless, the trajectory of Socrates' discussion leaves little doubt about his conception of wisdom. It must be the *epistémé* that enables us to make authoritative judgements about what is advantageous for the whole composite, whether this be the city or the soul.³⁹ From this one could easily construct a more complete definition on Plato's behalf.⁴⁰ In any case, this insight is crucial for our purposes because in Book V *epistémé* itself is identified

³⁸ 428e7-429a3 and 442c4-6.

³⁹ This is largely accepted by scholars who write on the *Republic*. So, for example, Cross and Woollsey, *Commentary*, 105, claim the wisdom of the city is: the knowledge 'which is concerned, not with the interests of any particular person or group, but with the welfare of the city as a whole and its relations with other cities.' Cf. Santas, *Understanding*, 92, wisdom is: 'knowledge that only reason can have about what is beneficial for each part of the soul and the whole soul.'

⁴⁰ In the case of the wisdom of the city, an early passage seems to me to come quite close to a proper definition. After identifying wisdom as the knowledge that endows the city with good deliberation,

as a power.⁴¹ And if wisdom is a sort of *epistēmē* and *epistēmē* is essentially a power, wisdom must also be a power.

The final virtue, temperance, is trickier still than wisdom. Whereas wisdom does not get a clear definition, the trouble with temperance is that it risks getting too many.⁴² Socrates begins his discussion of temperance in the city by claiming that it is a sort of mastery (*enkrateia*) over pleasures and pains, but a little over halfway through the discussion he transitions to another model of temperance, according to which it is the shared belief (*homodoxia*) of all the classes in the city as to which of them ought to rule.⁴³ This model persists and forms the basis for Socrates' final word on temperance in the city, which is that it is an agreement (*sumphōnia*) between the better and the worse parts as to 'which ought to rule both in the city and in the individual' (432a6-b1).⁴⁴ The account of temperance in the individual adds the idea that it comes about by a friendship of the three soul-parts, but it also claims that it is a shared belief that reason ought to rule (442c9-d2).

We are left only with hints as to the precise relationship between these two accounts and which of them represents Plato's true understanding of temperance. These questions cannot be solved here: more work needs to be done on the nature of temperance in the *Republic*. Suffice it to say that the Book I treatment of virtue puts us in the market for an account of temperance as a power and that

Socrates specifies that this will be the knowledge: 'which does not deliberate about some one of the things in the city, but about the whole city – in what way it would best deal with itself and with other cities' (428d1-3).

⁴¹ 477b6, 477b8, 477b112, 477d8-9, 478a7, 478a11, 478a14-b1 and 478d7.

⁴² See Christopher Bobonich's 'The Puzzle of Moderation,' in Christoph Horn (ed.), *Platon: Gesetze/Nomoi* (Akademie Verlag, 2013), 23-43 at 27: 'In the *Republic*, too, Plato presents two conceptions of moderation: one on which it is a kind of consonance (*sumphōnia*) and one that involves resistance to wayward motivations.'

⁴³ See 430e4-5 and 431d9-e2.

⁴⁴ It is worth noting that this definition of temperance in the city is explicitly said to be applicable to the individual as well the city. Assuming a parallelism between temperance and courage, this provides further support for the claim that civic courage applies to individuals as well as cities.

most obvious candidates for the true nature of temperance look like they could be powers.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, even if it is not immediately clear from Socrates' treatments in Book IV that temperance is a power, I hope to have shown that there is good reason for regarding both justice and wisdom as powers. And this provides further support that courage is a power as well.

II

If courage is a power, then it must possess the features essential to this kind and operate as all powers do. The following sections develop an interpretation of courage and its role in human life that is explicitly based on a consideration of the nature of *dunamis*. I begin this section by considering Socrates' theoretical discussion of powers in Book V and then turn to the treatments of courage found in Book IV. This will establish the core of my understanding of this virtue. In the following two sections I explore two interesting implications of courage being a power of the sort argued for here.

Nearing the end of Book V Socrates claims that there will be no end to the evils of the city until philosophers rule – a claim which his interlocutors find so outrageous that Socrates is forced to explain himself. He defends his position by defining who the philosophers are that he claims should rule. What follows is the well-known argument distinguishing philosophers, who have genuine *epistêmê*, from the so-called 'lovers of sights and sounds,' who possess mere *doxa*. Since the argument trades on the fact that both *epistêmê* and *doxa* are powers, Socrates introduces and delineates the concept in some detail. After stating that powers are the class of the things which enable each thing to do what it is able to do, he says (477c6-d5):

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

⁴⁵ This is particularly the case for what I take to be the most promising candidate, the shared belief of all parts of the city and soul about which part should rule. For *doxa* is explicitly identified as a power at 447b8-9, 477e2-4, 478a4-5, 478a13-b2 and 478b5-7, and shared belief would still seem to be a sort of belief.

I call the same power; what is ordered over something different and does something different I call a different power.⁴⁶

This is the only place in Plato's corpus that so explicitly and straightforwardly states the identity conditions of powers. Before discussing this passage directly, it is worth noting a sort of ambiguity in the way power-terms are used that Book V makes particularly vivid.⁴⁷ As Socrates' first statement about powers at 477c1-4 indicates, powers can identify a capacity by which we accomplish something. To use a favorite example, *opsis* can – and in that passage does – refer to the capacity of sight which enables us to see. But powers are also used to identify the operation of capacities. Thus *opsis* may also refer to the operation of the capacity to see, namely active seeing.⁴⁸ This ambiguity in the way terms are used helps to explain some peculiarities we have already noted in passing.⁴⁹

In any case, this crucial passage identifies two features that are definitive of any power. Every power is a) over something and b) accomplishes something. Though strictly speaking these are two distinct features of a power, they are so closely linked that Socrates speaks of them as if they are one (N.B. he looks only to *touto*, in the singular). In practice neither feature can be fully understood in isolation from the other: that which the power is over is the domain on which it typically operates; what it accomplishes it typically does to or with respect to that domain. Still, as David Lefebvre has recently pointed out, explicitly distinguishing between these two features facilitates an easier identification of powers, as it is sometimes easier to identify a power's domain and other times easier to identify what

⁴⁶ My understanding of this passage and the general topic of the operation of the powers has been particularly influenced by the sections of David Lefebvre's book focusing on the *Republic*. See his *Dynamis: Sens et genèse de la notion aristotélicienne de puissance [Dynamis]* (Vrin, 2018), esp. 229-72. I have also profited from reading Harte, 'Knowing and Believing'.

⁴⁷ On this ambiguity, see Lefebvre, *Dynamis*, 259-63.

⁴⁸ As it evidently does at 507d10-e1, for example.

⁴⁹ It lies behind Socrates' switch from talking about courage in the city as a power which preserves to talking about it as the preservation. In the first case he is talking about courage *qua* capacity that enables the auxiliaries to preserve the correct beliefs; in the second case he is talking about courage *qua* active preserving.

the power accomplishes.⁵⁰ It is pretty clear that what *opsis* accomplishes is seeing, but it is only with a better understanding of Plato's thought and Greek optics that we learn that its domain is colors.⁵¹ On the other hand, the domain of prophecy is presumably what will be.⁵² But what it accomplishes is far from clear. Nevertheless, once one has discovered both features a full specification of the power can be given. *Opsis* is the power that is over colors and accomplishes seeing.

We turn now to courage. Since it too is a power, we must identify what it is ordered over and what it accomplishes. It is natural to think that what it accomplishes must be courageous activity. It may be up for debate whether the proper domain of courage is war, dangerous situations more generally or even the whole external sphere, but who could deny that courage directly accomplishes reliable and successful external courageous activity?⁵³ However attractive or natural, I do not think this initial suggestion can be correct. In the first instance, it gives too much power to the powers. We are asking too much of a psychic power if we expect it to successfully, reliably and consistently produce a determinate sort of external behavior. Sad though it may be, the world does not always accommodate itself to our will and even our noblest intentions may be thwarted by circumstances beyond our control. This suggestion also lacks robust textual support. The central passages do not at all indicate that courage accomplishes external behavior. Quite to the contrary. Like temperance and justice, the virtue of courage is primarily conceived of as operating on and affecting the internal workings of the soul, rather than anything on the outside world.⁵⁴ The power is, in other words, ordered over certain

⁵⁰ Lefebvre, *Dynamis*, 259.

⁵¹ At 507d10-e1 Plato seems to identify colors as the domain of seeing (cf. *Charm.* 168d9-e1 and *Tim.* 68a-e). And this fits well enough with what we know about Greek optics. For a helpful overview, see Mark Smith's 'Greek Optics' in A. Jones and L. Taub (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Science* (Cambridge, 2018), 413-27.

⁵² At *Lach.* 195e89 seers are said to recognize signs of 'what will be' (*tôn esomenôn*).

⁵³ Wolfsdorf, '*Dynamis*', 338, for example, suggests that this is what courage accomplishes: 'The obvious candidate is courageous corporeal action; that is to say, the psychological state of courage enables a person to act courageously.'

⁵⁴ This is very clear in the case of justice. In the long passage concluding his discussion of justice in Book IV Socrates goes out of his way to explain that justice is not about external action (*peri tēn exō*

features of our psychology. More specifically, I shall argue that it is ordered over the judgements arrived at through reason's deliberations about how one ought to act and that what it accomplishes is the preservation of those judgements in the face of certain psychological threats that might otherwise corrupt one's thought process and lead one to act contrary to reason's correct decisions about what is to be done. This interpretation explains the intuitive link between the possession of courage and external courageous activity, for preserving reason's judgements will, as we shall see, entail a motivation to act accordingly, and acting as reason prescribes in certain difficult circumstances *just is* external courageous activity.

There is in fact very strong textual evidence that the power of courage looks inward and is ordered over other features of our psyche. Recall Socrates' definition of civic courage (430b3-5):

I call such a *dunamin kai sôtêrian* through everything of the correct and lawful belief about fearful and not fearful things courage.

And now consider the parallel account for the individual. An individual is courageous (442b10-c2):

whenever their spirit preserves through both pains and pleasures the thing prescribed by rational accounts as fearful or not.

Rather strikingly, these two central texts say nothing about external courageous activity. They rather indicate that Plato conceived of courage in the individual as existing in the spirited part of the soul while nevertheless being ordered over and operating on certain beliefs of prescriptions arrived at by the rational part of the soul.⁵⁵

praxin) but about action inside of one's soul (*peri tén entos*) and, in particular, each soul-part doing its own work (443c9-d2).

⁵⁵ In one manuscript (preferred by Adam, *Commentary*, 260, but curiously not mentioned at all by Slings) the Greek of the second passage even says the individual is courageous 'whenever their spirit conserves through both pleasure and pain the thing prescribed *by reason* [ὕπὸ τοῦ λόγου] as fearful or not'.

We therefore need to ask, first, what these beliefs or prescriptions are and, second, what it means to preserve them? Due to the fact that Plato has so little to say about these beliefs or prescriptions, the first question has proven difficult to answer in detail, though there is a general consensus that they must be action-guiding directives or judgements of one sort or another. I suggest that they are the result of reason's practical deliberations or (what I take to be the same thing) reason's judgements about what one ought to do. I admit that 'beliefs' or 'prescriptions' about what is and is not fearful seems to be an awkward way to talk about the result of our deliberations concerning what ought to be done, but there is considerable evidence suggesting something like this must be what Plato had in mind. On multiple occasions in Book IV Socrates stresses that reason and spirit are natural allies, that together they ought to hold one's appetite in check, and that this happens when spirit accepts the goals of reason and helps to realize them in practice. It therefore seems to me beyond dispute that spirit may be expected to help preserve *any* of reason's practical judgements threatened by appetite and, moreover, that courage is key to this.

Two texts are particularly relevant in this context. The ideal relationship between spirit and reason is explicated by Socrates after he completes his argument for the tripartition of the soul. Before discussing the virtues of the individual, Socrates offers some general praise for the well-ordered soul. One notable benefit of reason and spirit is how they are able to keep the unruly appetites in check when they work together. This enables them to fulfill many important tasks, such as responding to external threats (442b5-8):

Wouldn't these two 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 had been deliberated (*epiteloun ta bouleuthenta*)?

The logic of this passage suggests that there is a natural division of labor that allows the two soul-parts to work together effectively. Reason deliberates as to what should be done in response to external threats or challenges.⁵⁶ And then – and only then (N.B. the aorist passive participle *ta bouleuthenta*) –

⁵⁶ Elsewhere, too, reason and the ruling part of the city are consistently portrayed as deliberating about what is best for the whole city or soul (βουλευεται, 428c11-d3; cf. 586e4-587a2 and 589a5-b6). It would

spirit ‘fights’ against the appetites in such a way that the agent is ultimately able to realize in practice the course of action that reason has decided upon. What it means for spirit to ‘fight’ on behalf of reason’s decisions will be addressed below. For the moment note that any other way the soul might respond to external threats would be much less effective. It would be ruinous for spirit to deliberate about how to respond to threats, as it lacks the robust intellectual capacity required to do so. Reason on its own is not able to fight through appetite’s volatile emotional reaction to external dangers.

Two other points should be noted about this passage. First, the text quite clearly implies that spirit’s activity should be directed towards the course of action that will be genuinely good and beneficial for the agent. To the extent that it appropriately subordinates itself to reason and fights to actualize reason’s deliberations, spirit will inherit the goal of promoting the course of action that best serves the whole body and soul. This is something spirit is expected to do quite generally, even in situations that do not feature external threats that are particularly terrifying.⁵⁷ The second – and most relevant – thing to note about this passage is that Socrates explicitly identifies courage as the instrument which completes reason’s deliberations. The only way that I can see to make this consistent with Book IV’s account of courage is to understand that the correct beliefs and prescriptions about what is and is not fearful somehow contain or express reason’s deliberations about what is best for the whole body and soul. These are then preserved by courage, thereby ensuring that the agent will be motivated to act upon and complete them.

Consider a second passage that offers further support for this general picture. At 442c4-7 Socrates says we call an individual (442c4-7):

not be unfair to say that reason’s function is to deliberate about what is best for the whole soul and legislate a course of action based on these deliberations.

⁵⁷ At 440b4-7 Socrates suggests that spirit almost never allies itself with the appetite and does what reason claims ought not to be done (*mê dei antiprattein*). As this passage comes right after the example of Leontius, we are plainly meant to understand that the spirit ought to work with reason in opposing the appetitive desire to gaze at corpses. This is not a particularly fearsome or terrifying situation, but still spirit works to effect reason’s plans and promote the good of the body and soul.

wise because of that small part which rules in them and prescribes those things (*tauta*), and which moreover has the knowledge in it of what is beneficial for each part and the whole [soul], the community of the three parts.

This passage offers decisive evidence that the rational soul-part makes the prescriptions which the spirit is expected to preserve, as the only possible referent for the *tauta* are the prescriptions mentioned in the preceding paragraph about courage in the individual. For our present purposes, however, the second half of this passage is more revealing. Here Socrates claims that reason, which makes those prescriptions to the spirit, possesses the knowledge of what is beneficial both for the individual parts of the soul and for the composite. It is difficult to imagine that this special knowledge does not inform every aspect of reason's rule over the soul. I take it that we are plainly to assume that a rich understanding of what is beneficial for the whole soul is the driving force behind the prescriptions reason makes to the spirit. And if this is so then the prescriptions will express a concern for, and ultimately aim at, what is good and beneficial for the whole body and soul. By preserving them the spirit of the courageous agent will be promoting their interests at a very general level.

Why then does Socrates talk of things prescribed as fearful or not when they might, according to my view, be better described as prescriptions about what is beneficial or harmful? Because the fearful things just are the future bad things which will harm us and ought to be avoided!⁵⁸ Of course, even granting this, one might still wonder why Plato wouldn't just say that courage preserves beliefs or prescriptions about what is bad or harmful, or good and beneficial. One possibility is that the language of 'the fearful' is attractive insofar as it is particularly evocative of a conventional understanding of courage. It is no secret that *Republic's* presentation of the cardinal virtues is – to put it mildly – significantly revisionary. Their revisionary status leads Plato to submit his own account of justice to certain 'vulgar' tests in order to pump the intuition that he really is talking about the virtue his

⁵⁸ At *Laches* 198c2-3 Socrates quite explicitly equates fearful things with the future bad things, and the context reveals that what is meant by this are those things that will cause harm to the agent in the future. Despite the fact that Socrates goes on to reject as problematic the account of courage developed in this part of the *Laches*, I can see no reason for rejecting the account of *ta deina* developed here. If I am right, then Plato continues to accept this understanding of the fearful as the future harmful even in the *Republic*.

contemporaries know and love (or, in some cases, hate).⁵⁹ The language of fear may well serve a similar purpose in the case of courage, signaling to his readers that this really is the virtue they are familiar with, even though its scope is far wider than what they may have previously thought. Another (complementary) possibility is that the language of fear is the preferred way for reason to communicate with spirit. Given that spirit lacks the robust cognitive capacities of reason, it may be that the best way for reason to prescribe what should and should not be done is for it to represent certain objects or courses of actions as fearful and to be avoided, or not fearful and to be pursued.⁶⁰

We turn now to the more difficult question of what it means to preserve the beliefs and prescriptions of reason. Josh Wilburn has very helpfully addressed this question in his recent paper on courage and akrasia in the *Republic*. He persuasively argues that the psychological account developed in our dialogue is not, as is often thought, a radically new development designed in part to show how akrasia is possible, but that it is in many respects continuous with the *Protagoras*' account of motivation, according to which akrasia is impossible.⁶¹ As Wilburn notes, much of what Plato says in the *Republic* looks to presuppose an important theoretical commitment evinced in the earlier dialogue, namely that people are always motivated to act in the way that they know or believe to be best at the moment of action.⁶² This presupposition is perhaps most palpable in Socrates' discussion surrounding the testing regimen periodically administered to prospective guardians during their education in music and gymnastics. The tests are not, as one might naturally expect, designed to evaluate whether would-be guardians can remember the edifying lessons of censor-approved poetry. They are not even designed to directly assess how potential rulers will act in the difficult situations they are likely to encounter

⁵⁹ 442d11-443b3.

⁶⁰ If this is correct, then it would anticipate the 'imagistic' account of reason's communication with spirit that some scholars have found in Plato's *Timaeus*. See, for example, Josh Wilburn's recent contribution, 'The Spirited Part of the soul in Plato's *Timaeus*,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52.4 (2014), 627-52, esp. 34-41.

⁶¹ See his 'Courage and the Spirited Part of the Soul in Plato's *Republic*' ['Courage'], *Philosophers Imprint* 15.26 (2015), 1-21.

⁶² Though scholarly attention on the *Protagoras* has generally focused on the purported sufficiency of knowledge of what is best for determining action, that belief may also be sufficient to guide one's action seems to me the clear import of 358b6-c3.

upon their return to the cave. Instead, the tests are primarily designed to evaluate the durability of their belief that they ought to serve the city. As Socrates says (412e4-7):

It seems to me they must be watched in every age to see if they are guardians of this conviction and do not, either through being bewitched or forced, forget and discard (*ekballousin*) the belief that they ought to do (*poiein dein*) what is best for the city.

Importantly, the belief in question here is explicitly presented as a belief about what these individuals ought to do – it is, in other words, an action-guiding belief, like the deliberations of reason that guide our confrontations with external enemies. If we ask why the tests are designed to ensure that the rulers will never abandon this belief, the obvious answer is that Socrates assumes throughout that those who maintain this belief will be motivated to serve the city to the best of their very impressive abilities. In any case, that assumption – or something very similar – seems to lie behind his final assurance that those true guardians who pass these tests will in fact benefit the city by watching over both friends and enemies (414b1-5).

The assumption that people act in accordance with their beliefs about what it would be best to do also lies behind the explanation of why some guardians might ultimately harm their city. Socrates goes on to offer an extended and important (though often overlooked) discussion about how people lose their beliefs. We are told that there are broadly two ways this can happen: either voluntarily or involuntarily. A belief is lost voluntarily upon realizing that it is in fact false. Since no one wants to be mistaken about anything, we happily discard our false beliefs. But this cannot explain why prospective guardians might lose the belief that they ought to serve their city, for this belief is true. Socrates then explains that we lose true beliefs involuntarily by one of three different psychological processes: we can lose a true belief by ‘theft’, which is forgetting a belief or being persuaded it is false; we can lose it by ‘force’, which occurs when pain or suffering causes us to change our mind; or we can lose it by ‘bewitchment’, which occurs when pleasure or fear causes us to change our mind.⁶³ Socrates does not provide examples to illustrate these psychological phenomena in action, but the language of theft suggests that in the case of forgetting the belief simply disappears, which strikes me as a fair description of the

⁶³ The whole discussion concerning how we lose our beliefs runs from 412e9-413c4; theft is discussed at 413b4-8, force at 413b9-11 and bewitchment at 413c1-4.

phenomenology of forgetting. The language of force or bewitchment, however, suggests that the doxastic effect of emotions or pain may be more complex and insidious, as if outside forces transform our beliefs by coopting our very thought process.⁶⁴ This perhaps explains why in the cases of force and bewitchment, but not theft, Socrates uses the verb *metadoxazein*, which literally means to change one's beliefs (413b10 and 413c2). In these two cases the experience of pain, suffering, pleasure or fear affects us so profoundly that we literally discard true beliefs and adopt false ones. Even absent illustrative examples, we can readily see why this would be catastrophic in the case of would-be guardians. For if people always act on the basis of their beliefs or knowledge about what ought to be done, these pernicious cases of *metadoxazein* would lead prospective guardians to act at least sub-optimally and likely quite harmfully. This explains Socrates' stubborn insistence on continual testing: guardians must either become immune to theft, force and bewitchment or they must be exiled from the ranks of rulers.

Wilburn's insight is significant for our interpretation of courage, as it highlights just how crucial it is that one never abandon reason's correct beliefs and prescriptions. If courage is able to preserve reason's judgements and prevent this from being discarded, it will ensure that we are motivated to act in our best interest. Perhaps the greatest evidence for thinking that courage operates in just this way comes from Socrates' first discussion of courage in Book IV, which quite self-consciously alludes back to Book III's discussion of true beliefs, how they can be lost and the importance of making sure this does not happen. In his initial explanation of what makes the city courageous Socrates highlights the fact that auxiliaries keep their lawful beliefs through pains, pleasures, desires and fears – *and that they do not discard them (mê ekballein, 429d1)*. This is the same verb featured so prominently in Socrates'

⁶⁴ Rogers and Hart's classic tune 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered' tells of the power of love to completely transform a person into someone new: 'I'm wild again, beguiled again/A simpering, whimpering child again/Bewitched, bothered and bewildered am I.' The general point holds in Greek too. In his wonderful philosophic display speech, the *Encomium of Helen*, Gorgias uses the nominal form of the verb translated above as bewitch, γοητέω, to describe a dangerous force that deludes, confuses and changes people's thought and deliberative processes (DK82 B11.10). It is entirely possible that Plato's use of γοητέω in the *Republic* was informed by the *Encomium*, as Gorgias there claims that bewitchment is an 'error of belief' which comes about by the power of pleasurable words associating with belief.

command at 412e4-7 that prospective rulers should be observed to ensure that they maintain the conviction that they ought to serve the city's best interests. Additionally, one should note that elaborate analogy between well-dyed clothing and well-trained auxiliaries also picks up on the educational and testing regimen articulated in the passages discussed above. The best-natured citizens are selected, educated in the paired arts of music and athletics and then tested 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' (430a3-b2).

Courage is quite explicitly presented as a virtue that prevents affective or emotional experiences from altering our rationally-endorsed beliefs about how we ought to act. It provides a sort of psychological fortitude in the face of pleasures, pains, fears and desires, thereby ensuring that the courageous agent will be motivated to do what their reason has decided is best for their whole soul.⁶⁵ Consider the case of an Amazon Princess, Diana, who deliberates and correctly decides that it would be best for her and the Amazons to rescue Queen Hippolyta from Athens. However confidently she now holds this belief, it may well be that she faces psychological difficulties which threaten to upset her plans upon arriving in Attica. She might catch sight of the entire Athenian army brandishing their spears, and this terrifying vision might pain her and produce a burning appetitive desire to avoid battle at all costs. A cowardly agent would succumb to these psychological forces and flee. But since she is courageous, Diana is able to preserve her correct beliefs about what she ought to do. She will, then, continue to be motivated to attack Athens and will do so to the best of her ability. It of course does not follow that she will succeed in saving her mother. Even if Diana correctly calculated that the Amazons have a significant

⁶⁵ To be clear, Socrates never claims that courage prevents the virtuous individual from 'discarding' any true belief. Our virtue is only responsible for preventing instances of force and bewitchment, the pernicious instances of *metadoxazein* caused by pain, suffering, pleasure, fear or desire. This still leaves open the possibility that the courageous agent might suffer from theft and forget what they ought to do or be persuaded out of their conviction to help the city through specious arguments. There are other mechanisms put in place to ensure that prospective rulers will not succumb to theft as well as other tests designed to ensure they work. Ultimately, it will be the guardians' philosophical natures, carefully strengthened by years of theoretical education, that will ensure that *Kallipolis* is free of gullible or amnesiac rulers. On the topic of forgetfulness, see 486c-d; on the topic of persuasion, see 538a-539e.

tactical and troop advantage, it could happen that a rogue arrow strikes her down at the beginning of the siege and this might lead her sisters, now confused and lacking an effective leader, to be routed and defeated. Such things happen in war. But the unpredictable nature of battle notwithstanding, it should be clear by now that the courageous agent is *much* more likely to succeed at doing what is in their best interests than the coward. They will have the correct beliefs about what will advance their self-interests and they will be able to overcome the psychological difficulties that would cause lesser individuals to change their minds and adopt different courses of action. Thus they will always be motivated to act as their reason has decided. By acting on these decisions they will be acting courageously, for courageous external activity just is whatever activity reason prescribed as best.

III

The picture of courage that has emerged is, I think, interesting, attractive and well supported by the text. All virtues are powers, and courage is the power over reason's judgements about what ought to be done; what it accomplishes is to preserve these judgements in the face of appetitive threats that would cause lesser individuals to alter them. This picture accommodates many of our own pre-theoretical commitments or intuitions, such as the common thought that courageous individuals never change plans because they are 'scared out of their mind.' But the interpretation developed here also has some significant implications for Plato's moral psychology and, in particular, the role of spirit in the operation of courage. Briefly, because spirit plays a certain functional role in the soul – namely, preserving reason's considered practical judgements about what ought to be done – the affections characteristic of spirit must be subordinated to this end. Contrary to a number of recent scholarly discussions of the spirit, my account of courage does not privilege shame, pride, anger, indignation, love of honor, desire for victory or any other motivation characteristic of the middle soul-part. It does not follow from this, however, that spirited affections have no role to play. They are rather the means by which the courageous agent responds to appetitive threats and ultimately preserves their reason's correct judgements. Aside from being supported by the text, this feature of my interpretation has the advantage of affording Plato a realistic psychology of courage that can accommodate the many differences among individuals as well as the differences among circumstances that might elicit a courageous response.

As we saw in the previous section, individuals without the virtue of courage are liable to have their correct beliefs altered by pains, pleasures, fears and desires. Plato is not as clear as one would like about how exactly these appetitive forces cause pernicious cases of *metadoxazein* and lead cowardly individuals to adopt new beliefs, but two important passages suggest that they do this by hijacking the rational faculty and making reason adopt the goal(s) of appetite. The most important piece of evidence comes from Book X, in a speech which warns against the dangers of poetry. There Socrates explains that spectators can get carried away by tragedy and may be seduced into doing things that they would normally be ashamed to do, such as publicly pitying individuals unworthy of pity. It is clear from the context that it is appetite which hungers for the satisfaction of wantonly pitying, but – and this is the important part – it is equally clear that if anyone gives into pity it is only when their rational part, which normally opposes public expressions of pity, begins to endorse it. As Socrates puts it, in such cases the best part of our soul comes to ‘think that this provides a benefit (*kerdainein*), namely pleasure’ (606b3-4). That is to say, in such cases our reason comes to endorse as good for the soul the behavior that will gratify our appetitive cravings. A second passage reinforces this interpretation by depicting a soul so thoroughly corrupted by appetite that its reason is permanently disposed to deliberate about how to best pursue its basest desires, as if this were what was best for the whole soul. Inside the oligarchic individual of Book VIII appetite sits upon a throne and rules while spirit and reason sit below, slaves to their king. Socrates explains that in its ‘enslaved’ condition reason does not consider anything other than how the oligarch can get richer, or ‘from where a little bit of money will become a lot’ (553d3-4). Importantly, though, the oligarch is not represented as someone who constantly experiences a schizophrenic state of internal conflict in which their reason wants to consider what will be best for the whole soul but is dragged kicking and screaming to consider instead how to make money. On the contrary, the point of Socrates’ colorful description is to show that the oligarch’s cupidity is so strong that it pushes the rational part of their soul into conceptualizing money as good. As a result, it wholeheartedly devotes itself to calculating how to maximize wealth.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Wilburn, ‘Courage’, 11, also cites the oligarch, along with Socrates’ discussion of manual laborers at the end of Book IX (509c2-6), in order to argue that the real threat of appetite is that it will ‘corrupt or change the agent’s rational judgement.’ I am in broad agreement with his analysis of how and why this happens, though I think he has missed two important pieces of textual evidence that help to paint a fuller picture. In addition to the passage about tragedy, which Wilburn does not cite, one should also consider 402e4, where Socrates and Glaucon agree that excessive pleasures and pains are ruinous to

Appetite becomes particularly dangerous when its desires are strong enough that reason begins to conceptualize that which is desired as good and then endorses the course of action that will win the object of appetite's eye. Presumably, a similar mechanism works in the case of pains or terror. The terror of war, for example, may be so overwhelming that I abandon my reasoned belief in favor of fighting and come to accept instead the incorrect belief that it would be better for me to flee. The sheer pain of imagining an unfaithful Desdemona pushes Othello to accept that he ought to kill the wife he loves so dearly. But, according to Plato, this would never happen to the genuinely courageous individual. In them spirit intercedes to protect reason's beliefs by preventing these appetitive pressures from altering any judgements about what ought to be done. It does this by producing desires, emotions or motivations that counteract and neutralize the force of appetite. Socrates alludes to this fact in Book X when he carefully points out that those tragic viewers of tragedy are led to indulge in a sort of pity in which they would normally be *ashamed* to indulge. His point is that an occurrent and robust feeling of shame at the prospect of wailing loudly in public would effectively counteract the force of appetite's desire, thereby preserving reason's standing judgement that such things ought to be avoided in public. Other passages attest to the fact that spirited impulses are conceived of as counteracting the motivational force of appetite as well. Consider Leontius. In response to his desire to stare at the naked corpses dumped outside of Athens' wall, he experiences a sort of self-anger that aims to stop his lecherous gaze.⁶⁷ And though this spirited response ultimately fails to prevent his unseemly behavior, Socrates' commentary leaves little doubt that the sort of anger evinced by Leontius is healthy and would effectively curtail vicious behavior in a slightly less depraved individual.⁶⁸

virtue because they drive us out of our wits (*ekprona poiiei*). Presumably, these intense experiences lead us to pursue those pleasures or avoid those pains in a way that directly contravenes reason's dictates.
⁶⁷439e5-440a4.

⁶⁸ In his post-Leontius commentary, Socrates highlights many important and beneficial features of spirit. He explains that it almost always does what reason decides (440b4-7); that it is aroused if we are punished unfairly but not if we are punished fairly (440b9-d3); that the angry, spirited individual will not cease from noble actions (440d1); and that the guardians of the city will be highly spirited (440d6-7). This is all high praise for spirit and the way in which it contributes to virtuous, noble behavior. In fact, Socrates' praise for spirit is so high that he almost convinces Glaucon that spirit is

Plato evidently thought that if the desires and the motivations of the appetitive soul-part were able to upset our reasoning and cause it to endorse a course of action that is bad for the whole soul, then the desires and motivations of the spirited soul-part are able to buttress reason and preserve its correct judgements. This is the sense in which spirited responses are the means by which courage accomplishes its function. By counteracting and neutralizing the destabilizing force of pleasures, pains, fears and desires, these spirited responses prevent reason from endorsing as good the objects pursued by appetite. We might think of shame, anger, desire for honor, pride and indignation as a set of psychic ‘forces’ that press back against the dangerous psychic forces of appetite.⁶⁹ This way of putting things is admittedly a little vague, and but this is deliberate. It is meant to leave open the possibility that any particular spirited response may be utilized to counteract the pernicious force of any particular appetitive threat. On the front lines of battle a soldier, like Diana, typically feels a very intense variety of terror which will constitute a significant threat to their rational judgement that they ought to fight, though a battle-tested general such as Diana may handle it better than most. Contrast this with the pleasure a spouse derives from entertaining the possibility of a hurtful extramarital affair. A spirited response may be needed for each agent to preserve their motivation to act correctly, but – and here is the important part – I can see no reason to expect responses of the same kind or intensity. One would hope that the spirited response required to remain faithful to one’s spouse is both qualitatively and quantitatively different – and less demanding – than the one required to stare down immanent death.

It is important to remember that virtues enable subjects to accomplish their function: in this case, spirit’s function is to preserve reason’s considered judgements about what ought to be done. We

a part of reason. The example of Odysseus (441b2-c2) is then needed to show that spirit is distinct from reason.

⁶⁹ In conceiving of spirit’s motivations as psychic ‘forces’, I am inspired by other passages in Plato’s *corpus* where he gives ‘mechanistic’ or ‘physical’ descriptions of the way a power’s activity is accomplished. Thus at *Tim.* 45c-d we find a mechanistic account of seeing as something that occurs when one’s internal fire stretches out into the external world, makes contact with an object and thereafter transmits the motions of the external object through the body to the soul. Accounts such as these presumably provide a supplement to the metaphysical picture of powers developed in Book V at the level of physical discourse.

should therefore expect that Plato's theory would avail itself of the full range and complexity of spirited responses. All desires, emotions or motivations should be fair game so long as they are effective in neutralizing the cognitive threat posed by an equally diverse range of appetites. This is particularly worth stressing now because a number of recent studies seem to reject this. In response to an earlier generation of scholars who regarded the middle soul-part as a messy agglomeration of disparate emotions, a number of recent scholars have sought to rehabilitate spirit's reputation identifying an underlying coherence to its diverse range of affective responses.⁷⁰ While this has on the whole been a most welcome intervention, it has resulted in certain scholars suggesting that there is one motivation – avoiding shame,⁷¹ the desire for the *kalon*⁷² or some other aspect of our psychic lives to which spirit is supposed to give rise – that occupies a privileged place in the activity of spirit. This suggestion strikes me as both undermotivated by the text of the *Republic* and philosophically unattractive, especially when it comes to the operation of courage. From a textual point of view, it is obviously significant that there is no mention of *any* of spirit's responses in either of the central accounts of courage developed in Book IV. And so far as I can tell, the other relevant texts lead us to expect that courageous individuals will call on a broad range of emotions when they manifesting their virtue. The early education described in Books II and III, for example, is designed to inculcate a range

⁷⁰ Jessica Moss is quite explicit about wishing to rehabilitate spirit in her 'Shame, Pleasure and the Divided Soul' ['Shame'], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 29 (2005), 137-70. Her article also includes an instructive discussion of earlier scholars who have been less than generous in their treatment of spirit. Other important papers stressing the coherence and importance of the spirit include John Cooper's 'Plato's Theory of Human Motivation,' *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1 (1984), 3-21; Rachana Kamtekar's 'Imperfect Virtue,' *Ancient Philosophy* 18.2 (1998), 315-39; Angela Hobbs' *Plato and the Hero: Courage, Manliness and the Impersonal Good [Hero]* (Cambridge, 2000), esp. 1-49; Myles Burnyeat's 'The Truth of Tripartition,' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 106 (2006), 1-23; James Wilberding 'Plato's Two Forms of Second Best Morality' ['Second Best'], *Philosophical Review* 118 (2009), 351-74; and Rachel Singpurwalla's 'Why Spirit is the Natural Ally of Reason: Spirit, Reason, and the Fine in Plato's *Republic*' ['Natural Ally'], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 44 (2013), 41-65.

⁷¹ Moss, 'Shame', gives shame a privileged place in her respective treatment of courage.

⁷² Singpurwalla, 'Natural Ally', privileges the desire for the *kalon*.

of appropriate spirited motivations, including a sense of shame, a desire for honor and self-reproach.⁷³ To the extent that we expect mature ethical agents to be formed by this education, we should expect them to manifest any or all of these emotions. Moreover, as a matter of human psychology it just seems false that one motivation occupies a privileged place in expressions of courage. Different people have different motivational lives, after all, and the many situations that call for courage may well affect people differently. And Plato is certainly aware of this. 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 pleasures.⁷⁴ It is presumably for this reason that prospective guardians are to be tested for their ability to withstand both pleasures and pains. I can see no reason to deny that he would expect different people with different psychological lives to call upon different spirited emotions in situations demanding courage.

It is not mere speculation to insist that different agents will rely on different spirited responses while expressing their courage. Once our eyes are open to this possibility, we start to realize that the examples of courage found in Plato's dialogues often come in different varieties and in differing intensities. Consider just two different varieties – I'll call them hot and cold. By 'hot courage' I mean expressions of courage accompanied with very intense emotions or desires, prototypically exemplified by a warrior's burning desire for honor or recognition. The paradigmatic example of hot courage in the ancient world is Achilles, whose indomitable spirit drove him to take on everything that opposed him in his quest for eternal renown and revenge. Though Plato's attitude towards Achilles is not unambiguously positive, on multiple occasions he has his characters admiringly cite the warrior's famously courageous action of avenging Patroclus, despite knowing that his own death would follow

⁷³ On shame, see 378c1 and 396d6; on honor, 386a3; and on self-reproach, 388d4-5. All three seem to me to be presented as equally important.

⁷⁴ This seems to be Socrates' point at *Lach.* 191e4-7 when he says, 'some people are called courageous in pleasures, others in pain, others in appetites and still others in fears.' Socrates is here merely describing how people talk. He is not making a point about courage as he understands it. But the underlying point remains true: some people are naturally or constitutionally better at coping with certain appetitive threats than others.

soon after slaying Hector.⁷⁵ The interlocutors in Plato's dialogues provide additional, albeit less extreme, 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 Laches 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 no doubt meant to be rather amusing, the fervid desire for victory that helps Laches hold fast against Socrates' elenctic assault harkens back to ready examples of genuine hot courage. Contrast this with the 'cold courage' evinced by the natural philosopher who doesn't consider human life to be a great thing and therefore lacks a strong appetitive attachment to almost everything. The paradigm of cold courage in Plato's dialogues is of course Socrates. The most revealing example of his courage comes from the *Symposium*, where Alcibiades describes how, at the battle of Delium, Socrates *calmly* (*êrema*) retreated while nonetheless ruthlessly fighting against any enemy that approached him, ultimately saving not only his own life but Laches' as well.⁷⁶ If one asks what motivates Socrates in such situations, it seems a very mild variety of prospective shame elicited by the thought of doing something other than what he ought to do.⁷⁷

I conclude that there is little reason to accept that any particular spirited motivation occupies a privileged place in the operation of courage. Plato's thinking reflects the fact that different agents express courage in different ways, and he allows that these various expressions may exhibit a wide range of spirited desires, motivations and emotions. This is an attractive feature of his moral philosophy, which is ultimately rooted in the fact that he conceives of courage as a power and thus as something that contributes to a functional goal. To be courageous is to preserve reason's correct beliefs and prescriptions about what ought to be done. So long as it effectively serves this end by

⁷⁵ See *Apol.* 28b-d and *Symp.* 179e-180a. On Plato's complex attitudes towards Achilles throughout his works, readers should consider the subtle and thoughtful discussion in the relevant chapters of Hobbs, *Hero*, 175-98 and 199-219.

⁷⁶ *Symp.* 221a-c. In addition to this example one should also consider Socrates' cool composure on the day of his death described at *Phdo* 116d-118a and Socrates' own description of the of terrible fighting at Potidaea at *Charm.* 153a-d and *Symp.* 219e-220e.

⁷⁷ At least shame is emphasized in the *Apology*, which I take to be powerful evidence about the character of Socrates in Plato's dialogues. See 17b, 17b, 28b, 28d, 29b, 35a and 38d.

counteracting appetitive threats, any of spirit's many affective responses may feature in the affective life of the virtuous agent.

IV

The previous section, and particularly the comparison of the general's 'hot courage' with philosophical 'cold-courage', invites the question of whether genuine courage presupposes the philosopher's virtue, wisdom. With one recent and notable exception, most scholars endorse – either implicitly or explicitly – some version of the unity of virtue thesis and claim that true courage requires wisdom.⁷⁸ Wilburn, for example, has recently claimed that 'genuine courage cannot consist merely in the preservation of true beliefs' but must preserve knowledge.⁷⁹ But if the interpretation presented here is correct, it is not obvious why this orthodox view should be correct. Neither the educational regime discussed in Books II and III, including the lengthy and detailed discussion of how we lose true beliefs, nor Socrates' initial treatment of courage in Book IV mention knowledge at all. They focus entirely on the possession of correct belief or conviction. The long and laborious educational regime articulated prior to Book IV is apparently sufficient to endow certain individuals with the intellectual ability to make or identify correct judgements about what ought to be done, despite the fact they lack knowledge about what is good for their soul. Those individuals will, in addition, possess a psychological power that reliably protects their correct beliefs from *any* appetitive challenges the world might throw at them (*dia pantos*, 430b3). As a result, they will 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 a significant – indeed, remarkable – ethical achievement, far beyond what most of us can hope to achieve in our lives. Why would we want to deny that such individuals are courageous?

It is true that the second treatment of courage in Book IV refers to a knowledgeable rational soul-part that issues prescriptions to the spirit, and that the soul of the individual to whom these parts is called wise as well as courageous. But does it follow that genuine courage presupposes wisdom? Clearly not. Nothing in this second treatment commits Plato to the view that an individual is courageous *only* if

⁷⁸ The exception is Wilberding, 'Second Best', esp. 360.

⁷⁹ Wilburn, 'Courage', 15. For an earlier statement of a similarly explicit statement of the view, see Cooper, 'Psychology', 152-3.

their rational soul-part is lucky enough to possess knowledge about what is beneficial for the tripartite soul. Instead, this passage depicts Socrates describing what it is for an individual to be wise as well as how the reason of that individual issues prescriptions which their spirit then preserves. But this is completely unremarkable, for at this point in the *Republic* Socrates is explaining how the soul-parts of a completely virtuous individual interact with one another. All that follows from this stretch of text 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 from either definition in Book IV requires that the courageous agent be wise at all. As James 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.’⁸⁰ Or as I would put it, the power of courage preserves correct prescriptions whether they derive from knowledge or true belief.

One will object that, all that notwithstanding, there is still an important difference between those who have *bona fide* 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 far from certain. For one thing, the fact that knowledge is said to be of that which completely is (*to pantelôs on*, 477a3) raises the old and unresolved puzzle as to how wisdom might ever be deployed in everyday deliberations, which typically concern those things which are and are not rather than what completely is. But more importantly for our purposes, Plato evidently took 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 or eliminated. This is why imitative poetry is so dangerous: recall that the greatest charge against it is that it corrupts even the best of us (605c5-8). And, as Book IX makes clear, paragons of moderation have enduring lawless desires that manifest themselves in dreams (572b2-7). It is not hard to imagine that in extreme circumstances, such as war, severe pain or deprivation, even philosophers might need spirited interventions to protect against the pernicious impulses of their appetite. It is worth noting that Aristotle’s paradigm of courage, though as undaunted (*anekplékotos*) as can be by dangerous wartime situations, nevertheless remains perturbed by those things which no human could meet with serene indifference.⁸¹ And on this point Aristotle seems to agree with Plato, who in Book II of our own text

⁸⁰ Wilberding, ‘Second Best’, 360 n.40.

⁸¹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1115b10-11.

claims that the most courageous soul is *least disturbed* – not undisturbed – by any external circumstances.⁸²

I do not mean to deny that those who are wise and courageous have some advantages over those who are merely courageous. Only the philosopher will have access to the world of forms, an intellectual playground which affords superb pleasures and which drastically enhances the value of one's life.⁸³ I don't even wish to deny that the courage of the wise and courageous individual is more robust and counterfactually reliable than the courage of the merely courageous individual. It may well be that only the wise philosopher is completely immune to intellectual threats that might cause other people to discard their correct beliefs and accept false ones. For all that I have said so far, a deceptive argument might persuade the merely courageous individual to reject their correct beliefs and accept new, incorrect ones. That is to say, they might succumb to a sophisticated sort of theft. And if they were to succumb, they would thereby cease to be courageous since courage requires at least correct beliefs. But this only shows that the courage of the merely courageous individual is fragile in a way that the courageous of the completely virtuous agent is not, and that the former sort of courage must be protected from insidious intellectual threats. This is precisely why Socrates constructs a city in which dialectic and argumentation are not introduced – let alone taught – to prospective rulers until they are already 30 years of age.⁸⁴ We learn how to withstand temptations and fears before we learn how to withstand intellectual trickery.

All I wish to deny here is that such advantages as the wise and courageous individual has over the merely courageous individual must include a greater or more reliable ability to preserve reason's correct judgements about what ought to be done in the face of pleasures, pains, fears, desires or any other appetitive threat. Because both agents possess the power of preservation, neither will experience a pernicious case of appetite-induced *metadoxazein*. And that seems to me sufficient to make both

⁸² 381a3-4. Note that, while similar in spirit, Plato's point is much more general than Aristotle's. For whereas Aristotle is talking about fearful (*phoberon*) experiences – and particularly those experiences that threaten death in war – Plato claims that the most courageous individual is least disturbed by any external circumstances (*ti exóthen pathos*).

⁸³ On the pleasures of the philosophic life, see 580d-583a and 583b-587e.

⁸⁴ 538c-539a.

agents courageous on a reasonable interpretation of the evidence presented explicitly in Book IV. Perhaps following the ‘longer road’ referred to in Book VI would lead one to an understanding of genuine courage which presupposes wisdom, but such an understanding would need to be argued for and would, I suggest, go beyond the conception of courage explicitly articulated in Book IV.⁸⁵

It’s worth remembering that the bulk of the *Republic* is a conversation designed to convince Glaucon and his brother that being just and virtuous will make them happier than being unjust and vicious will. Neither brother is knowledgeable about the most important subjects at the time of the dialogue’s conversation, and there are fairly strong hints within the dialogue that neither will ever become truly wise.⁸⁶ If wisdom were a prerequisite for courage or the other virtues, one would expect the overall tone of the dialogue – or at least the tone of the brothers – to be hopeless. But it is not. When it comes to the issue of human happiness, the tone of the dialogue remains relatively optimistic throughout, and all parties seem to presume that Glaucon and Adeimantus might yet live virtuous and happy lives. Philosophers may indeed possess a god-like wisdom that far surpasses the intellectual achievements of the mass of humanity, but the dialogue suggests that it is still possible for (at least some of) the rest of us to acquire the remaining virtues and to live well because of it.

V

I have argued that in Plato’s *Republic* courage is a power and then, by comparing the relevant passages in Book IV with Socrates’ theoretical discussion of *dunameis* in Book V, I have articulated precisely what courage is. It is the power that preserves the result of reason’s deliberations about what one ought to do from the appetitive forces that threaten to corrupt and alter reason’s considered judgements. That this virtue is of huge ethical significance and contributions to the well-lived life should be obvious, for it ensures that virtuous agents are reliably motivated to act in the way that

⁸⁵ 504b1-7. For a discussion on the ‘longer road’ see Mitchell Miller’s ‘Beginning the “Longer Way”’ in *Cambridge Companion*, 310-44.

⁸⁶ At 533a1-2 Socrates bluntly announces that he cannot teach the brothers about dialectic because ‘they will not be able to follow any longer.’ This seems as clear a statement as ever that the brothers lack wisdom, and given their relatively advanced age, as well as the fact they do not seem endowed with the characteristics of natural philosophers, there seems to me little hope they will become wise.

reason has correctly identified will benefit them. In a world that is often hostile to our interests, courage will be absolutely indispensable for a successful and effectual life. What is less obvious but still, I have argued, true, is that the spirited affections that often take center-stage in discussions of courage are in fact the means by which the spirited soul-part accomplishes its function of preserving reason's judgements. Finally, I have suggested that if the argument presented here is correct it may well be that wisdom is not required for the possession of courage.

In addition to shedding light on Plato's understanding of a particular virtue, my intention was that the case-study of courage would shine a spotlight 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 cardinal virtues, which we also have good reason to believe are powers. The results would no doubt be interesting and provocative for our understanding of this masterpiece of ancient philosophy and Plato's thought more generally. Indeed, it seems to me that the concept of *dunamis* does a lot of heavy lifting throughout Plato's *corpus* in ways that we have yet to fully grasp. Though I have not been able to directly argue for the claim here, my hope is that the present case-study is compelling enough to convince the reader that the concept of *dunamis* is worth attending to in all aspects of Plato's works.