

On *Akrasia* in Decision Making: Socrates' Hedonism in *Protagoras*

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Abstract

In *Protagoras*, Socrates discusses the possibility of *akrasia*: doing something other than the best while knowing what is, and being able to do, the best. *Akrasia* is often construed as weakness of will, and if this is correct, then bioethics should be largely devoted to cultivating the willpower of individuals in order to enable them to make the best decisions among various ethical options. However, Socrates in *Protagoras* suggests that *akrasia* is a matter of cognitive failure in which one does not know what is best, and it is impossible for one to *knowingly* do something other than the best. If he is right, bioethics should be largely devoted to cultivating the cognitive ability of individuals rather than cultivating willpower. In order to set the right direction of bioethics, it is important to understand what *akrasia* consists of, and this paper is a preliminary inquiry focused on Socrates' discussion on *akrasia* in *Protagoras*, before the full-fledged discussion on the nature of *akrasia*. In his discussion of *akrasia*, Socrates offers two *reductiones* through which he shows the impossibility of *akrasia*. His argument is based on the substitution of "goodness" for "pleasure." The question which arises here is whether

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Socrates' needs to be committed to ethical hedonism for this substitution. In this paper, I address this issue of ethical hedonism and its relationship to Socrates' argument concerning *akrasia*. I show that recent scholarship has not clearly proven that Socrates is uncommitted to ethical hedonism in *Protagoras*. Instead, I will argue that Socrates may actually be committed to ethical hedonism in *Protagoras*.

Keywords

akrasia, weakness of will, hedonism, goodness, pleasure, decision making, Socrates, Protagoras

1. INTRODUCTION: *Akrasia* in *Protagoras*

From Socrates onward the idea of *akrasia*, which means doing something other than the best while knowing what is, and being able to, the best, has been thought to pose problems. The seemingly *akratic* actions occur in a range of circumstances, including the cases where patients make decisions that health professionals do not consider best. For instance, a person can refuse a blood transfusion because he is afraid of needles due to his traumatic experience in childhood, while knowing that transfusion would be the best way to save his life.¹ *Akrasia* is often construed as weakness of will, and if this is correct, then bioethics should be largely devoted to cultivating the willpower of individuals-patients, health professionals, and other parties involved, in order to encourage them to

1. This example is from Christopher J McKnight, "Autonomy and the *Akratic* Patient", *Journal of Medical Ethics* 19 (1993): 206-10.

make the best decisions among various ethical options. However, it is controversial whether *akrasia* could be reasonably considered to be weakness of will. For instance, Socrates in *Protagoras* suggests that *akrasia* is a matter of cognitive failure, in other words, failure in discerning what is the best, or what actually results in the biggest amount of pleasure, in a given situation. If Socrates is right, bioethics should be largely devoted to cultivating the ability of individuals to discern what is the best among the given options, and ensuring that individuals are properly informed of the given situation and options, rather than to cultivating willpower.

Thus, it is crucial to consider what *akrasia* actually consists of in order to set the right direction of bioethics, in the light of the fact that many of us manifest, at least intermittently, *akrasia*.² As a preliminary inquiry before the full-fledged discussion on the nature of *akrasia*, this paper focuses on Socrates' discussion of *akrasia* as cognitive failure in *Protagoras*. It will help us to see how people in his time used to think of *akrasia*, whether we should consider Socrates in *Protagoras* to be committed to ethical hedonism which identifies goodness with pleasure, and what factors are to be considered in decision-making process in order to make the best decision when one is faced with conflicting ethical arguments.

In *Protagoras*, Socrates discusses the possibility of *akrasia* (*Prot.* 351b-358e): doing something other than the best while knowing what is, and being able to do, the best. The possibility of *akrasia* is presented here as popular opinion. Socrates addresses this issue as follows:

Most people ... say that many men, who know what the best thing to do is and are able to do it, are unwilling to do it and do something

2. Raanan Gillon considers *akrasia* to be the very characteristic of all human beings. See R. Gillon, "Autonomy, Respect for Autonomy and Weakness of Will", *Journal of Medical Ethics* 19 (1993): 195-96.

else ... They say [the reason for this is] that they are overcome by pleasure or pain or by one of those things by which I was just saying that agents are overpowered when they act (*Prot.* 352d5-e2).

Socrates' view is contrary to this popular opinion: it is impossible for one to knowingly do something other than the best. He shows, precisely, that it is impossible to knowingly allow oneself to be overcome by pleasure.³ To prove his point, Socrates offers two *reductiones* against this popular conception. The original formula of *akrasia* can be represented as follows:⁴

A man willingly performs an act, knowing it to be bad, because he is overcome by pleasure(*Prot.* 355a7-b1).

In the first *reductio*, Socrates substitutes "goodness" for "pleasure," viz.:

A man willingly performs an act, knowing it to be bad, because he is overcome by goodness.(*Prot.* 355d1-3).

And in the second *reductio*, he substitutes "pleasure" for "goodness"

3. Although Socrates shows the impossibility of *akrasia* through pleasure, it seems that this critique can easily be applied to other kinds of *akrasia*. For example, *akrasia* through fear can be explained by mistaken measurement of future pleasure and future pain. However, there seems to be a good reason why Socrates chooses *akrasia* through pleasure as the main target. D. Wolfsdorf claims that it is chosen on the grounds that Plato believed that masses were motivated to act to maximize pleasure (David Wolfsdorf. "The Ridiculousness of Being Overcome by Pleasure: *Protagoras* 352b1-358d4," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 31 (2006): 113-136.).

4. Concerning the formulation of the argument concerning *akrasia* and Socrates' two *reductiones*, I am following the version of Wolfsdorf (*Ibid.*, 113-114.).

and “pain” for “badness,” viz.:

A man willingly performs an act, knowing it to be painful, because he is overcome by pleasure(*Prot.* 355e5-356a1).

Through these *reductiones*, Socrates argues that *akrasia* is not possible. However, it is controversial whether he is arguing for psychological or logical impossibility. For example, G. Vlastos claims that Socrates shows the psychological impossibility of *akrasia* through pleasure in the first *reductio*, since it implies that one would knowingly choose the smaller of available goodness.⁵ As for logical impossibility, D. Wolfsdorf claims that Socrates explains at *Prot.* 355d4-e3 that the concept of *akrasia* is self-contradictory both because being overcome by goodness implies that the quantity of goodness of the *akratic* action is greater than the quantity of badness, and also because the conception of *akrasia* as an error implies the contrary, that the quantity of badness outweighs that of goodness.⁶ Both of the explanations are based on Socrates' substitution of “goodness” for “pleasure” in the first *reductio*, since it is this substitution that allows the comparison of the quantity of goodness. The question which arises here is whether Socrates needs to be committed to ethical hedonism (pleasure is goodness) to show either kind of impossibility of *akrasia* through pleasure.

Among interpreters of *Protagoras*, those who think that Socrates endorses hedonism include J. Gosling and C. Taylor (1982), T. Irwin (1995), and G. Rudebusch (1999). However, this view is not shared by D. Russell (2000), M. Morris (2006), and D. Wolfsdorf (2006). It must be noted that

5. Vlastos Gregory, “Socrates on *Acrasia*,” *Phoenix* 23 (1969): 71-88.

6. Wolfsdorf, *op.cit.*, 121.

much recent literature on this issue has been claiming that Socrates is not committed to hedonism, and hedonism is used *ad hominem* in *Protagoras*. Many philosophers supporting this claim rely on a particular interpretation of *Gorgias*. *Gorgias* has often been considered together with *Protagoras* because it is regarded as the dialogue nearest in date to *Protagoras*. It also seems to contain Socrates' explicit rejection of hedonism. However, it could be the case that Socrates is just not consistent in these two dialogues or that *Gorgias* reflects Socrates' further thoughts on pleasure after those of *Protagoras*. It is also possible to deny that *Gorgias* attacks hedonism in general.⁷

In this essay, I will address this issue of hedonism, especially ethical hedonism and its relationship to Socrates' argument concerning *akrasia*. I will set aside considerations external to the *Protagoras* and show that recent scholarship has not clearly proven that Socrates is uncommitted to ethical hedonism in *Protagoras*. Instead, I will argue that Socrates may actually be committed to ethical hedonism in *Protagoras*. I will begin my argument by discussing the logical necessity of hedonism in *Protagoras* and then discuss the possibility of hedonism as an *ad hominem* argument. These discussions will provide reasons for my claim that Socrates may actually be committed to ethical hedonism.

2. THE LOGICAL NECESSITY OF HEDONISM IN PROTAGORAS

7. For example, Gosling and Taylor suggest that the hedonism defended in *Protagoras* is that of long-term pleasure, and the one refuted in *Gorgias* is that of short-term pleasure. Therefore Socrates' refutation of the identification of goodness with short-term pleasure in *Gorgias* does not mean that Socrates should be read not to endorse the identification of goodness with long-term pleasure in *Protagoras* (J.C.G. Gosling and C.C.W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982)).

2-1. *M. Morris's argument.*

Many scholars argue that Socrates in *Protagoras* does not endorse hedonism. This view is often inferred, in some cases, from the claim that hedonism is not logically necessary in the argument concerning *akrasia*. Since Morris has recently defended this position and examined the logical structure of the *akrasia* argument, I will focus on his argument and determine whether it actually shows hedonism to be unnecessary.

Morris begins with an alternative argument which he claims to require only premises Socrates would accept “provided that we allow ourselves a little re-interpretation to make the modalities clear.”⁸ The argument is as follows:

- (A1) Necessarily, if anyone does what he knows to be wrong, then for some *a*, *b*, and *t*, he chooses to do *a* rather than *b*, despite thinking at time *t* that *b* is better than *a*, because at *t* he desires *a* more than *b*;
- (A2) To desire *a* more than *b* is to think that *a* is better than *b*; so
- (A3) Necessarily, if anyone does what he knows to be wrong, then for some *a*, *b*, and *t*, he chooses to do *a* rather than *b*, despite thinking at time *t* that *b* is better than *a*, because he thinks at *t* that *a* is better than *b*; but
- (A4) It is impossible, for any *a*, *b*, and *t*, for anyone to think at *t* that *a* is better than *b* and think at *t* that *b* is better than *a*; so
- (A5) It is impossible to do what one knows to be wrong.⁹

8. Michael Morris, “*Akrasia* in the *Protagoras* and the Republic,” *Phronesis* 51 (2006): 199.

9. *Ibid.*, 197.

This argument depends upon two main assumptions. One is the evaluative conception of desire: to desire *a* more than *b* is to think that *a* is better than *b*, which is presented in (A2). The other is the idea that it is impossible for anyone to have contradictory preferences, presented in (A4).¹⁰ Morris also claims that the evaluative conception of desire can be replaced by a rough notion of rationality, for it would not be rational to do *a* rather than *b* while thinking *b* is better unless there should be consideration of other factors. Additionally, the impossibility of contradictory preferences can also be replaced by a notion of rationality since someone with contradictory preferences could not be rational if we think of a person as a single psychological unit.¹¹ Therefore, the argument against the possibility of *akrasia* is not essentially based on hedonism but on our common notion of rationality.¹²

Of course there is a problem here. *Akrasia* is understood to be irrational yet laymen still believe in *akratic* actions. Therefore, Morris' claim that *akrasia* is impossible because it is irrational does not appeal to those people who believe that we can and do sometimes act irrationally. What has to be shown is the impossibility of *akrasia*, not its irrationality which is widely acknowledged, and the former does not follow from the latter. Morris seems to be aware of this problem. However, he supports his argument by first giving a natural line of reasoning in its favor: insofar as it is an action, it must be rationally explicable; but insofar as it is *akratic* action it is irrational, and thus *akrasia* is impossible. Secondly, he argues that (A2) and (A4) are premises which Plato might easily have used, and

10. Morris, op. cit., 198.

11. Ibid., 203.

12. Morris seems to argue for the psychological impossibility of *akrasia* especially when he talks about the impossibility of contradictory preferences in terms of a person as a single psychological unit.

thus Morris' own argument can replace Socrates'. What remains unaccounted for is that Socrates acknowledges the possibility of so-called *akratic* actions. While admitting that people can be irrational and thus participate in so-called *akratic* actions, Socrates explains that these actions are not truly *akratic*, i.e. people doing something other than the best while knowing what is, and able to do, the best. It is people doing something other than the best *without* knowing which choice is really best. In other words, Socrates does not argue that *irrational actions are impossible* like Morris does, but he argues that *knowingly doing irrational things is impossible*. This problem prevents Morris' alternative argument from actually replacing Socrates' argument.

Morris further supports his claim that hedonism is not logically necessary by showing the impossibility of *akrasia* by distinguishing two of Socrates' arguments.¹³ *Argument One*, which is from the first *reductio* at *Prot.* 355c8-d3 where Socrates substitutes "pleasure" for "goodness," says:

If by any chance the questioner is rude he might burst out laughing and say: 'What you're saying is ridiculous - someone does what is bad, knowing that it is bad, when it is not necessary to do it, having been overcome by the good ... '

Argument Two, which is from the second *reductio* at *Prot.* 355e6-356a1 where Socrates substitutes "goodness" for "pleasure" and "badness" for "pain," says:

Now let us say that a man does what before we called 'bad' things

13. Although Morris uses *Conclusion One* and *Conclusion Two* to refer to each argument, I will use the term *Argument One* and *Argument Two* in order to avoid possible confusion.

and now shall call ‘painful’ ones, knowing that they are painful things, but being overcome by pleasant things, although it is clear that they do not outweigh them.

Morris begins his essay without clarification of which kind of hedonism he deems logically unnecessary in Socrates’ argument against *akrasia*, however, in introducing these two arguments he shows that he is dealing with psychological hedonism only. Although my concern here is whether Socrates is committed to ethical hedonism in *Protagoras*, I believe that Morris’ argument concerning psychological hedonism can also shed light on the issue of the logical necessity of ethical hedonism. In order to examine the necessity of psychological hedonism, Morris offers the definition of it first. He claims that psychological hedonism is true of someone if he meets these three characteristics:

- (H1) If he finds something pleasant he thinks it is good, and if he finds something painful he thinks it is bad;
- (H2) The only thing he thinks is good is what he finds pleasant, and the only thing he thinks is bad is what he finds painful;
- (H3) Whatever he thinks is good, he thinks is good because it is pleasant, and whatever he thinks is bad, he thinks is bad because it is painful.

Morris admits that *Argument Two* logically depends upon psychological hedonism. It is because in order to legitimately substitute “pleasure” for “goodness” - and “pain” for “badness,” the argument needs the hedonistic thesis not only that pleasure is valued((H1)), but also that only pleasure is valued((H2)), and that pleasure is always valued insofar as it is regarded as pleasant((H3)).¹⁴ However, Morris also states that

psychological hedonism is unnecessary for *Argument One*. He claims that all we need for the substitution of “goodness” for “pleasure” in *Argument One* is the thought that when someone pursues pleasure he is valuing pleasure ((H1)).¹⁵ Consequently, unlike *Argument Two*, *Argument One* depends upon the evaluative conception of desire: an agent desires *a* because he thinks *a* is good. Given this, Morris claims that *Argument One* and *Argument Two* are independent from each other. *Argument One* only follows the substitution of “goodness” for “pleasure” based on the evaluative conception of desire. On the other hand, *Argument Two* needs hedonism for the identification of “goodness” with “pleasure” which is not drawn from *Argument One*. This means that *Argument One* is not a prerequisite for *Argument Two*, and in itself *Argument One* suffices to demonstrate the impossibility of *akrasia*. Also, it seems that *Argument One* depends on nothing more than the assumptions Morris supplies in his alternative argument: namely the evaluative conception of desire and the impossibility of contradictory preferences. Based on this, Morris concludes that Socrates does not need psychological hedonism for the argument against the possibility of *akrasia* in *Protagoras* and that hedonism is not his main concern.¹⁶

Setting aside the problem that Morris' alternative argument proves to be inadequate for replacing Socrates' argument as shown above, there is another major problem in Morris' argument: it is not clear why the substitution of “pleasure” for “goodness” requires psychological hedonism while the reversed substitution does not. Morris does not offer compelling reasons for this point. Regardless of the direction, substitutions imply an

14. Morris, op.cit., 204.

15. Ibid., 202.

16. Ibid., 204.

identity claim. If *Argument One* needs only “pleasure is valued,” then that should be the only thing *Argument Two* requires. If *Argument Two* needs all three premises of psychological hedonism, then *Argument One* should require all of them.

A more fundamental problem, however, is that it is not clear why Morris assumes that it is psychological hedonism which is required for the substitution of “pleasure” for “goodness” and vice versa. In order to substitute “pleasure” for “goodness”, “pleasure” should be identified with “goodness”, and thus, the issue here is not whether Socrates is endorsing *psychological hedonism* (pleasure is valued) but whether he is endorsing *ethical hedonism* (pleasure is goodness). Therefore, if Morris is right to claim that *Argument Two* clearly needs hedonism, then it should be ethical hedonism that is needed, and *Argument One* should also need ethical hedonism as much as *Argument Two*. Morris fails to show that hedonism, whether psychological or ethical, is unnecessary for Socrates’ argument against the possibility of *akrasia*.

2-2. D. Wolfsdorf’s argument

Morris unsuccessfully claims that *Argument One* does not rely on psychological hedonism, and since the argument alone is sufficient to show that *akrasia* is impossible, psychological hedonism is logically unnecessary in Socrates’ argument concerning *akrasia*.¹⁷ However, even if Morris’ argument proves to be plausible, it leaves a question: why does Socrates need *Argument Two* at all? Wolfsdorf seems to answer the question by claiming that *Argument Two* serves to supplement *Argument*

17. When claiming that *Argument One* shows the impossibility of *akrasia*, Morris does not clarify whether he is talking about logical impossibility or psychological impossibility.

One.

Wolfsdorf argues that the first *reductio*, *Argument One* on Morris' account, is where the majority of the work is done in Socrates' demonstration of the logical impossibility of *akrasia*. He argues that the self-contradiction of the concept of *akrasia* in terms of the quantity of goodness is fully revealed in the first *reductio*: "being overcome by good things implies that the quantity of good things is superior to the quantity of bad things. But by definition the *akratic* agent erred, and this implies that his action contains a greater quantity of bad things than good things."¹⁸ Then, he explains that the second *reductio*, and the comment on it, is presented by Socrates in order to address a potential objection to the previous explanation in the first *reductio*.¹⁹ Some might argue that being overcome by good things does not necessarily mean that the quantity of good things outweighs the quantity of bad things since people can be overcome by the immediacy of good things, and thus, the concept of *akrasia* is not self-contradictory. Socrates admits at *Prot.* 356c-d, the comment on *Argument Two*, that the immediacy or temporal dimension of pleasure/goodness can affect the way many people *perceive* the quantity of pleasure.²⁰ This might be one of the reasons why so-called *akratic* actions can happen. However, Socrates also makes it clear that immediacy cannot affect the real magnitude of pleasure, and there is no real difference between immediate pleasure and the pleasure of a later time. At *Prot.* 356b Socrates states,

For if someone were to say: 'But Socrates, the immediate pleasure is

18. Wolfsdorf, op. cit., 121.

19. Ibid., 126.

20. *Protagoras.* 356c-d.

very much different from the pleasant and the painful at a later time,’ I would reply, ‘They are not different in any other way than by pleasure and pain, for there is no other way that they could differ.’

Thus, when people choose a smaller immediate pleasure over a bigger pleasure at a later time, it does not show that *akrasia* is not self-contradictory, but that people are mistaken about the real quantity of each pleasure.

Wolfsdorf’s argument answers the question left by Morris regarding why Socrates offers *Argument Two* if *Argument One* suffices to demonstrate the impossibility of *akrasia*. However, there is another problem for Morris even with the help of Wolfsdorf’s argument. If it is the case that *Argument One* does not rely on hedonism while *Argument Two* does, Morris should explain the possible function of *Argument Two* as well as the reason Socrates would choose *Argument Two* among other possible arguments which could serve the function despite the fact that *Argument Two* requires hedonism which, according to Morris, is not endorsed by Socrates. It should be noted that the same problem does not seem to occur within Wolfsdorf’s own argument. Although Wolfsdorf agrees with Morris in that Socrates is not committed to hedonism in the argument concerning *akrasia*, he does not claim that the first *reductio* relies on hedonism and the second does not. Wolfsdorf says “The internal evidence from *Protagoras* against Platonic endorsement of ethical hedonism is itself strong,” but without offering obvious or direct evidence.²¹ Thus, Wolfsdorf’s

21. Wolfsdorf, *op.cit.*, 133-34. Wolfsdorf provides indirect evidence against Platonic endorsement of ethical hedonism which is based on historicity of several dramatic elements in *Protagoras*. He suggests that the dialogue is set at the house of Callias, who was infamous for his profligacy and hedonism, and selecting certain notorious Athenians to be students of the Sophists there could be an indirect evidence. (Wolfsdorf, “The Historical Reader of Plato’s *Protagoras*,” *Classical Quarterly* 48

argument cannot help Morris show why there is at least one argument, *Argument Two* on Morris' account, which relies on hedonism. Any answer to this question will assume one of two positions: (1) hedonism is Socrates' view or (2) hedonism is used *ad hominem*. Since I believe the first explanation to be more plausible, I will examine the second explanation now.

3. THE POSSIBILITY OF HEDONISM AS AN *AD HOMINEM* ARGUMENT

3-1. D. Russell's argument

Russell is one among many scholars who claim that Socrates deploys hedonism only as a dialectical expedient and that it does not reflect Socrates' genuine view.²² To support his claim, he first clarifies Socrates' overall goal and the structure of the dialogue in *Protagoras*. Socrates' goal in the whole dialogue is clear: in refuting *Protagoras*, who claims that courage can be separated from other virtues, Socrates wants to show that a virtue is a kind of knowledge and that courage in particular is not an exception. What then is the specific role of the argument concerning *akrasia* for this overall goal? Russell claims that using the argument concerning *akrasia*, Socrates attributes hedonism to *Protagoras* and other sophists. He then shows that *Protagoras*' view on courage proves to be wrong when construed through hedonism. Thus, hedonism used in this argument is not Socrates' own view but is used *ad hominem*, targeted not only at

(1998): 126-133.)

22. D. Russell, "Protagoras and Socrates on Courage and Pleasure: *Protagoras* 349d ad finem," *Ancient Philosophy* 20 (2000), 336.

laymen but also *Protagoras* and other sophists.

Russell starts his argument by explaining how hedonism can be attributed to *Protagoras* and other sophists despite the fact that *Protagoras* hesitates to give a positive answer when asked if a pleasant thing is good just insofar as it is pleasant at *Prot.* 351c-e.²³ Russell clarifies that *Protagoras* hesitates not because he believes that there is some kind of pleasure which itself is bad, but because he thinks that some pleasure can bring about significant pain later.²⁴

Protagoras appreciates the importance of overall pleasure in one's life. Thus, if the hedonism Socrates tries to attribute to *Protagoras* is not at odds with *Protagoras'* view on overall pleasure, there seems to be no good reason for *Protagoras* to reject hedonism. Moreover, Russell claims that hedonism must also be attractive to *Protagoras* and other sophists due to their need for justifying their profession of teaching virtues.²⁵ The advertisement of their ability to make the masses virtuous should rely on an epistemic account of virtue: people who regard the lack of virtue in *akrasia* as due to something other than ignorance would not think that it could be cured by teaching. If sophists can show that *akratic* action never happens when the appropriate kind of knowledge is acquired, it would justify their profession and attract more pupils. The argument concerning *akrasia* shows that living virtuously is living pleasantly on the grounds of ethical hedonism. And, living pleasantly becomes possible by acquiring the art of measurement which sophists claim to be capable of teaching. For this reason, the given argument and the hedonistic premise underlying it must be something to which *Protagoras* and other sophists would be committed.

23. *Protagoras.* 351d.

24. *Protagoras.* 354d.

25. Russell, *op.cit.*, 313-315.

There is another argument Russell offers for the claim that hedonism is just an expedient dialectic. The argument involving hedonism is fallacious in the sense that there are too many unsupported assumptions. For example, in order for the masses to be convinced of the need of the art of measurement, they should be committed to the commensurability of pleasure thesis. Only when pleasures are commensurable can the art of measurement help people choose the greatest pleasure. They must believe in the irrelevance of the temporal dimension of pleasure. Also, more fundamentally, they should believe that if S chooses A, then S believes that A is the most pleasant, all things considered.²⁶ This leads Russell to the conclusion that the argument involving hedonism should be considered as an argument that Socrates offers on behalf of *Protagoras* and other sophists; moreover, he claims that the supposed audience of the argument is neither *Protagoras* nor other sophists, but instead the masses. This is because the masses may lack the necessary insight to reject this fallacious argument. Russell suggests that this is a good reason to think that Socrates gives this argument as a mock protreptic that *Protagoras* would offer to persuade the masses of the necessity of teaching virtues.

Russell then argues that *Protagoras'* view on courage cannot hold when construed through hedonism. The argument involving hedonism prevents *Protagoras* from admitting non-epistemic elements into courage, and it bases courage solely on knowledge which constitutes the basis of other virtues as well.²⁷ In *Prot.* 349e-351a, immediately before the argument concerning *akrasia*, *Protagoras* disagrees with the view that courage can be identified with knowledge, while he admits that courage can be increased along with the increment of knowledge. This is possible

26. *Ibid.*, 325.

27. *Ibid.*, 336.

because he believes that courage has two sources - nature and the proper nurture of the soul.²⁸ Presumably, what *Protagoras* regards as courage is, for example, a disposition to go to combat. This disposition does not come solely from acquirement of some skill for horseback fighting but also from one's nature. Someone can be reluctant to go to combat even with an excellent skill for horseback fighting, and it can be said to be caused by his nature. *Protagoras* claims that courage can be separated from other virtues based on the belief that the requirements of courage ('nature and the proper nurture of the soul') do not come from knowledge. However, Russell claims that the argument involving hedonism offers the necessary explanation to refute this view of *Protagoras*. The argument shows that people make a choice based on their assessment of the quantity of pleasure, and sometimes people make a wrong choice due to their inability to assess pleasure correctly. The disposition of going to combat is explained by knowledge of what is good and bad in terms of overall pleasure. If a person knows that going to combat is overall more beneficial and more pleasant than not going, the knowledge will be enough to cause him to be ready for combat. Socrates and *Protagoras* agree that both the courageous and the cowardly do not have a disposition to act in things they take to be fearsome. As for combat, the difference is not that the courageous have the nature for acting in fearsome situations while the cowardly do not. Rather, the courageous know that going to combat is more beneficial and pleasant than not going, thus it is not to be feared. The cowardly do not reason in this manner because they do not properly possess the art of measurement. At this point, the important source of courage, 'nature and nurture in a proper way,' can be included in the

28. "For confidence, like power, comes from skill and from passionate emotion and madness as well; courage from nature, and the proper nurture of the soul" (*Protagoras*. 351a)

picture of courage solely based on knowledge. Thus far, I have shown that hedonism can be attractive to *Protagoras* and other sophists for the goal of justifying their career of teaching virtues, and it is also possible for Socrates to defeat *Protagoras*' view by attributing hedonism to *Protagoras* and then showing that *Protagoras*' view on courage proves to be wrong when construed through hedonism.

3-2. Socrates' endorsement of hedonism

After showing that Morris failed in proving that hedonism is unnecessary in the argument concerning *akrasia*, I mentioned above two possible explanations of Socrates' use of hedonism in *Protagoras*. The first explanation was that Socrates uses hedonism because it is his own view. The second explanation was that Socrates uses hedonism *ad hominem* without reflecting his own view. I have examined the second explanation and demonstrated it to be plausible. However, I believe that the plausibility of the second explanation does not confirm that Socrates does not endorse hedonism himself.

First, the fact that *Protagoras* has a good reason to be attracted to hedonism does not necessarily mean that *Protagoras* actually takes hedonism as a premise. He and the other sophists need a good epistemic account of virtue that can justify their profession, and it does not have to be based on hedonism. There might be another, or even better, epistemic account of virtue that sophists can be attracted to. If that is the case, then there is no good reason for Socrates to choose hedonism over other possible epistemic accounts only for defeating *Protagoras* without endorsing hedonism himself. After all, *Protagoras* does not explicitly endorse hedonism in *Protagoras*.

Moreover, even if the hedonistic account is the best or the only

epistemic account of virtue and attributing hedonism to *Protagoras*, and thus defeating him based on it seems to be the best strategy for Socrates, it does not necessarily mean that Socrates actually knows that it is the best strategy or actually chooses it. More importantly, whether or not Socrates intends to attribute hedonism to *Protagoras* and other sophists, there is nothing which indicates that hedonism can be endorsed by only Socrates or *Protagoras*. There is a possibility that all of them are committed to hedonism, although this may not be explicitly indicated. The plausibility of the *ad hominem* explanation shows that *Protagoras might* endorse hedonism, and thus Socrates *might* also bring up hedonism without endorsing it himself. Unless the hedonistic view presented in *Protagoras* is incompatible with other Socratic theses presented in *Protagoras*, there is no good reason to believe that Socrates does not endorse hedonism, which he himself is the first to address in *Protagoras*. Instead, the very fact that Socrates is the first to address hedonism, without anyone bringing it up prior to him, may imply that Socrates has a hedonistic view of virtue.

Although I conclude that *Protagoras* alone does not clearly show whether or not Socrates is committed to ethical hedonism, there is a compelling reason to think that he is. The discussions of courage and the virtues in general presented before and after the *akrasia* argument are widely acknowledged as genuine Socratic positions.²⁹ The *akrasia* argument, in which Socrates uses hedonism to disprove *Protagoras'* views on courage and the virtues in general, is located in between these discussions. Thus, it seems plausible to assume that the hedonism in the argument concerning *akrasia* is also Socrates' position. This could put us in favor of the view that Socrates may be committed to ethical hedonism in *Protagoras*.

29. Gosling and Taylor, *op. cit.*, 53.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper shows that Socrates in *Protagoras* can be reasonably considered to be committed to ethical hedonism, and thus in Socrates' view here what seems to be *akrasia* is a result of cognitive failure, and in fact doing something other than the best while knowing what is best is impossible. What actually happens, according to Socrates, is that people do something other than the best because they do not know what is best. In other words, when combined with Socrates' ethical hedonism, *akrasia* is a result of failure in calculating which generates the biggest amount of pleasure among the available options. From this we can temporarily conclude that bioethics does need to be largely devoted to cultivating cognitive ability, that is, the ability of individuals - patients, health professionals, and other parties involved - to calculate the amount of goodness or pleasure involved in each available option in the given situation. The importance of informing individuals, especially patients, of the given situation and available options also becomes manifest. However, more comprehensive discussion on the nature of *akrasia*, which is not confined to Socrates' view in *Protagoras*, is required for *akrasia* to function as a guide to setting the direction of bioethics.

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