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THE SOCRATIC ARGUMENT AGAINST AKRASIA IN THE PROTAGORAS

by Donald Zeyl

In a famous argument at the end of the *Protagoras* Socrates undertakes to show (a) that the thesis that one can act contrary to what one knows to be best is “absurd”, given the explanation of such actions as being due to the agent’s being “overcome by pleasure”, and given the hedonistic standards of evaluation to which most people are committed; and (b) that the correct explanation of such actions is that they are due to the agent’s ignorance, i.e., his failure to know what is best in the circumstances. Like many others,¹ I want to know what Socrates thinks the absurdity in question is, and whether he is correct in making the charge. I also want to know on what grounds he bases his rival explanation, and whether these grounds are compelling. In what follows I set out the thesis under attack, determine to what extent hedonism is being relied upon in the argument, diagnose and analyse the absurdity, and analyse the argument which sponsors Socrates’ rival explanation. I hope to offer some fresh insights into the logical structure and assumptions of the argument, and shall express disagreement with some existing interpretations where such expression is indicated.

I

The thesis against which Socrates directs his argument I shall call the “De-feasibility of Knowledge” thesis (DK), and shall formulate it as follows, distinguishing its several parts.²

DK: Sometimes an agent N does X (A) which is bad (E), even-though he could have refrained from doing X (C1) and even though he knows that X is bad (C2) because he is over-come by pleasure (Ex).

In this formulation (A) is the report of the action, (E) the evaluation of the action as a bad one (i.e., bad on the whole, relatively to other alternatives), (C1) and (C2) conditions said to obtain at the time of the action,³ and (Ex) the explanation given for the act. The conjunction of the first four of these constitute the *explanandum*, the last the *explanans*.⁴

Socrates may well think that DK by itself is free from absurdity.⁵ It is the conjunction of it with hedonism which he thinks generates absurdity, and he takes some pains to determine for everyone’s benefit that his opponents are committed to the hedonistic thesis (353c9-354e2). “The many”, his imaginary opponents, agree (M1) that the only standard they accept for evaluating things as good is pleasure, and as bad is pain; and (M2) that they pursue pleasure as (the) good, and avoid pain as (the) bad.⁶ That M1 commits them to evaluative hedon-

nism is clear. It is sometimes thought that M2 commits them to psychological hedonism as well, but this is a mistake. They admit that they pursue pleasure as *good*, flee pain as *bad*, that is, *because* they judge these to be good and bad. Thus in M2 they agree that their behavior is directed by their evaluations, and not that they seek pleasure and avoid pain as a matter of their “natural springs of action”. Even so, given this restriction in the sense of M2, it is still importantly ambiguous, and, as I hope to show, it is on this ambiguity that the success or failure of Socrates’ argument depends. We can distinguish the following senses of M2:

M2a: Whenever the many pursue pleasure and flee pain they pursue and flee these as good and as bad.

M2b: The many pursue only pleasure as good and flee only pain as bad.

M2a states that *all* pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain is ethically motivated; there is no pursuit of pleasure which is not a pursuit of it *as good*, etc. M2b on the other hand allows such pursuits; what it disallows is the pursuit of anything other than pleasure as good, and the avoidance of anything other than pain as bad. In context, M2b is surely the required sense. Socrates is concerned to establish that the many have no other *telos* in their evaluations and pursuits than pleasure and pain. The admission that *all* pursuits of pleasure and avoidances of pain are ethically motivated is simply irrelevant to that concern. I shall show that M2a, however and not M2b, is an assumption upon which the success of Socrates’ argument will depend.

II

Socrates claims that the thesis of the many conjoined with hedonism involves the sponsors of that thesis in absurdity. Where in the text is that absurdity shown? And what is the nature of the absurdity? The former of these questions must govern our answer to the latter, and not *vice-versa*.⁸ That question is easily answered. What Socrates calls “absurd” (*geloion*) in the text in three places (355a6; b4; d1) is DK itself, taken in conjunction with hedonism. He believes that certain substitutions of predicates warranted (he thinks) by hedonism in DK will make the absurdity “manifest” (*katadelon estai*, b4), and he notes that the first sentence produced by carrying out the substitutions is “an absurd affair” (*geloion pragma*, d1). It follows (a) that the absurdity is not generated by anything stated or argued *beyond* the mere statement of the substitution sentences; (b) and hence that any such further statements or arguments will have a function *other than* assisting in the demonstration of absurdity;⁹ and (c) that the same diagnosis of the absurdity must be given for each of the two substitution sentences which Socrates produces.¹⁰ In accordance with the last point, I shall present a revised version of DK which represents both of the substitution sentences. I shall further replace “pleasant” and “good”, and “pleasure” by the variables, “F” and “F-ness”, and their contraries by “un-F” and “un-F-ness”. It will be seen that nothing in the absurdity hangs on peculiarities about these predicates:

DK-R: Sometimes an agent N performs an action X (A) which is

un-F (E-R), even though he could have refrained from doing X (C1), and even though he knows that X is un-F (C2-R), because he is overcome by F-ness (Ex-R).

What might strike one as absurd about DK-R? It is absurd because “the proposed *explanans*... belie(s) the *explanandum*.”¹¹ To explain an action in which something un-F was knowingly chosen by referring to the agent’s desire for F-ness violates canons of explanation. If I tell you that I accepted a job which I knew carried a lower salary than some other one I was offered, and proceed to explain my choice as due to my being overcome by greed, you will either reject my explanation or suspect the sincerity of my claim to have made an informed choice. We expect that an explanation of any action should be logically consistent with the description of that action.

If this is right, the absurdity is supposed to be one of logical inconsistency. In particular, the claim that the agent *knows* that X is un-F is inconsistent with the claim that he does X because he is overcome by F-ness. Thus the following proposition is being assumed:

S1. If N does X because he is overcome by F-ness, then it is not the case that N knows that X is un-F,

or its equivalent:

S1’: If N knows that X is un-F, then it is not the case that N does X because he is overcome by F-ness.

S1 and S1’ are most plausibly supported by S2 and S3:

S2: If N is overcome by F-ness, then N desires F-ness.

S3: If N does X because he desires F-ness, then N does X because he believes that X is F.¹²

S2 and S3 together entail that if N does X because he is overcome by F-ness, then he does X because he believes that X is F, and this in turn entails S1 and S1’, given analytic connections between believing and knowing. So the charge of absurdity will carry if S2 and S3 are true.

Are they true? Consider first S2. It seems obviously true. If we (plausibly) paraphrase, “overcome by F-ness” as “giving in to a desire for F-ness”, the paraphrase certainly entails the consequent of S2. But the use of “overcome by...” suggests the presence of psychological conflict, and this language suggests the presence of certain conditions which obtain and which limit the sense of “desire” in the consequent of S2. First, one is “overcome by” a certain desire, it is plausible to suppose, only if acting on that desire frustrates some aim or purpose one has; hence it is reasonable to suppose that if N does X because he is “overcome”, then N *also* has a desire to avoid doing X. Second, if one desires F-ness in the sense of S2, it need not be the case that one desires whatever (one believes to) yield(s) *more* F-ness than any alternative.

Consider now S3. It, too, seems at first unexceptionable. A recognition of X as being F is surely a necessary condition for doing X *because* one desires F-ness. In S3, however, “...is F” needs to be expanded to “is F *on the whole*”, if S3 is to do its work to support S1 and S1’ against DK-R, but once this is insisted upon, S3 loses plausibility.¹³

S3 will regain plausibility if we are prepared to understand “desire” in a particular way, so that its consequent, understood in the required sense, is entailed by its antecedent. If we suppose that the securing of F-ness is one of N’s goals, then it will follow (a) that he will desire things insofar as they produce F-ness, and (b) that he will prefer that which offers him more F-ness to that which offers him less, *ceteris paribus*. Let us call this sense “rational desire” or “r-desire”, and say that N’s r-desire for F-ness is a desire for F-ness as a goal (*telos*), and particularly N’s r-desire to do X is determined by his belief that X contributes more than any other alternative to the realization of his goal.

If we now reconsider S2, we can readily see that “desires” in its consequent can hardly be taken as “r-desires”; in fact, the competing desire is more properly taken as such. In S2 the desire by which N is “overcome” is not for F-ness as a goal, or for X as the alternative which most contributes to that goal. It is for F-ness as that which satisfies some presently experienced appetite. It is plausible to hold that some of a person’s desires are caused by his psycho-physical condition, whether that condition is chronic, intermittent or temporary. There is a “deficiency” in the organism which seeks “replenishment”.¹⁴ Relevant to the explanation of actions motivated by such desires is a reference to the temporal proximity of the satisfaction expected to the action, so that if some alternative offers F-ness sooner than some other, it may be preferred for that reason, even if it offers less F-ness than that other in the long run. I shall call this sense of “desire”, “appetitive desire”, or “a-desire”, and suggest that N’s a-desire for F-ness is a desire for F-ness as satisfying some present appetite, and particularly that N’s a-desire to do X is determined by his belief that X will satisfy that appetite more immediately than any alternative.

If this distinction between senses of “desire” is accepted as applicable to S2 and S3, it will follow that these propositions do not support S1 and S1’, and that their apparent support is due to ambiguity. If Socrates thinks that DK-R is self-contradictory because he assumes that S2 and S3 work together to support S1 and S1’, he is mistaken. DK-R is intelligible after all, provided that we distinguish between N’s r-desire and his a-desire, and the different conditions under which they may be present.

To this defense of DK-R Socrates has a brilliant reply, and it is this that in my opinion constitutes the genius of the argument: the hedonistic supporter cannot avail himself of this defense, for in declaring and pursuing only pleasure as the good, he is *ex hypothesi* committed to regarding the attainment of pleasure as a goal (*telos*), and hence his desire for pleasure is, not a-a-desire, but r-desire. The hedonist takes pleasure to be a value of the variable, F-ness, in DK-R. Now if N is overcome by a desire for F-ness, then that desire is properly an r-desire, and not an a-desire, as the defense of DK-R has so far claimed. Whatever the merits of the distinction between r- and a-desires (and Socrates would surely doubt these), the hedonist cannot avail himself of it to extricate himself from absurdity. The charge of absurdity sticks.

Or does it? Is the hedonistic defender of DK-R to be denied a-desires for pleasure? Here the ambiguity of the many’s previous admission, M2, becomes crucial. If they have admitted M2 in the sense of M2a, they are lost. For by admitting, as they would in M2a, that all pursuit of pleasure is pursuit of it as good,

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they are in fact admitting that all such pursuit is actuated by *r*-desire, and denying that they have a conflicting *a*-desire for pleasure. On that other hand, if all they have admitted is M2b, they can allow *a*-desires for pleasure (though no *r*-desires for anything other than pleasure), and they can, in my judgement, even claim that in the case in question N's *a*-desire for immediate pleasure caused him to choose the known lesser pleasure of X, thus knowingly foregoing the greater pleasure of some alternative. Socrates' argument fails after all.¹⁵

III

It is now time to consider the next stage in Socrates' argument against DK, namely, the attempt to prove that the acts it explains by (Ex) require a different explanation. They are explained by the agent's ignorance.

I believe that the essentials of this attempt are given in the highly compressed section at 355d3-e3, and its even more compressed counterpart at 356a1-5. Although the conclusion is not explicitly stated there, the logical labor to get to that conclusion is done in these lines, and the stretch which follows (356a5-357e8) is mainly hortatory.¹⁶

The argument appears to be given in the text as follows:

S4: If N wrongly does X (where rightness and wrongness is determined by whether the F-ness of X is "worth"¹⁷ its un-F-ness), then X's F-ness (where F-ness is the property which constitutes the *telos* of evaluation and action) is not worth its un-F-ness (d3-6; 356a1).

S5: X's F-ness is worth its un-F-ness iff X's F-ness is greater (in size and number) than its un-F-ness; X's F-ness is not worth its un-F-ness iff X's F-ness is less (in size or number) than its un-F-ness (d6-e2; 356a1-4)

S6: *Therefore it is clear that:*

To be overcome (sc. by F-ness) is to take the greater un-F-ness as the price for the lesser F-ness (e2,3).

How is S6 supposed to follow from S4 and S5? Clearly we need to supply other premises. S5 seems to be an auxiliary premise, translating talk of relative worth to talk of relative size. This suggests that S6 is translatable back into talk of "worth", as follows:

S7: To be overcome (by F-ness) is to take the un-F-ness as the price for the F-ness *when the F-ness is not worth the un-F-ness*.

S7 will bear the same logical relation to S4 as S6 to the conjunction of S4 and S5. What is it, then that gets us from S4 to S7?

Socrates needs to rely on the following analysis of "doing X because one is overcome by F-ness":

S8: If N does X because he is overcome by F-ness, then he does X because he takes the un-F-ness as the price for the F-ness.

The sense of "takes" is problematic. I take it to be fixed by the mercantile metaphor used in the passage, as is indicated by talk of relative "worth" of alternatives, and the use of the preposition, "*anti*" to mean, "as the price for", or "in exchange for", and thus take it to mean, "accepts". If un-F-ness is "taken" as (payment of) the price for the F-ness that one is after, then the un-F-ness is tolerated or accepted, not chosen for its own sake, but as (alas) a necessary means to getting the F-ness.¹⁸

The argument is now complete. By S4 N *wrongly* does X, and hence its F-ness is not worth its un-F-ness. By the general analysis given in S8, now applied to *wrong* action (S4), S7 will follow, and S7 can be translated into S6 via S5.

I have claimed that this stage of the argument has as its role that of giving support to the conclusion that wrongdoing is due to ignorance. My analysis, however, has not required any reference to N's beliefs, or lack of knowledge. Socrates will go on to argue in the sequel (356c4ff) for the following:

- S9: If N takes the greater un-F-ness as the price for the lesser F-ness (= takes the un-F-ness as the price for the F-ness, when the latter is not worth the former), then N does not know that the un-F-ness is greater than the F-ness (= that the F-ness is not worth the un-F-ness).

And he thinks that he has thereby shown that the phenomenon of being overcome by F-ness is really ignorance. In the course of the argument he contrasts the measuring art (the appropriate type of knowledge) with "the power of appearance" (356d4). What he appears to have assumed throughout, without explicitly mentioning it, is the following:

- S10: One takes un-F-ness as the price for F-ness iff one believes that the F-ness is worth the un-F-ness.

Only if S10 is assumed do the references to "the power of appearance" and the final verdict that N's ignorance explains his action have any point. And S10 appears to have been assumed already in the course of the argument just analysed. That argument depends on S8. One may well ask, however, why anyone should think that S8 is true, as a general analysis of actions involving choices between F-ness and un-F-ness. And S8 is most plausibly explained by S10. If this is true, then indeed the logical labor to get to Socrates' final conclusion is already performed in this compressed argument.

Is Socrates' argument successful? An opponent might challenge it either (a) by accepting S10 but rejecting S5, or (b) by rejecting S10. As to (a), Socrates has already secured his assent to S5, and hence he can now only reject S10. And why should he not? He may claim that if N *knows* that X is un-F, he also knows that the F-ness he wants is "not worth" the un-F-ness he will incur as payment for securing that F-ness. Socrates may reply that without S10, the action is completely unintelligible. He may claim that S10 represents a basic axiom about the intelligibility of actions. The opponent may continue to claim that S10 is false, at least for some actions, only if he gives an alternative account of the intelligibility of those actions. He does so, at 356a5-7, and the account he offers is in terms of the greater temporal proximity of securing the F-ness of X to that of

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securing the F-ness of alternatives. In terms of our distinction between *r*- and *a*-desires, he is explaining that N's doing X was actuated by his *a*-desire, and not his *r*-desire.

Socrates' reply is disappointing. He says, in effect, that the agent *ought not*¹⁹ allow temporal proximity to have independent weight in determining his choices of amounts of F-ness against amounts of un-F-ness. That is, he seems to say that this defense does not succeed in *justifying* the agent's action. This, however, is *ignoratio elenchi*: the question is not whether the acts in question can be justified (*ex hypothesi* they cannot), but explained, that is, made intelligible. And there is no reason to disallow an *explanation* in terms of temporal proximity even if there is reason to disallow this as justification.

Socrates' brilliant argument attempting to replace the many's explanation of allegedly akratic action by his own must be considered a failure. In the end it fails to support his heartfelt conviction that knowledge is sufficient for virtue.

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¹For recent discussion of this issue, see the bibliography.

²The thesis is introduced (with rhetorical flourish) at 352b1-c2, and is repeated (more dispassionately) at 352d6-e2; 353c6-8; 355a7-b1. I formulate (C1) in terms of the possibility of refraining from doing X, rather than in terms of doing something else, Y, because this is the formulation actually used at 355aff. Nothing of importance hinges on this.

³I represent these conditions by concessive clauses, as the Greek allows, for their conjunction renders (A) problematic, and in need of explanation: if N both knows that X is bad *and* is able to refrain from doing X, then how is it that he does X anyway? It is the function of (Ex) to provide the answer to that question.

⁴As a critic of DK Socrates is not, of course, committed to rejecting *all* of the components of DK. He need not deny (A), the occurrence of the allegedly acratia action, nor (E) and (C1) He denies (C2) and (Ex) *as the proper explanation* of (A). (That is, he need not think that "N is overcome by pleasure" is false *as such*, but is "false" (cf. 353a3) *as the explanation* of (A): viz., that "A does X *because* he is overcome by pleasure.")

⁵I believe that the argument against DK depends for its success on hedonism, and thus I disagree with Vlastos, pp. 86-7, who argues that DK is shown to be absurd on the first substitution, and that hedonism is not required for that substitution, but only the more generally acceptable thesis that pleasure is a good. This interpretation must rely on the supposition that the goods of the rejected alternative are goods other than pleasure, or, if they do include pleasure, that pleasure is less than that of X. Thus a non-hedonist who nevertheless believes pleasure to be one of several independent goods may claim that the first substitution does not render his support for DK absurd, for he can appeal to qualitative differences among goods, and claim that the acratia agent is overcome by the lesser good, pleasure, to forego the greater, because pleasure is the *kind* of good that he wants more at the time of action. He will not and need not assent to Socrates' demand that the *only* measure determining "worth" of goods is size. Only if the Socratic doctrine that one always desires (and pursues) what one believes to be the (quantitatively) *greater* good is already granted will the argument be effective against such a non-hedonist, but there is no reason to inject this doctrine into the argument since, as I hope to show, the analysis of the argument doesn't require it.

⁶M1 is mentioned at 353c9; 354b1; c1; c7; d2; d5; d8. M2 at 354-c3-5.

⁷M2 is taken as evidence for psychological hedonism by Vlastos, p. 85, n. 49, following Santas, p. 319, n. 13, who follows Sullivan, p. 19. Taylor, p. 175 correctly notes that the many cannot be called psychological hedonists on the basis of this passage, since to be a psychological hedonist is to accept a certain theory, and the admission here concerns their conduct, not any theory to which they might subscribe. Even so, he claims that they admit that their actions "satisfy the theory of psychological hedonism."

⁸The temptation to apply criteria of absurdity not found in the text, and thereby determine the location of the demonstration of absurdity in the text should be resisted. Socrates may or may not count as absurd what contemporary logicians count as absurd.

⁹To demonstrate that DK, given hedonism, is absurd, and to demonstrate that the correct explanation of N's doing X is the fact that he is ignorant is to demonstrate two different things. To do the former is to show that DK contains two (or more) logically contradictory propositions; to do the latter is to argue for the rejection of (at least) one of them. Thus I shall construe components of Socrates' argument which have often been taken as

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parts of the demonstration of absurdity (e.g., by Gallop, Santas and Vlastos), as parts of the demonstration that wrongdoing is due to ignorance.

¹⁰It is common to arrive at a diagnosis of the absurdity of one of the substitution sentences, and subsequently to diagnose the other in its terms. Thus, Santas, p. 206, takes the absurdity to depend on psychological hedonism, and interpretation which is appropriate (though, I believe, incorrect) for the *second* substitution, and reads this interpretation into the first. Vlastos, on the other hand, pp. 82-85, takes the absurdity to depend on a denial of the Socratic doctrine that everyone always desires (and pursues what he thinks to be) the good, an interpretation more appropriate to the *first* substitution (though also, I believe, incorrect), and reads this interpretation into the second. For criticisms, see Dyson. pp. 32-35.

¹¹Vlastos, p. 81. Vlastos rejects this diagnosis, however, because he believes that the plurals in the formulations of the *explanans* ("pleasures", 355a8; "goods", d3) require the view that the agent is not defeated by pleasure or goodness as such, but by the *particular* goods or pleasures of X. These plurals have, however, an easier explanation: DK as formulated in the text concerns a class of actions, and not an individual act. Cf. *pollakis*, 355a7. It should be noted that whenever plurals are used in the *explanans*, they are also used in the *explanandum*, in (E) and (C2), where "bad" ("painful", 355e7) is predicated of the act itself: cf. 355a7, where they agent is described as doing *kaka* (not *kakon*), knowing that they are *kaka*, and similarly *agatha* (not *agathon*) at b2; d1,2; e6. Vlastos' own account of the absurdity is (a) that it is not shown until 355e3, where "being overcome" is said to mean, "taking the greater evils as the price for lesser goods", which he appears to gloss as *knowingly* taking the greater evils as the price for lesser goods, and (b) that the absurdity of that statement is its falsity, as shown by the fact that it contradicts the Socratic doctrine that everyone always desires the good, a doctrine that Socrates could defend by well-known Socratic tenets. As to (a), this analysis does not locate the absurdity in the substitution sentences itself, and in fact locates its ultimate significance outside of the text of the *Protagoras*. The assumption that the agent is *knowingly* taking the greater evils as the price for the lesser good is not justified by anything in the text (cf. Taylor, p. 185). As to (b), it is not clear that the argument needs to rely on this or any other psychological doctrine. If it did rely on Socratic "agathism", Socrates would not be *arguing* that DK is absurd, but would be flatly stating it. The defender of DK needs to be shown that *on his own admissions* DK is absurd. As I proceed to show in the text, the absurdity consists of or involves contradiction, and on this diagnosis I agree with Gallop and Irwin, though I believe that the former, in conflating the demonstration of absurdity with the demonstration of what is the correct explanation of the type of act in question, errs in claiming that the demonstration of absurdity is not complete until 357e. Dyson, p. 36 correctly insists that the absurdity must be immediately evident from the substitution sentences themselves, but fails to appreciate its logical character.

¹²This analysis accords with that of Irwin, p. 307, n. 11.3.

¹³One of two reasons given by Taylor against allowing the substitutions, p. 180, is that "pleasant" in the "overcome" clause can only *mean* "what contributes to a life in which pleasure predominates over pain", but this sense cannot be allowed here. He wrongly supposes that "pleasant" and "pleasure" have been restricted to mean only this in the previous argument; there is no reason why something painful in the long run may not be called pleasant in the short, provided that these qualifications are tacitly understood. There is no objection, then, to the substitution as such, though if Socrates' argument against the substitution sentences is to go through, he must indeed take "overcome by

pleasure" to entail, "believes X to be pleasant on the whole", in Taylor's "extended sense" of "pleasant". It is precisely because Socrates thinks that this entailment is involved in DK-R that Socrates thinks that thesis is absurd.

¹⁴Cf. *Philebus* 31e-32b, and *Rep.* 439d. My distinction between *r*- and *a*-desires corresponds roughly to the *Republic's* distinction between the desires of the rational part, and those of the appetitive part. I have refrained from *defining* rational desires as desires for what is good, for I do not think that "If *N* *r*-desires *F*-ness then *F*-ness constitutes or contributes to what *N* believes to be good" is an analytic truth, but a substantial, non-trivial thesis which must be defended by argument (as Socrates does defend it; cf. *Grg.* 467c5-468b4). The distinction between these two senses of "desire" is admittedly rough, and needs fuller treatment, which lies outside the scope of this paper. To defend my use of it I can say only (a) that it seems to me to be well taken; we do ordinarily admit the possibility of desiring something for its *F*-ness when we know or believe that either *F*-ness in general, or at least the *F*-ness of the object desired jeopardises one or more of our goals, and (b) that in any case the burden of proof is on Socrates, because he is the one to make the claim that DK-R is absurd. To carry the claim, he must give reasons for disallowing the distinction.

¹⁵Taylor's second reason for objecting to the substitution, pp. 180-181 (acknowledged as originating with M.J. Woods) is that it relies upon an illegitimate substitution in an opaque context. Thus it does not follow from, "*N* desires what is pleasant", that "*N* desires what is good", even if *N* believes that all and only pleasant things are good. It might be replied (as Michael Rohr has done in an unpublished paper) that even if this point is technically correct, the many, in admitting that they seek pleasure as good (i.e., because it is good) at 354c3-5 (cf. my M2a above) cannot object to the substitution on this ground. But this reply avails only if that admission is taken as M2a, and we have seen that this is not its required sense in context.

¹⁶It begins with a series of injunctions always to do that which is predominantly pleasant, and to take the greater pleasure over the smaller. The verbal adjectives here can only be gerundives, expressing, not physical or psychological necessity, but moral and prudential obligation. See Taylor, p. 190; Dyson, p. 33. The many have not previously admitted psychological hedonism, and unless Socrates is simply imposing his own psychological agathism here, no psychological claim is being made here. The subsequent section, which introduces the "measuring art", and concludes that wrongdoing is the result of failure to use that art, assumes that wrongdoing is the result of erroneous estimate of goods/pleasures and evils/pains, i.e. of false belief on the part of the agent. On this, see pp. 87 and 88 of this paper.

¹⁷This translates the text's "worthy to overcome", d3-5. Thus the agent will either avoid doing *X* because of its un-*F*-ness, or do *X* because of its *F*-ness. If the agent should (= ought to) avoid doing *X* because of its un-*F*-ness rather than do *X* because of its *F*-ness, then (and only then) the *F*-ness "is not worthy to prevail" over the un-*F*-ness in determining correct action.

¹⁸Santas argues rightly that "*lambanein*" is supposed to explain, and thus cannot be taken as merely redescribing, *N's* doing *X*. It does not follow, however, that the verb "would introduce a referentially opaque or intensional context" (*ibid.*), if this means *N* chooses or seeks (Santas' equivalents or *lambanein*) the greater evils/pain, knowing them to be the greater (and choosing them for that reason?). The verb is still explanatory and not redescriptive if it is taken as I propose.

¹⁹Cf. n. 16 for the interpretation of the verbal adjectives. It may be objected that the argument is liable to the complaint made in this paragraph only if the moral/prudential interpretation is insisted upon. If, however, the psychological interpretation is allowed, the argument is equally unsatisfactory. For (a) there is no evidence that the many have previously admitted to psychological hedonism (cf. my remarks on M2, above); and if they have not, Socrates is merely foisting his own doctrine that everyone pursues only what he thinks to be good, applied to hedonism, upon them. And (b) even if they should accept psychological hedonism as true about their own actions, it does not follow that they must needs pursue that alternative which they believe to be most pleasant *on the whole*, but merely that they must needs pursue what they recognize as being pleasant. Since there are good linguistic reasons for ruling out the psychological interpretation, and since Socrates' argument is not improved by it, the moral/prudential interpretation should stand, even though it also renders Socrates' argument unsatisfactory.

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