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Socrates, the primary question, and the unity of virtue

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ABSTRACT

For Socrates, the virtues are a kind of knowledge, and the virtues form a unity. Sometimes, Socrates suggests that the virtues are all 'one and the same' thing. Other times, he suggests they are 'parts of a single whole.' I argue that (i) the 'what is x?' question is sophisticated, it gives rise to two distinct kinds of investigations into virtue, a conceptual investigation into the *ousia* and a psychological investigation into the *dunamis*, (ii) Plato recognized the difference between definitional accounts of the *ousia* and a psychological accounts of the *dunamis*, and (iii) the distinction between these two investigations can effectively resolve various interpretive puzzles regarding the unity of the virtues. It is argued that the virtues are 'one and the same' psychologically, while they are 'parts of a single whole' conceptually.

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1. Introduction

Many of Plato's early dialogues allude to what has become known as the unity thesis, or thesis of 'the unity of the virtues.' It is argued for explicitly in the *Protagoras*, where Socrates adheres to the notion that all the virtues are knowledge, and that the virtues form a unity of some kind. It is not altogether clear what kind of unity Socrates is promoting in the *Protagoras*. The thesis that 'virtue is one' is often represented as an obscured equivalence, rather than an explicit identity. The **biconditional interpretation**, which is supported by Vlastos (1972), takes Socrates to be a proponent of the view that the virtues are distinct parts of a whole, each requiring a separate definition. On this interpretation, the thesis that 'the virtues are knowledge,' is understood to imply that each virtue is knowledge of a different kind (so that courage is knowledge of P, temperance knowledge of Q, justice knowledge of R, and so forth). The virtues

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form a unity simply because they are inseparable – if one has possession of one of the virtues, she will necessarily possess them all.

An alternate view is the **identity interpretation**, which is defended by Penner (1973). On this interpretation, Socrates is said to reject the thesis that the virtues are distinct parts of a whole. The thesis 'virtue is one' is taken quite literally, and Socrates is thought to endorse the view that the different virtues are actually one and the same thing (knowledge of good and bad). In this essay, I will examine the unity thesis, and provide a resolution to certain complications brought out by Devereux (1992), who maintains that there is a discrepancy between the *Protagoras* and the *Laches* – Socrates defends the identity view in the *Protagoras*, but he endorses the biconditional view in the *Laches*. The so-called 'discrepancy' reaches well beyond these two dialogues. But I will argue that it can be explained away. I overturn the discrepancy by recognizing *two distinct levels of inquiry* in early Plato. I believe the primary question of the early dialogues (what is *x*?) serves to introduce two distinct searches, which are conveniently outlined in the *Laches* and the *Euthyphro*, and finally brought together in the *Meno*. In order to appreciate the complexity of the unity thesis, we must recognize the dual function of the primary question. If successful, my project will change the way we approach the dialogues of definition, and broaden our understanding of Socratic doctrine. I will begin by discussing Socrates' commitment to the identity view in the *Protagoras*.

2. Socrates and the unity of virtue

At a crucial stage in the *Protagoras* (329 cd), Socrates asks his interlocutor whether (1) 'wisdom,' 'temperance,' 'courage,' 'justice,' and 'piety' are all names for one and the same thing, or (2) whether they are parts of a single whole. When Protagoras opts for the latter, he is confronted with the question of whether (a) their relation resembles the parts of a face, each possessing a distinct capacity, or whether (b) they resemble the parts of a piece of gold, 'which do not differ from one another, or from the whole, except in size.' At this point, Protagoras argues that the different virtues constitute a whole just as the parts of a face constitute a whole. It is a matter of controversy which position Socrates endorses. On the biconditional interpretation Socrates endorses (2); on the identity interpretation, Socrates endorses (1).

Vlastos asserts that the second claim, that the virtues are distinct *parts* of a single whole, is 'standard Socratic doctrine.' He cites passages from the *Meno* and *Laches* in support of his assertion.[1] According to Vlastos, Socrates himself would have opted for (2) if he were confronted with the same question – the two alternatives provided by Socrates in response to Protagoras' answer, (a) and (b), seem to indicate that (1) cannot be the unity relation that Socrates has in mind. However, it is common in the early dialogues for Socrates to proceed with his questioning using only those premises that are granted by his

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interlocutor. If this is the case in the *Protagoras*, the alternatives that Socrates presents to his interlocutor may not reflect his own view at all. It is certainly true that some passages in the *Meno* and *Laches* present problems for the idea that Socrates endorses (1). But leaving other dialogues aside, a careful reading of the *Protagoras* will suggest that this is precisely the view that Socrates defends in our dialogue. In fact, Socrates states his own view at 331b: 'On my own behalf, I myself would assert that justice *is* pious and that piety *is* just… that justice is *the same thing as* piety or as similar as possible …'[2] Protagoras understands Socrates to be defending the position that the virtues are all 'one and the same thing.' At 350d4, he recognizes that Socrates is trying to draw this conclusion, as Socrates recapitulates the two positions that are in play. Socrates asks Protagoras whether the virtues stand for a single thing, or whether each virtue has a particular thing underlying it, 'a thing with its own separate capacity' (349b). The context plainly indicates that they are resuming the previous discussion with the same two positions, and that Protagoras will continue to support (2). If (1) is still the active alternative to (2), then it would seem that Socrates is the one maintaining it. The conclusion of the dialogue appears to confirm this hypothesis, since Socrates reaches the conclusion that all the virtues are 'one and the same' knowledge (361a).[3]

If Socrates does defend the identity view in the *Protagoras*, then it is necessary to explore the deeper question of how this identity relation should be understood. An intriguing suggestion is made by Penner. His explanation begins with the primary question of the early dialogues. He explains that the 'what is *x*?' question (e.g. 'what is courage?' or 'what is temperance?' or 'what is piety?') is generally understood to be a request for either the meaning of the word '*x*,' or for the essence of *x*. The biconditional interpretation will typically take the primary question to be a request for the *essence* of *x*. It is a request for a conceptual analysis, which requires a definition that picks out *all* and *only* instances of '*x*,' so that the underlying essence (οὐσία) can be grasped.[4] It is in this way that the thesis of the biconditional interpretation (the thesis that the virtues are distinct parts of a whole) becomes agreeable, seeing that the virtue-names correspond to distinct essences.

This, however, is not how Penner understands the primary question. According to Penner, the 'what is *x*?' question is a request for the psychological state, or the capacity (δύναμις), responsible for making a virtuous person virtuous. When we encounter the question 'what is temperance?' it is a request for an account of the psychological state of the temperate person, the very psychological state which makes the temperate person temperate (1973, 80). For this reason, Penner refers to such questions as 'the general's question' – a question designed for the purpose of discovering that quality, the imparting of which will make a person virtuous. Once Penner makes this clarification, it is much easier for him to defend the identity interpretation. It amounts to the claim that the very same psychological state (δύναμις) lies behind each of

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the individual virtues. This underlying psychological state is a kind of knowledge, more precisely, knowledge concerning good and bad. Therefore, strictly speaking, the virtues *are* one and the same thing – knowledge of good and bad.

Perhaps this explanation sheds light on the *Protagoras*, where Socrates defends the view that the virtues are 'one and the same thing.' Unfortunately, it appears to conflict with Socrates' position concerning the virtues in other dialogues. As Vlastos points out, parts of the *Meno* and *Laches* seem to indicate that Socrates endorses the notion that the virtues are parts of a single whole – (2). And Penner's explanation doesn't seem to account for the fact that it is often a definition that Socrates is after. In such cases, it would seem that the essence (οὐσία) is being pursued, not the psychological state. Of course, given the complexity of the early dialogues, it is certainly possible that both features are present. In other words, it is possible that the primary question serves to introduce *two distinct searches*. This is precisely what I intend to uphold. I will suggest, in keeping with Penner, that there are passages in the early dialogues where the psychological state (δύναμις) of the virtuous person is the object of inquiry. (The *Protagoras* would seem to be an example of this). It is with respect to *these* inquiries that Socrates endorses the identity view (1), so that the identity interpretation is correct to this extent.[5] In other places, however, Socrates and his interlocutor(s) are engaged in a search for the *essence* (οὐσία) of a particular virtue. Such inquiries aim to establish a definition capable of picking out *all* and *only* instances of the virtue in question.[6] It is with respect to their definitions, as well as their essences, that the virtues are considered distinct parts of a single whole (2), and the biconditional interpretation is correct to this extent. Previous commentators have attempted to reconcile Socrates' claims about virtue by invoking similar distinctions. Brickhouse and Smith, for example, have suggested that (1) holds for the *extension* of the individual virtue-names, while (2) holds for their *intensions*. But such commentators have failed to identify the *two distinct levels of inquiry* that would give rise to such a distinction in the text.[7] The presence of *two distinct levels of inquiry* will explain the complexity of the unity thesis, and allow readers to understand *why* Socrates is making claims that appear to conflict. In what follows, I intend to bring these two levels of inquiry to the surface. I will call the search for an underlying psychological state the **psychological level of inquiry**, or simply the 'psychological search.' Socrates endorses the identity view here, at the psychological level. Meanwhile, I will call the search for definition the **conceptual level of inquiry**, or simply the 'conceptual search.' Socrates endorses the biconditional view here, at the conceptual level. I will demonstrate that the psychological search can be outlined through various passages in the *Protagoras* and *Laches* (Sections 3–5), that the conceptual search can be outlined through various passages in the *Euthyphro* and *Meno* (Sections 6–7), and that the *Meno* finally verifies that these two searches are in fact distinct (Section 8).

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3. *Protagoras* and the psychological search

The clearest formulation of Socrates' concern in the *Protagoras* occurs at 349b:

> (P) Are the five names (ὀνόματα) of wisdom, temperance, courage, justice, and piety attached to one thing (ενὶ πράγματί), *or* underlying each of these names is there a distinct essence (οὐσία) *and* (και) a distinct thing (πρᾶγμα) that has its own particular capacity (δύναμιν), each being different from the others?

The first disjunct represents Socrates' position in the *Protagoras*. But for the moment, let us focus our attention upon the second. By asking whether the virtue-names have (a) a distinct essence (οὐσία) *as well as* (b) a distinct thing (πρᾶγμα) underlying them with its own particular capacity (δύναμις), Socrates is making a distinction between two potentially separate questions. Throughout the *Protagoras*, the discussion focuses on (b), the particular *thing* (πρᾶγμα) underlying virtue, or the particular *capacity* (δύναμις). The *essence* (οὐσία) of virtue is never pursued in the *Protagoras*. Of course, the passage could be interpreted in such a way that οὐσία and πρᾶγμα are merely synonymous, or somewhat redundant, so that the occurrence of οὐσία adds nothing significant to the content of the question. This is how commentators have typically interpreted (P).[8] However, the passage might be interpreted quite differently. It might be read as suggesting that the *essences* (οὐσίαι) of the virtues are in fact distinct, and that the only remaining question is whether the underlying πράγματα (and corresponding δυνάμεις) are distinct as well.[9] I think this alternate interpretation is correct. After all, (P) is presented as a recapitulation of an earlier passage (329c-330c) in which Protagoras had assured Socrates that each of the individual virtues are 'distinct from the others' (331a5). Remarkably, Socrates responded with a follow-up question: 'Does each [virtue] *also* have its own particular *capacity* (δύναμις)?'[10] In this way, it is made clear that, even after the virtues are deemed distinct somehow, another question remains – whether the virtues also refer to distinct psychological states or capacities. We will return to this suggestion shortly. For now, let us note that the *Protagoras* examines the πρᾶγμα and δύναμις, with hardly a mention of essence (οὐσία).[11] Socrates and Protagoras are engaged in the psychological search. They are seeking the *thing* (πρᾶγμα) in the world to which the virtue-names refer. This involves either a single capacity (δύναμις) or multiple capacities. The question of how virtue is imparted (παραγίγνεσθαι) will depend entirely upon the nature of these capacities. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates equates virtue with a single capacity, the knowledge of good and bad, which is later described as the science of measurement. By doing so, he apparently abandons (2), the notion that the virtues are distinct parts of a single whole, the central notion of the biconditional interpretation.

4. The Devereux discrepancy

Devereux acknowledges Socrates' commitment to the identity view in the *Protagoras*; but he notices that, in the *Laches*, Socrates clearly states that the

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virtues are parts of a whole. This favors the biconditional interpretation over the identity interpretation, since the part-whole relationship is compatible with the former, not with the latter.[12] It is made explicit at 190c9-11, where Socrates suggests that their task would be overwhelming if they began by considering the whole of virtue. They ought instead to consider a part of it first.

> (L1) Let us not, therefore, my good friend, inquire forthwith about the *whole* (ὅλης) of virtue, since that may well be too much work for us; but let us first see if we are sufficiently provided with knowledge of some *part* (μέρους τινὸς) of it. In all likelihood this will make our inquiry easier. (190c)

Socrates remains loyal to this view throughout the *Laches*. In fact, he turns down Nicias' suggestion (194e) that courage is a kind of knowledge (knowledge of what is to be feared and dared), which turns out to be identical to the knowledge of good and bad. According to Devereux, if Socrates were still committed to the identity view, he would have availed himself of this definition.[13] But even if we employ the biconditional interpretation of the *Protagoras*, Devereux argues, Socrates' position in the *Laches* would remain incompatible. In the *Protagoras*, each of the five virtues is given an equal status,[14] and they are all somehow associated with knowledge. In the *Laches*, however, Socrates treats four of the virtues (justice, courage, temperance, and piety) equally as parts of a whole, while wisdom is said to be the elite virtue that constitutes the whole itself. This is precisely what leads Devereux (1992, 788) to conclude that, in the *Laches*, 'Plato … articulates a more coherent doctrine … he drops the claim that the virtues are identical … and develops and refines the idea that the virtues are parts of a whole, and that wisdom is the key to their unity.'

5. *Laches* and the psychological search

If the Devereux discrepancy can be explained away, Devereux's conclusion will not be required. My suggestion is that the *Laches* features a Socratic endorsement of both (1) and (2); Socrates is committed to both the identity view and the biconditional view. In the lengthy introduction of the *Laches*, Socrates joins a conversation about the correct way to train, teach, and raise young men. He then motivates the question of how virtue can be imparted (παραγίγνεσθαι). This is a fitting prelude to the general's question. In fact, once the primary question (what is courage?) has been posed at 190d, Socrates narrows the investigation by providing an example. According to Socrates, quickness is 'the *capacity* (δύναμις) to get a great deal done in a short amount of time.' He then summons Laches to provide a similar answer for courage:

> (L2) So now try to tell me on your part, Laches, about courage in the same way: what *capacity* is it (τίς οὖσα δύναμις), the same whether in pleasure or in pain or in any of the things we said just now it was to be found, that has been singled out by the name courage. (192b6-9)

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Socrates makes it perfectly clear that they are seeking a capacity (δύναμις) responsible for making the courageous person courageous. Moments later, this is described as a natural quality (πεφυκὸς) in the soul (192b), and also as the noble thing (πρᾶγμα) designated by the name 'courage' (192d). Socrates never once asks for the *essence* (οὐσία) of courage in the *Laches*. In this respect, the investigation resembles the *Protagoras*.[15]

But in the *Protagoras*, Socrates argued that the virtues are one and the same thing. Thus, he appeared to abandon the notion that the virtues are distinct parts of a whole. In the *Laches* (L1), he endorses this notion. In fact, when Nicias proposes the identity relation (195c) he had once heard from Socrates (namely, that courage and wisdom are *the same thing*), this allegedly *Socratic* account of virtue is met with strong resistance from Laches, who says 'surely wisdom is distinct (χωρίς) from courage.' And curiously, Socrates appears sympathetic to Laches' concern:

> (L3) 'What is Laches saying, in your opinion, Nicias? There does seem to be something in what he says [i.e. that wisdom is *distinct* from courage].' (195c)

It appears that Socrates' interlocutors must either abandon (a) the notion that courage and wisdom are distinct *parts* of virtue, or (b) the account of courage as 'knowledge of what is to be feared and dared,' which is identical to the knowledge of good and bad (the *whole* of virtue). These two options create an apparent dilemma. The dilemma is compelling enough to generate the dialogue's *aporetic* ending. But the dilemma is false.[16] The two options are in fact compatible, and the Socratic solution is to accept both (a) and (b).

To retrace this solution in the dialogues, we must return to (P), where it was originally implied that the virtue-names have distinct essences (οὐσίαι), but where Socrates was also defending the identity view, which says that the virtues refer to a single capacity (δύναμις). Now we find that the *Laches* also features a Socratic identity statement together with a Socratic endorsement of the notion that the virtues are distinct parts of a single whole. My suggestion is that Socrates retains the identity view at the psychological level, while holding that the virtues are *definitionally distinct*, each possessing a distinct essence (οὐσία).[17] In order to support this interpretation, it will be necessary to explore the notion of *essence* (οὐσία), and to clarify the conceptual search, which I take to be a search for definition.

6. *Euthyphro* and the conceptual search

It is not uncommon for Plato scholars to describe Socrates' preoccupation with the primary question as a search for definition. Even Aristotle understood the question this way:

> Socrates busied himself concerning the ethical virtues and was the first to seek to *define* (ὁρίζεσθαι) them universally … He was reasonable in seeking the what it is; for he sought to syllogize, and the what it is is the starting point of syllogisms. (*Metaphysics* 1078b17-29)

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Socrates' preoccupation with definition is most prominent in the so-called 'dialogues of definition.' As Charles Kahn has pointed out, there are three dialogues in particular, *Laches-Euthyphro-Meno*, which form 'a unified exposition on the logic of definition.'[18] About this, there seems to be general agreement among scholars. Still, some have resisted the temptation to speak in terms of definition. Hugh Benson, for instance, is quite cautious:

> … appealing to definitions here is problematic for at least two reasons. First, pointing out that in asking these sorts of questions Socrates is looking for definitions of the relevant F-nesses (piety, courage, temperance, etc.) only pushes the question back. One wants to know what features are required for definitions of the relevant F-nesses. Second, talk of definitions is potentially misleading since it is likely to carry with it anachronistic connotations concerning the nature of definition. (Benson 2013, 136)

I sympathize with Benson's caution. But I also believe that Plato provides a unified exposition on the logic of definition, and that a careful examination will reveal those features which, for Plato, are necessary for an adequate definition.[19]

The *Euthyphro* contains a search for definition. It exhibits an interlocutor who inquires with Socrates at the conceptual level, rather than the psychological level. The primary question (what is piety?) is introduced at 5d, arising in response to Euthyphro's profession of knowledge. Euthyphro thinks he has expert knowledge of divine matters; and thus, he is unafraid that, in prosecuting his father for murder, he is doing wrong. But when Euthyphro provides his first answer that piety is 'what [he is] doing now,' Socrates responds promptly, clarifying the object of inquiry:

> (E1) this is not what I asked you, to tell me one or two of the many pious acts, but to tell the essential quality (το εἰδός), by which all pious things are pious (ᾧ πάντα τὰ ὅσια ἐστιν) … give me what this quality is that I may keep my eye fixed upon it (ἀποβλέπων) and employ it as a model (παραδείγματι), if anything you or anyone else does agrees with it, may say that the act is pious, and if not, that it is impious. (6e)

Socrates is asking for the essential quality (εἶδος) common to all pious things. He is seeking the distinctive feature of both pious *acts* and pious *persons* (7a).[20] Thus, the inquiry takes a different description than that of the *Laches* and *Protagoras*, where Socrates had sought the particular capacity (δύναμις) of the virtuous person, and where Socrates never once asked for the quality (εἶδος) unique to courageous things in general. Nor was Socrates seeking there (in the *Laches - Protagoras*) to establish a model (παραδείγματι) upon which to fix the eye, as he does here (E1). Conversely, here in the *Euthyphro*, the language of the psychological search is nowhere to be found: Socrates does not request a thing (πρᾶγμα) in the world,[21] nor does he request the underlying capacity (δύναμις) of the pious person, nor does he request a natural quality (πεφυκὸς) in the soul. Bearing these facts in mind, it appears that Socrates is requesting something very different in the *Euthyphro*. I contend that he is requesting a *definition*, and seeking to clarify the *concept* of piety.

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Socrates usually rejects an answer to the primary question by showing that it is either too *broad* or too *narrow*. He wants to capture *all* and *only* instances of the virtue. This is true of the *Euthyphro* most of all. But why should we think that Socrates is requesting a *definition*? I suggest that we should, because Plato tells us to. Upon hearing Euthyphro's second answer, that piety is 'what is dear to the gods,' Socrates commends his interlocutor for his vast improvement.[22] He then explains that piety cannot be what is dear to the gods, since the gods are often in disagreement. And here, Plato further informs his reader about the object of inquiry.

> (E2) … we saw just now that piety and its opposite are not defined (οὐ ὡρισμενα) in this way … but shall we now emend our definition (ἐπανορθούμενα ἐν τῷ λόγω)…? (9c8 - d5)

The verb ὁρίζω (or ὁρίζεσθαι) serves as a convenient verb for definition – to mark out the boundaries of a word or concept. Also, when referring to these boundaries, Plato occasionally uses the term ὅρος.[23] Aristotle would later coin his own technical term for definition, ὁρισμός, from these words, and he would do so in a way that links the notion of *essence* to that of definition. In *Topics*, Aristotle explains that 'a definition (ὁρισμός) is an account (λόγος) that signifies an essence (οὐσία).'[24] In (E2), Plato makes it clear that he too will sometimes use the term λόγος to denote the *definiens*. And after amending the definition so that piety is 'what *all* the gods love,' Plato puts the verb of definition (ἡμῖν ὡρίσθαι) back into Socrates' mouth: 'Do you wish *this* now to be our definition (ἡμῖν ὡρίσθαι) of piety and impiety?'[25]

As Benson notes, appealing to definitions pushes the question back, so that it becomes necessary to determine what constitutes an *adequate* definition; but before we declare this a problem, let us decide whether a theory of definition emerges. We have witnessed that, for Socrates, an adequate definition will reveal the common quality (εἶδος) belonging to *all* and *only* instances of the virtue being defined. The definition must also serve as a standard (παραδείγμα) for us to look toward (ἀποβλέπτειν) as we judge whether or not something is virtuous. But this cannot be the whole story; for there is reason to think the present definition of piety (that which *all* the gods love) satisfies these criteria. It appears to preserve co-extension at any rate, since it is not criticized for being too broad or too narrow.[26] And yet, despite this, Socrates rejects the definition.

> (E3) Euthyphro, it seems that when you were asked what piety is you were unwilling to make clear its *essence* (τὴν οὐσίαν δηλῶσαι), but you mentioned something that has happened to (πάθος) this piety, namely, that it is loved by the gods. (11a-b)

For Socrates, an adequate definition will make clear the *essence* (οὐσία) of the thing being defined. Unfortunately, Euthyphro's definition fails to make clear the essence of piety; instead, it merely clarifies how the gods *feel* about piety. Euthyphro has offered a mere *pathos*. To make clear the essence of piety, his definition must articulate the unique characteristic responsible for making

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something an *instance* of piety. In other words, an adequate definition of *F* must state the *explanatory cause* of something's being *F*.

Now it might be tempting to conclude, as Ferejohn (1984) does, that the characteristic being sought here is just the capacity (δύναμις) of the virtuous person[27] so that, when all is said and done, there is *only one object* being sought after all. In other words, the essence of any individual virtue *just is* the capacity that underlies all the virtues. This interpretation would unify the primary question and restore the traditional notion that the *Laches* and *Euthyphro* are investigating virtue *at the same level*. But the single capacity (δύναμις) underlying virtue, as an object of inquiry, doesn't fit the profile we have been given in the *Euthyphro*. Insofar as the capacity (δύναμις) constitutes the whole of virtue, it won't provide an adequate model upon which to look (ἀποβλέπειν) when determining whether an act is *pious*. In other words, the capacity will not distinguish *pious* acts from *courageous* acts, nor *courageous* acts from *just* acts, and so on. As we have seen (E1), this is an explicit criterion of Socratic definition. It stands to reason that the *essence* (οὐσία) of piety will be something unique to piety itself, as a distinct part of virtue.[28]

At this point, one might suggest that there are distinct capacities (δυνάμεις) underlying each of the individual virtue-names. But this is also problematic. Socrates denies this position in the *Protagoras*. Furthermore, we must take into account the *extent* to which the language of investigation in the *Euthyphro* differs from the language of investigation in the *Laches* and the *Protagoras*. In those dialogues, Socrates openly examined the *capacity* (δύναμις) of the virtuous person. In the *Euthyphro,* Socrates makes no mention of capacities at all. Instead, he examines the *essence* (οὐσία) of piety. Those who take the *Euthyphro* and *Laches* to be conducting parallel searches will be hard-pressed to explain the omission of the term δύναμις from the *Euthyphro*, when this term is used frequently to narrow the search for courage in the *Laches*. Such commentators will also be hard-pressed to explain the omission of the term οὐσία from the *Laches*, when this term is used to narrow the search for piety in the *Euthyphro*. The presence of two distinct levels of inquiry (conceptual and psychological) will provide the best explanation of these facts.[29]

These terminological differences have been a topic of examination for David Wolfsdorf (2005), who makes a similar distinction among definitional dialogues.[30] According to Wolfsdorf, the 'what is *x*?' question is a request for the *referent* of '*x*.' As he puts it, the referent being sought in *Laches* and *Protagoras* is a psychological capacity (δύναμις), while the referent being sought in *Euthyphro* and *Meno* is a metaphysical Form (οὐσία). Unfortunately, if we accept Wolfsdorf's claim that the search for οὐσία is a metaphysical search for the *Form* of virtue, it will be difficult to make sense of the part-whole relationship that obtains between them. Wolfsdorf himself never explains this relation. I have suggested instead that we understand the search for essence (οὐσία) as a conceptual search for definition.[31] The passage above (E3) provides important information about the

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search for an essence. In traditional logic, we distinguish between the *extension* of a concept and the *intension* of a concept. The 'extension' indicates the set of objects picked out by the concept, whereas the 'intension' indicates the *internal description* under which it picks them out. In requesting the essence (οὐσία) of piety, Socrates is requesting something like the *intension* of 'piety.' According to Socrates, even if all and only pious things are *loved by all the gods*, this alone would not express the essential nature (οὐσία) of piety, because the definition (λόγος) does not state the explanatory cause, and being *loved by all the gods* is not intensionally equivalent to 'piety.' It may be helpful here to borrow an example from Quine, as some commentators have been inclined to do.[32] *Even if* all and only those creatures with a heart are creatures with a kidney, it still does not follow, and is indeed false to suppose that 'creature with a kidney' means the same thing as, or defines 'creature with a heart.' We learn from (E3) that an adequate definition for Plato requires something like an intensional equivalence between *definiendum* and *definiens*. This is an integral part of the process of 'making clear the essence' of piety.[33] The definition (λόγος)) of *F* must capture the *conceptual essence* of *F*, by expressing its intensional content, or by stating the characteristic that uniquely qualifies something as an instance of *F*.[34] A definition of this kind will serve as a standard by which to judge whether or not something is *F*.

7. Virtues as definitionally distinct

Socrates occasionally describes each virtue as a distinct *part* (μέρος) of a single whole. This has puzzled commentators who aim to explain the unity thesis. I suggest that the part-whole relation makes the most sense within the two-level account, where it fits nicely into the framework of the conceptual search. On my interpretation, Socrates considers the virtues (wisdom, justice, courage, temperance, and piety) to be conceptually, or *definitionally* distinct. The part-whole relation simply refers to a definitional overlap – the meaning of 'virtue' will be broad enough to encompass the various meanings of the individual virtue-names. And so, the fact that Socrates now suggests that piety is a 'part of justice' should not come as an unpleasant surprise.

> (E4) It was something of this sort that I meant before, when I asked whether where the just is, there also is piety, or where piety is, there also is the just; but piety is not everywhere where the just is, for piety is a *part* of the just (μόριον γὰρ τοῦ δικαίου τὸ ὅσιον). Do we agree to this? (12d)

Socrates is proposing a part-whole relation between justice and piety, and the suggestion occurs at the conceptual level. In the *Euthyphro*, there is no counteracting effort to unify the virtues into a single thing (δύναμις), as there was in the *Laches*. Piety and justice are conceptually distinct. Yet, it is clear that the definition of justice will somehow *encompass* the definition of piety, just as the definition of virtue will *encompass* the definitions of each of the individual

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virtues. And so, it is suggested here that 'justice' casts a wider net than 'piety,' just as it was suggested previously (L1) that 'virtue' casts a wider net than 'courage.'

Of course, the commentary above may seem unsophisticated in light of Socrates' analogy at 12d-e, where Socrates mentions 'number' and 'odd' to illustrate the overlapping relation between justice and piety. We should notice that 'number' and 'odd,' in addition to having different *intensions*, also have different *extensions* (which means that some instances of justice are not instances of piety). This may appear to threaten the *biconditional* view, as we can no longer contend that something is just *if and only if* it is pious. Yet, the example is not as threatening as it appears. As Brickhouse and Smith have observed, a perfectly good explanation is made available by the text.[35] Socrates initially requested the quality (εἶδος) distinctive of both pious *acts* and pious *persons* (7a), so that the definition might serve as a model by which to identify pious things *in general*. When it comes to *persons*, the virtue-names have the same extension (δύναμις), which is all biconditionality requires. Yet, when it comes to *actions*, they certainly do not. The virtue-names manage to pick out different *actions* by means of their different intensions (so that some just acts are not pious). If we suppose that 'justice' connotes something which expresses the right relation to others, and we suppose that 'piety' connotes something which expresses the right relation to the gods, then we can see how this part-whole relation might hold at the conceptual level, insofar as the 'gods' are considered a subset of 'others.'[36] But the mere fact that the *meanings* of these terms are related in this way does not imply that their *psychological states* must also be distinct. The virtue-terms may still refer to one and the same psychological state (δύναμις), the expert knowledge of good and bad. This is where the biconditional interpretation proves correct, since the conceptually distinct virtues are *inseparable* within the agent.

But this gives rise to another question. If indeed the virtues are identical with respect to the underlying psychological state, what explanation is there for their definitional variance? How exactly do the definitions vary?[37] A plausible suggestion comes from Brickhouse and Smith (1997, 2010). They explain that a single expertise can have different *applications*, and that these applications can be distinguished conceptually by their various *results* (ἔργα). In the early dialogues, when a virtue has been identified as a kind of scientific knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), Socrates will typically inquire into the result (ἔργον), as he does here (12e): 'What *result* (τινος ἔργου) would the science [piety], which provides service (θεραπίαν) to the gods, ultimately accomplish.' Sciences are distinguished from one another by reference to an *object* (the subject matter) and by reference to a *result* (the product). Medicine, for instance, concerns the body and produces health; carpentry concerns building-materials, and produces buildings. According to Brickhouse and Smith, the knowledge of good and bad (*qua* psychological state) will have different *applications*. These applications are differentiated conceptually by their results (ἔργα). On this interpretation, virtue as a whole produces benefit. Justice produces benefit *to others*, piety produces

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benefit *to the gods*, and so on. Unfortunately, this interpretation runs into problems. There is no indication that a single science will produce multifarious results. On the contrary, there is one clear indication that piety will *not* produce *benefit to the gods*. At 13a-b, the suggestion is abandoned under Socrates' influence.[38] Therefore, although I am in agreement with Brickhouse and Smith that the virtues are unified by a single psychological state (δύναμις), I cannot accept the claim that the virtues are distinguished conceptually by their individual *results* (ἔργα).

In response, Brickhouse and Smith may contend that the search for piety breaks down (13e 12) precisely where Euthyphro fails to identify the *result* of piety. In their most recent work (2010, 159–167), they suggest that Socrates actually *leads* Euthyphro into thinking about piety *as a part of justice* in terms of 'some distinctive result that [piety] produces.' For Brickhouse and Smith, piety will be distinguished from justice by means of its distinctive result (ἔργον). In my estimation, this is where Brickhouse and Smith have gone wrong. It is one thing to distinguish the virtues by means of identifying different *applications* of a single knowledge; it is quite another thing to distinguish the individual virtues by their distinctive *results*. A close examination of the *Euthyphro* will show that, although the investigation does break down where Euthyphro fails to identify the *result* of piety, this 'break down' is not a failure to distinguish piety *as a part of justice*. Euthyphro has already given Socrates a satisfactory answer about piety as a part of justice. At 12e 5, Euthyphro answers that piety is 'the part of justice concerned specifically with the service *to the gods* [rather than human beings].' Socrates applauds Euthyphro's answer (at 12e 8), saying the answer is 'very well-put!' From this moment forward, Socrates no longer questions Euthyphro about piety *as a part of justice*. This confirms that Socrates is satisfied with the answer Euthyphro has given.

Of course, Socrates does request one more small thing from Euthyphro. This 'small thing' concerns the 'all-noble *result*' of piety (πάγκαλον ἔργον).[39] But since the all-noble result is never discovered, there is nothing in the text that *rules out* the possibility that piety and justice will produce the *same* result. What we discover is that piety will *not* produce a benefit to the gods (13b). Thus, we are led to consider *who* receives the benefit; and the most plausible answer is that piety (like justice) results in a benefit *to human beings*.[40] It not unreasonable to suppose that piety and justice produce the very same result.

Even if piety and justice do produce the *same* result, they will be distinguishable already, simply in virtue of the *relational category* Euthyphro has outlined in his response at 12e 5. A unique *result* (for each of the putative virtues) is not exactly needed to fulfill the role of distinguishing them. In fact, we may have good reason to be skeptical of the idea that the virtues produce distinctive results (ἔργα). In Book 5 of the *Republic*, Plato offers an account of how different *capacities* (δυνάμεις) should be distinguished. At 477c1-d5, Socrates says 'that which relates to a different thing and produces a different thing, I call a

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different δύναμις.' If this is how Socrates distinguishes between different capacities (δυνάμεις), we have stumbled upon something important. For Brickhouse and Smith describe each virtue as having a distinct range of application *together with* a distinctive result. By doing so, I believe they are in danger of describing distinct *capacities*. This would undermine their own account of what *unifies* the virtues. We must take care, it seems, not to do *too much* to distinguish the virtues, lest we obliterate the thing that unifies them.

And so, let us now explore a related solution. In human life, there are indeed a number of *relational categories* toward which the knowledge of good and bad (*qua* psychological state) might be applied. The definitions of the individual virtue-names may simply outline these relational categories or domains. Justice, for instance, does involve one's relationship to others, as temperance involves one's relationship to self, and piety does involve one's relationship to the gods. Courage, it seems, involves one's relationship to an uncertain future. That being said, we should pay special attention to courage in this context, since the only definition privileged enough to bear the 'Socratic' label in the early dialogues happens to be the definition of courage as 'knowledge of what is to be feared and dared.' This definition surfaces both in the *Laches* (195a) and in the *Protagoras* (360c-d). Of course, the *capacity* (δύναμις) of the virtuous person is being sought in both dialogues. For this reason, the 'knowledge of what is to be feared and dared' is immediately equated with the knowledge of good and bad (the whole of virtue). Had Socrates been investigating the *essence* (οὐσία) of courage instead, the definition may have proven acceptable.[41] At any rate, the definition of courage constitutes the most promising definition of any virtue to be found in the early dialogues. If we follow this model faithfully, the definitions of the individual virtues may *diverge* simply because they outline different *relational categories* to which the knowledge of good and bad can be applied.[42] Since there is no independent result or accomplishment (ἔργον) mentioned within the context of this definition, and since no distinctive result is ever discovered for any of the putative virtues, I suggest that the virtues all share a single result (namely, εὐδαιμονία). This seems to be the implication of certain passages in the *Euthydemus* and *Charmides*.[43] The knowledge of good and bad, as a single capacity in the soul, is said to result in the production of good and happy human lives. I suggest, therefore, that *eudaimonia* is the shared result of the virtues, and that the 'all-noble result' of piety (as with any of the virtues) is the production of good and happy human lives.

But regardless of how we individuate the virtues, in the end, we learn that there is potential for reconciling the claim that the virtues are definitionally distinct parts (the biconditional view) with the claim that they are all one and the same psychological thing (the identity view). In the next section, we will turn to the *Meno*. The *Meno* offers compelling evidence that our two levels of inquiry are in fact *distinct*.

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8. *Meno* and the two distinct levels

In the opening lines of the *Meno*, Socrates is asked whether virtue can be taught:

> (M1) Can you tell me, Socrates, can virtue be taught? Or is it not teachable but the result of practice, or is it neither of these, but men possess it by nature or in some other way?

Meno's question is connected to the psychological search – it is the same question that generated the unity thesis in the *Protagoras*.[44] The *Laches* too arose from the question of whether virtue can be taught.[45] In these dialogues, the question was a request for the psychological state of the virtuous person. The same holds for (M1), where Meno wants to discover how the psychological state of virtue comes to be present. Yet, Socrates' response (71a-b) is important:

> (M2) If I do not know *what* (τί) something is, how could I know *the sort of thing* (ὁποῖον) it is?

Socrates is distinguishing between two separate questions (again), and his response implies that one must be answered before the other.[46] This has come to be known as the Priority of Definition: Socrates is insisting that the first question *what virtue is* (τί) is epistemically prior to the second question *the sort of thing virtue is* (ὁποῖος). I will argue that the second question (ὁποῖος) concerns the psychological state (δύναμις) of the virtuous person, as evidenced by (M1), where Meno sought to know *how* the psychological state arises. The prior question (τί) concerns the *definition* (οὐσία) of virtue.[47] For, despite (M1), the initial investigation of the *Meno* is heavily decorated with the vocabulary of the conceptual search. According to Socrates, an answer to the first question (τί) must pick out *all* and *only* those things that are virtuous (73d); it must make clear (δηλῶσαι) the essence of virtue (72b-c); and it must serve as a standard (παραδείγμα) by which to judge whether an action is virtuous (72c). The object of inquiry is finally stated at 72a-c.

> (M3) … suppose I should ask what the *essence* (οὐσίας) of the bee is, *what it is* (ὅ τι ποτ' εστι)? … so likewise with the virtues, however many and various they may be, they all have one common quality (εἴδος) whereby they are virtues. (72a-c)

Commentators agree that the first section (70–77) of the *Meno* resembles a dialogue of definition.[48] The vocabulary echoes the search for piety in the *Euthyphro*. That being said, Meno has a very different agenda, as his opening lines indicate. He intends to inquire at the psychological level, to develop a psychological theory.

Socrates is perfectly aware of Meno's agenda. When Meno fails to offer an adequate definition, Socrates issues three *types* of answers that could be given in response to the 'what is *x*?' question. The first two examples answer the question 'what is shape?' while third example answers the question 'what is color?'

(1) 75b10: 'shape is that which, alone of the things that are, always accompanies color.'

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(2) 76a: 'shape is the limit of a solid.'
(3) 76d: 'color is an effluence from shapes which is commensurate with sight and perceptible.'

The examples appear to offer rare insight into the *type* of answer Socrates wants from the primary question. Unfortunately, the relations between these examples, and their precise Socratic rankings, have been the subject of controversy. For this reason, interpreters have suggested that Socrates (and perhaps Plato too) had no clear idea of the *type* of answer the primary question required.[49] I think this suggestion is incorrect. My own opinion is that the examples above provide valuable insight into the *relation* between our two distinct levels of inquiry. They speak to the epistemic priority of the conceptual level over the psychological. In order to support this reading, I will examine the examples one-by-one, and provide an account of their precise Socratic rankings.

According to the first example (75b10), 'shape is that which alone, of the things that are, always accompanies color.' Socrates says he would be pleased if Meno could describe virtue in this manner. But Meno rejects the first definition because it uses a term that has not yet been discussed ('color'). Moments later, Socrates indicates (79d) that the criticism is mutual, saying 'if you remember [Meno] … *we* rejected the sort of answer that tries to give an answer in terms of things that are still being searched for, and have not yet been agreed upon.' But the first example is open to another (specifically *Socratic*) criticism. According to the example, color will always be accompanied by shape. And while this appears to leave open the possibility of having shape without color, we know that Socrates would not offer a definition that was too broad or too narrow. We must recognize that the example was meant to capture *all* and *only* instances of 'shape,' so that the terms are co-extensive.[50] Yet, if *definiendum* and *definiens* are merely co-extensive, the definition will fail to capture the essence (οὐσία) of shape. Recall the *Euthyphro*. Socrates rejected the definition of piety ('what all the gods love') because it failed to capture the essence of piety. Euthyphro had offered a mere *pathos*. The same criticism applies to our first example, which fails to capture the essence of shape. Despite preserving co-extension, it fails to state the characteristic that uniquely qualifies something as an instance of shape.[51]

According to the second example (76a), 'shape is the limit of a solid.' Socrates carefully secures the meaning of the relevant terms (limit, plane, solid) before offering this overtly geometrical example, which follows the standard pattern of a definition by genus and differentia, and is explicitly endorsed by Socrates, who later indicates (at 76e) that it is somehow better than the third and final example. In fact, the second example appears to satisfy Socrates' criterion for definition. There is no reason to think that it fails to capture the conceptual essence (οὐσία) of 'shape.' In contrast to the first example, Meno offers no criticism. He appears to accept the definition along with Socrates. Yet, he also appears curiously underwhelmed by the geometrical definition. He openly gravitates toward

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the third example instead. A careful reader will wonder *why* Meno favors the third example over the second, despite lacking a criticism of the second.[52] It is here that the 'two-levels' interpretation yields a most compelling explanation.

Prior to the third example, Meno confronts Socrates. He demands yet another *type* of answer to the 'what is *x*?' question. We have observed that Meno, from the very beginning, has expressed *more* of an interest in a psychological theory of virtue than a definition. Socrates apparently recognizes this, and responds appropriately (76a-b).

> (M4) How overbearing of you, Meno, to press an old man to answer such *matters* (πράγματα) when you will not trouble yourself to recollect and tell me *what* Gorgias says virtue is (τί). (76a-b)

Socrates is aware that Meno wants an account of the natural thing (πρᾶγμα) of virtue. Thus, at 76d, Socrates reluctantly agrees to indulge Meno 'in the manner of Gorgias,' giving his interlocutor the kind of answer he wants.

According to the third and final example, 'color is an effluence from shapes which is commensurate with sight and perceptible.' Needless to say, Meno finds the answer completely satisfactory (76d), while Socrates has reservations. We should notice that the answer is based on Empedocles' theory of vision: Meno's preferred answer fits within the framework of a scientific theory related to a particular capacity (δύναμις), the capacity of the human eye. Socrates does not *reject* the third example. But when Meno exclaims that it is 'excellently put!' Socrates says the second example is better. According to Socrates, Meno would prefer the second example too, if he would remain long enough to hear about it. But Meno won't be converted, as he makes perfectly clear (77a) 'I would stay, Socrates, if you would give me many such answers.'

These examples (2 and 3) therefore expose a methodological disagreement between Socrates and Meno concerning the examination of virtue. Socrates' model-answer (example 2) is framed in accordance with the conceptual level of inquiry, and is meant to capture the essence (οὐσία) of shape; Meno's model-answer (example 3) is framed in accordance with the psychological level, and is meant to offer a scientific explanation of the natural phenomenon (πρᾶγμα) color, which involves a certain capacity (δύναμις). By my lights, Socrates endorses the second example for one reason: the conceptual search is epistemically prior to the psychological search.

As we shall see, this reading is supported by the dialogue's second portion (77–100) no less than by its first (70–77). As Meno persists, a visible shift occurs, from the vocabulary of the conceptual search to the vocabulary of the psychological search. At 77b, Socrates attempts to revive the conceptual search for definition, and instructs his interlocutor to trace the boundaries of virtue 'in the pattern … just now received.' Meno's answer is both defiant and informative.

> (M5) Well, in my view, Socrates, virtue is … to desire what is honorable and to be capable (δύνασθαι) to procure it. (77b)

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This answer is conveniently summarized (78c) as 'the ability (δύναμις) to procure good things.' In this way, Meno conforms his answer to his own preference (example 3),[53] rather than following the pattern of Socrates' model-answer (example 2). It is noteworthy that Meno's answer resembles the Socratic account of quickness from *Laches*, where Socrates openly engaged the psychological search.[54] But Socrates is not seeking this type of answer in the *Meno*. He is seeking an answer to the conceptual search, which requires a definition. For this reason, Socrates reconstructs Meno's answer (78c5), omitting the psychological term so that virtue is 'being of the sort to acquire good things.' Once Meno's list of good things is exposed (health, wealth, status) it becomes clear that such things can be acquired either justly or unjustly. Meno is forced to agree that the *just* acquisition of good things is required, which allows Socrates to reject the definition on grounds that it defines the *whole* of virtue, using a *part* of virtue.

> (M6) I gave examples of how it was necessary to answer, but you were careless about this, and you say to me that virtue is to be of the sort (οἷον) to acquire good things with justice. But this you say is a *part* (μόριον) of virtue … as if you had told me what the *whole* (το ὅλον) of virtue is. (79b-c)

As Socrates pushes the conceptual search, it is suitable that he should exploit the part-whole relation. For, as it turns out, Meno cannot find his way through the conceptual landscape. At 79b, the primary question (what is virtue?) is posed once again. Meno must start the conceptual search over 'from the top.'

Perhaps out of frustration, Meno responds with his famous paradox. He asks how Socrates can even *look* for virtue, when he does not know at all what virtue is. (If Socrates already knows what virtue is, he need not look for it. But if he does *not* know what virtue is, he won't recognize a virtue once he encounters it). Socrates' answer involves the theory of recollection, which I do not have space to discuss.[55] I will confine myself to the discussion that follows the demonstration (82b-85b) using the slave boy, a demonstration that can be summarized with one key insight: knowledge of *what something is* (τί) can be attained, like geometrical knowledge, by searching one's own inner resources.[56]

Having once labored to convince Meno that it is worthwhile to continue the search for definition (85b- 86d), Socrates starts the conceptual search again, but only to find more resistance:

> (M7) but Socrates, I should be most pleased to investigate and hear your answer to my original question (ἠρόμην τὸ πρῶτον), whether we should try on the assumption that virtue is something teachable, or is a natural gift (ἢ ὡς φύσει), or in whatever way it comes to men (παραγιγνομένης τοῖς ἀνθρώποις)? (86c-d)

Predictably, the Priority of Definition is presented again. Socrates informs Meno that he really ought to inquire into the *essence* of virtue before considering whether virtue is *the sort of thing* to be taught. The persistence of Meno prevails.

> (M8) Had I control over you, Meno… we should not have begun considering whether virtue can be taught until we had first inquired into the prior question of *what it is* (πρὶν ὅτι εστι πρῶτον ἐζητήσαμεν). But since…you try to control me, I will yield to

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> your request – what else am I to do? ... It seems that we are to consider *the sort of thing* (ποῖον) something is, of which we know not *what it is* (ὅτι ἐστίν)! (86d)

Now, in order to examine *the sort of thing* virtue is, they must bypass the prerequisite definition, and proceed by use of a hypothesis (ὑπόθεσις). From this moment, the language of investigation shifts entirely from the language of the dialogue's first section (70–75) which featured the vocabulary of the conceptual search, to that of the dialogue's second section (75–100) which features the vocabulary of the psychological search. Commentators have failed altogether to notice this shift. Even Wolfsdorf (2005), who examines the subtle difference in terminology among definitional dialogues, fails to notice the shift in terminology here in the *Meno*.[57] The shift begins with Socrates' three examples, which exposed a methodological disagreement between Socrates and Meno. Prior to these examples, the terms πρᾶγμα and δύναμις simply do not occur. After the examples, the terms εἰδός and οὐσία simply do not occur.[58] A few passages will further illustrate this point.

> (M9) …let us investigate whether [virtue] is teachable or not by means of a hypothesis, and say this: Supposing virtue is some *sort of thing* (ποῖόν τί) concerning *that which exists in the soul* (περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ὄντων ἀρετή) will it be teachable or not? (87b)

In this passage, the second question of the *Meno* is permanently affixed to the psychological search. The new investigation will concern a psychological reality (περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ὄντων). Moments later (89d), Socrates ties this reality to the technical term, πρᾶγμα, and proceeds to solidify the connection (96a) through repetition.[59]

> (M10) Tell me this: if … any such *thing* (πρᾶγμα) is teachable, must there not be teachers and learners of it? (89d)
>
> (M11) Can you mention any other *thing* (πρᾶγματος) in which the professing teachers are not only refused recognition as teachers, but regarded … as poor with respect to the very *thing* (πρᾶγμα) they claim to teach? (96a)

This confirms that when Socrates previously agreed to switch from the prior question *what virtue is* (τί) to the secondary question *the sort of thing virtue is* (οποῖον), he thereby moved from the conceptual search for essence (οὐσία) to the search for a psychological state (πρᾶγμα). By keeping essences and psychological states distinct, and by emphasizing the priority of the conceptual level over the psychological level, the *Meno* vividly reconfirms the presence of *two distinct levels of inquiry*, and provides important information about the relationship between them. Finally, the investigation in *Euthyphro* is clearly concerned with the *essence* (οὐσία) of piety, while the investigations of the *Laches* and *Protagoras* are concerned with the *psychological state* (δύναμις) of the virtuous person. Thus, there is clear evidence that these two levels have been kept distinct throughout the dialogues of definition. Understanding the primary question as a springboard for two distinct searches manages to relieve a great deal of tension in the early dialogues, and it introduces a compelling new

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approach to Socratic doctrine. I have argued that this interpretation is essential to understanding the unity thesis.

Notes

1. See Vlastos (1972, 225), footnote 8.
2. ἐγω μὲν γὰρ αὐτὸς ὑπέρ γε ἐμαυτοῦ φαίην ἂν καί δικαιοσύνην ὅσιον εἶναι καὶ τὴν ὁσιότητα δίκαιον ... ὅτι ἤτοι ταὐτον γ᾽ ἐστι δικαιότης ὁσιότητι ἢ ὅτι ὁμοιότητατον. Here, Socrates explicitly endorses the identity view, or a view that approximates it. The passage indicates that Socrates has a personal stake in one of the alternatives proposed to Protagoras. This isn't merely dialectical procedure. In fact, Socrates says (333c) that he is 'examining equally both [himself] and the one answering.'
3. The relevant kind of knowledge is discussed in the arguments at 356d and 360d, it is depicted as the knowledge of good and bad. Although Socrates speaks as though this is an unforeseen conclusion, he is well aware of the fact that it is a particularly unsuitable conclusion for Protagoras, who is made to appear incompetent with respect to the very subject he claims to have expertise in.
4. Vlastos takes the question 'what is *x*?' to be a request for the meaning of '*x*,' which involves an attempt to discover the fundamental characteristic that makes something *an instance of x*. Vlastos' interpretation falls under (what Penner calls) the 'meaning view.'
5. Here, I follow Penner (1973) and Brickhouse and Smith (2010) in recognizing that the virtues are unified by a single psychological *capacity* (δύναμις). This is what Socrates is concerned with in the *Protagoras*.
6. I will argue that the *Euthyphro* contains an example of this.
7. Previous commentators include Brickhouse and Smith (1997) and an earlier account from Ferejohn (1982). I agree with Ferejohn's reconciliation of the seemingly incompatible texts, but here again, Ferejohn quite deliberately conflates what I take to be two separate searches. (I discuss this in §6). Nevertheless, my view can be seen as a descendant of theirs. For another approach, see Woodruff (1977). Woodruff reconciles the seemingly incompatible texts by claiming that the putatively different virtues share the same *essence*, but that they can still be distinguished because they have different *accidents*. I think Woodruff was on the right track, but he turns up the wrong distinction. He fails distinguishes the essence (οὐσία) from the psychological state (δύναμις), and therefore conflates the two searches I intend to outline.
8. Brickhouse and Smith (2010) may be the exception here. They agree that the δύναμις of a virtue is not the same as the δύναμις of a virtue. That being said, Brickhouse and Smith do not emphasize (P).
9. The term πρᾶγμα has several generic meanings (e.g. *thing, occurrence, reality, matter*). I intend to establish that, within the context of the primary question (what is *x*?), Plato is using πρᾶγμα technically, as a term of art associated with the search for *a real thing* in the world, perhaps a thing with causal power. In the case of virtue, this turns out be a *psychological* thing, or δύναμις. This will become evident as we examine key passages.
10. Socrates' initial formulation of the question (at 329c8) asks whether the virtue-names are 'all names of a single thing (πάντα ὀνόματα τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἑνὸς ὄντος).' The language of this formulation is neutral with respect to our present distinction, but once Protagoras claims that the virtues are each distinct (330a3), Socrates begins using a different set of terms – e.g. at 330a4 'Does each also have its

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own particular *capacity* (δύναμις)?,' or at 330c1: 'First, let us ask, is justice some *thing* (πρᾶγμα), or not a *thing* (πρᾶγμα)?' There is a clear shift in language, which supports the distinction I have drawn in passage (P), between the οὐσία of a virtue, and the πρᾶγμα or δύναμις.

11. It is surely significant that the only occurrence of the term οὐσία in the *Protagoras* is the occurrence mentioned in (P), while the term πρᾶγμα occurs several times in the context of the virtues (349b3, 349b3, 349c1, 355d, 347e, etc.). Moreover, the related term δύναμις occurs at least nine times (330a6, 330a4, 330b1, 331d6, 349b5, 349c5, 351a1, 351a2, 351b1, 356d4, 359a7, etc.) in the *Protagoras*.
12. See Devereux (1992). The part-whole relation, although consistent with the biconditional interpretation, does not directly support it. The fact that the individual virtues are proper parts of a single whole does not entail that the person possessing one virtue will therefore possess them all. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pointing this out. Furthermore, the part-whole relation is made especially complicated by the *Euthyphro*, where one virtue is described as being part of another virtue. See footnote 35 below.
13. Here, the upshot is that Nicias must either reject the notion that the virtues are parts of a whole (which was agreed to earlier), or he must give up his definition of courage as a kind of knowledge. Penner argues that Nicias could have solved this dilemma by asserting that courage is in fact knowledge of good and evil. Thus, according to Penner, it is Nicias who fails to avail himself of the conclusion. But it should be noted that Socrates doesn't exactly jump at the opportunity either. In fact, he appears to retreat, in order to emphasize the part-whole relation. See Penner (1997, 100).
14. The suggestion that courage is somehow different from the other virtues is short-lived.
15. See Wolfsdorf (2005), who notices the same terminological divide with respect to the dialogues of definition, and separates them in much the same way I do. That said, however, Wolfsdorf does not make use of the terms πεφυκός and πρᾶγμα, which are consistently used within the context of the psychological investigation. Nor does he apply his results to the unity thesis. In §8 I offer an analysis of the *Meno* that differs from Wolfsdorf's as well.
16. Ferejohn (1984) originally observed the falsity of this dilemma. Brickhouse and Smith (1997) also observed it, and offer a similar solution to the Devereux discrepancy. The solution is roughly that (a) is true, and courage is a distinct 'part' of virtue, since the virtues are definitionally distinct, while (b) is true, and courage is identical to the whole of virtue, because all the virtue-names refer to a single capacity in the soul. I believe this solution is the best available. In many ways, I am indebted to the interpretation of Brickhouse and Smith. But they did not notice the further connection between this solution and passage (P) from the *Protagoras*, and they fell short of identifying the two distinct levels of inquiry in the dialogues. It is also worth noting that they offer a very different answer to the question of how the individual virtues are conceptually distinct.
17. This can be taken as a sense-reference distinction, as long as the 'reference' of a virtue-name is further specified as the psychological state of a virtuous *person* (not the quality of an *action*). This is how Penner (1973) describes the entire unity debate, footnote 17. Penner doesn't notice that, on this construal, passage (P) can be read as the following question: 'do the virtues each have a distinct sense *and* a distinct *reference*?'

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18. See Kahn (1996, 149). I regard the *Laches* as a work that contributes to Socrates' theory of definition in a limited sense, since that dialogue primarily examines the *capacity* of the courageous person, and not the *essence* of courage.
19. See Kahn (1996, 172). He acknowledges that 'although it is irresistibly convenient to speak of the "dialogues of definition" we need to bear in mind that we come upon the concept of definition here *in statu nascendi*.' But Kahn too believes that this need not deter us from speaking in terms of definition.
20. Socrates is investigating a *generic* conception of piety, the quality shared by all pious things. Many different kinds of things can be described as pious – e.g. actions, temples, institutions, agents, etc. Incidentally, this marks an important difference between piety and courage, and it may help to explain why the generic quality is being sought here, while the psychic state of courage was being sought in the *Laches*. For more on this, see McPherran (2000).
21. The only occurrences of the term πρᾶγμα in the *Euthyphro* take place in the prologue, and refer to Socrates' *matter* in court (see 2c, 3c-e, 4d-e). There is one possible exception, at 12b.10, which occurs in the context of fear and reverence, not in the context of the primary question.
22. 7a: 'Excellent Euthyphro! Now you have answered as I sought an answer. However, whether it is true, I am not yet sure ….'
23. See, for instance, *Rep. I* 331d.
24. Aristotle, *Topics* 102a3.
25. Dancy (2004) argues that this is not best translated as 'definition,' for reasons that are unclear to me. The occurrence here is very similar to that of the *Charmides* (173a9), which he does render 'definition.'
26. Many commentators agree about this co-extensivity. See especially Kahn (1996), and Karasmanis (2006)
27. Ferejohn (1984, 15) says 'this power [δύναμις] is both the single thing of which all the virtue-terms are 'names' and the universal Socrates wants specified when he asks 'What is piety?' and so on.' Apart from his failure to distinguish the two separate searches, and their objects, I am in agreement with much of what Ferejohn has written.
28. The search for an essence (οὐσία) eventually develops into the remembrance of a Form (εἶδος), where our prenatal encounter with abstract objects has left a conceptual residue in our minds. This is another indication that Socrates is seeking something of a *conceptual* nature in the *Euthyphro*. As objects of inquiry, there is a significant difference between the *concept* of virtue, and the *psychological state* of being virtuous. And it seems quite unlikely that the latter would develop in the general direction of the Forms. We should conclude that the conceptual search is a prelude to the metaphysical theory of Forms, while the substantial search is a prelude to the psychological theory of the tripartite soul.
29. In fact, the key terms associated with the psychological search, δύναμις and πρᾶγμα, are never used in the context of the *Euthyphro*'s primary question. The key terms associated with the conceptual search, εἶδος and οὐσία, are never used at all in the *Laches*. Kahn (1996, 178), seems to notice this briefly, but offers little by way of explanation. He simply suggests that the *Euthyphro* builds off of the *Laches*. To my mind, this is hardly an adequate explanation for such clear separation of technical vocabulary.
30. However, Wolfsdorf depicts the *Meno* as a straightforward search for the metaphysical Form of virtue. I will argue that the *Meno* contains both a psychological and a conceptual search.
31. See footnote 28 above.

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32. See Allen's (1970, 50–55).
33. In this respect, I am in agreement with Kahn (1996, 175). Speaking of (E3), he says that Plato 'draws a line between the condition of extensional equivalence, which Euthyphro's definition satisfies, and the criterion of intensional content or "meaning," which it does not. And Plato's notion of intensional content is made quite precise in the argument by which Euthyphro is refuted.'
34. We should not be surprised if the Platonic Socrates differs from Aristotle on the nature of essences (οὐσίαι). Essences for Aristotle are things in the natural world. I am suggesting here that Socrates is seeking *conceptual essences*. The present interpretation therefore constitutes a departure from Woodruff. Woodruff takes Socrates to be searching for real definitions, or real essences. On Woodruff's account, the individual virtues share a single definition and a single essence. I maintain that the virtues have distinct conceptual essences. However, we should not think of the *conceptual search* merely as a search for *meanings*. The doctrine of essences will soon get linked to the metaphysical doctrine of Forms in the middle dialogues.
35. See Brickhouse and Smith (1997, 322). As they put it, 'this objection results from a failure to distinguish virtuous agents from virtuous acts.' I agree. The biconditional view requires only that an *agent* is pious *if and only if* she is also just, and so forth. In the *Euthyphro*, piety and justice have different extensions because some just *actions* are not also pious *actions*. There is no threat to the biconditionality interpretation, once the virtuous act/virtuous agent distinction is made. See also, McPherran (2000).
36. For similar conclusions about the scope of justice and piety, see also Ferejohn (1984), Taylor (1982) and Brickhouse and Smith (1997).
37. Devereux (1992) presents a possibility worth noting. He claims that there are additional qualities that accompany the knowledge of good and evil under certain circumstances. The quality of endurance in the *Laches* is just short of earning Socrates' approval, and therefore may have a place in the definition of courage. Thus, we might speculate about additional distinguishing qualities (accompanying the knowledge of good and evil) that are associated with each definitionally distinct virtue. However, if these additional qualities are *essential* to the concept of an individual virtue (e.g. courage), then they must find a place within the definition of 'virtue' itself, as a whole. This seems implausible. These additional qualities will most likely be *accidental* features of virtue. I owe this observation to Voula Tsouna.
38. 13b: '… I suppose you do not mean the sort of care we give to other things. The service of the gods is not like that … [where] care is given for the good and benefit of the object served … Are you prepared to say that, when you do a pious thing, you make some god better? ... By heavens, not I!' For more on this passage, see Taylor (1982), with whom I am in general agreement.
39. Socrates' request (13e 6-8) for the *result* of piety is often interpreted as a mere follow through on the question of how piety is related to justice. For this reason, it is tempting to conclude that a *distinctive* ἔργον is required to distinguish piety from justice. But this further temptation should be resisted. Even if we understand the passage as a 'follow through' on the question of how piety is related to justice, we should not be surprised, I think, if Socrates is steering his interlocutor toward an important *commonality* among the virtues. Socrates has been known to do this, even while investigating a single virtue (e.g. *Laches*). Nor again should we be surprised, I think, if a *shared* ἔργον is needed to complete the definition. After all, the virtues do share a single δύναμις.

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40. In the *Apology*, 24a-26c, 29d-31c, Socrates depicts his own service to the gods as a benefit to human beings.
41. It is noteworthy that the *only* technical term of the conceptual search found in the *Laches*, occurs once, in the context of *this* proposal. Prior to offering this definition, Nicias suggests that they are not 'defining' courage correctly (194c-d), and he uses the verb for definition, ὁρίζεσθαι. This may support the notion that the definition is acceptable at the conceptual level. The occurrence of ὁρίζεσθαι causes no trouble at all for the interpretation I have offered, since Socrates refrains from using such language himself throughout the entire dialogue, most of all during the clarification of their search at 192a-c, where he uses only the psychological vocabulary.
42. On my view, wisdom can be defined in terms of one's relationship to things typically valued (wealth, reputation, pleasure, friendship, truth, etc.), so that wisdom is knowledge of what is actually conducive to εὐδαιμονία, knowledge of good and bad. Justice can be defined in terms of one's relationship to others, it is 'knowledge of what is owed to others.' Temperance can be defined in terms of one's relationship to self, it is 'knowledge of what is owed to oneself.' And piety can be defined in terms of one's relationship to the gods, it is 'knowledge of what is owed to the gods.' But, although the individual virtues are conceptually distinct (by virtue of outlining certain *relational categories* essential to human flourishing), they are nevertheless one and the same psychological state, knowledge of good and bad. It turns out that there is only one thing owed in each case – the cultivation of εύδαιμονία.
43. *Charmides* 174b-c: '… life with knowledge does not make us do well and be happy (εὐδαιμονειν), *unless it is this knowledge*, [knowledge] of good and bad.' *Euthydemus* 280a- 281e: '… wisdom *everywhere* causes *men* to succeed: I presume she could never err, but must be right in act and result; otherwise she could no longer be wisdom… in this way, we could be happy (εύδαιμονιομεν) because of our present goods.' About this, I am in agreement with Ferejohn.
44. This is the 'general's question.' See *Protagoras*129b: 'So if you can demonstrate to us more explicitly that virtue is teachable, do not grudge us this demonstration ....'
45. At *Laches* 190a-b: 'And are not our two friends, Laches, at this very moment inviting us to a consultation in what way virtue may be established …?'
46. In my view, the two questions distinguished here – namely, τί and ὁπoῖον – are the same as those previously distinguished by Socrates in (P) concerning (a) οὐσία and (b) πρᾶγμα/ δύναμις. See page 6.
47. For a useful discussion of the priority of definition, see Ferejohn (2013, 28–33).
48. See, for instance, Robinson (1953, 122); Sharples (1985, 1); Freidlander (1964, 276); Irwin (1996, 127); Thomas (1980, 11).
49. Most recently, Charles (2006), who argues that Plato in the end conflates various different sorts of answers to the primary question, and is not ultimately clear about the difference between them.
50. Scholars who support the co-extensiveness of these terms are as follows: Karasmanis (2006, 137); Sharples, (1985, 131); Klein (1965, 59). See also Tuozzo (2007).
51. An action φ is not pious *because it is loved by the gods*. Similarly, a square is not a shape *because it accompanies color*. The first example fails to state the *intensional content* of 'shape.' I am in agreement with Gail Fine's (2010), she argues (against Charles) to the effect that, with the first two examples (1 and 2), Socrates is *not* ultimately pursuing two separate objects (signification and essence). Rather, both of these are aimed at capturing the essence of shape. Fine argues admirably

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that the signification question (co-extension) is merely a helpful step toward finding the essence, which is really the only thing Socrates is seeking in these examples (1 and 2).

52. Weiss (2001, 28), for instance, suggests that the second example is simply too 'unpretentious' for Meno.
53. Scott (2006, 31–32), puzzles about how Meno seems to have 'forgotten the lessons of the previous discussion.' My interpretation offers a solution he does not consider, namely that Meno is being *defiant* by offering a definition that fits his own preference, rather than that of Socrates.
54. In the *Laches*, at 192a, Socrates offered an example for Laches to follow, namely that quickness is 'the *capacity* (δύναμις) to get a great deal done in a short amount of time.'
55. See Fine (2014, 105–175).
56. See, for instance, Long and Sedley's introduction (2010, xviii).
57. Wolfsdorf considers the *Meno* a straightforward metaphysical search for the Form of virtue. See Wolfsdorf (2005, 340–347).
58. One exception is the occurrence εἰδός at 80a5, which is used in the context of Socrates' personal appearance, and not in the context of the primary question.
59. The term πρᾶγμα occurs at least 10 times, and each occurrence is well within the latter half of the dialogue.

Notes on contributor

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