

PROTAGORAS: 351c-356a-360e

From Hedonism to the Impossibility of Akrasia to Moral Intellectualism

First Argument (351c-355e, with special emphasis on 354e-355e)

1. S does avoidable X, knowing that X is bad, having been overcome by *pleasure*. [S is akratic]
2. Pleasure = the good. [Hedonism]
- So, 3. S does avoidable X, knowing that X is bad, having been overcome by *the good*. [1, 2, Leibniz's Law]
4. If the good outweighs the bad in S, then S does not do any avoidable thing, knowing that it is bad.
- So, 5. The good does not outweigh the bad in S. [3, 4]
6. The good fails to outweigh the bad only if the good is less than (or equal to) the bad.
- So, 7. The good is less than (or equal to) the bad in S. [5, 6]
8. If S is overcome by the good, then the good is greater than the bad in S.
- So, 9. The good is greater than the bad in S. [3, 8]
10. If X is less than (or equal to) Y, then X is not greater than Y.
- So, 11. The good is not greater than the bad in S. [7, 10]

Contradiction at 9 and 11. So, if 2 is true, then (assuming the truth of 4, 6, 8, and 10) 1 is false. In other words, if hedonism is true, then (assuming the truth of 4, 6, 8, and 10) akrasia is impossible.

Second Argument (355e-356a)

This argument relies on the premises of the First Argument:

12. The painful = the bad. [Hedonism]
13. If the F = the G, then 'F' and 'G' are everywhere intersubstitutable *salva veritate*. [See Principle of Intersubstitutability, Socrates' Theory of Definition]
- So, 14. S does avoidable X, knowing that X is *painful*, having been overcome by pleasure. [1, 12, 13]
- So, 15. If pleasure outweighs the painful in S, then S does not do any avoidable thing, knowing that it is painful. [2, 4, 12, 13]
- So, 16. Pleasure does not outweigh the painful in S. [14, 15]
- So, 17. Pleasure fails to outweigh the painful only if pleasure is less than (or equal to) the painful. [2, 6, 12, 13]
- So, 18. Pleasure is less than (or equal to) the painful. [16, 17]
- So, 19. If S is overcome by pleasure, then pleasure is greater than the painful in S. [2, 8, 12, 13]
- So, 20. Pleasure is greater than the painful in S. [14, 19]
- So, 21. Pleasure is not greater than the painful in S. [10, 18]

Contradiction at 20 and 21. So, if 2 and 12 are true, then (assuming the truth of 4, 6, 8, 10, and 13) 1 is false. In other words, if hedonism is true, then (assuming the truth of 4, 6, 8, 10, and 13) akrasia is impossible.

Objection and Reply (356a-357e)

The objection targets step 17 of the Second Argument (and so, by implication, also targets step 6 of the First Argument). As Socrates puts the objection at 356a, in answer to the question, "How else does pleasure outweigh pain, except in relative excess or deficiency?", someone might say that "the *immediate* pleasure is very much different from the pleasant and the painful *at a later time*". The thought here is that pleasure might outweigh pain, *not* by virtue of being *greater*, but by virtue of being *earlier* (the objects of comparison being, say, *present pleasure* and *future pain*). Or, alternatively, pleasure might fail to outweigh pain, not by virtue of being less (or equal), but by virtue of being

later (the objects of comparison being, say, *present pain* and *future pleasure*). In other words, the objector is suggesting that the fact of being in the present makes a pleasure or pain weigh more, and the fact of being in the future makes a pleasure or pain weigh less.

In reply, Socrates states at 356b that pleasure and pain “are not different in any other way than by pleasure and pain”. He recognizes that, just as “things of the same size appear...larger when seen near at hand and smaller when seen from a distance” (356c), things that are equally pleasant (or: painful) appear more pleasant (or: more painful) when they are to be experienced in the present and appear less pleasant (or: less painful) when they are to be experienced in the future. But this is an illusion that we can guard against if we have the right kind of knowledge, namely “the art of measurement”. In fact, anyone who possesses this knowledge will never choose a greater bad (pain) over a lesser good (pleasure) if he can avoid it. Thus, if anyone does some avoidable bad thing, the only possible explanation for this is that he is ignorant, in the sense of lacking the necessary “art of measurement” (357d), and the experience that the many erroneously describe as “being overcome by pleasure” is really nothing other than being (relevantly) ignorant (357e).

Final Argument (358a-360e)

Socrates then uses these results to argue for one of the central theses of moral intellectualism, namely that courage (one of the virtues) is a certain kind of wisdom (namely, the knowledge of what is and is not to be feared):

1. No-one willingly goes toward what he believes to be bad (and no-one willingly avoids what he believes to be good). [Impossibility of Akrasia: Conclusion of First and Second Arguments]
 2. Fear is the expectation of something bad.
 3. If X expects Y to be bad, then X believes Y to be bad.
- So,
4. No-one willingly goes toward what he fears (i.e., the things he considers or believes to be fearsome), and no-one willingly avoids the things he considers or believes not to be fearsome. [1, 2, 3]
 5. Cowards willingly avoid going to war.
- So,
6. Cowards do not believe that going to war is not fearsome. [4, 5]
 7. If S does not believe P, then S does not know P.
- So,
8. Cowards do not know that going to war is not fearsome. [6, 7]

9. Going to war is honorable.
10. Honorable things are good.
- So, 11. Going to war is good. [9, 10]
- So, 12. Going to war is not to be feared. [2, 11]
13. If going to war is not to be feared and cowards do not know this, then they are ignorant of what is and is not to be feared.
- So, 14. Cowards are ignorant of what is and is not to be feared. [8, 12, 13]
- So,
15. Ignorance of what is and is not to be feared is what makes cowards cowardly.
16. What makes cowards cowardly is cowardice.
- So, 17. Cowardice is ignorance of what is and is not to be feared. [15, 16]
18. Cowardice is the opposite of courage.
19. Wisdom (knowledge) about what is and is not to be feared is the opposite of ignorance of what is and is not to be feared.
20. To each opposite there is only one opposite.
- So, 21. Courage is wisdom (knowledge) about what is and is not to be feared. [17, 18, 19, 20]