

## Definitions of ἀνδρεία [courage] in Plato's Socratic dialogues

Three definitions of ἀνδρεία are expounded in Plato's Socratic dialogues, that by Protagoras in the *Protagoras*,<sup>1</sup> reprised by Socrates in the *Republic*, that by Socrates in the *Protagoras*,<sup>2</sup> reprised by Nicias in the *Laches*, and that by Laches in the *Laches*,<sup>3</sup> reprised by Isocrates,<sup>4</sup> Xenophon<sup>5</sup> and Aristotle.<sup>6</sup>

### Laches' definition of ἀνδρεία

The military specialty "fighting in heavy armor" (ἐν ὄπλοις μάχεσθαι) is represented in the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Prt.* 351b1–2: ἀνδρεία is from nature (φύσις) and from its good nurture (εὐτροφία) in souls.

<sup>2</sup> *Prt.* 360d4–5: ἀνδρεία is the σοφία of dire things (τὰ δεῖνα) and benign things (τὰ μὴ δεῖνα).

Earlier, at *Prt.* 349c4–5, Socrates simply equates ἀνδρεία and σοφία.

<sup>3</sup> *La.*192b9–c1: καρτερία (enduring resistance) is an essential characteristic of ἀνδρεία.

<sup>4</sup> *Orat. Panathenaicus* § 258,1 (referring to the Spartans' military invincibility): "To that fact no one could testify better (*sc.* than I) of their ἀνδρεία and καρτερία."

<sup>5</sup> *Sym.* 8.8.3: Socrates eulogizes Callias for loving Autolycus, characterizing the young man in a phrase in which ῥώμη (physical strength) and σωφροσύνη bracket καρτερία and ἀνδρεία.

<sup>6</sup> *Pol.* 7.1334a18–20: "Many necessities need be forthcoming to permit leisure-time activities. Thus it devolves on the city to exercise σώφρων leisure-time activities, and as well to possess an enduring and resisting (καρτερική) ἀνδρεία (*sc.* so that the city prevail in war and be preserved for the sake of peace and leisure-time activity)."

*Laches* as an innovation for the sake of portraying Laches' temperament.<sup>7</sup> Laches argues that the laughable failure of a previous military innovation, namely a sickle lashed to a spear, suffices to reject the same inventor's innovation of "fighting in heavy armor." Laches' rock steady temperament dulls him when face to face with learning new things, a personality type well described at *Tht.* 144b.<sup>8</sup> Theodorus contrasts that temperament with those possessing greater perspicacity yet are more manic than brave. Nicias immediately recognizes the utility of Stesilaus' innovation.

At *La.* 192a8–b2, Socrates sets down a definition of speediness that neatly accords with the facts of the matter, that in instances of speediness, many related particulars take place in a brief period of time. Socrates' definition of speediness is a self-evident verity.<sup>9</sup> The definition of speediness is followed apace by Laches' definition of ἀνδρεία. I argue that Laches' words also express a truth, self-evident to those who possess and have exercised ἀνδρεία, that once initiated, the exercise of ἀνδρεία may be essentially characterized as an enduring resistance (καρτερία). Isocrates, Xenophon and Aristotle read Plato's writings. As καρτερία and ἀνδρεία are paired only in the *Laches*, it seems that all had read that dialogue. In reprising Laches' characterization of ἀνδρεία, those authors testify that they read the remark as a

---

<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere in Plato (*Euthydemus*, *Gorgias*, the *Republic* and *Laws*), ἐν ὅπλοις μάχεσθαι is spoken of as a acknowledged military speciality.

<sup>8</sup> *Tht.* 144b1–2: οἳ τε αὖ ἐμβριθέστεροι νωθροί πως ἀπαντῶσι πρὸς τὰς μαθήσεις.

<sup>9</sup> At *Prt.* 343a8–b3, Socrates refers to the existence of true sayings, sage utterances as it were, which were repeated by all. Cf. August. *Conf.* 7.19: ". . . at one time, to put forth wise thoughts in words, at another, to remain silent" (*nunc proferre per signa sapientes sententias, nunc esse in silentio*).

truism and recognized that Socrates' refutation of it was specious.

Tasked by Socrates to define ἀνδρεία, Laches opines that a kind of καρτερία in the soul characterizes the exercise of ἀνδρεία in all matters. Socrates expands on Laches' notion that an enduring resistive ἀνδρεία may be exercised in all spheres of human activity, citing hoplites fighting in close order battle and Scythian cavalry ranging across battlefields. And more generally, in enduring painful circumstances of all sorts and even in resisting desires and the state of poverty. Laches agrees wholeheartedly that an enduring resistive ἀνδρεία is to be exercised in all circumstances.

Socrates goes on to invent dubious examples of καρτερία that are not καλόν [fine and honorable] and therefore not compatible with ἀνδρεία, thereby reducing Laches to *aporia* [self-doubt]. The fact of Laches' *aporia* does not disconfirm the veredicality of his remark.

### **Nicias' reprise in the *Laches* of Socrates' definition of ἀνδρεία in the *Protagoras***

After Laches is reduced to *aporia*, Nicias in turn offers a definition of ἀνδρεία, not his but borrowed. In the *Meno*, Socrates proposes that he and Meno "look into the things in souls" (τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν σκεψώμεθα [*Men.* 88a8–b1]). Meno looks into the things of his own soul, the only one available for him to look into. Meno affirms that in addition to seeing σωφροσύνη and justice in his soul, he sees ἀνδρεία, a quick wit, a strong memory and μεγαλοπρέπεια. Nicias does not possess ἀνδρεία in his soul, so cannot see it, and must borrow another's definition of it. Laches implies as much at *La.* 196c. Plutarch speaks of

Nicias' cowardice (τὴν δειλίαν), obscured by his good luck as a general.<sup>10</sup> When Socrates alludes to the common belief that fierce animals such as leopards, stags, bears, and boars possess ἀνδρεία, Nicias denies the truth of that belief, attributing the seeming ἀνδρεία of animals and children to unconsidered rashness. Nicias who does not possess ἀνδρεία himself is apparently unable to recognize it in animals and children. One wonders whether he would recognize ἀνδρεία exercised by a man. Laches and Alcibiades, who both possessed ἀνδρεία, recognized Socrates' exercise of ἀνδρεία in the press of headlong flight from a military defeat. To mitigate his aggressive interlocuter, Nicias grants that Laches and a general named Lamachos possess ἀνδρεία, likely relying on hearsay.

Nicias proposes that ἀνδρεία is the ἐπιστήμη [knowledge] of dire circumstances and benign circumstances in war and in all other affairs. That formulation reprises Socrates' definition of ἀνδρεία in the *Protagoras* expressed there in the grammar of a rhetorical question (*Prt.* 360d4–5):

(*sc.* Is not) the σοφία [wisdom] of dire and benign circumstances ἀνδρεία?

In effect, Socrates in the *Laches* subjects his own definition in the *Protagoras* to critical examination. Socrates observes that dire things (τὰ δεινὰ) prompt fear as benign things do not. Dire events in the past do not prompt fear. Fear in the present is the expectation of

---

<sup>10</sup> *Comparatio Niciae et Crassi* 2.4: "For by nature he (*sc.* Nicias) lacked daringness and (*sc.* by nature was) a pessimist" (τῇ φύσει γὰρ ὦν ἀθαροσῆς καὶ δύσελπτις). Nicias' ambivalence about the superiority of life over death at *La.* 195c11–12 is an intimation of his personal and general pessimism.

suffering *future* dire events. Fear of what might happen disappears when it happens. Socrates notes that ἐπιστήμαι are bodies of knowledge that address their subject irrespective of time. If, according to Nicias' borrowed definition, ἀνδρεία is an ἐπιστήμη that addresses only future ills, it is at best a definition of one third of an ἐπιστήμη. That objection would seem as well to apply to and disconfirm Socrates' definition of ἀνδρεία as a σοφία in the *Protagoras*. The referents that ἐπιστήμη and σοφία name in Plato's vocabulary seem to differ only in nuance.

### **Socrates' definitions of ἀνδρεία in the *Protagoras***

Initially, at *Prt.* 350c4–5, Socrates simply equates σοφία and ἀνδρεία. A full-length exegesis of the significance of Socrates propounding that equation and revising it at *Prt.* 3560d4–5 is outside the compass of this paper.<sup>11</sup> Briefly, Socrates' intention behind the revision is to replace Protagoras' wise saying about ἀνδρεία, at *Prt.* 351b1-2, so as not to lose his friendship with Hippocrates. Hippocrates wishes to be made wise, and were Protagoras' wise saying not refuted, the young man would elect to associate with the sophist, thus dissolving his friendship with Socrates.<sup>12</sup>

### **Protagoras' definition of ἀνδρεία in the *Protagoras***

The sophist rejects Socrates' equation of ἀνδρεία and σοφία at *Prt.* 350c4–5 and expounds

---

<sup>11</sup> Cf. this author's "The storyline of Plato's *Protagoras*," 2019,

<http://www.charlesumlauf.com/storyline.htm>

<sup>12</sup> The fact of that relationship is established at *Prt.* 313b1.

his definition of ἀνδρεία at *Prt.* 351b1-2. The steps of his reasoning are these. Protagoras notes that physical strength (ἰσχύς) permits the exercise of power (δύναμις). Further, that absent innate physical strength, power may also issue from a honorable (καλόν) expertise, or from base (αἰσχρόν) insanity or base anger of those whose expertise, or state of insanity, or transient anger permits them to exceed their physical limitations. He returns to the subject of physical strength. In light of the fact that innately strong young boys perfect that gift under the tutelage of gym masters, the sophist observes that "ἰσχύς comes from nature and its good nurture (εὐτροφία) in bodies." Finally, Protagoras infers that the *aition* of ἀνδρεία is analogous to that of ἰσχύς, stating that "ἀνδρεία comes from nature, and from its good nurture in souls."

#### **Socrates' reprise in the *Republic* of Protagoras' definition of ἀνδρεία in the *Protagoras***

At *Rep.* 4.429d4 *et seq.* Socrates locates martial ἀνδρεία in a subset of citizens, fewer than the number of metal workers; those are the guardian-soldiers of the Just City. The nature and nurture of those chosen to be guardian soldiers is likened to naturally white wool that dyers pick out from variously colored wools, and by means of a complex procedure, imbue with fast colors that do not fade even when scoured by harsh detergent. The steadfastness of the guardian-soldiers is like the color fastness of that dyed wool.

The particulars of Socrates' characterization of ἀνδρεία are these (*Rep.* 4.429e8–430b5):

. . . and when we choose (*sc.* those likely to become) soldiers (στρατιῶται) . . . educated through music and gymnastics . . . persuaded that the νόμοι [laws] are the finest things

. . . their ὀρθὴ δόξα<sup>13</sup> [correct opinion] regarding the dreadful things (τὰ δεινὰ) and the other things (τὰ ἄλλα) is made colorfast . . . *and possessing such a gift of nature and receiving its appropriate nurture, . . . this I name and set down to be ἀνδρεία.*

The Greek of the emphasized phrase above—διὰ τὸ τήν τε φύσιν καὶ τὴν τροφήν ἐπιτηδεῖαν ἐσχηκέναι—echoes the sophist's characterization of ἀνδρεία in the *Protagoras*—ἀνδρεία δὲ ἀπὸ φύσεως καὶ εὐτροφίας τῶν ψυχῶν γίγνεται—in thought and vocabulary.<sup>14</sup> The reprise of Protagoras' remark in the *Protagoras*, which Socrates had heard when he was a young man, asserts authoritative voice,<sup>15</sup> warranting that *Prt.* 351b1–2 is a wise saying.

---

<sup>13</sup> Ὄρθὴ δόξα concerning the dreadful things is not about recognizing phenomenal δεινὰ as such, or noticing their absence; rather it is the ground of ὀρθὴ πραξις [correct practice] in confronting them.

<sup>14</sup> Bernd Manuwald, *Platon "Protagoras"* (Göttingen 1999), 377, denies that *Rep.* 4.430a4–5 and *Prt.* 351b1–2 express the same thought about the same thing. His view is that despite their shared vocabulary, Socrates in the *Republic* and Protagoras in the *Protagoras* are talking about different kinds of ἀνδρεία. On the one hand, Socrates uses different words to name the same or almost the same thing. For example, σοφία, ἐπιστήμη and φρόνησις are virtually synonymous and seem to replace one another according to the nuance to be conveyed. On the other hand, to use the same words to name different things would be a recipe for confusion. The sophist brothers at *Euth.* 275d3–277d7 exploit contradictory senses of the verb μανθάνειν in order to confuse the young Kleinias.

<sup>15</sup> *Rep.* 4.430b5: ἀνδρείαν ἔγωγε καλῶ καὶ τίθεμαι.

Michael Eisenstadt  
eisenstadt0@gmail.com

Austin