NOTHING IN EXCESS:
THE ETHICS OF MEASURE AND THE MEAN IN PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School
of the University of Notre Dame
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Notre Dame, Indiana
December 2015
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Abstract

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Aristotle's doctrine of the mean is one of a handful of ancient philosophical theories that is widely known among philosophers generally. By contrast, Plato's discussions of measure are hardly known even among ancient philosophy specialists. It is unsurprising, then, that the influence of those discussions on Aristotle's doctrine has hardly been acknowledged, let alone examined in detail. The project of this dissertation is to fill this gap in our understanding; it is to examine the relationship between Plato's measure and Aristotle's mean.

In order to undertake this examination, accurate accounts of Plato's measure and of Aristotle's mean are needed. With regard to Plato, I pay particular attention to the Statesman and the Philebus. Out of the entire Platonic corpus, the passage on the art of measurement from the Statesman (283c-285c) is the clearest source of inspiration for Aristotle's doctrine. The standard interpretation of this difficult passage, however, is fundamentally mistaken, and so an alternative interpretation is needed. The discussions of
measure in the *Philebus* supplement and illuminate this passage from the *Statesman* by elucidating the philosophical roles played by measure: measure both gives particular things their identities and serves as the relevant norm compliance with which renders those things good.

Turning to Aristotle, I develop a novel account of the doctrine of the mean. The need for such an account is especially pressing inasmuch as Aristotle's doctrine is often interpreted in a way that renders the doctrine philosophically implausible but that also has very little textual support. The novel account offered in this thesis is shown to handle readily the most common objections to Aristotle's doctrine.

With accurate accounts of measure and the mean, I then turn to comparing them along four points: normativity, ethical knowledge, what compliance with measure or the mean consists in, and absolutism (as opposed to relativism). The differences between Aristotle and Plato with regard to these four points reveal, I conclude, a fundamental difference in approach to ethical philosophy. For Plato, ethical theorizing is to be undertaken for the sake of gaining greater theoretical understanding; for Aristotle, its benefit is primarily practical.
For Naomi, Peter, and Augusta
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The seeds of the ideas in this dissertation were first planted in a graduate seminar on Plato’s “trilogy” (the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*) led by my advisor, Kenneth Sayre. And since they were planted, no one has done more than him to ensure their growth. Without his patience, attention, encouragement, and enthusiasm, I am confident that those seeds would have produced considerably less fruit, if any at all. My deepest thanks to him.

In the course of writing the dissertation, I received helpful guidance and feedback from Sean Kelsey, David O’Connor, Joseph Karbowski, and Alison Murphy. Along with Gretchen Reydams-Schils and Catherine Zuckert, they have contributed greatly to my understanding of ancient Greek philosophy and to my development as a scholar.

This dissertation—and, indeed, my education in philosophy—would never even have been started were it not for the support of my parents. Their support has been patient and unflagging, and it has encouraged me to pursue the life of the mind without reservations. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my brother, Matt. It was in conversations with him that my interest in philosophy, art, politics, and ideas generally was first sparked. Without his interest in these things, mine surely would not have developed.

Finally I wish to thank my wife, Naomi. She deserves more of my gratitude than could possibly be expressed here. Without her support, this dissertation may never have
been completed, and without her and our children, I would see much less of a point in completing it.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ancient visitors to the Temple of Apollo at Delphi would have noticed several aphorisms inscribed on the walls. These inscriptions are famous today as articulations of many of the ideals for which ancient Greek culture is rightly renowned. Consider the most well known of these inscriptions, “Know Thyself (γνῶθι σαυτόν).” It is central not only to some of the greatest works of Greek tragedy (Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, to name two) but also to Greek philosophy, in particular to the philosophy of Socrates. Indeed, the centrality of “Know Thyself” to Socrates' life has been so often noted that the saying is sometimes misattributed to Socrates himself.

For Plato and Aristotle, another Delphic maxim was similarly important: “Nothing in Excess (μηδὲν ἄγαν).” The influence of this maxim, however, is considerably less celebrated than that of its more famous counterpart. Plato's embrace of this maxim is shown most clearly in his discussions of measure (μέτρον), but commentators on Plato have devoted relatively little attention (if any at all) to these discussions.¹ By contrast, the doctrine of Aristotle's that is most clearly influenced by this second Delphic maxim—the

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¹ For example, one of the most widely cited book-length treatments of Plato's ethics, Irwin (1995), discusses measure for less than four pages (pp. 323-327). And one of the most prominent collections of essays on Plato's ethics, Fine (2000), contains no direct discussion of measure at all.
doctrine of the mean—has not been neglected by commentators. But though it is frequently discussed, it has certainly not been celebrated. It is widely disparaged as false, silly, and unworthy of the genius of Aristotle.²

In the cases of both Aristotle and Plato, there is a curious and unfortunate lacuna in our understanding of their philosophy. With regard to Plato, most readers and scholars are simply unaware of the central place of measure in Plato's ethics, let alone of its central place in his metaphysics and epistemology. With regard to Aristotle, the fact that these quick and harsh rejections of the doctrine of mean are commonplace suggests that perhaps we have not truly understood Aristotle's doctrine. For it would be surprising for a philosopher of Aristotle's caliber to make the patently silly mistakes with which he and his doctrine are often charged. As I shall argue later, the common criticisms of the doctrine are in fact premised on misunderstandings of it, and they are easily avoided by a more accurate account of the doctrine.

These two lacunae are related to a third: namely, one concerning the relationship between Plato's measure and Aristotle's mean. Aristotle's doctrine of the mean is clearly influenced by Plato's discussions of measure in the Statesman and Philebus, as will be shown shortly. Aristotle, however, departs from Plato in several philosophically substantial ways. Insofar as these departures are Aristotle's changes to theories he inherited from Plato, they hold promise of being revelatory of more fundamental differences between Plato and Aristotle, and thereby of helping us more fully understand the relationship between their philosophical outlooks.

To date, however, there has been no extended treatment of the relationship between Plato's measure and Aristotle's mean. When it is even noted, this relationship typically has been relegated to footnotes. In the best case, it is given a page or two. Moreover, as we shall see, the brevity of these treatments is not their only deficiency. For they also misunderstand the very theories being compared. In short, the relationship between Aristotle's mean and Plato's measure has not received the sustained, detailed, and accurate examination that it deserves.

The primary task of this dissertation is to examine thoroughly the relationship between Aristotle's doctrine of the mean and Plato's discussions of measure, and thereby to fill the third lacuna. Of course, if Plato's measure was not in fact an influence on Aristotle's mean, any attempt at this task might seem futile. Let us now examine what reason there is for thinking that Plato did indeed influence Aristotle in this regard.

In both the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle puts forward what commentators call “the doctrine of the mean” (Aristotle himself never uses such a phrase). Like Plato's “theory of the Forms,” Aristotle's doctrine of the mean is one of a handful of ancient philosophical theories that enjoys fame among philosophers generally, and not just within the circle of ancient philosophy specialists. Part of the reason for this is that nearly every introductory overview of Aristotle's ethics discusses the doctrine. And they do so with good reason. For the doctrine is central to Aristotle's conception of virtue and virtue is of course central to Aristotle's ethics. The mean's centrality consists not only in the fact that Aristotle's definition of virtue explicitly mentions the mean (see II.6 1106b36-7a2), but also in the fact that the doctrine permeates the discussions of the
individual virtues in books III-IV of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Each of these discussions includes three parts: an identification of the mean-state, an identification of the relevant states that stand in opposition to the mean-state, and descriptions of these various states. The upshot is that a large portion of Aristotle's discussion of virtue is informed in one way or another by the doctrine of the mean.

Now consider the doctrine itself. It states that virtues such as courage, temperance, and generosity are “mean-states (μεσότητες)” in that they dispose their possessors to aim at and to achieve the “mean (μέσον)” in passion and action. The details of this doctrine will be explored in due course. For present purposes, note that Aristotle claims that the mean lies in between “excess and deficiency (ὑπερβολή καὶ ἔλλειψις)” (*NE* II.6 1106b17, see also 1106a29, 1106b5-6, 11-12, 23-26, 34, 1107a2-3, 20-27), and that the vices (such as cowardice, self-indulgence, and stinginess) are dispositions toward excess or deficiency. Central to the doctrine of the mean is this tripartite scheme of excess (ὑπερβολή), deficiency (ἔλλειψις), and what comes between them, the mean (μέσον).

Unlike Aristotle's discussions of the mean, Plato's discussions of measure are virtually unknown to philosophers outside of ancient philosophy. Indeed, they are hardly known within it either. These discussions are quite difficult to understand and they occur in seldom read and difficult dialogues, namely, the *Philebus* and *Statesman*. They were not, however, ignored by Aristotle. Consider the extended discussion of measure at *Statesman* 283c-287a. The primary speaker of the dialogue, an unnamed Stranger (ξένος) from Elea, undertakes an examination of “excess and deficiency (τήν τε ὑπερβολήν καὶ τήν ἔλλειψιν)” (283c3-4). These of course are the very same words Aristotle used in
explaining the doctrine of the mean. The mean, Aristotle says, lies in between “excess and deficiency (ὑπερβολή καὶ ἔλλειψις).” Furthermore, as the examination proceeds the Stranger claims that excess and deficiency are both to be avoided, and that we should aim at what is neither excessive nor deficient. However, he does not call this target the “mean (μέσον).” Rather, he refers to it as “measure (τὸ μέτρον)” or “due measure (τὸ μέτριον)” (see 283e3-4, 11, 284a2, 8, b1, c1, d6, e6). Central to the Statesman’s discussion of measure is the tripartite scheme of excess (ὑπερβολή), deficiency (ἔλλειψις), and what comes between them, measure (μέτρον).

The similarities between the discussion of measure in the Statesman and Aristotle’s discussion of the mean are obvious: They both describe a tripartite scheme of excess, deficiency (ὑπερβολή καὶ ἔλλειψις), and some third thing which is neither excessive nor deficient. And the apparent dissimilarity—that Aristotle uses the word μέσον for this third thing, while Plato uses μέτρον—is not much of a dissimilarity, especially when considered in light of the Academy’s book of definitions (i.e., the Definitions that are spuriously attributed to Plato).³ In that work, both measure and due measure are defined as “the mean between excess and deficiency (τὸ μέσον ὑπερβολῆς καὶ ἔλλειψεως)” (415a4-6).⁴ In light of the fact that Aristotle was a student at the Academy, the Definitions give us evidence of terminology and distinctions to which

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³ Though the Definitions are included in Thrasyllus’ edition of Plato’s complete works, most scholars think the work was not written exclusively by Plato (if written by him at all). Rather, they regard it as a dictionary compiled by members of the Academy, both during and after Plato’s lifetime (and so during, at least in part, Aristotle’s stint at the Academy). See Cooper (1997) pp. ix-x.

⁴ The only difference between the definition of ‘measure’ and that of ‘due measure’ is that due measure is said to be “achieved in accordance with art (κατὰ τέχνην ἀρκοῦν)” (415a4-5). This is not claimed for measure.
Aristotle was most likely exposed. And so for Aristotle, as for the writers and compilers of the *Definitions*, there may not have been much of a difference between μέσον and μέτρον. On the basis of this evidence from the *Definitions*, in conjunction with the fact that both Plato and Aristotle employ a tripartite scheme two members of which both refer to as ὑπερβολή and ἔλλειψις, it seems all but certain that Aristotle's doctrine of the mean is a direct descendant of Plato's discussions of measure.

As was mentioned earlier, other commentators have noticed this relationship. But they have done little more than merely notice it. This relationship is tangential to these commentators' main concerns and so their discussions of it typically span less than a page (in some cases, the “discussion” is a single sentence) and are often relegated to footnotes. Accordingly, these discussions lack both detail and breadth. As of now, there is no extended and detailed examination of the relationship between Plato's measure and Aristotle's mean.

Given the rarity and brevity of discussions of the relationship, our review of those discussions can likewise be brief. This is especially so because these discussions tend to focus on the same point of comparison, and they tend to draw the same conclusion.

With regard to Plato, these discussions focus on the Stranger's distinction between two kinds of measurement. I shall examine this distinction in detail in Chapter 2. For present purposes, it is sufficient to note that it is a distinction between a kind that

5 The discussions I have in mind are the following: Woods (1982), p. 104; Annas and Waterfield (1995), p. x; Brown (1997) p. 89, fnnt. 24; Hursthouse (2006), p. 97, 102; Lawrence (2009), p. 427, 432-3. Also relevant is Lane (1998), p. 187, who notes that the doctrine of the mean is a successor to Plato's thoughts about measure. However, her subsequent discussion of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean (pp. 187-190) does not compare Aristotle's mean with Plato's measure.
measures relative to due measure (the second art of measurement) and a kind that does not (the first art of measurement). Commentators typically interpret this distinction in terms of normativity: the second art encompasses normative kinds of measurement, and the first encompasses non-normative kinds. Moreover, they tend to claim or to assume that sciences concerned with invariable truths, such as mathematics, are examples of the non-normative kind, while sciences concerned with human needs and interests, such as statecraft, weaving, or house-building, are examples of the normative kind.

With regard to Aristotle, these commentators focus on his distinction between two kinds of means: the mean “relative to us” and the mean “in the thing itself” (NE II.6 1106a26-29). What exactly this distinction amounts to will be discussed in Chapter 4. Important for present purposes is that commentators claim that this distinction can be assimilated to the Stranger's distinction between two kinds of measurement. The most common way of understanding the relationship between Plato's measure and Aristotle's mean is to compare these two distinctions and then find them to be, more or less, the same distinction.

The crucial problem with this view, however, is that it rests on an inadequate interpretation of the art of measurement, particularly of the first art. These commentators claim that the first art is a non-normative kind of measurement, paradigmatic examples of which include arithmetic and geometry. But, simply put, this view of the first art is

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7 Brown (1997), p. 89, fn. 24 offers a particularly clear example of this.
mistaken. In particular, branches of mathematics are not instances of that art. The argument for the falsity of this interpretation of the first art will have to wait until Chapter 2, but here let me offer a cause for suspicion. Plato famously treats number (ʔρηθμός) as highly value-laden\(^8\) and often treats mathematics as concerned with, or revelatory of, the Good. Indeed, one of the puzzles in understanding Plato is understanding how it is that mathematics might be so bound up with goodness.\(^9\) Accordingly, it would be quite discordant with Plato's other relevant discussions of mathematics were he all of a sudden to classify mathematics as a non-normative art. In my view, he does no such thing.

Now consider a different and slightly longer discussion of the relationship between Plato's measure and Aristotle's mean. Rosalind Hursthouse (2006) claims that Plato's discussions of measure are precursors to Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, and further that Aristotle incorporates several ideas from those discussions into his doctrine (see Hursthouse (2006), p. 97). In particular, she notes that both Plato's measure and Aristotle's mean 1) are opposed to excess and deficiency, which both authors at least occasionally interchange with 'more and less' or 'great and small'; 2) are, or produce, what is good or best; 3) are that at which all skills, including virtue, aim; 4) are associated with a plethora of terms with which they are more or less interchangeable (she mentions μέτριον, πρέπον, and καιρόν); 5) are principles in medical theory; and, more generally, 6) are principles in scientific theory. This is a much more detailed and much more promising beginning to a comparison of Plato's measure and Aristotle's mean. Unfortunately,

\(^8\) See Roochnik (1994).

\(^9\) For attempts at grappling with this puzzle, see Kung (1989) and Burnyeat (2000).
immediately after setting out these six areas of similarity, Hursthouse turns her efforts toward persuading us that Aristotle's doctrine of the mean is, to use her words, “simply whacky” (p. 99). Her elaborations on these points of comparison are tailored toward persuading us of this and of little else.

The points of comparison that most interest Hursthouse are (5) and (6). Indeed, these are the only points she goes on to discuss at all. According to Hursthouse, the doctrine of the mean is “whacky” because, like Plato's discussions of measure, it is heavily influenced by medical and scientific theories of the time, theories which are “completely misguided” (p. 99). Inasmuch as it is based on such theories, Hursthouse thinks we need not be so charitable to the doctrine of the mean; we need not even try to find any truth in it, as some commentators on Aristotle's ethics have vainly done.

Let me pause to note that this criticism of the doctrine is not terribly convincing. Even if false scientific and medical theory had an influence upon the doctrine of the mean, that doctrine may be true nonetheless or at least insightful. For Aristotle was not one to apply ancient Greek medical theory blindly to whatever subject he happened to be considering. And so if distinctions and terminology prevalent in medical theory crop up in some non-medical context (e.g., in a discussion of virtue), presumably they do so because the subject matter is particularly amenable to those distinctions and terminology; because the subject matter is clarified by, and helpfully explained in terms of, those distinctions and terminology. And much the same could be said for Plato (presumably Hursthouse would think his use of measure in ethical contexts “whacky” as well). Following Hursthouse, we could just as easily argue that modern physics is “simply
whacky” because it employs a term, 'energy' (ἐνέργεια), that is drawn from outdated Aristotelian science. This, to say the least, is an unconvincing criticism of modern physics, and Hursthouse's criticism of Aristotle's doctrine is hardly any better. In assessing the doctrine, we need to examine the doctrine itself, not the sources of the terminology employed in the doctrine. Aristotle's doctrine may indeed be “simply whacky,” but the mere fact that it employs now discredited medical terminology is not a good reason for thinking so.

But even after putting the cogency of Hursthouse's criticism aside, this discussion of the relationship between Plato's measure and Aristotle's mean leaves considerable work to be done. For there are many questions left unanswered by her discussion, questions which when investigated promise to yield considerable insight into Plato's measure, Aristotle's mean, and the relationship between them. For example: With regard to (1), what exactly is the relationship between excess and deficiency, greatness and smallness, and more and less? With regard to (2), in what sense can measure and the mean be said to be, or to produce, the good? Is it the same sense for measure as for the mean? With regard to (3), how exactly are measure and the mean bound up with skill? How with virtue? With regard to (4), what is the significance of this variety of terms (μέτριον, πρέπον, καρόν, etc.)? With regard to (5) and (6), how exactly are measure and the mean related to knowledge (i.e., to science)?

In what follows, I will not directly or explicitly answer these questions; much less will I organize my discussion around answering them. But they all receive answers in the
course of the dissertation, insofar as answers are possible. The present point is simply that while Hursthouse gives us an interesting beginning for thinking about the relationship between the mean and measure, it is merely a beginning. And the substantive point that she tries to draw out of this comparison—namely, that the doctrine of the mean is “whacky”—is an unpersuasive and unfortunate distraction.

Let us take stock. If I am right that the *Statesman*’s first art of measurement does not include mathematics, then the current understanding of the relationship between Plato's measure and Aristotle's mean is premised on a misunderstanding. And so in order to fruitfully compare measure and the mean, we first need an accurate account of Plato's measure. But the situation with regard to Aristotle's mean is hardly any better, as the reader may have begun to suspect from the above discussion of Hursthouse. As I shall argue, current interpretations of the doctrine of the mean are textually unsupported and saddle Aristotle with a philosophically implausible theory that there is little reason to think he held. But clearly any comparison of Aristotle's mean with Plato's measure that used such an interpretation of the mean would be likely to run into difficulties, if not indeed to be a fruitless waste of time. And so, in order to undertake our comparison, we will need to give an accurate and (therefore) novel account of the doctrine of the mean. In short, in order to fill the third of our above mentioned lacunae, we will have to fill the first two. For without a firm grasp of Plato's measure and Aristotle's mean individually, any comparison of them is likely to be shallow, insecure, and mistaken, which is

10 While all of these questions are germane to Plato's discussions of measure, not all of them are so to Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. For example, contra Hursthouse's implication, Aristotle does not deploy a variety of terms to refer to the mean (μέτρητον, πρέπον, καιρόν, etc.), and so a question about the significance of that variety is clearly inapt in his case.
precisely the fate of these recent attempts to understand that relationship. So while the ultimate task of this dissertation is to fill the third lacuna, the other two will be filled first.

Let us now turn to a more detailed overview. A central passage for understanding Plato's views concerning measure is the above mentioned Statesman 283c-285c. Until recently, this passage has received relatively little attention in the Anglophone world\textsuperscript{11} despite the fact that Plato highlights its importance by placing it at the physical center of the dialogue.\textsuperscript{12} In fact, some commentators seem to think 283c-285c is a sketchy digression that distracts from the more interesting, and straightforwardly political, parts of the dialogue.\textsuperscript{13} While I think such a view is incorrect and short-sighted, my main purpose in discussing this passage will not be to refute it (though I will have occasion to show why such a view is highly problematic). Rather, my main purpose is to articulate a detailed and accurate account of the Statesman's art of measurement, for such an account is necessary for a fruitful comparison of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean with Plato's discussions of measure. The task of Chapter 2 is to give such an account.

\textsuperscript{11} Miller (1980) includes a brief discussion of this passage. Marquez (2006), Sayre (2006), and Harvey (2009) treat this passage in considerable detail. French scholars have discussed these issues to a greater extent: See Rodier (1957), Kucharski (1960), Lafrance (1995), Tordesillas (1995), and Delcomminette (2005).

\textsuperscript{12} Plato commonly highlights the importance of a topic or discussion by placing it at the physical center of the dialogue. For example, the discussion of the philosopher-king is at the physical center of the Republic, and the “digression” about the free man and the man of the law-courts is similarly placed in the Theaetetus.

\textsuperscript{13} This appears to be the opinion of Annas and Waterfield (1995). They mention “surprising digressions and methodological sidetracks” (p. xii) and on multiple occasions mention, in one form or another, the lengthy, boring, difficult, and sketchy material that must be waded through in order to get to the political theory. Also of note is that they the only topics that they cover in their introductory essay are political in nature; there are no extended discussions of measurement or methodology.
One of the most pressing issues to be addressed in giving this account is that of the first formulation of the art of measurement. As has been mentioned, the Stranger divides the art of measurement into two sub-arts, and the second of these arts is initially described as measuring “according to the being necessary for generation (κατὰ τὴν τῆς γενέσεως ἀναγκαίαν οὐσίαν)” (283c8-9). This enigmatic phrase has quite understandably puzzled readers and divided commentators. I hope to show, however, that considerable clarity is cast upon this first formulation by the subsequent descriptions of the art of measurement. In particular, it becomes clear that this enigmatic “being” is none other than measure.

However, it is not just the second art of measurement that has proven difficult to interpret. While the descriptions of the first art of measurement seem relatively straightforward, they have nonetheless invited misinterpretation. In particular, most commentators claim that mathematical arts, such as arithmetic and geometry, are paradigmatic examples of the first art. As I mentioned above, I shall argue that this claim is false.

One of the reasons the art of measurement is discussed at length in the *Statesman* is because the art of statecraft makes use of it. For the most part, this fact has gone unnoticed. Many commentators treat the political theory in isolation from the art of measurement, implying that the political theory can be adequately understood without referring to the statesman's use of measurement. I shall show that giving such an isolated treatment is a mistake and that without understanding the use that the statesman makes of

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14 Lane (1998) is a notable exception to this tendency, and her view is the primary foil in my discussion of statecraft and measure.
the second art of measurement, one cannot understand the account of statecraft. That is to say, without proper appreciation of the passage on measurement, a proper understanding of the political theory of the Statesman will remain elusive. I shall close Chapter 2 by elucidating how exactly statecraft makes use of measurement, thus giving us a sophisticated example of measurement with which to work as we proceed.

A different problem with previous attempts to understand the relationship between Plato's measure and Aristotle's mean is that, with regard to Plato's measure, they focus too narrowly on the Statesman. Many of the Stranger's claims about measure are further explained and heavily supplemented by Socrates in a different dialogue that prominently features measure: the Philebus. As we shall see, the Philebus supplies much of the philosophical edifice upon which the Stranger's claims about measurement rest. What is merely (and sometimes enigmatically) hinted at in the Statesman is explicitly and thoroughly addressed in the Philebus. More particularly, we shall see that in these dialogues, Plato treats measurement as the primary method of evaluation of objects (be they statues, houses, dogs, humans, and so on) because of the ontological structure of such objects. This structure is thoroughly described in Philebus (particularly from 23c-27c) and will be a central topic of discussion of Chapter 3.

One of the key ideas that I draw out of the Philebus is that measure plays both a normative and an identifying role. With regard to the latter, measure imparts identity to those sensible particulars of which it is the measure. It makes these sensible particulars the very kind of thing they are. With regard to the former, measures are the relevant evaluative standards for determining whether or not a sensible particular is a good one of
its kind. The upshot of measure's having these two roles is that, according to the *Philebus*, normative evaluation is grounded in the identity of the things being evaluated.

In short, the task of Chapter 3 is to articulate what the *Philebus* adds to Plato's account of measure, and the task of Chapters 2 and 3 together is to elucidate Plato's views on measure. These chapters thus are tasked with filling the first of our mentioned lacunae.

Chapter 4 examines Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. Contemporary opinion of the doctrine has been, for the most part, negative. Of course, other theories of Aristotle's have received such a verdict, for example, his natural teleology. But the negative opinion of the doctrine of the mean is notably harsher than that held concerning many of these other theories. Aristotle's natural teleology, while rejected by most philosophers, is still respected as a formidable, albeit decisively refuted, philosophical theory. The doctrine of the mean, however, is commonly regarded as not merely false, but silly and absurd, as was mentioned earlier.

Now there have recently been a handful of commentators who have risen to the defense of the doctrine.\(^{15}\) These defenders, however, agree to a significant extent with the way that the critics interpret the doctrine of the mean; they only disagree with some of the details. In particular, they agree that Aristotle accepts what some have called the “parameter doctrine.” According to this doctrine, to achieve the mean in one's actions or passions one must achieve the mean in each of the parameters relevant to the action or passion in question. Examples of these parameters include object, people, time, amount, and end. In my view, Aristotle neither states nor commits himself to the parameter

\(^{15}\) Most notable among them is Curzer (1996). See also Losin (1987) and Welton and Polansky (1995).
doctrine. It is an invention of a handful of 20th century commentators, and it has very little grounding in the words of Aristotle. And by disencumbering Aristotle from this doctrine, what are often regarded as the most pressing problems for Aristotle's doctrine of the mean can be easily cast aside.

In place of these defective accounts of the doctrine of the mean, I present an alternative account, which I hope to show is both more faithful to the text of Aristotle and more philosophically plausible. Briefly described, my account interprets the doctrine as claiming that virtues are mean-states in that they dispose their possessors to achieve the mean in passion. Further, it claims that an intermediate passion is one that has an appropriate intensity with regard to the circumstances in which it is felt (e.g., with regard to the time at which it is felt, with regard to the people toward whom it is felt, with regard to the objects over which it is felt, etc.).

Also relevant to any account of the doctrine of the mean is Aristotle's above mentioned distinction between two kinds of means: the mean “relative to us” (which is the kind of mean relevant to the doctrine of the mean) and the mean “in the thing itself.” In explaining this distinction, Aristotle puts forward the well-known example of Milo the wrestler. In my view, Aristotle means to claim that the mean “relative to us” is relative to the history, development, and capabilities of individuals. One upshot is that what would be cowardly for me to do might not be so for you, and what would be temperate for you to do might be self-indulgent for me, and so on for other cases. This interpretation of the “relative to us” qualification, however, has been attacked for not paying sufficient
attention to the details of the Milo example.\textsuperscript{16} I shall argue that, quite to the contrary, it is such attacks that fail to take account of those details. Close attention to the Milo example, far from giving us reason to reject the interpretation that I defend, supports it.

In short, the task of Chapter 4 is to offer an accurate account of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, so that it might be meaningfully compared with the account of measure put forward in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 4 thus is tasked with filling the second lacuna.

With these detailed accounts of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean and of Plato's discussions of measure, Chapter 5 addresses the third lacuna, namely that concerning the relationship between Plato's discussions and Aristotle's doctrine. In the course of comparing Plato and Aristotle, several general features of their ethical theories will be elucidated. In particular, I discuss and compare their views concerning normativity, ethical knowledge, compliance with measure or the mean, and absolutism (as opposed to relativism). Let me briefly elaborate.

With regard to normativity, we shall see that the \textit{Philebus} and \textit{Statesman} contain an account of normativity that centrally involves measure, inasmuch as it claims that to be good is to achieve measure. That is, it claims that measure is the source of goodness. This account, however, is quite different from what is typically attributed to Plato. Typically, Plato is seen as something of a proto-Moorean, believing there is such a thing as the Good in itself, or "absolute goodness."\textsuperscript{17} I shall argue that, in the \textit{Philebus} and \textit{Statesman} at least, Plato puts forward no such view. Rather, the account in those

\textsuperscript{16} See Brown (1997) and Brown (2014).

\textsuperscript{17} See, for example, Annas (1981), p. 221, 245, 322, Cooper (1977) pp. 154-5, and White (1979), p. 35.
dialogues holds that goodness is relative to kinds. Furthermore, when read in light of what the *Philebus* claims about the relationship between norms and the gods, we find that this account of normativity implies a solution to the famous Euthyphro dilemma.

Turning to Aristotle, we shall see that the mean is a derivative norm, in that it derives its normativity from a more basic norm enjoining us to be happy, to flourish (to be εὐδαίμων). In other words, one ought to aim at and achieve the mean *because* one ought to flourish. As a result, the mean is only of tangential concern (at best) for understanding Aristotle's account of normativity.

With regard to ethical knowledge, we shall see that both the *Philebus* and the *Statesman* claim that systematic knowledge of ethics is possible and, moreover, that the objects of such knowledge are measures. Being the objects of knowledge, measures assume a similar epistemological role to that played by the Forms in the *Republic*. For Aristotle, by contrast, I shall argue that systematic knowledge of the mean is impossible and, further, that one upshot of there being no such knowledge of the mean is that Aristotle is a particularist.

Turning to the third point of comparison, we shall see that Plato conceives of compliance with measure as a matter of *approximation*. Approximation to measure both makes a thing the kind of thing it is and, if the approximation is close, makes the thing a good one of its kind. In this way, approximation to measure plays a similar role as participation in a Form played in the *Republic* and *Phaedo*. Compliance with the mean, by contrast, is simply a matter of avoiding excess and deficiency. For the mean is simply that which is in between excess and deficiency. Thus, where Plato would have us strive
toward an ideal, approximating it as closely as possible, Aristotle would counsel us to focus on staving off excess and deficiency and thereby to back our way into achieving the mean.

Lastly, we shall see that Plato's measure is an absolute norm. However, his account of compliance with measure incorporates sensitivity to circumstance and thus avoids a criticism often lodged against absolutism, namely, that it lacks such sensitivity. Aristotle too is an absolutist, as we shall see, but he incorporates the following characteristic claim of relativism into his account of the mean: what it is right or wrong to do varies from individual to individual. For according to Aristotle, the mean for me may not be the mean for you. In other words, what is right for me to do may not be what is right for you to do. And these differences in what is right and wrong for us to do stem from certain differences between me and you (differences in our histories, capabilities, or proclivities, for example).

Through these discussions, it will become clear that measure occupies a central place in the philosophical theories of the *Philebus* and *Statesman*. Indeed, measure occupies a philosophical role similar to that played by Forms in the *Republic* and *Phaedo*, and consequently is essential for theoretical understanding in the *Philebus* and *Statesman*. The mean, by contrast, does not occupy such a central place with regard to the philosophical theories of Aristotle. Accordingly, it is less central to theoretical understanding for Aristotle than measure is for Plato. But what the mean lacks in theoretical importance, it makes up for in practical importance, at least according to Aristotle. And here we shall come upon a fundamental difference in approach between
Aristotle and Plato with regard to ethical philosophy, a difference that is revealed by the four comparisons discussed in Chapter 5. For Plato, ethical theorizing is to be undertaken for the sake of gaining greater theoretical understanding, whereas for Aristotle, its benefit is primarily practical. Plato would have us focus on understanding the ideal abstract world of measures, whereas Aristotle would call us to pay attention to particular circumstances of the world here around us.
CHAPTER 2

THE ART OF MEASUREMENT IN THE STATESMAN

Measurement is not a typical topic of philosophical discussion. And so when we find an extended discussion of measurement within a philosophical work a reasonable first question is why that discussion is there at all. This question, of course, applies to the Statesman and its discussion of the art of measurement ranging from 283c-285c. Let us begin our examination by considering the answer.

Turn to the beginning of the Stranger's discussion. The Stranger and Young Socrates have just finished defining the craft of weaving, and the Stranger raises the worry that the discussion of weaving might have been too long. Young Socrates assures the Stranger that he does not think so, but in order to allay such worries were they to arise again, the Stranger embarks on a discussion of “excess and deficiency in general (πᾶσαν τήν τε ὑπερβολὴν καὶ τήν ἔλλειψιν)” (283c3-4).18 As the Stranger proceeds, it becomes clear that the purpose of this discussion is not merely to reinforce Young Socrates' judgment that the conversation was an appropriate length. Rather, it is to help Young

18 Translations from Statesman 283c-285c are those of Sayre (2005), though I have slightly modified some of them. All translations from the rest of the Statesman are those of Rowe (1995a), though, again, I have modified many of them.
Socrates correctly distribute praise and censure in any situation in which things might be excessive or deficient.

Wherever something can be excessive or deficient, it must be because some aspect of the thing in question admits variation in degree or amount. For example, it is possible for a conversation to be excessive or deficient insofar as the length of a conversation might be longer or shorter. Now in trying to determine whether or not some $x$ is correctly censured as excessive or deficient, we need to determine whether or not the degree or amount of the relevant aspect of $x$ is too great or too little. As we might also say, we need to measure these degrees or amounts. Accordingly, the Stranger introduces the art of measurement inasmuch as this art is concerned with making correct judgments or measurements with regard to excess and deficiency in general. He then proceeds to discuss this art from 283c-285c.

In this chapter, I shall attempt to clarify the art of measurement as it is presented in the Statesman. In section 1, I will give an overview and explication of the Stranger's various formulations of the art of measurement found at 283c-285c. Section 2 will then focus on clarifying in detail three points of interest raised by 283c-285c. Those three points are: what the enigmatic first formulation means, how measure and measurement are related to the crafts, and how mathematical arts are related to the art of measurement. Finally, in section 3, I will examine the Stranger's most detailed illustration of the art of measurement. This is the Stranger's final and definitive account of statecraft with which the dialogue culminates. As we shall see, this account crucially involves the art of
measurement inasmuch as that account cannot be adequately understood without a grasp of the role of measurement in it.

2.1 The Two Arts of Measurement

Having introduced the art of measurement, the Stranger promptly divides it in two (283d4-5). In the course of explaining this division, he gives six different formulations of these two arts, not all of which are immediately perspicuous.

According to the Stranger's first formulation, the first art of measurement measures “according to the association of greatness and smallness with each other (κατὰ τὴν πρὸς ἄλληλα μεγέθους καὶ σμικρότητος κοινωνίαν)” (283d7-8) while the second art measures “according to the being necessary for generation (κατὰ τὴν τῆς γενέσεως ἀναγκαίαν οὐσίαν)” (283c8-9). Both of these formulations are abstruse, especially that of the second art. In the Statesman, the Stranger offers little direct clarification of what exactly this “being” which is necessary for generation is (which is not to say he offers no clarification), and a full account of this being requires turning to the Philebus, as we shall see. After surveying the five subsequent formulations, however, I will return to this first formulation of the second art. For in light of the other five formulations, it is much clearer how this “being” should be understood.

The formulation of the first art, while less obscure, presents a significant difficulty as well: What exactly does the Stranger mean by the “association” or “community” (κοινωνίαν) of greatness and smallness? The Stranger's next formulation of the two arts offers helpful clarification.
“The greater,” the Stranger says, “ought to be termed greater in comparison with nothing other than the smaller, and the smaller in turn smaller than nothing other than the greater (τὸ μεῖζον μηδενὸς ἑτέρου δεῖν μεῖζον λέγειν ἢ τοῦ ἐλάττονος, καὶ τοῦλαττον αὖ τοῦ μεῖζονος ἐλαττον, ἄλλου δὲ μηδενὸς)” (283d11-e1). This is a second formulation of the first art. There is no explicit mention of 'association' but rather an explanation of what that association consists in. Greater and smaller can be said to be in association with each other insofar as the one is judged relative to the other. To judge, for example, that “this army is greater than that smaller army” is to judge according to the association of greatness and smallness; it is to judge the greater in comparison with the smaller.

The Stranger continues by amending what he had just said. The greater ought not be termed greater only in comparison with the smaller, for there are also things which “exceed the condition of due measure, or are exceeded by it (τὸ τὴν τοῦ μετρίου φύσιν ύπερβάλλον καὶ ύπερβαλλόμενον ύπ' αυτῆς)” (283e3-4). In other words, we can measure something as being greater than the condition of due measure, not just as being greater than something smaller (and the same holds mutatis mutandis for measuring things as smaller). This is the second formulation of the second art. It introduces, for the first time, the term 'due measure' (μέτριον), and all subsequent formulations and descriptions of the second art will invoke this term. It will be used and discussed frequently throughout this dissertation, and there will be numerous occasions for further attention to its philosophical role in the Statesman and Philebus. For present purposes,

19 Determining how exactly φύσιν should be translated here is difficult. To most translators, “nature” seems inapt, carrying as it does connotations of biology and geology which are clearly not intended here. Sayre (2005) opts for 'condition', Rowe (1995a) translates it as 'class', and Annas and Waterfield (1995) simply pretend that φύσιν is not there.
However, the standard definition (from LSJ) is sufficient: the μέτριον is what is fitting, proportionate, appropriate, sufficient, or in due measure. An example of the second art would be, “that army is of a greater size than is appropriate.” Or, as we might alternatively put it, “that army is excessively large.”

The Stranger continues. If the greater can be compared both to the smaller and to the condition of due measure, then

we must lay it down that the great and the small both have being and are judged in these two ways, not just in relation to each other as we said a moment ago. As was said just now, we should speak rather of their existing relative to each other on the one hand and relative to due measure on the other (διττὰς ἄρα τὰύτας οὕσιάς καὶ κρίσις τοῦ μεγάλου καὶ τοῦ σμικροῦ θετέον, ἄλλ' οὐχ ός ἔφαμεν ἀρτι πρὸς ἀλληλα μόνον δεῖν, ἄλλ' ὀσπερ νῦν εἴρηται μᾶλλον τὴν μὲν πρὸς ἀλληλα λεκτέον, τὴν δ' αὖ πρὸς τὸ μέτριον) (283e8-11).

The chief novelty of this third formulation of the two arts is the introduction of “the great and the small.” According to Aristotle, the great and the small (τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρόν) is a principle of Plato's ontology (Metaphysics I.6, XIV.1, Physics I.9), and he is echoed in this regard by nearly every ancient commentator who speaks to the issue. The Stranger, however, does not in any obvious way describe the great and the small as an ontological principle (though, in this passage, he does mention it as “being (οὐσίας),” a word with obvious ontological significance). He introduces the phrase quite casually, freely switching between 'the great and the small' (and related words) and 'excess and

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20 Translations of τὸ μέτριον vary considerably, though “due measure” seems to be most common. Skemp (1952), Rowe (1995a, 1997), Annas and Waterfield (1995), and Sayre (2005) all translate it thus. It is also frequently translated as referring, in some way or other, to “the mean.” So, for example, in Miller (1980) we find “the character of the mean,” in Jowett (1892) “the principle of the mean,” and in Fowler (1925), “the standard of the mean.”

deficiency' (and related words). This tendency to switch without notice or comment strongly suggests that there is no philosophically significant difference between the great and the small, on the one hand, and excess and deficiency, on the other. A further reason to identify them, if one is needed, is that the ancient commentators all identify them as well.22

The great and the small, being equivalent to excess and deficiency, is a general term, under which specific measurable dimensions (such as length, time, temperature, weight, etc.) all fall. So much is clear from the Statesman. Its status as an ontological principle is decidedly less clear, at least when we focus on that dialogue alone. And so I will postpone discussing the ontological aspect of the great and the small until Chapter 3 where we will turn to the Philebus and its detailed discussion of the unlimited (another equivalent for excess and deficiency and the great and the small).

Let us continue with the Stranger's discussion. The great and the small both exist and are judged in relation both to each other and to due measure. The Stranger now proceeds to explain why we should lay down the great and the small both as existing and as being judged in relation to due measure. The reason is that if the great and the small cannot be judged, and do not exist, in relation to due measure, then statecraft, weaving, and other such crafts (τέχνας) (284a5), along with their products (τἆργα) (284a5), would be “destroyed (διολοῦμεν)” (284a6) and would “disappear (ἀφανίσωμεν)” (284b3). For all such crafts “guard against exceeding due measure and falling short of it, not as something nonexistent but as something hard to deal with in their practice (τὸ τοῦ 22 See Sayre (2006), pp. 149-150.
μετρίου πλέον καὶ ἐλαττων ὦξ ως οὐκ ὁν ἄλλῃ ὦξ ὁν χαλεπὸν περὶ τὰς πράξεις παραφυλάττουσι)” (284a8-10). And it is by “preserving measure in this way that everything good and fine is produced (τῷ τρόπῳ τὸ μέτρον σφόνευσαι πάντα ἀγαθὰ καὶ καλὰ ἀπεργάζονται)” (284a10-b1). In short, it is essential to such crafts not only that the great and the small exist in relation to due measure, but also that the great and the small be judged in relation to due measure. If it is not possible to judge the great and the small in relation to due measure, then it is not possible to practice such crafts. If it is not possible for a made product to be appropriately measured, then it is not possible for that product to be a good and fine object of a craft.

Recall now that the initially stated purpose of the conversation between the Stranger and Young Socrates is to define the statesman, a person who is from the start revealed to be a practitioner of a particular craft (i.e., statecraft) (see, e.g., 259b4). Lest this search lack a way forward, the Stranger insists that he and Young Socrates compel the “more and the less to be measured not only with respect to each other but also with respect to the inception of due measure (τὸ πλέον...καὶ ἐλαττων μετρητὰ...μὴ πρὸς ἀλληλα μόνον ἄλλα καὶ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ μετρίου γένεσιν)” (284b8-c1). This is a fourth formulation of the two arts. The first art measures the more and the less with respect to each other, while the second art measures them with respect to the γένεσις of due measure. This formulation of the first art presents no problems or novelties. This formulation of the second art, however, introduces the claim that the second art measures relative to τὴν τοῦ μετρίου γένεσιν. And commentators are sharply divided on what exactly this phrase means, and so also on how to translate it accurately. By this phrase,
the Stranger could mean either (1) the generating or creating of the due measure itself,\textsuperscript{23} or (2) the generating of things that are characterized by due measure.\textsuperscript{24}

As Sayre (2005, pp. 7-8) notes, the surrounding context strongly suggests (2). For this formulation comes in the midst of a discussion about the relationship between due measure and the crafts. Of particular import is the Stranger's mention of the fact that it is by preserving measure that the crafts produce “good and fine” things. These good, fine, and measured products are, of course, generated. And so when the stranger refers to τὴν τοῦ μετρίου γένεσιν, we should understand him as referring to the generation of things which are characterized by the appropriate measures; not the generation of a norm of appropriateness or of due measure itself.\textsuperscript{25} The second art of measurement, then, measures with a view toward making or generating things that are characterized by the appropriate measurements. Examples of such measurement include “this nose is too long for a statue of Socrates,” as thought (or muttered) by a sculptor trying to make a bust of Socrates; or, “the walls of this pithos (a jar used for bulk storage) are too thin,” as thought by the potter.

Such judgments could of course be made by non-craftsmen; they could be made by people observing a craftsman's work or by people interested in buying the statue, or pithos, or whatever. And such people are not, in any obvious way, judging relative to the


\textsuperscript{24} Rowe (1995a), Sayre (2005) p. 7-8 give this reading of this phrase.

\textsuperscript{25} Sayre (2005, 2006) opts to translate γένεσιν as ‘inception' in order to avoid introducing words into the English translation of this phrase that have no correspondent in the Greek. He accepts that “the generation of what is in due measure”, for example, adequately captures the sense of the phrase, but notes that it takes liberties with the Greek.
_inception_ or _generation_ of due measure, since they are not making these judgments with a view towards fixing the excess or defect and instilling measure in the product. Rather, they are simply judging relative to the condition of due measure. The inclusion of the word _γένεσιν_ both here and in the next formulation is not, in my view, necessary. One can engage in the second art without measuring relative to the _generation_ of anything. The Stranger's inclusion of _γένεσιν_ indicates both the particularly prominent role that the second art plays in the crafts and, more importantly, draws our attention to the fact that the activities of craftsmen afford clear, easy to understand, illustrations of the second art.

The Stranger then goes on to make explicit the mutual dependence between the crafts and due measure, and in so doing gives a fifth formulation of the two arts. We should suppose, he says, that it is equally the case that “all the crafts exist (τὰς τέχνας πάσας εἶναι)” (284d4-5) and that “greater and smaller are measurable not only with respect to each other but also with respect to the inception of due measure (μεῖζόν τε...καὶ ἔλαττον μετρεῖσθαι μὴ πρὸς ἄλληλα μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ μετρίου γένεσιν)” (284d5-6). For if greater and smaller are measurable with respect to the inception of due measure, then the crafts exist; and if the crafts exist, then greater and smaller are thus measurable (284e6-8). In other words, if it is possible for things to be appropriately measured, then it is possible for there to be crafts the purpose of which is to produce those appropriately measured things. And if there are such crafts, then it is is possible for things to be appropriately measured, for the task of these crafts is to produce such products.
More will be said about this mutual dependence in section 2. Before moving on to the sixth formulation, let me note one further fact revealed by the introduction of the crafts into the discussion of the art of measurement. While the Stranger typically formulates the second art of measurement as measuring whether or not something is greater or smaller (or more or less, etc.) than the due measure, it is nonetheless clear that there is a third possibility, namely, that the second art measures a thing as being *equivalent* to the condition of due measure. For surely craftsmen make these kinds of judgments, though perhaps only implicitly and without stating them. The sculptor at some point and in some sense judges that “this is the right length for Socrates' nose;” the musician, that “this is the appropriate speed for this piece of music;” and so on. Otherwise, they would never stop fiddling with their work, or would do so only from frustration.

Young Socrates agrees to what has been said and asks the Stranger what comes next. In response, the Stranger claims that “it is clear that we should divide the art of measurement, cutting it in two as we said (δῆλον ὅτι διαιροὶμεν ἄν τὴν μετρητικὴν, καθὰπερ ἐρρήθη, ταύτη δίχα τέμνοντες)” (284e2-3). He then goes on to give a sixth and final formulation of the division:

As one part of it we lay down all those arts measuring number, length, depth, width, and speed relative to the opposite; as another, those measuring according to due measure, to the fitting, the timely, and the proper—all that has been withdrawn from the extremes to the mean (ἐν μὲν τιθέντες αὐτῆς μόριον συμπάσας τέχνας ὁπόσαι τὸν ἀριθμὸν καὶ μήκη καὶ βάθη καὶ βάθη καὶ πλάτη καὶ ταχύτητας πρὸς τοὐναντίον μετροῦσιν, τὸ δὲ ἐτερον, ὁπόσαι πρὸς τὸ μέτριον καὶ τὸ πρέπον καὶ τὸν καπρὸν καὶ τὸ δέον καὶ πάνθ' ὁπόσαι εἰς τὸ μέσον ἀπωκίσθη τῶν ἐσχάτων) (284e3-8).
This final formulation is markedly different from what came before. The main difference is that this formulation lacks any explicit reference to the great and the small, excess and deficiency, or any related terms, such as greatness and smallness or more and less. Instead we find that both arts of measurement measure “number, length, depth, width, and speed,” the first in relation to “the opposite” and the second in relation to “the due measure, the fitting, the timely, and the proper.” That the Stranger fails to note or comment upon this switch suggests that the phrase “number, length, depth, width, and speed” refers to various dimensions of the great and the small, breaking that general term down into more specific categories. This suggestion becomes more plausible if we look to the description of the first art, according to which the first art measures number, length, depth, width, and speed relative to the opposite. Consider measuring number relative to the opposite. The ancient Greeks had not yet discovered negative numbers, and so by the opposite of a number, the Stranger cannot mean a negative one. Rather, ‘ἀριθμὸν’ here probably means something like 'amount'. And measuring an amount relative to the opposite can plausibly be taken as a way of measuring the greatness of something relative to something smaller. An example of measuring “number (i.e., amount) relative to the opposite” would be “that army is greater than this smaller one” (or, to get the word 'amount' into the judgment, “there is a greater amount of soldiers in that army than there is in this one”). Likewise, measuring length relative to the opposite should be understood as measuring something as longer in comparison with something shorter. For example, “this path is longer than that shorter one.” And similar such accounts can be given,

26 ‘Amount’ is one translation of 'ἀριθμὸν' given in LSJ.
mutatis mutandis, for depth (deeper and shallower), width (wider and narrower), and speed (quicker and slower).

Another difference between this formulation and the previous ones is that the second art is here described as measuring relative to due measure, the fitting, the timely, and the proper; not just due measure (or its inception, or the condition of it). These newly mentioned terms, however, should not be read as referring to distinct and different kinds of standard. For there is considerable overlap in the meanings of these words; indeed, in many instances they can be used as synonyms for one another. In adding this list, the Stranger is signaling that the second art of measurement takes many forms. Whenever we measure something as greater or smaller than is appropriate, or than is fitting, or than is proportionate (these words being possible meanings of several of the terms listed by the Stranger), we are using the second art.

The Stranger then indicates that we should not confine ourselves even to these listed terms. For we are using the second art whenever we judge the great and the small relative to anything that “has been withdrawn from the extremes to the mean (εἰς τὸ μέσον ἀπωκίσθη τῶν ἐσχάτων)” (284e7-8). This is the first and only occurrence in the discussion of measurement of the word 'mean (μέσον)'. Mean (μέσον), of course, is the word Aristotle uses in his doctrine of the mean. How is the Stranger using it here?

Consider the way in which due measure, the fitting, the timely, and the proper can be said to “withdraw from the extremes to the mean.” It is relative to due measure, the fitting, etc. that the great and the small is judged when using the second art. To be greater than one of these standards is to be too great, to be excessive, or in other words, to be
extreme. For example, for a piece of lumber to be longer than is fitting is for it to be too long, or we might say to be excessively long. And to be smaller than is fitting or appropriate is to be too small, or to be deficient. Excess and deficiency are extremes in the sense that they lie at opposite ends of a spectrum. And due measure, the fitting, etc. all avoid these extremes in that they are neither excessive nor deficient. They are all greater than what would be too small and smaller than what would be too great. Thus they are all in between these extremes. This is the sense in which due measure, the fitting, etc. are means. The Stranger, then, ends the sixth formulation of the second art by telling us that due measure, the fitting, etc. are not the only such means; anything which is in between excess and deficiency in this way can be a mean (μέσον) relative to which the second art can measure.

The sixth formulation of the two arts of measurement extends our understanding of measurement in two ways. It does so, first, by both clarifying the extensive scope of the second art of measurement (it measures relative not only to due measure, but also to the fitting, the appropriate, etc.), and giving a generalization of those standards. Any “mean” in between excess and deficiency is such a standard. Second, the sixth formulation extends our understanding by listing a series of dimensions which are measured by the two arts—amount, length, depth, width, and speed. Presumably, however, this list of dimensions is not exhaustive. There is no obvious reason to think that the great and the small might not manifest itself in ways other than those listed here. These listed ways are singled out, I take it, because they are dimensions which are of

27 Indeed, one of the meanings of μέσον is “in between.”

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particular import for the crafts, which are a central focus of the *Statesman* (owing to the fact that the statesman is a craftsman). The citharode must instill and preserve measure in the speed of the music. The sculptor must instill and preserve measure in the amount of clay, and in the length, width, and depth of the various parts of the statue. The crafts are primarily concerned with shaping or configuring sensible material, and so the Stranger lists those dimensions which are particularly pertinent for such activities.

Interestingly, none of the mentioned dimensions is one in which statecraft preserves measure. The social fabric produced by the statesman does not have an amount, length, depth, breadth, or speed and so *a fortiori* is not characterized by the appropriate amount, length, etc. But the point of listing these five dimensions still stands. For in listing those dimensions in which the common crafts aim at preserving measure, the Stranger further clarifies how the art of measurement is involved in these readily understood crafts. And this prepares both Young Socrates and the reader for the Stranger's eventual explanation of how measurement works in the much less readily understood craft of the statesman. Discussion of this explanation will be the task of section 3.

Let us now take stock. The Stranger first formulates the division of the two arts of measurement in such a way that neither Young Socrates nor we as readers can readily understand it. In particular, the phrase “the being necessary for generation (τὴν τῆς γενέσεως ἀναγκαίαν οὐσίαν)” (283c8-9) seems recalcitrant to interpretation. To clarify the division, he then proceeded to give five more formulations. While each of these subsequent formulations has its own peculiarities, together they nonetheless add up to a clear, coherent account of the two arts of measurement. The first art of measurement
measures something as greater relative to something smaller (or vice versa): that arm of
the statue is longer than this (shorter) one, that violinist is playing faster than this (slower)
one, that note is higher than this (lower) one. The second art of measurement, by contrast,
measures something as greater or smaller than (or as satisfying) some standard of
appropriateness: That arm is longer than it ought to be; that violinist is playing too slow;
that note is on pitch. Included among these standards involved in the second art is
anything which is a mean between excess and deficiency. This fact may explain why
μέτριον is the Stranger's preferred word for referring to the standard against which the
second art measures. For as we saw in Chapter 1, the Definitions states that “due measure
is the mean between excess and deficiency and is achieved in accordance with craft
(μέτριον τὸ μέσον ὑπερβολῆς καὶ ἐλλείψεως καὶ κατὰ τέχνην ἄρκουν) (415a4-5). This
definition suggests that perhaps μέτριον is the typical way in which Plato referred to this
mean between excess and deficiency. That is, wherever there is a mean in between excess
and deficiency, that mean would typically be called a due measure (μέτριον).

Having thus clarified excess and deficiency in general, the Stranger and Young
Socrates turn their attention back to the concern that spurred the discussion of
measurement in the first place, namely, the concern about whether the discussion of
weaving was too long. The answer, of course, is that it was not. But in order to see this,
the Stranger is aware that we need to know the purpose of that discussion. It is because
the purpose of the discussion of weaving, and indeed of the entire conversation between
the Stranger and Young Socrates, is to become “better dialecticians about all things (περὶ
πάντα διαλεκτικωτέροις)” (285d5-6) that the discussion of weaving was not too long. For
that discussion gave Young Socrates valuable practice at the method of division, thus helping him become better at dialectic.

But this is not the only way in which the definition of weaving helped Young Socrates become a better dialectician. For the details of the definition of weaving will be crucially important when it is later put to use as a paradigm for statecraft. Had the discussion of weaving been shorter—had they just skipped straightaway to the conclusion that weaving is an intertwining of warp and woof—only then would there have been cause to criticize the discussion. For in that case, certain details, such as the distinguishing of “causes (αἰτίαι)” from “contributory causes (συναιτίαι)” (see 281d11-e5), would have been left out, thus leaving little way forward for the defining of statecraft. If they had not bothered discussing weaving at such length, then Young Socrates would not have been able to practice the method of division on the much more difficult topic of statecraft. For division was able to proceed in this latter definition only because they were able to use the earlier, extensive definition of weaving as a paradigm. Inasmuch as the purpose of the discussion is to become better dialecticians, then, the discussion of weaving was not too long.

2.2 Clarifications

Let us now turn our attention to clarifying some of the more puzzling and intriguing issues raised by the discussion of measurement. In particular, we will consider (1) the factor deemed “necessary for generation” at 283c8-9, (2) the relationship between due measure and the crafts, and (3) the place of the mathematical arts in the twofold
division. Clarification of these issues promises to strengthen our understanding of the art of measurement.

2.2.1 “The Being Necessary for Generation”

Recall the first formulation at 283c8-9 which states that the second art measures “according to the being necessary for generation (κατὰ τὴν τῆς γενέσεως ἀναγκαίαν οὐσίαν).” The Stranger recognizes Young Socrates' initial failure to comprehend this formulation and tries to clarify it by reformulating it. The five subsequent formulations all refer, in some way or other, to due measure instead of this “being.” Accordingly, it seems safe to assume that there must be some close connection between this enigmatic being and due measure. Indeed, the fact that due measure comes to replace this being in all the clarifying formulations suggests that perhaps due measure is simply a less abstract way of referring to it. Were this suggestion correct, the first formulation would amount to the claim that the second art measures according to due measure, and due measure is necessary for generation.

To follow through with this suggestion, we would want to know how exactly due measure is involved in the generation of measurable things and why due measure is necessary for such generation. The connection drawn between due measure and the crafts hints at answers to these questions, answers which will be discussed in section 2.2. But they are only hints. I will argue shortly that due measure and the being necessary for generation are identified in the Philebus as well, and that this identification is clear and definitive in that dialogue. Before turning to the Philebus, however, let us critically
examine some of the ways that other commentators and translators have tried to understand and clarify the phrase, “τὴν τῆς γενέσεως ἀναγκαίαν οὐσίαν.” For my chosen translation, “the being necessary for generation,” is but one among many possibilities, and my suggestion to identify this “being” with due measure is but one of several approaches to clarifying this puzzling phrase. Instead of examining every translation and interpretation of this phrase, which would take far too long, let us confine our attention to some of the most prominent and representative ones.

Benardete (1984), p. III.34 ambiguously translates “τὴν τῆς γενέσεως ἀναγκαίαν οὐσίαν” as “the necessary (indispensable) being of becoming.” This phrase could mean either “the necessary existence of becoming” or “that being which is necessary for becoming.” Benardete offers little in the way of clarification. The former sense, however, is problematic insofar as there is little indication in the Statesman that “becoming” necessarily exists, nor is there any obvious way to relate the first formulation thus understood with the subsequent five formulations. By contrast, the latter sense avoids these problems and thus is more promising. Rosen's translation, “the necessary being of genesis” (Rosen (1995), p. 123), is similar to Benardete's, but Rosen avoids ambiguity when he subsequently paraphrases this being as “that which is necessary to genesis” (p. 123). Neither scholar, however, gives a detailed analysis of the phrase,28 and so they leave

28 Benardete simply does not discuss it in his commentary, whereas Rosen's discussion consists of two (rhetorical?) questions: “What is it that is generated in this type of measurement? Is it the mean between the two extremes, either of which must be modified in order for the middle term to come into existence?” (Rosen (1995, p. 123). The first question seems misguided. Measurement is primarily of things that are generated—one does not generate things simply by measuring (though measuring certainly can be used in the generation of things, as is the case with the crafts). The second question should be answered ‘no.’ There is no indication in the Statesman that due measure itself is generated (at the very least, it is far from clear, and so would require considerable argument, that the generation of due measure is what is
us with little more than a translation. This translation does not significantly diverge from my chosen translation of “the being necessary for generation.”

Rowe (1995a) translates the phrase as “what producing things necessarily is,” and Rowe (1997) opts for the more general “what coming into being necessarily is.” These translations, however, clarify the first formulation only by obscuring our understanding of the second art as described by the other five formulations. For on Rowe's reading, whatever coming into being (or production) necessarily is, it is according to that the second art measures. But there is a categorical difference between due measure, on the one hand, and what coming into being necessarily is, on the other. Coming into being, at the very least, is a process or change, and due measure is not. And so we would want to know how exactly the first formulation, understood as Rowe would have us understand it, harmonizes with the subsequent five formulations, all of which prominently feature due measure in place of “τὴν τῆς γενέσεως ἀναγκαίαν οὐσίαν.” Rowe's translation makes this need particularly pressing insofar as it introduces this categorical difference between the first and the subsequent five formulations of the second art. Rowe, however, gives us no account of how the first formulation, understood as he suggests, relates to the other formulations.

Miller (1980) is one of the few commentators who addresses this phrase directly and at length. He translates the phrase as “the essential being necessary to coming-into-being” (p. 66). He takes the things that come-into-being to be human speeches and deeds mentioned in this first formulation). Further, the ensuing discussion makes it clear that the generated things under discussion are sensible particulars (for example, things made by the crafts) and not the standards against which those generated things are measured. In any event, these questions do not do much to elucidate this puzzling phrase.
(λόγοι καὶ ἔργα), and he refers to them as “praxis.” The “being” which is essential to praxis are the Forms which human praxis ought to instantiate, Forms such as Justice or the Good. For Miller, these Forms are essential in that human praxis is necessarily directed towards the instantiation of these Forms; being so directed in part defines what human speeches and deeds are.

One problem with this line of interpretation is that there is very little in the text to suggest that the Forms which occupied Plato in the Republic (e.g., the Form of the Good, the Form of Justice) are what the Stranger has in mind here. The typical words for Forms—εἶδος, ἰδέα, γένος, παράδειγμα—are absent. And the fact that the Stranger uses the word 'οὐσίαν' does not mean that he is necessarily referring to a Form. For while the Forms are certainly called “οὐσία” at Phaedo 65d13-e1, so too are generated, sensible particulars at Philebus 26d7-8. It is incautious to conclude that Forms are at issue merely on the basis of the Stranger's use of a word that can, but need not, refer to Forms.

Another problem is that, in order to connect this account of the first formulation with the five subsequent formulations, Miller introduces the supposition that “the mean (τὸ μέτριον)” is an “intermediate” between the relevant Form and the sensible thing being measured. There is, however, very little indication in the text that τὸ μέτριον fills such an intermediate role. Moreover, if τὸ μέτριον is intermediate in this manner, then what the Stranger claims in the first formulation is, strictly speaking, wrong. For Miller says that there must be some sort of intermediate between Forms and sensibles because Forms and sensibles are “incommensurate”—the one cannot be measured relative to the other. On Miller's account, however, the first formulation claims that the second art measures
according to Forms. Such measurement would be impossible, however, were Forms and sensibles incommensurate.

Were Miller to allow for the identification of the οὐσίαν with due measure, his account would not run into these problems. For, with such an identification, there would be no need to bring Forms into the account, nor would there be a need for an intermediate between Forms and sensibles. The problems with Miller's account arise precisely where he differs from my suggested reading of the first formulation. ²⁹

Section 2.2 will give further reason for identifying due measure and the being necessary for generation by showing how such an identification is not only comprehensible but enlightening, at least in the case of the generation of the products of the crafts. Before turning to that discussion, however, let us consider the *Philebus*. For the discussion of ontology in that dialogue strongly indicates that we should identify due measure with the being necessary for generation. ³⁰

In the *Philebus*, Socrates classifies due measure (μέτριον, 24c8) as an example of an ontological principle, namely, limit. While a detailed exposition of measure, limit, and the ontological scheme of the *Philebus* will have to wait until Chapter 3, we may note for now that limit is one of four ontological principles into which Socrates divides “everything that now exists (πάντα τὰ νῦν ὄντα)” (23c4). ³¹ And limit, along with the unlimited (another one of the four), is a constitutive principle of all generated things.

²⁹ This overview of alternative translations is far from exhaustive. For a more complete overview of the varying translations see Sayre (2006), pp. 176-7.

³⁰ The argument of the following two paragraphs is heavily indebted to Sayre (2006), pp. 177-8.

³¹ All translations from the *Philebus* are those of Frede (1993), though I have modified many of them.
Consider now 26d7-9, where Socrates claims that all generated things “come into being through the working of measures with limit (γένεσιν εἰς οὐσίαν ἐκ τῶν μετὰ τοῦ πέρατος ἀπειργασμένων μέτρων).” In other words, measure (or, limit) is necessary for the generation of things. Moreover, being a member of the fourfold division of beings, it is quite obviously a being. Measure is, in other words, a being necessary for generation.

So too is the unlimited, however. It is a member of the fourfold division of beings and it is a necessary constituent of all generated things. But as will be argued in Chapter 3, the unlimited is equivalent to the great and the small and, as such, is not a plausible candidate for the being necessary for generation according to which the second art measures. For substituting the great and the small (i.e., the unlimited) into the first formulation of the second art yields the claim that the second art measures according to the great and the small. This, however, looks like a statement of the first art, not the second. Given that the identification of the being necessary for generation with the unlimited yields such a confused result, it is safe to conclude that this identification is incorrect.

Cause (another one of the four) is also a being necessary for generation. For, as Socrates states, all generated things must be caused to exist. But insofar as measurement is not itself productive (though it certainly can be involved in production), cause would be an implausible candidate for the being referred to in the first formulation. Furthermore, if the Stranger meant to claim here that the second art measures according to the cause of generated things, it would be unclear what he was trying to say. What could it possibly mean to measure in this way? Moreover, as with several other attempts
to clarify this phrase, identifying the being with cause obscures the relationship between the first formulation and the subsequent five, something we have reason to avoid.

In short, the *Philebus* indicates that the being necessary for generation mentioned in the first formulation is limit, which in the *Philebus* comprises measure, due measure, and other such standards. More will be said about how due measure functions as a limit in Chapter 3. Let us now turn back to the *Statesman*, and in particular, to what it says about the crafts and due measure.

2.2.2 Due Measure and the Crafts

The Stranger frequently mentions the crafts in explaining or describing some feature of due measure or of its involvement in the second art of measurement. Many of these remarks about the crafts are offered as helpful illustrations intended to clarify what Young Socrates found obscure. Accordingly, it seems safe to assume that further light will be shed on due measure by examining in greater detail the relationship between it and the crafts. Such an examination is the task of this section. Further, as I have already suggested, the connection between due measure and the crafts helps clarify how due measure can be said to be a “being necessary for generation.” Thus examining the crafts helps us further understand this puzzling phrase and how it harmonizes with the other formulations of the second art.

Start with the Stranger’s claim that, by “preserving measure (τὸ μέτρον σῴζουσαι)” (284a10-b1), the crafts “produce everything good and fine (πάντα ἀγαθὰ καὶ καλὰ ἀπεργάζονται)” (284b1). A good (and fine) product is a measured product, and its
being measured is responsible for its goodness. Now to preserve measure consists, at least in part, in guarding against both exceeding and being exceeded by (i.e., being deficient with regard to) due measure. Were a product to be characterized by such excess or deficiency, it would for that reason be inadequate, imperfect, or, to speak generally, bad. Let us now examine what reason there is for connecting measure with goodness and badness in this way.

Earlier in the Statesman, the terminology of the second art is prominently used in the passage where the Stranger criticizes the myth of Cronus for being excessive. The Stranger remarks that he and Young Socrates had thought it “appropriate (πρέπειν)” to the king to give a “great (μεγάλα)” (277b3) paradigm. Thus they took upon themselves a great mass of material in the form of the myth, which forced them to use a “greater part (μείζονι...μέρει)” of the myth than was “proper (δέοντος)” (277b5). Recall that both τὸ δέον and τὸ πρέπον are mentioned as standards against which the great and the small are measured by a practitioner of the second art. In claiming that the myth was larger than was appropriate, the Stranger is quite clearly practicing such measurement in the present passage.

Of particular import is the illustration that the Stranger gives in explaining what went wrong with the myth. He says that he and Young Socrates acted “just like sculptors who sometimes hurry inappropriately and add to the work, making several parts larger and greater than is required (καθάπερ ἀνδριατοποιοὶ παρὰ καιρὸν ἐνίοτε σπεύδοντες πλείω καὶ μείζω τὸν δέοντος ἕκαστα τῷ ἔργῳ ἐπεμβαλλόμενοι)” (277a6-b1). Two of the standards of the second art are used here, τὸ καιρὸν and τὸ δέον, and the Stranger’s use of
'larger (πλεῖο)’ and 'greater (μεῖζω)’ brings to mind the great and the small. In light of this terminology, it seems rather safe to conclude that the Stranger is presenting here an example of the second art of measurement as it applies to sculpture. Sculptors are craftsmen, of course, and so the sculptor illustration, in addition to explaining how the Stranger erred in his telling of the myth of Cronus, also illustrates more generally the relationship between crafts and the standards of appropriateness or, to use the Stranger's preferred term in 283c-5c, due measure.

The illustration is straightforward. These sculptors are said to make certain parts of the statue larger or greater than is fitting. In a rush, a sculptor may not take sufficient care to ensure, for example, that the nose is of appropriate proportions or that the left arm fits the statue. For the sake of a more specific example, let us say a sculptor is trying to make a statue of Zeus, but that the nose is too wide, and the left arm is too long. In that case, the nose and arm are greater than is appropriate; they both exceed due measure. Now insofar as the statue is excessive in these two ways, the statue is disproportionate. And for the ancient Greeks, that would mean that it is ugly and bad. For, in ancient Greek sculpture, successful statues were those that exemplified beauty, and such exemplification was primarily a matter of being proportionate.32

32 See, for example, the following fragments from Polykleitos' Kanon. “So the perfect human body should be neither too tall nor too short, nor too stout or too thin, but exactly well proportioned” (Galen, Ars medica; Lucian, de Saltatione 75). “Perfection in proportion comes about via an exact commensurability of all the body’s parts to one another: of finger to finger and of these to the hand and wrist, of these to the forearm, of the forearm to the upper arm; of the equivalent parts of the leg; and of everything to everything else” (Galen, de Temperamentis 1.9; Ars medica 14; Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis; de Usu partium 17.1; de Optima nostri corporis constitutione 4). And, finally, consider the link between perfection and beauty: “Perfection comes about little by little through many numbers” (Philo of Byzantium, Belopoeica 4.1), and “the numbers must all come to a congruence through some system of commensurability and harmony, for ugliness is immediately ready to come into being if only one chance element is omitted or
Were the sculptor to narrow the nose and shorten the arm to the appropriate degrees, the arm and nose would then “fit” into the statue, and the statue would become “measured” in the sense of being proportionate. And so long as the sculptor preserved this measure or proportion throughout the production process, the resultant statue would itself be measured and proportionate and, thus, beautiful and good. This is the sense in which the sculptor “produces something good and fine” by “preserving measure.”

The above examples of good and bad statues should not be taken to indicate, however, that all statues (or products of the crafts) must either be good or bad, or that there is a sharp line demarcating the good from the bad. Indeed, most statues are most likely in a “gray area”: they are not grossly excessive or deficient, but they also lack the degree of proportion that would make them beautiful. And so they are neither particularly good, nor particularly bad, but rather unremarkable and indifferent. According to the Stranger's framework of due measure, their very indifference is due to their being neither especially well measured nor especially excessive or deficient.

As I have indicated, the Stranger introduces the example of the sculptor as an illustration of ruining a product by making something about it excessive. It is meant to make comprehensible the relationships between goodness and badness, on the one hand, and due measure, excess, and deficiency, on the other. That this is its purpose invites us to generalize from the example. And so it seems that, in general, crafts are concerned with at least one measurable dimension of something: sculpting is concerned with, among other things, the amount, length, depth, and width, of clay (or marble, or wax, etc.), house-

inserted out of place” (Plutarch, Moralia 45C). All translations of Polykleitos' fragments are those of McCague (2009).
building with the length of lumber, singing with pitch of the voice, drawing with the thickness and shade of line, and so on. In all of these cases, it is possible for the object of the craft to be either excessive, or deficient, or of an appropriate degree in the dimension(s) with which the craft is concerned. An artist might make a line too thick or too thin, or too dark or too light. Good artists, however, make their lines the appropriate thickness and shade. And by making such lines, a good artist creates a good drawing. Similar details could be given *mutatis mutandis* for the other crafts mentioned. In general, the realization of the appropriate measures in the relevant measurable dimensions is responsible for the goodness of the objects of the crafts; the failure to realize those measures, for the badness of those objects.

I mentioned above that good artists are those who are able to preserve measure in their drawings, and thus regularly produce good drawings. At 283e3-6, the Stranger indicates that this holds generally and not just for artists and drawings. He says that exceeding, and being exceeded by, due measure occurs “in words and works (ἐν λόγοις...καὶ ἐν ἔργοις)” (283e4), and, further, that “the chief difference among the good and the bad among us lies in this (ἐν ὧν καὶ διαφέρουσι μάλιστα ἡμῶν οἱ κακοὶ καὶ οἱ ἀγαθοί)” (283e5-6). That is, the chief difference lies in whether or not one's words and works are appropriately measured.

The reference to “words” or “speeches” (λόγοι) addresses the fact that certain crafts do not make something tangible like a sketch or a house, but rather produce words. Poets or rhetoricians, for example, are concerned with words (λόγοι), and success in their crafts results from preserving measure in their poems or speeches. To modify every noun
with at least two adjectives is excessive and spoils the poem; to use the “rule of three” in 
every other sentence is likewise excessive and likewise ruins the speech. In short, the 
chief difference between those of us who are good (at a craft) and those of us who are bad 
(at it) is whether or not one preserves measure in the object of the craft.

The reference to “the good and bad among us” might, however, be read to indicate 
that the Stranger is talking about good and bad people (in contrast, for example, to good 
and bad artists or poets or rhetoricians) and so about the human good.33 In a similar vein, 
the reference to due measure ἐν λόγοις καὶ ἐν ἔργοις might be read to indicate that the 
Stranger is discussing goodness in how we act and so, again, that he is discussing 
straightforwardly ethical topics.34 It might seem, then, that the Stranger is applying the 
conceptual framework of due measure to ethical topics and telling us that to be a good 
human being and to act well is to engage in appropriately measured actions.

But such a conclusion is, I think, premature. For the Stranger does not explicitly 
specify what kind of goodness or badness is under consideration. To suppose that he is 
straightforwardly discussing ethical topics assumes that he is discussing goodness and 
badness as they relate to the living of a human life. But he might simply be talking about 
goodness and badness as they relate to the crafts. Indeed, the fact that the Stranger 
mencions due measure in one's words and works suggests the latter. For the word 
translated as 'work' is ἔργον which typically refers to the works or products of the crafts.35

34 Miller (1980, p. 66) does this.
35 Cf. Statesman 277a7, 282e4-5 288a8-10, 288b4-8 289e6, and 308e1.
The ἔργον of the craft of medicine, for example, is health;\textsuperscript{36} the ἔργον of the house-builder, a house.\textsuperscript{37} Were the Stranger straightforwardly discussing ethically good actions here in this passage, we might expect him to use a word that more clearly indicates as much, for example, πρᾶξις. But he does not. And given the surrounding context, where the crafts and their products are often at center stage, it seems ill-considered to read \textit{Statesman} 283e3-6 as a straightforward reference to anything specifically ethical.\textsuperscript{38}

Nonetheless, my interpretation of 283e3-6 does not rule out the possibility of an application of the framework of due measure to ethics. It merely shows that 283e3-6 is not obviously such an application. The passage is perhaps (and at most) an undeveloped hint in that direction.

Now return to the relationship between due measure and the crafts. Particularly important for understanding this relationship is the fifth formulation. It claims that there is a biconditional relationship between the second art and crafts: The great and the small is measurable relative to due measure if and only if crafts exist. Now given the fact that the first art of measurement is a craft (see 284e4), the Stranger must not be referring to \textit{all} crafts in this biconditional. For presumably the first art of measurement could exist without the second art or due measure existing. Rather, the Stranger must only be referring to crafts such as weaving and statecraft (cf. 284a7-8), that is, crafts “relating to things done (περὶ τὰς πράξεις)” (284c2). Call these practical crafts.

\textsuperscript{36} Cf. \textit{Euthydemus} 291e.

\textsuperscript{37} Cf. \textit{Charmides} 165e.

\textsuperscript{38} As for example Miller (1980, p. 66) does.
Consider the claim that the second art of measurement exists only if practical crafts do. Unfortunately, the Stranger says little that would indicate his reason for thinking this true.\textsuperscript{39} I think, however, that we can venture a plausible, though speculative, reason for it. Consider the second art of measurement as applied to a piece of lumber. To measure it as too long or too narrow requires that we have in mind its function or purpose (about which, more later). For the piece of lumber is not simply too long or too narrow, but rather too narrow \textit{for a floor joist}, or too long \textit{for a rafter}. But to make such judgments requires that there be (or that there possibly be) such things as floor joists and rafters, and such things exist only if buildings exist. For to be a floor joist, as opposed to a mere piece of lumber, is to be a (potential) part of a building. Buildings, however, are human artifacts; they exist only if there are human activities that bring them into existence. The activity that brings them into existence, however, just is craft activity. And so in order to judge that this piece of lumber is too long for a rafter, it must be the case that buildings exist which, in turn, requires that there be the craft of building.

Similar examples could be given \textit{mutatis mutandis} for cases other than pieces of lumber. To judge a sole as too long requires that the craft of cobbling exist, and to judge a note as too sharp requires that the art of music exist. In such cases, to use the second art of measurement requires that there be crafts.

Now consider the other part of the biconditional: Practical crafts exist only if the second art of measurement and due measure exist. If due measure did not exist, of course there would be no such thing as preserving it, nor any such thing as guarding against

\textsuperscript{39} Sayre (2006), pp. 188-90 turns to the story of Theuth in the \textit{Philebus} to find a reason for why Plato may have put this claim forward.
exceeding it or being exceeded by it. But if such preservation and guarding is not possible, then evidently neither is practical craft activity. For such activity just *is* (at least in part) such preservation and guarding, according to the Stranger. And if practical craft activity is not possible, presumably the products of that kind of activity could not be said to exist either. In short, if there are no due measures, then there are no practical crafts nor are there products of such crafts.

For the sake of illustration, consider the sculptor. Among other things, sculptors try to make the noses of their statues of Zeus neither too wide nor too narrow; they try to give them the appropriate widths. But sculptors could not guard against making the nose too wide, if there were no such thing as due measure. For in that case there would be no such thing as a nose that was too wide (i.e., a nose that exceeded the due measure in width). Likewise, the sculptor could not make an appropriately sized nose, for again there would be no such thing. Indeed, it seems that if there were no appropriate measures for their statues, sculptors could not sculpt anything wrongly or rightly, well or badly. For in such a case there would be no such thing as good or bad statues and, indeed, no such thing as statues *at all*. What distinguishes a statue of Zeus from a mere lump of clay is that the former realizes some (if not all) of the measurements and proportions characteristic and definitive of statues of Zeus, whereas the latter does not. If there are no appropriate measures or proportions, every mass of clay would simply be a lump, some greater or smaller than others, but none any more proportionate, fitting, beautiful, or better than any other.
The practical crafts are skills for producing things well and for making good products. If there were no such thing as producing something well nor any such thing as a good product, there would be no such thing as a practical craft. And so, as the fifth formulation states, due measure is a necessary condition of the existence of the practical crafts and of their objects. In this way, due measure can be said to be necessary for the production of the objects of the crafts.

It is in this sense that craftsmen can be said to employ an art of measurement that measures “according to the being necessary for generation (κατὰ τὴν τῆς γενέσεως ἀναγκαίαν οὐσίαν)” (283c8-9). In the case of the crafts, the generation in question is the production of the objects of the crafts. The “being” is due measure. And so what the first formulation of the second art claims, at least with regard to the practical crafts, is that due measure must exist (i.e., must be a “being”) in order for the practical crafts to produce their objects. Further, it states that to employ the second art of measurement is to measure according to the relevant due measure. This is the sense in which the practical crafts measure according to the being necessary for generation.

Before moving on to discuss the mathematical arts, let us address one more question about the relationship between due measure and the crafts: What determines the appropriate measures for some object? It will be useful here to recall the resolution of the concern that began the discussion of measurement. The discussion of weaving was not too long inasmuch as the purpose of the conversation was to become better dialecticians. And the discussion of weaving helped Young Socrates do precisely this by giving him practice both at defining weaving, and also at (eventually) defining statecraft, for without
the definition of weaving, there would have been no clear way forward in the definition of statecraft. What determines the appropriate length for a discussion is the purpose of the discussion. Had that purpose been different, the appropriate length would have been different as well. And the Stranger is well aware that there can be different purposes for discussions and that, indeed, many people might judge the discussion of weaving “relative to something else (πρὸς ἄλλ'){(287a5)—that is, by some other purpose. Judging the conversation relative to some other purpose (e.g., impressing one's audience), one might very well think it too long.

Though the Stranger never directly extends this connection between purposes and due measure to the case of the crafts, it nonetheless seems plausible that the purposes of the crafts also determine the appropriate measures for their objects. Why is this nose too wide for this statue of Zeus? Because the statue is supposed to represent Zeus—such representation is, in part, its purpose. After all, the sculptor adds clay here and subtracts clay there for the sake of making a representation of Zeus. (But this is the purpose of the statue only in part, for the statue of Zeus is itself for the sake of something else, e.g., honoring Zeus.) The current nose detracts from such representation insofar as it makes the statue ugly and comical. Much the same can be said, mutatis mutandis for the other crafts. In order to make a house, the pieces of lumber should be of certain lengths; in order to make a pithos, the clay should be of a certain thickness, and so on.

As a result of the fact that the appropriate measures for objects of the crafts are thus determined by their purpose(s), what the appropriate measures for some type of object are will vary depending on the particular circumstances in which that particular
object is situated. For in order to fulfill its purpose, an object must be crafted in such a way that takes into account those particular circumstances. By way of illustration, consider a pair of shoes. For the sake of simplicity, let us say that the purpose of pair of shoes is to facilitate walking and to protect one's feet (disregard the role they play in fashion, displaying one's wealth, etc.). Depending on whom a pair of shoes is for, the appropriate measurements for a pair of shoes will vary. Five inches may be an appropriate length for a pair of toddler's shoes, but for an adult such soles would be far too short. And the reason they would be too short is that shoes with such sole lengths would not fulfill the purpose of shoes well at all, if those shoes were for an adult. The due measure for soles (and for the other parts of shoes) varies depending upon whose shoes they are meant to be. The size of the particular person's feet is one of the particular circumstances that a cobbler needs to take into account in crafting shoes.

That the due measure for some object varies depending upon particular circumstances seems to hold in most cases. The appropriate volume for a sung note is determined, in part, by the particular venue in which it is performed; the appropriate dosage of medicine, by the severity of the particular illness and the condition of the particular patient. Which particular circumstances are relevant is a function of what the object is and what its purpose is. Physical length (as opposed to temporal length) is irrelevant when singing notes; likewise, the volume of one's voice is irrelevant when making shoes.\[^{40}\] It seems unlikely that there is any general rule for figuring out which circumstances are relevant for which objects, and the Stranger certainly does nothing to

\[^{40}\] The Stranger indicates that he is well aware of this at 286c5-d6.
indicate that he thinks there is such a rule. In many cases it is simply obvious which circumstances are relevant. And when it is not obvious, it seems plausible that having the (non-codifiable) ability to correctly judge which circumstances are relevant is part of what it is to possess craft-expertise.

These examples point toward the fact that, for most aspects of most objects of the crafts, there is no one, absolute, appropriate measure. Accordingly, insofar as the practical crafts are illustrative of how due measure functions generally, the connection drawn between due measure and the crafts suggests that due measure varies depending upon circumstances. To be clear, it does not vary with the whims, desires, or beliefs of the people using or making the objects in the way that Protagoras or a similarly minded relativist might think. That a sole of 5 inches is too small for me is true regardless of what I think, believe, or feel. Rather, it varies with those circumstances relevant to whatever it is that is under consideration. The Stranger thus avoids relativism while simultaneously accommodating contextual variability in what is appropriate. He does not merely identify certain invariable truths or principles concerning goodness; he also develops an account of how it is that goodness and beauty can come to be present in this variable, imperfect, sensible world around us.

2.2.3 The Mathematical Arts and the Art of Measurement

Let us now shift our focus to the question of where the mathematical arts, such as arithmetic and geometry, are to be placed in the Stranger's division of measurement. As
we shall see, how this question is answered is of crucial importance for comparing Aristotle's doctrine of the mean with the *Statesman*'s art of measurement.

The central passage of the *Statesman* in this regard is 284e3-8, where the Stranger gives us his sixth and final formulation of the two arts. Consider the formulation of the first art: it “measures number, length, depth, width, and speed relative to the opposite (τὸν ἀριθμὸν καὶ μήκη καὶ βάθη καὶ πλάτη καὶ ταχυτήτας πρὸς τούναντίον μετροῦσιν)” (284e4-5). Nearly every commentator who addresses the place of the mathematical arts within the division of measurement interprets this passage as indicating that the mathematical arts belong to, and indeed are paradigmatic instances of, the first art of measurement.41 When the Stranger refers to “measuring number,” so this interpretation goes, he is referring to arithmetic (or perhaps counting), and when he refers to “measuring lengths depths, and widths,” to geometry. These commentators typically do not identify which mathematical art “measures speed,” but perhaps they might say it refers to something like harmonics or astronomy (in the sense described in *Republic* VII).

According to this interpretation, the division between the two arts of measurement is a division between mathematical arts, on the one hand, and normative arts on the other.42 Many commentators have then proceeded to compare the art of measurement thus interpreted with Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. And what they find is that Aristotle's division between two kinds of means—an arithmetic mean and a mean “relative to us”


(these will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4)—maps onto the Statesman’s division between mathematical measurement and normative measurement.43

As far as I am aware, the comparison has never been pushed or probed much further than simply noting this apparently tidy correspondence. Further investigation along these lines, however, would probably prove unfruitful. For there is a fundamental problem with this comparison: The mathematical arts do not belong to, and hence a fortiori are not paradigmatic instances of, the first art of measurement. Look again at the sixth formulation of the first art. It measures number, length, depth, width, and speed relative to the opposite. The five preceding formulations of the first art make this feature of it perfectly clear as well. The first art is always described, in some way or other, as measuring in terms of two opposites (e.g., greater to smaller, more to less, the great and the small relative to each other). And in the five preceding formulations, it is abundantly clear what kinds of measurements the Stranger has in mind as paradigmatic examples of the first art: measurements such as “that path is longer than this (shorter) one,” or “that army is smaller than this (larger) one.” These measurements bear little resemblance to arithmetic or geometry. Further, as I argued in section 1, these kinds of measurements are precisely the kinds of examples that the sixth formulation of the first art suggests as well, provided that we take into account the aforementioned qualification “relative to the opposite.” For measuring length relative to the opposite seems to be nothing other than measuring something longer in comparison with something shorter; measuring width

relative to the opposite, nothing other than measuring something wider in comparison with something narrower; and so on.

Further, in contrast to the interpretation in question, it is far from obvious that the mathematical arts are non-normative. After all, there are correct answers to mathematical problems, and there are appropriate methods for finding them. Moreover, it makes perfect sense to say of some mathematical proofs that they are deficient (e.g., if they leave out some crucial step) or, of others, that they are excessive (e.g., if they include irrelevant or unnecessary steps). And inasmuch as it is excessive or deficient, the proof is sloppy, imperfect, and in general, bad. If mathematics is to be classified as a kind of measurement, it may very well be that it is an example of the second kind of measurement, not the first.

But it is far from clear that mathematics is even a kind of measurement at all. In the Statesman, both arts of measurement are described as measuring one thing relative to another: the first art measures greatness relative to smallness (or vice versa), and the second art measures greatness (or smallness) relative to what is appropriate. While arithmetic and geometry may involve some comparative measurements (e.g., Line AB is longer than Line AC), such comparisons are hardly exhaustive of the operations of those arts. Indeed, the paradigmatic and most common operations of those arts are not comparisons of greater or smaller to something else; the most common operations are

44 Plato was well aware of the normativity involved in mathematics. Indeed, it seems that he may have even thought that ethical norms are involved in mathematics. See, for example, Socrates' discussion of education in Republic VII and his diagnosis of Callicles' fundamental failing at Gorgias 508a3-8. For discussions of the relationship between mathematics and ethics in Plato, see Burnyeat (2000), Roochnik (1994), and Kung (1989).
things like solving for an unknown length using the Pythagorean Theorem, or adding two numbers. Thus, mathematical arts are not straightforward examples of either art of measurement.

This suggests that the question “to which kind of measurement does arithmetic, or geometry belong?” may be ill-conceived. For the question assumes that it must belong to one of them, but there is little reason to think this assumption true.

Given that the first art of measurement does not include mathematical arts, however, the typical way of comparing the Statesman's art of measurement with Aristotle's doctrine of the mean is clearly inadequate. The first art of measurement has nothing to do with Aristotle's “arithmetic means.” It is simply false that the division of measurement in the Statesman maps onto the distinction between two kinds of mean in Aristotle. And so with regard to the relationship between Plato's measure and Aristotle's mean, we need a fresh start. In particular, we need adequate accounts of both measure and the mean. And as was said at the outset, giving such an account of measure is the goal of the present and subsequent chapter, while giving such an account of the mean is the goal of Chapter 4.

2.3 Statecraft and the Second Art of Measurement

As I mentioned earlier, the passage on measurement has been neglected by commentators until fairly recently. Prior to recent work on measurement, commentary on the Statesman tended to focus on the overtly political passages of the dialogue. Much of the political theorizing in the Statesman, however, is infused with the metaphysical and
methodological theorizing of the dialogue, theorizing such as that found in the passage on measurement. As a result, commentary that focuses solely on the political theory without paying attention to this theorizing is less clarifying than it otherwise could be.

This is particularly true of the overtly political last six Stephanus pages of the dialogue, 306-311. In these pages, the Stranger gives his final, definitive account of statecraft, bringing the paradigm of the weaver to bear on the discussion of the statesman. Throughout these six pages, the terminology of the second art of measurement—particularly τὸ καιρόν, but also τὸ πρέπον, and τὸ δέον—is used repeatedly. The abundance of such terminology makes it perfectly plain that statecraft makes use of the second art of measurement. Indeed, we should expect that the statesman would do this, given that statecraft is a craft and the crafts make use of the second art, as was discussed above. To further our understanding of due measure, let us examine the Stranger's final illustration of the second art at work, namely, statecraft.

2.3.1 Lane on Statecraft

Unfortunately, most commentators on these final six pages pay little attention to the statesman's use of the second art. One notable exception is Melissa Lane (1998). According to her account, the statesman's knowledge “consists in knowing what the kairos demands,” (p. 143), with καιρός understood in strictly temporal terms as the “right time.” Καιρός, of course, is one of the standards against which the second art measures, and thus her account of statecraft highlights the statesman's use of the second art.

45 This is also made perfectly plain by the fact that, in the passage on measurement, the Stranger tells us that if the second art failed to exist, then so would statecraft (see 284a5-8).
However, her account is problematic for at least two reasons: First, it multiplies the tasks of the statesman in a way that is inconsistent with what the Stranger says, and second, it relies on interpreting καιρός as having a primarily temporal sense. I will argue later that καιρός cannot have a primarily temporal sense in the Statesman, given the various uses to which it is put. Let me begin discussing statecraft, however, by examining the first problem in greater detail.

Lane's account of statecraft is based primarily upon the result drawn about statecraft at the end of the final series of divisions:

For what is really kingship [i.e., statecraft] must not itself perform practical tasks, but control those with the capacity to perform them, because it knows when it is the right time to begin and set in motion the most important things in cities and when it is the wrong time; and others must do what has been prescribed for them (τὴν γὰρ ὄντως οὐσαν βασιλικὴν οὐκ αὐτὴν δεῖ πράττειν ἄλλ’ ἄρχειν τῶν δυναμένων πράττειν, γιγνώσκουσαν τὴν ἀρχήν τε καὶ ὁρμὴν τῶν μεγίστων ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν ἕγκαιριας τε πέρι καὶ ἀκαιρίας, τὰς δ’ ἄλλας τὰ προσταχθέντα δρᾶν) (305c10-d4).

According to Lane, the statesman knows the right time for the various crafts and so tells the various craftsmen of the city when to start and stop their activities. This is the sense in which the statesman knows “what the καιρός demands.” Such directing is the defining task of the statesman, according to Lane, and it distinguishes the statesman from all other craftsmen. This is one task of the statesman.

The above passage comes immediately before the Stranger brings the weaving paradigm to bear on the discussion of statecraft. I will discuss the details of this passage in detail below, but for now let us examine the concluding remarks of that discussion. The Stranger claims that the “single and entire task (ἐν καὶ ὅλον...ἔργον)” (310e7-8) of the
statesman is to “work courageous and moderate characters closely into each other as if
with a shuttle (σώφρονα...τῶν ἀνδρείων ἢθη συγκερκίζοντα)” (310e9) through the
sharing of opinions about the good, the fine, the just, and the opposites of these things.
The task of the statesman is to weave together the woof that is the moderate people with
the warp that is the courageous people and thus to produce “a fine-woven fabric out of
them (εὖήτριον ὑφασμα...ἐξ αὐτῶν)” (310e11-1a1).

According to Lane's account, this weaving together of the citizens is a second
task of statecraft (the first being the above mentioned directing of the crafts). As she puts it,
“there is more to the city than the arts and their practitioners. There are the citizens in
general, and in its relation to them political knowledge is revealed in full kinship to the
example of weaving” (p. 163).

But notice that the Stranger describes the weaving of the courageous and the
moderate as the single and entire task of the statesman. It seems plainly inconsistent with
what the Stranger says here to interpret statecraft such that it has has two tasks. It would
be far preferable to have an account of statecraft which avoided such multiplicity of tasks
and, instead, took the Stranger at his word, positing only one task for the statesman,
namely, the task of weaving.46

The challenge is in incorporating the statesman's directing of the crafts into this
single task. To meet this challenge, we first need to know how exactly the weaving

46 Lane claims that these “two sides of the definition [i.e., directing the crafts and weaving together
the citizens] of the statesman come together in the kairos” (p. 172). The fact that the statesman must know
both the καιρός for initiating the crafts and the καιρός for vigorous and calm action does not, however,
unify these two tasks. For they are still two different καιροί. To claim that, because they are both instances
of knowledge of a καιρός, they are therefore unified would entail that these two aspects of statecraft are
also unified with, for example, improvisational jazz piano insofar as such musicianship also requires
knowledge of a καιρός.
together of the citizens makes use of the second art of measurement. As I shall argue, the statesman's use of the second art in the case of this weaving is similar to the statesman's use of the second art in the case of directing the crafts. And if we heed this similarity, the problem of an apparent multiplicity of tasks will be solved.

2.3.2 Statecraft as Weaving

As the attentive reader may have noticed, there is no mention of due measure or related terms in the above statement of the weaving that the statesman performs. This absence raises the question of how exactly this weaving together of the courageous and the moderate makes use of the second art of measurement.

A promising sign of the tractability of this question is that prior to the discussion of the statesman's weaving, the Stranger discusses the two kinds of people who are to be woven together, and in this discussion the terminology of the second art is prevalent. In particular, the Stranger repeatedly mentions the καιρός. Before entering into the details of the discussion of these two kinds of people, a word about how καιρός should be understood is in order. For it is a matter of dispute as to whether or not, during the time that Plato was writing, καιρός was primarily a temporal word, as in “the right time”, or “opportune moment”.47 Lane, as I have mentioned, comes down firmly on the side of treating it as primarily temporal. In my view, however, this is a mistake: While καιρός

47 Some of the key contributions charting the changes in meaning of καιρός over time include Wilamowitz (1880), Fränkel (1975), Wilson (1980), and Race (1981).
does have a temporal sense in some passages of the *Statesman*, its primary sense is not
temporal.

In its earliest uses, καιρός clearly does not have a temporal aspect. The earliest
recorded use of the word is from Hesiod who uses it to mean something like “due
measure” (cf. *Works and Days*, 694). And most scholars agree that up until around the
4th century B.C., due measure seems to be the primary meaning of the word. Most
scholars further agree that by the late 4th century B.C., καιρός had acquired a primarily
temporal meaning. Thus, Aristotle's use of καιρός is typical of his time (i.e., the late 4th
century) when he claims that the good as it relates to time is the καιρός (I.6 1096a23-7).
The main ground of dispute is the period of transition from the archaic usage of καιρός as
“due measure” to the late 4th century-and-beyond usage of καιρός as “right time.”

Plato belongs to this period over which there is considerable debate. Accordingly,
how we should understand this word, καιρός, which is so central to the *Statesman’s*
account of statecraft, is an open question, waiting to be settled by a close examination of
the passages in which it is used. And as we will see presently, such an examination
reveals that, contrary to Lane's account, καιρός does not have a primarily temporal sense,
but rather means something like “due measure.” For in many instances, treating καιρός as
the “right time” renders the passage in question unintelligible.

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48 See Wilson (1980), pp. 178-9 for a more detailed discussion of why, in this passage from
Hesiod, καιρός should be understood as due measure.

49 A notable exception is Homer. Homer uses it to refer to the part of a body a wound to which
would be lethal (cf. *Iliad* 8.84).
Let us consider some of these passages. At 307b8-c2, the Stranger remarks that we call “things that are deeper and slower and softer than the καιρός 'cowardly and lethargic' (τοῦ καιροῦ...τὰ δὲ βαρύτερα καὶ βραδύτερα καὶ μαλακώτερα δειλὰ καὶ βλακικά).” While it is perhaps intelligible, though certainly not pellucid, to claim that something is slower than the opportune moment (about which more in a moment), it makes no sense to say that something is softer or deeper than the opportune moment. Times or moments are not the kinds of things that can be deep or soft, and so they are not the kinds of things than which something might be deeper or softer. Accordingly, in this passage, καιρός should not be understood to have a temporal aspect. Rather, it must mean something like “appropriate” or “due measure”.

Return to the idea of something being “slower than the right moment.” The reason that this is not a pellucid description is that moments are not themselves slow or fast. To make sense of the phrase “slower than the right moment,” we must think not of something being slower than the right moment, but of something being or occurring after the right moment. In effect, we must “fix” what Plato actually wrote in order to make it intelligible. The same can be said mutatis mutandis for 307b8-9, where the Stranger describes things which are “quicker than the καιρός (τοῦ καιροῦ...θάττω).” It would be far preferable, however, to have interpretations of these remarks that did not require us to thus “fix” Plato's writing. Given that there is such an interpretation, namely, the

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50 In this passage, we also find the same problems as we found in 307b8-c2 concerning things being softer and deeper than the καιρός. For the Stranger here claims that things can be “harder (σκληρότερα)” and “sharper (δέρτερα)” than the καιρός. Both these claims would be unintelligible were we to understand καιρός here in a temporal sense.
interpretation according to which καιρός means something like “due measure,” we ought to opt for it.

Furthermore, Lane's argument for why we should understand καιρός to have a primarily temporal sense is not convincing, even aside from the above considerations. It is correct, and indeed uncontroversial, to hold as she does that in the Statesman, καιρός is a norm to which actions and speeches ought to conform. Likewise, it is correct and uncontroversial to hold that actions and speeches occur in time. From these rather obvious facts, however, Lane concludes that καιρός must have a primarily temporal sense in the Statesman. This seems to me to be a non sequitur. Just because actions are in time does not mean that the norms which govern action must be temporal norms.

Let us now examine the discussion of the two kinds of people in more detail. According to the Stranger, there are strong, vigorous, quick people, on the one hand, and calm, slow, and soft people, on the other. Both sets of qualities are capable of being exhibited in praiseworthy ways. When people are calm or soft or slow in a praiseworthy way, we call them orderly or moderate (307a-b). Likewise, when people are vigorous, quick, or sharp in a praiseworthy way, we call them courageous (306e).

This raises the question of what makes vigorous or calm action praiseworthy. The answer is revealed in what the Stranger goes on to say about blameworthiness with regard to these two sets of qualities. And what he says is contained in the passages quoted above in which καιρός is mentioned. “Things which turn out sharper than is appropriate and appear faster and harder than is appropriate [are] excessive and manic, and things which

turn out deeper and slower and softer than is appropriate [are] cowardly and lethargic
(ὀξύτερα μὲν αὐτὰ γεγονόμενα τοῦ καιροῦ καὶ θάττω καὶ σκληρότερα φαινόμενα [καὶ]
vinceikā καὶ μανικά...τὰ δὲ βαρύτερα καὶ βραδύτερα καὶ μαλακότερα δειλά καὶ
βλακικά)” (307b8-c2). To act more vigorously or calmly than is appropriate is to act in a
blameworthy way (also see 307b4-6). The implication, which is suggested at 307a10-b2,
is that to act with an appropriate degree of vigor and an appropriate degree of calmness is
praiseworthy.

There are several other passages which claim something similar to those quoted
above. At 307e6-7, calm people are described as having a “passion (ἔρωτα)” for calmness
which is “more importunate than it should be (ἀκακικότερον...ἥ χρή)”; this passion, in
other words, is stronger than is appropriate. At 310e2 the souls of the calm people are
said to “grow more sluggish than is appropriate (νωθεστέρα φύεσθαι τοῦ καιροῦ)” when
they reproduce only with one another and not with vigorous souls. Turning to the
vigorous people, we find the Stranger using a standard other than the καιρός for
describing a failure of theirs when he claims that “their desire for a life of this sort [i.e., a
life of war] (τὴν τοῦ τοιούτου βίου...ἐπιθυμίαν)” is “more vigorous than is proper
(σφοδροτέραν τοῦ δέοντος)” (308a6). Recall that τὸ δέον is one of the other standards
mentioned in the sixth formulation of the second art. Thus, to judge that a desire exceeds
tὸ δέον is to employ the second art of measurement. And though δέον typically connotes
necessity or compulsion, the close association the Stranger draws between δέον and other
terms such as μέτριον, καιρόν, and πρέπον should incline us toward treating δέον as
“fitting” or “proper,” both of which are acceptable translations of the word.
While these various remarks clearly demonstrate that the terminology of the second art is relevant to statecraft, they do not tell us how exactly. For it is not as though the statesman is meant to go tell the vigorous or calm people what degree of calmness or vigor they should act with, or what degree of desire or passion they should feel, in each and every situation. Indeed, this possibility is explicitly ruled out at 294a-5b, where the Stranger defends the statesman's use of laws on the basis that it would be practically impossible for the statesman to go about telling everyone how to act.

The link between these remarks and the statesman's weaving is suggested in the discussion running from 309a-10a. There, the Stranger discusses the bonds with which the statesman brings the two kinds of people together. The most important is the “divine bond (θείῳ...δεσμῷ)” (309c2) of “true opinion (ἀληθῆ δόξαν)” concerning “what things are fine, just, good, and the opposite of these (τῶν καλῶν καὶ δικαίων...καὶ ἀγαθῶν καὶ τῶν τούτων ἐναντίων)” (309c5-6). Calm people who are given these true opinions become “genuinely moderate and wise (ὄντως σ＆φρον καὶ φρόνιμον)” (309e6), and a courageous soul with such opinions will be “tamed (ἡμεροῦται)” (309e1) and will be “thus especially willing to share in what is just (τῶν δικαίων μάλιστα οὕτω κοινωνεῖν)” (309e1-2). By weaving together the two kinds of people by means of true opinions, the statesman moderates excessive and inappropriate manifestations of vigor and calmness. The vigorous people, for example, will no longer excessively desire a life of war, but rather will share in what is just and so only desire war when justice demands it. And calm people will no longer foolishly and cowardly avoid action, but will act in accordance with wisdom.
The proper exercise of statecraft produces a citizenry that will, of itself, not fall into the excesses that it otherwise would were the statesman to not exercise his weaving. The citizenry itself avoids being inappropriately vigorous and inappropriately calm. In order to produce such a citizenry, presumably the statesman must know what things are inappropriately vigorous and inappropriately calm, for otherwise it would be unclear how the statesman could take as his goal the production of a social fabric that avoids both of these extremes. The statesman thus uses the second art of measurement in a way similar to the other crafts discussed. Just as a sculptor aims to avoid making an excessively wide or excessively narrow nose, the statesman aims to avoid making a citizenry that is excessively vigorous or excessively calm. And just as sculptors know how to make statues that avoid excess and deficiency, likewise the statesman knows how to weave together the particular people that he rules over in such a way that the citizenry will avoid these extremes.

At the very end of the dialogue, the Stranger tells us in concrete detail one of the things (in addition to teaching true opinions) that the statesman will do to ensure that the city avoids the extremes: The statesman will entrust offices to the courageous and the moderate in common (see 311a1-2 ff.). The moderate people “when in office are markedly cautious, just, and conservative, but they lack bite, and a certain sharp and practical keenness (τὰ μὲν γὰρ σωφρόνων ἄρχόντων ἢθη σφόδρα καὶ δίκαια καὶ σωτήρια, δριμύτητος δὲ καὶ τινος ἰταμότητος ὀξείας καὶ πρακτικῆς ἐνδεῖται)” (311a7-9). By contrast, the courageous people are “inferior to the others [i.e., the moderate people] in relation to justice and caution, but have an exceptional degree of keenness
when it comes to action (τὸ δίκαιον καὶ εὐλαβὲς ἑκείνων ἐπιδεέστερα, τὸ δὲ ἐν ταῖς
πράξεσι ἰταμὸν διαφερόντως ἴσχει)” (311b1-3). By distributing offices among each group
of people, the statesman aims to ensure that each of the two groups keeps the other group
from falling into excessive behavior. The statesman aims to ensure that the decisions
reached by the city will not be too aggressive, keen, and vigorous, nor too passive,
cautious, and calm. And he aims to ensure this not by monitoring each decision made by
those in office, but by distributing the offices in such a way that the office-holders
themselves will keep one another from being excessive.

Just as there is no one proper width for noses on statues, so too is there no one
proper distribution of offices. How offices should be distributed in order to achieve a
“fine-woven social fabric” is dependent upon the particular characters of the particular
citizens over whom the statesman rules. The art of statecraft is, in part, the art of knowing
how to distribute offices to particular kinds of characters. Statecraft thus requires a
knowledge of character in at least two ways.

In the first instance, the statesman must know what kind of characters are “fitting
(πρέπον)” in relation to the weaving that the statesman performs, for not all are fitting
(304e4-8). Making such judgments about the citizens' characters is a second way in
which the statesman utilizes the second art of measurement (the first way consisting of
judgments relating to the (in)appropriateness of vigorous or calm actions and passions).
The statesman must judge whether or not the characters of the various people he rules
over are fitting or appropriate for the weaving that he will undertake. This is analogous to
a weaver judging whether or not the warp and woof is suitable for weaving. Presumably,
the Stranger's idea is that just as some warp might be too rough, or some woof too weak, so too might some characters be too vigorous or too calm. The statesman must be able to accurately judge this. Those characters that are not fitting will not be woven into the social fabric but will, instead, be banished from the city.

In the second instance, the statesman must know, as was discussed above, what the effect will be of combining the various characters. In particular the statesman must know how to weave together the two kinds of characters in such a way that the excesses of both kinds are avoided.

In summary, there are at least two ways in which the statesman makes use of the second art of measurement. First, the statesman measures characters themselves as “fitting (πρέπον)” or not. Second, in weaving together the courageous and the calm, the statesman must be able to accurately measure or judge what the character of the resultant social fabric will be. The statesman must be able to judge whether it will result in excessively vigorous or calm action and must be able to weave the people together in such a way that they will, of themselves, avoid either of these extremes.

2.3.3 Statecraft, the Καιρός, and the Crafts

The statesman aims to weave together a citizenry that will, of its own accord, avoid excess. The Stranger's claim at 305c10-d4 that the statesman directs the crafts should be read in light of this fact. For just as it would be practically impossible for a ruler to go about the city telling the citizens how to act, so too would it be for the ruler to tell all the various craftsmen when to perform their crafts.
To be sure, the statesman must know when it would be appropriate for the various crafts to be used or performed, but he does not put this knowledge to use by giving directions to every cobbler, house-builder, and doctor. Indeed, in my view it would be a mistake to hold even that the statesman tells the generals when to make war. For, as we saw in the above discussion of vigor and calmness, the aim of the statesman is to produce a citizenry that will, *of its own accord*, be neither excessively vigorous and war hungry nor excessively calm and war averse. If the statesman is successful at producing such a citizenry, then the citizenry will itself start and avoid wars at the right time. The statesman must know when the right time for war (and the other activities of the crafts) is only insofar as the statesman must weave a social fabric that will itself ensure that the city goes to war (and initiates the other crafts) only at the right times. In this way, statecraft does not require performing the practically impossible task of directing each and every craftsman. Nonetheless, statecraft still can be said to direct the crafts insofar as statecraft crafts its social fabric with a view toward producing a citizenry that will itself initiate the crafts at the appropriate times.

Interpreting the statesman's direction of the crafts in this way allows us to take the Stranger at his word when he says the single and entire task of statecraft is weaving together the citizens. For, on the account developed above, it is through the statesman's weaving that the statesman directs the crafts, just as it is through that weaving that the statesman ensures that the citizens avoid excessive vigor and calmness.

Particularly relevant for present purposes is that, to perform this weaving well, the statesman must employ the second art of measurement. The statesman must know which
actions and passions are excessive and must also know when it would be appropriate to
set in motion the crafts, both of which employ measuring relative to one of the standards
mentioned in the sixth formulation.

That statecraft crucially involves the second art of measurement should come as
no surprise. After all, statecraft is a practical craft and practical crafts, as we saw,
crucially involve the second art of measurement. If it were not possible for actions and
passions to exceed, be exceeded by, or achieve due measure, and if there was no
appropriate time for setting the crafts in motion, it would not be possible for the
statesman to practice statecraft. For such measurements are essential guides for the
statesman's weaving. Without them, the statesman would have no reason to choose one
assignment of political offices over any other. For what makes one assignment better or
worse than another is whether the assignment leads to excessive, deficient, or appropriate
actions and passions and whether or not it leads to the various crafts being employed
when and only when appropriate.

The art of measurement is thus central to political theory, at least in the
Statesman.\textsuperscript{52} This fact alone should give commentators, even those primarily (or only)
interested in Plato's political theory, sufficient reason to pay detailed attention to the

\textsuperscript{52} Measure is also central to the political theory of the \textit{Laws}. A detailed articulation of its centrality
must be postponed to a later time. But for now, consider two important topics of Plato's political
philosophy: what makes for a well-established city and what makes for political justice. With regard to the
first, the Athenian Stranger tells us that what protects against rulers trying “to get the better of the laws (τὸ
πλεονεκτεῖν τῶν τεθέντων νόμων)” and against the “greatest ignorance” (that is, weakness of will) is the
preservation of “due measure (τὸ μέ τριον)” (691a-d). Further, protecting against these things and
preserving due measure is what preserves regimes (691c-692b), and a city is well established only when it
is established and preserved in due measure (701e). With regard to the second, in his discussion of the two
kinds of equality (756e-758a), the Athenian tells us that the better kind of equality is to give what is in due
measure to each according to his or her nature. Doing so, he goes on to say, constitutes political justice.

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discussion of measurement. But as will become clear in the discussion of the *Philebus* in Chapter 3, measure is central not just to Plato's political theory, but also to his ethics and metaphysics. And as we shall see in Chapter 5, measure is also a crucial component of his epistemology. In short, measure is central to Plato's philosophical theorizing in the *Philebus* and *Statesman*. Let us now turn to the *Philebus* to see what it adds to Plato's account of measure.
CHAPTER 3

MEASURE AND THE PHILEBUS

In the *Statesman*, the Stranger's discussion of measure gravitates around the crafts. He not only uses the crafts as illustrations of the second art of measurement, but also draws substantive connections between the crafts and the second art, such as claiming that the existence of one implies the existence of the other (284d4-8). The Stranger's discussion thus might create the impression that the art of measurement is relevant primarily for understanding the workings of the crafts, but for little else. And so unless one is interested in understanding how the crafts work, it might seem that Plato's discussions of the art of measurement are of little value.

Focusing just on the *Statesman*, one can find reasons for being skeptical of such a dismissive view. There are suggestions, for example, that measurement may apply to the case of the human good (283e3-6), that it may apply to the obviously ethical subject of pleasure (286d4-6), and that it may apply to everything that comes into being (284e11-285a2). These suggestions, however, are left as mere suggestions and receive no detailed development in the *Statesman*. In the *Philebus*, by contrast, both the ethics and ontology of measure are explored in much greater detail. The *Philebus* situates both measure and the great and the small in a comprehensive ontological framework. Furthermore, the
Philebus directly discusses the relationship between measure and goodness in general, not just the goodness of products of the crafts. In short, the Philebus shows that measure is a key ontological and ethical principle of distinct relevance beyond the crafts.

To understand the Philebus' account of measure, there are two key passages that we need to examine: the discussion of ontology at 23c-27c, and the discussion of goodness at 65a-66a. For both of these passages discuss the nature of measure, and they do so in quite different ways. The first passage, 23c-27c, situates measure within a comprehensive ontological framework while the second passage, 65a-66a, describes its evaluative or normative role. The central concern of the present chapter is to explicate these two discussions of measure and then to revisit the Statesman in light of this explication. By the end of this chapter, we will have an account of measure at hand, ready for comparison with Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. Let us begin by considering the fourfold ontology laid out at 23c-27c.

3.1 The Fourfold Ontology

As any reader of Philebus 23c-27c will tell you, this material is dense and difficult to understand. In the space of a mere four Stephanus pages, Socrates gives a comprehensive ontology and does so using an unfamiliar terminology that is largely unprecedented in the Platonic corpus.53 And as any reader of the secondary literature on this section will tell you, this material is also extraordinarily contentious. Indeed, it has

53 The term 'unlimited' is not completely unprecedented. It appears in the Parmenides and plays an especially important role in the generation of numbers. Further, Sayre (1983), pp. 124-6, persuasively shows that its use in the Parmenides is of a piece with its use in the Philebus.
been remarked that there as many interpretations of this passage as there are readers of it.\footnote{Frede (1993), p. xiii.}

It will be helpful to begin with a brief overview of the ontology laid out at 23c-27c. Socrates divides “all that now exists (πάντα τὰ νῦν ὄντα)” (23c4) into four kinds: the unlimited (τὸ ἄπειρον), the limit (τὸ πέρας), the mixture (τὸ μεικτόν) of limit and unlimited, and the cause (ἡ αἰτία) of mixture.\footnote{All translations from the \textit{Philebus} are those of Frede (1993), though I have modified many of them.} Commentators agree on this much at least. Unfortunately, they agree on little else. And so the following brief overview should be taken as something of a promissory note on which payment will be made in the course of this chapter.

Start with the third kind, mixture. Included within this kind are organisms, music, and sensible particulars in general. Not all mixtures, however, are sensible. As we shall see, Socrates regards abstract letters, numbers, and measures as mixtures as well. According to Socrates' ontology, mixtures are generated through the mixing of limit with unlimited (hence the name 'mixture'). And limit and unlimited are not merely ingredients of mixture, but are the proper ontological analysans of such things. Now the mixing of limit and unlimited does not happen spontaneously or without explanation. Rather, there must be a cause of this mixing—this cause is the fourth kind. Both the third and fourth kinds, then, are explicated in terms of the first two kinds, limit and unlimited. Accordingly, disagreements about mixture or cause tend to trace back to disagreements about limit and unlimited. And so the focus of this chapter will be predominantly on these

\footnote{Frede (1993), p. xiii.}

\footnote{All translations from the \textit{Philebus} are those of Frede (1993), though I have modified many of them.}
first two kinds, for an understanding of them should yield a ready understanding of the latter two.

To give us an initial grasp of the interpretation of Socrates' ontology offered in this chapter,\(^{56}\) consider a D played on the fourth string of a violin in standard tuning. This D is a mixture, and its cause is the violinist. The relevant unlimited is the continuum of pitched sound. The unlimited is not a particular tone or pitched sound, but rather the entire range of sounds, extending from low to high. The relevant limit in this case is the interval, 3:2—a perfect fifth.\(^{57}\) It is the abstract perfect fifth with which musical theory is concerned. As an abstract entity, it is not itself audible.

Now in what sense does cause produce a mixture of limit and unlimited? According to the interpretation argued for in this chapter, the violinist (i.e., the cause) mixes a limit or measure (namely, the ratio of 3:2—a perfect fifth) with the unlimited (pitched sound) and thereby produces an audible D, a mixture. That the limit of the mixture is the perfect fifth, however, should not be taken to imply that the audible note is a perfectly on-pitch D (or that the audible note is exactly a perfect fifth from the sound of the open string). Indeed, it seems unlikely that there ever has been or ever will be a perfectly on-pitch audible note or interval. Instead, we should understand the claim that the violinist's note has the perfect fifth as its limit as indicating that the violinist's D closely approximates that limit. And in virtue of this approximation, the audible D

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\(^{56}\) The interpretation in this chapter draws heavily on the relevant work of Kenneth Sayre. See in particular Sayre (1983), Sayre (1987), Sayre (2005), and Sayre (2006).

\(^{57}\) In standard tuning, the fourth string of a violin is tuned to G. D is a perfect fifth up from G and the ratio of the frequency of D to that of G is 3:2.
receives its identity as a D; the limit makes the audible D a D. In this way, limit plays a role similar to that of Forms in the middle dialogues. In those dialogues, sensible things receive their identity from the Form in which they participate, but their participation does not amount to perfect or complete instantiation of the relevant Form. A defective bed participates nonetheless in the Form of Bed and its so participating is what makes it a bed. Likewise, the violinist's note receives its identity from the limit that it (imperfectly) approximates.

Aside from the single mention of 'measure', little in what has just been said about the ontology of the Philebus seems particularly relevant to the art of measurement of the Statesman. Such relevance would start to become apparent, however, if the unlimited of the Philebus and the great and the small of the Statesman turned out to be the same principle. This would allow us to correlate the four kinds of the Philebus with various things relevant to the art of measurement in the Statesman. The unlimited would simply be the great and the small, limit would be related, in some way, to measure, mixtures would be the things measured by the art of measurement (e.g., musical notes, shoes, passions, etc.), and cause would include the various craftsmen who use the second art of measurement. In what follows, I shall argue that the Statesman and the Philebus do indeed align in this way. Let us now turn to the details of the fourfold ontology, by first examining the unlimited.

58 Fundamental to Sayre's interpretation of these dialogues is that these principles are indeed the same. See Sayre (2006), chs. 7-9. Several other commentators have made the same identification, e.g., Delcomminette (2005) pp. 351-2, and Harvey (2009), p. 9.
3.2 The Unlimited

If the great and the small and the unlimited are indeed the same principle, then the ontology of the *Philebus* will be clearly relevant to the discussion of measurement in the *Statesman*. Arguing that these two principles are indeed the same is the first task of this section. The second task is to examine what Socrates says about the nature of the unlimited.

3.2.1 The Unlimited and the Great and the Small

Why think the unlimited and the great and the small are the same principle? The first reason that leaps out to even the casual reader is the notable similarity of their descriptions. In the *Statesman*, the Stranger refers not only to “the great and the small (τοῦ μεγάλου καὶ τοῦ σμικροῦ)” (283e8-9), but interchanges this phrase with “the more and less (τὸ πλέον...καὶ ἔλαττον)” (284b8). In the *Philebus*, Socrates classifies as unlimited the “more and less (πλέον καὶ ἔλαττον)” (25c9) and “greater and smaller (μεῖζον καὶ σμικρότερον)” (25c9-10). Furthermore, both the unlimited and the great and the small are repeatedly described in these dialogues as pairs of contrary comparatives. As examples of the unlimited, Socrates cites “hotter and colder (θερμότερον καὶ ψυχρότερον)” (24a7-8, b4, d3, 25c5-6), “more and less (τὸ πλέον καὶ τὸ ἔλαττον)” (24c5, 25c9), “dryer and wetter (ξηρότερον καὶ ύγρότερον)” (25c8), “faster and slower (θαττὸν καὶ βραδύτερον)” (25c9), and “greater and fewer (μεῖζον καὶ σμικρότερον)” (25c9-10). In the second formulation of the art of measurement in the *Statesman*, the two arts are
described as measuring in terms of the “greater and smaller (μεῖζον...ἔλαττον)” (284d5, see also 283d11-e1 and 284a1-2).

Similarity in description, however does not necessarily indicate identity. A much stronger reason for thinking them identical has been developed at length by Kenneth Sayre. Going through their relevant writings, he shows that Aristotle and many of Aristotle's commentators (Alexander, Simplicius, and Porphyry, among others) either implicitly or explicitly say that the great and the small and the unlimited are the same principle.\(^{59}\) To give just one example, Simplicius approvingly cites Porphyry's claim that Plato had set down “the great and the small (τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρὸν)” as being the “unlimited nature (τῆς ἀπείρου φύσεως)” (453, 32-6). While it is possible that all of these ancient commentators are simply confused and mistaken, such a fundamental error would be remarkable, especially given its prevalence.

Another strong reason to think them the same is that if we turn to the dialogues with this identification as a guiding hypothesis, considerable light is cast on the difficult passages in which Plato discusses these two principles.\(^{60}\) By identifying the great and the small with the unlimited and carrying over what is said about the latter to our understanding of the former, we come to a better understanding of the discussion of measurement in the Statesman.


3.2.2 The Nature of the Unlimited

Now consider the unlimited itself. The essence or “mark of the nature of the unlimited (τῆς τοῦ ἀπείρου φύσεως...σημεῖον),” (24e4-5) is that it is “becoming more and less (μᾶλλον τε καὶ ἦττον γιγνόμενα)” (24e7). Wherever more and less apply, “they prevent everything from adopting a definite quantity (οὐκ ἐῖναι ποσὸν ἕκαστον)” (24c3) or, as he also puts it, they “do away with all definite quantity (τὸ...ποσὸν ἀφανίζετον)” (24c6). By its very nature, then, the unlimited excludes definite quantity. Socrates helpfully explains this exclusion further: the unlimited is “always in flux and never remain[s], while definite quantity means standstill and the end of all progression (προχωρεῖ...καὶ οὐ μένει...αἐί...τὸ δὲ ποσὸν ἔστη καὶ προϊὸν ἐπαύσατο)” (24d4-5).

To help us understand what these statements amount to, consider Socrates’ most frequently used example of the unlimited: the “hotter and the colder (θερμοτέρου καὶ ψυχροτέρου)” (24a7-8, b4, d3, 25c5-6). In what sense is the hotter and colder “becoming more and less”? For the moment, focus on just the hotter. A hotter temperature is not simply one that is hot.61 For hot implies more heat whereas hot does not. This fact about the hotter is expressed by Socrates in his saying that the hotter is “always in flux and never remains.” A hot temperature, by contrast, might rest at the temperature at which it is; a hot temperature need not be increasing. Accordingly, the hotter, which is always “becoming more,” must exclude any particular definite temperature, for no particular definite temperature is always becoming more or always increasing and not

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61 Contrary to what Frede (1993, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv) writes, neither the ‘hot’ nor the ‘cold’ are ever mentioned as members of the unlimited. The only mention of hot and cold in the dialogue comes at 32d3. There, they are simply described as things that may be good at one time but bad at another. Their being examples of the unlimited is neither stated nor implied.
resting. Let me illustrate using degrees of temperature. For a human body, 102º is a hot
temperature. But we are looking not merely for the “hot”, so to speak, but rather for the
“hotter,” and 102.1º is hotter than 102º. In searching for the hotter, however, we cannot
rest content with 102.1º either, for 102.11º is hotter than 102.1º. But then 102.111º is
hotter than 102.11º, 102.1111º than 102.111º; and so on without end. The upshot is that
the 'hotter' in itself (that is, not in comparison to some other temperature), does not refer
to a definite, particular temperature. This is the sense in which the hotter (as an example
of the unlimited) “excludes” definite quantity. Mutatis mutandis, the same example could
be given for the colder.62 The hotter and colder together, then, trace out a continuous
range of temperatures extending both in the direction of more heat and in the direction of
less heat. The hotter and colder is a range or continuum of temperatures and not a
particular temperature on that range. More generally, the unlimited “comprises all ranges
of qualitative differences that are continuous in the sense of admitting more or less in
degree at any given point” (Sayre (1983), p.155).

Thus far the unlimited might seem rather abstract. But Socrates is clear that it is
present in things that are sensible and concrete (see, e.g., 32a8-b1). To see how this is so,
consider Porphyry's illustration of the unlimited as related by Simplicius in his
commentary on Book III of Aristotle's Physics.63 Porphyry tells us to think of “some
limited magnitude (τι μέγεθος πεπερασμένον)” (453, 37),64 such as a cubit, and to cut it in

62 ‘Colder' implies less heat. And so 94º cannot be the colder, for (94º – 0.1º) is colder than 94º.
But then (94º – 0.11º) is colder than (94º – 0.1º). And (94º – 0.111º) is colder than (94º – 0.111º), and so on.

63 Sayre (1983), p. 152 turns to this example to illustrate the nature of the unlimited as well.

64 Translations of Simplicius are from Simplicius (2002), though I have modified some of them.
two. Then, leaving one half uncut, cut the other half in half, adding one of these new halves to the uncut half. Repeat this process, always halving the smaller piece and always adding to the larger one. This process can continue without end, Porphyry says, because we shall never come to an indivisible piece as we cut. The cubit is continuous (συνεχές) and continuous things divide into ever divisible parts. This unending process of cutting reveals “some nature of the unlimited enclosed in the cubit (τινα φύσιν ἀπείρου κατακεκλεισμένην ἐν τῷ πήχει)” (454, 6). In particular, it reveals the great and the small since one of the pieces “tends towards the great (ἐπὶ τὸ μέγα προϊοῦ σαν),” becoming greater and greater without end, and the other towards “the small (τὸ μικρόν)” (454, 7), becoming smaller and smaller without end.65

Porphyry goes on to tell us that such a procedure is possible not just in the case of a cubit abstractly conceived, but also in the case of “continuous bodies (συνεχέσι σώμασι)” (454, 9-10), that is, in the case of material, spatially extended things. Spatially extended things can in thought, though certainly not in deed, be cut continuously according to the procedure outlined above. Thus, Porphyry would say, the great and small (i.e., the unlimited) is “enclosed” in spatially extended things. As will be discussed in more detail when we turn to limit, this “enclosure” amounts to the idea that the great and the small (i.e., the unlimited) is an ontological constituent of spatially extended things. Likewise, the hotter and the colder is an ontological constituent of things which non-

65 His use of ‘the great and the small’ to refer to the unlimited specific to spatial extension—and not just the unlimited in general—signals that ‘the great and the small’ can be used in two senses. In one sense, ‘the great and the small’ is a synonym for the unlimited, as was discussed in section 2.1. In another sense (which is the sense Porphyry is using here), the great and the small refers to a specific kind of unlimited, namely, that of spatial extension.
accidentally have temperature, such as the weather or health. This is the way in which the unlimited is present in sensible, concrete things.

3.3 Limit, Measure, and Mixture

3.3.1 Measure and Limit

Measure is first introduced in the *Philebus* as something which stands in opposition to the unlimited. “Definite quantity and due measure (τὸ ποσόν...καὶ τὸ μέτριον)” (24c7) drive out the more and the less, they bring the unlimited to “standstill (ἔστη) (24d5), and they stop it from “always advancing and not remaining (προχωρεῖ...καὶ οὐ μένει...ἀεί)” (24d4-5). Given the nature of the unlimited as previously explained, it is fairly clear what Socrates is claiming here. Take, for example, the hotter and colder. As was discussed, the hotter and colder is a continuum of temperatures. The introduction of a definite quantity into this continuum results in a particular temperature. This particular temperature is not “always advancing” and “never remaining” in the sense previously described, but rather remains and stands still. The temperature 102° is 102°. It is not becoming 102.1° nor is it necessarily fluctuating and unstable. More generally, when definite quantity and due measure are introduced into the unlimited, something (viz. a mixture) is produced. And that produced thing has a particular amount or degree of the quality of which the relevant unlimited is a continuum.66

66 Some scholars have thought that in this passage Socrates distinguishes between definite quantity and due measure and that this distinction is central to understanding the ontology of the *Philebus* (see, e.g., Jackson (1882), Cooper (1968)). I will discuss their views in Section 3.4
Things which introduce measure or number into the unlimited, Socrates goes on to claim, are examples of limit. For members of limit do not admit the “more and less.” Rather, they admit qualities such as, “the equal and equality,” “the double,” and “everything which is a number relative to number or a measure relative to measure (τὸ ἴσον καὶ ἰσότητα...τὸ διπλάσιον καὶ πᾶν ὅτι πρὸς ἄριθμον ἄριθμός ἦ μέτρον ἦ πρὸς μέτρον)” (25a7-b1). As he then explains, the equal and the double “put an end to the conflicts there are among opposites, making them commensurate and harmonious by imposing a definite number on them (παύει πρὸς ἄλληλα τάναντια διαφόρως ἔχοντα, σύμμετρα δὲ καὶ σύμφωνα ἐνθείσα ἀριθμὸν ἀπεργάζεται)” (25d11-e2).

In his explanation of limit, Socrates seems to be particularly influenced by Pythagorean musical theory. Consider the unlimited that is relevant to pitched sound: the high and the low. What are the “equal,” “double,” and so forth as they relate to pitched sound? The most obvious answer is that they are musical intervals. Not only are musical intervals highlighted as essential to musical science earlier in the *Philebus* (see 17c11-d2), but musical intervals perfectly fit Socrates’ description of limit. Consider first the “equal.” Two equal quantities or measures stand, in virtue of their equality, in a 1 to 1 ratio with each other. This ratio, 1:1, is also a name by which the Pythagoreans (and musical theorists still today) have referred to a particular interval, namely, unison. The “double,” or 2:1, is another interval, namely, the octave. The perfect fifth (3:2) and perfect fourth (4:5), and indeed all other intervals, are likewise clear examples of things “which are a number relative to number or a measure relative to measure.”

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67 As Sayre (1983) puts it “limit...comprises all numbers and measures by which such continua [i.e., by which members of the unlimited] can be subdivided into determinate elements” (p. 155).
Socrates focuses on intervals rather than notes, I take it, because the Greeks did not have a pitch standard, such as we have today. There was no one correct frequency for the notes of their scales. Rather, a musician would simply tune the strings of the lyre, for example, so that they were in tune with one another; that is, such that they were all certain intervals from each other. Further, in contrast to how we tend to think, the Greeks did not think of scales as being composed of notes, but rather as being composed of intervals. Pitch standards, however, allow us to refer to the abstract members of the musical scales much more easily. Instead of being able to discuss those members only by relating them to other ones, with a pitch standard we can simply talk about middle C, or F#, or G. Nonetheless, these notes are still determined by the relationships that they stand in with each other. Middle C is the note that is a major sixth from the note A, which according to the most common pitch standard is to be set at 440 Hz; tenor high C is a minor third from that A; E above middle C, a perfect fourth; and so on. But because less verbiage is required to discuss a note such as middle C than is required to discuss intervals, I will often use notes, not intervals, as examples of limit. Though this is anachronistic, it is not seriously so. Everything said in terms of notes could be “translated” back into talk of intervals in the way described above. The benefit of leaner and simpler illustrations is worth the price of slight and inconsequential anachronism.

Let us continue our examination of limit by considering two examples, both of them concerned with music. First consider the establishment of musical measures. Although Socrates’ example of the establishment of measures is concerned with letters

68 A440 is the pitch standard most commonly used today. According to this standard, the A above middle C should be 440 Hz.
(this is the story of Theuth at 18b-d), it is nonetheless clear that the Pythagoreans were
similarly divinely-inspired (see 16c7-8). Moreover it is clear that they similarly
established a science, albeit one concerned with music, not letters. Just as Theuth started
with the unlimited of vocal sound, divided it into the several kinds of letters, and thereby
established the art of grammar, so too must the Pythagoreans have started with the
unlimited of pitched sound, divided it into the several intervals, and thereby established
the science of music. What exactly is it, though, to establish a science in the way that
Theuth and the Pythagoreans did? More particularly, do these divine intelligences
discover these measures or do they, in some sense, create them?69

In an effort to tie Aristotle's account of Plato's metaphysics to Plato's dialogues,
Sayre has argued that we should understand Theuth and the Pythagoreans to be creators
of measure.70 On Sayre's account, Aristotle's claim that Forms are generated from the
great and the small and unity (Metaph. I.6 988a11-13) is tantamount to the claim that
measures are generated from the unlimited and limit. And the most obvious candidate for
a discussion of such generation in the Philebus is the story of Theuth. As was just
mentioned, however, whatever Theuth does with regard to letters, the Pythagoreans do
with regard to music. And so, on the basis of Aristotle's testimony, Sayre argues that we

69 One major controversy in scholarship on the Philebus concerns whether Forms, which are
typically understood to be the kinds of things which Theuth and the Pythagoreans discovered/created, are
mixtures as well. Some of those who say Forms are mixtures include Jackson (1882), pp. 282-4, Sayre
and Reshotko (2010), p. 95.

should understand the Pythagoreans and other such divine intelligences as creating the measures with which their respective sciences are concerned.

I find this argument compelling. And while the language used to describe Theuth's activity is non-commital with regard to whether he created or discovered letters,\textsuperscript{71} the language used in a later case of the divine establishment of measure strongly supports that such establishment is indeed a kind of creation. At 26b8-10, Socrates tells us that “the goddess herself (αὕτη...ἡ θεός)” recognized that human beings were such as to seek pleasure endlessly, and so she “set down law and order as a limit (νόμον καὶ τάξιν πέρας...ἔθετο)” on our behavior. Commentators typically identify this goddess as Aphrodite, presumably because (sexual) pleasure is a central topic of the \textit{Philebus}. But it seems much more likely that the goddess Socrates refers to is actually Themis. For in Greek mythology, it is Themis, not Aphrodite, who sets down law and order for human beings. In any event, the goddess in our passage does not \textit{discover} the law and order that limit our behavior and subsequently announce this discovery. Rather, Socrates' use of τίθημι (in the form of ἔθετο) indicates that she creates, sets up, or promulgates law and order as a limit. In the same way that a law is not a law prior to its promulgation, so too law and order were not measures or standards of human behavior prior to Themis' activity. These measures are the products of the goddess's creative, intelligent activity.

Return now to the Pythagorean creation of musical measure. The Pythagoreans bring limit in the form of mathematical ratios (1:1, 2:1, 3:2, 4:5, etc.) to bear upon the

\textsuperscript{71} Socrates describes Theuth as “understanding (κατενόησεν)” (18b9) that there are several vowels, and as “establishing (διεστήσατο)” (18c2-3) the different kinds of letters. Such language is compatible both with Theuth creating letters and with Theuth discovering them.
relevant unlimited, namely, the higher and lower (cf. 26a2). However, insofar as 1) the vast majority of members of the unlimited are described in terms of contrary comparatives, and 2) comparatives do a better job of conveying the idea that the unlimited always advances and never remains (see the above discussion of the hotter and the hot), I have chosen to refer to the unlimited pertinent to pitched sound as the higher and lower.

73 Aristotle arguably provides further evidence that measures are both mixtures and limits when he claims that unity mixes with the great and small to produce Forms (or, as he also calls them numbers) which themselves then combine with the great and small to produce sensible particulars (Metaph. I.6 988a11-13). If we understand Aristotle's reference to 'numbers' to include measures and if we understand unity to be akin to limit, then Aristotle is saying that measures are mixtures of limit and the unlimited which can then play the role of limit in the constitution of sensible particulars. For arguments that Aristotle should be understood in this way, see the discussion of Sayre (1983), pp. 161-168.
serves as the relevant measure in the case of the audible D played by a violinist. The violinist mixes this limit (measure) with the unlimited of pitched sound and thereby produces a mixture, namely the audible D.

What makes this audible D a D? While this D is a pitched sound and so has the higher and lower as a constituent, the higher and lower cannot be what makes it a D. For the higher and lower are equally present in all pitched sounds and obviously not every pitched sound is a D. Rather, what makes this D a D is that it has approximated the measure D. And the same can be said mutatis mutandis for any other musical note. The abstract measures created by the Pythagoreans give audible notes their identity and they do so by being approximated by audible notes.

In the case of an audible D, this may seem obvious, given that the name for the measure is the same as the name for the mixture—D. But it nonetheless sheds important light on the role played by measure. Measure is responsible for what a thing (a mixture) is. Were a mixture to have a different measure, it would be a different kind of thing. If the measure of the violinist's note was F♯ instead of D, the mixture produced by the violinist would be an audible F♯ instead of an audible D. The important point here is that measure plays this role not only in the case of musical notes, but in the case of any sensible mixture. The relevant measure makes a mixture to be the kind of thing it is; the relevant measure gives mixtures their identities.

Consider now one of the unresolved issues from the Statesman. In that dialogue, it is not clear whether or how the conclusions drawn concerning measure extend beyond the realm of the crafts. Socrates in the Philebus, by contrast, offers a clear and strong reason
for thinking that reflection on the role of measure in the crafts is a guide to the role of measure generally. For after claiming that it is “necessary that everything that comes to be comes to be through some cause (ἀναγκαίον εἶναι πάντα τὰ γιγνόμενα διὰ τινα αἰτίαιν γίγνεσθαι)” (26e3-4), he goes on to claim that “there is no difference between the nature of what makes and the cause, except in name, so that the maker and the cause would rightly be called one (ἡ τοῦ ποιοῦντος φύσις οὐδὲν πλὴν ὄνοματι τῆς αἰτίας διαφέρει, τὸ δὲ ποιοῦν καὶ τὸ αἴτιον ὀρθῶς ἂν εἴη λεγόμενον ἐν)” (26e6-8). Produced things, such as the objects made by the crafts, and generated things, such as you, me, plants, and animals, are equally mixtures and are equally produced by a cause. That is to say, they have the same ontological structure (viz., mixtures of limit and unlimited) and they are produced in structurally similar ways (viz., by bringing limit to bear on the unlimited).

In claiming this, Socrates seems to be assuming that everything that is generated is composed of limit and unlimited; that is to say, that every generated thing is a mixture. Indeed, there is good reason to think that he in fact thinks this. As such, everything in the generated world here around us has a limit that makes it the kind of thing it is. So not only objects of the crafts, but roses, frogs, humans, and rocks all are mixtures as well. Most importantly for the project of the Philebus, lives are to be included as mixtures too. The good life, an account of which is being sought in the Philebus, is a mixture (27d7-78).

74 The fourth kind, cause, is introduced as that which combines limit and unlimited to make mixtures (23d7-8). But then when discussing cause at greater length from 26e-27c, Socrates refers to it as the cause of “everything which comes to be (πάντα τὰ γιγνόμενα)” (26e3) and as the craftsman of “all these things (πάντα ταῦτα)” (27b1) where “these things” refers to “things which have come into being (τὰ...γιγνόμενα)” (27a11). The rather clear implication is that everything which comes to be is a mixture.

75 Socrates is explicit that living things are mixtures. He claims that a “live organism (ἔμψυχον)” is constituted from a “natural combination of limit and unlimited (τὸ ἐκ τῆς ἀπάθειας καὶ πέρατος κατὰ φύσιν)” (32a9-b1).
10). And just as we saw in our discussion of the goodness of the objects of the crafts in Statesman, what makes the good, mixed life valuable and choice-worthy, according to Socrates, is measure (cf. 64d3-e3). Let us now turn to the other section on measure in the Philebus and discuss in detail the relationship between goodness and measure.

3.3.2 Measure and the Good

In the closing pages of the Philebus, Socrates examines goodness in general and then proceeds to rank various items with regard to their goodness. In both of these discussions, measure is at center stage.

First, consider what Socrates says about “the good”:

Well, then, if we cannot capture the good in one form, we will have to take hold of it in a conjunction of three: beauty, proportion, and truth. Let us affirm that these should by right be treated as a unity and be held responsible for what is in the mixture, for its goodness is what makes the mixture itself a good one (Οὐκοῦν εἰ μὴ μιᾷ δυνάμεθα ἰδέᾳ τὸ ἄγαθὸν θηρεῦσαι, σὺν τρισὶ λαβόντες, κάλλει καὶ συμμετρίᾳ καὶ ἄληθείᾳ, λέγομεν ὡς τοῦτο οἷον ἐν ὀρθότατ' ἂν αἰτιασαίμεθ' ἂν τῶν ἐν τῇ συμμείξει, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὡς ἄγαθὸν ὃν τοιαύτην αὐτήν γεγονέναι) (65a1-5).

The mixture in question is that of pleasure and knowledge or, in other words, the human good (cf. 22a-d, 61a-d). Beauty, proportion and truth are what make the human good good. Indeed, this trio is what makes anything good, seeing as this trio taken as a unity is goodness itself. While there are several important issues and questions raised by this passage, for present purposes the reference to “proportion (συμμετρίᾳ)” is most salient. In the two subsequent restatements of this aspect of the good, Socrates refers not to “proportion (συμμετρίᾳ),” but rather, to “due measure” (“μετριότητος” at 65b8,
Because due measure is an aspect of the good, observance of it causes mixtures (including the human good) to be good. Presumably, the converse holds true as well: insofar as a mixture exceeds or falls short of due measure, it is bad, and, indeed, it is this very exceeding or falling short that is its badness.

Recall that, in the Statesman, craftsmen are said to produce “good and fine (ἀγαθὰ καὶ καλὰ)” products by “preserving measure (τὸ μέτρον σῴζουσαι)” (see 284a10-b1). In Chapter 2, I interpreted this claim to mean that it is by making their products appropriately measured (e.g., making a statue to have a nose that is of an appropriate width), that craftsmen make their products good; that being of an appropriate measure renders a product good. Here in the Philebus, we find a further explication of the relationship between measure and goodness, but one that is clearly not limited to the products of the crafts. While brief, this account of the relationship explains why being of an appropriate measure renders something good: It does so because due measure is itself good, indeed, an aspect of the form of the good. It is the goodness of due measure that makes the things that have achieved due measure good. And this is true not just for the products of the crafts, but for anything that might achieve due measure, such as natural phenomena, human lives, and, indeed, all mixtures (cf. 64d3-e3).

Turn now to the ranking of goods. Socrates examines various human possessions and ranks them according to which are “more akin to the highest good and more honored by gods and humans (τοῦ ἀρίστου συγγενέστερόν τε καὶ τιμιώτερον ἐν ἀνθρώποις τέ ἐστι καὶ θεοῖς)” (65b1-2). First place goes to “measure and due measure and the right time and all such things (μέτρον καὶ τὸ μέτριον καὶ καύριον καὶ πάντα ὁπόσα)” (66a6-7). In other
words, the observance of measure is not merely one among the many various things that are good for human beings (things such as beauty, truth, and knowledge). Rather, it stands apart from those various things by being *better* than all of them. Indeed, it is the *best* thing there is.

Due measure (μέτριον) and the right time (καιρόν) are also mentioned in the sixth formulation of the second art of measurement at *Statesman* 284e6-7. They are standards relative to which the great and small might be measured during employment of the second art. The Stranger also mentions two other standards: the fitting (τὸ πρέπον) and the requisite (τὸ δέον). It is reasonable to suppose that “all such things” at the top rank mentioned at 66a6-7 includes, at the very least, these two other standards. Thus, Socrates' point is that whatever plays the role of an appropriate measure, degree, or amount, whether it be best described as μέτριον, καιρόν, πρέπον, δέον, or something else depending upon the circumstances, is to be counted among the members of the first rank.

Measure thus plays two roles in the *Philebus*. First, measure is described at 23c-27c as limit and as making sensible mixtures what they are. That is to say, it is described as playing an identifying role. Second, measure is described at 65a-66a as being responsible for the goodness of mixtures in that to conform to measure is to be good. And so the goodness and the being of a mixture are determined by the same principle, measure. As I shall argue in section 3.4, measure plays a corresponding dual role in the case of bad or imperfect mixtures as well. But first, let us examine the relationship between these two roles in more detail.
3.3.3 Measure: A Principle of Identity and Evaluation

What reason does Socrates have for assigning these two significantly different roles to one and the same thing, measure? The example of musical notes is illuminating once again, in that it makes this convergence of roles plausible and intuitive. To see this, consider again the system of musical notes.

All pitched sounds fall along the continuum of pitched sound (i.e., the higher and lower). To be a musical note, however, requires more than falling along this continuum. It requires that the pitched sound be a member of an interval. And because musical scales are constructed out of intervals, to be a musical note requires that the pitched sound find a place in various musical scales. In short, pitched sounds are musical notes inasmuch as they find a place in various musical scales. Thus every musical note will be harmonious not only with those tones that are some particular interval away from it, but also with whatever scales it is a member of. Limit produces proportion and harmony in pitched sound (see 25d11-e2) by producing musical notes that are proportional to, and harmonious with, one another and with the scale of which they are a part.

Any particular pitched sound that I sing will fall along the continuum of the higher and lower inasmuch as it is a pitched sound. If one were to ask for the identity of my sung pitched sound, the answer would refer to the system of musical notes (i.e., the various scales) just described. That is to say, any tone that I sing will receive its identity from the location it occupies on the continuum of pitched sound. This includes imperfect tones. If I am flat, then the C I sing will be too low. It is nonetheless still a C (albeit a bad

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76 For an extended discussion of this point as it relates to the Philebus, see Harte (2002), pp. 201-2. For discussion of this point in the context of Greek musical theory generally, see Barker (1989), p. 16.
one), since it falls closest to C on the continuum of pitched sound. Here, then, we see the identifying role of measure. Particular audible pitched sounds receive their identity as musical notes in virtue of approximating particular fixed points (i.e., the relevant measures) on the continuum of pitched sound. These particular fixed points are the various abstract musical notes.

The abstract notes, however, have an additional function. They supply us with standards for evaluating particular tones. This is already apparent in the above example. My flat C is flat because it is lower than it ought to be—it is lower than the measure C. The notes of a scale give us targets at which to aim, and any pitched sound that is significantly higher or lower than the intended target is a defective tone (such as a flat C or a sharp F). Because these abstract notes thus play the role of an evaluative standard, and because an abstract note is a measure, measure also plays an evaluative role.

More generally, something that perfectly observes the relevant measure is perfectly what it is (a perfectly sung C is a perfect C), while something that either significantly falls short of or significantly exceeds its measure, such as my flat C, nonetheless still receives its identity from what it imperfectly approximates. In short, possession of measure, be it perfect or only approximate, makes the mixture what it is (e.g., it makes my sung tone a C). And that very same measure is the relevant standard for determining whether or not the mixture is good (e.g., determining whether my sung tone is on pitch (i.e., good) or out of tune (i.e., bad)). In the case of musical notes, the unity of these two roles is quite intuitive and plausible.
Of course, it is not just in the case of music that measure plays these two roles according to Socrates. In addition to music, he also draws our attention to the health of the body (25e7-8), the seasons (26a6-b3), and lawful and orderly behavior (26b5-c2). And although music offers the clearest and most plausible example of the convergence of these roles, we should nonetheless examine how these roles may have been supposed to converge in these other cases. Unfortunately, Socrates is of little help in this regard as he goes into very little detail about these other cases. Nonetheless, we can piece together brief (and admittedly speculative) accounts of how these other cases might work.

According to Socrates, human bodies are composed of the four elements (29a9-11). Presumably, though, they are not made from just any combination of the elements. Rather they must be combined in the appropriate measure (or with proper proportion) to form flesh, blood, bone, marrow, etc. (cf. *Timaeus* 73b5-c3). Flesh, blood, bone, and so on must themselves then be arranged in the proper proportion to form a human body, for otherwise they would form a mere heap of tissues. It is approximation to these measures and proportions (both at the level of individual tissues and at the level of the body as a whole) that makes a thing a human body. Thus measure plays an ontological role in the case of the human body. Turn now to its evaluative role. When a body falls away from these proportions or measures, perhaps through an “unnatural coagulation of the fluids (παρὰ φύσιν...τῆς ύγρότητος πηξίζης)” (*Philebus* 32a6-7) or, more generally, through an increase or decrease in one of the four elements (cf. *Timaeus* 81e6-2a7), the body becomes diseased and pained; it comes to be in a bad condition. By contrast the restoration of these proportions or measures produces the good condition of the body,
health (cf. *Timaeus* 87c1-6, *Philebus* 25e7-8). A good (i.e., healthy) body closely approximates these measures; a bad (i.e., diseased) body, fails to do so. Thus the very same measure that plays an ontological role with regard to the human body also plays an evaluative role.

The second of the above mentioned cases is that of the seasons (see 26a6-b3). Socrates begins with a claim about climatic conditions. “Limit (πέρας)” takes away “the great excesses and unlimitedness (τὸ...πολὺ λίαν καὶ ἅπειρον)” of “wintry chill and stifling heat (χειμῶσιν καὶ πνίγεσιν),” and thereby “produces moderation and proportion (τὸ...ἔμμετρον καὶ ἅμα σύμμετρον ἀπηργάσατο)” (26a6-8). Through this mixing of limit and unlimited, Socrates continues, “the seasons and all sorts of fine things of that kind (ὒραι τε καὶ ὅσα καλὰ πάντα)” (26b1) are produced. Seasons, then, are the relevant mixture, while the relevant limit goes unnamed and the relevant unlimited is related to wintry chill and stifling heat. Presumably there are several such unlimiteds, two of them surely being the hotter and colder and the dryer and wetter.

Consider what makes winter what it is. It is a period of dry coldness. That is, it is a period characterized by particular measures of the hotter and colder and the dryer and wetter. Approximation to these measures is what makes winter what it is. And the same could be said, of course, for the other seasons. This is the identifying role of measure: approximation to measure (limit) makes the seasons what they are.

Weather, of course, can be unseasonable. A heat spell in early January is not normal. It is a period of excessive warmth, a period in which the heat is inapt or inappropriate by being higher than the appropriate measure. And while winter is the
coldest of the seasons, a winter of temperatures consistently well below 0° F would also be excessive and not fitting for the season. In both cases, one could sensibly describe the winter as exceeding due measure with regard to temperature: “winter was excessively warm (or cold) this year.” And although we are perhaps likely to judge the seasons relative to our comfort (and so perhaps likely to judge an excessively warm winter a “good one”), nonetheless we can readily make sense of the claim that an excessively warm winter is an imperfect or defective winter. It is a winter that is bad qua winter. Thus, measure also plays an evaluative role in regard to the seasons.

Lastly consider Socrates' remarks about lawful and orderly behavior (26b5-c2). Themis, recognizing that our “insolence and wickedness (ὕβριν...καὶ...πονηρίαν)” allows for “limit (πέρας)” in neither our “pleasures nor their fulfillment (ἡδονῶν...οὔτε πλησμονῶν),” imposes “law and order (νόμον καὶ τάξιν)” as a “limit (πέρας).” I argued above that we should understand Themis to be creating, and not merely discovering, measures (i.e., law and order). I would like now to focus on a different aspect of this example, namely, the relationship between our behavior and law and order.

Law and order are measures or standards for our behavior. When we closely adhere to these standards, our behavior is lawful and orderly; when we deviate significantly from them, it is unlawful and disordered. In the same way that a tone can be a middle C only with the advent of Pythagorean music theory, so too can behavior be lawful and orderly only with the advent of the Themis' imposition of law and order. These measures, both middle C and law and order, make the things that approximate them the
very things that they are. In this way, law and order play an identifying role with regard to such behavior.

They clearly also play an evaluative role. Close approximation to law and order in our behavior renders it *good*, while significantly deviating from them makes our behavior bad. The proper standard for evaluating our morally relevant behavior is law and order, the very thing which makes our morally relevant behavior what it is.

Let us now speak more generally. When limit is imposed upon the unlimited, a determinate mixture is produced. That mixture is both identified by, and evaluated according to, the relevant limit or measure that it most closely approximates. These measures that serve as criteria for both identification and evaluation form a system, in that these measures stand in certain relationships with one another. They serve as criteria for identity insofar as what it is to be a particular kind of thing is to closely approximate a particular measure. They serve as criteria for evaluation insofar as close approximation to them renders a mixture good, while distant approximation renders it bad. In short, that which makes something to be a certain kind of thing is also a standard for evaluating instances of that kind of thing. In this way, normative evaluation is grounded in the identity of the thing being evaluated.

**3.3.4 Measure and Defective Mixtures**

The interpretation of the ontology of the *Philebus* developed above is at odds with that of several commentators. In particular, several commentators have interpreted the *Philebus* to be claiming that there are *no* bad mixtures; that every mixture is good. This is
quite clearly at odds with my interpretation, according to which bad or defective mixtures are quite common. They are those mixtures which deviate significantly from measure, such as my flat middle C. In the course of critically discussing this alternative interpretation, the view that I offer in its place will be further explained.

Dorothea Frede is the leading contributor to this alternative interpretation. According to this line of interpretation, everything that one might be tempted to call a bad mixture is actually a member of the unlimited. Such an interpretation requires a conception of the unlimited that is significantly different from the one presented in this chapter, and Frede gives us one which is both clear and succinct: “Anything that can retain its identity through a change in quantity belongs to the apeiron [i.e., the unlimited]” (Frede (1993), p.xxxv). My flat C could become higher or lower but nonetheless remain exactly what it is—a flat C. My flat C, then, is not a bad mixture, according to Frede, but rather a member of the unlimited. Frede cites two reasons for this interpretation (see pp. xxxiv-vi). The first is that all of the examples of mixtures in the Philebus are of good things such as health, fair weather, and music (see 25e3-6b7). On her view, a flat C or a fever, not being good, must not be mixtures and so must belong to the unlimited. The second is that at 64d9-e3, Socrates says that something which lacks measure is not really a mixture at all. On Frede's interpretation, flat C's, fevers and bad things generally all lack measure, and so must not be mixtures.

In reply to the first reason, Sayre has argued that close attention to what Socrates says at 25e3-6b7, far from undermining his (and my) interpretation, supports it. For what Socrates says is that the “right combination (ὀρθὴ κοινωνία)” of limit and unlimited produces health, fair weather, and music. It would be not only redundant, but highly misleading of Socrates to mention a 'right combination' if all combinations were right. And so we should infer that some combinations are wrong or defective. Further evidence for this view comes from the fact that Socrates on numerous occasions describes all generated things (which, of course, would include bad generated things such as flat C's) as mixtures (see 27a1-3, a11-12, 30d10-e2). And so while it is true that all of the specific examples of mixtures that Socrates offers are good, it is simply false that Socrates refers only to good mixtures. Accordingly, Socrates' focus on good combinations does not prove that, nor should it even be taken as a sign that, there are only good mixtures.

Turn now to the second reason. It is drawn from the following fact about mixtures of which Socrates avers everyone is aware—namely:

That any kind of mixture that does not in some way or other possess measure or the nature of proportion will necessarily corrupt its ingredients and most of all


79 Frede (1993) translates this passage as saying that health, fair weather, and music are produced by the right combination “of the opposites.” What I have treated as “limit and unlimited” and what Frede has treated as “the opposites” is, in the Greek, “τούτων”. (Socrates says “τούτων ὀρθὴ κοινωνία” (25e7).) Given the context, in which Protarchus and Socrates are discussing how the mixing together of limit and unlimited produces the third kind, mixtures, it is much more natural to take the τούτων to refer to limit and unlimited, that is, to the things which are combined to produce mixtures.

80 That the class of mixtures includes bad combinations of limit and unlimited is not a position unique to Sayre. Other scholars who have argued for it are Jackson (1882), p. 282, Cooper (1968), p. 13, Hampton (1990), pp. 44-5 and Delcomminette (2005), p. 353.
Verity Harte (2002) concedes that Frede's first reason is inconclusive (and that it is so for the reasons that Sayre had suggested). Nonetheless she defends Frede's interpretation for she believes Frede's second reason establishes that interpretation (see Harte (2002), pp. 210-1). Harte offers a more detailed analysis of this passage than Frede does, so let us turn to what Harte says. According to Harte (see p. 211), that a flat C (or any bad generated thing for that matter) belongs to the unlimited follows from the fact that a flat C lacks measure (μέτρον). Notice, however, that Socrates never explicitly says that something like a flat C (i.e., a bad generated thing) lacks measure. Harte supports this claim by drawing our attention to the fact that immediately after the above passage, Socrates tells us that “measure and proportion manifest themselves in all areas as beauty and virtue (μετριότης γάρ καὶ συμμετρία κάλλος δήποτε καὶ ἀρετή πανταχοῦ συμβαίνει γίγνεσθαι)” (64e6-7). According to Harte's interpretation, Socrates is claiming that if something has measure, then it is beautiful and excellent. Since a flat C is obviously neither beautiful nor excellent, it must not have measure and so, in light of 64d9-e3, must not be a mixture. Not being a mixture (nor a cause, nor a limit), it must belong to the unlimited. And so it is 64d9-e3—not the lack of examples of bad mixtures—that establishes that there are no bad mixtures, according to Harte.
Such a reading, however, mischaracterizes what Socrates says about the relationship between mixtures and measures here at 64d9-e3. Harte interprets Socrates as putting forward a binary, all or nothing, view of the possession of measure: something either possesses measure, in which case it is good and is a mixture, or it does not, in which case it is bad and belongs to the unlimited (see p. 212). But Socrates does not put forward such a view. Quite the contrary. He says that any mixture that does not in some way or other (ὁπωσοῦν) possess measure is not really a mixture. The clear implication is that there are many ways in which a thing might possess measure, presumably some better or more fully than others. Socrates' point, then, is that if something in no way at all possesses measure (that is, if something fails to possess measure even defectively), then it is not really a mixture. We can agree with Harte that a flat C does not possess measure perfectly, but what reason is there for denying that it possesses measure imperfectly or defectively? What this passage strongly suggests, then, is that flat C's (and other imperfect things) possess measure in a way, namely, an imperfect way. Flat C's imperfectly approximate the measure C. Accordingly, they are mixtures (since they in some way possess measure and limit) and not members of the unlimited. And so close attention to what Socrates says here at 64d9-e3, far from undermining the interpretation on offer in this chapter, in fact supports it.

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81 Frede adopts this binary view too. According to her, good mixtures “are either 'just right' or not good mixtures at all” (p. xxxv) and so, by her own account, not even mixtures at all.

82 Another way of putting Socrates' point here: If a mixture does not in any way have a limit, then it is not really a mixture. This is obviously true given the account of mixture as a combination of limit and unlimited.
3.4 The Statesman's Art of Measurement and the Philebus

The Philebus supplements the Statesman's two arts of measurement by supplying accounts of the criteria of identity and of the standards of evaluation of the objects of measurement. In turning to due measure and measurement to discuss normative evaluation, the Stranger is not simply introducing an odd and unmotivated framework for such evaluation, but rather he is explicating the proper way to judge things given the fact that measure is responsible for what a thing is. Let us now revisit the two arts of measurement in light of the Philebus.

3.4.1 The First Art of Measurement

Recall that the first art measures the great and small relative to each other. As one might also say, the first art measures greatness relative to smallness and vice versa. Examples of such measurement are: “this tone is higher in pitch than that one,” “that statue's nose is wider than this one's,” and “that line in the drawing is thicker than this other line.” In the language of the Philebus, tones, noses of statues, and lines in drawings, are all mixtures of limit and unlimited. Indeed, not only are all objects of the crafts mixtures, but all sensible, generated things are as well. And not only are objects of the crafts measurable by the first art, but any generated thing is. For example, “that frog is heavier than this one,” “today is warmer than yesterday,” or “this pleasure is more intense than that one.”

As discussed above, measure (or limit) makes a mixture the particular kind of mixture it is. That the note I sing has middle C as its measure makes the note I sing
middle C. The first art of measurement, of course, makes no reference to due measure. And so when one uses the first art of measurement, one is not measuring a mixture relative to what it is, for the first art does not measure relative to due measure. When I measure my sung middle C using the first art, I do not measure whether or not it closely approximates middle C (i.e., whether or not it is a good middle C), but rather I simply compare it to some other tone. For example, I would measure the tone I am singing not as a flat, sharp, or on pitch middle C, but rather as higher or lower than some other tone, while there is no evaluation of whether or not a higher or lower tone is better or worse (flatter or sharper).

Furthermore, as the *Philebus* makes clear, limit (measure) is responsible for the determinate qualities that mixtures have. To measure without taking limit into account, then, amounts to abstracting from the determinate degree of the quality of the mixture which is being measured. For example, in applying the first art to a statue's nose, the measurement will not make use of or mention the determinate width of the nose (say, one inch). Rather it will simply compare it with the width of something else. And to judge that this statue's nose is, say, narrower than some other statue's nose does not mention or make use of anything determinate insofar as there are still an infinite number of degrees of width that the narrower nose may have.

One upshot is that the *Philebus* confirms one of the important conclusions argued for in the previous chapter: the first art of measurement does not include mathematical arts such as arithmetic and geometry. For these mathematical arts clearly make use of definite quantities. And as the *Philebus* makes clear, to measure without reference to due
measure (as one does when using the first art) is to measure in such a way that does not make use of such quantities.

3.4.2 The Second Art of Measurement

Turn now to the second art of measurement, which measures the great and the small relative to due measure. Examples of such measurement include: “that note is flat,” “the nose of that statue is too big,” and “the thickness of that line in the drawing is fitting.” In light of the *Philebus*, we can expand our set of examples beyond the confines of the crafts, for any generated thing is measurable by the second art. The judgments “that dog is too thin,” “there is too much bile in that person's body,” “this weather is too warm,” and “that pleasure is excessive,” are further examples of the second art.

As we have seen, the relevant measure plays an identifying role in making a mixture what it is. The middle C that I am singing is a middle C because its limit or measure is middle C (and this is true even if my middle C is off-pitch). To measure something according to due measure, then, is to measure it according to what it is. Thus, for something to be a particular kind of mixture, it is necessary that it have the due measure that is characteristic and definitive of that kind of mixture. Due measure is, in this sense, necessary for the generation of a mixture. Accordingly, an accurate way of describing the second art is as measuring according to the essential and necessary “being” of the thing being measured; or, as one might put it, “according to the being necessary for generation (κατὰ τὴν τῆς γενέσεως ἀναγκαίαν οὐσίαν).” In this way, the first formulation of the second art of measurement refers not only to the ingredient (namely, limit or
measure) that is necessary for the generation of a mixture, but also to the “being” or essence of the mixture which is generated. Measure is the essence of any mixture and, as such, is necessary for the generation of any mixture. The first formulation of the second art of measurement, while initially the most obscure of the six formulations, is also perhaps the most perspicacious and insightful of them.

As we have also seen, measure provides standards for the evaluation of mixtures. Middle C (abstractly conceived) gives us the appropriate standard for evaluating audible middle C's; audible middle C's are good insofar as they closely approximate this standard and bad insofar as they fail to do so. To measure something according to due measure, then, is to measure it according to the standards that it must meet in order to be a good member of its kind.

It seems likely that Socrates and the Stranger would also think the converse of this conditional is true. As we saw earlier, Socrates claims that measure is the highest good (66a6-7) and, indeed, that it is an aspect of the form of the good (65a1-5). Given that the good is thus “captured” by measure, to judge something according to the standards that it must meet in order to be a good member of its kind is to measure it according to the relevant measure. To evaluate properly the middle C that I sing, one must measure it, if only by ear, relative to its appropriate measure. And those who would thus measure my sung note are utilizing, even if they are not aware of it, the second art of measurement. Likewise for all other correct evaluations of goodness.

Let us take stock. In the Statesman, the second art of measurement is said to measure relative to due measure, or as the Stranger also claims, according to the being
necessary for generation. Moreover, such measurement is said to be necessary for the exercise of practical crafts. Of particular importance is the fact that craftsman are said to make good products only insofar as they preserve measure. In the *Philebus*, the Stranger's claims about measure—both its status as the being necessary for generation, and its relationship to goodness—are given a philosophically rich grounding. Measure is the being necessary for generation in that measure plays an identifying role, making particular things to be what they are. And measure is related to goodness insofar as it plays an evaluative role, that is, insofar as approximation to measure determines whether a particular kind of thing is a good or bad member of that kind. Having thus explicated Plato's discussions of measure, let us now turn to Aristotle and his doctrine of the mean.
CHAPTER 4

ARISTOTLE'S DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN

Over the past few decades, Aristotle's ethical works have found a prominent place not just in historical scholarship, but also in contemporary moral philosophy, particularly among philosophers interested in so-called “virtue ethics.” And while its advocates are by no means in the majority, Aristotelian virtue ethics nonetheless has come to be a respected and formidable third competitor to consequentialism and deontology. It is somewhat striking, then, that a doctrine that is central to Aristotle's conception of virtue—the doctrine of the mean—should be so commonly maligned. At one moment scholars extoll Aristotle for his focus on, and insight into, virtue, and the next, they disparage his conception of virtue, thinking it either vacuously true or absurd.\(^83\) Even those who are otherwise sympathetic to Aristotle find the doctrine deeply problematic. One of the foremost proponents of virtue ethics, Rosalind Hursthouse, thinks the doctrine is “not merely false but extremely silly” (Hursthouse (1980-1), p. 60). In my view, the explanation for this disparity in reactions to Aristotle lies largely in the fact that

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\(^{83}\) See, for example, Williams (1985) p. 36.
commentators have severely misinterpreted Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. I hope to correct the most serious of these misinterpretations in the course of this chapter.

My primary purpose, however, is to set the stage for a comparison between Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, on the one hand, and Plato's discussions of measure on the other. If this comparison is to be accurate, we need an accurate account of the doctrine of the mean. Laying out such an account is the main task of this chapter.

I will proceed by first laying out my account of the doctrine of the mean in Section 1. With this account in hand, Section 2 critically examines the most influential and widespread criticisms of the doctrine of the mean, and argues that they rest on interpretive or philosophical mistakes. Moreover, we shall see that the most prominent defense of the doctrine against some of these criticisms rests on the very same mistakes. The account offered in Section 1, by contrast, avoids these mistakes and enjoys both stronger textual support and greater philosophical plausibility than rival accounts.

4.1 The Doctrine of the Mean

4.1.1 Three Examples: Generosity, Good-Temper, and Courage

It will be helpful to have a number of pertinent examples at hand as we discuss the doctrine. Let me start by laying out three.

Example (1): Generosity – A great number of the things we do are bound up with receiving or spending money. And while such transactions are common in every life, people vary in how exactly they engage in them. One person might go on a shopping binge, spending large amounts of money on unnecessary things. Another person, by
contrast, might not only refrain from such a spree, but also refrain from spending on nearly anything, including something worthwhile such as a gift or a charitable donation. Moreover, certain people seem to regularly refrain from worthwhile spending (such as charitable donations), and others to regularly go on shopping binges. Insofar as these kinds of actions are regular, they seem to be expressive of the character of the person. People who regularly waste money on frivolous things are wasteful or prodigal people, and their wasteful spending seems to be both a source and a symptom of their character. And people who regularly abstain from spending their (surplus) money, even on worthwhile things, are stingy or miserly people, and their abstention seems, again, to be both a source and a symptom of their character.

Both of these types of people differ from a third kind of person. People of this third kind neither go on shopping sprees nor refrain from all charitable donations. Rather they spend their money appropriately and do so regularly. As such, they will not waste their money and they will regularly give from their surplus to those who are in need. We call such people generous.

*Example (2): Good-Temper* – Just as the use of money is found in nearly every human life, so too is the feeling of anger. And with regard to anger, we also find variation in how exactly people feel it. Someone might fly into a rage over something trivial, while someone else might feel hardly any anger at all even though their spouse (or child or friend) just received an unprovoked and serious insult. Moreover, certain people seem to regularly become irate over minor things, while others seem to regularly feel no anger even in those situations which arguably call for it. The former kind of people have
irascible characters, in that they tend to become overly angry. The latter kind of people also have a particular character, but unfortunately there does not seem to be an English word that adequately captures it.\textsuperscript{84} We might say that they are “inirascible,” by which we mean they tend to feel very little anger (if any at all) even when anger might be appropriate or required.

The irascible person and the inirascible person both differ from a third kind of person. People belonging to this third kind tend to become angry over the insolent treatment of their friends but not over trivial matters. Moreover, it might be their disposition to get angry this way. That is, they get angry when and only when it is appropriate to do so. Now inasmuch as the occasions for anger are somewhat rare (insolent insults and the like being somewhat uncommon), these people would not often feel anger. Indeed, they might seem quite similar to the inirascible person. But to mark the difference between the inirascible person (who (almost) never gets angry) and this third kind of person (who occasionally gets angry), let us call people of this third kind “good-tempered.” They are good-tempered in that their temper flares up only when it should and never when it should not.

Example (3): Courage – In the face of terrible things, such as death or severe physical harm, human beings typically feel fear. Some of us, however, might feel fear over things that are not terrible at all. For example, the sight of a mouse might cause someone to jump up in fear and run away. Insofar as mice are not actually dangerous, such fear seems misplaced. But it also seems possible to have excessive fear over things

\textsuperscript{84} There does not appear to be a Greek word that captures it either. See \textit{NE} 1108a5-9 and 1125b26-9, where Aristotle coins a neologism (ἄοργησια) to refer to this vice.
which are actually terrible. The green army recruit might feel so much fear over the impending firefight that he runs away, deserting his fellow soldiers.

Another way to describe such people is to focus on their lack of confidence. The green army recruit feels very little confidence or boldness inasmuch as he fearfully turns away from the undertaking at hand. By contrast, a different soldier might recklessly charge into the battle with an overbold zeal. Given the dangers of the battle, such boldness is misplaced; this soldier feels too confident and, as a result, acts recklessly. Death is a very real possibility in the soldier's situation and he seems to feel too little fear and too much boldness or confidence given that situation.

People who regularly feel too much fear and too little confidence in response to terrible things (or in response to things that are not even terrible, such as mice) are cowards. And people who regularly feel too little fear and too much confidence in response to terrible things are rash. In contrast to these two types of people, there stands the courageous person. Courageous people feel fear in the face of terrible things but not to an excessive degree; likewise with regard to confidence. For example, the confidence or boldness of courageous soldiers leads them to fight the battle valiantly while their fear keeps them vigilant.

Consider now the common features of these three examples. In each one, there is what I will call a “sphere of life.” In the case of generosity, it is the use of money; in the case of good-temper, the feeling of anger; and in the case of courage, the feeling of fear and confidence. With regard to these spheres of life, one might be disposed well or badly, as we saw in the examples. Now the character trait of the one who is disposed well is a
virtue. Thus, generosity, good-temper, and courage are all virtues. And, as we saw, these traits give rise to the appropriate action or feeling in the relevant sphere of life. The generous person is such as to spend or give appropriately; the good-tempered person, to feel anger appropriately; and the courageous person to feel fear and confidence appropriately.

In contrast, those who are disposed badly come in two different kinds. On the one hand, there are those people who are disposed toward excess or towards “too much.” The prodigal person spends money excessively, the irascible person feels too much anger, and the rash person feels too much confidence.85 These character traits—prodigality, irascibility, and rashness—are vices of excess. On the other hand, there are people who are disposed toward deficiency or toward “too little.” The stingy miser spends (or gives) too little, the inirascible person feels too little anger, and the coward feels too little confidence. These character traits—stinginess, inirascibility, and cowardice—are vices of deficiency. For the sake of convenience, let us represent these examples with the following table (I have also included the Greek that Aristotle uses to refer to each of the items in the table):

85 Whether rashness or cowardice is labeled as the vice of excess is somewhat arbitrary. Aristotle speaks of cowardice as disposing one to be deficient in confidence (1116a1), but then also as disposing one toward excessive fear (1115b33-4). Rashness is mentioned only as a vice of excess (and not a vice of deficiency) and so I have opted to put it, and not cowardice, in the “excess” column. Worries as to whether or not courage adequately fits within the doctrine of the mean will be addressed in section 1.4.
TABLE 4.1
THREE EXAMPLES OF VIRTUE AND VICE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sphere of Life</th>
<th>Virtue</th>
<th>Vice of Excess</th>
<th>Vice of Deficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear and confidence (φόβος καὶ θάρσος)</td>
<td>Courage (ἀνδρεία)</td>
<td>Rashness (θρασύτης)</td>
<td>Cowardice (δειλία)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using of money (δόσις καὶ λήψις (μικρῶν) χρημάτων)</td>
<td>Generosity (ἐλευθεριότης)</td>
<td>Prodigality (ἀσωτία)</td>
<td>Stinginess (ἀνελευθερία)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger (ὀργή)</td>
<td>Good-temper (πραότης)</td>
<td>Irascibility (.ordinal)</td>
<td>Inirascibility (ἀγιστρία)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2 Virtues as Mean-States

In its simplest form, the doctrine of the mean states that a virtue, such as courage, generosity, or good-temper, is “a mean-state between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on deficiency (μεσότης δὲ δύο κακιῶν τῆς μὲν καθ' ὑπερβολὴν τῆς δὲ κατ' ἔλλειψιν)” (NE II.6 1107a2-3, cf. EE II.3 1220b34-5). For example, the character of the generous person is, in some sense, “in between” that of the prodigal person and that of the stingy miser. Prodigal people are excessive, stingy people are deficient, and generous people are neither excessive nor deficient but rather in between these extremes. According to the doctrine of the mean, every virtue is like this; every virtue lies between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency (see NE II.7 and EE II.3 1220b38-1a12). In short, virtues themselves are means.

86 Throughout this chapter, when I use the word 'virtue', I am referring to what Aristotle calls 'character virtue (ἡθικὴ ἀρετή)'.

87 All translations of the Nicomachean Ethics are those of Ross, and all translations of the Eudemian Ethics are those of Solomon, though in both cases I have made slight modifications.
However, it is not only the virtues that Aristotle describes as being intermediate (i.e., as being means between excess and deficiency). At II.5 1105b26-8, passions are described as being felt well when they are felt “intermediately (μέσως).” And in a similar vein, several of Aristotle's descriptions of virtue state that it “aims at the mean in passion and action (στοχαστικὴ τοῦ μέσου...ἐν τοῖς πάθεσι καὶ ἐν ταῖς πράξεσι)” (1109a22-3, cf. 1106b16-23). For an initial understanding of what this “mean” might be, consider the passion of anger. Anger is felt with varying degrees of intensity. Furthermore, certain intensities of anger are inappropriate for certain situations in that they are excessive or deficient. For example, irascible people may feel too much anger when a fellow-motorist accidentally cuts them off; their anger will be excessive for that situation. Good-tempered people, by contrast, avoid such excessive anger. In addition, they avoid deficient anger and thus they achieve the “mean” in anger. The anger they feel is in between too much and too little and thus is appropriate. In this way, passions can also be said to be means, and virtues are those states which dispose one to aim at such means.

Now we saw in our three examples that each of the virtues deals with a particular sphere of life: courage with fear and confidence, generosity with the use of money, and good-temper with anger. Fear, confidence, and anger are all passions; the use of money, an action. In Aristotle's view, all of the various spheres of life to which the virtues and vices pertain are instances of passion (πάθος) or action (πρᾶξις). This is why when Aristotle talks about virtue in general—as opposed to specific virtues—he will often speak of their disposing us appropriately with regard to action and passion (see, e.g., *NE* II.6 1106b16-8, 24-7, 7a3-6). Virtues dispose us to do well in the sphere of life to which
they pertain in that they dispose us to perform the appropriate action and feel the appropriate passion. Or, in other words, they dispose us to hit the mean in passion and action. What exactly the mean in action is and how exactly it is related to the mean in passion will be discussed shortly. For now, what is important is the fact that appropriate passions and actions are themselves means.

Aristotle, then, presents us with two means that are relevant to virtue: the mean-state (μεσότης) that is virtue, and the mean (μέσον) in passion and action at which virtue aims. This raises the question, what is the relationship between these two means? Fortunately, Aristotle is clear on this point:

That character virtue is a mean-state, then, and in what sense it is so, and that it is a mean-state between two vices, the one involving excess, the other deficiency, and that it is such because its character is to aim at the mean in passions and in actions, has been sufficiently stated (Ὅτι μὲν οὖν ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρετὴ ἡ ἠθικὴ μεσότης, καὶ πῶς, καὶ ὅτι μεσότης δύο κακιῶν, τῆς μὲν καθ’ ύπερβολὴν τῆς δὲ κατ’ ἐλλειψιν, καὶ ὅτι τοιαύτη ἐστὶ διὰ τὸ στοχαστικὴ τοῦ μέσου εἶναι τοῦ ἐν τοῖς πάθεσι καὶ ἐν ταῖς πράξεσι, ἰκανώς εἰρηται) (NE II.9 1109a20-24).

Aristotle states quite clearly that virtues are mean-states because (διὰ) they aim at the mean in passion and action. To put it more precisely, virtues are those states of the soul that dispose one to aim at the mean in passion and action, and it is on account of their so aiming that they themselves can be called “mean” states. In other words, that virtues are mean-states is derivative from their aiming at the mean in passion and action.88

88 Many commentators have claimed or argued for this. The most thorough treatment is that of Brown (2014). See also Lawrence (2009), Young (1996), Blankenship (1996), and Hardie (1964-5). For dissenting opinions, see Urmson (1973), Broadie (1991), p. 101 and Bostock (2000), p. 42. I find Brown’s arguments against Urmson, Bostock, and Broadie convincing (see Brown (2014), pp. 72-4). Given the prevalence of the interpretation she argues for, however, I find it inaccurate to call the interpretation of Urmson, Bostock, and Broadie the “usual” one (Brown (2014), p. 64).
Presumably, the same is true of the vices as well: vices can be called excessive or deficient states in that they dispose one to aim at excess or deficiency in passion and action.

Consider our examples. According to *NE* II.9 1109a20-24, rashness, prodigality, and irascibility can all correctly be called excessive states on account of their disposing one to act or feel in an excessive manner. Rashness can be called a state of excess *because* it disposes one to feel excessive confidence; prodigality, *because* it disposes one to use money excessively; and irascibility, *because* it disposes one to feel excessive anger. Likewise, cowardice, stinginess, and inirascibility can all be called deficient states on account of their disposing one to act or feel in a deficient manner. And courage, generosity, and good-temper are mean-states in that they dispose one to act or feel in a way that is neither excessive nor deficient, but rather in between these. That virtues are mean-states is derivative of the fact that they dispose one to aim at the mean in passion and action.

Consequently, in order to understand Aristotle's claim that virtues are mean-states—that is, in order to understand the doctrine of the mean—we need an explication of the mean in passion and action. For the doctrine of the mean is tantamount to the claim that virtues dispose their possessors to achieve the mean in passion and action. Let us now turn to this task.
4.1.3 The Mean in Passion and Action

What exactly is the relationship between passion and action and how exactly should we understand the mean that is in them? The key to answering these questions is to note the relationship Aristotle draws between action, on the one hand, and pleasure and pain, on the other, especially in the context of the doctrine of the mean. Consider Eudemian Ethics 1222a6-14 (the emphasis is mine):

But since we have already assumed that virtue is that sort of disposition from which men have a tendency to do the best actions...and best is what is in accordance with right reason, and this is the mean between excess and deficiency relative to us; it would follow that character virtue is a mean-state relative to each individual himself, and is concerned with certain means in pleasures and pains, in the pleasant and the painful. The mean will sometimes be in pleasures (for there too is excess and deficiency), sometimes in pains, sometimes in both (ἐπεὶ δ’ ὑπόκειται ἄρετή εἶναι ἢ τοιαύτη ἔξις ἢφ’ ἢς πρακτικοὶ τῶν βελτίστων...βέλτιστον δὲ καὶ ἄριστον τό κατά τόν ὀρθόν λόγον, τούτῳ δ’ ἐστὶ τό μέσον ὑπερβολῆς καὶ ἐλλείψεως τῆς πρός ἡμᾶς ἀναγκαίον ἢν εἴη τὴν ἡθικὴν ἄρετὴν καθ’ αὑτὸν ἐκαστὸν μεσότητα εἶναι καὶ περὶ μέσ’ ἄττα ἐν ἠδοναῖς καὶ λύπαις καὶ ἡδέσι καὶ λυπηροῖς, ἐσται δ’ ἡ μεσοτής ὅτε μὲν ἐν ἠδοναῖς (καὶ γὰρ ὑπερβολὴ καὶ ἐλλείψεις), ὅτε δ’ ἐν λύπαις, ὅτε δ’ ἐν ἀμφοτέραις).

Aristotle begins by claiming that virtue disposes one to perform the best actions and that the best is a mean between excess and deficiency. From these claims he says that it follows that virtue is concerned with certain means in pleasures and pains. Unfortunately, Aristotle does not spell out why exactly this follows. Aristotle seems to be assuming, however, that the mean relevant to action just is a mean in pleasure and pain. And thus it would follow from the fact that virtue is concerned with a mean with regard to action that it is concerned with a mean in pleasure and pain. If he is not assuming this, then Aristotle
would be guilty of a blatant non sequitur. This would be an unpromising line of interpretation to say the least.

However, it is not yet clear just how the mean in action might be a mean in pleasure and pain. Moreover, it is not clear why this fact about the mean in action is germane to understanding the relationship between passion and action and the mean in them. The key to clarifying these obscurities is that, in Aristotle's view, passions are pleasures and pains, and thus the mean in pleasure and pain referred to at EE 1222a6-14 is really just a mean in passion. Thus, the mean that is relevant with regard to action is just the mean in passion.89

Consider now what reason there might be for thinking Aristotle accepted the crucial premise used to establish this conclusion, namely, that passions are pleasures and pains. By passion, Aristotle means “appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, friendliness, hatred, longing, emulation, pity, and in general those things accompanied by pleasure and pain (ἐπιθυμίαν ὀργὴν φόβον θάρσος φθόνον χαρὰν φιλίαν μίσος πόθον ζῆλον ἔλεον, ὁλως οίς ἔπεται ἡδονὴ ἢ λύπη) (1105b21-3).”90 Of particular importance presently is the last item on the list: passions, in general, are things which “are accompanied by (ἔπεται)” pleasure and pain. As several commentators have argued, ἔπεται in this context means something much stronger than contingent accompaniment.91 Consider Rhetoric II.1-11. In II.1, Aristotle again claims that passions are those things

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89 Some commentators have put forward a similar view, arguing that the mean in passion and action is a mean in pleasure and pain. See Tracy (1969), p. 235 and Reeve (2013), p. 96.

90 Cf. EE II.2 1220b12-14.

that are accompanied by (ἕπεται) pleasure and pain (1378a19-21). The discussion of the individual passions that follows in II.2-11 strongly suggests that passions simply are (particular kinds of) pleasure or pain. Indeed, most of them are explicitly defined as such. For example, fear is defined as a pain due to imagining some future evil (1382a21); pity, as pain at evil which befalls an undeserving person (1385b13-4); and emulation, as pain caused by seeing people similar to us with good things (1388a31-4).92

Moreover, throughout the corpus ἕπεται most commonly indicates an essential connection between two things, not a mere contingent accompaniment.93 To say that x is accompanied by (ἕπεται) y is to say that it is part of the essence of x to be y in that x's are kinds of y's. In light of the discussion of the passions in the Rhetoric, it seems safe to interpret Aristotle's claim that passion is accompanied by (ἕπεται) pleasure and pain as the claim that passions are pleasures or pains in that pleasure and pain are the genera of the passions.94

When defining virtue both in NE II.5 and EE II.2, Aristotle argues that virtue disposes one with regard to passion (no mention being made of any thing else). Given this fact, it seems likely that the mean in pleasure and pain referred to at EE 1222a6-14 is a mean in passion. Indeed, this is implied shortly after that passage:

92 For more detailed examinations of the discussions of the passions in Rhetoric II, see Dow (2011), pp. 52-6. Dow argues that, though Aristotle does not always state the point directly, every passion is either a pleasure or a pain. See also Fortenbaugh (2006), pp. 76-81 who conducts similarly detailed examinations, arguing for the same conclusion.

93 For an overview of the various uses of ἕπεται in Aristotle, see Dow (2011), pp. 50-1.

And since we have reached a list of the dispositions in regard to the several passions, with their excesses and deficiencies, and the opposite dispositions in virtue of which men are as right reason directs them to be...it is clear that all the character virtues and vices have to do with excesses and deficiencies of pleasures and pains (ἐπεὶ δ' εἴληπται ἡ διαλογὴ τῶν ἔξεων καθ' ἕκαστα τὰ πάθη, καὶ αἱ ὑπερβολαὶ καὶ ἐλλεῖψεις, καὶ τῶν ἐναντίων ἔξεων, καθ' ἃς ἔχουσι κατὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον...φανερὸν ὅτι πάσαι αἱ ἡθικαὶ ἀρεταὶ καὶ κακίαι περὶ ἡδονῶν καὶ λυπῶν ὑπερβολὰς καὶ ἐλλεῖψεις εἰσί, καὶ ἡδοναὶ καὶ λύπαι) (1222b5-11).

The “list of the dispositions” is just the list of the virtues. Thus, Aristotle is saying that inasmuch as the virtues are concerned with the mean in the several passions, they are concerned with the mean in pleasure and pain. The mean in pleasure and pain with which virtue is concerned simply is the mean in passion. In light of 1222a6-14, it is clear that the mean with regard to action is a mean in passion.95

Thus far, I have primarily focused on the textual case to be made for such a conclusion. Let us now consider what philosophical sense can be made of it. How might the mean with regard to action be a mean in passion?

Aristotle's detailed discussions of the specific virtues are of help here, particularly those of courage and generosity. In his discussion of courage, Aristotle focuses on the passions with which courage is concerned, namely, fear and confidence. He first discusses the person who achieves the mean in these passions, after which he discusses the various ways in which someone might err by way of either excess or deficiency with regard to these passions. The conclusion of his discussion, however, is not only about passions but actions as well:

95 Hughes (2001), pp. 69-70 draws a similar conclusion.
The man...who faces and who fears the right things and with the right aim, in the right way and at the right time, and who feels confidence under the corresponding conditions, is courageous; for the courageous man feels and acts according to the merits of the case (ὁ μὲν οὖν ἃ δεῖ καὶ οὗ ἕνεκα ὑπομένων καὶ φοβούμενος, καὶ ὃς δεῖ καὶ ὁτε, ὤμοιος δὲ καὶ θαρρῶν, ἀνδρεῖος· κατ’ ἀξίαν γὰρ, καὶ ὃς ἂν ὁ λόγος, πάσχει καὶ πράττει ὁ ἀνδρεῖος) (1115b17-20).

Feeling fear and confidence in the right way, at the right times, etc. is courageous. Aristotle then notes a reason why we should identify courage with a disposition for such feelings: courage disposes one to feel and act according to the merits of the case, that is, to feel and act at the right time, in the right way, etc. Aristotle seems to be implying that the person who achieves the mean in fear and confidence will, as a result, act courageously, inasmuch as the actions to which appropriate fear and confidence give rise will themselves be appropriate. For Aristotle never directly discusses or explains the mean in action in the rest of his discussion of courage. And so the conclusions he draws about appropriate action in that discussion would seem to have to follow merely from his discussion of the mean in the passions of fear and confidence.

Now consider Aristotle's discussion of generosity. This virtue governs certain actions, namely, the “giving and taking of wealth (δόσιν χρημάτων καὶ λήψιν)” (1119b25). Stinginess is a vice of deficiency with regard to the giving of money, disposing one to give too little money. In discussing stingy people and their actions, however, Aristotle often switches to discussing their desires or motivations. Stingy people are “lovers of money (φιλοχρήματοι)” (1121b15), and they “care more than they ought for wealth (μᾶλλον ἡ δὲὶ περὶ χρήματα σπουδάζουσι)” (1119a29-30). Their desire or passion for money is excessive and such a desire leads to corresponding stingy actions of
giving too little. Likewise, prodigal people who spend too much have “an appetite for giving (διδόναι...ἐπιθυμοῦσι)” (1121b2); their desire or passion to spend money is excessive, which leads to excessive spending. The passions and desires of both kinds of vicious people are what motivate their vicious actions.

More generally, all actions are necessarily motivated and initiated by some desire or passion, according to Aristotle.\(^96\) The mean that is relevant with regard to action is the mean in the motivating or initiating passion. Thus, the prodigal's actions are excessive in that the desire or passion that gives rise to those actions is excessive, and the coward's actions are deficient in that the desire or passion that gives rise to them is deficient.

This is not how the mean in action is typically understood by commentators.\(^97\) Take the case of spending money. A common and perhaps even intuitive way of understanding the mean with regard to spending money is to think of it in terms of the amount of money spent. To achieve the mean in the spending of money is to spend the right, or mean, amount of money. Likewise, the relevant excess is to be understood in terms of spending an excessive amount of money; the relevant deficiency, a deficient amount.

On the view presented in the previous paragraphs, by contrast, the person who achieves the mean will generally spend the right amount of money, but the mean does not refer to a particular amount of money. Rather, it refers to a particular degree of desire. The prodigal person's desire to spend wealth is too great and thus such a person ends up

\(^{96}\) See *NE* VI.2 1139a31-33, *Magna Moralia* I.12 1187b8-9, *De Anima* III.10 433a21, and *De Motu Animalium* 6.


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spending too much money. Likewise, the stingy person's desire to spend or give away money is deficient and thus such a person spends too little. The generous person's desire to spend money, by contrast, is of an appropriate strength, and thus such a person spends the right amount of money. So even though the generous person does in fact spend the right amount of money (and neither stingy nor prodigal people do), the mean does not directly pertain to the money spent, but rather to the desire.

But why accept the account of the mean that I have offered over the rival one presented above? The reason is because the rival view clearly conflicts with Aristotle's stated reason for introducing the doctrine of the mean in the first place. At NE II.6 1106a26-9, Aristotle says that in anything “continuous and divisible (συνεχεῖ καὶ διαιρετῷ)” there is a mean, excess, and deficiency. Wherever there is a mean, then, we should expect to find a continuum in which that mean lies. Money, however, is not a continuum in Aristotle's sense of continuum. At Physics V.3 227a11-2, Aristotle tells us that “things are called continuous when the touching limits of each become one and the same and are, as the word implies, contained in each other.” An implication of this, Aristotle takes it, is that “nothing that is continuous can be composed of indivisibles” (Physics VI.1 231a24) and so “everything continuous is divisible into divisibles that are always divisible” (Physics VI.1 231b 15-6). In other words, a continuum is divisible ad infinitum. A range of amounts of money, however, is not. There is a smallest unit of currency (the chalkos for the ancient Greeks) and in dividing the range of monetary amounts, upon reaching these indivisible units, further division is impossible. Because

98 Cf. EE II.3 1220b21-2.
money thus is not a continuum, the mean relevant to the spending of money must not refer to a particular amount of money.

By contrast, passions are continuous. They can all be felt with varying degrees of intensity but, unlike in the case of money, there is no smallest unit of passion. Accordingly, taking the mean relevant to generosity to be a mean in passion, as opposed to a mean in amounts of money, renders Aristotle's discussion of the mean coherent. And an interpretation according to which Aristotle is coherent is clearly preferable to one in which he is not, other things being equal.

Someone's desire for spending money is something which can be too intense, not intense enough, or neither of these. According to Aristotle, all passions are like this: they can all be felt too much, too little, or appropriately. And passions go wrong by being too intense or not intense enough. That is to say, any bad or vicious passion will be either excessive or deficient in intensity. Someone errs with regard to anger, for example, by feeling too much anger, by feeling anger to an excessive degree, or, as I will put it, by feeling anger with an excessive intensity. By contrast, the appropriate passion is simply one that is neither too intense nor not intense enough. The appropriate passion, in other words, is a “mean” between excessively and deficiently intense passions. Good-tempered people feel neither excessively intense nor deficiently intense anger; they feel anger with an appropriate intensity.
4.1.4 The Mean in Passion

There are various ways in which a vicious passion might exhibit its excessive or deficient intensity. In what follows, I am going to discuss each of these ways at length. Doing so will clarify Aristotle's controversial claim that it is by being excessive or deficient that actions and passions go wrong. Furthermore, it will allow us to see that the doctrine of the mean, far from being a procrustean scheme with obvious counterexamples, is actually quite flexible and sensitive to the complexities of human life.

One way that a passion might be excessive is with respect to the people one feels a passion toward. The phenomenon of displaced anger is an example of this. Say that my boss unfairly passes me over for promotion (she promotes, instead, her incompetent nephew). Since I do not want to endanger my further career advancement by upsetting my boss, I hold back my anger from her. But later that day I lash out at a co-worker for some minor, unintentional mistake. In such a case, my anger toward my co-worker is excessively intense—I feel too much anger toward him. The intensity of my anger has “missed the mark” so to speak, and, in doing so, has caused my anger to go wrong in respect of the people toward whom I feel it.

Quite interestingly, Aristotle does not confine himself to just one term to describe the character of people who habitually become too angry. Rather he uses different terms to pick out the different kinds of dispositions toward excess. Presently, we are considering people whose anger goes wrong with regard to the people toward whom it is felt. Such people are, in Aristotle's words, either “irascible” (ὀργίλος) (1126a13) or “choleric” (ἀκράχολος) (1126a18).
Consider another way in which anger might be excessive. I might feel my anger for too long a time. In that case, at the point when my anger should have passed, I will still be feeling it. My anger will be, at that time, excessively intense; I should feel it less intensely than I do at that time. As an example of this kind of failing, consider Dostoevsky's Underground Man. After receiving a slight offense from an officer (the officer forcibly moves the Underground Man out of his way), the Underground Man angrily broods over the offense, calculating revenge, for years (see Notes from Underground Part II, ch. 1). Even granting that some anger would have been justified by such an offense, maintaining that anger for years is clearly too long a time to feel anger over something so minor. By the time the Underground Man eventually takes his revenge, the appropriate time for his anger has long since past. In such a case, the intensity of anger has gone wrong with respect to the time at which it is felt. Depending on how else they feel anger, people who go wrong in this way are either “sulky” (πικρός) (1126a19) or “bad-tempered” (χαλεπός) (1126a26), according to Aristotle.

Before going on to consider other ways in which passions go wrong, let me note one upshot of the above discussion of anger. There is evidently more than one vice of excess. Indeed, Aristotle describes four: irascibility, being choleric, sulkiness, and bad-temper. These four distinct (and, in some cases, mutually incompatible (see 1126a8-13)) vices all dispose their possessors to feel too much anger, but too much anger in different ways. For example, the vice of sulkiness disposes one to feel anger for too long, whereas

99 To be clear, I do not claim to have comprehensively explored the psychology of the Underground Man with this brief analysis. To the contrary, this analysis hardly scratches the surface.
the vice of irascibility is explicitly said not to do this (see 1126a15). Rather, irascibility
disposes one to feel anger toward too many people and in regards to too many things. The
doctrine of the mean, then, does not state that there are precisely two vices for each
virtue. Rather, it states that there are two kinds of vices: vices of excess and vices of
deficiency. Vices of excess dispose their possessors toward excessive passions; vices of
deficiency, deficient ones. But, as we have just seen in the case of anger, there are many
different ways in which excessive passions can be excessive, and one can be disposed to
feel a passion excessively in one way but not in another. Accordingly, there are, in the
case of some passions (such as anger) at least, several different dispositions toward either
excess or deficiency. In other words, in some cases there are more than two vices
opposing a single virtue.

Consider now two other ways in which excess might be exhibited. The first of
these ways is is most perspicuously discussed by Aristotle in relationship to the virtue of
friendliness. According to Aristotle, there are several virtues that regulate “intercourse in

100 And so Hursthouse's complaint against Aristotle that it would be an astonishing case of
“extraordinary mathematical symmetry” if there were precisely two vices for each virtue is misguided (see
Hursthouse (1980-1), pp.59-60). For Aristotle, there are not precisely two vices for each virtue.

101 In those cases where there are more than one vice of excess or deficiency, at times Aristotle
nonetheless assigns a single name to the vices of excess or deficiency. He does this, for example, in the
catalog of virtues at NE II.7 and EE II.3. Instead of mentioning the four vices of excessive anger, he
mentions only irascibility (ὀργιλότης). In these cases, however, it is clear that he is using the single name as
a shorthand—perhaps the various vices of excess are specifications of the single vice mentioned in the
catalog, or perhaps the single vice mentioned in the catalog is the most obvious choice, for whatever
reason, for a shorthand in referring to multiple vices. In the case of anger, for example, όργιλότης is the
single vice mentioned in the catalogs, but when Aristotle comes to discuss the vices in detail, όργιλότης is
just one of the vices of excess; indeed, there is at least one other vice of excess anger which is incompatible
with όργιλότης, namely, sulkiness. Sulkiness cannot, then, be a specification of όργιλότης. And there is no
hint in Aristotle's discussion that όργιλότης is more common or worse than any of the other vices. My guess
as to why όργιλότης is the single vice mentioned is simply that it is derived from the word for anger, 'ὀργή',
whereas none of the other words for the vices of excess are. Since these are vices related to anger,
όργιλότης is an obvious choice for a shorthand in referring to them.

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words and actions (περὶ λόγων καὶ πράξεων κοινωνίαν)” (1108a11). One of these virtues is “friendliness (φιλία)” (1108a28), and it regulates social intercourse as it relates to “pleasantness...in the circumstances of life (τὸ ἡδύ...ἐν πάσι τοῖς κατὰ τὸν βίον)” (1108a13-4). There are at least two kinds of excess that correspond to this virtue.

I might praise someone and do so for the sake of pleasing them. Say I want to please this person in order to get more money (e.g., by influencing this person to hire or promote me). This being my end or goal, however, Aristotle would say that I should not desire to please this person at all. Any desire to please this person for this end is excessive due to the fact that my end is wrong. In my social intercourse, Aristotle thinks that I should be aiming at “the noble and the good (τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ συμφέρον)” (1126b29). By aiming merely at pleasing this person, my desire to please is already excessive—I should have no desire to please someone with such an end in view. By pleasing this person for this end, I am guilty of being a “flatterer (κόλαξ)” (1127a8-10). Now if my end were merely the pleasing of this person (and not money or any other ulterior motive), then in that case I am being what we today might call a “people-pleaser” or, to put it in Aristotle's words, I am being “obsequious (ἄρεσκος)” (1127a8). To aim to please people merely for the sake of pleasing them is, on Aristotle's view, excessive; it is to desire to please people too much. In both of these cases, the intensity of my desire to please people has gone wrong with regard to the end or aim that I have.

Lastly, consider a passion that goes wrong by being felt toward the wrong things. Say I feel an incapacitating fear at the squeak of a mouse. Mice, according to Aristotle, are not appropriate objects of fear (see NE VII.5 1149a7-8). That is to say, I should feel
no fear of the mouse. In being terrified of the mouse, then, Aristotle would say I am feeling too much fear; my fear is excessively intense. The intensity of my fear has gone wrong with respect to the object I feel it toward.

These examples illustrate that to feel a passion appropriately, one must feel it in such a manner that it is in no way excessively or deficiently intense. As Aristotle puts it, feeling a passion appropriately requires feeling it “at the right times, with reference to the right objects, toward the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way (τὸ δὲντε δεῖ καὶ ἐφ’ ὁς καὶ πρὸς ὦς καὶ ὦ ἐνεκα καὶ ὦς δεῖ)” (NE II.6 1106b21-22). To feel passions in such a way, Aristotle says, is “the mean and the best (μέσον τε καὶ ἄριστον)” (1106b22). To feel a passion with a mean intensity, in other words, requires not feeling it at the wrong times, not feeling it toward the wrong people or objects, and not feeling it with the wrong aims. For if one were to err in one of these ways, one's passion would, in that respect, be excessively or deficiently intense.102

Let us take stock. The doctrine of the mean states that virtues such as courage, generosity and good-temper are mean-states in that they dispose their possessors to aim at and achieve the mean in passion. And achieving the mean in passion is tantamount to feeling a passion that has an appropriate intensity with regard to the time at which it is felt, with regard to the people toward whom it is felt, with regard to the objects toward which it is felt, and with regard to the end for which it is felt. In short, an intermediate passion has an appropriate intensity with regard to the circumstances in which it is felt. In

102 My interpretation of NE II.6 1106b21-22 is markedly different from that of most commentators. Furthermore, it is because I interpret this passage so differently that I see far fewer problems with the doctrine of the mean than most other commentators. I will address these alternative interpretations in section 2.
the remainder of this section, I shall focus on clarifying this point. For it is only in light of these clarifications that we can adequately understand and assess Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. And though a detailed engagement with criticisms of the doctrine of the mean must wait until Section 2, in the course of clarifying the above point there will be occasion to note or show how some criticisms of the doctrine rest on a failure to appreciate these clarifications.

Return to Aristotle's claim that feeling a passion appropriately requires feeling it “at the right times, with reference to the right objects, toward the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way” (NE II.6 1106b21-22). Not every one of the listed items will be relevant for every passion and in every situation. In some situations, only one may be relevant, whereas in others all four may be. Further, there is nothing in what Aristotle says that rules out there being even more items with regard to which we might fall into error than those he lists. The listed items simply seem to be those that are relevant most often. And so, in some situation, even more than the four listed items may be relevant or some item other than the four may be relevant.

Furthermore, the listed items with regard to which we are prone to err differs from passion to passion. To see this, consider the contrast between Aristotle's discussion of the vices of obsequiousness and flattery, on the one hand, and that of self-indulgence, on the other. In the case of social intercourse with regard to pleasantness in the circumstances of life, Aristotle thinks that people are particularly prone to err with regard to the end for the sake of which they act. People are particularly prone to be obsequious people-pleasers and flatterers, aiming at pleasing people simply for the sake of pleasing them, or for the
sake of monetary gain. In short, people are prone toward excess in respect of their ends. By contrast, Aristotle makes only a few brief remarks about the ends one ought to pursue in his discussion of pleasures of touch and the corresponding virtue of temperance. He focuses, instead, on the fact that self-indulgent people (ἀκόλαστοι) tend toward excess in the objects that they desire and in which they take pleasure (see III.11 1118b25-8). They desire certain objects too much and they likewise take too much pleasure in them. In short, people are prone toward excess in respect of the relevant objects.

For Aristotle, human beings are prone to ethical failure in different ways depending upon the particular sphere of life under consideration. With respect to pleasure in the circumstances of life, people are particularly prone toward excess in respect of their ends; with respect to pleasures of touch, by contrast, people are particularly prone toward excess in respect of their objects. We should not expect, then, that in every sphere of life human beings will be disposed to fail in the various ways to the same extent.

In his discussions of the various vices, Aristotle is cataloging and organizing his observations about how it is that human beings tend, in fact, to go wrong. And, as I have been discussing, he is sensitive to the fact that there is a large number of ways in which human beings are disposed to vicious action and passion. It is consistent with the doctrine of the mean, however, that there be even more ways than Aristotle himself specified. Recognition of this fact helps to undercut some of the counterexamples raised against the doctrine of the mean. Consider two counterexamples put forward by Anselm Müller.: that concerned with unjust cowards and that concerned with inirascible people who are also irascible.
In the first alleged counterexample, 'unjust cowards' refers to people who act cowardly in defense of unjust causes (see Müller (2004), p. 33). Such people seem to feel simultaneously too much confidence, insofar as they feel any confidence at all for an ignoble end, and too little confidence, insofar as they act cowardly by, say, sheepishly backing down from frightening adversaries. This, according to Müller, “seem[s] to make the doctrine of the mean inconsistent” (p.33) as the cowardly defender of injustice feels confidence with both too much and too little intensity. This, so the argument goes, is a contradiction.

It is only a contradiction, however, if the confidence is felt both too much and too little in the same regard. But it is not. It is too much with regard to the end (i.e., an unjust cause), and it is too little with regard to the object (i.e., frightening adversaries). Such people have two kinds of failings. They have a disposition to feel excessive confidence for ignoble ends (they are, we might say, presumptuous) and a disposition toward deficient confidence in the face of adversity (they are cowards). While Aristotle does not discuss such a possibility, there is nothing in the doctrine of the mean that rules out the coexistence of both kinds of dispositions in one person. Presumptuous cowards pose no problem for the doctrine.

Now consider the second alleged counterexample, namely that concerned with an inirascible irascible person. Müller writes: “It may be typical of a person to be furious or indignant when he finds a little bit of cork in his wine glass, but only mildly annoyed when one of his friends is unjustly passed over for a job. Is he irascible? Is he unfeeling [i.e., inirascible]? He cannot, on Aristotle's view, be both” (Müller (2004), p. 31). But
quite to the contrary, he can indeed have both of these dispositions on Aristotle's view. Someone might be disposed toward excessive anger with regard to personal inconveniences, and, nevertheless, be disposed toward deficient anger with regard to injustice suffered by one's friends. Such a person would have a mix of two opposed vices, inirascibility, and irascibility. There is nothing in the doctrine of the mean that rules out such a possibility. All the doctrine of the mean rules out is a person's being, for example, disposed toward both excessive and deficient anger with regard to personal inconveniences. And it seems reasonable to rule such possibilities out.

Aristotle himself explicitly indicates that people might err in apparently opposite directions within the same sphere of life. At *NE* III.7 1115b28-33, Aristotle claims that most rash people are also cowards. They are rash insofar as they are too confident in the face of terrible things (such as death, and grievous bodily harm), and so rush into situations where they will be faced with these terrible things. But once in these situations, they do not hold their ground and, instead, feel excessive fear and act as cowards. Aristotle is aware of the complexity of human dispositions. He is aware that people might have a disposition to feel some passion excessively in some respect, but then also a disposition to feel it deficiently in some other respect. It is unproblematic for Aristotle and the doctrine of the mean that this person's “overall” disposition does not fit neatly into either excess or deficiency. Aristotle's overarching concern in these discussions is to elucidate the most common and problematic human failings and to show how they involve missing the mean, by way of either excess or deficiency. That some of these failings end up being a mix of dispositions for both excess and deficiency is consistent
with the doctrine of the mean. And so just as Aristotle's doctrine can accommodate rash cowards, so too can it accommodate presumptuous ones.

And, recall, it is no objection to the doctrine of mean that there would then be three vices corresponding to the virtue of courage. Aristotle may have not noticed all the vices, or new vices may have arisen or become more prominent in the intervening years, and so there may, in fact, be many more vices than we find in either the *NE* or *EE*. Nor is Aristotle committed to the claim that we will find among human beings at least two vices for each virtue. In his discussion of temperance, Aristotle is skeptical that there are any human beings who err in the way of deficiency: “People who fall short with regard to pleasures [of touch] and delight in them less than they should are hardly found; for such insensibility is not human (ἐλλείποντες δὲ τὰ περὶ τὰς ἡδονὰς καὶ ἤττον ἢ δεῖ χαίροντες οὐ πάνω γίνονται· οὐ γὰρ ἀνθρωπική ἐστιν ἡ τοιαύτη ἀναισθησία)” (*NE III.11 1119a5-7*).

So while it is possible for someone to err in this way, according to Aristotle virtually no one does. The only vice with regard to pleasures of touch that we will actually find among human beings is the vice of excess, self-indulgence. By contrast, the virtue of good temper has a multitude of vices which oppose it (inirascibility, hot-temper, being choleric, sulkiness, and bad-temper). With respect to some passions, there is a multitude of different kinds of failing that we will find people falling into, with respect to others, there is only one.

4.1.5 The Mean “Relative to Us”

So far we have said very little about what factors determine where this mean is situated with respect to excess and deficiency. Without such an account, however,
Aristotle's doctrine of the mean is not merely incomplete or lacking, it could very well be misleading. For in both Greek and English, 'mean' (\(\mu\acute{e}sov\)) can denote an arithmetic average. If we understand the mean to be arithmetic, then the things being averaged determine what the mean is. For example, that six is the mean or average is determined by the two numbers being averaged, say, ten and two. In the case of passions, the idea might be that we should consider both the most and the least intense anger imaginable, and then aim at an anger which is "equidistant" between these—an anger which is an average of the most and the least. Such a view, however, would tell us to feel an average amount of anger \textit{all the time, and in every situation}.\footnote{This appears to be what Urmson (1973) refers to as a "doctrine of moderation." Urmson is quite wrong, I think, to hold that the doctrine of the mean would amount to this so-called doctrine of moderation were Aristotle to take the mean-state of virtue to be derivative from the mean in passion and action, for it would do so only if one were to understand the mean in action and passion as mean "in the thing itself" and \textit{not} a mean "relative to us." Aristotle, of course, tells us explicitly to not understand it that way.} But clearly it would be inappropriate to feel anger in this way. To avoid such confusion, Aristotle clarifies that the mean in passion and action is \textit{not} arithmetic but, rather, that it is "relative to us."

"In everything that is continuous and divisible," Aristotle tells us, "it is possible to take more, less, or an equal amount, and that either in terms of the thing itself or relative to us; and the equal is a mean between excess and defect (\(\epsilon\nu\ \pi\alpha\nu\tau\iota\ \delta\acute{h} \varsigma\upsilon\nu\varepsilon\chi\varepsilon\iota\ \kappa\alpha\iota\) \(\delta\iota\ \\varepsilon\lambda\alpha\iota\tau\omicron\ \tau\omicron\ \delta\iota\ \acute{h}\iota\sigma\omicron,\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \tau\alpha\delta\iota\ \acute{h} \varsigma\alpha\tau\iota\ \\alpha\upsilon\tau\theta\omicron\ \tau\omicron\ \acute{h}\iota\sigma\omicron\ \mu\acute{e}\sigma\sigma\omicron\ \tau\omicron\ \\upsilon\pi\epsilon\rho\beta\omicron\\lambda\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\varsigma\iota\varsigma\)\) (1106a26-29). He then goes on to explain the two kinds of means just introduced. "By the mean in the thing itself, I mean that which is equidistant from each of the extremes, which is one and the same for all (\(\lambda\acute{e}g\omega\ \delta\varepsilon\ \tau\omicron\ \mu\acute{e}n \\pi\acute{r}\acute{a}g\omicron\mu\alpha\tau\omicron\ \mu\acute{e}\sigma\sigma\omicron\ \tau\omicron\ \\acute{h}\iota\sigma\omicron\ \\upsilon\acute{p}\acute{e}x\omicron\ \\upsilon\rho\iota\ \\acute{e}k\acute{a}t\acute{e}r\omicron\ \tau\omicron\ \\acute{a}k\acute{r}\omicron\).
ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἕν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ πᾶ σιν” (1106a29-31). Offering further clarification, Aristotle tells us that such a mean is an “arithmetical mean (ἀριθμητικής)” mean (1106a35-6). For example, between two and ten the arithmetic mean—the mean in the thing itself—is six, as six is equally far from two and ten. The mean in passion and action is *not* this kind of mean.

By the mean relative to us, on the other hand, Aristotle refers to “that which is neither too much nor deficient—and this is not one, nor the same for all (ὃ μήτε πλεονάζει μήτε ἐλλείπει· τοῦτο δ’ οὐχ ἐν, οὐδὲ ταύτὸν πᾶσιν)” (1106a31-2). Aware that further clarity is needed, Aristotle offers an illustration of this mean. He starts by contrasting the mean relative to us with the arithmetic mean:

The mean relative to us is not to be taken so [i.e., in the same way as the arithmetic mean]; if ten pounds are too much for particular person to eat and two too little, it does not follow that the physical trainer will order six pounds; for this also is perhaps too much for the person who is to take it, or too little—too little for Milo, too much for the beginner in athletic exercises (τὸ δὲ πρὸς ἡμᾶς οὕτω ληπτέον· οὐ γὰρ εἴ τῳ δέκα μναὶ φαγεῖν πολὺ δῦο δὲ ὀλίγον, ὁ ἀλείπτης ἕξ μνᾶς προστάξει· ἐστι γὰρ ἰσως καὶ τούτο πολὺ τῷ ληψομένῳ ἡ ὀλίγον· Μίλωνι μὲν γὰρ ὀλίγον, τῷ δὲ ἄρχομένῳ τῶν γυμνασίων πολύ) (1106a36-b4).

This illustration is supposed to show how it is that the mean relative to us is not one and the same for all. The mean for Milo, given his presumably large stature, is more than six, the mean for the beginner, given a beginner's presumably slight stature, is less than six. What the illustration shows is that the particular details of the situation need to be taken into account by the trainer who is aiming at the mean—details such as the trainee's size. These details determine where the mean “relative to us” is. And since the mean in passion and action is also “relative to us”, it will also be determined by the particular details of
the given situation. Just as it is might be appropriate for a trainer to prescribe a lot of food in one situation and hardly any food in another, so likewise the degree of fear that is appropriate in one set of circumstances—say, when a grizzly bear is charging at you—might be inappropriate in another—say, when a mouse scurries by you.

But even with this illustration of the trainer, how exactly we should understand the mean relative to us is controversial, for this illustration does not clearly indicate what the relevant particular details are. To settle what these details are, two questions need to be answered: Who exactly is the 'us' in the “mean relative to us”? And, how should the claim that the mean relative to us is not one and the same “for all (πᾶσιν)” be understood?

Many commentators have weighed in on these questions, and two promising lines of interpretation have emerged from these contributions: the “species-relativist” line and the “attribute-relativist” line. Lesley Brown (1997) has given the strongest and clearest statement of species-relativism and so in what follows I will focus on her views. According to Brown, the “us” in question is “us human beings:” the mean is relative to our needs and purposes qua human beings. For example, the right, or mean, amount of anger for me to feel depends upon my nature as a human being, and any other human being in my same position should feel that same amount of anger toward the same things, for the same reasons, etc., given our shared human nature. According to Brown, when

104 I follow what has become the standard way of referring to these two positions. Leighton (1992) was the first to label these positions such.

105 While species-relativism is certainly the less traditional and less espoused line of interpretation (as Brown is well aware), it does have some other adherents, such as Curzer (2006), and, perhaps, Hursthouse (2006). Also, Brown (2014) contains a restatement of her position.

106 See, for example, Brown (1997), p. 78.
Aristotle states that the mean is not the same “for all (πᾶσιν),” he is saying that it is not the same for all situations. The right amount of anger for me or any human being to feel in some situation is determined by the particularities of that situation; some situations call for a lot of anger, some for a little, and some for none at all. But whatever those particularities are, the mean in passion will be the same for every human being in such a situation. As Brown states it, “the mean is not relative to agents over and above being relative to situations” (Brown (1997), p. 86).

Attribute-relativists agree with Brown that the mean is relative to situations, but disagree with her when she limits the relativity to only situations. This view is by far the more widespread of the two, so much so that Brown calls it the ‘traditional view’. Stephen Leighton (1992, 1995) has given the strongest and clearest statement of this interpretation and so in what follows I will focus on his views. According to Leighton, the “us” in question is “us as individuals with our particular capacities, activities, and levels of development.” And when Aristotle states that the mean is not the same “for all (πᾶσιν),” he is saying that it is not the same for each and every individual. For example, if the enemy is charging, the right amount of fear for the green, newly enlisted private to feel will be different than the right amount for the battle-hardened general to feel, both of which will, in turn, be different from the right amount for a non-combatant bystander to feel. And this is true despite the fact that all three might very well be courageous.


As Brown realizes, the differences between these two lines of interpretation stem from differences in how the example involving Milo is read. Attribute-relativists read this passage as showing that the mean is relative to one's capacities and level of development. The mean or right amount of food for the beginner is less than the mean amount of food for the advanced Milo. In other words, this passage shows that the mean is not the same for all people. According to Brown, however, attribute-relativists misread the passage by failing to account properly for the role of the physical trainer. It is the physical trainer, Brown stresses, that is aiming at the mean relative to us; not Milo or the beginner. And surely the right diet to prescribe does not change with who the trainer is; it is not relative to the trainer. Rather, whatever the correct diet consists of is invariant across trainers, and the expert trainer is simply the one who can determine and so prescribe the correct diet. The correct diet, of course, is not the same in all situations; when considering Milo, more food needs to be prescribed; when considering the beginner, less. But, as Brown puts it, “we have no more reason to think that the appropriate action [or passion] varies with the moral agent than the appropriate diet with the trainer” (p. 87). According to Brown, when read properly the Milo example undermines attribute-relativism and supports species-relativism.

I think Brown is correct in claiming that attribute-relativists have failed to account adequately for the role of the physical trainer in the Milo example. I do not think, however, that properly appreciating the role of the trainer in the way in which she suggests undermines attribute-relativism. For her reading overlooks the fact that, with respect to moral agency, we are in some sense both the physical trainer and the object
over which expertise is exercised. For consider what the analogue of food and Milo would be in the case of the moral agent. On Brown's reading, Milo and his level of achievement are part of the situation or circumstances. As expert physical trainers, we are trying to hit the mean in the amount of food, given the particularities of the situation (i.e., given that we are prescribing for Milo). In the case of the virtuous agent, though, one is not concerned with dietary regimens and training, but, rather, with passions and actions. The virtuous agent is trying to achieve the mean in passion and action given the particular circumstances in which the virtuous agent finds him- or herself. In the Milo example, details about particular kinds of food and how Milo has reacted to them in the past will be relevant to the physical trainer who is trying to determine how much food to prescribe for Milo. Analogously, details about one's passions and how they have or have not manifested in the past will be relevant for determining what the mean in passion is. In other words, facts about the moral agent are, in part, what determine what the mean “relative to us” will be in any given situation. Contrary to what Brown has said, then, the mean in passion is, in fact, relative to agents. It is because passions are parts of ourselves that, in the case of the virtuous agent, both the subject and the object of expertise overlap. And this overlap would occur even if Aristotle were to have taken Brown's advice and “substituted [for the Milo example] an example drawn from the exercising of horses or from the number and size of sails appropriate for different types of ship” (Brown (1997), p. 90).

Attribute-relativism, then, seems to be Aristotle's position. Now this interpretation not only harmonizes well with the example of Milo, but it is also the more
philosophically plausible of the two positions. For whether someone acts, say, courageously or rashly is determined in large part by facts about the person. If a passenger on a boat has fallen overboard, it would be rash and reckless for me to dive in after them if I do not myself know how to swim. Knowing how to swim, however, it may be courageous for me to do so. My abilities in part determine what it is appropriate or inappropriate for me to do. A species-relativist, however, is committed to saying that any facts about the agent's abilities should not factor into what the mean is. If it is courageous for you to dive in, a species-relativist must say, it is also courageous for me to, even if you know how to swim and I do not. Since this is highly implausible, so too is species-relativism. Consider another example. What exactly temperance requires of one seems to be, in large part, determined by one's history and past proclivities. If one is particularly prone to drink excessively, it may be intemperate for one to take a drink at dinner, whereas for someone without such a proclivity, it would not be. Again, a species-relativist is committed to saying that these facts about proclivities and past histories are irrelevant for determining what the intermediate action or passion is; if it is within the bounds of temperance for me to have a drink, it is also within those bounds for the person with a proclivity and past history of excess to have a drink as well.

By claiming that the mean in passion and action is “relative to us,” Aristotle accommodates our intuitions about such cases: the mean with regard to drinking at a dinner party for a person with a history of, and proclivity for, excessive drinking is different from what it is for someone without such a proclivity or history; and in the case of fellow-passenger falling overboard, the mean in fear and confidence for someone
unable to swim is different from what it is for someone who is able. For Aristotle's remarks clearly indicate that among the things to which the mean is relative, he includes the agent him or herself. That is, the mean is relative not only to the particularities of the situation, but also to the individual agent; to the agent's history, abilities, and proclivities.

4.2 Criticisms of the Doctrine of the Mean

With this account of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean in hand, let us now turn to the criticisms most commonly raised against the doctrine. As I mentioned earlier, many if not most commentators take a dim view of the doctrine. Given its tarnished reputation, one might question the worth of discussing the doctrine at length at all. I hope to show that these criticisms fail to give a compelling reason for thinking the doctrine is false, silly, or better forgotten, and that the negative reputation is accordingly undeserved. These criticisms fail, however, in two different ways. Some of them fail because they rest on a faulty interpretation of the doctrine of the mean. Others of them rest not on interpretive failures, but philosophical ones. The widespread claim that the doctrine is useless, unhelpful, or vacuous is one such criticism, as I shall attempt to show in closing.

4.2.1 The Mistaken Account of the Doctrine of the Mean

The account of the doctrine of the mean defended in Section 1 is at odds with most other accounts of the doctrine. The fundamental difference is over how to interpret the following passage from *NE* II.6:
To feel them [i.e., passions] at the right times, with reference to the right objects, toward the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue. (τὸ δ' ὅτε δεῖ καὶ ἐφ' οἷς καὶ πρὸς οὓς καὶ σῷ ἔνεκα καὶ ως δεῖ, μέσον τε καὶ ἀριστον, ὅπερ ἐστὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς) (1106b21-22).

On the view that I have argued for, Aristotle is saying that one's passion achieves the mean if and only if it is felt “as it ought to be (ὡς δεῖ).” And a passion is felt in such a way only if it is felt at the right times, toward the right objects and people, and for the right ends. To be more specific, on my view Aristotle is drawing our attention to the fact that the intermediate passion has an appropriate intensity with regard to the time at which it is felt, with regard to the objects toward which it is felt, with regard to the people toward whom it is felt, and with regard to the end for which it is felt. In short, it has an appropriate intensity with regard to the circumstances in which the passion is felt. And which of the listed items (time, object, people, end) are relevant aspects of the circumstances differs from passion to passion as described above.

A vicious passion, on the other hand, is excessively (or deficiently) intense with regard to one or more of these listed items. The Underground Man's anger is excessively intense with regard to the time at which he feels it; people terrified of mice feel an excessively intense fear with regard to the object of their fear; my displaced anger at my co-worker is excessively intense with regard to the person toward whom I feel it; and the flatterer who has a desire to please others for the sake of getting money out of them has a desire that is excessively intense with regard to its aim or end. A passion that has an appropriate (i.e., intermediate) intensity, then, will necessarily be felt at the right times, toward the right objects and people, and for the right end. For were one to feel a passion
toward, say, the wrong object, one's passion would be excessive with regard to that object and thus not of the appropriate intensity.

Most commentators interpret 1106b21-2 differently. On their reading, Aristotle is claiming that there are various parameters in which the virtuous person will aim at and achieve a mean, and it is by achieving the mean in all of these parameters that one's passion achieves the mean all things considered. These parameters include, but are not limited to, the items mentioned in the above passage: time, objects, people, aims, and way (or, as they also call it, amount or intensity). In each of these parameters, it is possible either to achieve a mean or to err by way of excess or deficiency. And in order to achieve the mean in passion and action, it is necessary and sufficient to achieve the mean in each of the relevant parameters. Consider fear, for example. According to one recent commentator who has put forward this interpretation, Aristotle thinks the relevant parameters for fear are object, occasion, and amount.109 Accordingly, to achieve the mean in fear requires: fearing neither too many nor too few objects and thus achieving the mean in the object parameter; fearing on neither too many nor too few occasions and thus achieving the mean in the occasion parameter; and feeling neither too great nor too little an amount of fear and thus achieving the mean in the amount parameter.

By contrast, to err by way of either excess or deficiency in any of the parameters renders one's passion or action vicious. Say the appropriate number of objects to fear is three. People who fear four objects are excessive in the object parameter and thus their fear is excessive. Similarly, people who fear only two objects are deficient in that

parameter and thus their fear is deficient. In contrast to these two kinds of people, those who fear three objects achieve the mean in the object parameter, and, if they similarly achieve the mean in the occasion and amount parameters, their fear will achieve the mean. Similar illustrations could be given *mutatis mutandis* for the other spheres of life and for the other parameters.

Call this view the Multi-Parameter View (hereafter, MPV). To summarize, it states that to achieve the mean in passion and action, one must achieve the mean in all of the parameters (e.g., time, people, object, end, amount, etc.) relevant to that passion or action. Virtually every commentator who discusses the doctrine of the mean and *NE* II.6 1106b21-22, be they a defender or detractor of Aristotle, reads Aristotle as holding the MPV.110

In my view, Aristotle was *not* an adherent of the MPV. Indeed, the MPV seems to me to be an invention of a handful of Aristotle's 20th century commentators. On the view that I have presented, there is not a mean (nor an excess or deficiency) within each of the items Aristotle lists at 1106b21-2; rather, there is simply a mean (or excess or deficiency) in the intensity or degree of one's passion. At 1106b21-2, Aristotle is drawing attention to the fact that whether or not a passion is of an appropriate (i.e., intermediate) intensity depends upon the circumstances. That is, it depends upon the time at which the passion is felt, the people toward whom it is felt, and so on. Or, to put the point in the terms I used

up above, the intensity of a passion is appropriate or excessive (or deficient) with regard to the various listed items.

Consider how my view and the MPV differ. On my view, when I feel anger at four people but only three are deserving of it, the root of my error is not, as the MPV suggests, that I have hit upon the wrong number of people in my feeling of anger, as though things would be better if I dropped my anger at any one of the four. Rather, my error is that I feel too intense an anger toward that fourth person. My anger has an excessive intensity with regard to that person, and only by decreasing the intensity of my anger with regard to that person will my anger become appropriate. The MPV, by contrast, would say that my error is simply one of failing to feel anger at the right number of people. Four people is one too many, and, to achieve the mean in the people parameter, I should feel anger at one less person.

The primary reason for rejecting the MPV as an interpretation of Aristotle is that the passage commentators take to be the statement of the MPV, *NE* II.6 1106b21-22, is quite simply not a statement of that view. In this passage, Aristotle says that to feel the passions when one ought to, toward those things and people that one ought to, and for the sake of those things that one ought to is “intermediate and best, and is characteristic of virtue (μέσον τε καὶ ἄριστον, ὅπερ ἐστὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς)” (1106b22). Aristotle does not state that there is a mean in each of the mentioned “parameters.” Rather, he claims that were one to achieve the mean in passion, one would feel the passion when one ought, toward the objects one ought, etc. The MPV certainly implies this claim, but then so does my interpretation. Indeed, it seems likely that any interpretation of Aristotle's account of
appropriate passion would imply this. There is nothing in the text of *NE* II.6 1106b21-22 that warrants reading Aristotle as holding the further claim that there is a mean (and excess and deficiency) *in* each of these parameters.

Another passage typically cited in favor of the MPV is *NE* IV.5 1126a8-11:

>The excess occurs in respect of all the points that have been named (for one can be angry with the wrong persons, at the wrong things, more than is right, too quickly, or too long) (ἡ δ’ὑπερβολὴ κατὰ πάντα μὲν γίνεται (καὶ γὰρ οἴς οὐ δεῖ, καὶ ἐφ’ οίς οὐ δεῖ, καὶ μάλλον ἡ δεῖ, καὶ θάττον, καὶ πλείω χρόνον)).

Again, this is simply *not* a statement of the MPV. Aristotle does not say that there is a mean (or excess) *in* each parameter (people, object, time, etc.). He simply says that one feels excessive anger if one feels it toward the wrong persons, or toward the wrong objects, or at the wrong times; he says that excess can occur “with respect to (κατὰ)” any of these things. To claim, as the MPV does, that people, object, and time are parameters in which there is a mean (and an excess and a deficiency) and, further, that to achieve the mean in passion one must achieve the mean in each of these parameters goes well beyond anything Aristotle states here. Nothing in the text of 1126a8-11 suggests this.

In short, the two passages which commentators have taken to be the most straightforward statements of the MPV (1106b21-2 and 1126a8-11) are quite simply *not* statements of that view. The first reason for rejecting the MPV as an interpretation of Aristotle, then, is that *Aristotle never states the MPV*. Accordingly, given how striking, unique, and peculiar a claim the MPV is, it makes very little sense to attribute it to him.

111 See, for example, Lawrence (2009), pp. 430-1 and Curzer (1996), p. 132, ftnt. 8.
There is a further reason to reject the MPV as an interpretation of Aristotle: It conflicts with his stated reason for thinking that there is a mean in passion and action in the first place. At *NE* II.6 1106a26-9, Aristotle gives his reason, claiming that in anything “continuous and divisible (συνεχεῖ καὶ διαιρετοί)” there is a mean, excess, and deficiency. And though he leaves it unstated, Aristotle clearly thinks that passion and action are continuous and divisible, for otherwise 1106a26-9 would not give any reason for there being a mean in passion and action. Given that Aristotle's stated reason for thinking there is a mean in passion and action is that there are means in anything continuous and divisible, we should expect to find a continuum in which any mean relevant to passion and action lies. Many of the mentioned “parameters,” however, are not continua in Aristotle's sense of continuum. Recall that, for Aristotle, a continuum is divisible *ad infinitum*. The range of the number of people one feels a passion toward, however, is not divisible in this way. I cannot feel angry toward two and a half people. Rather, the range of people is composed of indivisible units (namely, numbers of people). In other words, the parameter of people is not an Aristotelian continuum. And the same is true of the “parameters” of end and object, since one cannot feel a passion for the sake of two and two-thirds ends or feel anger at three and a half objects. It would be extraordinarily misleading of Aristotle to state that there is a mean in passion because

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112 See also *EE* II.3 1220b21-2.

113 Intensity is an Aristotelian continuum in that it does not divide into indivisible units of passion, for there are no such things. Rather, instead of jumping from one level of intensity to another, our passions increase or decrease gradually (which is not to say slowly), passing through a continuously divisible middle ground. Given that Aristotle clearly states that in any such continuum there will be a mean, undoubtedly he must think there is a mean in intensity.
passion is continuous, and then to hold that there are means in a variety of parameters many of which are not continua. This is a second reason to reject the MPV as an interpretation of Aristotle.

A third and final reason for rejecting the MPV as Aristotle's view is that the MPV is needlessly convoluted and redundant. And while it is certainly possible that Aristotle put forward a convoluted and redundant view, our presumption as interpreters should be that, absent compelling evidence, he did not. Now the MPV is redundant in that the parameters other than intensity make no difference as to whether the passion is excessive, deficient, or intermediate. For if a passion is itself excessive (or deficient), it will have an excessive (or deficient) intensity. And if a passion has an intermediate intensity, then it itself will be intermediate. Whichever way the intensity of the passion goes, so goes the passion itself. There is no need to check whether or not a passion achieves the mean (or falls into excess or deficiency) in any of the other parameters. Thus, the addition of these other parameters is unnecessary.

However, one proponent of the MPV, Howard Curzer,\textsuperscript{114} claims that there are cases where a passion might have an appropriate intensity but nonetheless be excessive (or deficient), owing to the fact that the passion is excessive in a parameter other than intensity (i.e., in people, object, time, end, etc.). If there are such cases, then the MPV is not needlessly convoluted, as I have claimed. For if there are such cases, then it is not the case that having an intermediate intensity renders a passion itself intermediate.

\textsuperscript{114} See in particular Curzer (2012). Curzer (1996) is also relevant.
But there are no such cases. Consider two of Curzer's attempts to give such a case. He asks us to consider a person who “eats enormous amounts of broccoli because she is on some fad diet, but who desires and enjoys each bite exactly as much as most people do” (Curzer (2012), p. 77). According to Curzer, such a person “goes wrong with respect to the objects and occasions parameters,” but not with respect to the intensity of her desire (p.77). While our intuitions about such a case might not be terribly clear (given how bizarre a case it is), nonetheless it seems plausible that the intensity of this person's desire for, say, her tenth serving of broccoli is excessive. At that time and in that situation, this person's desire to eat broccoli is too intense. But if that is the case, then the binge broccoli eater is not, in fact, an example of someone whose desire or passion is both appropriately intense but excessive in some other parameter. For her desire is excessively intense.

Consider another one of Curzer's attempts to give such a case. Curzer describes a person who “desires and enjoys sex a moderate amount” (2012, p. 77), but who nevertheless only sleeps with married people. This moderate adulterer, according to Curzer, “goes wrong with respect to the objects parameter, but not the amount or occasions parameters” (p. 77) (by “amount” he is referring to something like intensity or degree). But as Curzer himself writes only two pages later, “a person who desires and enjoys such objects [i.e., ignoble objects, such as adultery] at all is desiring and enjoying

\[115\] I find it odd to think of an adulterer primarily as someone who enjoys a particular object, namely, adultery. Both Curzer and Hursthouse treat adultery this way, though, and I will follow suit simply for the sake of not introducing into the discussion complexities which are irrelevant to the issues at hand. But while there very well may be adulterers who enjoy the object of adultery, I think most adulterers are probably people who err with regards to the people that they feel their passion toward. They feel too much desire toward particular people.
them too much” (p. 79). This is exactly right. To desire to sleep with a married person at all is to have a desire with an excessive intensity. But if this is so, then Curzer's example of the adulterer whose desires are “moderate” (that is, not excessive) is implausible. Simply in virtue of desiring such sexual relations at all, the adulterer's desire is excessively intense. Thus, despite what he initially claims, Curzer's moderate adulterer is not a case where an excessive passion has an appropriate intensity.

More generally, it seems that every instance of excess or deficiency is, at root, an instance of excess or deficiency in intensity. Someone who is angry on too many occasions feels too intense an anger at various given times (feels angry when one should not feel so); someone who is angry toward too many people feels too intense an anger toward that person, this person, and those people; and someone who is angry over too many objects feels too intense an anger over this, that, or those objects. Excessive passion, in other words, is excessively intense with regard to the time at which it is felt, with regard to the people toward whom it is felt, etc. But if this is the case, then not only will Curzer's particular examples fail to show that an excessive passion could have an appropriate intensity, but any such attempt to give an example will fail.

In short, there is no case of a passion being appropriately intense but nonetheless excessive (or deficient). To feel a passion correctly (to hit the mean in passion) one must simply feel the passion with an appropriate intensity. And so in addition to both clashing with Aristotle's claim that the mean must lie in a continuum, and having no textual support, the MPV also lacks philosophical support. Or, at the very least, the philosophical support marshaled in its favor by its defenders is inadequate to the task.
4.2.2 Hursthouse's Criticisms and the Multi-Parameter View

Let us now turn to what are perhaps the most famous and widely cited criticisms of the doctrine of the mean, namely, those put forward by Rosalind Hursthouse. Her criticisms have dominated discussions of the doctrine ever since they appeared in Hursthouse (1980-1). As we shall see, however, her criticisms rest on interpreting Aristotle according to the MPV. Given that Aristotle does not, in fact, accept the MPV, her criticisms are beside the point.

Consider the most widely noted of her criticisms: the example of the so-called "fearless phobic." A fearless phobic is someone who fears the right number of objects but who fears the wrong objects. Aristotle indicates that the courageous person fears three things—death, great pain, and extensive physical damage—and so the right number of objects to fear is three. Fearless phobics, however, do not fear these three things (thus they are fearless), but a different set of three things, namely, mice, the dark, and enclosed spaces (thus they are phobic).

What relevance do such people have to the doctrine of the mean? Hursthouse interprets Aristotle such that the following two theses are part of his doctrine of the mean: 1) the MPV: to achieve the mean in passion, one must achieve the mean in all the relevant parameters (object, people, time, etc.), and 2) to go right with respect to

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116 Hursthouse is not entirely clear on whether or not she thinks Aristotle actually accepts the MPV. For she says that “it may be that Urmson's way [i.e., the MPV] is the only way to fill out 'too much and 'too little'” (Hursthouse (1980-1), p.61), suggesting that the MPV may in fact be Aristotle's view. However, when recounting the argument of Hursthouse (1980-1) in a later paper, she says that to interpret the doctrine of the mean according to the MPV renders the doctrine not only false but silly and hence such a doctrine “should not be ascribed to Aristotle” (Hursthouse (2006), p.99).
parameter is to hit upon the right number in that parameter. For example, in order for my fear to go right with respect to the object parameter—that is, in order to fear the right objects—it is necessary and sufficient to fear the right number of objects. Fearless phobics fears the right number of objects insofar as they fear the same number of objects as the courageous person does. And so, according to this interpretation of the doctrine of the mean, fearless phobics fear the right objects. Clearly they do not fear the right objects, however, and so the doctrine of the mean is clearly false.

To deny either of (1) or (2) nullifies not only the fearless phobic counterexample, but all of Hursthouse's counterexamples since her other counterexamples also rest on both (1) and (2). Far from offering devastating criticisms of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, then, Hursthouse does not even give us a compelling reason for rejecting the MPV. For a defender of the MPV might simply deny (2).117 Given that there is strong reason to reject the MPV as an interpretation of Aristotle, we should also reject (1). And if we adopt the view presented in Section 1, the fearless phobic and other such examples clearly pose no problem for the doctrine of the mean. On my view, the fearless phobic's fear of death, great pain, and extensive physical damage is deficiently intense and the fearless phobic's fear of mice, the dark, and enclosed spaces is excessively intense. Such a person's fear goes wrong by being excessively and deficiently intense with regard to these particular objects. Such an analysis of a fearless phobic seems eminently reasonable

117 This is what Curzer (1996) does. As he puts it, Aristotle maintains that “if a person is vicious with respect to some parameter, then he or she goes to excess or defect with respect to some parameter (but not necessarily the same parameter)” (p. 134). So the fact that a fearless phobic is vicious with regard to the object parameter does not entail that he or she goes to excess or defect with respect to the object parameter. It only entails that the fearless phobic goes to excess or defect with respect to some parameter or other. In Curzer's analysis, fearless phobics go to both excess and defect with respect to the “amount” or intensity parameter.
if not, indeed, obvious. Fearless phobics, far from undermining the doctrine of the mean, support it insofar as the doctrine, when correctly interpreted, gives a plausible analysis of them.

Hursthouse's criticisms, then, are criticisms of a faulty interpretation of the doctrine of the mean. Indeed, they are criticisms of a faulty take on a faulty interpretation, for these criticisms only work if the MPV (the faulty interpretation) is conjoined with the bizarre claim that feeling a passion toward the right objects is tantamount to feeling that passion toward the right number of objects (the faulty take). Given that the MPV clashes with Aristotle's reason for introducing the mean in the first place and, further, that it has neither textual nor philosophical support, criticisms of the doctrine of the mean which rely on attributing it to Aristotle miss their mark. Having seen good reason to reject the MPV as an interpretation of Aristotle, I should hope that discussions of fearless phobics, binge broccoli eaters, and the like can be laid to rest.

4.2.3 That the Doctrine of the Mean Is Unhelpful

Finally, consider the often heard criticism that the doctrine of the mean is useless and unhelpful.¹¹⁸ Knowing that we should aim at the mean in passion and action, so the criticism typically goes, does not help us to act and feel appropriately. It is tantamount to simply knowing that one should do the right thing, which, while true, is vacuous and thus unhelpful for the person deliberating about what to do. Now if such a critic thinks that only a decision procedure for right action is “helpful,” then it must be admitted that the

doctrine of the mean is indeed unhelpful owing to its not being a decision procedure. But Aristotle would undoubtedly deny that only decision procedures are helpful in the case of ethics. The point of doing ethics, Aristotle thinks, is to help one live a better life. And by giving an account of what a good life is, Aristotle thinks he has given us a target at which to aim in the living of our lives (see *NE* I.2); an essential part of this target is the doctrine of the mean. And just as archers are more likely to hit a target if they know where the target is, so too are we more likely to hit our target, the good life, by knowing what it is. And just as pointing out the target is helpful to the archer despite not giving the archer a decision procedure for hitting the target, so too is knowing what the good life is (which includes knowing that character virtues are mean-states) helpful.

Some critics might agree with Aristotle that ethics can be helpful even without giving a decision procedure for right action but nonetheless maintain that the doctrine of the mean is unhelpful. As Broadie (1991) writes, “encouraging a prospective agent to aim at the intermediate is not helpful even as a metaphor” (p. 101). I do not think the mean is a metaphor nor do I think it clearly unhelpful to advise someone to aim at the mean. Indeed, I think such advice can be helpful and useful in at least two ways.

First, it can be helpful for deliberating about what to do. For what is it to tell oneself to aim at the mean? It is to tell oneself to not get too angry, to not drink too much at the reception, or to not be too boorish at the dinner-party. The fact that all of these statements ultimately contain the advice to avoid excess and deficiency does not render them ineffective or unhelpful. People prone to excessive anger might know that they are so prone, and so, in an effort to control their anger, they might tell themselves “don't get
too angry.” And such thoughts might very well help them control their anger. Likewise for those disposed toward excess drinking (e.g., “don't drink too much”) or those disposed toward being rude or boorish in social gatherings (e.g., “don't be too aloof and cold”).

Second, the doctrine of the mean can be helpful to people when they reflect about what they have done and how they might respond more appropriately in the future. The situation having passed, reflective agents can look back on how they behaved and assess whether or not they behaved in an excessive or deficient way. Such reflection about other people's actions and passions is, of course, also possible. The doctrine of the mean provides one with a tool for explaining why particular actions or passions (either one's own or someone else's) are appropriate or not.119 And by building up one's understanding of appropriate responses and behavior, one will be better able to achieve the mean in their future actions and passions.

Consider, for the sake of illustration, sculpting. According to Aristotle, an expert sculptor makes beautiful statues by looking to the mean and judging the statue by this standard (see NE II.6 1106b5-16).120 The good sculptor, Aristotle tells us, avoids excess and deficiency. This is why “we often say of good works of art that it is not possible either to take away or to add anything (ὅθεν εἰώθασιν ἐπιλέγειν τοῖς ἐπὶ ἔχουσιν ἔργοις ὅτι οὔτε ἀφελεῖν ἐστίν οὔτε προσθείναι)” (1106b9-11). Simply knowing that a beautiful statue is one in which the tip of the nose is neither too wide nor too narrow does not, of

119 Leibowitz (2013) contains a much more thorough account of how the doctrine of the mean explains why particular actions and passions are appropriate or not.

120 As we saw in Chapter 2, this is indeed how Polykleitos thought sculpture should proceed.
course, make one a good sculptor. Likewise, simply knowing that one ought to aim at the mean in passion and action does not make one a good person. But consider the sculptor at work. As the sculptor crafts the nose, he makes (implicit) judgments, e.g., “this is too wide,” and changes the work accordingly. Such judgments are clearly helpful for the sculptor at work; indeed, it is through such judgments (implicit though they may be) that the sculptor is able to make an excellent statue. Now consider someone who is trying to become an expert sculptor, that is, an apprentice who needs help in sculpting. Part of learning almost any art is practicing the art. So the apprentice makes statues. The expert sculptor might point out the various features of the statue that keep it from resembling the person it is meant to represent or that keep it from being beautiful. For example, “the tip of the nose is too wide,” or “the eyes are too far apart.” The apprentice sculptor can then use this feedback in his future practice. And the hope is that through such instruction, the apprentice will come to be able to make such judgments for himself. That is, the apprentice sculptor will be able to explain why it is that certain statues are successful and certain ones are not. These judgments help the apprentice by alerting him to those failures to which he and others might be inclined and so help him avoid them in the future.

So too in the case of living a life. The doctrine of the mean helps us explain why what we or someone else did was inappropriate thereby helping us avoid this failure in the future. Simply knowing the proposition that 'one ought to aim at the mean in passion and action' is not necessarily going to help one hit said mean. But, according to Aristotle, ethics is not merely a theoretical discipline, it is a practical one. The various doctrines discussed in the Ethics are meant to be intimately tied to practice. Understood in this
light, the doctrine of the mean can be of considerable use, helping us to avoid those excesses and deficiencies to which we are prone. In short, the doctrine does not tell us what exactly to do in any given situation, but then the mean does not do this in the case of sculpture either. Nonetheless such advice or judgments are helpful.
CHAPTER 5

MEASURE AND THE MEAN: A COMPARISON

Among the most famous works of art concerned with philosophy is Raphael's *School of Athens*. At its center are Plato and Aristotle, engaged in an apparent disagreement. In portraying them this way, Raphael is clearly trying to convey something about the philosophical (but perhaps also personal) relationship between these two philosophers; he is trying to convey that there is some sort of fundamental difference between them. Of course, Raphael is not alone in taking up the subject of the philosophical relationship between Aristotle and Plato. It seems that wherever and whenever the texts of both philosophers have been available, the subject arises. Many ancient readers viewed the relationship less antagonistically than Raphael. Cicero lumps Plato and Aristotle together as members of one philosophical school, the “Old Academy,” while Plotinus and other Platonists stress the fundamental harmony between the two, thinking the differences between them to be relatively minor.

The above discussions of measure and the mean afford us an opportunity to engage in a novel comparison of Plato and Aristotle and, thus, an opportunity to shed new light on this subject of perennial interest. As was discussed in Chapter 1, Aristotle's doctrine of the mean is quite clearly influenced by Plato's discussions of measure. Given
this strong influence, those places where Aristotle differs sharply from Plato promise to be particularly revealing of the differences between these two philosophers. And the differences between measure and the mean, I shall argue, support a view such as that illustrated by Raphael rather than that put forward by Cicero or Plotinus. Indeed, Raphael is correct not only concerning the fact that Plato and Aristotle do differ in some fundamental way, but also, as we shall see, concerning what that difference consists in.

This chapter is organized into five parts. Each of the first four parts is concerned with a specific point of comparison. The four points of comparison are: 1) the source of the normativity of measure and the mean, 2) knowledge of measure and the mean, 3) in what conformity to measure and the mean consists, and 4) whether measure and the mean are absolute or relative norms. At each stage of the comparison, measure and the mean will be discussed individually, after which they will be compared. I have chosen to discuss these four points, first, because they are particularly revealing of the place of measure and the mean within Plato and Aristotle's respective philosophical projects, and second, because they are particularly revealing of the differences between measure and the mean. The fifth and final part of this chapter synthesizes the results of these four comparisons.

5.1 The Source of Normativity of Measure and the Mean

Consider the question of the source of ethical norms. Whence do ethical norms come? Christine Korsgaard very helpfully distinguishes two ways in which this question might be understood: to use her terminology, it may be understood as a “genealogical
question” or as a “normative question.” The genealogical question asks what produced the ethical norm. As an example, consider the ethical norm of refraining from murder. In asking the genealogical question, one would be asking how this norm arose among human beings. One possible answer to this genealogical question might cite evolutionary processes (e.g., we came to believe that haphazardly killing one another is wrong because the belief emerged by natural selection) and another might cite divine action (e.g., God implanted the knowledge that murder is wrong in the hearts of all people (cf. Romans 2:14-15)).

My primary purpose in mentioning the genealogical question is to distinguish it from the question that I shall focus on, the normative question. This question asks about the normativity of ethical norms, not their genealogy. Why do ethical norms bind us? Or, to put it in other words, why do ethical norms have normative force over us? To cite an evolutionary process that resulted in humans accepting some particular ethical norm does not answer the normative question for that norm. For at best, such a process only explains why humans happen to accept that norm. It does not explain why that norm has normative force or, in other words, why we really ought to conform to that norm. That is, it does not tell us why acting in ways that are selected for by natural selection is good or right or virtuous. Korsgaard provides a helpful way to isolate the normative question from others. She writes:

> when you want to know what a philosopher's theory of normativity is, you must place yourself in the position of an agent on whom morality is making a difficult

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claim. You then ask the philosopher: must I really do this? Why must I do it? And his answer is his answer to the normative question (Korsgaard (1996), p. 16).

This section focuses on explicating Plato's and Aristotle's theories of normativity with regard to measure and the mean respectively, paying particular attention to the normative question as it might be posed about measure or the mean. According to Plato, why ought things conform to measure? According to Aristotle, why ought passions and actions conform to the mean?

5.1.1 Normativity and Measure

Let me begin with a brief review of the pertinent results from chapters 2 and 3. Measure, we saw, has two roles: an identifying role and an evaluative one. It plays an identifying role insofar as it gives a sensible particular its identity. In the terminology of the *Philebus*, measure gives each mixture its identity in the sense that it makes the mixture the very mixture that it is. For example, the abstract and inaudible middle C of musical theory is the measure for my sung middle C inasmuch as my sung middle C approximates the abstract middle C. Were my sung note to approximate a different measure (e.g., F#), then my note would be a different kind of particular (e.g., it would be an F#). In short, measure makes a particular the very particular that it is.

Now consider the evaluative role of measure. Both the *Philebus* and the *Statesman* maintain that conformity to measure renders the conforming thing good. For example, if my sung middle C closely conforms to or approximates the measure middle C, then my sung note will be a good one of its kind. For close approximation to middle C is
tantamount to being on pitch, and sung middle C's that are on pitch obviously are good ones.

It is in performing this second, evaluative, role that measures function as norms. Measures are norms insofar as conformity to measure renders the conforming mixture or particular a good one of its kind. In other words, measures are the standards relevant for judging each kind of thing. To judge whether or not a particular $x$ is a good $x$, one needs to ascertain whether or not the particular $x$ in question closely approximates or conforms to the measures relevant to being an $x$. And the measures relevant to being an $x$, as we have seen, are simply the measures that make an $x$ what it is. It is one and the same principle that fulfills both the identifying and the evaluative (or we might say, normative) roles. Approximating to measure both makes the mixture what it is (e.g., it makes my sung note a C) and determines whether the mixture is good or bad (e.g., determines whether my sung note is on pitch or out of tune). Which standards are relevant to some particular thing, then, is determined by what the thing in question is. And simply in virtue of being a particular kind of thing, a thing will be subject to certain norms, namely, those measures that make the thing what it is. This is Plato's answer to the normative question. An $x$ is bound by some norm (i.e., measure) $y$, because what makes $x$ an $x$ is approximation to that norm. In short, to be an $x$ is to be bound by the relevant norm, $y$.

One implication of this account is that there is no one measure which all things must achieve in order to be good; indeed, it is hard even to make sense of how that could be so. For measures are always measures of something: length, height, pitch, temperature, and so on. And a measure of height, for example, could not possibly be the measure of
temperature, if for no other reason than that the former is a measure of feet (or inches, or miles, etc.) and the latter, of degrees. Furthermore, even when two objects are being measured with regard to the same dimension, say height, what the achievement of measure will consist in will not necessarily be the same. A flagpole that achieves measure will be of a very different height than a radio tower that does the same.

The upshot is that 'measure', when used as an adjective or predicate (e.g., 'measured'),\(^{122}\) is what Peter Geach has helpfully labeled an “attributive adjective.”\(^{123}\) An attributive adjective is one such as 'big' in the following sense: There is no such thing as just “being big (period),” but rather a thing is a big house, or a big planet, or a big molecule, and so on. Whether or not \(x\) is big depends on what kind of thing \(x\) is. In this way, attributive adjectives are different from what Geach calls “predicative adjectives.” An example of the latter is 'red'. When we say, for example, that a car is red, we do not mean it is red for a car, but, rather that it is simply red (period). Whether or not the car is red does not depend at all on the fact that it is a car. To put the point generally, a predicative adjective, \(F\), is such that one can ascertain that an \(x\) is \(F\) independently of ascertaining that the \(x\) is an \(x\); an attributive adjective is such that one cannot do this.

Given this criterion, 'measured' is clearly attributive and not predicative. For one cannot ascertain that an \(x\) has achieved measure without ascertaining that the \(x\) is an \(x\).

\(^{122}\) To be clear, 'measured' here is being used in a sense in which it connotes appropriateness or moderation: e.g., “his anger was measured.” My discussion is concerned with 'measured' understood in this specific sense.

\(^{123}\) See Geach (1957). Many contemporary philosophers, particularly those influenced by ancient philosophers, have followed Geach and would agree with Plato (assuming my interpretation of him is correct) in thinking that 'good' is attributive. See Foot (2001), and Thomson (2008). G.E. Moore is the primary opponent of the view that goodness is attributive (see Moore (1903)).
One cannot do this because whatever information one gathers for determining whether or not the $x$ has achieved measure must take into account what the $x$ itself is. Take the example of my singing a tone of 261 Hz (the frequency of middle C). In order to ascertain whether my note is on pitch (i.e., whether it achieves measure), one must know what my note is. If my note is a middle C, then it is on pitch; if it is a C# instead, then it is decidedly flat. The fact that my tone is 261 Hz is not, in itself, information that would determine whether or not my note achieves measure. In order for it to constitute such information for me, I would have to know what my note is. More generally, to know whether or not $x$ has achieved measure, one must know what $x$ is. Thus, 'measured' is attributive.

Recall that Socrates claims in the *Philebus* that measure is an aspect of the Form of the Good, or, as he also indicates, that measure is goodness. Measure is responsible for the goodness of mixtures in that achieving measure amounts to being good. Now as we have just seen, an $x$ cannot simply achieve measure (period). Rather, $x$ achieves the measure for $x$; the specific measure that, in addition to serving as the relevant norm for any $x$, makes an $x$ an $x$. Given that achievement of measure functions this way and, further, that being measured is identified with goodness, the *Philebus* seems to suggest that 'good' is an attributive adjective. There is no such thing as just “being good (period),” but, rather, a thing, if good, is a good $x$: a good pair of shoes, a good sung note, a good person, and so on. The goodness of a thing cannot be determined apart from knowing what kind of thing it is. Because it makes no sense to talk about a thing's achieving
measure (period)—as opposed to, say, the measure of height for a flagpole—it accordingly makes no sense to talk about a thing's being good (period).

This is not how Plato's thoughts about 'good' are typically understood. Plato is often interpreted as holding, in effect, that 'good' is a predicative adjective. Indeed, such a view of Plato seems to harmonize well with the standard way of understanding his metaphysics. For according to that understanding of his metaphysics, a sensible particular has the qualities it has in virtue of participating in the Forms of those qualities: e.g., a thing is red in virtue of participating in the Form of Red, circular in virtue of participating in the Form of Circle, and hot in virtue of participating in the Form of Hot. And so, likewise, a thing is good in virtue of participating in the Form of the Good. Now it seems that whether or not x participates in the Form of the Good is independent of whether or not x participates in the Form of Dog, or in the Form of Human, or in the Form of Shoe. In other words, whether or not x is good seems to be independent of what (kind of thing) x is. One can ascertain that x is good simply by ascertaining whether or not it stands in a certain relationship to (i.e., “participates in”) the Form of the Good. One need not ascertain in what else it participates.

Interpretations of Plato according to which he treats 'good' as a predicative adjective focus almost exclusively on the middle dialogues, particularly the Republic.

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124 For example, see Annas (1981), p. 221, 245, 322, Cooper (1977) pp. 154-5, White (1979), p. 35, and Brewer (2009) p. 201. Though they do not use Geach's terminology, it is nonetheless clear that they read Plato along these lines. Kraut (2011), pp. 209-210 and Penner (2003) are notable exceptions to this tendency. According to Kraut, Plato did not think there was such a thing as, what Kraut calls, “absolute goodness.” That is to say, there is no “good (period).” According to Penner, 'good' always means something like 'advantage' or 'benefit' in Plato and so there is no “good (period)” but only “good for (someone or something).” Kraut likewise stresses the idea that 'good' is always 'good for'. Santas (1980) is also an exception to this tendency, for he interprets 'good' to be an attributive adjective. His view, however, differs significantly from the one I am presenting.
Here is not the place to engage in a detailed examination of the *Republic* and its account of goodness, but if the argument about measure and goodness in the *Philebus* above is sound, then the *Philebus* offers us a very different account of 'good' than Plato is often credited with. One advantage of the *Philebus'* account of goodness over the account allegedly found in the middle dialogues is that the former gives us a plausible and comprehensible account of what it is for a thing to be good; the latter, by contrast, only gives us the rather uninformative claim that for a thing to be good it must “participate” in the Form of the Good. But we might want to know what such participation amounts to—what does it mean for a thing to participate in a Form? The middle dialogues, however, seem to leave this unclear, as Aristotle was perhaps the first to note (see *Metaphysics* I.6 987b13-4). By contrast, the *Philebus* gives us a much more detailed account of what it is for a thing to be good. For a thing to be good is for that thing to conform to, or closely approximate, those measures that make the thing what it is. So though the *Philebus* eschews the terminology of participation, it nonetheless gives us an account of the relationship between the Form of the Good and particular, sensible things.\(^{125}\)

Quite interestingly, the *Philebus* also offers an answer to the genealogical question, an answer which moreover suggests a solution to the famous *Euthyphro* dilemma. Let me close this discussion of Plato's account of the source of normativity by exploring this answer and solution.

\(^{125}\) For further discussion of what light the *Philebus* and *Statesman* shed on the notion of participation in the Form of the Good, see Delcommenette (2005), pp. 361-365. For a general account of how the notion of participation functions in the late dialogues, see Sayre (1983), pp.174-186.
Return to a passage discussed earlier, *Philebus* 26b7-c1. There, Socrates makes the following remark to Philebus:

> It is the goddess herself, fair Philebus, who recognizes how excess and the overabundance of our wickedness allow for no limit in our pleasures and their fulfillment, and she therefore imposes law and order as a limit on them. And while you may complain that this ruins them, I by contrast call it their salvation (ὑβρίν γὰρ που καὶ σύμπασαν πάντων πονηρίαν αὕτη κατιδοῦσα ἡ θεός, ὦ καλὲ Φίληβε, πέρας οὕτε ἡδονῶν οὐδὲν οὕτε πλησμονῶν ἐνόν ἐν αὕτοῖς, νόμον καὶ τάξιν πέρας ἔχοντι ἐθετό· καὶ σὺ μὲν ἀποκναῖσαι φής αὐτήν, ἐγὼ δὲ τούναντιόν ἀποσώσαι λέγω).

In Chapter 2, I argued that we should understand the goddess' promulgation of law and order as a case of creation rather than discovery. The goddess does not merely discover that law and order are norms for our behavior and then inform us of this; rather, it is her promulgation that makes law and order norms for our behavior.

Furthermore, I argued that both the identifying and the ethical roles of measure are implicit in this example. Just as a tone can be a middle C only with the advent of Pythagorean music theory, so too can behavior be lawful and orderly only with the advent of the goddess's imposition of law and order. These measures, both middle C and law and order, make the things which approximate them the very things that they are. In this way, law and order play an identifying role with regard to such behavior. Law and order also play an evaluative role. Conformity to law and order renders our behavior good, while significantly deviating from law and order makes it bad. Thus, the proper standard for evaluating our morally relevant behavior is law and order, the very thing which makes our morally relevant behavior what it is.
What I would like to focus on now is how this account of norms, and what it claims about the relationship between norms and the gods, solves the so-called *Euthyphro* dilemma. In the *Euthyphro*, the titular character attempts to define the pious as that which all the gods love. In response, Socrates raises the following problem: is the pious pious because the gods love it, or do the gods love it because it is pious? Whichever answer Euthyphro chooses is arguably problematic, and thus this problem is a dilemma. Importantly for present purposes, this dilemma generalizes to all ethical norms: Are ethical norms in place because the gods created them and commanded us to follow them, or do the gods so command us because ethical norms are already in place? To answer yes to the first horn of this dilemma seems to commit one to divine command theory. Such a position, however, is unattractive in that it seems to make ethical norms arbitrary insofar as there is no reason for them apart from the gods' (arbitrary) wills. To answer yes to the second horn, however, seems to demote the gods to the role of mere middlemen or go-betweens who have no necessary role to play with regard to the good.

Based on the account of norms that I have argued is found in the *Philebus*, Socrates' solution to this dilemma would be to answer 'yes' to both horns, provided they are understood properly. A proper response to the dilemma requires, on Socrates' suggested solution, specifying what one means in denying or affirming one or the other horn. Consider the first horn. According to Socrates, that ethical norms are in place is the result of the gods (e.g., Themis) setting them down. And so he would answer 'yes' to the first horn. But this does not commit Socrates to a divine command theory. For what renders things good, recall, is that they approximate the relevant measure—a middle C is
a good middle C if it closely approximates the measure, middle C. So likewise, what renders our behavior good is that it conforms to the relevant measure (namely, law and order). And just as it would be a gross mistake to claim that what renders my sung middle C good is that it conforms to the will of Pythagoras (or Archytas, or other Pythagorean musical theorists), so too would it be a mistake to think that what renders my behavior good is that it conforms to the will of the goddess. And so if the gods do command us to conform to the divinely established law and order, they do so because thus conforming will render our behavior good. And so Socrates would answer 'yes' to the second horn as well. In doing so, however, he does not thereby demote the gods to mere middlemen. For the gods set down the norms in the first place.

5.1.2 Normativity and the Mean

Let us turn now to the mean. According to Aristotle, the mean is a norm for human passion and action in that human passion and action that conforms to the mean is thereby virtuous. Indeed, for an action or passion to be virtuous, it must conform to the mean—there simply is no other norm or standard conformity to which renders passions and actions virtuous, according to Aristotle. Thus, conforming to the mean is both necessary and sufficient for acting or feeling virtuously.

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^126 As was the case in Chapter 4, when I mention 'virtue' in the context of discussing Aristotle I am referring to character virtue and not intellectual virtue. The activity of the intellectual virtue of wisdom—contemplation—is virtuous, but does not conform to a mean; the mean is not a relevant norm for such activity. The mean is only a relevant norm for activity of the “desiderative part” (ὄρεκτικόν) of the soul, that is, the part of the soul responsible for our passions and the actions that follow upon them. And character virtues are virtues of this part of the soul (see NE 1.13).
But why is the mean thus a norm? Or, to put the question in the terms described at the beginning of this section, what is the source of normativity of the mean? I shall explain Aristotle's answer to this question in two stages. First, I will consider why for Aristotle the mean is the relevant norm for our passions. Second, I will consider why he thinks there is a norm for our passions at all. The resultant answer is that the mean is a norm because of the nature of the passions and their relationship to happiness.

Let us start with the first question. If the virtues regulate passion, then it seems obvious that they dispose one to feel the appropriate passion (for surely they would not dispose one to feel an inappropriate passion). By contrast, it is by no means obvious, and indeed it has struck many as false or even absurd, that virtues dispose one to feel intermediate (μέσον) passions. In Chapter 4, I argued that the reasons typically given for the falsity (or absurdity) of this claim fail. But still, we might wonder, why exactly does Aristotle take this additional step of claiming that the passion that virtue disposes one to feel is not only appropriate, but also intermediate? Why, in other words, is the mean the relevant norm for passion?

The answer to this question is to be found in Aristotle's stated reason for introducing the mean, a reason which we examined for a different purpose in Chapter 4. At NE II.6 1106a26-8, Aristotle claims that in anything “continuous and divisible (συνεχέω και διαιρετώ)” there is a mean “either in the thing itself or relative to us (ι κατ' αυτ' το πράγμα ι προς ήμις).” After explaining these two kinds of mean, he then

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127 There are some philosophers who do not think that the virtues regulate passion. The Stoics, for example, do not think that the passions need to be regulated; rather, they think the passions need to be eliminated. Accordingly, for the Stoics virtue does not regulate passion.
concludes that there is a mean relative to us in passion and action. This conclusion would not follow, however, unless Aristotle assumes that passion is continuous and divisible. Clearly, then, Aristotle thinks this and simply leaves it unstated. And, as was discussed in Chapter 4, passion does indeed seem to be continuous and divisible in the sense that passions can be felt to greater and lesser degrees and, further, that in between any two degrees of a passion, there is another.

But the fact that passion is continuous and divisible does not entail that there is a mean relative to us in passion. Rather, it merely entails that there is a mean, either relative to us or in the thing itself (or both) in passion. So what reason is there for concluding that there is a mean relative to us in passion?

Before considering what reason Aristotle gives, first consider the import of whether or not there is a mean relative to us in passion. As Aristotle makes clear in the course of discussing the two kinds of mean, only the mean relative to us is a norm conformity to which renders things good or virtuous. Works of art, for example, are made good by conforming to the mean relative to us; not by conforming to the mean in the thing itself (see 1106b5-7). And this makes sense. For the mean in the thing itself is simply an arithmetic mean. If you have a piece of lumber six feet long, the mean in the thing itself is located three feet from either end, at the midpoint. But that this is the mean in the thing itself does not indicate that one ought to cut the lumber at this point, or drill a hole there, or do anything else. Rather, the carpenter aims at the mean relative to us and

128 There are surely continuous and divisible things in which there is only a mean in the thing itself and not one relative to us, for example, a mere line segment (one which does not represent something else, such as pitched sound or the length of a building material).
cuts the lumber, or drills the hole, at this mean, which is to say, at the appropriate point (which may happen to be at three feet, but could also be at any other point). Conformity to the mean relative to us renders things good or fitting or appropriate; conformity to the mean in the thing itself does not, unless the two means happen to coincide (in which case it is simply a coincidence that conformity to the mean in the thing itself renders the thing good). Thus, if there is not a mean relative to us in passion, there would be no norm for our passions conformity to which renders them virtuous. There would simply be greater and lesser degrees of passion, none of them inappropriate and none more appropriate than any other.

What, then, is Aristotle's reason for thinking that there is a mean relative to us in passion? He suggests a reason at NE IV.4 (1125b18-9). Aristotle states that “where there is excess and deficiency, there is also a mean [relative to us] 129 (ἐν οἷς δ’ ἔστιν ὑπερβολή καὶ ἔλλειψις, καὶ τὸ μέσον).” If there are excessive (or deficient) passions, then there are also intermediate (relative to us) ones, which is to say, there is also a mean relative to us in passion. And Aristotle seems to think that it is clear that there are excessive and deficient passions. Thus, for Aristotle, it follows by modus ponens that there is a mean relative to us in passion.

Indeed, this is precisely how Aristotle argues at NE IV.4 1125b18-20 when he considers whether or not there is a mean relative to us in our desire for honor, an argument which begins with the statement quoted just above. He goes on to claim that certain people desire honor too much and certain people desire it too little (1125b19-20, 130).

129 It is clear that Aristotle is referring to a mean relative to us here for only the mean relative to us can be properly opposed to excess, or too much, and deficiency, or too little (cf. NE II.6 1106a29-32).
cf. 1125b7-8). Thus it follows that it is possible to desire honor in a way that is neither excessive nor deficient, or, in other words, in a way that is intermediate (relative to us). And similar arguments could be given to show that there is a mean relative to us in the other passions. For example, it is clear that certain feelings of anger are excessive while certain other ones are deficient, or that certain desires to give money to charity are deficient while other desires to spend money are excessive. And insofar as these things are clearly true, it is also clear, according to Aristotle, that there will be an intermediate degree of anger (relative to us) and an intermediate degree of the desire to spend or give money (relative to us), a degree which avoids excess and deficiency and is thus appropriate.

And so Aristotle's reason for thinking that the norm for our passions is a mean is the following. If passion is continuous and divisible, then there is a mean in passion, a mean either relative to us or in the thing itself. Passion is continuous and divisible, and so there is a mean in passion. But which kind of mean? Well, if passions can be excessive or deficient, then there is a mean relative to us in passion, for where there is excess and deficiency there is also a mean relative to us. Passions can indeed be excessive or deficient (as is clear from experience), and so there is a mean relative to us in passion.

But even with this answer as to why the norm for our passions is the mean, one might still wonder why there is a norm for our passions at all (be it the mean, or some other norm). To answer this question, we will need to examine the relationship between happiness and the mean. And to do this, it will be helpful first to examine a distinction between basic and derivative norms.
Many norms are derived from other, more basic norms. For example, a Kantian might claim that the norm that enjoins us to be honest is derived from the fundamental moral norm that enjoins us always to treat other people as an end, and never merely as a means. By contrast, and as a further example, a rule-utilitarian might claim that the norm enjoining honesty is derived not from Kant's so-called Formula of Humanity as above, but from the norm of maximizing utility. These derivative norms (in both cases, norms enjoining honesty) follow from those more basic ones (the Formula of Humanity and the Principle of Utility) in that the former are specifications of the latter. To treat people as ends and not merely as means requires being honest with them, according to the Kantian. And to maximize utility requires not lying, according to the rule-utilitarian.

Importantly for present purposes, these derivative norms “inherit” their normativity from the more basic norms. A norm enjoining honesty is binding because the Formula of Humanity or the Principle of Utility is binding. The normativity of the norm enjoining honesty is derived from the normativity of these basic norms.

The mean is a derivative norm for Aristotle in the same way that honesty is a derivative norm for a Kantian or a rule-utilitarian. The mean is derived not from the Formula of Humanity or from a norm of utility maximization, of course, but rather from the norm enjoining us to be happy, to flourish (to be εὐδαιμονία). According to Aristotle, happiness (εὐδαιμονία) is the highest or supreme good, and possession of it renders one's life good and makes one a good person. What then is happiness? Quite famously, Aristotle argues that it is “activity of [rational] soul in accordance with virtue (ψυχῆς
ἐνέργεια...κατ' ἀρετήν)” (1098a16-7). To achieve happiness, then, one must engage in virtuous rational activity, for such activity simply is happiness.

How is the mean related to happiness? Among rational activities, Aristotle includes the activities of the “desiderative (ὀρεκτικόν)” or “appetitive (ἐπιθυμητικόν)” part of the soul (NE I.13 1102b13-a3). These “activities” are the passions: “appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, friendliness, hatred, longing, emulation, pity, and in general those things accompanied by pleasure and pain (ἐπιθυμίαν ὀργήν φόβον θάρσος φθόνον χαρὰν φιλίαν μῖσον πόθον ζῆλον ἔλεον, ὅλως οἶς ἔπεται ἡδονή ἢ λύπη) (1105b21-3).”¹³⁰ To feel the passions virtuously, then, is in part happiness. Thus, a norm enjoining us to be happy enjoins us to feel passions virtuously.

As we saw above, Aristotle thinks that in order to feel the passions virtuously, one must feel them intermediately, that is, one must achieve the mean in passion. And so a norm enjoining us to be happy enjoins us to achieve the mean in passion. The norm of the mean is thus derived from the norm of happiness in that achieving the mean is, in part, what it is to achieve happiness. To achieve happiness requires achieving the mean in passion in the same way that treating people as ends or maximizing utility requires not lying to them.

Let us now take stock and lay out Aristotle's answer to the normative question with regard to the mean. Why must one conform to the mean? One must, according to

¹³⁰ It may seem a bit odd to call a passion an “activity.” For, as the name suggests, passions are passive; they are suffered. Activities, however, are active; they are performed. Nonetheless it is clear that Aristotle views the passions as activities. In NE II.5, for example, Aristotle draws a distinction between the capacity (δύναμις) to feel a passion, on the hand, and the actual feeling of a passion, on the other. The implication is that the feeling of a passion is the actualization or activity of the corresponding capacity.
Aristotle, because thus conforming is necessary for the achievement of happiness. It is necessary because, to achieve happiness, one must engage in virtuous rational activity. And one kind of this activity is feeling passions intermediately. Thus, because we ought to be happy (to be εὐδαίμων), we ought to achieve the mean in passion.

5.1.3 Measure, the Mean, and Normativity

Most discussions of normativity and Aristotle (be they interpretations of Aristotle or accounts of normativity in an Aristotelian vein) focus on happiness. To my knowledge, none of them discusses the mean, and quite sensibly so. For, as we have seen, the mean is a derivative norm, whereas happiness is a basic norm. One ought to conform to the mean because one ought to be happy. Accordingly, the foundational issues with regard to Aristotle's views on normativity concern the normativity of happiness, not that of the mean. There is very little in Aristotle's discussions of the mean that would enlighten those issues. And insofar as this is true, the mean is at best tangential to Aristotle's account of normativity. At worst, it is irrelevant.

By contrast, measure is not tangential (or irrelevant) to the account of normativity in the Philebus and Statesman. As we saw in Chapter 3, measure is said to be an aspect of the Form of the Good (Philebus 65a1-5) and, further, is elevated above all other good things insofar as it is the best thing (66a6-7). Moreover, Socrates claims that measure, being an aspect of the Form of the Good, is in part responsible for the goodness of good sensible particulars (65a1-5). My sung middle C is a good middle C because it closely conforms to the measure of middle C; that jar is a good jar because it conforms to the particular measures relevant for that kind of jar; and abstaining from mixed pleasures
(such as drinking) insofar as one can is appropriate or good because such abstinence complies with the measures of law and order. And so the answer to the question “why is your sung note, or that jar, or moderate behavior good?” is that my sung note, that jar, and that behavior comply with the relevant measures.

But this question is just the normative question as that question might be raised for these three particular things. This is most obvious if we consider the question concerning moderate behavior. For example, “why is abstaining from drinking insofar as one can (i.e., drinking only moderately) appropriate?” is just another way of asking “why ought I drink only moderately?” which is the normative question. Now the answer, as we have seen, is that such behavior complies with measure, that is, with law and order. (Of course, the normative question might then be raised about measure. And, as we saw in detail earlier, the answer as to why a sensible particular, $x$, ought to comply with a measure, $y$, is that part of what it is to be an $x$ is to be subject to $y$. In short, an $x$ ought to comply with the measure $y$ because the $x$ is an $x$.) Thus, at least some norms concerned with ethically relevant behavior (e.g., a norm enjoining us to drink only moderately) are derivative of measure: one ought to drink only moderately because such behavior complies with measure.

Indeed, the passage in which law and order are mentioned seems to suggest that all norms concerned with ethically relevant behavior are derivative of the norms of law.

131 According to the discussion of pleasure in the *Philebus*, it seems to follow that, to be moderate, one ought to drink as little as one can. Drinking is a mixed pleasure since the pleasure of replenishment is accompanied by the pain of desire. And unless they are necessary, mixed pleasures are to be avoided, according to the *Philebus.*
and order. For in that passage, Themis, recognizing our “insolence and the overabundance of our wickedness (ὕβριν...καὶ σύμπασαν πάντων πονηρίαν)” (26b7-8), imposes measure (law and order) in order to limit and put an end to our insolence and wickedness, that is, to our unethical behavior. Insofar as law and order are the only norms mentioned as relevant to our unethical behavior, this passage suggests that the norms concerned with ethical behavior are either law and order themselves or derivative of law and order.132

Return now to Socrates' claim that measure is responsible for the goodness of good things. This claim strongly suggests that measure is a basic source of normativity insofar as it suggests that measure is ultimately responsible for the goodness of good things. Furthermore, there are hints that measure is not only a, but the basic source of normativity. The only other plausible candidates for basic sources of normativity in the Philebus are the two other aspects of the Form of the Good—beauty and truth. Both beauty and truth, however, are relegated to a lower ranking than measure in the final ranking of goods. While measure finishes first, beauty comes in second and truth in third (66a-b).133 Furthermore, beauty is said to be a result of measure,134 which implies that

132 This suggestion is supported by Socrates' later evaluation of pleasure. When he turns to evaluating pleasure (as opposed to classifying and describing the different kinds of pleasure), he describes unethical pleasures as those that are prevalent in a life given to “insolence (ὕβρις)” (45d3)—the very kind of behavior Themis tries to curb with measure (law and order). He then goes on to describe such pleasures as “lacking measure (ἀμετρίαν)” (52c4). Given that these pleasures are those found in an insolent life, and further that law and order are the measures promulgated by Themis to curb our insolence, it seems likely that these unethical pleasures lack measure in that they are unlawful and disorderly; they fail to comply with the norms established by Themis.

133 Strictly speaking, “reason and intelligence (νοῦς καὶ φρόνημα)” (66b5-6) come in third place, not truth. But earlier, “reason (νοῦς)” is said to be either “the same as truth or of all things it is most like it and most true (ταὐτὸν καὶ ἀλήθεια ἄστιν ἢ πάντων ὁμοιότατον τε καὶ ἀληθέστατο)” (65d2-3).

134 “For measure and proportion manifest themselves in all areas as beauty and virtue (μετριότης γὰρ καὶ συμμετρία κάλλος δήπου καὶ ἀρετὴ πάντων συμβαίνει γίγνεσθαι)” (64e6-7).
beauty is derived from measure and thus is not basic. In light of these and similar passages, one commentator has called measure the “chief” or “primary” aspect of the Form of the Good,\textsuperscript{135} and another has argued that measure is what is fundamentally responsible for goodness in that it is a necessary condition for everything else ranked as good.\textsuperscript{136}

But regardless of whether or not measure is the only basic norm, it is clear that, in the \textit{Philebus}, measure is at least a basic norm and that it is at the heart of the account of normativity in that dialogue. The contrast with the mean could hardly be starker. The mean is clearly a derivative norm and the fundamental issues regarding Aristotle's account of normativity have very little, if anything, to do with the mean. Thus, while measure is crucial to Plato's philosophical theorizing with regard to normativity, the mean is irrelevant to Aristotle's.

5.2 Measure and the Mean as Objects of Knowledge

There are many different senses of knowledge. Particularly prominent in contemporary epistemology is propositional knowledge, examples of which include my knowing that Lansing is the capital of Michigan, that grass is green, and that \(2+2=4\). Plato and Aristotle were certainly aware of such knowledge but they did not focus their epistemological theorizing on it. Rather, they were more concerned with what we might call expertise or understanding. Examples of this kind of knowledge include a doctor's

\textsuperscript{135} See Delcomminette (2005).

\textsuperscript{136} See Lang (2010).
knowledge of medicine, Stephen Hawking's knowledge of physics, and my knowledge of algebra. In this section, I shall discuss in what sense, if any, measure and the mean are knowable. As we shall see, Plato thinks of measures as elements of systematic understanding, with the consequence that they are known in a sense that is similar to the physicist's knowing about particles or forces. Aristotle, by contrast, denies that the mean is an object of systematic understanding. At best, one can have propositional knowledge of the mean: for example, one can know that “he is too angry” or that “she is donating an appropriate amount of money.” I will begin by considering Plato, move on to consider Aristotle, and then close this section by comparing the two.

5.2.1 Knowledge of Measure

Plato is commonly believed to have subscribed to a so-called “Two World Theory,” according to which knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and belief (δόξα) take two different objects. Knowledge is had only about Forms, not sensible particulars, and belief is had only about sensible particulars, not Forms.¹³⁷ The focal passage for commentators' discussions of the Two World Theory is that concerned with the “lovers of sights” at Republic V 475d-480a, where Plato draws a distinction between the objects of knowledge and those of belief. The object of knowledge is “what is (τὸ ὄν)” (477a3, b11) while the object of belief is such as “to be and also not to be (εἶναι τε καὶ μὴ εἶναι)” (477a6).

¹³⁷ In Metaphysics I.6, Aristotle seems to ascribe such a view to Plato. The classic statements of this interpretation of Plato include Cherniss (1936), Vlastos (1965), and Vlastos (1985). Fine (1990) and (1978) rejects the Two World Theory as an interpretation of Plato, but see Gonzalez (1996) and Gerson (2006) for, to my mind, definitive criticisms of her view.
Now much has been written about *Republic* V 475d-480a and here is not the place to enter into controversies regarding this passage. I mention this familiar passage because we find a very similar, but less familiar, distinction in the *Philebus*. And this distinction is crucially important for understanding how measure functions as an object of knowledge. Furthermore, it is central to the differences between Aristotle and Plato with regard to their views about knowledge of their respective norms.

Toward the end of the *Philebus*, Socrates and Protarchus turn their attention toward an investigation of “knowledge (ἐπιστήμη)” (55c5). In this investigation, Socrates' focus is to find the truest, purest, and most precise kind of knowledge. Such knowledge is knowledge in the strict, or “most accurate (απηκριβωμένα)” (59d5), sense of the term. In the course of distinguishing this kind of knowledge from less pure kinds, Socrates draws out a necessary and sufficient condition that must be met by an object in order for that object to be knowable in this strict sense. The object must “forever [be] in the same state (ἀεὶ κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ)” (59c4, cf. 59a11-b2) and must “really be (τὸ ὀν ὀντως)” (59d4). The parallel with *Republic* V, where objects of knowledge are described as τὸ ὀν (477b11) and τὸ παντελῶς ὀν (477a3) is clear, but one difference should be noted. In the *Philebus*, Socrates is much more generous with his use of the word ἐπιστήμη, describing flute-playing, house-building, arithmetic, and measuring, among other things, as kinds of ἐπιστήμη. And he uses it broadly in this way even though some

138 Socrates introduces the discussion as being about “intelligence and knowledge (νοῦ...καὶ ἐπιστήμη)” (55c5), but in the discussion itself, Socrates focuses on ἐπιστήμη with little mention of νοῦς. Because of his penchant for interchanging these terms (along with other related terms such as φρόνησις and σοφία), it is unclear whether there is any important distinction in the *Philebus* between these various words for knowledge, reason, intelligence, wisdom, and so on.
of these kinds of ἐπιστήμη (such as flute-playing) rely on, or are concerned with, the senses (see, e.g., 55e-6a). But sensible objects, such as the sounds that come out of a flute, are not “forever in the same state” and so are not things that “really are,” as will be seen later. “Really being,” then is not a necessary condition for being knowable; rather, it is a necessary condition only for being knowable in the strict or highest sense. In the Republic, by contrast, Socrates seems to treat “really being” as a necessary condition for being knowable at all.

My focus in this section shall be on knowledge in this strict sense for, as I shall argue, measures are knowable in this strict sense. In the interest of not clogging the discussion with qualifications every time the word 'knowledge' is used, I will henceforth use the word 'knowledge' to refer to knowledge in the strict or highest sense, unless otherwise noted.

In the Philebus, Socrates distinguishes objects of knowledge from things that “are becoming, will become, and have become (τὰ γιγνόμενα καὶ γενησόμενα καὶ γεγονότα)” (59a7-8). These “becomers” are identified as the ever changing things of “this world order (τὸν κόσμον τόνδε)” (59a3)—the particular things that we interact with and experience all around us. About such things, Socrates claims that there is no knowledge that attains the “highest truth (τὸ ἀληθέστατον)” (59b8). That is just to say that there is no knowledge in the strict sense about them. Those who make such things the focus of their endeavors, Socrates tells us, are “concerned with beliefs and make beliefs the center of their search (δόξας χρῶνται καὶ τὰ περὶ δόξαν ζητοῦσι συντεταμένως)” (59a1-2). The parallel with Republic V is again clear. About the sensible things of this world, one has
beliefs, not knowledge. But here the difference between the Republic and the Philebus appears once again. Here in the Philebus, Socrates seems to be suggesting that there is some sort of overlap between belief and the less pure forms of knowledge. One can have knowledge (though not in the strict sense) about changing, sensible particulars, even though these things are objects of belief—a concession, perhaps, on Plato's part to ordinary language. In any event, the important point going forward is that if something is known (in the strict sense), that thing must “really be,” a condition which no sensible particular meets.

However, in the Philebus “really being” is not only a necessary condition for something to be knowable, it is also a sufficient condition. Socrates identifies dialectic, which is knowledge in the strictest sense (see 57e), as the discipline which is “concerned with being, with what really is, and with what is always entirely the same by nature (περὶ τὸ ὄν καὶ τὸ ὄντως καὶ τὸ κατὰ ταὐτὸν ἅμι περισκός πάντως)” (58a2-3). If something really is, then it is an object of dialectic, according to Socrates. But whatever is an object of dialectic is an object of knowledge, and so if something really is, then it is an object of knowledge. Thus, it is both necessary and sufficient for \( x \) to be an object of knowledge that \( x \) “really be.”

Now one of the puzzles in interpreting Plato's metaphysics is that of ascertaining what Plato means in saying that something “really is.” A helpful, common, and obvious strategy for tackling this issue is to look at the contrast class: in the Republic, things that “really are” are contrasted with things that “are and are not,” with, that is, objects of

\[139 \text{The secondary literature on this issue is vast. The classic treatments include Vlastos (1965), Allen (1960), and Nehamas (1975).}\]
belief. In the *Philebus*, things that “really are” are similarly contrasted with objects of belief, but the objects of belief are described differently. As we have already seen, they are described as things that “are becoming, will become, and have become.” Socrates continues his description of such things by noting that it is because such things never did, never will, and do not now posses sameness that we cannot say “anything clear (τι σαφές)” (59a11) and “with the most precise truth (τῇ ἀκριβεστάτῃ ἀληθείᾳ)” (59a11-b1) about them. In other words, it is because they *change* and thus are “uncertain (μὴ...βεβαιότητα)” (59b4) that they cannot be known. Things that “really are” must, by contrast, be certain and unchanging and it is their very stability which renders them knowable. Something “really is,” then, just in case it is unchanging (and so also clear and certain).

So in order for $x$ to be known, it is necessary and sufficient that $x$ “really be.” And for $x$ to “really be,” $x$ must be unchanging and always the same. Thus far, the discussion has been rather abstract. But with this epistemological theory in place, let us now turn to consider one of Socrates' applications of it, namely, his application of it to the case of music. Socrates treats this application as illustrative and paradigmatic of knowledge generally, and thus it will help clarify his epistemological theory. It will also, as we shall see, clarify whether and how measures are knowable.

Socrates quite rightly claims that someone who has no education in music theory can nonetheless accurately hear and judge whether or not some particular set of notes is harmonious (see 55e-6a), that is, whether or not two notes form an interval. Indeed, he suggests, again quite rightly, that most musicians simply train their ears to pick up these
harmonies (or dis-harmonies) through practice and experience. But such a grasp of intervals is, according to Socrates, “trivial (φαῦλον)” (55e2). In grasping the intervals in this way, we rely “on our ability to make lucky guesses (ταῖς τῆς στοχαστικῆς προσχωμένους δυνάμεσιν)” (55e6-7), and so there is “a lot that is unclear mixed up in it [i.e., in our grasp of the intervals] and very little certainty (πολὺ μεμειγμένον ἔχειν τὸ μὴ σαφές, σμικρὸν δὲ τὸ βέβαιον)” (56a6-7). By concerning themselves with audible notes, these musicians are concerning themselves with sensible particulars, with things that are unclear, subject to change, and uncertain. Thus they do not have knowledge of music.

But, we might wonder, why does the fact that these sensible notes are subject to generation and corruption preclude them from being objects of knowledge? More generally, why must objects of knowledge be unchanging? Close attention to the Philebus reveals a plausible reason for so restricting knowledge. And examining what this reason is will be helpful for understanding the epistemology of measure.

To understand this reason, it will be helpful first to know what knowledge of music consists in, according to Socrates in the Philebus. Consider what he claims is inferior about the above mentioned musicians' grasp of the intervals. The root of the problem is that these musicians do not make use of “measures (μέτρῳ)” (56a4) or “measurement (μετρητικὴν)” (55e2). Making use of measure would presumably render one's grasp superior to that of the musician. But what would it be to make use of measurement here? Socrates does not say, but the following seems plausible: To make use of measurement would be to use a Pythagorean monochord. A monochord consists of a single string mounted on a sound box with a moveable bridge. The bridge can be
moved to certain measured distances—half the string length, two-thirds the string length, three-fourths the string length, etc.—and the resultant note will produce a particular interval (relative to the note produced by the whole string) depending on where exactly the bridge is placed. To produce, for example, the perfect fifth, one would place the bridge at the two-thirds mark. In this way, one could produce and judge a perfect fifth, not simply by using one's ear, but by using measurement.140

Such a grasp of the perfect fifth results from a general grasp of musical theory, particularly from the insight that the perfect fifth is a particular ratio or measure between two notes. The playing and subsequent hearing of the two notes that constitute a particular perfect fifth is, in fact, secondary to grasping and understanding the perfect fifth as such a ratio. Indeed, as has already been discussed, Socrates frowns upon trying to grasp the perfect fifth through sense-experience inasmuch as such a grasp relies upon guesswork and is “trivial.”141 A precise and pure grasp of the measure that is the perfect fifth is an intellectual one which comes through a mastery of harmonic theory. As Socrates tells us, one must know:

how many intervals there are in high pitch and low pitch, what character they have, by what notes the intervals are defined, and the kinds of combinations they form (τὰ διαστήματα ὁπόσα ἐστὶ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τῆς φωνῆς ὀξύτητος τε πέρι καὶ βαρύτητος, καὶ ὁποία, καὶ τοὺς ὅρους τῶν διαστημάτων, καὶ τὰ ἐκ τούτων ὅσα συστήματα γέγονεν) (17c11-d2).

140 For an interesting discussion of Philebus 56a in light of the Pythagorean monochord, see Borthwick (2003).

141 See Burnyeat (2000) pp. 47-53 for further discussion of the claim that sensory perception of musical relationships is inferior to an intellectual, theoretical, and non-sensory grasp of them.
One cannot truly understand the perfect fifth without understanding how exactly it is related to the other intervals: how it is harmonious with certain other intervals, how it is inharmonious with yet others, and how, in combination with certain intervals, it forms various musical scales. In short, to truly understand the perfect fifth, one must have a mastery of music theory.

As was discussed in Chapter 3, intervals are measures. What the above description of musical knowledge suggests, then, is that to truly grasp any particular measure, one must have an understanding of the system of measures of which it is a part. This suggestion is confirmed in the discussion of Theuth's creation of the alphabet: Theuth “realized that none of us could gain any knowledge of a single one of them [i.e., of a single letter], taken by itself without understanding them all (καθορῶν δὲ ὡς οὐδεὶς ἡμῶν οὐδ’ ἄν ἐν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ ἄνευ πάντων αὐτῶν μάθοι)” (18d7-8). One cannot have knowledge of the letter 'A' without knowing how it combines with each of the other letters which, of course, requires that one know the other letters. Only when one has an understanding of the entire system is one wise and does one have knowledge.

To be clear, this knowledge of music, the alphabet, and, more generally, knowledge of measures, is knowledge in the strict sense. For measures are unchanging, they “really are.” Consider the measure middle C (the middle C that the music theorist thinks about, not the middle C that comes out of a flute). It is not currently undergoing any change nor will it in the future; indeed, it is difficult to imagine what it could possibly even be for the measure middle C to undergo a change. For were it to become, say, sharper, it simply would no longer be the measure middle C. Indeed, given the fact that
interrelations between middle C and the other notes in part makes middle C what it is, it is impossible for middle C to become sharper (or, more generally, to change). For were it to become sharper it would, for example, no longer be a perfect fifth above F, but being a perfect above F is necessary to being C.

With this account of knowledge of music, let us return to the question of why the musician's grasp of the interval does not qualify as knowledge. Recall the kind of grasp of the interval that musicians are described as having. They hear two notes and can judge whether or not those two audible notes form an interval and are harmonious. And, as we saw, Socrates criticizes such a grasp because the notes themselves are unclear and subject to change—they are becoming, will become, and have become. Our question was why these facts about audible notes rule such notes out from being objects of knowledge. My proposal is that these facts render audible notes unfit to be objects of systematic understanding. And since knowledge is systematic, these audible notes cannot be objects of knowledge.

In Socrates' view, the elements of a knowable system stand in precise relationships to one another. And to stand in this way, they obviously must exist and, moreover, must exist in a stable state. Audible notes, however, only exist for as long as they are being played or sung. As such, they are not the kinds of things which could be the elements of a systematic understanding. They do not have the required fixity or constancy.

Moreover, even while an audible note is being played (i.e., is in existence), it fluctuates. It becomes sharper and flatter (if only very slightly), oscillating around the note that it is. Because audible notes fluctuate in this way, they are somewhat imprecise.
The middle C that I sing is not exactly middle C, but rather, it approximates middle C. And likewise for the other notes I sing or play. As such, audible notes are not entirely clear (σαφές) and so neither will be their relationships with each other. Insofar as systematic understanding requires an understanding of the precise relationships between the elements of the system, then, audible notes are again not the kinds of things that could be those elements.

It seems plausible that the person who really knows about music—about how notes relate to one another, about how scales work, and so on—is the person who has learned music theory. Musicians who can merely hear whether or not two notes are harmonious do not fully understand how music works. They do not understand why those two notes are harmonious, or how those two notes relate to other notes, or how they relate to the scales of which they are a part. These musicians simply have an ear for harmony; they do not have understanding of it. It is the person who grasps the relevant abstract measures and understands how they relate to one another who has understanding. Insofar as this is plausible, Plato has a plausible account of the nature of systematic knowledge. And according to that account, such knowledge simply cannot be had of sensible particulars. Rather it can only be had of things that are abstract and unchanging. In the Philebus, these things are measures.

Recall now that musical knowledge is discussed in the Philebus in order to illustrate knowledge generally. And one of the important points that it illustrates is that sensible particulars cannot be objects of knowledge because they are not fit to be objects of systematic understanding. They come into and out of existence, they change and are
imprecise. Measures, by contrast, do not change and will not go out of existence. (What would it even mean for, say, middle C to go out of existence?) Furthermore, measures enter into precise (in some cases, mathematical) relationships with each other. To have knowledge of some field, be it music, grammar, or something else, one must grasp both these measures themselves and the systematic relationships between them. And when one has done this, one has a mastery of the subject. In short, measures are the objects of knowledge.

As the reader may have already suspected by now, measures in the *Philebus* play the same epistemological role that Forms play in the *Republic*. Recall that Forms are the objects of knowledge in the *Republic* because they “really are.” As I have argued, measures similarly “really are” according to the *Philebus*, and their being so is what makes them knowable. Another parallel between knowledge of Forms and knowledge of measures is that both kinds of knowledge are systematic. We have just discussed this idea with regard to measures. In the *Republic*, this idea is less well developed, but nonetheless present.

Consider what Socrates says about the highest section of the Divided Line where the soul is said to utilize “the power of dialectic (τῇ τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δυνάμει)” (511b4). After grasping the “unhypothetical first principle of everything (τοῦ ἀνυποθέτου ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ἀρχὴν)” (511b6-7), the soul sees what follows from this principle and “comes down to a conclusion without making use of anything visible at all, but only of Forms themselves, moving on from Forms to Forms, and ending in Forms (ἐπὶ τελευτὴν καταβαίνῃ, αἰσθητῷ παντάπασιν οὐδὲνι προσχρώμενος, ἄλλ’ εἰδέσειν αὐτοῖς δι’ αὐτῶν εἰς
There are relationships between Forms, relationships which the dialectician traces and understands. In describing education, Socrates goes on to claim that the mark of someone’s being “dialectical (διαλεκτικός)” (537c7) is that they can form a “unified vision (σύνοψιν)” (537c2) of the subjects that they had previously learned, that is, of “calculation, geometry, and all the preliminary education for dialectic (λογισμῶν τε καὶ γεωμετριῶν καὶ πάσης τῆς προπαιδείας, ἣν τῆς διαλεκτικῆς δεῖ προπαιδευθῆ ναι)” (536d5-6). In short, the highest and most perfect knowledge arises through dialectic and involves a systematic understanding of how all other subjects and their corresponding Forms are related to one another.

The Republic, however, is relatively silent as to what exactly the elements of this systematic knowledge are. It is clear that they are Forms, but which ones exactly and why those? It is also relatively silent about how those elements are related to one another, and about why the highest, most perfect knowledge must be systematic. By contrast, the Philebus offers a much clearer account of systematic knowledge. The elements of systematic knowledge are those measures relevant to the subject-matter at hand (e.g., notes in the case of music, letters in the case of the alphabet). These elements are related, at least in some cases, mathematically (e.g., the various intervals, notes, and scales are related to each other through mathematical ratios). And the idea that knowledge is systematic is made plausible by the various illustrations in the Philebus: it seems plausible that it is the musical theorist (as opposed to the musician described above) who has knowledge of notes, intervals, and so on; and it is plausible that the person who has mastered the alphabet is the person who has knowledge of letters. So while measures in
the *Philebus* play the same epistemological role as Forms in the *Republic*, measures play that role in a clearer, more developed way.

They play this role in a clearer way, at least with regard to musical knowledge. Before moving on to Aristotle, I want to consider a different kind of knowledge in light of the above described epistemological role of measure, namely, statecraft. In the *Statesman*, the Stranger clearly identifies statecraft as a kind of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and, as we saw in Chapter 2, statecraft indispensably involves measure. The following discussion is somewhat speculative; this is primarily due to the fact that the Stranger says very little about the epistemological aspects of statecraft. Nonetheless, drawing out the epistemological aspects of measure as they appear in the discussion of statecraft will give us a fuller understanding both of the epistemological role of measure and of statecraft.

As was described in Chapter 2, the task of the statesman is to weave the vigorous and the calm citizens together. Prior to doing so, however, the statesman must inspect the citizens and determine whether their characters (ἦθός) are suitable or “fitting (πρέπον)” (308e7) for the social fabric that is to be produced. And whoever has an unsuitable character is to be excluded from the city owing to their “godlessness, excess, and injustice (ἀθεότητα καὶ ὕβριν καὶ ἀδικίαν)” (308e10-9a1). 'Fitting (πρέπον),' the reader may recall, is one of the words that the Stranger uses to refer to measure, in particular in the sixth formulation of the art of measurement. In the context of statecraft, it is a norm for the characters of the citizens.

It is the responsibility of educators to produce citizens with characters that are fitting for the city. But the educators do not themselves determine how they are to do this.
Rather, the statesman directs the educators, laying down prescriptions for them with a view towards producing citizens who will be suitable for the statesman's weaving (308d1-e2). The statesman, then, both establishes a curriculum that produces suitable or fitting characters, and also inspects the characters of the people, determining whether or not they are suitable.

What the foregoing discussion suggests is that the statesman has an expert knowledge of human character and of how different characters do and do not combine. The statesman can see which characters are fitting and, further, how they might best be combined so as to produce a harmonious social fabric. This knowledge, I want to suggest, is similar to that of the musical theorist discussed above. The various fitting characters that people might have, ranging from calm to vigorous, can be thought of as the various musical notes, ranging from high to low. And just as those tones which do not closely approximate one of the musical notes are bad tones (they are sharp or flat), so too are characters which are not fitting bad characters. Further, the musical theorist knows how these various notes do and do not combine. That is to say, they know which combinations will produce harmony and which will produce dissonance. In a similar fashion, the statesman knows how the various characters that human beings may have do and do not combine, and the statesman knows what the result of combining particular characters will be.

But the statesman is not merely a theorist. For the statesman is not interested merely in the abstract question of how various characters may or may not combine, but also in the actual combining of the particular characters over which he rules. In this way,
he is like a composer who employs music theory to produce harmonious music. Such a composer knows what the various notes, scales, and intervals are, and knows how they relate to one another. This knowledge is then put to use in the composing of a score, insofar as it helps the composer to see, among other things, what would be harmonious and what would not. The same holds true mutatis mutandis in the case of statecraft. The statesman has systematic knowledge of human character, knowing how various characters relate to one another. This knowledge is then put to use in the statesman's weaving. It helps the statesman determine how to combine the various characters at his disposal so as to produce a harmonious society. Indeed, the statesman's weaving is even described as a kind of “music (μούσῃ)” (309d2).

Understanding the statesman to be like a composer also helps explain why it is that the term καιρός sometimes appears with a specifically temporal sense in the Stranger's discussion of statecraft.¹⁴² For the composer is quite clearly concerned with a temporal καιρός. The composer tries to make sure that the various notes all fit within the piece of music, and for a note to fit in this way is, in part at least, for that note to occur at the right time. We can understand the statesman's making of a harmonious social fabric, into which all of the various citizens with their various characters fit, in a similar way. Part of what it is for a character to fit is for that character to manifest itself at the appropriate time. We saw in Chapter 2 that the statesman weaves the citizens together with a view to producing a citizenry that will of its own accord act vigorously when vigor is appropriate, and calmly when calmness is. That is just to say that the statesman will

¹⁴² Though, as I argue in Chapter 2, it does not always have a temporal sense in this discussion.
produce a citizenry which allows the vigorous characters to manifest their vigor when it is the right time to do so, and the calm characters to manifest their calmness likewise. Like in a well composed piece of music, the various characters (notes) manifest themselves at the right time.

Thus we see measure playing the same role in the Statesman's account of statecraft as it plays in the Philebus's account of musical knowledge. In short, measures are parts of larger systems of measures, and knowledge consists in knowing the individual elements (i.e., measures) of that system and knowing how they are related to one another. Thus measures—not Forms—are the objects of knowledge in the Philebus and Statesman.

5.2.2 Knowledge of the Mean

Aristotle never directly addresses the issue of whether or nor the mean is knowable. And so his view on this matter must be pieced together from what he says about knowledge and from what he says about the mean. I will begin by discussing Aristotle's view of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). (Henceforth, I will use 'knowledge' and 'to know' to translate ἐπιστήμη and ἐπισταθαι respectively, unless otherwise noted). As we shall see, there is considerable controversy over how Aristotle's account of knowledge should be understood. But regardless of how this controversy is settled, it turns out that the mean is not knowable.

At Posterior Analytics I.2, Aristotle claims that “we think we know something unconditionally...when we think we grasp of the explanation because of which the object
holds that it is its explanation, and also that it is not possible for it to be otherwise
(ἐπίστασθαι δὲ οἰόμεθ' ἕκαστον ἀπλῶς,...ὅταν τὴν τ’ αἰτίαν οἰώμεθα γινώσκειν δι’ ἣν τὸ
πρᾶγμα ἐστιν, ὅτι ἐκείνου αἰτία ἐστί, καὶ μὴ ἐνδέχεσθαι τοῦτ’ ἄλλως ἔχειν)” (71b9-12).143

And, similarly, at *NE* VI.3 1139b20-1, Aristotle states that “what we know is not capable
of being otherwise (ὃ ἐπιστάμεθα, μηδ’ ἐνδέχεσθαι ἄλλως ἔχειν).” By “things not capable
of being otherwise,” Aristotle refers to necessary connections between universals (e.g., a
triangle has interior angles the sum of which is equivalent to two right angles), which
should be understood to include what we today might call “law-like regularities” (e.g.,
humans are animals, oak trees lose their leaves).144 And so for one to have knowledge of
x, x must be a general, law-like regularity, and one must grasp the explanation of that
regularity. For illustration, consider Aristotle's example of lunar eclipses (*Posterior
Analytics* II.1). Our knowledge of lunar eclipses is of the phenomenon of lunar eclipses in
general; not of this or that particular lunar eclipse.145 And we have knowledge of the
phenomenon of the lunar eclipse (a general regularity) when we grasp why the lunar
eclipse happens—e.g., when we grasp that it is because the earth screens the moon from
the sun.

Given this account of knowledge, several commentators have thought that for
Aristotle there could not possibly be any such thing as ethical knowledge, understood as a

143 All translations from the *Posterior Analytics* are those of Barnes, though I have made some
slight modifications.


145 Aristotle allows for only a *qualified* kind of knowledge of particular lunar eclipses (see
body of explanatory, general truths. For consider what Aristotle tells us about the subject matter of ethics. “Matters concerned with actions and what is good for us have no fixity (τὰ δὲ ἐν ταῖς πράξεσι καὶ τὰ συμφέροντα οὐδὲν ἑστηκὸς ἔχει)” (NE II.2 1104a3-4).

As Aristotle explains earlier:

Fine and just actions...exhibit much variety and fluctuation...And goods also exhibit a similar fluctuation because they bring harm to people; for before now men have been undone by reason of their wealth, and others by reason of their courage. We must be content then in speaking of such subjects and with such premises to indicate the truth roughly and in outline, and in speaking about things which are only for the most part true and with premises of the same kind to reach conclusions that are no better (τὰ δὲ καλὰ καὶ τὰ δίκαια...πολλὰν ἔχει διαφορὰν καὶ πλάνην...τοιαύτην δὲ τινα πλάνην ἔχει καὶ τάγαθα διὰ τὸ πολλὸς συμβαίνειν βλάβας ἀπ᾽ αὐτῶν· ἔδρα γὰρ τινὲς ἀπώλοντο διὰ πλοῦτον, ἔτεροι δὲ δι᾽ ἀνδρείαν. ἀγαπητὸν οὖν περὶ τοιούτων καὶ ἐκ τοιούτων λέγοντας παραλόγως καὶ τύπῳ τάληθες ἐνδείκνυσθαι, καὶ περὶ τῶν ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ καὶ ἐκ τοιούτων λέγοντας τοιαύτα καὶ συμπεραινεσθαι.) (NE I.3 1094b14-22).

According to Aristotle it is a general truth that wealth is beneficial. But this general truth holds only “for the most part (ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ).” For, as he points out, wealth can sometimes harm its possessor, for example, if the possessor is vicious and uses wealth to do vicious things. And similar things could be said, Aristotle claims, about courage, justice, goodness, and whatever else is concerned with matters of conduct. Because the subject matter of ethics is thus “capable of being otherwise,” it seems that, for Aristotle, it is not possible to have knowledge of ethics.

Indeed, Aristotle seems to argue explicitly that knowledge cannot be had of ethics in NE VI.5. There, Aristotle discusses practical wisdom (φρόνησις) which is a state of the soul that grasps the truth about “what sorts of things conduces to the good life in general

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(ποία πρὸς τὸ εὖ ζῆν ὅλως)” (1140a28). And as he later clarifies, by “things which conduce to the good life” he means actions or things that can be done (see 1140b3-5). In short, practical wisdom is a grasping of the truth about what is good or bad to do with regard to the living of one's life as whole (as opposed to with regard to the making of a chair, or being healthy, or some other particular respect). As such, if there is such a thing as ethical knowledge in Aristotle's view, such knowledge would surely be, at least in part, practical wisdom. Aristotle argues, however, that practical wisdom does not amount to knowledge:

Practical wisdom cannot be knowledge...because that which can be done is capable of being otherwise (οὐκ ἂν εἶη ἡ φρόνησις ἐπιστήμη...ὅτι ἐνδέχεται τὸ πρακτὸν ἄλλως ἔχειν) (NE VI.5 1140b1-3).

Aristotle leaves it unstated here, but clearly he is assuming that knowledge is concerned with things that cannot be otherwise. Thus it follows that practical wisdom is not knowledge. Indeed, any normative claim about action would seem to be disqualified from being knowable, on the basis that such a claim would be capable of being otherwise.

The mean, however, would be included among such unknowable things, for it is concerned with that which can be done insofar as it is a norm for what can be done. Thus it seems that, according to Aristotle, the mean is not a possible object of knowledge. This does not mean that there is no truth of the matter as to whether or not some action or passion achieves the mean. Rather, it means that there is no general explanation as to why some particular passion is intermediate. The person of practical wisdom can simply perceive that, for example, he is too fearful, or that she is too angry, or that they are being
profligate. However, his being too fearful (to take just one of these examples) does not follow from, and hence is not explained by, any general rule. He is too fearful, and the person of practical wisdom can simply perceive that.

I will discuss the issue of perception and the mean in more detail later. For now, consider one consequence of attributing this view of knowledge to Aristotle. If this is his view, then there would be, for Aristotle, no knowledge of biology or of physical phenomena more generally. For physical and biological regularities only hold “for the most part (ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολλόν).”147 Aristotle, however, quite clearly thinks that there is knowledge of these subjects.148 And so either Aristotle contradicts himself, or the view of knowledge discussed above is not actually Aristotle's view.

Wanting to avoid attributing such an obvious contradiction to Aristotle, several commentators have recently developed an alternative account of Aristotle's view of knowledge.149 According to this alternative account, Aristotle holds that subjects like physics, biology, and (most importantly for present purposes) ethics are knowable, while also holding that knowledge is of necessary regularities. In the view of these commentators, “for the most part” regularities are, in some sense, necessary and thus can be known. Now in my view, even if this alternative account were correct, there would

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147 See *Metaphysics* 1025b26-1026a6. There are several examples throughout the corpus of specific biological or physical regularities holding only for the most part. See, for example, *History of Animals* 527b6-7 and *Posterior Analytics* 96a9-11.

148 At the beginning of the *Physics* Aristotle indicates that he is, in that work, concerned with “knowledge of nature (φύσεως ἐπιστήμης)” (184a15). And in the biological works, there are likewise several indications that Aristotle takes his subject to be a kind of science or knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). See, e.g., *Parts of Animals* I.1 639a3, 640a2, and 641a35-6.

nonetheless not be knowledge of the mean. In what follows I shall focus on establishing this claim about the mean, and I will only bring in details of this alternative account insofar as they are pertinent to that argument.

According to this alternative interpretation, it is possible to have knowledge of regularities which hold “for the most part (ὁς ἐπὶ τὸ πολύ).” Thus the fact that ethics is concerned with such regularities, far from entailing that ethics cannot be known, suggests that it is in fact a knowable subject. And if there are such regularities concerning the mean, then it would seem that there is knowledge of the mean, at least if this alternative interpretation is correct. Before considering whether there are such regularities, a brief clarification of “for the most part” is in order. According to this alternative interpretation, there is a technical use of “for the most part” in Aristotle's writings. When used in this technical way, “for the most part” means something stronger than mere statistical preponderance. Indeed, it must mean something stronger if “for the most part” regularities are to be knowable, for the commentators who put forward this alternative interpretation all agree that mere statistical preponderances are not knowable according to Aristotle. What exactly “for the most part” means, however, is a matter of controversy.150 In order to have a better sense of what this alternative interpretation of Aristotle's epistemology amounts to, let us consider just one account of “for the most part.” I should say, however, that for the sake of my argument concerning the knowability of the mean, it does not matter how exactly “for the most part” regularities are understood, so long as they are understood as being stronger than mere statistical preponderances.

Winter (1997, pp. 178-9) interprets “for the most part” regularities as unconditionally necessitated tendencies, which may or may not be made manifest. Consider the following example which Aristotle gives us: Human males for the most part have hair on their chins (Posterior Analytics II.12 96a9-11). On Winter's view of Aristotle, it is part of the nature of being a human male that one has the capacity or potential for having hair on one's chin. That is to say, all human males necessarily (in virtue of being a human male) have this potential. But this potential may or may not be actualized. And so not every human male has hair on his chin, but they all nonetheless have the potential to have hair on their chins. All technical “for the most part” regularities, on Winter's view, follow this same pattern. “A's are for the most part B's” means that all A's necessarily (in virtue of the nature of A) have the capacity to be B's, but this capacity is not actualized in every case.

Now back to the mean. At first glance, it seems that there are in fact regularities which hold for the most part concerning the mean. For in the the discussion of the particular virtues and their corresponding vices in Books III-IV, Aristotle seems to describe many such regularities. For example, in discussing courage, Aristotle states that the courageous man is “fearless in face of a noble death, and of all emergencies that involve death (περὶ τὸν καλὸν θάνατον ἀδεής, καὶ ὅσα θάνατον ἐπιφέρει ὑπόγυια ὄντα)” (NE III.6 1115a33-4). Strictly speaking, Aristotle could mean something like “the courageous man never, under any circumstances whatsoever, fears a noble death,” but this is hardly the most natural reading. It seems instead that we should read it as a “for the most part” claim, and indeed at EE 1228b4 Aristotle says as much: “it seems that the
brave man is fearless for the most part (δοκεῖ δ’ ὁ ἄνδρεῖος ἄφοβος εἶναι ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ).” Now the mean is not mentioned explicitly in either of these claims, but it is nonetheless clear how to relate the mean to them. Consider the second claim. Since the mean in fear is the degree of fear that the courageous person feels, the second claim amounts to the following: achieving the mean in fear is, for the most part, feeling no fear.

Consider another apparent example of a “for the most part” regularity involving the mean. Aristotle claims that “the good-tempered person tends to be unperturbed (βούλεται...ὁ πρᾶος ἀτάραχος εἰναι)” (NE IV.5 1125b33-4). As Aristotle makes clear in the ensuing discussion, he means that the good-tempered person tends not to feel anger and so tends to act and to feel in a way that is more similar to the deficient person (i.e., the “inirascible” person) than to the excessive, irascible person. The good-tempered person, however, will nonetheless get angry when the situation calls for anger, but these situations are few and far between, according to Aristotle. And so the good-tempered person is unperturbed only for the most part. To put this in terms of the mean, we might say: to achieve the mean in anger is, for the most part, to feel no anger (i.e., to be unperturbed).

Similar such examples could be pieced together from many of the other discussions of the virtues and vices in Books III-IV. The question now is whether these “for the most part” regularities are technical “for the most part” regularities that can be demonstrated and thus known. I think they are not for two reasons.

First, these regularities involving the mean seem to be mere statistical preponderances. To see why, consider our two examples. First we saw that the
courageous people are fearless for the most part. Aristotle suggests that the reason for their general fearlessness is that the appropriate objects of fear are relatively rare. Serious threats of death, great pain, and extensive bodily damage (i.e., the appropriate objects of fear) are simply not common occurrences. And because they are so uncommon, people who feel fear appropriately (i.e., courageous people) will have few occasions for feeling fear. If, for some reason, these occasions became much more common, Aristotle would most likely rescind his judgment that courageous people are in general fearless. For otherwise he would have to claim that courageous people do not feel the fear of those objects that they should, and this is clearly absurd for Aristotle. And so it seems that the general fearlessness of courageous people is simply a result of the scarcity of appropriate occasions for fear. In any event, it is clearly not a result of courage's being, to use Winter's terminology, an “unconditionally necessitated tendency” to feel no fear. For courage is simply not such a tendency. (If anything, such a tendency would seem to characterize rashness.) Rather, courage is a tendency to feel fear when, and only when, fear is appropriate. The upshot is that the regularity according to which courageous people are fearless for the most part seems to be a mere statistical preponderance and not a technical “for the most part” regularity.

The second example of a “for the most part” regularity involved good-temper: the good-tempered person will for the most part be unperturbed. It seems, however, that the same analysis given of courage and fear applies here in the case of good-temper and anger. Given that the occasions for justifiable anger are few and far between, the good-tempered person will simply not feel anger with any great frequency; most of the time,
such a person will be unperturbed. And as was the case with regard to courage and fearlessness, good-temper is simply not an unconditionally necessitated tendency to feel no anger. And so this regularity also seems to be a mere statistical preponderance.

But as we saw, in order that “for the most part” regularities be knowable, “for the most part” must mean something stronger than mere statistical preponderance. Given that the “for the most part” regularities that involve the mean seem to be mere statistical preponderances, however, they must not be genuine, technical “for the most part” regularities. In other words, they are not the kind of thing that can be known.

There is a second reason for denying that regularities involving the mean are technical “for the most part” regularities and thus objects of knowledge: namely, regularities involving the mean do not enter into the requisite explanatory relationships. Recall that in order for something to be an object of knowledge, one must grasp the explanation of it. This explanation must be from items which are “more familiar than and prior to (γνωριμωτέρων καὶ προτέρων)” the thing being explained (Posterior Analytics I.2 71b21-2). But there are two senses of familiarity and priority: that by nature and that in relation to us (71b33-72a1). As Aristotle explains, “I call prior and more familiar in relation to us items which are nearer to perception; prior and more familiar simpliciter items which are further away (λέγω δὲ πρῶς ἡμᾶς μὲν πρότερα καὶ γνωριμώτερα τὰ ἐγγύτερον τῆς αἰσθήσεως, ἀπλῶς δὲ πρότερα καὶ γνωριμώτερα τὰ πορρώτερον.” (72a1-4). Now it is the latter kind of priority and familiarity that Aristotle thinks is relevant to explaining an object of knowledge. Let us consider the regularities involving the mean. What explains them? Well, as we just saw, it seems that they are statistical generalizations
from experience. In living a life, one will simply see (if one is brought up well) that the occasions for anger are few and far between. And so one can lay it down as a general rule of thumb that the good-tempered person will be unperturbed. But this explanation is in terms of something that is more familiar and prior in relation to us, and not something that is more familiar and prior by nature. For it is based upon perception. But this seems to be the only plausible explanation for these regularities. For what could the fact that the good-tempered person tends to be unperturbed be established by if not one's experience that the appropriate occasions for anger are few and far between? There is, then, no explanation (in the sense that is relevant for knowledge) of these regularities. Accordingly, regularities involving the mean are not known. And this is so even if the alternative interpretation of Aristotle's epistemology (according to which there is knowledge of ethics in other respects) is correct.

The mean, then, is not knowable on either of the two going accounts of Aristotle's epistemology. Rather, the only kind of cognitive grasp that we can have of the mean is that had through perception. What is excessive, deficient, and intermediate between these two is “not easy to determine by reasoning, any more than anything else that is perceived by the senses; such things depend on particular facts, and the decision rests with perception (οὐ ῥᾴδιον τῷ λόγῳ ἀφορίσαι· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἄλλο οὐδὲν τῶν αἰσθητῶν· τὰ δὲ τοιαῦτα ἐν τοῖς καθ’ ἕκαστα, καὶ ἐν τῇ αἰσθήσει ἡ κρίσις)” (NE II.9 1109b21-3, cf. IV.5 1126b2-4). People of practical wisdom are attuned to the relevant facts of whatever situations they find themselves in, and they will able to perceive what it is appropriate to do in light of those facts. That is to say, they will be able to perceive what the
intermediate passion or action is for the situation at hand. And this judgment of the mean rests solely in perception; it does not follow from general principles, such as those previously discussed regularities involving the mean (e.g., the courageous person is for the most part fearless).

Now people of practical wisdom can, just like anyone else, discern patterns or statistical preponderances. And so, through experience, they may come to see that anger and fear are hardly ever appropriate. And on the basis of such experience, they may advise others to feel anger and fear only rarely. The virtuous person, they may say, is for the most part fearless and unperturbed. But these rules of thumb are little more than defeasible and (hopefully) helpful guidance. They do not explain why certain behaviors are or are not appropriate nor are they ethical principles which one must know if one is to have knowledge of ethics. For they are not knowable.

5.2.3 Measure, the Mean, and Knowledge

The difference between Plato and Aristotle with regard to knowledge of their respective norms is clear: According to Plato, measure is knowable; according to Aristotle, the mean is not.

One consequence of Plato's holding that measures are knowable is that it is possible, according to Plato, to have knowledge of ethics. Consider the Statesman. There, the statesman is held to have systematic knowledge of human character; more particularly, knowledge of which characters are fitting or suitable for communal life in the city, of how these characters relate to one another, and of how to combine these
characters so as to produce a city that acts appropriately. Indeed, statecraft is even described as producing in the citizens, as a result of its weaving them together, the four cardinal virtues: justice, courage, temperance, and wisdom (see *Statesman* 309d10-e8). Quite clearly then, statecraft is a kind of ethical knowledge and thus it is possible to have a systematic knowledge of ethics, according to Plato.

This systematic knowledge is similar to what we today might call a 'science'. The statesman starts with a mastery of the system of abstract measures relevant to human character and then applies this knowledge to the particular city and citizens over whom he rules. The statesman is able to predict with accuracy what effect certain combinations of characters will have on the city and, further, he has the knowledge and ability to manipulate how those characters are combined so as to produce a city that acts as it should. In short, statecraft is systematic knowledge of abstract generalities which is effective in predicting and manipulating concrete particulars. Science, as we today tend to think of it, works in a similar way. Having mastered the relevant universal, abstract laws (such as the laws of physics or chemistry), we can then use those laws to accurately predict physical phenomena and to manipulate physical systems so as to produce particular phenomena. Thus, we might say, according to Plato, there is a science of ethics.

As was discussed above, Plato contrasts scientific mastery thus understood with a lesser kind of cognitive grasp. Consider, again, the case of the musician and the musical theorist. The knowledge that the musical theorist has is superior to the grasp of intervals that a musician (who is ignorant of music theory) might have. The musician, the reader may recall, can merely pick out by ear whether or not two notes form an interval. As
Socrates says, such a grasp of intervals is trivial and relies on lucky guesses (55e2-7). And as a result of relying on lucky guesses, there is much that is unclear in such a grasp and very little certainty (56a6-7). The reason such a grasp is inferior, we saw, is that the intervals that the musician grasps are sensible. As such, they fluctuate, they are imprecise, and they are not exactly a perfect fifth, or octave, or whatever other interval they happen to approximate. Thus there is much uncertainty and very little clarity in our grasp of them.

This description of the musician's grasp of the interval could very easily be translated into the terminology that Aristotle uses. These sensible intervals, Aristotle might say, are “capable of being otherwise,” and the musician grasps them by “perception.” As we saw in the discussion of Aristotle, this is precisely how the person of practical wisdom's grasp of the mean is portrayed. And so just as the musician does not have knowledge of intervals according to Plato, neither does the person of practical wisdom have knowledge of the mean according to Aristotle. For knowledge is of unchanging things; things which cannot be otherwise.

In the previous section, I argued in more detail that the mean is not knowable. As we saw, there are no general explanatory principles concerning the mean and, thus, there is no science or systematic knowledge of the mean, according to Aristotle. At this point, a clarification is in order. I have only argued for the claim that according to Aristotle there is no knowledge of the mean. There being no such knowledge is perfectly consistent with there being knowledge of other areas of ethics. For example, Aristotle's definition of happiness (εὐδαιμονία) as virtuous rational activity may, for all that I have argued, be a
general explanatory ethical principle and may very well be an object of knowledge. Thus there may be ethical knowledge according to Aristotle. I have merely argued that there is no knowledge of the mean.

Though this conclusion is thus qualified, it is still quite significant. Recall that the mean in action or passion just is the appropriate action or passion. There being no knowledge of the mean thus entails that there is no knowledge of what it is appropriate to do or feel—that there is no knowledge of how one ought to act or feel—according to Aristotle. And given that there are no general explanatory principles concerning the mean, there are no general, explanatory principles that would directly guide the moral agent about how to act or feel. People of practical wisdom simply perceive what it is appropriate to do or feel in whichever situation they find themselves.

One debate over Aristotle's ethics concerns whether or not Aristotle is a particularist.151 Though different authors give different accounts of particularism, they all seem to hold in common the following claim: rational moral judgment does not rest on, or proceed from, moral principles.152 In what follows, 'particularism' will refer to this claim. Now insofar as judgments concerning the mean—concerning, that is, what one ought to do or feel—do not rest on, or proceed from, general principles, Aristotle is a particularist. People of practical wisdom do not bring general principles about appropriate conduct to bear on whichever situation they find themselves in, for there are no such principles. Moreover, even if there are other general ethical principles according to

151 Those who interpret Aristotle as a particularist include McDowell (1979), Nussbaum (1990), and Dancy (1993), Leibowitz (2013). Irwin (2000) has argued that Aristotle is not a particularist.

152 See Dancy (2013).
Aristotle (e.g., happiness is virtuous rational activity), these principles are not relevant for the kind of moral judgment in which the person of practical wisdom engages in while deliberating. No deliberating agent figures out what do or feel by applying, for example, the principle that happiness is virtuous rational activity to present circumstances. The moral judgments that the person of practical wisdom makes—judgments such as “this is the right amount of money to spend”—do not proceed in any straightforward way from this principle; rather, they rest upon perception of the particular facts and perception of what it is appropriate to do in light of them. So though Aristotle may hold that there are some general ethical principles, there are none concerning the mean and thus none from which moral judgments about what to do or feel must proceed if they are to be rational.

Standing in opposition to the particularist is someone we might call the generalist, that is, someone who holds that rational moral judgments must proceed from or rest upon moral principles. Plato, with his conception of knowledge of measure, is clearly a generalist. The most rational judgments with regards to intervals are those of the music theorist; not those of the musician. For the music theorist has a systematic mastery of the mathematical relationships between the various abstract measures. And the judgments of the music theorist proceed from this systematic knowledge, thus rendering them more precise, truer, and more rational.

In short, Plato is a generalist who believes that measures are knowable and that systematic knowledge of ethics is possible. By contrast, Aristotle is a particularist who believes that the mean is unknowable and that systematic knowledge of what it is appropriate to do or feel is unachievable.
5.3 Compliance with Measure, Compliance with the Mean

Norms give us directions. The fact that norms direct us to behave in some particular way, however, obviously does not imply that we will so behave. Though we may heed the norm enjoining honest behavior by, for example, speaking the truth, we may also flout it and speak falsely. In the former case, we comply with the norm; in the latter, we do not. Both measure and the mean are likewise norms and likewise both may either be complied with or not. The generous person complies with the mean by having an appropriately intense desire for giving and taking money; having an excessive desire to spend money, the prodigal does not so comply. The temperate person complies with the measures of law and order by not going after false pleasures; the insatiable hedonist (such as Philebus) fails to so comply. Let us now examine in detail what exactly compliance with measure and with the mean consists in.

5.3.1 Compliance with Measure as Approximation

In the middle dialogues, the norms that Plato is interested in are Forms, not measures. Forms are something like ideal standards, and sensible particulars can more or less closely meet or comply with those standards, though they can never perfectly meet them. And in the middle dialogues, Plato has an answer to the question about what compliance with Forms amounts to that is as simple to state as it is difficult to fully understand: It amounts to participating in the Form. In what follows, I shall argue that, in the Philebus, measures come to occupy a role similar to that of Forms in the middle
dialogues. Measures occupy the role of norms insofar as they are the relevant standards with which sensible particulars ought to comply. However, in neither the *Philebus* nor the *Statesman* do we find the terminology of participation. Rather, Plato suggests that the relationship between sensible particulars and norms (i.e., measures) is one of approximation. A good sensible particular, \( x \), is one that closely approximates the measure(s) relevant to being an \( x \).

Let us begin with the theory of the Forms.\textsuperscript{153} According to this theory there are Forms, on the one hand, and sensible particulars, on the other. And Forms and sensible particulars are related to each other via participation. Sensible particulars participate in Forms and, in virtue of so participating, are called the same name as the Form.\textsuperscript{154} Furthermore, sensible particulars are made to be the kind of thing that they are by participating in Forms.\textsuperscript{155} For example, a bed is made to be a bed by participating in the Form of Bed. And it is in virtue of thus participating that we call the bed after the same name as the Form, namely 'bed'.

Turn now to the *Philebus*. In the terminology of the fourfold ontology, sensible particulars are mixtures of limit and unlimited, and measures are limits. As was discussed in Chapter 3, for any given mixture, the limit is what makes the mixture the kind of

\textsuperscript{153} This theory is found in the middle dialogues, in particular, the *Phaedo* and *Republic*. The *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* also contain important relevant passages, as does the *Parmenides*. This latter dialogue is, of course, typically identified as late, though the focus of commentators interested in the theory of the Forms has exclusively been on the first 10 or so Stephanus pages. And this section of the *Parmenides* is often seen either as being written during Plato's middle period, or at least as being written about the theory of Forms as it is found in the middle dialogues.

\textsuperscript{154} See *Phaedo* 78e2 and *Republic* X 596a7.

\textsuperscript{155} See *Phaedo* 100d4-e6.
mixture that it is. For example, my sung note is a middle C in virtue of having as its limit the measure middle C. In short, measure makes a sensible particular the kind of sensible particular that it is. In Chapter 3, I referred to this as as the identifying role of measure. Now this role is similar to the role that Forms play in the middle dialogues. And, as we just saw, Forms play this role through participation. For, according to the middle dialogues, it is by participating in a Form that a sensible particular comes to be whatever it is. Now insofar as measures play the above-described identifying role in the Philebus, the relationship between sensible particulars and measures is analogous to participation.

What exactly participation amounts to in the middle dialogues is highly controversial.\textsuperscript{156} If Aristotle is to be believed, Plato never in fact settles the issue (see Metaphysics I.6 987b13-4). By contrast, the relationship between measures and sensible particulars is much clearer. Approximation to a measure gives sensible particulars their identities. My sung middle C is a middle C in virtue of closely approximating the measure middle C. The measure middle C picks out a particular frequency within the High and Low, that is, within the continuum of pitched sound. The other notes (i.e., measures) similarly pick out particular frequencies, and these notes or measures are mathematically related to one another. When I sing, the frequency of my sung note will fall somewhere along the continuum of pitched sound. Which note my sung note ends up being depends upon where its frequency falls on that continuum. If it is closest to the measure of middle C, my sung note is a middle C; if it is closest to A above middle C, it is an A above middle C.

\textsuperscript{156} See Allen (1960) and Nehamas (1975).
Furthermore, the closer the frequency of my sung note to that of its measure, the better my sung note is. Measures are, after all, norms; compliance with them renders the thing so complying a good one of its kind. A sung middle C with a frequency closer to 261.63 Hz (the frequency of middle C) is a better middle C than one with a frequency that is further away. Thus, in virtue of approximating measure, my sung note is both the kind of thing that it is, and my sung note is good, assuming it closely approximates measure. And the more closely it approximates measure, the better it is.

More generally, measures mark particular cuts along a continuum of some quality (along, that is, an unlimited). Sensible particulars possess those qualities, such as pitch, temperature, and length, to particular degrees. And depending on the degree of the quality possessed, the sensible particular will either closely approximate those cuts picked out by the relevant measures, or it will fail to do so. In either case, the degree of the quality is determined by where that quality falls along the relevant continuum, that is, along the relevant unlimited. A sensible particular approximates the measure to which the degree of the sensible particular's quality is closest. And whichever measure the sensible particular approximates is the measure which gives the sensible particular its identity. Furthermore, insofar as the approximation is close, the sensible particular is good, at least with respect to the quality in question, and insofar as the approximation is distant, it is bad. In short, compliance with measure consists in approximation of measure and, as we saw earlier, such approximation plays a role analogous to that of participation.
5.3.2 Compliance with the Mean as Avoidance

Turn now to Aristotle. As we have seen, the mean is a norm for passion. Accordingly, in exploring what compliance with the mean consists in, let us narrow our focus to the following question: in what does a passion's complying with the mean consist?

An important clue to the answer is given by the word itself that Aristotle uses for the norm: μέσον. Importantly for present purposes, μέσον can take genitive nouns. For the sake of illustration, call these genitive nouns \( x \) and \( y \). "Μέσον \( x \) and \( y \)" means something like “in the middle of \( x \) and \( y \),” or “in between \( x \) and \( y \).” In Aristotle's description of the mean, he uses this grammatical construction. The mean is identified as “something in between excess and deficiency (μέσον τι ὑπερβολῆς καὶ ἐλλείψεως” (NE II.6 1106a28-9). And thus, instead of translating this norm as “the mean,” it would be less misleading, though certainly also less natural and elegant, to call it the “in between.” It would be less misleading inasmuch as it indicates that the mean is identifiable only relative to excess and deficiency; it is what is in between them.157 By contrast, the former phrase (“the mean”) might mislead us into thinking that this norm is identifiable in its own right, independently of excess and deficiency. (Though it is potentially misleading, I shall continue to call this norm “the mean;” the “in between” is simply not English).

Given that the mean in passion is simply that passion which is neither excessive nor deficient, we have, in effect, the answer to the question of this section. For a passion to comply with the mean is for that passion to avoid excess and deficiency; it is for that

157 As Aristotle also puts this point, “the mean is what is neither excessive nor deficient (μέσον...δ μήτε πλεονάζει μήτε ἐλλείπει)” (1106a30-2).
passion to have neither too much nor too little intensity. Indeed, this is all that compliance could amount to, for Aristotle never characterizes the mean in way that is ultimately independent of excess and deficiency.

However, it might appear that he does gives such a characterization at *NE* II.6 1106b21-22. In this passage, Aristotle claims that to feel the mean in passion is to feel a passion “at the right times, with reference to the right objects, toward the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way (τὸ δὲ ὅτε δὲ καὶ ἐφ᾽ οὗ καὶ πρὸς οὗ καὶ οὗ ἕνεκα καὶ ὡς δεῖ).” Here it seems that the mean is characterized independently of excess and deficiency, for Aristotle does not, after all, use those terms. But as we saw in Chapter 4, this claim about the mean is not ultimately independent of excess and deficiency. Take the passion of anger. This passage indicates that to achieve the mean in anger one must, among other things, feel anger toward the right people. But feeling anger toward the right people is not a characterization of the mean inasmuch as it does not tell us what the mean is. Rather, feeling anger towards the right people is simply a consequence of achieving the mean. If one achieves the mean in anger, then one will feel anger toward the right people (and at the right times, and over the right objects, etc.). And this is true, as we saw, because if one felt anger toward the wrong person (or over the wrong object, or at the wrong time, etc.) then one's anger would be excessive in that regard. One would feel too much anger toward that person (or over that object, or at that time, etc.). Thus, despite appearances to the contrary, 1106b21-22 does not give us a characterization of the mean that is ultimately independent of excess and deficiency.
To comply with the mean, then, is to avoid excess and deficiency. And so, according to Aristotle, in our attempts thus to comply, we ought to aim at avoiding excess and deficiency. Consider his advice for how to best achieve the mean:

We must consider the things towards which we ourselves are easily carried away...We must drag ourselves away to the contrary extreme; for we shall get into the intermediate state by drawing well away from error (σκοπεῖν δὲ δεὶ πρὸς ἀντίθετα ἐναντίον...αὐτοὶ εὐκατάφοροι ἐσμεν...εἰς τοῦ ἄμαρτάνεων δὲ ἐγκατεστάσεις...τῆς πολὺ γὰρ ἀπαγόντες τοῦ ἁμαρτάνειν εἰς τὸ μέσον ἥξομεν) (NE II.9 1109b1-6).

We need first to figure out in which respects we tend towards excess and deficiency. Then we can set about remedying those tendencies. In Aristotle's view, the best remedy for a tendency toward excessive or deficient behavior is to “drag” oneself to the opposite extreme. So, for example, if one is prone toward feeling too much anger, one should aim to feel too little anger. Whether or not this is good advice is beside the point. For present purposes, simply note that his advice is about how best to avoid excess and deficiency. By staving off excess and deficiency we can, as it were, “back our way into” the mean. And so, to comply with the mean, one ought to strive to avoid excess and deficiency. For the mean is simply that which is neither excessive nor deficient.

5.3.3 Plato and Aristotle, Approximation and Avoidance

At first glance, there may appear to be considerable similarity between Aristotle and Plato with regard to complying with the mean and measure respectively. According to Plato, one ought to aim to approximate the measure. For example, in singing a middle C, the singer tries to approximate middle C as closely as possible. Similarly, Aristotle
tells us that we ought to “focus on the mean (πρὸς τὸ μέσον βλέπουσα)” (1106b8-9) and “aim at the mean (τοῦ μέσου...στοχαστική)” (1106b15-6).

But there is a crucial difference. For Plato, measure is characterized and identified without reference to excess and deficiency. The middle C that the singer approximates is defined by its mathematical relationships with other measures, and thus as part of a mathematical system of measures. And while notes that closely approximate the measure do indeed avoid excess and deficiency, a proper characterization of the measure will not mention flatness or sharpness (the relevant kind of excess and deficiency) at all. Indeed, it seems that excess and deficiency would themselves be properly characterized in terms of measure. For example, to be flat is to be lower in pitch than the relevant note (i.e., than the relevant measure). And so, on Plato’s view, one aims at the measure, striving to approximate it as closely as possible. And if such striving is successful, one will avoid excess and deficiency. But the avoidance of excess and deficiency is not primarily what it is to comply with measure. Rather, such compliance is primarily a matter of approximating measure.

For Aristotle, by contrast, the mean is simply that which is neither excessive nor deficient. There is no way of characterizing the mean (mathematical or otherwise) that ultimately avoids reference to excess and deficiency, for the mean simply is what is “in between” them. And as we saw earlier in this chapter, one upshot of such a characterization is that to strive to achieve the mean is nothing more than striving to avoid excess and deficiency. As such, Aristotle's view is not that one should aim at approximating some independently identified mean, for there is no such mean. Rather
one should simply strive to avoid error (i.e., avoid excess and deficiency), and thereby act and feel appropriately.

So though Plato and Aristotle would both counsel us to aim at and to comply with the measure or mean and to avoid excess and deficiency, their understandings of what it is to comply are altogether different. Plato would have us aim at an abstract ideal, focusing our efforts on approximating it as closely as possible. And, if our efforts are successful, we will avoid excess and deficiency as a result. Aristotle, by contrast, would have us focus our efforts on guarding against excess and deficiency. And if those efforts are successful, the result will be that we have achieved the mean. For the mean is simply that which is neither excessive nor deficient.

5.4 Absolutism and Relativism

A central question in metaethics is whether or not morality is relative or absolute. Moral relativism is the thesis that moral judgments are true or false relative to the standards of the person making the judgment. According to moral relativism, a particular moral judgment, such as that “adultery is wrong,” may be true or may be false, and which it is depends upon the standards of the person making the judgment. For the

158 There are several different varieties of moral relativism. The main difference between them concerns to what exactly morality is claimed to be relative. Perhaps the most common version of moral relativism holds that moral judgments are true or false relative to the standards of the person making the judgment. Other versions, however, hold that they are true or false not relative to the person making the judgment, but to the agent or person who is acting or deliberating (often times, of course, the agent and the judge are the same person, as they are when we judge our own conduct). Still others hold that moral judgments are true or false relative to the moral standards of a culture or society. Both for the sake of simplicity and because it is most pertinent for the following discussion of Plato and Aristotle, I will focus exclusively on the kind of moral relativism which relativizes the truth value of moral judgments to the standards of the judge.
truth value of the judgment is in part a function of those standards. Thus, moral judgments are not true or false *simpliciter*, according to moral relativism, but only true or false relative to someone or another's standards. One upshot of this view is that there is no single true moral code or morality. There is only my morality, your morality, their morality, and so on, and none of these moralities is truer or more correct than any other. Thus, what is right or good for me to do may be wrong or bad for you to do, and vice versa.

By contrast, moral absolutism is the thesis that moral judgments are not relative to my, your, or anyone else's standards, but rather, such judgments are either true or false *simpliciter*.159 According to moral absolutism, the standards held by the person making a moral judgment are irrelevant to the truth value of that moral judgment. Thus, even though relative to your standards “adultery is wrong” is false, it may nonetheless be true that adultery is wrong, and it may be nonetheless wrong for you to engage in adultery. And assuming that it is true that adultery is wrong, it is true *simpliciter* and not true merely relative to my or someone else's standards.

According to the views put forward by Socrates and the Stranger in the *Philebus* and *Statesman* respectively, whether or not something achieves measure is not a function of anyone's particular standards. Thus, those views appear to be absolutist, an appearance I shall argue is true in the next section. In a similar vein, whether or not a passion is intermediate, according to Aristotle, is not a function of anyone's standards. And so it

159 For similar statements of the distinction between moral absolutism (or, as it is also called, moral objectivism) and moral relativism, see Gowans (2015), Brogaard (2012), p. 538, Kim and Wreen (2003), pp. 448-9, and Harman (1996), p. 5.
might appear that Aristotle is likewise a straightforward absolutist. In what follows, however, I shall argue that this appearance is somewhat deceiving in that it might lead us to overlook the way that Aristotle incorporates certain aspects of relativism into his account of the mean.

5.4.1 Measure and Circumstances

In order to come to an adequate understanding of Plato's absolutism with regard to measure, it will be helpful to consider what facets of a situation are relevant with regard to whether or not measure is achieved within that situation. And to do this, it will be helpful to consider the second art of measurement in the *Statesman*.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, the second art of measurement is used by the practitioners of the various arts in their making of good and beautiful things. Artisans look to the relevant measures and, if they are successful in making their work closely approximate them, their product will be good. Now whether or not some product of an art is a good one of its kind depends upon a variety of factors. For example, whether or not a jug is good depends upon what the jug will be used for (decoration? transporting liquid? storing liquid?). And whether or not the jug fulfills this purpose is determined in part by the shape, size, strength, and coloring of the jug. These factors, then, are relevant to whether or not the jug achieves measure. These particular factors, of course, are not going to be relevant in every art. But we can, I think, recognize fairly easily which factors are relevant in the cases of various arts (for house-building, factors related to the building
Consider now the case of statecraft. The statesman's product is a social fabric. To produce a good social fabric, the statesman must, among other things, distribute offices well. Whether or not offices are distributed well depends upon the particular characteristics of the citizens who will be holding those offices. For a good distribution of offices is one which allows the vigorous tendencies of the courageous citizens and the peaceful tendencies of the moderate citizens to be expressed by the city when and only when appropriate. And whether or not some particular distribution of offices will, in fact, accomplish this depends in large part upon which particular offices are entrusted to which particular people. In the case of statecraft, then, one of the primary factors to which the practitioner of statecraft needs to be sensitive is the character of the citizens. Whether or not the social fabric produced by the statesman's weaving is good is determined to a large degree by the particular characters of the citizens who are woven together.

In the case of the statesman and of the potter (i.e., the maker of jugs), the personal history and capabilities of the statesman or potter are irrelevant with regard to whether or not the product in question conforms to measure. This point seems to hold generally: the personal history and capabilities of a practitioner of an expertise are irrelevant with regard to whether or not the product produced by the expert conforms to measure. To be sure, we might not be as critical of a beginning potter who makes a jug too small as we would be of an experienced potter who makes the same mistake. But this reluctance to be critical does not change the fact that the beginner's jug is bad and that it fails to conform
to the relevant measure. The beginner's lack of training and ability might make such a failure excusable, but it does not make it any less a failure. Likewise for the statesman. If a city is over zealous for war, the statesman has created a bad social fabric, and this is so regardless of any facts about the statesman's personal history or capabilities. So though whether or not $x$ conforms to measure depends upon particular facets of the situation surrounding $x$, such conformity does not depend at all upon any facts about the person producing or doing $x$.

5.4.2 The Mean and the “Relative to Us” Qualification

As we saw in Chapter 4, Aristotle himself directly addresses the issue of which facets of a situation are relevant with regard to achieving the mean. He does so in his explanation of what he means in saying that the mean is “relative to us (πρὸς ἡμᾶς).”

As the reader may recall, Aristotle attempts to explain what the mean relative to us is by way of an example. He asks us to consider a physical trainer who must prescribe diet regimens both for the famous wrestler Milo and for a beginner. According to Aristotle, physical trainers aim at the mean “relative to us” in such prescriptions. And, as Aristotle makes clear, this implies that the trainer will not prescribe the same amount of food for Milo as for the beginner. Which amount of food is appropriate—which amount is the mean “relative to us”—depends upon the situation.

Likewise, the mean relative to us at which virtue aims also depends on the situation. For which passion and which degree of that passion are appropriate (i.e., intermediate relative to us) varies depending upon circumstances. What the mean is
depends, for example, upon who the relevant people involved are, what they have done, what your relationship to them is, and so on. Consider anger. Whether and to what degree it is appropriate to be angry depends upon, among other things, who your anger is directed towards and what that person has or has not done.

The “relative to us” qualification indicates something further, though. As was also discussed in Chapter 4, it indicates that what the appropriate action or passion is depends upon the personal history and capabilities of the person feeling the passion or performing the action. For example, if I am particularly prone to drink excessively, it may be inappropriate for me to have a drink at dinner, but for someone who is not so prone, it may be fine. Or, if I do not know how to swim, it may be rash for me to dive into the water to save someone, whereas it may be cowardly for the expert swimmer not to do so. The mean is different for each of us, and the reason it is different is that we have different proclivities and personal histories. Thus the mean is relative not only to the particularities of the situation, but also to the individual agent; to the agent's history, abilities, and proclivities.

5.4.3 The Absoluteness of Measure and the Mean

According to absolutism, what is good or bad (or right or wrong) is so independently of the beliefs or perspective of the agent or of any other fact about the agent. According to relativism, by contrast, what is good or bad (or right or wrong) is so only relative to the standards of the person making the judgment. There is nothing that is good or bad simpliciter; things are only good for me, for you, for him, or for her. The
account of measure in the *Philebus* and *Statesman* is quite clearly absolutist. For whether or not something conforms to measure (and thus is good or bad) does not at all depend upon the standards of the person making the judgment. Whether or not my sung note is a (good) middle C is determined by the objective character of the note; my standards or beliefs about music are irrelevant.

But though Plato is an absolutist with regard to measure, he is nonetheless able to incorporate a sensitivity to context into his account of compliance with measure. For whether or not some sensible particular complies with measure depends upon the context or situation that the sensible particular is in. Whether or not a nose of a statue is too long depends upon both the size of the rest of the statue and whom the statue represents. Whether or not it is fitting for a particular citizen to occupy a particular office depends upon what that office is, what the characters of the other citizens are, and which offices those other citizens hold.

Now consider Aristotle. The standards held by the person judging whether or not a passion is intermediate are quite clearly irrelevant for whether or not that passion is in fact intermediate. Consider what Aristotle says about rash people. Such people tend to believe both that their rash behavior is appropriate (i.e., that it is intermediate), and that what is in fact courageous behavior is cowardly (*NE* II.8 1108b23-6). For the sake of illustration, suppose that defending one's current battle position is courageous, fleeing the battle is cowardly, and charging the enemy is rash. Aristotle's idea is that the rash person will tend to think that charging the enemy is courageous and that defending one's current position is cowardly, just like fleeing. In other words, according to the standards of the

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rash person, defending is deficient. But Aristotle implies in the above quoted passage that, despite the rash person's standards, defending is in fact courageous. That defending would be judged cowardly according to the standards of rash people is irrelevant for whether or not such behavior is in fact courageous. Given that the standards of the person making an ethical judgment are thus irrelevant, Aristotle rejects relativism and seems to accept absolutism.

But both Aristotle's rejection of relativism and acceptance of absolutism are qualified. For he agrees with one of the key claims made by relativists and rejected by absolutists, namely, that what is right for me may be wrong for you (and vice versa). Furthermore, Aristotle thinks that the reason for this difference has to do with certain facts about me and about you. Consider the case discussed above concerning saving someone who has fallen into the water. If I do not know how to swim, it would be foolish and rash for me to jump in to save this person. For the expert swimmer, however, jumping in would not be rash; it would be courageous. Thus, what is right or appropriate for the expert swimmer is not right or appropriate for me (assuming I do not know how to swim). And the reason for this difference between what it is right for each of us lies in our having different skills or abilities: the expert knows how to swim, and I do not. Thus, because the expert swimmer and I are different, what it is right or appropriate for each of us to do is different. In this way, Aristotle incorporates one of the key claims made by the relativist and rejected by the absolutist.

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160 Though what it is right or wrong to do is different for different people, nonetheless Aristotle thinks there are certain actions and passions which it is never appropriate to perform or feel, regardless of any facts about one's personal history or abilities. Actions such as adultery, theft, and murder (μοιχεία
Aristotle's position with regard to the distinction between relativism and absolutism is complex. Strictly speaking, he views the mean as an absolute norm, for the standards of the person making an ethical judgment are irrelevant to whether that judgment is true or false. But insofar as the history and abilities of a person partially determine the truth value of ethical judgments concerning that person, Aristotle incorporates one of the core ideas of relativism, namely, that what is right or wrong varies from person to person, and, further, that the reason for this variation lies in the differences between people.

Plato's measure, by contrast, is straightforwardly an absolute norm. People's standards, histories, and abilities are all irrelevant to whether or not something complies with measure. Nonetheless, Plato incorporates into his account of compliance with measure a sensitivity to the particular details of the situation, a sensitivity which absolutists are sometimes criticized for lacking.

5.5 Measure and the Mean, Plato and Aristotle

Let us review the results of the above four comparisons. First we considered the source of normativity. Measure, we saw, is a basic source of normativity in that it does not derive its normativity from any other source. Rather, other norms such as beauty seem to be derivative of measure. The mean, on the other hand, was seen to be a derivative source of normativity, in that its normativity was derived from that of

κλοπή ἄνδροφονία,” and passions such as “spite, shamelessness, and envy (ἐπιχαιρεκακία ἀναισχυντία φθόνος)” (1107a10-12) are always impermissible, according to Aristotle.
happiness. In other words, we saw that one ought to comply with the mean, according to Aristotle, because one ought to be happy.

Second, we compared measure and the mean with respect to whether we can have expert knowledge (or, knowledge in the strict sense) concerning them. As the *Philebus* makes clear, measures are the objects of such knowledge. To have knowledge of some field, one must understand not only the measures relevant to that field individually, but also how these measures are related to one another. According to Aristotle, by contrast, the mean is not knowable. For in his view knowledge is of things which “cannot be otherwise” or of things which hold “for the most part.” In either case, however, one cannot have knowledge of the mean, for there are neither necessary nor “for the most part” regularities concerning the mean.

Third, we examined what each philosopher thought compliance with their respective norm consisted in. For Plato, to comply with measure is to approximate measure. The artisan, the statesman, the ethical agent, or anyone else concerned with measure, ought to aim at measure in whatever it is they are doing or making; and if their efforts are successful, the result will closely approximate the measure at which they aim, thereby being good. By contrast, Aristotle viewed compliance with the mean not as approximation of some ideal, but as avoidance of excess and deficiency. The mean is not some independently specifiable ideal, but rather it is simply what is “in between” excess and deficiency; it is what is neither excessive nor deficient.

Finally, we considered the issue of absolutism and relativism. And while Plato's account of measure turned out to be straightforwardly absolutist, Aristotle's view, though
absolutist, is qualified. For he incorporates into his account of the mean one of the key
claims typically put forward by relativists and rejected by absolutists, namely, the claim
that what it is right or wrong to do differs from person to person and the reason for this
difference lies in the differences between people.

For the reader's convenience, these results are summarized in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>The Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 The Source of Normativity</strong></td>
<td>Basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Compliance</strong></td>
<td>Approximation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Absolutism vs. Relativism</strong></td>
<td>Absolute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To synthesize these results and to see what the upshot of them is, it will be helpful
to discuss an item central to the philosophical theories of both Plato and Aristotle, namely
εἶδος or form. Platonic Forms have been discussed numerous times already, owing to
the fact that such discussions have helped elucidate certain features of measure. As we
shall see, it is no coincidence that Forms shed light on measure, for in the *Philebus*

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161 In what follows, I will use the word εἶδος, not 'form'. My reason for doing so is that, in
discussing Plato and Aristotle on εἶδος, I need a word that is neutral between Platonic Forms and
Aristotelian ones. Given that I have followed the convention of capitalizing 'form' whenever I use it to refer
to a Platonic Form, were I to capitalize 'form' in the following discussion, it would (obviously) create the
impression that I am referring to a Platonic Form. But were I to leave 'form' un-capitalized, it might create
the impression that I am referring not to a Platonic Form and, instead, to an Aristotelian one. I use the word
εἶδος to avoid creating these impressions.
measures come to play several of the roles that in the middle dialogues are played by Forms. Aristotelian forms, by contrast, have not been discussed at all. As we shall also see, this too is no accident, for the mean has very little connection to εἶδος. The difference between the mean and measure with regard to εἶδος is revealing both of the differences between these two norms generally and, further, between Platonic and Aristotelian ethics.

5.5.1 Measure, the Mean, and Form

Let us begin with a (very) brief overview of εἶδος in Plato and Aristotle. Εἷδος is one of Plato's favored words for referring to Forms (another being the etymologically related ἰδέα) and Aristotle, when discussing form and matter, often uses εἶδος to refer to form. As is well known, there are considerable differences between Aristotle and Plato's conceptions of εἶδος, differences that Aristotle himself frequently emphasizes. Perhaps most prominent among these differences is Aristotle's rejection of Plato's "separation (χωρισμός)" of εἶδη. Aristotle thinks an εἶδος is, in some sense, immanent in a sensible particular or substance, whereas Plato claims the εἶδη exist separately from the things which participate them, in the non-spatio-temporal, intelligible world.

Despite such well known differences, however, there is considerable similarity between these two philosophers with regard to their views of εἶδος, and it is these similarities that will be my focus here. In particular, I will focus on three philosophically central roles that εἶδος plays in both Plato and Aristotle: First, εἶδος plays the metaphysical role of making things to be what they are; second, it plays a crucial
epistemological role in that grasping an εἶδος is necessary for knowledge; and third, it plays the ethical role of being the ground or basic source of goodness. First let us establish that both Plato and Aristotle do indeed agree that εἶδος plays these roles. Then we shall discuss measure and the mean in light of them.

A key claim of Plato's theory of Forms is that a Form (εἶδος) makes the particulars that participate in it to be the kind of particular they are, a claim which we discussed earlier. Clearly, then, for Plato εἶδος plays the metaphysical role described above. And though Aristotle does not think that sensible particulars “participate” in an εἶδος, he nonetheless agrees with Plato that the relevant εἶδος makes a thing to be the kind of thing it is. On Aristotle's view, substances (such as a human being, a dog, a statue, water, etc.) are composed of form (εἶδος) and matter. And it is the form of these substances that makes them to be the kind of things that they are (see, e.g., *Metaphysics* 1032b1, 14). Thus, though Plato and Aristotle disagree on how exactly εἶδη play this metaphysical role, they nonetheless agree that it is εἶδος that plays the role of making things to be what they are.

That Plato's Forms play the second, epistemological role is clear from this chapter's earlier examination of Plato's discussions of knowledge. Recall that, according to Plato, objects of knowledge must “really be” (see, e.g., *Republic* V 477a3, b11), and that, in the middle dialogues, the things that “really are” are εἶδη (see, e.g., *Republic* X 596a-7b and *Phaedo* 78d). Thus, according to Plato, in order to have knowledge it is necessary that one grasp an εἶδος, for knowledge simply is such a grasp. By contrast, the grasping of an εἶδος does not constitute knowledge according to Aristotle. However, he
does think that such a grasping is *necessary* for knowledge. For to know something, that thing must be demonstrated (*Posterior Analytics* I.2 71b17), and all demonstrations proceed from definitions (II.3 90b24). Given that definitions are of essences (II.3 90b30-1) and the εἶδος of a thing is its essence (*Metaphysics* 1032b1), the grasping of the relevant εἶδος is necessary for knowledge. In short (and without some of the above technical terminology), knowledge proceeds from a grasp of what things are—that is, from a grasp of εἶδος. Thus despite the considerable differences between Plato and Aristotle with regard to epistemology, they agree that grasping an εἶδος is necessary for knowledge.

Likewise they agree upon the third role, that εἶδος is the ground or source of goodness. With regard to Plato, this point is obvious. He claims that there is a Form or εἶδος of the Good and that this εἶδος is in some way responsible for the goodness of all good things (*Philebus* 65a). With regard to Aristotle, a more circuitous route leads to the same point. Aristotle identifies εἶδος with one of the most important items in his metaphysics, actuality (ἐνέργεια) (*Metaphysics* 1050b2-3). And he identifies actuality with the end (τέλος) at which things aim (1050a9). Now a key claim of Aristotle's teleology is that the end (τέλος) is good (*EE* II.1 1219a10, II.10 1227a18). Thus, εἶδος, as the end, is the source of goodness. For x to fully realize or actualize its εἶδος is what it is for x to be good (i.e., to be a good x).

Plato and Aristotle agree, then, that εἶδος plays these three roles. But what have these three roles to do with measure and the mean? The answer, in short, is that measure plays all three of these roles while the mean plays none of them. This fact is the key to
understanding the differences between measure and the mean and between Aristotle and Plato's ethics more generally.

First consider measure. As we saw in Chapter 3, measure makes mixtures (i.e., sensible particulars) to be the kinds of mixture that they are. In other words, measure plays the first role. As we saw in this chapter, measures are the objects of knowledge in the *Philebus*. Thus they play the second role. And insofar as measure is an aspect, perhaps even the primary aspect, of the Form of the Good, measure plays the third role.

The upshot is that, in the *Philebus*, measure takes much of the philosophical place of εἶδος. In the same way that Forms are at the heart of the philosophical theories of the middle dialogues, so too is measure for those of the *Philebus*. And so to scour the *Philebus* looking for where the middle-period Forms may be hiding\(^\text{162}\) is to betray a misunderstanding of the theories put forward in the *Philebus*. They are not hiding anywhere. Rather, many of the roles once filled by Forms come to be occupied by a different entity, measure, thus making middle-period Forms otiose and unnecessary.

In contrast to measure, the mean plays none of the three discussed roles. First, the mean does not make anything to be the kind of thing it is. The most plausible candidate for which the mean might play this metaphysical role is passion. But, as is clear from Aristotle's various definitions of the passions, the mean does not play this role. Consider *De Anima* I.1 where Aristotle gives a hylomorphic definition of anger. The “matter (ὕλην)” (403b1) of anger is a boiling of the blood, while the “form (εἶδος)” (403b2) is an

\(^{162}\) As is done at varying lengths by Frede (1993) and Moravcsik (1979).
appetite to return pain for pain. The mean is not mentioned. The definitions of the various passions in *Rhetoric* II likewise make no reference at all to the mean.

Second, a grasp of the mean is not necessary for knowledge in the way that a grasp of εἶδος is necessary. Indeed, as we saw, Aristotle denies that any strong cognitive grasp of the mean is possible; at most, one can simply perceive that some passion or action is intermediate. Accordingly, if there is such a thing as ethical knowledge according to Aristotle (whether there is, the reader may recall, is a point of controversy), the mean will not be one of the items of knowledge included within it.

Third, and perhaps most obviously in light of the discussions in this chapter, the mean is not the ground or basic source of goodness. As we saw, the mean is a derivative norm and, as such, could not be a basic source of goodness.

Thus the mean plays none of the three above discussed roles of εἶδος. And it does not play any of these roles because the mean is neither an εĭδοςnor an occupant of the philosophical place of εἶδος (as is the case with measure). As such, the mean is less central to philosophical understanding for Aristotle than measure is for Plato. Measure is indispensably integrated not only into the ethics but also into the metaphysics and epistemology of the *Philebus* and *Statesman*. And while the mean is prominent in his ethics, Aristotle's metaphysics and epistemology make no mention of it.

5.5.2 Plato vs. Aristotle

We should not let this relative lack of philosophical importance, however, obscure the way in which the mean is indeed important for Aristotle. It is important not because
of its *philosophical* centrality (for it does not enjoy such centrality), but because of its *practical* centrality. The mean is Aristotle's norm for action and passion; it is the norm governing how we ought to behave in any situation where passion and action might be involved. In other words, the mean ought to guide nearly everything we do, since nearly everything we do involves action and passion.\(^\text{163}\) This is the sense in which the mean is *practically* central: It is relevant to nearly every activity in our day-to-day lives.

According to Aristotle, the point of doing ethics is to live a better life. To study ethics merely for the sake of gaining knowledge is, in his view, “of no use (οὐδὲν...ὄφελος)” (*NE* II.2 1103b26-9, see also I.3 1095a5-6 and *EE* I.5 1216b21-5). It is the fact that Aristotle's primary concern with regard to ethics is practical that explains in large part why Aristotle's mean differs from Plato's measure. In light of the fact that the mean is the relevant norm for most everything we do, Aristotle clearly is concerned with the practicality of the mean. It is this practical concern that leads Aristotle to treat compliance with the mean as mere avoidance of excess and deficiency, to eschew placing the mean within a systematic science, and to incorporate certain aspects of moral relativism into his account of the mean. Consider these in order.

Aristotle's view concerning compliance with the mean seems tailored to help one so comply. Recall that, in Aristotle's view, to comply with the mean is to avoid excess and deficiency. His main discussion of such avoidance (*NE* II.8-9) eventually becomes something like an advice manual for how to avoid excess and deficiency (see especially

\(^{163}\) There are two kinds of activity it does *not* govern: our deliberative activity and our scientific activity. These two kinds of activity, however, are not nearly as common as “desiderative” activity, that is, passion and action.
1109a30-b26). He gives pragmatic, practicable advice: reflect on which excesses or
deficiencies you are prone to (this can be figured out by reflecting on what you are
pleased and pained by); then, “drag” yourself to the opposite extreme (which can be done
in part by being on “guard against” your pleasures and pains).

That there is no specification of the mean that is independent of excess and
deficiency is, perhaps, disappointing philosophically. For without an independent
specification, the mean might seem somewhat empty; it is eliminable from Aristotle's
ethics insofar as every occurrence of “the mean” could be replaced with “what is neither
excessive nor deficient.” But that the mean is perhaps philosophically disappointing in
this respect is irrelevant for practical life. Indeed, for practical life, the advice Aristotle
ends up giving in discussing compliance with the mean is arguably helpful (Aristotle, at
least, thinks it is). His discussion of such compliance focuses on avoidance of excess and
deficiency, I suggest, because his interest in ethics is ultimately practical. Compliance
with the mean is among the most important practical issues to address, given the ubiquity
of action and passion in our lives. Because of the practical importance of such
compliance, Aristotle's thoughts concerning it are tailored toward practicable ways in
which to comply.

That Aristotle's concern with the mean is primarily practical also explains why he
avoids locating the mean within a systematic science and, instead, places the mean
among things that are merely perceived. For in practical life, we do not, and indeed could
not, bring a systematic science of appropriate action and passion to bear on every
deliberation about every action and passion that we might perform or feel. Were there

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such a science, it would, for the most part, be practically useless. And since Aristotle's concern with regard to the mean is primarily a practical one, he has no interest in a science of the mean. Rather, he quite correctly notices that the practically wise person tends to simply see what it is appropriate to do or feel in a given situation and to behave accordingly. That is to say, in practical life, perception of the mean is a sufficient cognitive grasp for appropriate behavior. And since it is our practical lives with which Aristotle is primarily concerned in discussions of the mean, there is no need for him to try to find a stronger cognitive grasp of the mean than perception.

Aristotle's primarily practical concern with the mean also explains why he qualifies his absolutism. As we saw in Chapter 4, the practically wise person is attentive to all of the ethically relevant details of a situation and, in light of these details, is able to perceive what it is appropriate to do or to feel. We also saw that, among those ethically relevant details, Aristotle includes the capabilities and personal histories of the people involved in the situation. In this chapter, we saw that this inclusion draws Aristotle into company with moral relativism insofar as it results in there being possible differences between what it is right for you to do and what it is right for me to do. I suggest that the reason for this inclusion is Aristotle's greater attention to the practical nature of ethics; in particular, to the particular kinds of actions and passions which are indeed appropriate and inappropriate. When we encounter situations like that of the expert swimmer, the person who does not know how to swim, and the overboard passenger, it begins to seem clear that what it is appropriate to do varies with one's personal history and capabilities. When, that is, we pay greater attention to what in fact is appropriate or inappropriate in
all the various situations we find ourselves in, we begin to see that what is appropriate is “relative to us.”

Raphael's *School of Athens* famously depicts Plato and Aristotle standing next to each other, engaged in what appears to be a disagreement. Aristotle's hand is gesturing downward, in contrast to Plato's pointing upward. And while one might initially take the downward gesture to signal the importance Aristotle assigns to the study of nature, the copy of the *Ethics* in Aristotle's other hand suggests instead that Aristotle is stressing the importance of practical reality. This focus on practical reality—this downward gesture—is nowhere more prevalent than it is in Aristotle's discussions of the mean. But what of Plato's pointing upward?

He is clearly gesturing toward the reality that lies beyond the sensible world. He is gesturing toward those knowable objects that “really are.” In the middle dialogues, these objects are of course the Forms; in the *Philebus*, these objects are measures. His pointing toward them indicates the emphasis he places on these objects, an emphasis which is supposed to stand in contrast to Aristotle's focus on the practical. In light of the discussion of this chapter, this contrast is clear. Aristotle's concern with the mean is primarily practical, whereas Plato's concern with measure is primarily theoretical. Measure, as we have seen, makes things what they are, is the object of knowledge, and is an aspect of the Form of the Good. It is thus central to metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. It is central, in other words, to theoretical understanding. And it is with such

164 This reality is non-spatio-temporal and so does not exist anywhere in space. Thus Plato is not really “pointing toward” it, since it is nowhere to be pointed at. Nonetheless, I take Plato to be gesturing away from the sensible world down here and, thus, “toward” the intelligible realm.
understanding that Plato is most concerned, as is expressed by his pointing toward the objects of such understanding.

The *Statesman* is particularly illustrative of this emphasis on the theoretical. The stated topic of the dialogue is the art of statecraft which is eventually revealed to be a practical art.\(^\text{165}\) But unlike in the case with Aristotle, the purpose of studying such practical matters is *not* primarily so that one might improve in these practical matters. Rather, the ultimate purpose of discussing statecraft is to become “better dialecticians about all things (περὶ πάντα διαλεκτικωτέροις)” (285d5-6). The purpose, in other words, is to hone our dialectical skills so that we can come to better understand all things. Even in the midst of discussing the most practical of arts, statecraft, Plato's concern is ultimately with theoretical understanding.

“Nothing in excess.” Both Plato and Aristotle appropriate this Delphic inscription, finding within it the kernel of some important truth. In Aristotle, it is that one ought to avoid excess and deficiency in one's passions and aim at the mean. In Plato's *Philebus* and *Statesman*, the truth contained in this maxim is further reaching. It is important not only for ethics, but also for metaphysics and epistemology. For what stands in opposition to excess, namely, measure, is key to all three branches of philosophy, as we have seen.

These two different ways of appropriating the Delphic maxim reveal the very difference between these two philosophers that Raphael captured in the *School of Athens*. For the more practically minded Aristotle, “nothing in excess” is a piece of down-to-

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\(^{165}\) Statecraft is initially classified as a theoretical art in the *Statesman* (see 259c-d). However, the attempt to define the statesman that begins with this classification is ultimately unsuccessful (see 267e-8b). Eventually, the Stranger and Young Socrates change course and recognize statecraft as being a “practical activity (πράξεως)” (289d1) and a practical art. See Sayre (2006), p. 103, and 121-2.
earth, practical advice. For the more theoretically minded Plato, it is a key to the the structure of reality, to the nature of knowledge, and to the source of goodness.
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