

# Platonic Power

---

Workshop  
October 4-8, 2021

Andrew Payne  
Anna Marmodoro  
Arnaud Macé  
Carolina Araújo  
Cristina Ionescu  
Daniel Vázquez  
Edward C. Halper  
Fiona Leigh  
Francesco Fronterotta  
Francisco J. Gonzalez  
Hugh H. Benson  
Louis-André Dorion  
Mary-Louise Gill  
Melissa Lane  
Merrick Anderson  
Thomas Tuozzo  
Vasilis Politis

Δύναμις  
in the History of  
Philosophy  
Rio-Ottawa-Rome

*pragma*  
PROGRAMA DE ESTUDOS  
EM FILOSOFIA ANTIGA  
DA UFRJ



**Platonic Power** is an editorial project aiming at grouping in one volume analyses by international scholars on power (δύναμις) in different arguments of Plato's works. An online workshop will be held in October 2021 during which contributors will discuss their work in progress.

## Program

### Oct. 4 Monday

14:00 – 15:20 UTC Time

Causes as difference-makers in Plato's metaphysics

Anna Marmodoro (Durham University)

15:20 – 16:40 UTC Time

Dunamis in the Hippias Minor

Hugh H. Benson (University of Oklahoma)

17:30 – 18:50 UTC Time

La dunamis de la divinité

Louis-André Dorion (Université de Montréal)

18:50 - 20:10 UTC Time

Blending Hippocratic powers: Plato's strategy at *Phaedrus* 270c-271b.

Arnaud Macé (Université de Franche-Comté)

### Oct. 5 Tuesday

14:00 – 15:20 UTC Time

*Dunamis te politike kai philosophia: Republic* 5.473d3 and the meaning of political expertise in Plato

Melissa Lane (Princeton University)

15:20 – 16:40 UTC Time

Knowledge and Δύναμις in Plato's *Parmenides*

Mary-Louise Gill (Brown University)

16:40 – 18:00 UTC Time

The Possibility of Reflexive Powers in Plato

Francisco J. Gonzalez (University of Ottawa)

### Oct. 6 Wednesday

14:00 – 15:20 UTC Time

Plato's belief in the power of the soul to reorientate itself towards the genuine good

Vasilis Politis (Trinity College Dublin)

15:20 –16:40 UTC Time

Towards a New Understand of the Nature of the Virtues in the *Republic*

Merrick Anderson (University College London)

17:30 – 18:50 UTC Time

Action for Platonists: Power, Function, Purpose

Andrew Payne (Saint Joseph's University)

18:50 - 20:10 UTC Time

Active and Passive Powers in Plato?

Thomas Tuozzo (University of Kansas)

## Oct. 7 Thursday

14:00 – 15:20 UTC Time

The Properties of Power Relations in Plato

Daniel Vázquez (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

15:20 –16:40 UTC Time

Δύναμις and Agency in the *Sophist*

Edward C. Halper (University of Georgia)

16:40 – 18:00 UTC Time

Power of connection

Carolina Araújo (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro)

## Oct. 8 Friday

14:00 – 15:20 UTC Time

On the Respective Powers of the Ingredients of a Good Life According to Plato's *Philebus*

Cristina Ionescu (Catholic University of America)

15:20 –16:40 UTC Time

Movement, Life, Soul and Intelligence: The δύναμις of Being at *Sophist* 248e-249a and Its Reception in the History of Platonism

Francesco Fronterotta (Università di Roma, La Sapienza)

16:40 – 18:00 UTC Time

Plato's ontology of being as 'power' (*dunamis*) in the *Sophist*

Fiona Leigh (University College London)

# Abstracts

(in alphabetical order by the first name)

Andrew Payne (Saint Joseph's University)

## Action for Platonists: Power, Function, Purpose

Any satisfying account of human action must explain how desire, emotion and thought interact to allow us to carry out those movements and changes which qualify as actions. In several texts from the *Phaedrus*, *Republic* 4, and *Laws* 1 and 2, Plato describes the soul's movements and the impulses by which the soul moves a human being to act. Associated with each type of motion is a cognitive element, some belief or calculation, as well as a desire. Two conclusions will emerge from a survey of passages in these three dialogues: first, that for Plato self-movement towards the good is a necessary feature of soul, and second that the movement of the soul falls into several types, depending on the sort of end that is identified by belief or calculation: bodily pleasure, honor, or wisdom. The distinction between these different ends allows us to identify different types of motion toward these ends. The different types of motion in the soul correspond to the different parts or powers of the soul which we find in *Republic* 4.

One distinctively Platonic element in this account of action is the role played by powers and functions of the human soul in specifying the end of actions. The soul has a range of powers which are completed by functions. Human actions have ends in virtue of the fact that they successfully complete one or more of the powers of the soul. Thus we may characterize the teleological nature of human action as rooted in the soul's realization of its powers in performance of its functions. This account of the teleological character of human action allows us to draw contrasts between a Platonist account of action and the more familiar theories of action of Aristotle and Donald Davidson.

Anna Marmodoro (Durham University)

## Causes as difference-makers in Plato's metaphysics

I argue that for Plato, speaking generally, *causes are powers to make* [something in the world] *different* (*Sophist* 247e1). Plato's conception of causes as difference-makers enables him to then classify as causes both, Forms in the World of Being and things in the World of Becoming. However, although the role of both these types of entity, the Forms and sensible things, is causal, they are two thoroughly different kinds of difference-makers: Forms are difference-makers *constitutively*; while sensible things are difference-makers *efficiently*.

Arnaud Macé (Université de Franche-Comté)

## Blending Hippocratic powers: Plato's strategy at *Phaedrus* 270c-271b.

The question of determining how "Hippocratic" the method so labeled by Plato in this passage of the *Phaedrus* might be has been the source of many debates among both Plato scholars and specialists of the Hippocratic corpus (see for instance J. Jouanna, « La collection hippocratique et Platon », *Revue des Études Grecques*, vol. 90, 1977, p. 15-28 and J. Mansfeld, « Plato and the Method of Hippocrates », *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 21:4 (Winter), 1980, p. 341-362).

I would like to reopen the case and reassess Plato's strategy as he invokes Hippocrates in order to describe the dialectic method required to establish a real philosophical art of rhetoric by analogy with the method of Hippocratic medicine. The passage raises difficulties especially because it seems to blend a method of classification (first putting the object of inquiry within the framework of a bigger "whole" and looking for its different species) with a method looking for powers of acting and being acted upon.

My reading hypothesis is that Plato is mixing the approach of two different Hippocratic treatises, *Airs, waters and places* on the one hand, with its attempt at understanding the *phusis* of each patient within the wider framework of its environment, and *On Ancient Medicine*, where the *phusis* of each patient is understood as a certain power (*dunamis*) of acting and being acted upon, especially in

relation to food and drink. Deciphering Plato's reading strategy, we will get a renewed opportunity at understanding how he proposes to understand dialectic as a method inscribing a doctrine of *dunamis* within a method of classification. The key to this synthesis is the reappropriation of the Hippocratic concept of *phusis*, understood as an inner state or disposition providing each individual with a certain *power*. How will these concepts of *phusis* and *dunamis* fit with a doctrine of classification relying on forms and participation ?

Carolina Araújo (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro)

### Power of connection

This chapter claims that in Plato we find a singular concept of power, the power of connection (δύναμις τῆς κοινωνίας). It figures preeminently at *Sophist*, 254c4-6 (see also 251e8-10) as what one should know about a kind besides what it is. I shall define it as the power every individual to be part of a state of affairs. It establishes both what is contingently and what is necessarily true about such individual. By exclusion, it determines what is necessarily false about it. This power does not cause change or motion.

In the first section, I point out that the Eleatic Visitor offers the concept to the Friends of Forms (248b1-8), who mistakenly assumed it to imply motion (248c7-9). I hope to explain how the power of connection accounts for the knowledge of forms.

My second section shows that knowing the power of connection of an individual is a requisite to make divisions (253b9-c3). I shall detail how it marks identity off from difference.

My last section aims at generalizing the two previous claims. I list mentions to the power of connection in similar explanations throughout the dialogues. I shall bring evidence from passages such as *Rep.*, 477c1-d5 and 507c1-2-508a1 and *Parm.*, 133b4-135b4 as well as from *Prot.*, 349b1-c5, *Phdr.*, 270d1-7, *Pol.*, 291b2-4, *Tim.* 28a6-b1.

Cristina Ionescu (Catholic University of America)

### On the Respective Powers of the Ingredients of a Good Life According to Plato's *Philebus*

The concept of power (*dunamis*) traverses the discussion of the good life in Plato's *Philebus*:

(1) It occurs most prominently in the context of the cosmological argument (28d-30c), where we are told that the elements that make up the universe are much exceeding in power and purity the elements that make up our body (29b, 29c), and hence that cosmic *Nous* is also much exceeding our own reason in power, beauty, and purity (30a-d).

(2) It also appears with reference to *reason* (31a) and the *power of dialectic* (57e7), which is so much higher than our capacity (*dunamis*) for guesswork employed in very imprecise arts (55e7), and to the innate *power of our soul* to love the truth and to do everything for its sake (58d4).

(3) *Dunamis* is also mentioned with reference to pleasure, both in the context of criticizing the naturists for not recognizing any due power to pleasure (44c7, 44d4), and in the concluding context, where the power of pleasure makes it rank fifth among the ingredients of a good life (67a15)

(4) Most importantly, and often times missed in translations, *dunamis* is used with reference to the Good, as we are told that the power of the Good has by now found refuge for/from us in the nature of the Beautiful (64e5).

In this paper, I reflect on the metaphysical and ethical implications of discussing the goodness of a human life in terms of gradations of power that correspond to its various ingredients. I argue that the respective powers of reason and pleasure in a good life are to be understood as reflections of the fact that the Good has the highest power and that the goodness of our lives is a reflection of how the Good can be instantiated in a variety of shifting circumstances.

Daniel Vázquez (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

### The Properties of Power Relations in Plato

In many dialogues, Plato's characters assume or argue that some beings have power over others. For example, in *Ion*, *Symposium* and *Statesman*, the gods have power over us. In the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Stranger proposes that all beings have some causal power. Sometimes, in contrast, a character doubts or denies that a specific power relation holds between two groups of entities. Think, for example, on the 'greatest difficulty' in *Parmenides*, where the interlocutors discuss whether the theory of forms implies the unpalatable consequence that the Gods have no power over us. Different power relations, then, appear to have specific properties that seem to depend on the type of relata picked up by the relation. This also seems to specify the range of the relations, whether they are transitive, symmetric, direct or indirect. Moreover, certain beings can transmit their power to others, like magnets with rocks and gods with the poets in the *Ion* or the form of the Good with the sun in the *Republic*.

All this raises interesting questions. Does Plato offer a uniform and coherent conception of power relations? Do we have evidence that he developed or changed his views on this topic?

I shall argue that regardless of the status of the speech or the dialogue, Plato offers a rich but uniform conception of power relations. In this contribution, I will analyse a selection of passages to show the main type of power relations found in Plato, their common as well as their distinctive characteristics.

Edward C. Halper (University of Georgia)

### Δύναμις and Agency in the Sophist

In the *Phaedo* being (τὸ ὄν) is "always the same" in contrast with becoming, which is never the same (78d-e). In the *Parmenides* only what is in time and, thus, changing can partake of being (141e). This paper argues, first, that being in the *Sophist*, the δύναμις to do or suffer (245d-e), encompasses both notions of being, that is, both being and becoming (249c-d) and that it belongs to whatever is capable of exercising or receiving agency. This last notion is so familiar from our experience and from Newtonian physics that readers suppose that the Stranger is talking about one object's impacting another and, thereby, transforming it qualitatively or quantitatively, while itself being transformed in the process. However, in the *Phaedo* Socrates rejects the notion that a motion such as combining or dividing could cause something one to become many and endorses the "safe" explanation that (1) something is or becomes large by partaking in Largeness and that, thereby, (2) some "large in us" belongs to the thing that partakes (101c-d). It follows that for something to become large is for it to acquire or, rather, mix with something else. This paper argues, second, that the *Sophist* extends this analysis to the human soul. Since soul is affected by and affects both sensibles and intelligibles, the extension broadens the sphere of being, but it preserves its essential feature, namely, that agency amounts to mixing. It follows from this analysis that a δύναμις to act or be acted upon is a capacity to mix or to be mixed with something else. This consequence is, I think, practically the opposite of the way this passage is generally read, but it fits nicely with what follows in the dialogue. It is their partaking of being that allows not only the greatest kinds to mix, but nouns and verbs as well. Thus, being makes possible the art (=agency) of the *Sophist* as well as the godly art he imperfectly imitates. Third, the paper argues that, despite appearances, this analysis is compatible with forms that are each αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ and with Aristotle's claims that there can be no nature common to all beings and that Plato does not advance efficient causes.

Fiona Leigh (University College London)

### Plato's ontology of being as 'power' (*dunamis*) in the Sophist

The central aim of the paper is to show how the definition of being as the power to act on or be affected by another is put to work in the discussion of the 'greatest kinds' (250a-257b), in order to provide a complete account of being, i.e. one that incorporates both intelligible and sensible features of the cosmos. Building on earlier work that argues for the status of the '*dunamis* proposal' as Plato's own definition of being as whatever is capable of standing in a causal relation, I argue that the primary causal relation for Plato is formal causation, which obtains between Form and participant.

Forms and participants emerge as the fundamental kinds of being: Forms, in virtue of their capacity to act on their participants by structuring them, and participants in virtue of their actually being so structured. I then show how this primary notion of cause, given the Stranger's assumption of the reality of being, and things that change and rest, is used by the Stranger from 250a-257b to argue for the five Forms that constitute the greatest kinds, and to establish the relations of participation between (some of) them. The considerations that inform the analysis of the extent of the capacity (or *dunamis*) for communion between forms, reveals three of the greatest kinds, Being, Same and Different, to be logical forms, and the remaining two, Change and Rest, to be substantive forms – the five together, along with the definition of being as power, being sufficient to account for the entirety of the cosmos or world as we encounter it.

### Francesco Fronterotta (Università di Roma, La Sapienza) Movement, Life, Soul and Intelligence: The δύναμις of Being at Sophist 248e-249a and Its Reception in the History of Platonism

In this talk I intend to discuss the few yet quite controversial lines of *Soph.* 248e7-249a2 and some of their main theoretical and historical implications. I will gradually move from the interpretation of the passage and its context, with particular attention to its tone and general thrust, to the sense and significance of some of the problematic expressions appearing in it (especially the syntagma παντελῶς ὄν and its description as σεμνόν [καὶ ἄγιον]). Next I will briefly highlight some moments in the exegetical history of the passage – most notably the interpretations offered by Aristotle, Theophrastus and Plotinus, who certainly allude to it – and make a connection between the status of (true) being and some of its properties, which can be traced back to some form of “mobility” or “dynamicity”, a certain kind of “vitality” and strictly “intellectual” features.

### Francisco J. Gonzalez (University of Ottawa) The Possibility of Reflexive Powers in Plato

In the *Charmides* Socrates situates the problem of how a reflexive knowledge of knowledge (which is Critias' suggested definition of σωφρόσυνη) could be even possible in the context of the broader problem of how any δύναμις could have itself as its object. In addressing this broader problem he suggests that a division is required between powers that cannot possibly be related to themselves and those that can. Indeed, he himself already begins to make the division by claiming that it is simply impossible for such things as magnitudes and quantities (μεγέθη μὲν γὰρ καὶ πλήθη καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα παντάπασιν ἀδύνατον, 168e5-6) to relate to themselves (since, for example, what is larger would need to be smaller than itself and what is double would need to be half of itself), whereas in other cases it is not impossible, but simply incredible to some (τοῖς μὲν ἀπιστίαν ἂν παράσχοι, ἴσως δέ τισιν οὐ, 168e10-169a1). These other cases include the powers of seeing, hearing and knowing. It is not immediately clear what makes these latter cases more promising: if what is larger could be larger than itself only by being smaller than itself, sight could see itself only by having a color and hearing could hear itself only by being itself audible. Is it not just as impossible for these psychic powers to relate to themselves as it is for quantities and magnitudes to do so? Socrates nevertheless asserts that a great person could distinguish this second class from the first, show how it can be self-reflexive, and determine if σωφρόσυνη is included within it. While such a project is never explicitly carried out either in this dialogue or in any other, Socrates' sudden inclusion of κίνησις in the class of powers that can possibly relate to themselves (κίνησις αὐτὴ ἐαυτὴν κινεῖν, 168e9-10) shows that Plato at least believed that such a project can be carried out: after all, Plato speaks in various places of a self-moving movement and indeed defines the soul in this way (τὴν δυναμένην αὐτὴν κινεῖν κίνησιν, *Laws* 896a1-2; see also *Phaedrus* 245e3-246a1; *Timaeus* 89a1-3).<sup>1</sup> Here the contrast with Aristotle proves

---

<sup>1</sup> We also find in the *Alcibiades I*, if written by Plato, a clear description of a seeing of seeing as a parallel to self-knowledge as a knowing of knowing: “ὄφθαλμός ἄρ' εἰ μέλλει ἰδεῖν αὐτόν, εἰς ὄφθαλμόν αὐτῷ βλέπτεον, καὶ τοῦ ὀμματος εἰς ἐκείνον τὸν τόπον ἐν ᾧ τυγχάνει ἢ ὄφθαλμοῦ ἀρετὴ ἐγγιγνόμενη: ἔστι δὲ τοῦτό που ὄψις. . . . καὶ ψυχή εἰ μέλλει γινώσασθαι αὐτήν, εἰς

illuminating. Aristotle clearly considers the notion of a self-moving movement an absurdity, both as a definition of the soul and as such (ἀδύνατον δὴ τὸ αὐτὸ αὐτὸ κινεῖν πάντα κινεῖν αὐτὸ αὐτό, *Physics* 257b2), but he just as clearly does not consider absurd that an *activity* (ἐνέργεια) should be its own object, as we see in the ‘thinking of thinking’ of the unmoved mover (νοήσεως νόησις, *Metaphysics* 1074b34-5; αὐτὴ αὐτῆς ἢ νόησις, 1075a10). Indeed, to the extent that an ἐνέργεια in the strict sense is its own end, there is a sense in which every ἐνέργεια is reflexive. Furthermore, when Aristotle in *De Anima* III.2 address the same problem raised in the *Charmides*, i.e., how there could be a seeing of seeing or a hearing of hearing given that we can see only colors and hear only sounds, at least part of his solution is to claim that in the *activity* of seeing the power becomes identical with its object (425b22-24; immediately after this argument he claims that ἡ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ ἐνέργεια καὶ τῆς αἰσθήσεως ἢ αὐτὴ μὲν ἐστὶ καὶ μία, 425b26-27). This solution is not available to Plato, however, since it depends on the distinctly Aristotelian notion of ἐνέργεια. Thus we have the question the present paper seeks to address: can we find in Plato a sense in which a δύναμις as such can be reflexive? And do we find any way of making the distinction between the kind of δύναμις that can and those that cannot? And do the answers to these questions shed any light on what is at issue in the *Charmides*: the nature and possibility of that self-knowledge (as opposed to divine thinking of thinking!) practiced by Socrates?

Hugh H. Benson (University of Oklahoma)

### Dunamis in the *Hippias Minor*

*Hippias Minor* 373c6-376b7 evidently presents an argument for the paradoxical thesis that “the one who voluntarily (ἐκὼν) misses the mark and does what is shameful and unjust, ... - that is, if there is such a person - would be no other than the good man (ὁ ἀγαθός)” (376b4-6). The argument has been understood as invalid depending on equivocal uses of the words ἐκὼν or ὁ ἀγαθός, and perhaps others, cf., e.g., (Sprague 1962) and (Mulhern 1968), while most recently it has been defended as sound, (Jones and Sharma 2017). I defend a middle course – discovering the argument’s validity as a necessary condition for its soundness. In this way I leave open Socrates’ commitment to the paradoxical thesis, without endorsing Weiss’ ad hominem reading according to which Socrates offers a valid argument based on Hippias’ misguided commitment to the technê analogy - thereby distancing himself from the paradoxical thesis; (Weiss 2006).

I adopt this approach because I am less concerned with the truth or even plausibility of the paradoxical thesis than with the concept of *dunamis* on which the argument depends. The word ‘*dunamis*’ and its cognates occur only four times in the dialogue and all four in the final portion of the argument for the paradoxical thesis in various iterations of or connections with the major premise of that portion the argument: justice is necessarily either some *dunamis* or *epistêmê* or both - a premise whose acceptability, especially to Hippias has been questioned. Weiss, of course, thinks this is the premise that Hippias, but not Socrates accepts. I argue that the premise is justified by the concept of *dunamis* at stake in the epagogic argument which precedes the major premise’s introduction (373c6-375d2) and in some earlier comments connected with the first epagogic argument at 365d6-369b6.

Louis-André Dorion (Université de Montréal)

### La *dunamis* de la divinité

Il y a assez peu de passages, dans le corpus de Platon, où le terme *dunamis* est associé à la divinité (cf. *Crat.* 404e – 405a, *Banq.* 202e, *Rép.* I 364b, *Lois* X 901c, *Alc.* 103a, *Théag.* 129e). Ces passages méritent d’être étudiés plus attentivement qu’ils ne l’ont été jusqu’à maintenant et l’on doit s’efforcer de déterminer en quoi consiste, au juste, la « puissance » de la divinité. Or ce qui frappe le lecteur, lorsqu’on examine ces passages, est la diversité des puissances ou des fonctions que Platon attribue à

---

ψυχὴν αὐτὴ βλέπτεον, καὶ μάλιστα εἰς τοῦτον αὐτῆς τὸν τόπον ἐν ᾧ ἐγγίγνεται ἡ ψυχῆς ἀρετὴ, σοφία, καὶ εἰς ἄλλο ᾧ τοῦτο τύχῃανει ὁμοιον ὄν” (133b2-10). But note that here sight can see itself and knowledge can know knowledge itself *only in another*.



la divinité Est-ce à dire que la « divinité », en tant qu'entité générique, n'a pas de puissance(s) fixe(s) et déterminée(s), et que les puissances que Platon attribue au dieu varient au gré des dieux et des contextes argumentatifs où il fait mention de ces puissances? J'accorderai une attention particulière à l'expression « *dunamis tou daimoniou* », dont on compte trois occurrences (cf. *Banq.* 202e, *Alc.* 103a, *Théag.* 129e). Là encore, il n'est pas du tout évident que cette expression unique désigne la même puissance dans les trois cas et je m'efforcerai de démontrer que la puissance du *daimonion* n'est pas la puissance du signe divin de Socrate, mais bien celle de la divinité qui s'exprime par le moyen d'un signe. Il est sans doute pertinent de faire ici appel à un passage de l'*Apologie* (13) où Xénophon emploie l'expression *tên tôn theôn dunamin* dans un contexte où il est également question du *daimonion* qui s'adresse à Socrate. Enfin, l'on se demandera si la puissance que Platon reconnaît à la divinité peut être rapprochée de la puissance qu'il attribue au Bien dans la *République* (VI 509b).

Mary-Louise Gill (Brown University)

### Knowledge and Δύναμις in Plato's *Parmenides*

The final argument in the first part of Plato's *Parmenides* raises what Parmenides calls the greatest difficulty: if forms are as they were shown to be in his earlier objections to Socrates' theory of forms, someone could object that forms cannot even be known, because Socrates hasn't adequately explained participation, the relation between sensible particulars and forms. The argument itself breaks into two main parts. The first part (133a8–134c3) focuses on our human realm and argues that forms have no relation to us and we have no cognitive access to them, but only to things around us. The second part (134c4–e8) turns to the gods and their world and argues that they are not our masters and that by means of divine knowledge, though much more precise than ours, they know nothing of us. Scholars have treated the two parts of the argument as quite distinct, and it has been argued that Plato uses the word δύναμις ambiguously in the two parts. This paper will argue instead that the argument is a coherent whole, and that δύναμις is used univocally in the two parts, and indeed much as it was defined in *Republic* 5. There Plato's Socrates distinguishes knowledge from belief by comparing them to sight and hearing, capacities (δυνάμεις) distinguished from each other by two criteria: (1) the objects they are set over (sight is set over colors, hearing over sounds), and (2) what they accomplish (sight sees, hearing hears). The Greatest Difficulty in the *Parmenides* prods the youthful Socrates to confront the challenge that, unless he manages to give a coherent account of the relation between sensible things and forms, forms cannot be objects of our knowledge nor can we and things in our world be the objects of divine knowledge.

Melissa Lane (Princeton University)

### *Dunamis te politikē kai philosophia: Republic* 5.473d3 and the meaning of political expertise in Plato

In a forthcoming paper on the *Statesman*,<sup>2</sup> I articulate that dialogue's account of the *dunamis* of *politikē epistēmē* as involving the activities of ruling, caring, and weaving (*Plt.* 305e4-6). I argue there that the *Statesman* advances the Platonic account of *dunamis* by making explicit reference to the *ergon* (task) of a given *dunamis* (305c4-5, filling this out at the end of the dialogue as the producing of an interwoven fabric covering the city), *ergon* being a term missing from the *Republic* V passage which is a standard *locus classicus* for the meaning of *dunamis* in Plato.

In the present proposal, I explore the related meaning of the phrase *dunamis te politikē kai philosophia* (*Resp.* 5.473d3), which appears in the famous statement of the 'third wave' of argument which I quote here only in part:

---

<sup>2</sup> Melissa Lane, 'The *dunamis* of statecraft: naming political expertise as the power of ruling, caring, and weaving,' in Panos Dimas, Melissa Lane, and Susan Sauvé Meyer (eds) *Plato's Statesman: A Philosophical Discussion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2021).

unless philosophers reign (*basileusōsin*) in cities or those who are now called kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophize, that is, until the *dunamis* of political expertise and philosophy fall in line (*sumpesēi*)... (*Resp.* 5.473c11-d3)

The place of *dunamis* in this important statement has not to my knowledge been adequately explored.<sup>3</sup> Neither has the fact that whereas political expertise is here defined (as is also done in depth in the *Statesman*) in terms of its *dunamis*, philosophy is not: the seeming parallel is actually undone by the grammar, which makes of *dunamis te politikē* one entity linked to a separate entity (*philosophia*) by a *kai*, rather than placing *philosophia* likewise within the scope of *dunamis*. What it means, for an expertise defined (as is standard for forms of expertise in Plato) in terms of its *dunamis*, to “fall in line (*sumpesēi*)” (a verb deserving exploration in the paper in its own right) with *philosophia*, will be the subject of my paper.

Merrick Anderson (University College London)

### Towards a New Understand of the Nature of the Virtues in the *Republic*

Although much has been written about the ethical virtues in the *Republic*, there is no explicit scholarly consensus and insufficient discussion regarding the metaphysical nature of these virtues.

In this paper I make a preliminary and general case for the view that what it is to be an ethical virtue is to be a *dunamis* of a certain sort. I begin with a close reading of Socrates’ discussion of the four cardinal virtues in Book IV and show that at least two are clearly identified as *dunameis*. To make sense of this important textual evidence and develop a fuller picture of what this means, I turn to Book I’s account of the virtues. This abstract account (which concerns all virtues, not just the ethical ones) tells us that a virtue is whatever enables any subject with a particular function to accomplish that function well. I then argue – on textual and philosophical grounds – that *dunameis* are the entities in the *Republic*’s ontology that are responsible for functions being accomplished well and, therefore, that the virtues are *dunameis*. With this general understanding of virtue in hand, I return to the ethical virtues and ask what makes them distinct from the non-ethical virtues discussed earlier. I tentatively suggest that they are a special species of the genus virtue, and in particular that they are *dunameis* of the soul and soul-parts that enable the soul and its parts to accomplish the functions that directly contribute to human prospering. I end by calling attention to a number of interpretive issues that could be resolved with a clearer understanding of the metaphysical nature of the virtues and by urging further work on the topic.

Thomas Tuozzo (University of Kansas)

### Active and Passive Powers in Plato?

Aristotle analyzes (efficient) causation as the (joint) exercise of causal powers; his theory has served as a (direct or indirect) inspiration for contemporary metaphysicians who develop their own powers-based causal theories and work out the requisite underlying ontology. One of the features of Aristotle’s theory that is usually *not* accepted by contemporary thinkers is the distinction between *active* and *passive* powers (e.g., the power to heat and the power to be heated). In my contribution to the *Platonic Power* project I will investigate the role of powers in Plato’s thoughts on causation, with particular attention to the question of whether he recognizes something analogous to the Aristotelian distinction between active and passive powers.

Two Platonic texts will be central to my investigation: the *Sophist* and the *Timaeus*. In the former the Eleatic Visitor proposes “the power to affect or be affected” as a *horos* of being (247e). The meaning of this proposal has been much debated; I shall argue that the powers it mentions are indeed powers to cause / undergo changes, and that they correspond roughly to Aristotelian active and passive powers. One of the questions to be decided about this proposed *horos* of being is whether it requires that every being have both active and passive powers, or whether beings can exist which have only one such

---

<sup>3</sup> I discuss other aspects of this passage, including especially the verb *basileuō*, in Melissa Lane, *Against Anarchy and Tyranny: Plato on Rule and Office* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming 2022).

type of power. After preliminarily addressing these issues I shall turn to the *Timaeus*, to see whether the account of powers in the *Sophist* underlies the causal theory of that dialogue, and in particular whether powers function differently in the two kinds of causation that Timaeus recognizes: the “divine” cause of intellect and the “necessary” causes that “are moved by others and set still others in motion” (47e).

Vasilis Politis (Trinity College Dublin)

### Plato's belief in the power of the soul to reorientate itself towards the genuine good

Plato, in such dialogues as *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, upholds a sharp distinction and opposition between the good as we think of it pre-philosophically and the good itself as the highest object of philosophy and dialectic: not only does the former involve our relying on convention and appearances, but there is no continuous path from there to the good itself. On the contrary, this path, for Plato, requires a reorientation (*periagōgē*, *peristrophē*) of the soul. This view is integral to the Cave story, with its reference to the liberation and reorientation that we, likened to chained prisoners, need to undergo, away from our original condition, in order to move in the direction of the good. Plato goes on to explain that what enables this reorientation is a power in the soul (*tautēn tēn enousan hekastou dunamin en tē[i] psuchē[i]*, 518c4–5).

By drawing on the *Republic* and (some of) these other dialogues, I want to investigate Plato's claim that the path towards the good requires reorientation, and that this is enabled by a power (*dunamis*) in the soul. This will require taking up (some of) the following questions: Why does Plato reject the view that the path from the conventional to the real good is continuous? Does his commitment to reorientation imply that he rejects this view? What is this power in the soul? Is it reason alone? If not, what, in addition to reason, does it involve? And how is the additional element or elements related to reason? How is this power related to the power of dialectic to which Plato refers in many places? (*hē tou dialegesthai dunamis*: *Republic* 511b4, 532d8, 533a8, 537d5; *Parmenides* 135c; *Philebus* 57e6–7) What triggers the activation of this power? And the consequent reorientation? How reliable is this power, in Plato's view?