18 May 2024

ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

ARCHIVIO ISTITUZIONALE
DELLA RICERCA

Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna
Archivio istituzionale della ricerca

Perfect Virtue in Simonides' Ode to Scopas: Exploring Some Philosophical Underpinnings of the Tetragōnos Man

This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:
Perfect Virtue in Simonides' Ode to Scopas: Exploring Some Philosophical Underpinnings of the Tetragōnos Man / Elena Irrera. - In: THE CLASSICAL WORLD. - ISSN 1558-9234. - ELETTRONICO. - 115:2(2022), pp. 131-156. [10.1353/clw.2022.0001]

This version is available at: https://hdl.handle.net/11585/861304 since: 2022-02-20

Published:

DOI: http://doi.org/10.1353/clw.2022.0001

Terms of use:

Some rights reserved. The terms and conditions for the reuse of this version of the manuscript are specified in the publishing policy. For all terms of use and more information see the publisher's website.

(Article begins on next page)

This item was downloaded from IRIS Università di Bologna (https://cris.unibo.it/).
When citing, please refer to the published version.

This is the final peer-reviewed accepted manuscript of:

Irrera, Elena. "Perfect Virtue in Simonides' *Ode to Scopas*: Exploring Some Philosophical Underpinnings of the *Tetragōnos* Man." *Classical World*, vol. 115 no. 2, 2022, p. 131-156. *Project MUSE*

The final published version is available online at: **doi:10.1353/clw.2022.0001**

Rights / License:

The terms and conditions for the reuse of this version of the manuscript are specified in the publishing policy. For all terms of use and more information see the publisher's website.

This item was downloaded from IRIS Università di Bologna (https://cris.unibo.it/)

When citing, please refer to the published version.

Perfect Virtue in Simonides' *Ode to Scopas*: Exploring Some Philosophical Underpinnings of the *Tetragōnos* Man

ELENA IRRERA

ABSTRACT: In this paper I explore some philosophical underpinnings of perfect virtue in Simonides' *Ode to Scopas*, an ideal which Socrates discusses in Plato's *Protagoras*. In the first place, I argue that Socrates is right in identifying in the Simonidean poem a distinction between "being virtuous" and "becoming virtuous." Then, I contend that Simonides' perfectly virtuous man conveys not only an idea of moral rigour but also adaptability to different circumstances. Finally, I stress the precarious nature of perfect excellence in Simonides' thought and conclude that Plato means to underscore its philosophical relevance as a model of supreme ethical virtue.

KEYWORDS: Simonides, Plato, *tetragōnos*

I. Setting the Issue

Simonides' *Ode* (or *Encomium*[1]) *to Scopas*, which Socrates attempts to reconstruct and interpret in Plato's *Protagoras*, represents a telling example of how a poetical text can be turned into valuable material for philosophical reflection. Although Simonides does not

really mean to thematize philosophical questions[2], many are the theoretically problematic issues that his piece of poetry raises. One–and perhaps the most important–of them concerns the nature of human goodness and the possible forms that this ideal can acquire. It is well known that, in the *Ode to Scopas*, the poet proposes two different ways of looking at human goodness. On the one hand, he sketches out the image of a perfectly good man (ἀγαθός ἀνήρ), *square* (τετράγωνος) *in hands and feet and mind, constructed without a flaw*[3] (Fr. 542.1.3 PMG; Fr. 4 Diehl; cf. Plato, *Prot.* 339b1–3; 344a2-3); on the other hand, he introduces the figure of a "healthy" man (ὑγιὴς ἀνήρ), who is good enough simply as long as he *is not bad or too lawless*[4], [a man] who in fact knows polis-benefiting justice, that is to say, a sound man (542.34–36 *PMG*; cf. Plato, *Prot.* 346c2–9). While the first image stresses the highest conceivable peak of human excellence, the second denotes a minimum degree of behavioural decency–which is to say, a threshold below which no person can be praised or be deemed as "good."

In this essay I suggest that, through Socrates' critical voice, Plato may encourage his readers to reflect philosophically on the main theoretical underpinnings of such images of virtue. I will also assume that the model of perfect virtue suggested in the Simonidean poem can plausibly be taken as an attainable ethical target. I hope to convey the message that Simonides' poem, regardless of the contingent circumstances of its composition, expresses and reflects ethical concerns widely shared in Archaic and Classical Greece. In this respect, Simonides' image of the perfectly virtuous man could represent a suitable cultural background of for the Socratic(-Platonic) idea of virtue as a quality that differs from sheer abidance by the existing laws.

For reasons of space I shall leave aside the image of the ὑγιὴς ἀνήρ and focus on the one of absolute perfect virtue that emerges out of Simonides' verses. After a short illustration of the context of composition of the poem and the supposed goals of its author, I will proceed to discuss some critical remarks provided by the Platonic Socrates in the *Protagoras*. I will contend that Socrates (perhaps intentionally) fails to ascribe to Simonides the view that "being virtuous" (presumably in the highest sense) is an easy task, but also that he is right in (a) identifying a difference in the Simonidean poem between the concepts of "becoming good" (ἄνδρ᾽ἀγαθόν γενέσθαι) and "being virtuous" (ἐσθλὸν ἔμμεναι), and also in (b) believing that this difference proves helpful to defend Simonides from the charge of self-contradiction advanced by Protagoras in *Protagoras* 339c12–d9.

Then, I will contend that the adjective τετράγωνος employed by Simonides conveys the idea of a moral perfection which, although corruptible and amenable to the strikes of bad luck, displays its full nature in the capacity to adopt inflexible moral standards in a variety of circumstances–a capacity which, as I will show, is also stressed by Aristotle in his theorization of the authentically virtuous person (who in *Eth. Nic* I, 10.1100b16 is described as τετράγωνος). I will hypothesize that the Simonidean image of a four-square man–and the philosophical implications of the corresponding moral ideal–might have been inspired by the field of visual arts and, more specifically, by observation of the square grids employed by sculptors to shape the constitutive matter of their works. Finally, I will focus on the supposedly precarious nature of perfect excellence in Simonides' thought and suggest that his moral ideal transcends the mere sphere of military courage and somehow evokes the unity of virtue which the Platonic Socrates

throughout the whole dialogue tries to defend. In this essay I shall assume that the adjectives ἀγαθός (employed in the Simonidean poem to indicate the activity of "becoming good") and ἐσθλός[5] (which indicates "being" or "staying" virtuous) are regarded by both Simonides and the Platonic Socrates as synonyms, so that they can be used interchangeably to denote the highest moral excellence achievable by human beings[6]. Accordingly, I will use the English adjective "virtuous" interchangeably with "good."

II. The Simonidean Poem: Context of Composition and Supposed Goals

Simonides was born in Kea island, likely from an aristocratic family, and lived approximately between 556 and 468 BC. He is generally hailed as one of the most successful representatives of choral lyric poetry, a literary trend whose span runs from the poet Alcman in the archaic period (seventh century BC)–to Timotheos in the classical period (beginning of fourth century)[7]. While in the first phase of lyric poetry the poems were presented before a wide audience, in the second phase the production of lyric works was specifically tailored to the needs of individual committees (usually members of aristocratic or, more generally, political élites). The frequent occurrence in the poetic production of Simonides of encomiastic verses aimed at praising aspects of the character and behaviour of the committees led philosophers and poets of the Classical age to consider the idea that Simonides was a "mercenary of poetry," a man lacking moral sincerity who produced literary works in return for payment[8] and praised money more than wisdom.[9]

The poem, probably composed around 513–510 BC,[10] was addressed to Scopas, son of the Thessalian king Creon, a man outstanding in power and wealth and yearning for celebration.[11] The occasion and the reasons for the composition of the poem remain a matter of speculation. A possible explanation is that Simonides' insistence on the difficulty of being perfectly good represents a general warning for the king not to be too self-demanding in terms of general ethical conduct.[12] An alternative explanation is that Simonides endeavours to free Scopas from an accusation of specific acts of injustice,[13] and a third one is that Simonides would simply try to console Scopas for his blatant lack of perfect virtue.[14] Considering the political role held by Scopas, it has even been suggested that the poet aims to provide him with an ethical code that may excuse a persistent policy of oppression (Smyth 1900: 311–12).

Whichever is the most appropriate solution, it is highly likely that Simonides' references to a modest degree of virtue–at least at a surface reading–are ultimately meant to convey a positive image of Scopas, drawing attention away from his evident lack of those qualities that an outstandingly virtuous man is held to possess. It is also possible, however, that the specific and contingent occasion for which the poem had been composed leaves room for further goals. It has been suggested, for instance, that the poem remains striking for its abstraction,[15] which might imply that praise and/or a consolation of the tyrant does not exclude a more generic, didactic discussion on human goodness and the supposed variety of its expressions.

The possibility of a coexistence in the poem between the image of the "decent" man and the one of the perfectly virtuous man has sparked considerable scholarly controversy. In the first place, while some readers believe that the human ideal of the

ὑγιής man is the real object of Simonides' praise,[16] others maintain that the poet's real focus is the image of the man of outstanding excellence outlined in the first two strophes.[17] Furthermore, it is not clear whether Simonides' approach on the issue of human goodness betrays prescriptive intentions. Perhaps (in accordance with the idea that the poem has didactic nature and goals) it would not be unreasonable to suppose that Simonides simply means to *describe* two types of virtue, which is to say, that he means to introduce those types without necessarily recommending one of them as a worthier ideal of practical conduct. Another possibility is that Simonides is simply interested in *praising*[18] but not in *recommending* certain kinds of virtue (indeed, he might be willing to praise either both virtues–in which case there would be no competition between perfect and imperfect virtue). In the following sections I shall assume that, leaving aside the supposedly practical relevance placed by Simonides on the nature of the "healthy man" and the benefits that such a life entails, his poem brings to light a wide array of aspects concerning perfect virtue that are worth discussing as eminently theoretical paradigms of ethical conduct.

As far as the structure of the poem is concerned, it is generally agreed that the *Ode to Scopas* has come down to us incomplete,[19] so that it must be classed as a large fragment rather than a whole poem (Parry 1965: 297). In this paper I will rely on the traditionally accepted reconstruction of the ode and its strophical organization (i.e., the one which retains the order of quotation of the verses contained in Plato's *Protagoras*). The traditional reconstruction is reported in the passage below:

ἄνδρ᾽ἀγαθὸν μὲν ἀλαθέως γενέσθαι
χαλεπόν χερσίν τε καὶ ποσὶ καὶ νόῳ

τετράγωνον, ἄνευ ψόγου τετυγμένον·
[
[
[
[
[
[
[
–

οὐδέ μοι ἐμμελέως τὸ Πιττάκειον
νέμεται, καίτοι σοφοῦ παρὰ φωτὸς εἰ-
ρημένον·χαλεπὸν φάτ᾽ἐσθλὸν ἔμμεναι.
θεὸς ἂν μόνος τοῦτ᾽ἔχοι γέρας, ἄνδρα δ᾽οὐκ
ἔστι μὴ οὐ κακὸν ἔμμεναι,
ὃν ἂν ἀμήχανος συμφορὰ καθέλῃ
πράξας μὲν γὰρ εὖ πᾶς ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός,
κακὸς δ᾽εἰ κακῶς [
[ἐπὶ πλεῖστον δὲ καὶ ἄριστοί εἰσιν
[οὕς ἂν οἱ θεοὶ φιλῶσιν.]
—
τοὔνεκεν οὔ ποτ᾽ἐγὼ τὸ μὴ γενέσθαι
δυνατὸν διζήμενος κενεὰν ἐς ἄ-
πρακτον ἐλπίδα μοῖραν αἰῶνος βαλέω,
πανάμωμον ἄνθρωπον, εὐρυεδοῦς ὅσοι
καρπὸν αἰνύμεθα χθονός·
ἐπί θ᾽ὑμῖν εὑρὼν ἀπαγγελέω.
πάντας δ᾽ἐπαίνημι καὶ φιλέω,
ἑκὼν ὅστις ἔρδῃ
μηδὲν αἰσχρόν: ἀνάγκαι
δ᾽οὐδὲ θεοὶ μάχονται.
[
[
[οὐκ εἰμὶ φιλόψογος, ἐπεὶ ἔμοιγ᾽ἐξαρκεῖ
ὃς ἂν μὴ κακὸς ᾖ] μηδ᾽ἄγαν ἀπάλαμνος, εἰ-
δώς γ᾽ὀνησίπολιν δίκαν,
ὑγιὴς ἀνήρ: οὔ†μὴν†ἐγὼ
μωμήσομαι· τῶν γὰρ ἠλιθίων
ἀπείρων γενέθλα.
πάντα τοι καλά, τοῖσίν
τ᾽αἰσχρὰ μὴ μέμεικται.

To become a good man truly

is difficult, in hands and feet and mind

square, fashioned without fault;

[…]

nor to me is the Pittakos-thing harmoniously

circulated, although said by a wise man;

he said that it is difficult to be noble.

A god alone would have this gift. It is

not possible for a man *not* to be bad,

[a man] whom intractable disaster takes down;

Faring well, every man is good,

but bad if [faring] badly,

and for the most part best [are the men]

whom the gods love.

Therefore not ever shall I, searching for

what cannot come into being,

toss a share of my life

onto an empty impractical hope,

[the hope of] an entirely blameless man, among all of us

who reap the solidly founded earth.

But if I should find him I'll let you know.

But I praise and love all,

whoever willingly does

nothing shameful; and not even do the gods

fight with necessity.

I am not a lover of blame. For me it is fitting
that a man not be wicked nor too inept, [a man]
understanding justice [a thing] useful to the state,
a healthy man; and him I
shall not blame; you see, [there are] generations
of numberless fools;
all things are fair, [the things] with which
shameful things are not mixed.[20]

III. Understanding the Poem within the Platonic Philosophical Framework

Before undertaking a critical discussion of the ideals of perfect and less perfect virtue introduced by Simonides in his *Ode to Scopas*, it is perhaps useful to say a few words on the context in which Plato places the Simonidean fragments. In the central section of the *Protagoras*, Socrates and Protagoras are portrayed by Plato as confronting each other on the issue of virtue and its teachability within an extremely challenging theoretical battlefield: the one represented by the critical exegesis of poetic compositions. Being strongly convinced that a man's education, in its greatest part, consists in being skilled in the matter of poetic verses (*Prot*. 338e7–8), Protagoras invites his interlocutor to transpose their joint investigation on virtue to the sphere of poetry and to critically reflect on the content of a work written by Simonides. The sophist, who openly admits to be a teacher of virtue (*Prot*. 316c5–d3; 317b2–5; 318a5–8), has just accepted Socrates' suggestion to resume discussion by question and answer (after a temporary impasse due to Socrates' initial refusal and professed inability to accommodate himself to the

discursive strategies endorsed by him; cf. *Prot*. 334c7-335c6). Coming to an agreement with the philosopher with the help of the other participants in the meeting at Callias' house, Protagoras accepts to hold a leading role in the conversation by illustrating the main tenets of Simonides' poem and by asking Socrates to express his judgment on his verses. In this context, the Platonic Socrates (and, ultimately, Plato himself) considers critical engagement with poetry not only a promising path towards the truth, but also a fruitful opportunity to make poetry a valuable ally of philosophy, instead of an enemy of it.[21]

Protagoras leads his interlocutor to accept the view that a supposed logical inconsistency occurs in the text with regard to the verses contained in two different strophes. In the first strophe (*Prot*. 339b1–3; cf. fragment 37 Diehl) Simonides claims, "[O]n the one hand, for a man to become good truly is difficult, / Square in hands and feet and mind, constructed without a flaw."[26] In the second strophe (*Prot*. 339c3–5), he states: "[N]or for me is the Pittakos-view harmoniously circulated, although said by a wise man–he said that being noble is difficult." The question is: how can Simonides claim that it is hard to become a good man and, in the same poem, attack Pittacus for expressing (what appears to be) the same view without falling into a glaring inconsistency? Having been challenged by Protagoras over the supposed logical incongruity of Simonides' claims, Socrates responds by attempting a reconstruction of its content to the effect of emphasising its inherent consistency. This challenge commits him to three different exegetical attempts, the first of which is introduced by Socrates himself as a "correction" (ἐπανόρθωμα) of what (on his view) is not true in the poem. A detailed analysis of the goals and the exegetical strategies enacted by Socrates is outside of the

purposes of this paper, nor will I discuss to what extent each of the interpretations proposed by Socrates succeeds in capturing the original message of Simonides' poem. However, it is worth noting that, in the attempt to "straighten" Protagoras out (340a7–8), in the first proposed exegesis Socrates criticizes Protagoras for failing to notice that there is a neat semantic difference between γενέσθαι ἀγαθόν in the first strophe and ἔμμεναι ἐσθλός in the second one.

On Socrates' view, the apparent discrepancy between the two strophes can be explained away by resorting to the idea that being (ἔμμεναι /εἶναι) good is not the same as becoming (γενέσθαι) good. By invoking the help of Prodicus of Ceos (465–395 BC), one of Simonides' most well-known fellow citizens, and by drawing on his expertise in the field of the linguistic analysis of ethical terms, Socrates points out the following (*Prot*. 340c3–d1):

> Pittacus was not saying that it was difficult *to become* noble (ἐσθλόν), as Simonides was saying, but *to be* [noble]; and these are not the same, Protagoras, as our Prodicus here says — *to be* and *to become.* And unless *to be* and *to become* are the same thing, Simonides himself is not saying things opposite to himself.

A contradiction between the two strophes would subsist only if Pittacus endorsed the same view as Simonides on the hardships involved in *being* a good man, but Socrates contends that this is not what Pittacus meant to claim. Socrates rather believes that, while becoming virtuous is difficult, "being" virtuous (presumably by possessing a stable trait

of character) is not. As it is attested in the following lines, he quotes the poet Hesiod to articulate a substantive view on human goodness (*Prot*. 340d1–4):

> [A]nd perhaps our Prodicus here and many others would say, in accordance with Hesiod, that to become good is difficult, "that before excellence the gods have put sweat" but when [someone] has come to the height [of excellence], then it is easy to be there, though it was difficult [before] [Hes. *Op.* 289; cf. Pl. *Resp.* 364c5–d3].

Noticeably, the claim above does not capture Simonides' views, given that in the subsequent lines of his poem he does not by any means suggest that being and staying virtuous is an easy task. To the contrary, in *Prot*. 344c1–5 Simonides stresses the fact that it is impossible to preserve one's own virtue exclusively by means of one's own strength, and the Platonic Socrates might be well aware of this, intentionally opting instead for a series of manifestations of unfair and unpersuasive literary criticism (Griswold 1999: 284). Several scholars have identified a further source of misunderstanding on Socrates' part by hypothesizing that Socrates would fail to notice (either intentionally or unintentionally) an important aspect of Simonides' use of the verbs γενέσθαι and ἔμμεναι. For Simonides would treat such verbs as synonyms (both meaning "being"), and not–as Socrates himself supposedly believes–as verbs conveying respectively the meanings of "becoming" and "being."[22] Among those who believe that Simonides considers γενέσθαι and ἔμμεναι as interchangeable, some have suggested that the semantic distinction between γενέσθαι and ἔμμεναι might be purely Platonic, being introduced as a "play,"[23] or rather as a "parody" (Taylor 1976: 145).

There might be a possibility, however, that Simonides really means to highlight a distinction between “being” and “becoming” in the poem and also that such a distinction would make the contents of the two strophes consistent with each other (although it would differ from the one between an unchanging being and an unresting becoming advocated by Plato; Woodbury 1953: 150; cf. Frede 1986: 741). This possibility is suggested by Socrates’ proposal of his interpretation through the linguistic skills of Prodicus. In fact, Prodicus is a well-known expert in terminological analysis who, although being generally ranked among the most illustrious representatives of the sophistic movement, seems to be treated by Socrates himself with the respect which is typically due to friends.[24] Notably ancient Greek literature offers several evidences of a semantic distinction between “being” and “becoming.”. Giuliano (1992: 143), for instance, cites a passage of Aristophanes’ *Frogs* (1182–1188) in which the tragic poet Aeschylus reproaches Euripides for inappropriately using the verb γενέσθαι instead of εἶναι. Also, a scholium to *Iliad* 6.98 notes that Homer, in having Helenus claim that Diomedes became the mightiest of the Acheans, was right in using the verb γενέσθαι instead of εἶναι.[25]

In the case at issue, Simonides might outline a distinction between the *process* through which non-virtuous people acquire virtue (a process expressed by the verb γενέσθαι) and the *stable preservation* of virtue throughout an entire life (expressed by the verb ἔμμεναι). Indeed, the idea that virtue is difficult to achieve for Simonides emerges also from doxographic reports. As he believes, human life, being conceived of as a process or “dynamic path,” is hard and cannot be exempt from toil and misery. In a

passage from the *Dirges* of Simonides preserved by Joannes Stobaeus in his *Anthology* (98.15; fr. 26 Edmonds[26]), for instance, we read that

> [That life is short, of little account,
> and full of care]: From the Dirges of Simonides:
> For even they that were of old time and were
> born half-immortal sons of most high Gods, came
> not unto old age without toil (ἄπονον), nor without the malice
> of men nor without peril.

Difficulty is not only an ineliminable aspect of human life in general (as the passage above shows) but also a condition which accompanies the efforts made by human beings towards the achievement of the goals they set. In his *Letter of Consolation to Apollonius* (11; fr. 29 Edmonds 1922), Plutarch records that, in Simonides' view,

> [L]ittle is man's strength (κάρτος) and his cares unavailing,
> and 'tis toil upon toil (πόνος ἀμφὶ πόνῳ) for him in a life that is short;
> for all he can do, there's a death hangs over him
> that will not be escaped, in which both good men
> and bad must share alike.

Simonides does not deny that human beings possess qualities which prompt them to make efforts in spite of the inevitability of death, nor does he suggest that such efforts

(for him as well as for any other human being) are not worth pursuing. Virtue, for instance, might be achieved at some point in life, and not even death can deny that such an achievement has effectively occurred. The fact remains, however, that acquiring virtue is not an easy pursuit. A fragment of *To Autolicus* (*on Providence*) by Teophilus of Antioch reports that Simonides claimed the impossibility of achieving excellence–that is, of becoming virtuous–without the aid of the Gods and, most importantly, without experiencing harm (fr. 32 Edmonds):

> None gets excellence[27] (ἀρετὰν λάβεν) without the Gods,
> neither man nor city. He that can devise all is
> a God, and there's nothing to be got among men
> without harm[28] (ἀπήμαντον).

Although the possibility of harm and misery is not by itself a form of difficulty concerning the acquisition of virtue, resistance to the pain brought in by harm and misery is. Judging by the above mentioned doxographic fragments, Simonides is seriously concerned with the possibility of becoming virtuous. If the phrase γενέσθαι ἀγαθόν in the *Ode to Scopas* expresses a similar concept to the one denoted by the ἀρετὰν λάβεν in the fragment above, γενέσθαι indicates not a concrete actualization of a supposed potentiality for virtue (as hypothesized above) but the dynamic nature of a process which causes human beings to become virtuous and achieve something they did not possess before.

IV. Perfect Virtue and the Nature of the τετράγωνος Man

The ideal of an absolute human perfection begins to take shape since the first strophe of the poem mentioned by the Platonic Socrates:

> ἄνδρ᾽ ἀγαθὸν μὲν ἀλαθέως γενέσθαι χαλεπόν,
>
> χερσίν τε καὶ ποσὶ καὶ νόῳ τετράγωνον, ἄνευ ψόγου τετυγμένον.
>
> EXACT LOCATION OF PASSAGE HERE
>
> (*Prot*., 339b1-3).
>
> On the one hand, for a man to become good truly is difficult,
>
> Square in hands and feet and mind, constructed without a flaw.

It might be wondered which ideal of human virtue Simonides means to convey through these verses, and also which role the qualification of τετράγωνος plays in shaping such an ideal. In the first place, it ought to be noticed that Socrates reads those verses by attaching the adverb ἀλαθέως ("truly") to the adjective χαλεπόν ("difficult"), thus ruling out the possibility that Simonides is talking about the "truly good man" (which would be the case only if ἀλαθέως were referred to ἀγαθόν). While attempting to justify Simonides' employment and specific position of the expressions "on the one hand" and "truly" in the first line of the strophe, Socrates says that the poet is warning Pittacus that what is truly difficult is not *to be* good, but *to become* so (*Prot*. 343e2–344a4):

> ‘to become a good man is difficult, Pittacus, truly’— not ‘truly good’— it’s not for this that he says ‘truly,’ as though there were some who were truly good and others who were good but not truly [so]; you see, this of course would appear a simple-minded thing and not Simonides’ [thought].

Socrates’ reading of Simonides is premised on what it seems to be a suspiciously Socratic-Platonic assumption: the idea that, in order to be qualified as “good,” a man or a thing must be “truly” as such. If we attributed (as Socrates does) this idea to Simonides, the adverb “truly” before the adjective “good” would become redundant, so that the only possibility of a reasonable exegesis left to us would rely on an understanding of “truly” as a qualification of “difficult.” If goodness were to be thought exclusively as “true goodness”, no room would be left for the possibility that goodness admits of different forms and degrees. It ought to be noticed, however, that Simonides introduces in his poem two forms of goodness: one identifiable with perfect virtue and one (less demanding than the first) which is typical of the “healthy” man. Provided that the second form of goodness consists in sheer avoidance of unjust behaviour, I think we might safely suppose that Simonides, while speaking of a truly virtuous human being, does so only with reference to a man endowed with the totality and highest degree of virtue. If that is the case, the adverb “truly,” if attached to “virtuous,” would demarcate the highest goodness from the one possessed by the “healthy” man.

It cannot be excluded, though, that Socrates, although aware of the poet’s real intentions, prefers once again to propose an incorrect reading–either to mock other

exegetes of his time, who deliberately deceive people, or simply to take an opportunity for expressing distinctively Socratic(-Platonic) views, such as the idea that we can speak of goodness only with reference to the highest one, regardless of the real message that Simonides means to convey. Alternatively, it might be supposed that Plato himself, by means of his fictional characters, is trying to stimulate his readers to critically react to the interpretation supplied by Socrates by identifying inappropriate assumptions and then by providing their own (hopefully more appropriate) exegetical solutions.[29]

Whichever interpretation one adopts, there is no doubt that Simonides' use of the adjective τετράγωνος refers to a man of outstanding virtue. What is more, the adjective and the specifications added by Simonides (in intellect and feet) might be thought to interiorize a cluster of references to ideas and images (visual as well as literary) well-known in Simonides' time. Unfortunately, the real (if any) sources of inspiration of the Simonidean concept of "square man" remain a matter of speculation. By way of example, at the beginning of the twentieth century, several scholars have proposed that the Simonidean τετράγωνος man evokes the nature and function of the Pythagorean τετρακτύς.[30] In Pythagorean numerology, the τετρακτύς was the geometrical representation of the number four, being a triangle made of ten points arranged in four rows. As a mystical symbol, it played a central role in the secret worship of the Pythagoreans; more specifically, in Pythagoras' times, number patterns were used as symbols of both divine essence and moral powers.[31] A problem that this reading elicits, however, is that there is no evidence for the dissemination of the details of Pythagorean numerological doctrines at such an early date (the first extant use of the term τετρακτύς, however, occurs only in the writings of the Pythagorean Philolaus; Cornford 1974: 140,

148), which suggests that Simonides is highly unlikely to have been familiar with that doctrine.

A more convincing hypothesis, in my opinion, is the one advanced by Johnston and Mulroy. After rejecting the idea of a supposedly Pythagorean influence on the Simonidean image of the τετράγωνος man, they propose that Simonides draws on the sphere of visual arts and, more specifically, on the world of archaic sculpture (Johnston and Mulroy 2004: 6). As the authors explain, tetragonal is the shape of the grids employed by sculptors for the moulding of individual works, as well as the works themselves that get shaped through those grids. This view, however, requires further critical scrutiny.

When discussing Simonides' use of the word τετράγωνος in relation to the world of sculpture, Johnston and Mulroy suggest that the attribute τετράγωνος applies to both the planning tools, i.e., the grids, and (as is attested in Thuc. 65.27, and in Paus. 1.19.2, 1.24.3, 2.10.7, 4.33.3, 10.12.6; Johnston and Mulroy 2004: 4) the herms, statues with rectilinear shafts carried out with the aid of square grids. What is more, they also believe that the adjective τετράγωνος denotes a supposed capacity of the sculpting material to "adapt" itself to the square forms of the grids. Assuming that their hypothesis is correct, the idea of the "four-square" man worked out by Simonides, being inspired by the world of sculpture, would express the capacity of the virtuous man to behave appropriately in a variety of circumstances.

If I understand Johnston's and Mulroy's argument correctly, I see at least two problems with their reading. In the first place, they fail to notice that nowhere in the Simonidean poem is the perfectly virtuous man described as an "adaptable material." To

the contrary, such a man is, by his own agency, a *source* of virtuous actions, and is supposedly endowed with a distinctive capacity to "mould" deeds, not to passively undergo situations. In the second place, the herms, being made by handless and feetless square blocks of marble, symbolize imperfection and incompleteness. If that were the case, Simonides' τετράγωνος man, being associated to the herms, would foreshadow the idea of a failure at achieving a perfect human form, which is to say, the same idea endorsed in the second part of the *Ode to Scopas*, where he outlines a praise of imperfection at the expenses of the highest form of excellence. Even if we admitted (as I personally do) that it is reasonable to establish an analogy between the sphere of visual arts and moral virtue, what it is not acceptable is that Simonides introduces the idea of a τετράγωνος man with a view to bringing into light the worth of imperfect virtue. For the τετράγωνος, being introduced with reference to the virtue which is difficult to attain, must represent a firm ideal of absolute perfection, one in contrast to which the image of the healthy man (that is, the one proposed in the last part of the ode) can be subsequently outlined.

It is for these reasons that, assuming that Simonides has been inspired by the art of sculpture, it will be perhaps more appropriate to associate the image of the τετράγωνος man to the perfection created by the square tools through which the works of art are crafted, and not to imperfect sculptures and their purely receptive material. Similarly to a planning tool, the perfectly virtuous man will be τετράγωνος thanks to his ability to carry out virtuous works, i.e. actions, and represent a model of perfection to the eyes of those who assess the righteousness of such actions. Like square grids, which were used by painters and sculptors to plan symmetrical, well-proportioned presentations of the human

body (that is to say, a body divisible into regular, square parts),[32] the τετράγωνος man would be a regular, constant source of production of good actions.

The typical "rigidity" of people in possession of firm "measuring tools" (that is to say, in possession of the ethical values which both inform and enable a correct assessment of virtuous human agency) is not necessarily incompatible with the capacity of such people to adapt to a variety of situations. It is rather possible that a truly virtuous man will be able to apply general and firm principles of conduct in concrete situations, so that they preserve their steadfastness while imposing themselves upon a "material" represented by a variety of possible courses of actions. By so doing, a perfectly virtuous man would be able to suitably respond to particular situations by use of his principles of virtuous conduct. The principles which, if possessed by a man, make that man virtuous, can preserve their nature and, at the same time, adapt themselves to a variety of situations modelling them, just like square grids employed to give matter a certain configuration.

The hypothetical analogy between being τετράγωνος and the squareness of planning grids suggests also that the τετράγωνος man, just qua τετράγωνος, is able to evaluate human actions (both his own and those performed by others) by way of the same criteria of recommendable agency he possesses. For being able to "produce" and "mould" virtuous courses of action implies being able to evaluate them properly as fair and righteous to the highest degree. Aristotle himself might have tacitly drawn on the Simonidean image of the τετράγωνος man for his treatment of his ideal of the authentically virtuous man as a "measure" of goodness.

In Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for instance, he explains that the good person (ὁ σπουδαῖος) behaves differently from the masses, who judge as "good"

something which is not, mostly because it is pleasant and it looks like a good thing (*Eth. Nic.* III, 4.1113a32-34):

> [T]he good person judges each case rightly, and in each case the truth is manifest to him. For each state has its own conception of what is noble and pleasant, and one might say that the good person stands out a long way by seeing the truth in each case, being a sort of standard and measure of what is noble and pleasant.[33]

Elsewhere, Aristotle describes the outstandingly good person not only as "truly good" (ἀληθῶς ἀγαθός), but also as τετράγωνος. As he suggests in *Nicomachean Ethics* (I, 10.1100b19–22), a virtuous man will engage in action and contemplation in accordance with virtue and

> will bear changes of fortunes in the fairest manner (κάλλιστα) and quite suitably in every regard (πάντῃ πάντως ἐμμελῶς) insofar as he is truly good (ἀληθῶς ἀγαθός) and square without flaw (τετράγωνος).[34]

Although Aristotle acknowledges that luck can affect the human search for happiness[35], in his ethical works he is inclined to defend the idea that the virtuous man takes on responsibility for his own wellbeing and tries to preserve his own excellent disposition of character against the strikes of bad luck. To the Aristotelian virtuous man (differently from the virtuous man sketched out by Simonides), extreme difficulties will not appear as corrupting forces, but rather as precious occasions to let human virtue shine.[36] As the

passage at *Nicomachean Ethics* quoted above reports, it is just by virtue of being "truly good" and "square without flaw" that the virtuous man succeeds in experiencing the negative changes of fortune in the fairest manner in absolute (κάλλιστα) and suitably in every circumstance (πάντῃ πάντως ἐμμελῶς). Therefore, it seems that Aristotle's use of the adjective τετράγωνος is primarily meant to emphasize the capacity of the virtuous man to stand against bad fortune thanks to the steadfastness (βεβαιότης) of his excellent dispositions of character. In the passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in which the adjective is mentioned, Aristotle says that the happy man will remain as such all his life, and that he will *bear*[37] change of fortunes in the noblest way (τὰς τύχας οἴσει κάλλιστα) and suitably to each circumstance.

This said, the possibility that the same capacity might indeed reflect an authentically Simonidean view is not to be excluded a priori. Admitting that (a) Simonides truly understands "resistance" as a property of the τετράγωνος and also that (b) the τετράγωνος evokes some distinctive properties of square grids, it would be reasonable to hypothesize that the "rigidity" of the grids is what enables both a successful resistance to adversities and a certain regularity in the performance of good actions. The metaphorical[38] idea of a four-square man, besides conveying the idea of flexibility, might also communicate the image of a "steady incorruptibility", namely, the quality of those persons in possession of stable and virtuous dispositions of character. Indeed, one's ability to preserve one's "inner structure" even when faced to difficulties, supposedly coexists with the idea that the virtuous man adapts suitably to specific occasions.

V. A Corruptible Virtue. Between Literary Tradition and Philosophical Novelty

It is worth noting that Simonides provides a characterization of the ideal of authentic moral perfection by drawing on the literary imagery of his own times. By means of some conventional phrases widely used in the literature familiar to him, Simonides qualifies the ἀγαθός man as physically faultless. The datives of relation χερσί τε καὶ ποσί ("in hands and feet") – and νόῳ ("mind" or "intellect") applied to the adjective τετράγωνος (i.e. perfect, unshaken), echo for instance Pindar. Pindar, on the one hand, stresses the combination of the excellences of hands and feet as the featuring trait of his victorious athletes (*Pyth*. 10.23, χερσὶν ἢ ποδῶν ἀρετᾷ κρατήσαις) and heroic prototypes such as Erginus (*Ol*. 4.24–25) and Achilles (*Isthm*. 8.37); on the other, he uses the combination of "head" and "hand" in his descriptions of ideal manhood as embodied by men such as Aiakos (*Nem*. 8.8) and in his enumerations of great qualities (ibid. 9.39; *Pyth*. 1.42; Bowra 1934: 231–32). Notably, Simonides' verses also evoke those of the poet Timocreon, who, speaking of an unnamed man (possibly Themistocles), claims that such a man *outshines* for excellence in hands and mind.[39] The conjunction of talents forms an essential part of the archaic notion of ἀρετή, and it is most likely that the exhibition of a coexistence of intellectual and physical excellences paves the way for the idea that the Greek hero, as a truly virtuous man, made use of his wit as a guide for the use of his physical parts in view of outstanding performances in war and, more generally, in the public life.[40]

By adopting the same stylistic devices as those employed by Pindar and Timocreon, Simonides is likely to subscribe to a traditional pattern of human virtue, at

least from a purely linguistic point of view (Dickie 1978). Less clear, instead is whether the adjective τετράγωνος injects new life in this pattern. I believe that τετράγωνος, if combined with traditional attributes of physical and intellectual excellence, might contribute to shaping the image of a person endowed with the totality of virtues and not simply with military courage. In fact, this might be an aspect of virtue which Plato himself (and the Platonic Socrates, of course) would like to emphasize in the dialogue. A similar view of excellent moral virtue seems also to be endorsed by Aristotle. In his view, the truly good and τετράγωνος man is the σπουδαῖος man, i.e. a person which possesses complete ethical virtue, alongside the intellectual, prudential wisdom which is required in righteous deliberative agency[41]. What is more, the ideal of objective goodness embodied by the σπουδαῖος is for Aristotle one which finds application especially in the field of interpersonal relationships. It is not a case that, as he believes, the (virtuous) activities which make the bulk of the highest good for an individual correspond to what is supremely good for the wellbeing of the community[42].

Should we suppose, then, that Simonides' excellent man is, like the Aristotelian ὁ σπουδαῖος, a fully virtuous, and not a simply courageous person? A reasonable possibility is that the term τετράγωνος has ethical implications even in Simonides' thought, and that the physical and intellectual talents qualifying the Simonidean τετράγωνος man, rather than being exclusively employed in agonistic contexts, are involved in moral endeavours broadly understood (for instance, those respectful of civic laws and human beings). This possibility may appear sound if we consider that, in his *Ode to Scopas*, Simonides means to establish a comparison between two kinds and levels

of human virtue, i.e. the idea of the perfectly virtuous man and the one of the "healthy man" (which is to say, a man who simply avoids behaving unjustly) and that a shared basis is needed to structure a discussion on the most practicable or preferable way of being. Given that the less perfect ideal is centred on an idea of an understanding of the importance of justice and its utility for the polis, it is possible that the same kind of interest be displayed by the four-square man.

A second reason why we should take the Simonidean virtuous man in absolute as a man in possession of a wider virtue than courage is that absolute perfection is not immune to the strikes of bad luck. As Socrates explains, on Simonides' view the highest form of human goodness, i.e. the one possessed by the τετράγωνος man, is not by itself stable; neither possession nor exercise of virtue are sufficient conditions for its preservation across time. Socrates quotes the following verses of the poem: "there's no way for a man not to be bad (κακός), whom an unmanageable misfortune (ἀμήχανος συμφορὰ) takes down" (*Prot.* 344c3–4). While speaking of the corruptibility of virtue, it is plausible that Simonides is referring here–if not exclusively, at least primarily–to the virtue of the τετράγωνος man. It is remarkable that nowhere in the passage above do we find a clue for the idea that bad luck exclusively turns courageous people into cowards. As it is rather plausible to suppose, Simonides believes that bad luck has the power to deprive virtuous people of their nature as human beings *tout court*.

This established, it is not clear whether Simonides, while arguing for the impossibility for a man to preserve virtue without the aid of a good luck, goes as far as to imply that, at some point in life, a certain virtuous man is always and necessarily exposed to circumstances that compromise his own virtue. Socrates seems to believe that he does,

for he offers support to Simonides' view by pointing out that the idea of a virtue corruptible by bad luck is also affirmed by a poet[43] who once said "[S]till, a good man at one time is bad, at another time, noble" (*Prot.* 344d5–6, αὐτὰρ ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς τοτὲ μὲν κακός, ἄλλοτε δ'ἐσθλός). (which seems to imply that there is always a time in which a person is bad). At any rate, nowhere in the verses come down to us does Simonides say that a good man necessarily turns bad. For instance, Socrates quotes Simonides' claim that "[You see,] every man who has done well is good, but bad [if he has done] badly (πράξας μὲν γὰρ εὖ πᾶς ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός, κακὸς δ'εἰ κακῶς, *Prot.* 344e5–6); this implying that some degree of individual responsibility is involved, even if, on his view, human agency is inevitably affected by luck.

Hypothetically, a man who has attained (either perfect of imperfect) goodness can remain as such across the rest of his life if good chance serves virtuous individual responsibility. Simonides' speech, however, tries to persuade the reader that perfect excellence, the one achievable through painful and committed efforts, is inevitably damaged whenever a series of negative events (either caused by the will of the gods[44] or, more generally, by a series of forces escaping human control) occur. Both before and after Simonides, well-known lyric poets acknowledged the possibility that unexpectedly bad events befall good people. Just to mention a few examples, Solon (who died approximately two years before Simonides' birth) observes in his *Elegy to the Muses* that Fate (μοῖρα) brings mankind both good and ill, and that the gifts offered by the immortal gods (θεῶν ἀθανάτων) must be accepted (verses 63–64; from Plutarch's *Life of Solon*, 3). He continues:

> In all actions there is risk and no one knows, when something starts, how it is going to turn out. The man who tries to act rightly falls unawares into great and harsh calamity (ἐς μεγάλην ἄτην καὶ χαλεπὴν ἔπεσεν), while to the one who acts badly (τῷ δὲ κακῶς ἔρδοντι) the god (θεός) gives success (συντυχίην ἀγαθήν) in all things, an escape from his folly (ἔκλυσιν ἀφροσύνης)[45].

[REPLACE IN BIBLIOGRAPHY EMONDS 1931 WITH GERBER 1999 (*Greek Elegiac Poetry. From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC*. Ed. And *trans*. By Douglas E. Gerber. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, 1999)]. Along a similar line, at the beginning of the Fourteenth *Epinician*, addressed to the charioteer Cleoptolemus of Thessaly, Bacchylides (who was approximately 36 years younger than Simonides) claims that no man is honored in all respects by explaining that it is best for a man to be allotted a fair fate by god (or a "divine" power), but that misfortune crushes the ἐσθλός (presumably, the healthy and noble man, and not necessarily the morally virtuous one[46]), while good fortune raises the κακός on high (lines 1-7):

> [T]o have a good allotment from the gods [παρὰ δαί[μονος[47]] is the best thing for men. Fortune (συμφορά) can destroy even a noble man, if she comes as a grievous burden, and can make a worthless man shine on high, if she works out well.[48]

Although recognizing the power of bad luck, Simonides claims that exceedingly nefarious events inevitably end up corrupting even the most virtuous nature, and not simply turning the richest man into an unhappy, poor one. In the lines of the *Ode to Scopas* come down to us, Simonides does not specify whether a supposedly good man, once having turned out bad due to bad events, can eventually restore his original virtue under good circumstances. What matters most to him is rather the fact that not even perfect excellence is stable, and it cannot win over the power of bad circumstances, once they befall a good man.

VI. Conclusions

In this essay I have tried to explore some philosophical aspects of perfect human goodness which, as I believe, a reading of Simonides' *Ode to Scopas* allows us to bring out. I have contended that, in Plato's *Protagoras*, Socrates misinterprets Simonides' real intentions when he says that "being virtuous" is an easy task. The Socratic reading, however, might be purposely erroneous, and Plato himself might willingly encourage the reader to identify its mistaken assumptions (especially by reference to *Prot.* 344c1–8, where Simonides seems to suggest that staying virtuous for an indefinite amount of time is impossible). On the other hand, I believe that Socrates is right to stress the relevance placed by Simonides on the issue of the difficulty involved in becoming virtuous in the absolute sense. To support my view, I have relied on some textual evidence supplied by other Simonidean poems, in which virtue (presumably perfect virtue) is presented as involving painful efforts.

Then, I have attempted to show that Simonides' use of the word τετράγωνος might disclose at least two significant (and related) aspects of Archaic and Classical Greek culture: (1) the idea that the perfectly virtuous man acts beautifully and suitably to circumstances, and (2) the paradigmatic and inflexible nature of the authentically virtuous man. I have also contended that the Simonidean image of the τετράγωνος man, although emphasizing an ideal of absolute and agonistic excellence, is not limited to courage in the military field. To the contrary, it seems to be a broader moral idea, one which encompasses the totality of human virtue, and not simply either intellectual or warlike talents. This is precisely what enables Simonides to establish a reasonable comparison between the perfect excellence of the τετράγωνος man and the more modest form of civic virtue which he instead seems to praise in the second part of the poem (a form which, implies decent interpersonal behavior).

Simonides offers a treatment of perfect virtue which, at least in the *Ode to Scopas*, does not seem to be prescriptive, even more because he highlights the fragile nature of excellence and presents the virtue of the healthy man as a more recommendable one. On the one hand, it is precisely that precariousness which should lead people, all things considered, to see a less perfect and demanding form of virtue as a more practicable option. On the other hand, it is not to be excluded that the specific occasion for the composition of the poem, i.e. a praise or recommendation of a minimum degree of virtue which even the tyrant Scopas may be thought to possess, conceals a deeper (and perhaps philosophical) intention: the project of a theoretical reflection on the different forms which virtue can assume. In that case, the image of a "truly virtuous person" might be understood as a paradigm of absolute perfection by comparison to which it is easier to

better understand the image of the "healthy" person, i.e. the one who is good simply throughout respect of the law and avoidance of injustice.

As it seems, the two patterns of virtue emerging in the Simonidean poem display significant similarities with the ideals of moral goodness respectively suggested by the Platonic Socrates and by Protagoras: the one of an outstanding virtue and the one of a more modest virtue, which is generally possessed by every citizen in virtue of his capacity for political participation. This aspect, in my opinion, turns the exegetical experience carried out by Socrates into a valuable opportunity not only to reflect on both kinds of virtue, but also to explore the possibility of a perfect form of moral goodness from a Socratic(-Platonic) standpoint.

By dismissing Socrates' reading of Simonides as a useless rhetorical exercise, Socrates' interlocutors in the dialogue fail to capture his interest in the possibility of achieving and preserving the highest form of moral goodness, as well as his intention to propose it as a more valuable option than the virtue of the "healthy" man. In the following section of the *Protagoras*, however, Socrates sets aside the model of basic virtue defended by Protagoras, and he tries once again to demonstrate the unity of a supreme and perfect virtue. It is in this sense that his reading of the Simonidean ideal of the perfectly virtuous man could offer an adequate cultural background to his philosophical attempt.

University of Bologna – Department of Social and Political

elena.irrera2@unibo.it

[1] The above-mentioned piece was widely known as an "encomium" (starting from Gentili 1964: 295–96). As a well-established form of poetic composition in Greek Archaic Age, the encomium was generally used to commemorate noble deeds and regarded as the repository of the society's record of its past. Only a few scholars have expressed reservation regarding the idea that the Simonidean poem can be classed as an encomium. See for instance Bowra 1934, who considers it to be a *skolion*, i.e. as a poem sung by invited guests at banquets;cf. Dickie 1978: 21–22.

[2] This point is stressed by Parry 1965.

[3] Trans. Arieti and Barrus 2010, from which all the passages of the *Protagoras* quoted in this essay will be taken, unless differently specified. The edition of the Greek text I employ is by Denyer 2008.

[4] Arieti translates ἀπάλαμνος as "inept". I prefer Lamb's translation as "lawless" (see Lamb1967).

[5] The adjective ἐσθλός is introduced in Plato's *Prot.* as part of a saying of Pittacos (340c5; cf. 344d6, and 344e3).

[6] As Bowra 1934: 233 explains, by the end of the sixth century BC the word ἐσθλός had become a political label assumed by aristocrats (especially by poets like Theognis and Pindar) in their struggle against those who, in virtue of their success at overthrowing aristocratic leaders, tended to consider themselves ἐσθλοί simply on the ground of possession of wealth and political offices. Other scholars (Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1913: 159–91, Woodbury 1953: 152, and Donlan 1969: 74) suggest that, for Simonides, ἐσθλός denotes a virtue based on moral desert, similarly to ἀγαθός.

[7] For a detailed introduction of the nature and the scopes of lyric poetry see Del Corno1988: 76–79.

[8] See for instance Pl. [*Hipparch*.] 228c2–3, where Socrates explains that Hipparchus induced Simonides to be in continual attendance upon him by high pay and valuable presents (cf. Barnstone 2010: 118: "Like Anakreon he was one of the poets invited to Athens by Hipparchus as part of the program of cultural enrichment inaugurated under the Peisistratid tyranny"). See also Ar. *Pax* 695–701, where Trygaeus tells Hermes that Sophocles has turned into Simonides, having become so greedy that he would put to sea on a hurdle just to gain an obolus. Cf. Plut. (*Moralia*. *Saying of Kings and Commanders* 9, Loeb ed.: 91.15e), who maintains that Simonides' poetry was directed to the benefit of the whole family of the Scopads.

[9] See Arist. *Rh.* II, 16.1391a9–12.

[10] On the issue of the date of composition of the poem I refer the reader to Johnston and Mulroy 2004: 2n3.

[11] On Scopas' desire for honour and his request to Symonides see Cic. *De Or.* 2.86.352.

[12] See for instance Snell 1961: 52.

[13] See for instance Schneidewin 1885: 21–22.

[14] See for instance Parry 1965: 298, 310, who points out that the consolatory tone of the poem might have been sparked by a specific (although unknown) occasion. See also Frede 1986: 738.

[15] See Hutchinson 2001: 292. Cf. Arieti and Barrus 2010: 122–23, who explain that the abstract nature of the poem commits Hutchinson to the view that "[T]he poem was probably not written for an occasion, and thus it is probably *not* an epinician poem, which

would have been written on the occasion of an athletic victory. The poem's abstract content, he says, makes it inappropriate for either a triumph or a consolation, and he proposes that the poem was composed for a more general kind of occasion, perhaps a symposium."

[16] See for instance Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1913: 175–76, who maintains that in the first strophe of his poem Simonides is describing an older aristocratic ideal being replaced with a new, more "ethical" one. See also Adam and Adam 1983: 200, who speak of "the easy-going morality of the poem".

[17] See Dickie 1978: 23–26, according to whom Simonides endorses the older aristocratic standard, although admitting that it is too difficult to attain. A similar view is held by Woodbury 1953: 153 and Frede 1986: 738.

[18] See Carson 1992, who claims that praise (in his view, praise of at least one type of virtue), not the nature of virtue itself or its possible implications, is the main intention of the poem.

[19] Woodbury 1953: 139 suggests that the poem «was well known in the fifth century, but not wholly preserved because it was too well known to quote in full».

[20] Translation by Arieti and Barrus in Appendix C (Arieti and Barrus 2010: 119-120).

[21] On the positive contribution that poetry supposedly plays in developing philosophical concepts in Plato's dialogues see Giuliano 2005.

[22] See for instance Schütrumpf 1987 and Beresford 2008.

[23] See Gundert 1952: 71 and von Wilamowits-Mollendorf 1919: 47 quoted by Giuliano 1992: 106, footnote 4.

[24] See for instance Plato, *Hippias Major* 282c, where Socrates calls Prodicus his "friend" (ἑταῖρος).

[25] καλῶς οὐκ εἶπεν εἶναι, ἀλλὰ γενέσθαι.

[26] Unless differently specified, all the fragments of Simonides (with the exception of the *Ode to Scopas*) mentioned in this essay will be taken from Edmonds' edition (1922).

[27] Edmonds translates ἀρετὰν λάβεν as "getteth achievement".

[28] I have slightly modified Edmond's translation, who renders ἀπήμαντον with "with no toil".

[29] This idea is suggested in Griswold 1999, especially at pp. 302-303.

[30] See Smyth (1900), Bowra (1934), and Parry (1965).

[31] See Johnston and Mulroy 2004: 2. See also Bowra 1934: 232, who quotes the view reported by the Byzantine philosopher Proclus (412–485 AD). In his comment on Euclides' *Elements* (*Ad Eucl. Elem.* 48 G), Proclus claims that the ancient Pythagorean notion of the number "four", τὸ τετράγωνον was identified as justice (See DK 58B40).

[32] See Johnston and Mulroy 2004: 3. As the authors make reference to the work of Ernest Mackay, who described and illustrated the remnants of grid systems on the walls of tombs starting in the eighteenth dynasty in Thebes (1550–1300 BC).

[33] Cf. *Eth. Nic.* X, 6.1176a15–18.

[34] I adopt Johnston and Mulroy's translation of the passage (2004).

[35] On the one hand, Aristotle he says that to entrust happiness to chance would be quite inappropriate (*Eth. Nic.* I, 9.1099b19–20). On the other hand, by making reference to the story of Priam of Troy, he claims that there are many vicissitudes in life, all sorts of

chance things might happen, and even the most successful can meet with great misfortunes in old age (*Eth. Nic.* I, 9.1100a4–8).

[36] See *Eth. Nic.* I, 10.1100b23–27. After saying that bad events oppress and spoil what is blessed, bringing distress and hindering many activities, Aristotle claims: "Nevertheless, even in their midst what is noble shines through, when a person calmly bears many great misfortunes, not through insensibility, but by being well bred and great-soule" (tr. Crisp 2004, from which all the passages of the *Nicomachean Ethics* quoted in this passage will be taken, unless differently specified).

[37] My Italics.

[38] Aristotle himself says that the image of the four-square man is metaphorical in *Rh.* III.11.1411b27.

[39] *PMG* 727; Plut. *Them.* 21; Bowra 1934: 231.

[40] On this aspect see Adkins 1972, especially chapters III, VIII and IX.

[41] In *Eth. Nic.* Aristotle suggests that no one can be said to possess practical wisdom (φρόνησις) without being "good", i.e. without having ethical virtue (*Eth. Nic.* VI, 12.1144a36–b1) and vice versa (*Eth. Nic.* VI, 13.1144b30–32; cf. *Eth. Nic.* VI, 13.1144b20–22).

[42] See for instance *Eth. Nic.* I, 2.1094b9-10, where Aristotle says that the human good is the same for one individual and for the polis (i.e. a community of human beings), although the good of the polis is said to be "finer" and "more godlike".

[43] Arieti and Barrus claim that it is an unknown poet (2010: 86, footnote 195), whereas Reale 2000: 858n96 identifies him with Bianthes of Pyrene.

[44] In fragment 53 (ed. Edmonds), for instance, Simonides suggests that "it is easy for a God to steal the wits of a man."

[45] Translation by Gerber 1999. It has frequently been noticed that these lines, if taken at a face value, appear incompatible with the faith in a divine justice which Solon seems to profess in the first part of the poem. For a detailed treatment of the various scholarly positions on the subject I refer the reader to Noussia Fantuzzi 2010: 133–36.

[46] As Burnett 1985: 51 explains, Bacchylides says that, in an ideal world, a man has a fine portion of what the gods give when his birth and hereditary position are high. In the real world, however, even noblemen, like any other, are subject to chance.

[47] As Liddell-Scott-Jones reports under the entry δαίμων, although a possible translation for that word is "gods,, these are generally understood in terms of a generic super-human, divine power, unlike θεός which denotes a "god in person".

[48] Translated by D.A. Svarlien 1991.