Laches is the Socratic dialogue devoted to courage. Like the rest of the Socratic dialogues, it ends in aporia - Socrates and his companions do not discover a satisfactory definition of courage. This inability to define courage could be taken as supporting Socrates' belief in the unity of the virtues, although the arguments within *Laches* itself may not necessarily suggest this. In addition to *Laches*, there is a significant discussion of courage in *Protagoras.* Both of these dialogues will be used to pursue the answer to the question: Is courage the same thing as wisdom?

In *Laches*, Socrates prods Laches until he produces this definition of courage: "a kind of endurance of the soul." (192c) Socrates' objection to this is that not all endurance is courageous. Foolish endurance cannot be courageous, since it is not noble (and all courage is noble.) A modified version of the definition is then considered: not just any endurance, but *wise* endurance. Still there is a problem, says Socrates, because we have not qualified wise in *what*. For example, is a miser courageous in spending his money wisely? Laches agrees that surely this is not so. What about a soldier who is outmatched and continues to fight? Socrates suggests that he is braver than a soldier who continues to fight knowing that he has the advantage. Yet, the outmatched soldier is more foolish to endure than the soldier who has the advantage.

This particular example is problematic, because not too long ago we agreed that foolish endurance is not courage. Laches may have forgotten this (for he agrees with Socrates' point), but we, the readers, need not. Either we must withdraw our objection to the original definition, that not all endurance is courageous (if we maintain, as Socrates now does, that even foolish endurance can be courageous), or we must say that foolish endurance is *not* courageous, thereby eliminating this objection to the definition of *wise* endurance. Still, the example of those who

endure wisely in small things (like the miser) is enough to show that wise endurance is too broad a definition.

Laches having exhausted his store of ideas on the subject, Socrates turns to Nicias, who suggests the definition: "courage is the knowledge of that which inspires fear or confidence in war, or in anything." (195a) Laches asks if this includes people like doctors, who know what is and is not to be feared in matters of disease and injury. No, certainly not, says Nicias. Doctors know the facts of disease and health, and what may result from various treatments, but they do not know what result is truly *good*. "Do you imagine, laches, that he knows whether health or illness is the more terrible to a man? Had not many a man better never get up from a sickbed? I should like to know whether you think that life is always better than death." (195d) This is a vital distinction between *technical* and *ethical* knowledge; that is, knowing about a specific topic vs. having good judgment in any given situation.

This distinction may offer clarity in Socrates' earlier discussion with Laches, in which he equivocates between these two types of knowledge. Endurance is not foolish merely because the agent has less knowledge of the action in question. Endurance is only foolish if one performs the action for foolish reasons. If you dive into a well to save a child despite having no knowledge of well-diving, it is not foolish if this is the only way to save the child. If you dive into a well to save your favorite bucket, that is foolhardy. Thus, we may be able to say that the soldier who endures in battle despite the odds is not necessarily more foolish; perhaps he is making the conscious choice to protect his country and home despite the great risk. If both soldiers are equally wise, we could then turn to the risks involved to explain why we feel that the outmatched soldier is braver. It is because he is risking more, and has more to fear.

Returning to Nicias' definition: Socrates launches into an extended refutation of this idea that courage is the knowledge of what is to be feared and what is to be hoped for. We fear future evils and we hope for future goods, says Socrates, and so you are saying that courage is the "science" of future evils and goods. But all sciences have knowledge of their subjects without regard to time; so in fact courage must be the science of evil and good at all times, of *all* evil and good. Anyone who possessed such knowledge would have all the virtues, knowing at all times what is the proper course of action. Thus, based upon this definition, we are forced to conclude that courage is all virtues.

This is the only direct suggestion in this dialogue of Socrates' belief in the unity of the virtues. Unfortunately it is grounded in an argument that lacks cogency. It is certainly not the case that all sciences have knowledge regardless of time; for example, the "science" of soothsayers mentioned earlier deals explicitly with the future. Historians deal exclusively with the past. Socrates' argument by no means undermines the definition of courage as the knowledge of what is to be feared and hoped for, because we have no valid reason to believe that this knowledge must be without reference to time. Despite this, it must be noted that Nicias' definition supports the idea that courage and wisdom are the same thing (which makes it all the more odd that Socrates' objects to it).

Keeping this whole discussion in mine, let us turn to *Protagoras*. Protagoras defines courage as "confident, yes, and keen to meet dangers from which most men shrink with fear." (349e) Socrates then protests in a way related to his earlier objection against Laches' definition, by pointing out that some confidence is foolish, and that this cannot be courageous. Protagoras agrees. At this point Socrates takes a different tact than he did in *Laches*, and instead of trying to further undermine their definition, he attempts to pursue the idea that courage is a type of

wisdom. If those who are foolishly confident are mad, while those who are wisely confident are courageous, then "it is their knowledge that must be courage." (350c)

Protagoras objects to Socrates' reasoning. First, he points out that he never said all confidence was courageous, only that all courage was confident; so really, the idea of foolish confidence has no bearing on the discussion. Even if we admit that those who are wisely confident are more courageous than those who are foolishly confident, this does not lead to the conclusion that courage and wisdom are the same thing. Protagoras gives a parallel argument concerning strength and wisdom.

> First of all you would proceed to ask me whether the strong are powerful… Next, whether those who know how to wrestle are more powerful than those who do not… and it would then be open to you to say… that on my own admission wisdom is physical strength. But here again I nowhere admit that the powerful are strong, only that the strong are powerful… Similarly in our present discussion, I deny that confidence and courage are the same… Confidence, like power, may be born of skill, or equally of madness or passion, but courage is a matter of nature and the proper nurture of the soul. (350e)

It is not clear to me what exactly Protagoras means here. Certainly he is right to maintain that while all courage may be confident, this does not imply that all confidence is courage. But it is not obvious what bearing this has on Socrates' argument that courage is a type of wisdom. Protagoras is right that many factors may give rise to confidence, but the question is not what gives rise to confidence but what gives rise to courage. Socrates' point then remains, that since only wise confidence can ever be called courage, and foolish confidence cannot, courage results from wisdom.

Much like a Socratic dialogue, this paper will end in aporia. Based upon the arguments in *Laches* and *Protagoras* there is no way to decide whether or not courage is reducible to wisdom. The problem is primarily one of oversimplification. This is a result of Greek ideas about virtues - that there are only five of them, for example. There is a lot of equivocation in the use of words like knowledge and wisdom, which further obscures the discussion. These considerations concerning courage and wisdom are more interesting as a commentary on the thinking of Socrates, Plato, and Ancient Greeks in general than as a rigorous philosophical analysis.