It has long been recognised that there are inconsistencies or 'tensions' in Plato's account of the virtues in the tripartite state and individual (Republic IV) and scholars have settled for an interpretation of this passage which would most easily fit most of the evidence. This traditional version has recently come under attacks which have been formidable but, I hope to show, misplaced. The problem arises from the fact that Plato holds two different views of the relation between the virtues of the individual and those of the state. In the first place, state and individual are related by analogy; the respective virtues of each are formed by parallel arrangements and dispositions among their three parts. Thus, for example, a state is wise if its ruling class possesses the knowledge which will enable it to take thought for the best possible conduct of the state as a whole in its internal and external relations (428d 1-3); analogously, the individual is wise if his ruling part rules with wisdom and foresight on behalf of the entire soul (441e 4-5). Secondly, the character which the state possesses is directly derived from the character of its individual members or citizens. 'Is it not impossible for us to avoid admitting this much, that the same forms and characters are to be found in each one of us that are in the state? They could not get there from any other source.' (435e 1-3). Thus, if Egypt is a money-loving state, it is because individual Egyptians are money-lovers (436a 1-3).

The difficulty is in reconciling the second 'derivative' relation with the first, analogous one. The traditional explanation has been to say that the character of the state is derived from the existence of parallel virtues in certain of the classes. While all classes are just and temperate and thus give the state its justice and temperance, the collective wisdom of the state is derived from the personal wisdom of the guardians and its collective courage from the personal courage of the auxiliaries.

2 Temperance has sometimes been thought to be restricted to the third class. This, as Skemp points out (op. cit. p. 36), is a mistake (see 432a 2).
The guardians are the only people who are wise, though it is allowed that the auxiliaries do not have a monopoly of courage; this virtue they share with the guardians who were originally chosen from amongst their number. Only the guardians, therefore, possess all four virtues; the auxiliaries have three, the rest two. Thus, the analogy between the virtues of the ideal state and the ideal citizen applies only to those citizens who are members of the ruling class.

Against this conclusion, Professors Demos and Skemp have argued that in the ideal state every citizen, and not just the rulers, will be ideally virtuous. Now, if the virtues of every individual are an analogous microcosm of the state’s, it follows that all citizens are the same in respect of virtue and so the virtues of the state cannot be caused by differences of virtue between the various classes. To meet this difficulty, Professor Demos posits two complete sets of personal virtues. One set are internal and are possessed by all citizens of the ideal state; the other set are 'civic' virtues, exercised in the 'political-technical' sphere, and vary between classes. But this will not work. There is no evidence for two sets of virtues; indeed, Plato clearly thinks there is only one (435e 2-3). Demos takes 443b-444a as suggesting a distinction between personal justice in one’s external relations and justice in one’s inner life, whereas, in fact, the contrast is between personal justice tout court and the collective justice of the state. Professor Skemp, realising these objections, offers a weakened version of Demos’ interpretation. He says that all the virtues are shared by all the classes but with different 'civic effects’. This is certainly more economical. Instead of two sets of personal virtues, to fit the analogous and derivative relations respectively, we now have virtues and effects. But the difficulty has been merely minimised, not overcome. How do similar virtues give rise to different effects? Why should one lot of ‘wisdom effects’ be singled out as the personal wisdom which makes the state wise? Plato and Skemp are silent. Clearly this is a compromise solution, to be accepted only if the assumption on which it is based, that the members of all classes are all equally virtuous, is itself unavoidable. But is it?

In the first place, to deny the moral superiority of the guardians is to distort the whole point of the Republic. That Plato believes that the best men should rule is undisputed. What is at issue is whether the

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3 See 429b5-6.
4 375a-376d, 412b-413b, cf. 486b1-4.