

Plethon Sings the Virtues: The Organization of the Specific Virtues in the *Law*

Bruce MacLennan

This article was originally published in

Platonism and its Heritage, *Selected Papers from the 19th Annual Conference of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies*

Edited by John F. Finamore, Ioanna Patsioti and Giannis Satamatellos

ISBN 978 1 898910 985

Published in 2023 by The Prometheus Trust, Chepstow, UK.

This article is published under the terms of **Creative Commons Licence BY 4.0**

Attribution —You must give appropriate credit, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

No additional restrictions —You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

The Prometheus Trust is a registered UK charity (no. 299648)

www.prometheustrust.co.uk

Plethon Sings the Virtues: The Organization of the Specific Virtues in the *Laws*

Bruce MacLennan

The Specific Virtues

In the early fifteenth century Georgios Gemistos Plethon's *Book of Laws* (Νόμων συγγραφή) described a complete Neopagan theology and religious practice based in Neoplatonism. Although much of the book was burned by Georgios Scholarios, the future Patriarch Gennadios II of the Orthodox Church, among the surviving parts are 27 hymns, each exactly nine hexameters long, for various liturgical purposes.¹ These comprise two perennial hymns, thirteen monthly hymns, six sacred hymns (for the monthly holy days), and six daily hymns, which are sung on the six secular days of each week of his liturgical calendar. In another work, his treatise *On Virtues* (Περὶ ἀρετῶν), Plethon describes a system of twelve specific virtues in three ranks within the cardinal virtues (thus defining a *scala virtutum*), as shown in this table:²

Prudence (Φρόνησις)	Justice (Δικαιοσύνη)	Fortitude (Ἀνδρεία)	Self-control (Σωφροσύνη)
religiousness (θεοσέβεια)	piety (όσιότης)	high spirit (εὐψυχία)	humility (μετριότης)
science (φυσική)	citizenship (πολιτεία)	nobility (γενναιότης)	liberality (ἐλευθεριότης)
good council (εὐβουλία)	goodness (χρηστότης)	gentleness (πραότης)	orderliness (κοσμιότης)

¹ Plethon, *Laws* III.35 [202–226]. Citations to the *Laws* are by book and chapter number in Plethon's text and by page and (sometimes) line number in the Alexandre (1858) edition. Translations are my own.

² Based on Plethon, *Virtues*, B.14 [14–15]. Citations to *Virtues* are by section and by page number and (sometimes) line number in the Tambrun-Krasker (1987) edition. Translations are my own.

Although he does not state a general ranking principle, it appears the highest rank addresses divine matters, the middle addresses the world, and the lowest addresses the individual. He also presents the order in which a person should acquire the specific virtues: generally, although not entirely systematically, from the lowest rank of the lowest cardinal virtue (self-control) to the highest rank of the highest cardinal virtue (prudence). In this chapter, I will demonstrate and explore the systematic correlation between the daily hymns and the specific virtues, and how the very systematic organization of the daily hymns in the later *Book of Laws* (TAQ 1452) confirms an apparent correction of the ranks of two specific virtues, which are exchanged in the earlier essay *On Virtues* (TAQ 1439).

In his *Laws* Plethon says his ethics is based on Zoroaster and Plato, but also the Stoics.³ Munitiz (2015) describes it as “teaching distilled from the Platonic dialogues, though with strong borrowings from the Stoic tradition.” The Stoic influence is especially evident in the context of their common deterministic cosmology. Alexidze (2017) observes that Plethon’s ethics is more suited to the *vita activa* than that of most Neoplatonists, such as Porphyry, which favor the *vita contemplativa*. This is in accord with Plethon’s goal in the *Laws*: a reform of society, including religion, based on Platonic philosophy. Thus his *scala virtutum* is not a ladder we climb to free ourselves from ordinary embodied life and to ascend toward an immaterial unitary One. Rather, it is a hierarchy of norms to help us live our embodied lives and better fulfill our essential function in the cosmos: to unite its immortal and mortal parts for the harmony of the All, in accord with Zeus’ Providence and immutable Fate, as Plethon tells us.⁴

I. Specific Virtues in the Daily Hymns

Although Plethon does not say so explicitly, it is apparent that the six daily hymns are devoted to the specific virtues ranked within each of the three lower cardinal virtues, that is, justice, self-control, and fortitude. According to Plethon these pertain to practical matters rather than to contemplation, which is the focus of prudence. The first three hymns address them in the order justice, self-control, fortitude, and the last

³ Alexandre (1858) 2. For a comprehensive discussion of his *Virtues*, see Tambrun-Krasker (1987).

⁴ *Laws* III.31 [122], III.34 [140, 180, 182, 184, 194, 196]. Add. MS 5424, foll. 119v, 120v, 121v.

three in the reverse order (fortitude, self-control, justice). In Plethon's sacred calendar, the secular days are numbered in ascending or descending order in alternating weeks, and therefore the daily hymns are sung in reversed order every other week. Because of the symmetric order in which the hymns address the lower virtues, in every week the virtues are addressed in the same order:

justice, self-control, fortitude, fortitude, self-control, justice.

It is also apparent that, although the specific virtues are not named in these hymns, each of the daily hymns addresses the three specific virtues belonging to a single cardinal virtue, devoting three verses to each. The first three hymns pray that we not fall short of the specific virtues, and each tristich begins *Μή*. For example, the third daily hymn, focused on fortitude, goes as follows:

Laws III.35 [224.1–11]

Hymn 24: Third Daily Hymn, Sung on Fourth Day.

O gods, don't let those accidents that sometimes strike
my mortal part destroy me, knowing that my soul's
immortal, separate from the mortal, and divine.
And do not let the troubles that with people come
disturb me while I exercise my liberty,
nor for some evil notion be in thrall to need.
And when it comes to me to bring about some good,
don't let me spare my mortal part, but let me care
for my immortal soul to always be the best.⁵

The last three three daily hymns state the specific virtues as beatitudes, in which each tristich begins *Ὁλβιος, ὄς*. For example, the fourth daily hymn, which also addresses fortitude, is as follows:

⁵ Ὕμνος τέσσαρες καὶ εἰκοστὸς, ἐφημερίων τρίτος, ἡμέρα ἀδόμενος τετάρτη. Μή με καθαιροῖεν τύχαι, ᾧ θεοὶ, θνητὸν ἐμεῖο / Καθδᾶλλουσαι ἐκάστοτε, εἰδότα ἀθάνατόν μοι / Τὴν ψυχὴν, θνητοῖο δὲ χωριστὴν, ἰδὲ θεῖον. / Μὴ ὅσα ἀνθρώπων πάρα τρηχέ' ἀπαντᾶ, τουτέων / Μὴ με ταραττοὶ μηδὲν, ἐλευθερίην ἀσκεῦντα, / Μηδὲ κακῆ ἰδέη γε χρείοσι δουλεύοντα. / Μὴ, καλοῦ ποτε εἵνεκα πρῆξιαι ἕς γ' ἐμὲ ἦκον, / Θνητοῦ ἐμοῦ πεφιδόιμην, ἀλλ' ὡς ἀθάνατός μοι / Ἡ γε ψυχὴ ἐοῦσα ἄριστα ἔχοι, μέλοι αἰέν.

Laws III.35 [224.12–22]**Hymn 25: Fourth Daily Hymn, Sung on the Fifth Day.**

Blest they who always care for their immortal soul
so that it be the best, and for their mortal part
are not concerned, not sparing it if it's required.

Blest they who when some mortals, acting thoughtlessly,
attack, will never be enslaved to them, but hold
their soul with firmness, rising o'er that wickedness.

Blest they who do not grieve with bitter heart the luck
that's heaven-sent, but bear it easily and mark
alone as good what lies in their immortal part.⁶

The hymns for justice and self-control address the specific virtues in either ascending or descending rank, either ascending in the first group of three hymns and descending in the second, or vice versa. In terms of the classification in *Virtues*, the hymns addressing fortitude (quoted above) are an exception, since they neither ascend nor descend through the ranks of specific virtues. Based on the content and tight structure of these hymns and on Plethon's explanation of the specific virtues I conjecture a correction to his classification of them in his essay *On Virtues*, exchanging the ranks of two of the specific virtues within fortitude (boldface in preceding table). The correction is *a priori* likely, based on the definitions he gives of the somewhat arbitrary technical terms he uses for the specific virtues, but is supported also by the tight structure of the daily hymns. In addition the correction is supported by a passage in Plethon's "Morning Address to the Gods" in the *Laws*, in which he prays that the gods grant us these virtues, which are described but not named.⁷ In this passage he goes through the cardinal virtues in the order prudence, fortitude, self-control, justice (the order of the last three agreeing with the hymns), but in each of them he prays for the specific virtues in the same order as they are addressed in the daily hymns. I propose that the correct organization is that reflected in the

⁶ Ὕμνος πέντε καὶ εἰκοστὸς, ἐφημερίων τέταρτος, ἡμέρα ἀδόμενος πέμπτη. Ὀλβιος, ᾧ κεν εἴς ψυχῆς μέλη ἀθανάτιο / Αἰὲν, ὅπως ὡς καλλίστη τελέθῃ, θνητοῦ δὲ / Μὴ πάνυ τοι κήδηται, ἦν δὲ δέη, καὶ ἀφειδέη. / Ὀλβιος, ὅς κε βροτῶν τοῖς τι πλήσσουσιν ἑαυτὸν / Μήποτε δουλοῖ ἀγνωμονέουσιν· ἔχων δὲ ψυχὴν / Ἄτρεμέ' αὐτὸς, κείνων τῆς κακῆς περιεΐη. / Ὀλβιος, ὅς κ' ἐπὶ δαιμονίησι τύχησι μὴ αὐτὸς / Ψυχὴν ἀλγέη πικροτέρησι, φέρη δὲ τε ρεῖα, / Ἐν τῷ αὐτέου. ἀθανάτῳ [μόνον] ἐσθλὸν ὀρίζων.

⁷ *Laws* III.34 [144–152].

Laws (in both the daily hymns and “Morning Address”), superceding the slightly different organization in the *Virtues*.

With the proposed correction each of the daily hymns either ascends or descends through the ranks of its specific virtues. Furthermore, the daily hymns are arranged symmetrically: descending justice, ascending self-control, descending fortitude, ascending fortitude, descending self-control, ascending justice.

II. The Ranks of Πραότης and Γενναιότης

The specific virtues in question are πραότης, which we might translate “gentleness,” and γενναιότης, perhaps “nobility.” These names, however, are somewhat vague, as I will explain, and so we need to see how Plethon describes these virtues. It must be said that the names he gives to his specific virtues often seem to correspond only loosely to their meanings. Brigitte Tambrun-Krasker (following J.W. Taylor) suggests Plethon might have been inspired to use them by the *Phaedo* (116c), wherein the executioner tells Socrates he is the γενναιότατον και πρώτατον—the noblest and gentlest—of those he has ever executed.⁸ As here, Plethon sometimes uses idiosyncratic technical terms for the specific virtues, and some of them appear to be based on notable phrases in Plato’s dialogues.⁹ As he does with his metaphysical principles in the *Laws* (i.e., defining them philosophically and then giving them traditional names: Zeus, Hera, etc.), so also he defines the virtues philosophically and then chooses names inspired by Plato’s dialogues.¹⁰

Be that as it may, we can look at how Plethon defines the relevant virtues. According to him, self-control is the virtue that pertains to things that are in our control, and fortitude is the virtue pertaining to what is not in our control; he defines fortitude as “the disposition of the soul to remain firm before the violent afflictions of life.”¹¹ He further observes that we suffer some of these difficulties voluntarily for the sake of something better, but others are involuntary and are caused either by

⁸ Tambrun-Krasker (1987) 70, 73, citing Taylor (1920) 92–3.

⁹ Tambrun-Krasker (1987) 73.

¹⁰ Tambrun-Krasker (1987) 73–74.

¹¹ And fortitude is this part of virtue, the disposition of the soul unmoved in the violent afflictions of life. (Καὶ ἔστι καὶ τοῦτο ἀνδρεία τὸ μόνιμον ἀρετῆς, ἕξις ψυχῆς ἀκίνητος ὑπὸ τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον βιαιῶν παθημάτων.) *Virtues* A.2 [2.20–2].

other people or by the gods (thus, by a double division, defining three specific virtues):

Virtues A.3 [4.12–23]

Fortitude is defined as impassiveness in the violent affections of life. Some of them we ourselves take on voluntarily for the sake of greater goods, as when we choose suffering or risk or something else without which we could not get our needs. But others are involuntary and come to those not expecting them, and of these some again are, simply said, from the god who arranges the universe, such as are called misfortunes, but others again are from people, like the bad disposition of certain people toward us, and their ill temper. For each there is a specific part of fortitude that preserves steadfastness and imperturbability from what is worse: **nobility** for what is chosen, but for the involuntary, **high spirit** for what is from the god and **gentleness** for what is from people.¹²

Endurance in the face of these acts of the gods is the highest specific virtue within fortitude, which Plethon calls *εὐψυχία*, which might be translated high spirit, goodness of soul, or boldness.¹³ With this excellence we understand that, as Plethon colorfully puts it, “we are neither a bag of flesh nor a bucket of blood nor anything else of the kind, but instead we are rational, immortal souls.”¹⁴ We should take care of our souls and not be so concerned with material matters. In agreement, the first tristich of Daily Hymn 3 is:

¹² Ἀνδρεία δὲ ἐπεὶ ἐστὶν ἀπάθεια ὑπὸ τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον βιαίων παθημάτων, τούτων δὲ τὰ μὲν αὐτοῖς που ἐθελονταὶ ὑφιστάμεθα, μειζόνων ἔνεκα ἀγαθῶν, ὡς ὅταν πόνους ἢ κινδύνους ἢ τι ἄλλο προσαιρώμεθα, ὧν ἄνευ μὴ οἶόν τε εἶη τῶν δεόντων του τυχεῖν, τὰ δ' ἀκούσια, καὶ οὐ προσδεχομένοις ἔπεισι, τούτων τε αὖ τὰ μὲν ὡς ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν, παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τε καὶ τὸ ὅλον τοῦτο διατάττοντος, οἷαίπερ αἱ καλούμεναι ξυμφοραὶ, τὰ δ' αὖ παρ' ἀνθρώπων, οἷαίπερ αἱ παρ' ἐνίων πρὸς ἡμᾶς δυσκολίαι τε καὶ δυσχέρειαι, εἶη ἂν καὶ ἐφ' ἐκάστῳ τούτων ἰδίον τι μόριον ἀνδρείας, σῶζον τὸ ἀκίνητον καὶ ἀπαθὲς ὑπὸ τῶν χειρόνων ἐκάστων, γενναιότης μὲν ἐπὶ τοῖς αἰρετοῖς, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖς ἀκουσίοις, εὐψυχία μὲν ἐπὶ τοῖς παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ, πραότης δὲ ἐπὶ τοῖς παρ' ἀνθρώπων.

¹³ Or strong spirit (Munitiz), *force d'âme* (Tambrun-Krasker), *forza d'animo* (Jerenis).

¹⁴ *Virtues B.4* [7.25–8.1].

Laws III.35 [224.3–5]

O gods, don't let those accidents that sometimes strike my mortal part destroy me, knowing that my soul's immortal, separate from the mortal, and divine.¹⁵

Similarly, the third tristich of Daily Hymn 4 is:

Laws III.35 [224.9–11]

Blest they who do not grieve with bitter heart the luck that's heaven-sent, but bear it easily and mark alone as good what lies in their immortal part.¹⁶

The specific virtue pertaining to the difficulties caused by other people is called *πραότης*, that is, gentleness, mildness, affability, or serenity:¹⁷

Virtues B.7 [10.5–14]

Certainly, after these it is fitting that **gentleness** comes, for us who know that we are the masters of ourselves and arrange our affairs according to both innate and acquired opinions, but are certainly not the masters of other souls, who also must follow their own thinking, since it is impossible to do anything other than what appears to be good. Therefore we must show them that it will be no less advantageous for them who choose what we think, and so long as we are unable, we ourselves, who could not persuade them, must be blamed rather than them; therefore it is good that we, who are trained, not get angry with people.¹⁸

¹⁵ Greek text in note 5.

¹⁶ Greek text in note 6.

¹⁷ Or *mansuétude* (Tambrun-Krasker), *mansuetudine* (Jerenis).\

¹⁸ Καὶ μὲν δὴ καὶ ἡ πραότης ἐπὶ τούτοις ἀρμόττοι ἂν μετελθεῖν, προσμεμαθηκόσιν ὡς ἡμῶν μὲν αὐτῶν αὐτοὶ κύριοι κατὰ τὰς ἐνούσας τε καὶ ἐγγιγνομένας δόξας διατιθέειν τὰ ἡμέτερον αὐτῶν, ψυχῶν δὲ ἀλλοτριῶν οὐ πᾶν τοι κύριοι, ἀλλ' ἀνάγκη καὶ ἐκείναις αὐτῶν αὐταῖς δοκοῦντι ἔπεσθαι, καὶ ἀμήχανον ἄλλο τι δρᾶν παρὰ τὸ φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν. Ἡ οὖν ἡμῖν ἐνδεικτέον κάκεινοις ὡς καὶ αὐτοῖς οὐδὲν τι ἥττον τὰ ἡμῖν δοκοῦντα ἐλομένοις συνοίσει, ἢ ἕως ἂν τοῦτο ἀδύνατοι ὦμεν, ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς μᾶλλον τοῦ μὴ οἴους τε εἶναι σφᾶς πείθειν ἢ ἐκείνους τῶν τοιούτων μεμπτέον, ὥστε καὶ ταύτη καλῶς ἂν ἡμῖν ἔχειν μεμελετηκόσι μὴ χαλεπαίνειν ἀνθρώποις.

We should understand that other people act as they think is best, and so we should try to persuade them if we want them to act differently and take responsibility if we fail to do so. By understanding that everyone seeks their own good, we can bear better the difficulties that arise from our interactions. This agrees well with the middle tristich of Daily Hymn 3:

Laws III.35 [224.14–16]

And do not let the troubles that with people come
disturb me while I exercise my liberty,
nor for some evil notion be in thrall to need.¹⁹

It also agrees with the middle tristich in Daily Hymn 4:

Laws III.35 [224.20–22]

Blest they who when some mortals, acting thoughtlessly,
attack, will never be enslaved to them, but hold
their soul with firmness, rising o'er that wickedness.²⁰

Similarly, in the “Morning Address to the Gods,” Plethon prays:

Laws III.34 [146.20–24]

Let us never have any resentment against people, who after all are
born to act as they themselves think, and who cannot affect us if
we know how to turn our attention to ourselves and know to desire
the most appropriate benefits.²¹

Finally, the specific virtue by which we face difficulties voluntarily assumed is called *γενναϊότης*, that is, nobility of mind or valor.²²

Virtues B.3 [7.1–5]

After orderliness, perhaps we should seek nobility. As it teaches
us to endure pains and to choose dangers for ourselves, preparing

¹⁹ Greek text in note 5.

²⁰ Greek text in note 6.

²¹ Μὴ ἀνθρώπων χαλεπήναιμεν, τῷ μὲν ἑαυτῷ δοκοῦντι ἔπεσθαι πεφυκῶτι, ἡμῶν δ' οὐχ ἀπτομένῳ, ἦν αὐτοὶ ἅμα μὲν ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς προσέχειν, ἅμα δὲ τοῖς οἰκειοτάτοις ἡμῶν αὐτῶν ἀγαθοῖς ἀγαπᾶν εἰδῶμεν.

²² Or *noblesse* (Tambrun-Krasker), *nobiltà* (Jerenis).

us for many of our duties, this virtue renders us very effective in action and most capable of other virtues.²³

Plethon argues that trying to avoid all pain is as futile as seeking every pleasure; we live better if we are willing to suffer physically for the sake of the greater goods that pertain to our immortal soul.²⁴ This is expressed in the third tristich of Daily Hymn 3:

Laws III.35 [224.6–8]

And when it comes to me to bring about some good,
don't let me spare my mortal part, but let me care
for my immortal soul to always be the best.²⁵

Likewise, the first tristich of Daily Hymn 4 is:

Laws III.35 [224.17–19]

Blest they who always care for their immortal soul
so that it be the best, and for their mortal part
are not concerned, not sparing it if it's required.²⁶

In the “Morning Address to the Gods” we read:

Laws III.34 [146.24–148.2]

Let us not recoil before what is noble and dear to you [gods], in a matter coming down from you, being hindered by fear either of the labor, or of losing some of what is not really our own, or of disapproval from ignorant people.²⁷

From the foregoing passages in the *Laws* and the order in which they address the specific virtues, it would seem that the highest specific

²³ Μετὰ δὲ κοσμιότητα ἢ γενναιότητα ποῦ ἂν εἶη μετιτέα. Πόνους τε γὰρ ἐγκαρτερεῖν, καὶ κινδύνους ἑαυτοῖς αἰρεῖσθαι, πρὸς πολλὰ τῶν δεόντων παρασκευάζουσα αὐτὴ ἢ ἀρετὴ, δυνατωτάτους τε πράττειν παρέχεται, καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἄλλας ἀρετὰς ἰκανωτάτους ἀποφαίνει.

²⁴ *Virtues* B.3 [7.1–5].

²⁵ Greek text in note 5.

²⁶ Greek text in note 6.

²⁷ Μὴ τῶν τινος καλῶν καὶ ὑμῖν φίλων πράξεως καθηκούσης ἀποσταῖμεν, δέει ἂν καλυθέντες πόνων, ἢ τῶν τινος ἡμῖν μὴ ἐς ἅπαν οἰκείων ἀποβολῆς, ἢ τῆς παρὰ τῶν γε οὐκ ἐμφρόνων ἂν ἀνθρώπων ἀδοξίας.

virtue, εὐψυχία or high spirit, pertains to the divine and the highest rank of fortitude; that πραότης or gentleness is a social virtue and belongs on the second rank; and that γενναιότης or nobility pertains to the individual and is on the lowest rank, but that is not how Plethon arranges them in *Virtues*. In a list that arranges all the specific virtues within each cardinal virtue from high to low, he lists the parts of fortitude as high spirit, nobility, and gentleness.²⁸ One might conjecture that he confused the two (since the names of the specific virtues are somewhat arbitrary), but the accompanying diagram in the manuscripts implies this same organization.²⁹ Therefore, I think we must suppose that in *Virtues* Plethon intended gentleness to be on the lowest rank and nobility to be in the middle, contrary to the apparent organization of the *Laws*.

IV. The Ranking Principle

Since Plethon never defines the three ranks explicitly, it might be objected that there is no general principle behind them beyond the intention to divide each cardinal virtue into three parts, and therefore there is no mis-ranking to correct. Against this objection, I will briefly review the specific virtues within the other cardinal virtues to show there is in fact a ranking principle, namely that the highest rank pertains to divine matters, the middle applies to the material world, and the lowest rank pertains to the individual.

Because the human soul is fundamentally rational, the highest cardinal virtue is prudence, which Plethon defines as “that speculative

²⁸ The generic virtues are prudence, justice, fortitude, and self-control, and the specific virtues are, within prudence: religiousness, science, and good counsel; within justice: piety, citizenship, goodness; within fortitude: high spirit, nobility, gentleness; within self-control: humility, liberality, orderliness. (Τῶν ἀρετῶν γενικαὶ μὲν, φρόνησις, δικαιοσύνη, ἀνδρεία, σωφροσύνη, εἰδικαὶ δέ, τῇ μὲν φρονήσει ὑποδιαίρουμναι, θεοσέβεια, φυσική, εὐβουλία, τῇ δὲ δικαιοσύνη, ὀσιότης, πολιτεία, χρηστότης, τῇ δὲ ἀνδρεία, εὐψυχία, γενναιότης, πραότης, τῇ δὲ σωφροσύνη, μετριότης, ἐλευθεριότης, κοσμιότης.) *Virtues* B.14 [14.17–21].

²⁹ *Virtues* B.14 [15]. Plethon specifies the order in which the specific virtues should be acquired (*Virtues* B.14 [15.8–10]), but this progression does not consistently ascend the ranks, and so we can’t infer from it anything about the relative rank of nobility and gentleness. Tambrun-Krasker (1987) 84 discerns a pattern in the acquisition order of the lower two cardinal virtues, which is imperfectly repeated in the upper two. Moreover my suggested reranking does not improve the correspondence. I think this imperfect correspondence is coincidental and it is more likely the acquisition order is based on pragmatic and pedagogical considerations, as Plethon himself suggests (*Virtues* B.1–14 [5–15]).

disposition of the soul that considers each being as it is.”³⁰ Plethon calls its highest species θεοσέβεια or religiousness, which is reverence and respect for the gods. The middle rank is φυσική or natural science, which is the exercise of reason to understand the created world. The lowest rank is εὐβουλία, that is good council or sound judgment, which refers to prudence and wisdom with respect to individual behavior.

The next highest cardinal virtue is justice, which governs our proper relations to other things. Its highest species is ὁσιότης, that is, piety or holiness, which relates to our worship of the gods in both public and private. The middle species is πολιτεία, which is the civic virtue, relating to citizenship, public life, and political conduct and action: to our relations to other mortal beings. The lowest species is χρηστότης, which is goodness of mind and character, probity, kindness, or honesty, which are individual character traits.

Finally, the most basic cardinal virtue is self-control, which pertains to needs and desires that are in our control in terms of both quantity and quality in the three categories of reputation, wealth, and pleasure. Its highest species is called μετριότης, which may be translated humility, right degree, moderation, or elegance; the connection to the divine is not so obvious, except that he says that we should value only the opinion of good people and never forget that we are mortals.³¹ The middle species is ἐλευθεριότης, liberality or generosity, which is self-control with respect to material wealth, especially in our interactions with other people. The lowest species of self-control is κοσμιότης, which we may translate orderliness, modesty, propriety, decorum, seemliness, dignity, and so forth, which is the individual disposition to require as little as possible.

In summary, we see that for each of the cardinal virtues the highest species relates to divine matters, the middle rank pertains to the material world and society, and the lowest rank addresses the individual, with the sole exception of the specific virtues under fortitude—gentleness and nobility—which appear to be exchanged in *Virtues* relative to their order in the third and fourth daily hymns and the “Morning Address” in *Laws*. What are we to make of the discrepancy? Although they are not definitively dated, it appears that the treatise *On Virtues* is the earlier work, for it was in existence by 1439, and the *Book of Laws* is probably later; although it wasn’t discovered until Plethon died in 1452, and

³⁰ ἔξις ψυχῆς θεωρητικῆ τῶν ὄντων, ἧπέρ ἐστιν ἕκαστα. *Virtues* A.2 [4.3–4].

³¹ *Virtues* B.5 [9].

probably existed for some years prior.³² The highly systematic structure of the daily hymns shows that Plethon was very conscious of the organization of his specific virtues, and so we may conjecture that he decided to revise his ranking of these two virtues. If Scholarios had not burned the three chapters Plethon devoted to fortitude, including one on its species, we might know for sure.³³

Conclusions

In his treatise *On Virtues* Plethon divides each of the cardinal virtues into three specific virtues. Although he states a principle of division for each cardinal virtue, he does not state a general principle of division that applies to all of them. Nevertheless, from his definitions of the cardinal and specific virtues it is apparent that the specific virtues are arranged in three ranks: the highest pertains to divine matters, the middle pertains to the human world, and the lowest pertains to the individual. There is one exception to this organization, in that the two lowest species of fortitude—gentleness and nobility—appear to be exchanged. In his apparently later *Book of Laws*, Plethon provides six daily hymns that go through the specific virtues within justice, self-control, and fortitude in a very systematic and symmetric order that does not exchange gentleness and nobility. Therefore I conjecture that the hymns in the *Book of Laws* reflect a revision of the analysis in the earlier essay *On Virtues*. Whatever reasons Plethon might have had for ordering these two specific virtues as he did in his treatise *On Virtues*, it appears that by the time he came to compose his daily hymns (and his “Morning Address to the Gods”) he had decided on a more consistent ranking of the specific virtues within the cardinal virtues. This would be consistent with his overall rational approach to the definition of virtue, which characterizes his religion as a whole.

³² On the dating of *Virtues* see Munitiz (2015).

³³ The destroyed chapters were *Laws* III.7–9.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Plethon. *Laws*. Alexandre, C. 1858. *Pléthon: Traité des Lois*, tr. A. Pellissier. Paris: Firmin Didot frères, 2–260.

Additional Manuscript 5424, folios 100r–145v. British Library.

Accessed May 11, 2021.

http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_5424_f100r.

Plethon. *Virtues*. Tambrun-Krasker, B. 1987. Γεώργιος Γεμιστός Πλήθων, Περὶ ἀρετῶν, *Traité des vertus, édition critique avec introduction, traduction et commentaire* (Corpus Philosophorum Medii Aevi 3), Leiden & New York, Brill, 1–15.

Secondary Sources

Alexidze, L. 2017. “Plethon on the Grades of Virtues: Back to Plato via Neoplatonism?” in *Byzantine Perspectives on Neoplatonism*, ed. S. Mariev. Berlin: de Gruyter, 221–242.

Gemisto Pletone, G. 1999. *Trattato delle Virtù*. Tr. & intr. Pavlos Jerenis. Rimini: Rafaelli Editore.

Munitiz, J. A. 2015. “An Approach to Plethon: The *De Virtutibus* Revisited.” *Estudios Bizantinos*, Vol. 3, 123–134.

Taylor, J. W. 1920. “Georgius Gemistus Pletho as a Moral Philosopher.” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 51, 84–110.