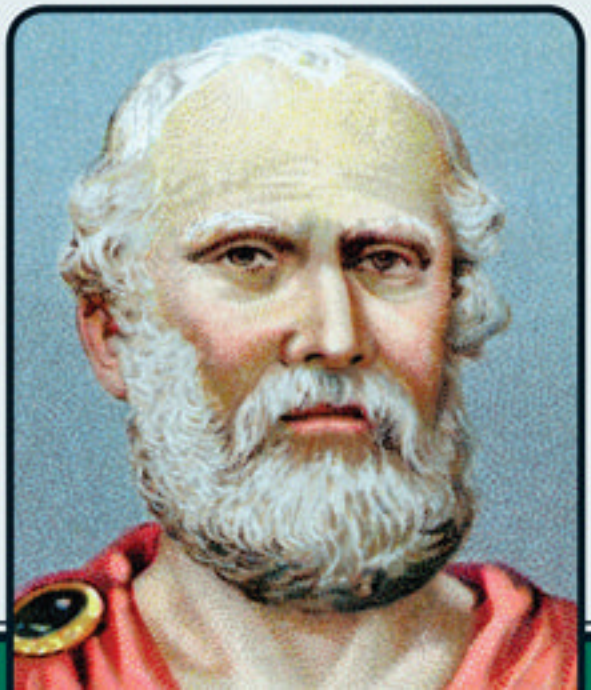
PLATO'S *PROTAGORAS*

TRANSLATION, COMMENTARY, AND APPENDICES

Translated and Edited by

James A. Arieti and Roger M. Barrus



Plato's *Protagoras*

Plato's *Protagoras*

Translation, Commentary, and Appendices

Translated and Edited by
James A. Arieti and Roger M. Barrus

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, INC.
Lanham • Boulder • New York • Toronto • Plymouth, UK

Published by Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowmanlittlefield.com

Estover Road, Plymouth PL6 7PY, United Kingdom

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Plato.
[Protagoras. English]
Plato's Protagoras : translation, commentary, and appendices / translated and edited by James A. Arieti and Roger M. Barrus.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 978-1-4422-0133-0 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-4422-0493-5 (electronic)
1. Protagoras. 2. Sophists (Greek philosophy). 3. Virtue. I. Arieti, James A. II. Barrus, Roger Milton. III. Title.
B382.A5A74 2010
170—dc22 2009051857

∞™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

For Richard C. McClintock, who for more than thirty years has lent his rich talents to our work.

Contents

Foreword

Plato's *Protagoras* is a wild, splashy, frolic—unpredictable, name-dropping, microscopically pedantic, galactically expansive—populated by a slew of characters who are naïve, pompous, vain, ostentatious, and even serious. Plato's prose is spectacularly suited to his subject matter—playfully crammed with puns, equivocations, sleights of sense, and burlesqued allusions to the classical literature of his day. The challenges to translators are profound. How can they clear the hurdle of two and a half thousand years to convey the substance and spirit of this far off conversation?

We have done our best and have still produced a volume twice as long as the original. How could this have happened? We have held the text itself as sacrosanct. Our method has been that of the Masoretes, those biblical scribes who elucidated the sacred text without altering it by establishing a noninvasive system of diacritical marks around the Hebrew letters to provide aid to readers. Like those scholars, we have put our helps *around* the text, in the form of an introduction to establish the scene, notes to gloss or interpret points in the dialogue, and appendices to illustrate the physical setting of the dialogue, to explain our choices of translations of particularly vexing terms, to review some of the recent interpretations of the poem by Simonides that Socrates and Protagoras wrangle over, and to show how Aristotle's *On Sophistical Refutations* might throw light on the *Protagoras*. In addition, we provide a glossary of major terms in the dialogue. We have tried to be as faithful as possible to the text of Plato himself: we have kept pagan references pagan, and where we have taken the liberty to attempt translating a pun with

a pun, we have indicated in a note the linguistic knavery by means of which the feat was accomplished.

Our work has benefited from others. We should like to thank Brett Chonko, a student at Hampden-Sydney, who read a draft of the translation and offered numerous useful suggestions. We should like also to thank Richard C. McClintock, who produced the illustration of Callias' house. We wish to express our gratitude to Hampden-Sydney College for its support through summer grants. Finally, we should like to recognize our wives, Barbara Arieti and Diane Barrus, who patiently encouraged and endured their naïve, pompous, vain, ostentatious, and occasionally serious husbands.

James A. Arieti
Roger M. Barrus
Hampden-Sydney, Virginia

Introduction

Background of the *Protagoras*: The Sophistic and Pre-Socratic Movements

In our post-Enlightenment world—when science has actually delivered on much of its promise and, with a set of remarkably coherent insights in mathematics, biology, and physics,[1] has produced a theoretical framework to unlock the mysteries of evolution, disease, planetary motion, tides, and the noise made by crickets, and, in addition, has generated the technology of medicines, rockets to the moon, computers, and weed killers that target particular plants—it is only by an exercise of our imagination that we conjure up an antiquity in which the actual causes of most things were not known, when almost everything that happened, especially in the natural world,[2] was mysterious and attributable to the will or caprice of a myriad of divinities.

In the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E., intelligent observers began to note the regularity of the heavens, the patterns in human diseases, and the correspondence between form and function in the structure of living things. To these individuals it appeared that the more they examined a phenomenon, the more it yielded understandable rules. They discovered that some events,

1. This collaboration of theories from different subject areas produced what E. O. Wilson has called "consilience."

2. Human impulses too were attributed to an inducement from the gods, what E. R. Dodds calls "psychic intervention" (*The Greeks and the Irrational* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964], 1–18 and *passim*).

when thought about in a systematic way, could even be predicted. These observers also discovered that they could create plausible explanations of how things worked, if they made assumptions about the nature of matter and the principles that affect it. The act of thinking itself seemed to obey rules, like the laws of identity and non-contradiction. The successes that resulted from contemplating the world by reason—prediction of eclipses, recognition of patterns in the progress of disease, appreciation of excellent literary passages and formulation of rules of composition—all impelled the confident belief that nature and human affairs could be understood and manipulated by *logos*. Then came the Persian Wars, and all Greece observed how the power of human reason in a small force could overwhelm the irrational management of vastly larger forces.[3] This victory was the aphrodisiac that made the Greek world fall in love, so to speak, with the possibilities of reason and inspired an enthusiastic self-conscious application of logic to numerous areas of human life, with the goal of practical, worldly success.

This confident belief in the power of reason, as we have said, was first expressed prior to the Persian Wars, in the attempts that were later credited as the beginnings of philosophy.[4] These first philosophers applied their reasoning to questions about the material universe, the nature of motion and change, the characteristics of the gods, and human nature. What distinguished these thinkers from poets was a significant absence of mythology; that is, the philosophers presumed that the nature of the cosmos could be explained on its own terms, without anthropomorphic storytelling, and their principal goal was *understanding how the world worked*. Later, after the Persian Wars, the intellectual elite applied their rational faculties to satisfying their desires for health, money, and political power, and now their principal goal was *achieving practical results*. All these men—philosophers, medical writers, rhetoricians, and others[5]—shared a belief in the power of reason. For the first group, whom later historians of philosophy called Pre-Socratics, the *emphasis*

3. We refer here, of course, to what Herodotus, probably typical of the fifth-century Greek world, saw as the calculating genius of Themistocles defeating the superstitious lunacy of the Persians.

4. Tradition attributes the first use of the term *philosophy* to Pythagoras (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 8.8; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 5.8). Modern historians of philosophy lump together the work of the earliest of its practitioners, men such as Thales, Anaximenes, Parmenides, Heraclitus, Xenophanes, Anaxagoras, and so forth, as *Pre-Socratic philosophers*—a name that dignifies certain thinkers by granting them the lofty title of *philosopher*, linking them to the revered Socrates, and implying that this group is not to be confused with individuals to whom the name *sophists* is applied. Cicero himself makes this identity in his *Tusculan Disputations* (5.4.10), when he says that Socrates had brought philosophy down from the sky and placed it in the cities and houses of men.

5. Among the others were those who thought about mathematics, city planning, art, logic, drama, architecture, politics, and all the other areas of human life that were subjected to study in the fifth century.

was on the understanding;[6] for the second group, whom these historians called Sophists, the emphasis was on the practical results. But both shared the same essence—a belief in the power of reason—and those who share the same essence are, essentially, the same thing.

In this volume we have elected to avoid the term *Sophist* and to translate the Greek word *sophistes* as "reasoner." We do so from several motives: first, to be faithful to the root of the word, *sophia*, which means "wisdom" and "knowledge" and is resplendently positive in its connotations (the men who called themselves *sophistai* were using an honorable term the root of which expressed a quality human beings share with the divine); second, to avoid using an appellation that, because of Plato's disparaging use, has for two and a half millennia been an insult; third, to employ a term that would apply to Hippias' pronouncements on the universe and mathematics, to Prodicus' subtle semantic distinctions in the meaning of synonyms, and to the work of those called Pre-Socratics; and fourth, to use a name that allows for the ironies that Plato clearly wishes to draw.

In the *Clouds* of Aristophanes, the character of Socrates seems a confused jumble combining features of what the historians distinguish as those of Pre-Socratics and Sophists. But to the average Philippos of the fifth century B.C.E., this comedic Socrates would have been what we have termed a "reasoner": a person who believes that the earth, the heavens, the leaps of fleas, and human actions and discourse can be understood, shaped, and exploited by reasoning. This understanding, shaping, and exploiting is education, the enterprise of Socrates' Think-shop in the *Clouds*, of Plato's Academy, of Aristotle's Lyceum, and of all the other schools of philosophy and rhetoric.

It seems (alas) a human quality that those people who share a general view will very often differ among themselves on the particulars of the view and on the exact means of carrying out their shared vision. To outsiders, these differences might very well seem minor variations, but to those with the same general views the differences frequently generate enormously hostile feelings. As Edward Gibbon observes in his history on the decline and fall of Rome, among the early Christians who shared a single basic faith there arose countless sects with different nuances of belief, each confident that it alone understood the exact truth necessary for salvation. As he puts it, "Even the imperceptible sect of the Rogations could affirm, without a blush, that, when Christ should descend to judge the earth, he would find his true religion

6. We need to stress our word *emphasis*. Aristotle's famous anecdote about how Thales used his understanding of the world to corner the market on olive oil and become rich shows the *practical* value of knowledge (*Politics* 1259a7–22).

preserved only in a few nameless villages of the Caesarean Mauritania."[7] In the same way, in the fifth century B.C.E., the disciples of reason saw their differences as more of a cause for *division* than was their like-mindedness a cause for *unity*, and from the start the earlier thinkers sought to correct each other's assertions by diktat.[8] Later, what came to be known as schools of philosophy and rhetoric developed a deep contempt for one another. The mordant wit of Plato as it attacks his rivals is every bit as devastating as that of Alexander Pope casting his wit on Colley Cibber.

Let us extend our comparison of the devotees of reason in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. and the devotees of Christ in the first three centuries C.E. When various sects of Christians denounced one another to the pagan Roman magistrates, the magistrates were unable to see the microscopic causes of complaint and considered all Christians to be cut from the same loathsome cloth.[9] In exactly this way, the average Athenian whom Aristophanes was trying to amuse could not have distinguished the followers of Leucippus from those of Democritus (a distinction that modern historians of philosophy are also hard-pressed to make) or those of Protagoras from those of Gorgias or Prodicus or Hippias. To the average Athenian, they were all "reasoners." Nor probably did Aristophanes himself draw the subtle distinctions; hence in the *Clouds* he presented a comic mishmash of the stereotypical "man of reason."

There was, in truth, much to mock. In the time of Protagoras and Plato, reason could actually understand very few causes in the natural world in a way that would qualify as knowledge. The Greeks, indeed, had a powerful sense of what knowledge is: Logic and mathematics provided a standard by which one could ascertain when he knew and when he did not know.[10] Cicero says that in the New Academy, to which he belonged, very few mat-

---

7. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Knopf, 1993), ch. 21, vol. 2, 300.

8. Despite their brilliance, the early reasoners, men like Thales, Anaximenes, and Anaxagoras, expounded theories that were no more than educated independent guesses about the principles of nature. Where a part of one thinker's theory proved unsatisfactory, a later thinker would come along with a new theory that would try to address the unsatisfactory part of the earlier theory while being oblivious to the inadequacies of his own replacement theory. See James A. Arieti and Patrick A. Wilson, *The Scientific and the Divine: Conflict and Reconciliation from Ancient Greece to the Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 87–88.

9. As Gibbon writes (*Decline and Fall*, ch. 14, vol. 2, 14): "A Pagan magistrate, who possessed neither leisure nor abilities to discern the almost imperceptible line which divides the orthodox faith from heretical pravity, might easily have imagined that their mutual animosity had extorted the discovery of their common guilt." Substitute *philosophy* for "orthodox faith" and *sophist* for "heretical pravity," and we have the situation of fourth- and fifth-century Socratics and reasoners.

10. Aristotle formalizes the Greek view of knowledge in the *Posterior Analytics*. For an account of ancient views of science and a summary of Aristotle's conclusions, see Arieti and Wilson, *The Scientific and the Divine*, 43–44 and 49–55.

ters were considered known.[11] The best that ancient reasoners could do was construct what seemed plausible, coherent models—such as we find, perhaps in humorous form, in Plato's *Timaeus*.[12] But these imaginative models, based on no experimental verification at all, were open to numerous criticisms, and their adherents had to exercise a great deal of faith in subscribing to the models. In debunking the various systems of ancient science in *On the Nature of the Gods*, Cicero shows that while much was speculated about, little was actually demonstrated in either Epicureanism or Stoicism, the two most authoritative sciences of his time.[13] There was much to laugh at in ancient science, and Aristophanes was not alone in laughing.

One place where reasoning did have success, however, was in political affairs.[14] Reasoners turned their attention to the great success that intelligence and, in particular, rhetorical skill had demonstrated. After the Persian Wars, in *poleis* with democratic constitutions, skill at persuasion was essential.[15] Celebrity-reasoners traveled throughout the Greek world, lecturing about the means for achieving political success. The greatest and most teachable of these means was "to be good at speaking"—a phrase that carries the same ambiguity in English as it does in Greek, an ambiguity that goes to the heart of the problem of rhetoric and the manipulation of arguments. "To be good at speaking" implies, on the one hand, an ability to manipulate the truth so as to persuade by appeals to emotion, patches of eloquence, verbal pyrotechnics,[16] logical tricks,[17] and other forms of bamboozlement. On the other

11. *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.1–2. In this work, Cicero, like an ancient al-Ghazali, shows that philosophy, by the very principles of philosophy, is incoherent. Cicero affirms that though knowledge is possible it is difficult and rare. He subscribes to Aristotle's strong view of knowledge, which requires an understanding of causes (*Posterior Analytics* 71b9–12).

12. See James A. Arieti, *Interpreting Plato: The Dialogues as Drama* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991), 44.

13. Epicureanism is done in by, among other things, the assertion of a mysterious, causeless swerve (*On the Nature of the Gods* 1.69). Stoicism is demolished by arguments that assert that since reason is the best thing in man, and since the universe is superior to man, the universe must be rational (*On the Nature of the Gods* 3.20–23). Plato is mocked for the many baseless assertions in his *Timaeus* (1.18) and, in particular, for its assertion that a sphere is the perfect shape (2.47).

14. Reasoning also had success in mathematics and other technical fields. These, however, required specialized study and so were outside the purview of the layman. Rhetoric and politics, as Plato's Protagoras points out in his great speech (*Protagoras* 322c–d), were areas in which all people could participate.

15. In monarchies or aristocracies based on blood, there was little need for persuasive skills: A chief could give orders and expect them to be obeyed. He did not have to persuade others to follow him.

16. These were features of the style of Gorgias and were very popular. For an example, see the introduction to our translation of the *Gorgias* (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2007), 17.

17. One example of a trick is a "sorites," by which it famously could be proved that a bald man had a full head of hair. In *On the Nature of the Gods* (3.43), one of the interlocutors, Carneades, is accused of using a sorites to prove that no line between the divine and the human or natural can be drawn. For another, see Aristotle's example from the handbook of Corax, by which one can show that any criminal is innocent. See below, page 22.

hand, "to be good at speaking" also implies a desire to speak the truth plainly, without ornament, and without emotional outbursts intended to distract or confuse. Very early on, it became clear that a successful rhetorical ploy was to *seem* to be a plain speaker while subtly manipulating the hearers. Aristotle makes the Machiavellian observation that it is necessary for a speaker to conceal his art and to *seem* to be natural, for men suspect artifice in speech the way they suspect doctored wine and think that the speaker is trying to trick them.[18] Since even Plato has Socrates make just such a claim in the opening of the *Apology*,[19] it should not be startling prima facie if Socrates could be confused with the general run of reasoners.[20]

Plato's Dialogues and Aristophanic Comedy (Old Comedy)

People who like their philosophy spoon-fed are better off not reading the dialogues of Plato. In the greatest dialogues—*Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Euthyphro*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*, *Theaetetus*, *Meno*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, *Cratylus*—the philosophical point is murky, the dramatic tension prominent, the arguments inconclusive. So lovers of spoon-fed philosophy will be disappointed in the *Protagoras*. What is the dialogue about? What are the parts of the dialogue? How do the parts fit together? Is Plato true to the historical personae of the individuals he portrays? Does the dialogue have closure, or, like an existential novel, does it simply end, with nothing settled? These are questions on which readers can speculate but on which they can reach no certain answers.

Reaching completely satisfying answers, as one does in solving the problems of mathematics, is not possible in Plato's dialogues. The rough and tumble of conversation is not geometry. As Aristotle says, subjects admit only the precision appropriate to their subject matter or genre: We do not expect rhetorical persuasion from a geometer or geometric precision from a rhetorician.[21] Part of the difficulty with dialogues like the *Protagoras* is that they do not fully belong to any single genre. They are *sui generis*, unique, and, since they do not fit into a genus, do not allow for definition.[22] Great works of art (and many not-so-great ones, too) deal with the infinite variety of human things, a fuzzy subject, and do not allow one interpretation to triumph. Art, unlike geometry, does not start off with fixed definitions and axioms,

18. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1404b17–21.
19. *Apology* (17a–b).
20. How he may have differed from this general run, at least to bright young men like Plato and Xenophon, will be taken up below.
21. *Nicomachaean Ethics* 1094b12–28.
22. Cf. Aristotle's rules for definitions, which are found in the *Topics* 103b16, 139a26ff., 143b5–10.

nor does it clearly and explicitly announce its Q.E.D., or articulate the implications of its conclusion. Art leaves the discovery of meaning to its audience. A work like *Hamlet* annually generates a plethora of interpretations about Shakespeare's intentions among astute critics who disagree vehemently with one another. We can only wish that Shakespeare would return from the dead to reproach that critic and praise this one! But even if Shakespeare could tell us what he meant, is it not possible that so richly fertile a work as *Hamlet* might give birth to meanings that even Shakespeare would recognize as legitimate offspring? This very point is made in the *Protagoras*, in the discussion of a lyric poem of Simonides,[23] on which Socrates and Protagoras offer differing interpretations and on which another character, Hippias, offers to present yet a third (347a–b)—an offer thankfully rejected. One problem with poetic interpretation, says Socrates (347e), is that it is not possible to ask the poets themselves what they mean. As Plato has Socrates affirm in the *Phaedrus*, writing is like a painting: It is silent, and it is not possible to ask it a question; like a painting, writing keeps on conveying the exact same thing forever (*Phaedrus* 275d–e).[24] The same uncertainty applies to the dialogues of Plato.[25]

If the *Protagoras* and dialogues similar to it resemble anything, it is what is known as Old Comedy, the sort of comedy that was produced in Athens in the fifth century B.C.E., when Pericles and Socrates lived. The playwrights

---

23. The possibility that Simonides wrote words with a meaning he did not himself intend is raised at 341a. The extra meaning that arises independent of an author's intention has been called an "unearned increment," on the analogy of the term's use in real estate.

24. The comparison of art and literature is common in antiquity. Critics from Aristotle to Horace to Longinus compare them. Longinus, responding to Caecilius of Calacte, denies with genuine Platonic feeling that art, specifically sculpture, and literature, are analogous. Greek art tended to be very representational, even when it idealized what it imitated (there was nothing like what we call "abstract" art). For Longinus, because art was tied to the human dimension, it could not be so great as the products of *logos*, the quality humans share with gods. It is through *logos*—speeches and writings—that human beings grasp nature and her greatness and then express it. Longinus says: "It may be said that though what is wondered at in artistic technique is the greatest precision, in the workings of nature it is greatness, and by nature the human being is characterized by rational thought; and while in statues likeness to a human being is sought, in speeches and writings what transcends the human is sought" (*On the Sublime* 36.2–3). In other words, in art, which is an *imitation* of nature, the highest excellence is the accurate representation of *nature*; but the products of reason can aim at the *supernatural*, which transcends the merely natural. Longinus sees literature as superior to music for similar reasons (39.2–3).

25. This uncertainty has not, of course, stopped very many from reading Plato as if he were Euclid or Aristotle, or someone who was working in a genre where the author tries to be as unambiguous about his meaning as possible—hence the very many readers of Plato who have no doubts about the precise accuracy of their interpretations. For a further account of why it is advisable to read the dialogues as drama and inadvisable to read them as treatises, see James A. Arieti, *Interpreting Plato: The Dialogues as Drama* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991), and by the same author, "How to Read a Platonic Dialogue," in *The Third Way: New Directions in Platonic Studies*, ed. Francisco J. Gonzalez (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), 119–32.

of Old Comedy, of whom our most famous example is Aristophanes, put together an assemblage of both imaginatively fictitious and imaginatively presented historical individuals in a dramatic situation that was wildly inventive, cheerfully violating the unities of time and place that Aristotle required for good tragedies. In Old Comedy, characters such as Dicaeopolis, Strepsiades, and Philippides were entirely made up; real Athenians, such as Cleon and Euripides and Socrates, were mocked; women, who had no political power at all, took charge; animals talked; mythology and literature were subjected to grotesque distortions; sex (heterosexual, homosexual, and self-sexual), excretion, eating, and other bodily activities were unashamedly displayed; the immortal gods suffered the woes and physical discomfort of mortals, and so on. One characteristic of comedy was that somewhere in the play, very often in the center, the chorus would step outside of the dramatic situation and address the audience directly in what was called a *parabasis*, literally, a "stepping alongside the subject."

Of the many subjects singled out for mockery in comedy, one was the enterprise of those we have termed reasoners.[26] The comic playwright Eupolis (445–411 B.C.E.), winner of seven first prizes for his comedies, put on the *Flatterers*, which, like the *Protagoras*, took place at Callias' house and mocked reasoners. Aristophanes wrote the *Fryers*, which lampooned the eccentric Prodicus, also lampooned by Plato in the *Protagoras*. Aristophanes also wrote the *Clouds*, the only survivor of these spoofs, which poked fun at Socrates, educators in general, and all the pursuits of the late-fifth-century reasoners. Plato's *Protagoras* most resembles what would be a prose version of one of these comedies.

Plato's *Protagoras* as Prose Comedy

The *Clouds* was first produced in 423. Aristophanes' rival Eupolis produced the *Flatterers* in 421. The *Flatterers*, like the *Protagoras*, featured an encounter at Callias' house among various reasoners, including Protagoras. It is quite possible that Plato had Eupolis' play in mind when he wrote his dialogue.[27] Because it was Aristophanes who eventually entered the marbled halls of the canon, while Eupolis survives only in a few fragments, *we* tend to think that if Plato had imitated or competed with anyone, it would have been Aristophanes. But it was Eupolis' play about Sophists that won first prize over Aristophanes' *Peace*, and it may well have been the worthier play.

26. See Arieti, *Interpreting Plato*, 3.

27. Wilamowitz also thought that Plato had Eupolis' scene in mind (Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Platon* [Berlin: Weidmann, 1919], vol. 1, 140).

From the fragments of the *Flatterers* that remain, it is evident that reasoners came in for ridicule on a number of counts, as they do in Plato's *Protagoras* and as they still do in our own contemporary comedy. Many were interested in matters of no possible practical interest. As today we joke about the debates about the number of angels who can dance on a pin or whether a tree that falls in a forest makes a noise,[28] in the fifth century B.C.E. men (and we need to recall that it was *men*) joked about the debates about the causes of thunder and lightning in the sky.[29] As in our day we laugh at the films of the Marx Brothers, which ridicule pomposity and formality, so in the fifth century B.C.E. men laughed when stuffed-shirt "reasoners" got their comeuppance. As Shaw's *Pygmalion* mocks the pretentious language of upper-class Englishmen, so Aristophanes laughed at the bloviated idioms of Aeschylus. And just as we enjoy in Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper* the comic conundrums of determining which part of a person's character is from nurture and which from nature, so did our fifth-century counterparts.[30]

The cast of Plato's comedy, like those of the comedies of the fifth century B.C.E., is both invented and real. At the opening we meet, invented for the occasion, an unnamed companion, to whom Socrates describes all the events of the dialogue. Hippocrates, probably invented,[31] represents the type of young man who is enthusiastic for learning. He does not know exactly what it is he wants to learn, but he has some sense that learning will be good for him. Finally, also invented, is Callias' slave, who represents a type of grumpy doorman very often found in comedy.[32] Of historical characters, besides Socrates and Protagoras, there are the famous reasoners Prodicus of Ceos and Hippias of Elis, both of whom have speaking parts; the host Callias, son of Hipponicus, who has a brief speaking part; Critias, the future ruthless tyrant, who Socrates reports may have had something to say; and the notorious Alcibiades, who has a brief but important role. Present but silent are Paralus and Xanthippus, sons of Pericles; Charmides, son of Glaucon; Philippides, son of Philomelus; Antimoirus of Mende; Eryximachus, son of Akoumenos; Phaedrus the Myrrhinusian; Andron, son of Androtion; Pausanias from

28. Aristotle also takes up the question of whether anything perceptible happens if people are not there to perceive it in *Metaphysics* 1046b29–1047a10.

29. For example, *Clouds* 392–397.

30. This is what is known as the question of *nomos* and *physis*, for a discussion of which, see the introduction to our translation of the *Gorgias*, 8–11.

31. This Hippocrates is not mentioned anywhere else in ancient literature. On the possible use of "Hippo-" for names for students, see the translation, note 11.

32. There is a considerable literature on door-knocking scenes in Greek and Roman comedy. For a recent survey and a fine discussion, see P. G. McC. Brown, "Aeschines at the Door: Terence, *Adelphoe* 632–43 and the Traditions of Greco-Roman Comedy," in *Papers of the Leeds International Seminar* 8 (1995), 71–89, and esp. note 1.

Cerameis; Agathon, son of Tisamenus; and two Adeimantuses, the son of Cepis and the son of Leucolophides. There are also a number of unnamed individuals, and so there are certainly enough for a chorus, and Plato has Socrates explicitly mention that all these constituted a chorus.[33] Since, of course, this is a Socratic conversation, and not actually a comedy on a stage, the comment alerts us to the idea that Plato is self-consciously composing his own quasi-comedy.

Plays of Old Comedy generally begin with "a happy idea"[34]—escaping to live with the birds, making a private peace with Sparta, organizing a sex strike to force peace, or some other ingenious plan. In comedy, the happy idea is revealed at the beginning of the play, in the prologue. In the *Protagoras*, the counterpart to the prologue is the opening scene that Socrates describes to his companion, when Hippocrates awakens Socrates and the two decide to go to Callias' house to consult the great Protagoras. The decision to talk to Protagoras is the "happy idea" that gets things started. This section of the play concludes with the doorman scene, a regular set-scene of comedies.[35] Then comes the humorous comparison of the tableau at Callias' house to Odysseus' view of the underworld in *Odyssey* 11, complete with quotations and a description of the suffering Tantalus.[36] The comparison to Hades might in fact be a deliberate echo on Plato's part to Aristophanes' *Birds*, where "unwashed Socrates" calls up the souls of the dead,[37] though there may also have been such allusions in Eupolis' play.

A structural feature of ancient comedy is the *parados*, the entrance of the chorus. Sometimes a lyric song, the *strophe*, is sung by half the chorus, followed a little later by the other half singing the *antistrophe*. In the *Protagoras*, as mentioned above, Socrates points out the chorus of the men present at Callias' house. They are even divided into two half-choruses, one following Protagoras in a comic dance, the other sitting attentively before Hippias. To ensure that no one misses the parody, Plato has Socrates *twice* explicitly call these people a "chorus."[38]

Another feature of comedy is an *agon*, a debate. In a sense, all of Plato's dialogues in which there is dialectic consist of this part of comedy, but in the

33. *Protagoras* 315b. A comic chorus usually had twenty-four *choreutai*.

34. P. W. Harsh, *A Handbook of Classical Drama* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1944), 259.

35. See note 34 above. Such scenes occur in *Birds* 465–478, *Frogs* 465–478, *Clouds* 132ff. and 1254, and *Acharnians* 864–867.

36. *Protagoras* 315c.

37. *Birds* 1153–1155. Just as Aristophanes makes it clear that he is imitating the *Nekuia* or underworld scene in the *Odyssey*, by explicitly saying "like Odysseus" (*Birds* 1561), so Plato has Socrates draw attention to his quotation from Homer's *Odyssey* (*Protagoras* 315b–c).

38. Both times in 315b.

Protagoras the *agon* is formally noted. At a critical moment, when Socrates is being outgunned by Protagoras' excellent series of examples showing that some things are beneficial in some circumstances but not in others, Socrates abruptly complains of being forgetful and demands that Protagoras speak briefly. Protagoras replies: "I've been in a debate [in Greek, *agon*] of words with many people, and if I had done what you bid—[if] I had conversed as my interlocutor bid me to converse—I wouldn't have appeared as better than anyone [else], nor would the name Protagoras have amounted to anything among the Greeks."[39] The *Protagoras* has a second *agon* as well, the farcical butchering of Simonides' poem that occupies about a seventh of the dialogue. This *agon* comes to a formal end when Socrates finishes his interpretation of the poem, and the chorus, with Alcibiades as chorus leader, rejects Hippias' offer to give yet another interpretation.[40]

A notable feature of the Old Comedy of Eupolis and Aristophanes was the *parabasis*, where the main actors go offstage and the chorus or the chorus leader comes forward to address the audience. There is a version of this also in the *Protagoras*.[41] The situation occurs in the climactic middle of the dialogue, when Socrates threatens to bolt from the house, claiming that he is unable to participate in a conversation in which his interlocutor speaks at length. First, the host Callias defends Protagoras' right to speak in whatever way he sees fit, just as it is Socrates' right to speak as he wishes, and begs Socrates to stay.[42] Then, finally, we hear the long-awaited Alcibiades, who breaks in and initiates a discussion among himself, Critias, Prodicus, and Hippias on the rules governing the conversation. This entire discussion is Plato's version of the comedic *parabasis*. Alcibiades and Critias make it clear that the conversation of Socrates and Protagoras is a sporting contest with its own rules of engagement. The contest, Alcibiades suggests, has more than one mode of competition, and while Socrates is quite willing to acknowledge Protagoras' superiority in one part—discourse—he will not yield to Protagoras or to

39. *Protagoras* 334c–335a.

40. *Protagoras* 347b.

41. It is combined with yet another humorous bit of parody. One of the features of Aeschylus that was often lampooned was his staging of mute characters, characters who are present but do not say anything until the last possible moment. Perhaps the most famous such character is Pylades, who has to wait until line 900 in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* to utter his single three-line speech. In the *agon* between Euripides and Aeschylus at the end of Aristophanes' *Frogs* (911–913), references are made to the *Niobe* and *The Ransoming of Hector*, lost plays of Aeschylus that also had mute characters. In the *Protagoras*, Plato has carefully built up anticipation of Alcibiades at the very start of the dialogue, when Socrates says not only that he has just come from being with Alcibiades but that Alcibiades had said many things in his behalf. Plato makes his readers wait until the dialogue is half over to hear Alcibiades.

42. *Protagoras* 336b.

anyone else in a second mode—dialectic.[43] Critias observes that Hippias is rooting for Protagoras and Alcibiades for Socrates but insists that it is necessary to be neutral. And then, in splendid parodies, Plato has Prodicus and Hippias use their rhetorical specialties to keep the conversation going. If this section of the dialogue is indeed Plato's *parabasis*, it would dramatically communicate Plato's lesson in the dialogue—that when "reasoning" and speechmaking and conversation are used not to pursue truth and understanding but to win a contest of cleverness, the result is confusion and disorder.[44]

Another feature of ancient drama is *peripeteia*, a reversal of the situation in which the characters started out. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle discusses *peripeteia* when treating the plots of tragedy,[45] in which the reversal is sometimes a change in fortune from prosperity to misery and sometimes a change from ignorance to knowledge—called *anagnorisis*—and sometimes both. For example, the change in the situation of Philoctetes from alienated castaway to reintegrated member of the Greek expeditionary force at Troy is a change in fortune. Theseus' discovery of Hippolytus' innocence of Phaedra's charge of rape is an example of a change from ignorance to knowledge. And Oedipus' discovery of his true parents and his exile from Thebes would be an example of both. *Peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* are features of ancient comedic plots as well.[46] At the end of the *Protagoras*, Plato has Socrates call our attention to a *peripeteia* in the dialogue. Socrates began by thinking that excellence was *not* teachable; now he has come to think that it is. And Protagoras began by thinking that excellence *was* teachable; now he has come to think that it is not.[47] And just in case the reader of Plato did not catch the similarity to theater, Plato has injected a second *peripeteia* into the ending of the *Protagoras*. At the beginning of the dialogue, in the conversation with the anonymous companion, Socrates declared that he had come from talking to someone more beautiful than Alcibiades, because he was the wisest of all people alive—Protagoras.[48] The second reversal comes in the last words of Protagoras, when, in front of all the guests at Callias' house, he says to Socrates, "I've told many people about you—that I

43. In a sense the contest is like a pentathlon, except that instead of five, here there are only *two* challenges, discourse and dialectic.

44. See appendix D, "Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations* and Plato's *Protagoras*."

45. *Poetics* 1452a22–36.

46. We can assert with relative confidence that this subject was taken up in the missing second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Where in tragedy the change in fortune is from good to bad, in comedy the change is from bad to good. For example, a discovered truth might be that someone thought to be of slave parents was actually of free birth but captured in babyhood by pirates. These are features of the plots of Roman comedies, which are in the style of New Comedy. Old Comedy had analogous reversals: the change from war to peace in the *Lysistrata*, the change from impoverished debt-ridden men to rulers of the universe in the *Birds*.

47. *Protagoras* 361a–b.

48. *Protagoras* 309d.

admire you most of those whom I have met, those of your age, absolutely; and I say, in fact, that I wouldn't wonder if you became one of the men esteemed for wisdom." Where in the opening it was Socrates who praised Protagoras, in the ending it is Protagoras who praises Socrates.

The Art of Caricature and the Cast

Of the ten speaking roles in the *Protagoras*, three—the companion, Hippocrates, and the doorman—are probably invented by Plato for the dialogue. The other seven—Socrates, Protagoras, Callias, Critias, Alcibiades, Prodicus, and Hippias—are publicly known and well attested in other sources, and Plato, like a writer of Old Comedy, caricatures them. Plato seems, in fact, to have delighted in caricature, for much of his corpus consists of an exuberant exercise of the art.[49]

Caricatures, of course, are not images an artist draws to capture either the form or spirit of its subject with dispassionate, disinterested accuracy. Instead, the artist takes the characteristics that are most identifiably those of the model and emphasizes them to grotesque proportions so that the resulting portrait is pointedly funny. In a sense, the image, the imitation, is more like the object than the original itself. If a mimic is performing a caricature of, say, Humphrey Bogart, he will take those characteristics most identifiably Bogart's and portray Bogart as having *only* those characteristics. So the mimic will, in this sense, be more like Bogart than Bogart himself (since the real Bogart would not *always* be speaking in his most identifiably Bogart-like mannerisms). If the qualities caricatured do not resemble and exaggerate actual qualities, the caricature will fail to be funny. When Aristophanes portrays Socrates as an intellectual fruitcake in the *Clouds*, the imitation must work at some level if the play is to make sense and amuse. In the same way, the characters in the *Protagoras* must exaggerate their models' qualities or at least be sufficiently similar to their generally perceived personae for the dialogue to succeed.

We shall discuss the members of the cast starting with Socrates. We shall then take up the other characters in their order of appearance.

Socrates

Socrates was executed by Athens in 399 B.C.E., when he was seventy years old. He is said to have been a sculptor and to have been married to a wife

49. We exclude such dialogues as the *Laws*, where the main character is the Athenian Stranger, or the *Sophist*, where the main character is the Eleatic Stranger. Obviously, where the character is a stranger, there can be no caricature of a known individual. Here the caricature must be of a *type*: an Athenian or a person of Elea (and hence from the school of Parmenides).

who complained that he was too often in the marketplace arguing with his talking companions.[50] The attempt to find "the historical Socrates," like the attempts to find the historical Jesus or the historical Homer, is surely futile. Antiquity has left us a number of portraits of Socrates besides those in Plato. But, for most people, Plato's has won the day.

Of the three literary portrayals of Socrates that survive in significant amounts, those of Aristophanes and Plato are the most like caricatures; that of Xenophon, the least. The Aristophanic caricature in the *Clouds*, the earliest that survives, is the most grotesque. In the *Clouds*, Socrates represents a *type* rather than a specific individual; he is a composite of a reasoner—a man who subjects the natural world and the human political world to *logos*, rational analysis. Unfortunately, admirers of Plato's Socrates cannot read the *Clouds* with equanimity, for they cannot help but recall the suggestion in Plato's *Apology* that Aristophanes' comedy is in large part responsible for the erroneous reputation Socrates had and hence for his unjust conviction.[51] These admirers, familiar with the moral firebrand they love from Book One of the *Republic* and the *Gorgias*, consider the *Clouds* a libelous, unfair diatribe. Yet the *Clouds* was composed a good two decades before Socrates' trial, *before* Socrates' boy-favorite Alcibiades had become notorious, *before* Athens had succumbed to defeat in the Peloponnesian War, and *before* Socrates' old companion Critias had become the vicious psychopathological leader of the Thirty Tyrants. After Socrates' death, readers, especially those who are also Plato's readers, are not likely to find the portrayal of the *Clouds* funny. And yet in the *Clouds* we are aware of echoes—perhaps, more correctly, "anticipatory echoes"—of the Socrates of some of the dialogues: a Socrates interested in physics, cosmology, and, of course, ethics.[52] Is Socrates portrayed straightforwardly in the *Clouds*? Of course not. The play is a farce, a normal product of Old Comedy.

Now, if the only surviving portrait of someone were one single caricature, there would be no way of knowing the extent to which the portrait was accurate. In the case of Socrates, complexity arises because we have *several* extant caricatures. Besides those of Plato, Aristophanes, and Xenophon, others were written as well. Just as each extant caricature portrays a different sort of Socrates, so the lost ones, too, probably emphasized different features of the same Socrates. Antisthenes, for example, in his Socratic

50. Shakespeare called Socrates' wife Xanthippe "curst and shrewd" (*The Taming of the Shrew* 1.2.70). The ancient source for Xanthippe's bad reputation seems to be Xenophon, *Symposium* 15.

51. *Apology* 18b–d.

52. Cf. *Phaedo* 96a–98b, for the interest in physics; Socrates is a willing listener to a lecture on cosmology in the *Timaeus*; and, of course, most of the dialogues deal with questions of ethics, including the *Protagoras*.

dialogues, seems to have stressed Socrates' indifference to pleasures and his insistence that virtue itself was all that mattered—views later taken up by the Stoics.[53] Aeschines, in his Socratic dialogues, seems to have portrayed a kindly, avuncular Socrates, whose ethical views were commonplace;[54] one of Aeschines' dialogues, *Alcibiades*, is believed to have defended Socrates against the charge of having corrupted Alcibiades.[55] Phaedo, too, the title character in one of Plato's dialogues, is known to have written at least two Socratic dialogues, though no fragments survive and nothing is known of how he portrayed his friend.

Plato shows Socrates as a thinker in pursuit of definitions of such words as *justice*, *love*, *friendship*, *excellence*, *courage*, and *piety*, and the dialogues about these words are among his most accessible and stimulating. Everyone, after all, thinks he knows the meaning of these simple words, and yet only a few questions expose the complex difficulties of finding definitions that at once capture the way the words are used, cover their connotations, and lack self-contradiction. It must have been amusing for young men to stand around watching Socrates argue with people who, though supremely confident of their knowledge, were quickly deflated by a few simple questions. We see this in the *Protagoras* and in the *Gorgias*, where such pleasure is taken by the non-interlocutors that they insist the suffering interlocutors continue the conversation.

For the majority of Plato's readers, the most inspiring quality of the Socrates in the dialogues is the enactment of his courage to pursue truth no matter the cost. What gives substantial historical meaning to his life is his decision to die rather than to abandon his post as philosopher of Athens. If he had accepted banishment, like Protagoras and Anaxagoras, or had fled like Aristotle, who declined to "allow Athens to sin twice against philosophy,"[56] he would not serve as the martyr to philosophy—the upright thinker who valued truth and justice above everything else. Plato portrays Socrates throughout the dialogues as willing to stand up to bullies such as Thrasymachus and Callicles and Meno, who praise the tyrannical life over the virtuous life and threaten Socrates personally. And Plato shows him completely

53. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 6.11. Like Hippias, Antisthenes seems to have been a polymath, writing on ethics, language, literature, and many other subjects. He is considered to be the founder of Cynic tradition.

54. G. C. Field, *Plato and His Contemporaries* (London: Methuen, 1967), 46–52. Field observes that Aeschines is reported in Plato's *Apology* to have been present at the trial of Socrates and in the *Phaedo* to have been present at his death. Field includes a discussion of the major fragments of Aeschines' *Alcibiades*.

55. Field, *Plato*, 148–49.

56. Aelian, *Historical Miscellany* 3.36; but compare Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 5.9.

unintimidated by such famous intellects as Protagoras, Parmenides, Gorgias, and Aristophanes, with whom he more than holds his own.

Xenophon presents us with portrayals of Socrates in the *Oeconomicus*, *Symposium*, *Apology*, and *Memorabilia*. Xenophon's Socrates, like Plato's, holds that virtue, not wealth, is the chief good; engages in discussion by question and answer; leads his interlocutor to positions different from his initial position; and has a tendency, if not toward flagrant erotic flirtation, at least toward an awareness of the erotic possibilities in a situation.[57] But what different versions of Socrates we find in Xenophon and Plato! Where Xenophon's Socrates has charm, Plato's has intensity; where Plato's shocks with conclusions that seem antithetical to human life, Xenophon's calms with the reassuring injunctions one might hear from a grandfather. Plato's Socrates sometimes rubs a conclusion in the face of an interlocutor, making him feel the full humiliating pain of self-contradiction and stripping him naked, as it were, before an attentive crowd of critics eager to point out his warts and other imperfections; Xenophon's gently chides, drawing his companion behind a curtain and offering counsel in soft whispers. Plato often presents his Socrates as antagonistic, slippery at escaping from traps, rude, and, yes, ironic, even contumeliously so, and yet his Socrates nevertheless seldom fails to inspire, for he is persistent in tracking down an argument, invulnerable to intimidation by the most aggressive assaults to his person and his positions, and tenaciously devoted to justice. If we love Socrates in some of Plato's dialogues, we wish to wring his neck in others; if in some dialogues we are fully persuaded, in others we wish we could interrupt the interlocutor and tell him exactly how to refute Socrates. In short, in Plato's Socrates we find the kind of portrait that literary critics say cannot enthrall: the dramatization of a man who is basically wise and good as he is being in the main (but not perfectly) wise and good.[58]

In Xenophon's portrayal of Socrates we find a pleasant, charming, witty man, not a man with a soul so captivatingly aflame as to engage the imagination and emulation of others. The judgment of the West has confirmed our verdict: Plato is provocative, controversial, sometimes even banned—but he is read. Xenophon is admired by pedants for his pure Attic style and his window into social history—but he has the effect of a sermon.

The lessons on moral goodness that Xenophon and Plato report Socrates imparting were remembered and portrayed as they had been filtered through the author's own mental apparatus. Thus Xenophon portrays a Socrates

57. See Carlo Natali, *Senofonte*, *L'amministrazione della casa* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1988), 41.
58. See Arieti, *Philosophy in the Ancient World*, 174.

that is rather like Xenophon—a genial man with good moral instincts, who believes that the gods have given human beings good minds and bodies and that they care about human beings and their behavior. Xenophon was a raconteur of anecdotes, a charming man, alert to sexual charms, and, for his era, as liberal a thinker as existed. Plato, for his part, portrays a Socrates that is like Plato—self-confident, assertively, even aggressively brilliant, unyieldingly persistent, insightfully creative, and exploding with volcanic eruptions of analogies and metaphors and myths, a man who finally discovered in writing Socratic conversations a wholesome outlet for his playwriting instincts and, in establishing the Academy, an outlet for his administrative and political ambitions.[59]

Portraits, even loving ones, have their limits, and honest portrait artists will not ignore their subjects' problematic blemishes. The big problem for portrayers of Socrates as the exemplary rational man was, of course, his *daimonion*—the voice that Xenophon and Plato show Socrates believed warned him not to do things.[60] One discreetly avoided explanation of the *daimonion* is that Socrates experienced hallucinations. As has been commonly observed, the line between madness and genius is often very thin. Those who are mentally ill are at times wonderfully creative, or focused, or perceptive, or analytical.[61] Our language contains such ambiguously positive expressions as "daft" or "touched" or "moonstruck" or "possessed" or "balmy" that show an affectionate regard toward some mental imbalances. Socrates, like Joan of Arc and Joseph Caro, was perhaps one of these individuals who was inspired in this way.[62]

That hearing the voice of a *daimonion* is a conspicuous mental aberration makes it likely that Xenophon and Plato, who personally knew Socrates and probably had heard him mention this voice in public, could not cover up or ignore the inconvenient fact but had to deal with it. The *daimonion* remained a problem for admirers of Socrates even centuries later (as indeed it is for moderns[63]). Five hundred years after Socrates' execution, Plutarch

59. This occurred after his failed attempt to turn Dionysius of Syracuse into a philosopher king.

60. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.2; Plato, *Apology* 40a–c.

61. For example, as has recently been discussed, there may be connections between autism and mathematical skill (see Sally Wheelwright and Simon Baron-Cohen, "The Link between Autism and Skills Such as Engineering, Math, Physics, and Computing: A Reply to Jarrold and Routh," *Autism* 5 (2001), 223–27.

62. The case of Joseph Caro, the famous rabbi from the sixteenth century who wrote the *Shulhan Aruk*, is strikingly similar to that of Socrates. Caro describes how an invisible messenger from God advised him for fifty-two of his eighty-seven years. For an account of Caro by a rabbi who is also a psychoanalyst, see H. L. Gordon, *The Maggid of Caro* (New York: Pardes, 1949).

63. One need only consider Julian Jaynes' *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977) and the debate it generated.

wrote a dialogue on the subject.[64] Neither Xenophon nor Plato, however, look deeply into the matter. Of the two, Xenophon gives it the greater soft-pedaling whitewash, converting the *daimonion* from a symptom of true mania to either a rather mundane sign of divinity or a polite excuse to avoid some undesired activity.[65] Plato does not demythologize the voice by reducing it to a euphemism or metaphor. He has his Socrates explain that the voice, which began visiting him in early childhood, deters him, or fails to deter him, from certain activities. In this context it has advised him to take or not to take someone on as a disciple.[66]

The underlying picture of Socrates that emerges from the caricatures drawn by Plato and Xenophon is quite different from what we derive from the caricature drawn by Aristophanes, perhaps because Aristophanes did not

64. One of the interlocutors in Plutarch's dialogue, Polymnis, explains the *daimonion* as a metaphor for a sneeze, an explanation that would, of course, sweep away any doubts about Socrates' total rationality. The main character of the dialogue, Simmias, explains that while Socrates did not believe people who claimed to have *seen* supernatural entities, he did believe those who claimed to have *heard* voices: "He [Simmias] had also (he said) often witnessed Socrates dismissing as imposters people who claimed to have contact with divine beings by visions, while listening carefully, and eagerly questioning anyone who claimed to have heard a voice" (Plutarch, *Selected Essays*, tr. Donald Russell [Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 104). Certain ages seem more accepting, even welcoming of, this sort of epiphany. As Robert Lemberton (*Plutarch* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001], 180) observes, for Plutarch's generation, "The question of Socrates' *daimonion* was one whose time had arrived. In an age when demonology was of intellectual and literary interest, we have treatments of the same subject from two more philosopher-rhetors of Plutarch's stamp—Maximus of Tyre and Apuleius—within a generation or so of Plutarch's death."

65. An example of the first is Socrates' explanation of his voice in the defense speech in Xenophon's *Apology* 12–13: "And furthermore, how could I be bringing in *new* daimonia when I say that a voice of a god seems to be showing me what it is necessary to do? You see those using the voices of birds and the chance words of men are a witness, I do suppose, to these voices. As for thunder, is there anyone who will dispute either that thunder gives voice or is an omen? . . . Some call the signs birds and chance words and signs and prophets, but *I* call this the daimonion, and I think that in naming it in this way I am speaking with more truth and holiness than those attributing the power of the gods to birds." An example of the second is Xenophon's *Symposium* 8.5, where Socrates has just commenced his speech on Eros and turns to ask Antisthenes whether he is the only one of those present who has erotic feelings for no one (8.3). Antisthenes exclaims that he does have such feelings—for Socrates, in fact! Socrates then tells Antisthenes not to make a scene because Socrates is busy. At this point Antisthenes replies with annoyance, "You pimp of yourself, you're always doing such; at one time alleging your daimonion, you don't converse with me, and at another time, [you don't converse because you are] aiming at something else." The suggestion is that Socrates uses the *daimonion* as an excuse, rather like a dinner guest tactfully complaining of an allergy to spinach in declining to partake of it.

66. On the commencement of the voice (*Apology* 31c–d); on deterring (*Euthydemus* 272e; *Phaedrus* 242b–c); on failing to deter (*Apology* 40a–b); on advice on accepting disciples (*Theaetetus* 151a, *Theages* 128d–131a). The passage in the *Theages* is the longest concerning the *daimonion* in Plato and Xenophon. Whether the *Theages* is genuine has been a source of debate. Those who question its authenticity do so largely on their opinion of its inferiority, but the alleged mediocrity of some of its dialogue has been defended as a characterization of the interlocutors being portrayed rather than as indicating an art of portraiture inferior to Plato's. The dialogue's authenticity is persuasively defended by Paul Friedländer (*Plato: Volume 2: The Dialogues, First Period*, tr. Hans Meyerhoff [New York: Pantheon Books, 1964], 147–54, and esp. 326–27, note 1).

have the warm relationship with Socrates that the younger men did. Plato and Xenophon saw Socrates with the eyes of youths admiring someone unlike anyone else they knew; they wrote their Socratic conversations with what psychologists refer to as "euphoric recall." When Plato and Xenophon were being educated, the attention of "reasoners" was no longer focused on scientific matters (this attention would occur again in Aristotle's generation). Instead, the reasoners of Plato and Xenophon's youth zeroed in on the art of persuasion and the tricks by which rhetoric could move men's souls.[67] But to Plato, Xenophon, and their like-minded companions, Socrates alone dwelled meaningfully on moral issues and on the arguments for how people should develop into individuals with all the virtues of temperance, justice, courage, and wisdom. Other reasoners assaulted the traditional rules of morality by clever verbal uses or abuses of reason, showing that might makes right, that it was best to be immoderate, that the laws of animal conduct applied to human beings, that one should gratify someone sexually who did not love you rather than someone who did, and many other repulsive principles. But Socrates was using his reasoning skills to defend traditional morality. To young men like Plato, Xenophon, and the others who looked to Socrates as the source of true wisdom, this wholehearted defense of goodness made Socrates a fount of wisdom and a source of profound inspiration. This is the portrait of Socrates that emerges from beneath the veil of all the caricatures.

It seems safe to assert that in life Socrates was a polarizing figure. Athenians must have been sufficiently annoyed with him or with his political allies to execute him. At the same time, whether or not Plato's picture of Socrates is true, even in part, the real Socrates was inspirational to many who knew him. And he has continued to be a source of inspiration throughout Western history. Dante placed him among the virtuous pagans; Erasmus invoked him in his prayers, saying, "Holy Socrates, pray for us." And for those who begin their study of philosophy with a Platonic dialogue, he continues to inspire.

---

67. They all had their specialties. As Arieti writes (*Philosophy in the Ancient World*, 154): "Thus Evenus of Paros specialized in secret allusions and indirect compliments or censures; Tisias, in dressing up trifles as matters of significance and novel matters as matters of antiquity and vice versa and in arguing at length about anything and everything; Polus, in maxims and similes; Thrasymachus, in stirring up and then soothing the passions of the audience (*Phaedrus* 267a–d). Prodicus practiced the artful drawing of subtle distinctions, Protagoras, the art of drawing deep philosophy from interpretations of poetry—a talent burlesqued in Plato's dialogue *Protagoras*. Teachers of rhetoric wrote innumerable handbooks, many of them sterile and repetitive, multiplying distinctions that vie in subtlety with those of the most refined medieval scholastics. No doubt ancient aficionados of rhetoric were able to identify an author from a brief quotation. They could also recognize dozens and dozens of rhetorical devices, just as we recognize the hackneyed formulae of spy novels or the cinematic clichés of action films or the familiar platitudes of political advertisements."

The Companion
This is the sort of person who is very interested in everything Socrates and his friends do and say. Similar anonymous characters appear in other dialogues, such as the *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, and *Minos*, where someone (sometimes Socrates) gives an account of a conversation in which Socrates had participated. In the *Protagoras*, the companion is accompanied by other unnamed people.[68] The companion is an intimate friend of Socrates. He knows all about Socrates' relationship with Alcibiades and is on such good terms with Socrates as to engage in friendly banter on the relationship and to be given an unabridged version of what happened at Callias' house.

Hippocrates
Hippocrates is a young man eager to learn from the famous Protagoras. He is not sure *what* he will learn, but he is sure the learning will be valuable. He represents a type of eager but not very reflective young man.

The Doorman
Doorkeepers in comedy are usually grumpy, and the one here is no exception. It is likely, as we have argued above, that Plato wants his readers to think of the type of scene appropriate to the comedy he is writing. He wants to prepare the minds of his readers for the expectations of the genre.[69]

Protagoras
It is sorely to be lamented that so little of the actual work of Protagoras survives. This man from Abdera was surely one of the most influential intellectuals in antiquity. Though scorned by his adversaries as a godless enemy of truth, he was nevertheless held in merited respect by them. If Plato's work has been a stimulus to philosophy in the West, we can assert with equal confidence that Protagoras' work was a stimulus to Plato, and that without Protagoras, there would have been no Plato.[70] A testimony to Protagoras' intellectual status may be found in Aristotle's preference of his argument to that of geometers in a subtle matter having to do with lines and circles, and in Aristotle's endorsement of his pioneer work in grammar.[71] And Pericles evidently thought so highly of Protagoras that he assigned him the task of

68. Their presence is indicated only by plural verbs.
69. On how knowing genres prepares readers to respond appropriately, see Arieti, *Philosophy in the Ancient World*, 18.
70. This is argued persuasively by Jacqueline de Romilly in *The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens*, tr. Janet Lloyd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 101–3. The entire book is an insightful account of the sophistic enterprise and its influence on philosophy.
71. At *Metaphysics* 998a3 and *Rhetoric* 1407b7 respectively.

establishing laws for Thurii, a pan-Hellenic colony Athens was taking the lead to establish in 444 B.C.E.[72]

Our main source for the life of Protagoras is Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*. As with so much of what Diogenes reports about the philosophers, its historical accuracy is highly dubious, though for a general impression, it is quite satisfactory.[73] Impoverished in his youth, Protagoras worked as a porter, and in this capacity his inventive resourcefulness stirred him to invent the shoulder pads that porters continued to use into Diogenes' time. One day Democritus, the founder of atomic theory, saw him carrying bundles of wood and so admired the skill with which they were tied that he took Protagoras into his care. Protagoras is said by Diogenes to have been the first to distinguish grammatical moods and by Aristotle the first to divide nouns into the grammatical genders. He is said to have been expelled from Athens for having introduced a book with these sentences: "As to the gods, I have no means of knowing whether they exist or do not exist. For many are the obstacles that impede knowledge, both the obscurity of the question and the shortness of human life." Diogenes reports that Protagoras is variously said to have died at age ninety or seventy.

Protagoras is most famous for the statement, "Man is the measure of all things, of the things that are, that they are; of the things that are not, that they are not." The statement probably means that in the human world it is humans who determine the various standards and limits. The exact meaning is not at all certain, and it is not clear whether Protagoras was speaking of *a* man as the measure, in which case every individual would be a separate measurer, or man in general. Plato seems deliberately to have his characters distort the statement into a total and pervasive relativism,[74] where there is no truth at all, an interpretation that Aristotle adopts.[75]

Aristotle denounces Protagoras strongly in the *Rhetoric* for having proclaimed that he could make the weaker argument the stronger. This, of course, was one of the charges that Socrates says in Plato's *Apology* was made against him. And in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, one of the scenes shows Unjust Argument

72. Plutarch, *Life of Pericles* 36.

73. By this we mean that anecdotes very often tell us how a person was looked upon by others. For example, we learn about the reverence afforded George Washington by the story of his cutting down a cherry tree. Whether the story is historically accurate or not, it tells us a truth about the man. Except as noted, the events in this paragraph are taken from Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, tr. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), 9.50–56.

74. E.g., *Theaetetus* 166. Cf. de Romilly, *The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens*, 99–103.

75. Aristotle undertakes to refute the extreme form of Protagorean relativism in the *Metaphysics* (1009a–1016), arguing that if every man is the measurer, then the same thing would be both true and false, for if person A said that a proposition was true, it *would be* true; and if person B said that it was false, it *would be* false.

defeating Just Argument at the Socratic Think-Shop.[76] Aristotle says that in the competitive debates[77] of men like Protagoras, it is argued that things that don't exist *do* exist and that things that are unknown *are* known. He mentions as well Agathon's well-known remark that it is likely for unlikely things to happen and concludes with Corax's method of acquitting all criminals:

> You see, what is contrary to what is likely *does* happen, so that what is contrary to what is likely is also likely. If this is [the case], what is contrary to likelihood will be likely. . . . And from this *topos* the "Technical Skill" of Corax is composed: you see, should an accusation not be [appropriate] to a man accused of a crime (for example, because a man is weak he escapes the charge of outrageous conduct—you see, it would not be likely [that he had committed the crime]); and should he actually be able to have committed the crime (for example, he actually is strong), [the argument would be that] it would not be likely [for him to have committed it]— you see, it would *seem* likely [that he had committed it, and no one would commit a crime that it would be likely for him to commit because he would be caught]. And it will [be argued] similarly in other cases. It is necessary that either a man [credibly] accused of a crime or one not [credibly] accused of a crime is the one responsible [for the crime]. And so both appear to be likely, and the one is likely [without qualification] but the other with qualification, as has been said. And this is to make the worse argument the better. And here people are rightly displeased with the declaration of Protagoras: you see, it is a lie, and the likelihood is not true but apparent, and it has no place in any technical skill but in rhetoric and debate.[78]

It seems quite possible that Aristotle is writing these lines under the influence of the Academy, for it is redolent of the low reputation in which Plato holds the reasoners.

Perhaps, with a touch of Protagoras' reasoning, we might assert that what could be used against Protagoras in one way might be brought to his defense in another way. Protagoras declared that there are two sides to every ques-

---

76. *Apology* 19b–c; *Clouds* 889–1112. We should remember that by the time Aristophanes was writing the *Clouds*, Protagoras was already dead and his statement could easily be subjected to deliberate distortion, as indeed everything is, in comedy. But *because* Protagoras was recently dead, it would not have been so funny to portray him on stage as it would a living person who resembled him in the popular imagination—Socrates. So Aristophanes attributed to Socrates' Think-Shop lessons in making the weaker argument the stronger—not for the purpose of having Socrates charged twenty years later, but for the purpose of comedic entertainment.

77. The actual term in Greek is *eristikon*. Protagoras wrote a treatise, the *Techne Eristikon* ("Argumentative Technical Skill"), to provide instruction in how to handle oneself in debate where opposite sides are taken. As de Romilly observes (*The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens*, 76), such debates are a regular feature of Greek literature long before Protagoras—though, as Diogenes Laertius says (*Lives* 9.51), Protagoras may have been the first formally to declare that "there are two sides to every question that are opposed to each other."

78. *Rhetoric* 1402a3–28.

tion, and in his *Antilogies*, also known as *Double Arguments*, he taught how to defend one point of view and then its opposite.[79] He seems to have declared that good and evil are never without qualification but are always attended by circumstances. In any case, he does not seem to have been a simple-minded relativist. It is entirely possible that he had in mind an anticipation of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in which Smith observes the value for moral reasoning of putting oneself in the other person's shoes. The effect of such reasoning would be to produce more reflective, empathetic individuals.

In short, it would probably be prudent, as well as fair, to admit that what we actually *know* about Protagoras is slight and that much of what has come down to us is tainted by misrepresentation, malice, and ignorance.

Callias

Callias, from a very distinguished family, was named for his grandfather, who had fought at Marathon. The Callias of the dialogue is a rich man famous for his womanizing and profligacy, his entertaining, and his spending on reasoners.[80] In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates reports that Callias has spent more on reasoners than anyone else.[81] In the *Protagoras*, Plato has Hippias declare Callias' house[82] "the greatest and most prosperous in the city."[83] Plato has a character in the *Theaetetus* say that Callias was Protagoras' trustee—which, if true, would suggest a strong friendship between the two men.[84] In the *Protagoras*, Callias is very much concerned with keeping the conversation of Socrates and Protagoras going.

Alcibiades and Critias

Because there are significant ways in which Alcibiades and Critias are a linked pair, they will be treated in the same section.

Alcibiades, the son of Cleinias, was among the most controversial Athenians of the last two decades of the fifth century B.C.E. He became a companion of Socrates when he was a young man growing up in the household

79. For an account of what can be conjectured about these works, see de Romilly, *The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens*, 75–77.

80. His profligacy is ridiculed by Aristophanes in *Birds* 283 and *Frogs* 429; his womanizing in *Birds* 286. As discussed above (see this introduction, pages 8–9), the *Flatterers* of Eupolis is set at his house, where he is host. He also hosts the party for Protagoras in our dialogue, the party in Xenophon's *Symposium*, and, according to Plutarch, a party for Dion of Syracuse, whom Plato "turned toward philosophy" (*Life of Dion* 17). His womanizing (he is accused, among other vile acts, of seducing his wife's mother) is attacked by Andocides in his defense speech *On the Mysteries* 124–131.

81. *Apology* 20a.

82. See appendix A for an illustration of the house.

83. *Protagoras* 337d.

84. *Theaetetus* 165a.

of his uncle Pericles. During the truce between Athens and Sparta in the Peloponnesian War, he became a strong proponent of the Athenian naval attack on Syracuse in Sicily. Just before the departure of the expeditionary fleet, a great many herms were vandalized, a profanation that seemed a very bad omen before a journey.[85] Alcibiades was suspected of participating in this act, a suspicion lent credibility because rumors already existed that he had mocked the Eleusinian mysteries at private parties.[86] Rather than stand trial in Athens, Alcibiades fled to Sparta. There he gave the Spartans advice that enabled them to defeat the Athenians in Sicily and, by the advice to fortify the strategically located Decelea, to harass them in their homeland, a maneuver that—as Thucydides says—was the ruin of Athens.[87] Later, after his scandalous seduction of the wife of one of the Spartan kings, he fled from Sparta. He then succeeded in securing Persian help for Athens and was welcomed back to Athens. Defeated at the Battle of Notium, he fled to the Propontis and was later executed by the Persians. Aristophanes' *Frogs*, produced in 404 B.C.E., probably reflects Athens' feelings about Alcibiades: "The polis longs for him, it hates him, and it wants him back."[88]

When Sparta imposed terms on Athens after her surrender, in addition to the disarming of the polis, Sparta established an oligarchic regime friendly to herself. The dominant person in this regime was Critias, Plato's uncle, who at first invited Plato to participate in the government.[89] Plato quickly saw that this regime made the previous one seem, as he says, a "golden age" in comparison, and refused to have anything to do with a government so completely opposed to the moral teaching he had received from Socrates[90]—for Critias used his position to murder his rivals and opponents with impunity and steal their wealth.[91] Critias' success was short-lived, as the democratic leader Thrasybulus led a successful rebellion in the Piraeus, in which Critias was killed.[92] The takeover of Athens by men such as the rapacious and cruel

85. Herms were four-cornered shafts ending in the bust of a god—Hermes, Dionysus, Ares. Male genitalia were carved on the front of the shaft. Herms served as local street shrines, markers of sacred places, and memorials (Cimon dedicated three to celebrate his victory in the Battle of Eurymedon). They were believed to provide fertility or good luck.

86. Thucydides 6.27–29. The mysteries were secret rites that took place in Eleusis, near Athens. Though there has been much speculation about what occurred there, the secret was well kept and not much is actually known. Later, Cicero speaks movingly of their good effects (*De legibus* 2.14.36).

87. Thucydides 7.27.

88. *Frogs* 1425.

89. Plato, *Seventh Letter* 324c–d.

90. Plato, *Seventh Letter* 324d–325d.

91. For details on the brutality of this regime, known as the Thirty Tyrants, and on Critias' involvement in the assassination of his more moderate colleague Theramenes, see Xenophon, *Hellenica* 2.3–4. For a further ancient assessment of Critias, see Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* 1.16.

92. *Hellenica* 2.3.11–13.

Critias showed, at least to Plato, that the brutal Realpolitik position taken by Critias and admirers of tyranny in the dialogues (like Thrasymachus in the *Republic* and Callicles in the *Gorgias*) is not only repugnant philosophically and antithetical to civilized life but, for all the bluster of its adherents, is not assured of real-world success either.

Xenophon, answering a charge that probably appeared in the fictional *Accusation of Socrates* by a certain Polycrates,[93] conjoins Alcibiades and Critias as men who greatly harmed Athens.[94] The charge was that since Alcibiades and Critias were both "students" of Socrates, their teacher was to be blamed for their evil ways.[95] Xenophon is at pains to defend Socrates against this charge. He maintains that Critias and Alcibiades associated with Socrates because they wanted to become adequate at speaking and acting,[96] but if they had had to choose between Socrates' ascetic mode of living and death, they would have preferred death.[97] Socrates taught both by his example, Xenophon continues, and by speaking about goodness.[98] And while these villains were actually *with* Socrates, they remembered his counsel,[99] but as soon as they parted from Socrates they fell into bad company and forgot the lessons.[100] In Thessaly, Critias became the companion of men who practiced lawlessness rather than justice; and Alcibiades, on account of his good looks, was hunted by many noblewomen, whom he did not resist. Because of his amatory success and his power in Athens and among the allies, he gave himself airs.[101] Socrates, Xenophon avers, ought rather to be praised for saving them in their youth: As we do not blame prudent fathers for their sons' misbehavior, so we should not blame Socrates.[102] In fact, Xenophon concludes, Socrates *did* try to control Critias, for which Critias harbored bitter

93. Defenses and accusations of Socrates seem to have been somewhat in vogue in the decades following Socrates' execution. Perhaps such exercises enabled teachers of rhetoric to show off their skills as they competed to cap one another in cleverness and persuasiveness.

94. *Memorabilia* 1.2.12.

95. *Topoi* of this sort were surely common. Diogenes Laertius (*Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 9.56) reports a parallel in Protagoras' witty response when he was suing his pupil Euthalos for the tuition. "If, on the one hand, *I* should be victorious, *because I* have been victorious, it is necessary for *me* to take the fee; if, on the other hand, *you* [should be victorious], [it is necessary for me to take the fee] because *you* [have been victorious]." In other words, if Euthalos wins his case against Protagoras, it will be clear that Protagoras taught him to plead cases well and hence deserves his fee. For our purposes, what is relevant is the principle that what a student does is attributable to his teacher.

96. *Memorabilia* 1.2.15–16. To educate someone to be a speaker and a doer was the goal of education since Homer (*Iliad* 9.443). This double purpose of education is raised in the *Protagoras* at 318e.

97. *Memorabilia* 1.2.16.

98. *Memorabilia* 1.2.18.

99. *Memorabilia* 1.2.24.

100. *Memorabilia* 1.2.24.

101. *Memorabilia* 1.2.24.

102. *Memorabilia* 1.2.26–27.

feelings.[103] And Alcibiades was always so ambitious for power that he never really had been a disciple of Socrates.[104]

Plato also feels an obligation to account for how two individuals closely associated with the single most luminous exemplar of virtue could go so far wrong. He does so in two ways, first by discussing the general relationships of students and teachers in dialogues such as the *Protagoras*, *Theaetetus*, and *Laches*, and second, by discussing and portraying Alcibiades and Critias.

In the *Theaetetus*, Plato has Socrates describe how some young men left Socrates sooner than they should have and as a result suffered a miscarriage of their thoughts. They fell in with bad company and ruined the intellectual children he had delivered by bringing them up badly.[105] One such youth was Aristides, son of Lysimachus, and there were many more. Some of these, Socrates adds, later came back to him to beg him to renew their relationship; sometimes his *daimonion* forbade the renewal and sometimes permitted it. In the *Laches*, this same Aristides is used as an example of a youth whom Socrates could not teach, or for whom the teaching did no good.[106] It requires very little imagination to liken Alcibiades and Critias to Aristides. And, of course, in the *Protagoras*, the question is raised of why, if excellence can be taught, the children of excellent men so often lack excellence,[107] with different answers from Protagoras[108] and from Socrates.[109]

Plato brings up Alcibiades and Critias very often, and perhaps his plan was to confront head-on the charges against Socrates of corrupting them and to show dramatically that Socrates did his best for them and they themselves were responsible for their failings.[110] In the *Symposium*, we see Plato give Alcibiades a theatrical and magnificent speech in praise of Socrates. Alcibiades recounts their shared military experiences, his unsuccessful attempt to

103. *Memorabilia* 1.2.29–38.

104. *Memorabilia* 1.2.39. To show how Alcibiades abused the techniques of dialectic that he learned from Socrates, Xenophon presents a dialectical exchange between Alcibiades and his uncle Pericles on what a law is (*Memorabilia* 1.2.40–46). In the exchange, Alcibiades puts Pericles through his paces and reduces him to self-contradiction.

105. *Theaetetus* 151a.

106. *Laches* 179a.

107. *Protagoras* 319e–320c.

108. Plato's Protagoras gives an explanation by an analogy with flute-playing (327a–c). If everyone plays the flute and teaches flute-playing to everyone (just as in a polis everyone behaves with justice and teaches it to everyone), then natural variations will emerge, and just as the variation in natural talent would account for why some fathers are better flautists than their sons, so natural variations in excellence would account for variations in justice and other forms of excellence.

109. Socrates' answer comes in 353c–358e, where what causes one to choose a pleasure over a good is a failure in the skill of measuring: One chooses what is near (a pleasure) over what is far (a good) because of a problem with perspective, an inability to assess the true size.

110. Showing that Socrates did his best for Alcibiades seems to have been the purpose of Antisthenes' dialogue *Alcibiades*, the fragments of which are translated into English by G. C. Field in his *Plato and His Contemporaries*, 148–49.

seduce Socrates, and the contrary effects Socrates has on him: On the one hand, Socrates moves his soul more powerfully than the greatest orators, more even than Pericles, and makes him feel ashamed; on the other hand, he wishes Socrates were dead and refuses to listen to him.[111] Here Plato defends Socrates brilliantly—by giving the words to the very person he was accused of corrupting! In the *Alcibiades Major*—an entire conversation between Socrates and Alcibiades—we glimpse Plato's imaginary picture of Alcibiades as a young man full of ambition to rival the great kings of Sparta and Persia, and we have an example of Socrates' attempt to tame him. The *Euthyphro* shows another situation in which we find Socrates involved in a discussion with a young man and where, despite Socrates' best efforts, there is no effect whatsoever on the interlocutor. Though the young man, Euthyphro, is repeatedly shown that his position leads to self-contradiction and therefore must be false, he continues to believe that he is infallible. Plato's defense of Socrates is powerfully persuasive: Not only has Socrates *not* corrupted Euthyphro, he has had no effect on him whatsoever. The real danger, the dialogue shows, is from young people who presume knowledge, not from Socrates.

We have suggested in the introduction to our translation of the *Gorgias* that the fictitious character Callicles is a stand-in for Critias.[112] If this speculation be true, it would be a very severe condemnation of Callicles. Men such as Callicles and Critias understood politics to exemplify the laws of nature, red in tooth and claw, and saw the only role of philosophy as lending a bit of polish to brutish, swaggering selfishness. Such men would never benefit the world of politics, which could never improve until "those who rightly follow philosophy acquired political authority or those who have political authority were divinely inspired to become philosophers."[113] Critias is one of the major interlocutors in Plato's *Charmides*, where the discussion is about the nature of *sophrosyne*, self-restraint. In the dialogue, Critias is a youth taking care of his extremely beautiful cousin Charmides, who is induced to discuss the definition of *sophrosyne*. At various points in the dialogue, Critias becomes angry and accuses Socrates of not sincerely pursuing truth but of trying only to refute him.[114] Critias is said by Socrates to be hiding his perplexity in order to maintain his reputation.[115] As Paul Friedländer observes, "Every Athenian reader would see in him the later tyrant—that he lacks the virtue of *sophrosyne* . . . that is the topic of conversation."[116]

111. *Symposium* 215e–216c.
112. Arieti and Barrus, *Gorgias*, 15.
113. Plato, *Seventh Letter* 326a–b.
114. *Charmides* 162c–d, 166c.
115. *Charmides* 169c.
116. Friedländer, *Plato*, vol. 2, 67–68.

We may lament that Xenophon and Plato both fail to offer a satisfactory explanation of why excellent teachers sometimes have poor students and why excellent parents sometimes have rotten children. But after reflecting on our own failures and the often incomprehensible quality of human things, we shall have to acknowledge the acute, if trite, conclusion of the poet Roberts Burns:

> The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men
> Gang aft a-gley;
> An' lea'e us nought but grief and pain,
> For promis'd joy. ("To a Mouse")

Prodicus

Prodicus, most likely a contemporary of Socrates, achieved fame and influence for his ability to distinguish words the meaning of which seem nearly the same. One of the consequences of long war, and of the Peloponnesian War in particular, Thucydides reports, is a deterioration in the precision of words.[117] It is evident that there was a backlash to this developing imprecision, and the work of Prodicus and Socrates, and later of Plato and Aristotle, aimed at discovering the principles of definition and at defining words in a way to promote exactness, clarity, and beauty. At first one might think that arguing over precision in words amounts to quibbles, yet much human labor is based on just such quibbles. In the *Protagoras*, Prodicus draws distinctions between *impartial* and *equal*, *disagree* and *squabble*, *esteem* and *praise*, *contented* and *pleased*.[118] In Thucydides' *History*, the Corinthians make a Prodicus-like distinction between *remonstrance* and *accusation* in their speech against the Athenians at Sparta.[119] Aristotle singles out Prodicus' threefold distinctions in pleasure.[120] Prodicus was also a promoter of virtue, and to this end composed an essay, "The Choice of Heracles," which Xenophon records in paraphrase, in which Badness (*Kakia*) tries to persuade Heracles to choose the pleasant, easy path while Excellence (*Arete*) tries to persuade him to choose the hard but noble path.

Hippias

Aside from the scarce and unreliable evidence in Xenophon and Plato, not much comes to us about Hippias from antiquity. In the *Protagoras*, Hippias is portrayed sitting on a throne while answering questions about astronomy—a harmless, if bombastic blowhard. In the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon's Socrates converses with Hippias about justice and its relationship to the laws legis-

117. Thucydides describes, with a full sense of outrage, what happens to language in his description of the revolution in Corcyra in *History of the Peloponnesian Wars* 3.82.4–5.
118. *Protagoras* 337a–337c.
119. Thucydides 1.69.
120. *Topics* 112b2.

lated in cities and to the unwritten laws.[121] Xenophon's intention is to show that Socrates taught morally upright lessons about justice. Xenophon may have presented the conversation as taking place with Hippias in particular to respond to the charge that in Plato's dialogue *Hippias Minor* Socrates had been a teacher of immorality.[122] Hippias is not mentioned at all by Aristotle in his extant works—a sign, perhaps, that he was not very influential.

What, Finally, Is the Dialogue About?

James Boswell reports a conversation between Dr. Johnson and a chap he meets by chance on a London street. The chap is a certain Oliver Edwards, who was at Oxford with Johnson forty-nine years earlier and recognizes the old lexicographer even after so many years. Boswell, wishing to record the encounter between these two old men, invites Edwards to Johnson's apartment. At length, Johnson seeks to prove to Edwards that he does in fact remember him and brings up a conversation they had all those years before in an alehouse near Pembroke Gate, in which they discussed some Latin verses relating to Jesus' miracle of changing water into wine. After Johnson recites verbatim the various Latin verses that each quoted in the conversation five decades earlier, Boswell records Edwards' reply: "You are a philosopher, Dr. Johnson. I have tried in my time to be a philosopher; but, I don't know how, cheerfulness was always breaking in."

Plato's dialogues, to be sure, often lack cheerfulness and contain some very dark passages. The bitterness in the *Gorgias* is not confined to the character Callicles; the whole dialogue leaves one with a sense of despair—that the contemplative life Plato saw as necessary for ethical participation in politics was somehow lacking in the very men who chose to engage in it. The *Gorgias*, with sardonic grimness and sophistical cleverness, suggested that a philosopher-politician would seek a suicidal society in which villains would prosper. The humor in the *Gorgias* was all black and the sun barely, if ever, peeked through

121. *Memorabilia* 4.4.5–25.

122. In fact, Paul Friedländer admits that he would not consider the *Hippias Minor* a genuine work of Plato if Aristotle had not explicitly named the dialogue as Plato's. Friedländer approves of Wilamowitz, who "pointed out [that] after 399 B.C.E., no member of the Socratic circle could afford to depict Socrates—though the disguise be ever so transparent—as representing immorality. So the *Hippias Minor* must be earlier than 399, perhaps by several years" (*Plato: The Dialogues [First Period]* [New York: Pantheon Books], 146). We believe that both Xenophon and the school represented by Friedländer are mistaken. When a literary work—especially one by as crafty a writer as Plato—deals with the topic of deception, readers ought to be alert to the possibility that the writer may himself be practicing deception—the very kind of intentional deception that leads Socrates in the dialogue to praise the wily Odysseus as a hero greater than Achilles. A careful reading of the *Hippias Minor* with an awareness of Plato's craft will reveal that in praising Odysseus and defending Odyssean wiliness, Socrates is upholding Greek traditions about the Ithacan and about Greek morality generally.

the clouds. The *Gorgias* seemed to accept Edwards' implication—that philosophy is a despairing, dour, even suicidal business.

How, then, are we to see the blithe, even frolicsome *Protagoras*? If, as we have suggested, the dialogue is in fact a Platonic analogue of Old Comedy, can it at the same time be *philosophy*? Is it possible for a serious, philosophical point to emerge through the mirth? To be sure, there is a great deal of mirth. Let us glance at one passage, where, before explicating Simonides' poem, Socrates invokes the preeminence of the Spartans in learning.[123] The passage is a superlative example of how one can cleverly make a strong case out of a weak, even ridiculous, case. Socrates aims to show that Sparta, a polis traditionally lacking even an iota of interest in philosophy, is actually the most assiduous and most ancient at cultivating it. Spartans have deliberately hidden this "fact," says Socrates, to keep others, who like to imitate them, from also becoming philosophers. Sparta keeps her young men from traveling so that they will not unlearn the philosophy they have been taught.[124] The success of the Spartan plan is illustrated by the very "fact" that everyone who talks to Spartans thinks they are stupid because of their pithiness of expression.[125] Even Spartan women use pithy expressions.[126] When someone speaks pithily about philosophy, he is imitating the Spartans in a more essential way than if he engaged in physical training. This imitation is just what Thales and the other sages were doing when they made their pronouncements about nature. Apollo, too, was imitating the Spartans in his laconic Delphic injunctions, such as "Know thyself." Pittacus' phrase in the poem under discussion was also just such an imitation, and Simonides knew he would carry off the palm of honor if he could demolish the phrase.

The passage shows how handily Plato's Socrates can himself employ the most notorious means of the reasoners: the "proof" of a ridiculous assertion, here, that the Spartans are philosophers; the use of what is known, their pithiness, to prove what is not known, their philosophy-mindedness; the attribution of motives compatible with their known motives—here, the hiding of their philosophical power in conformity with hiding their military power; the apparent "fact" that many imitate Spartan ways.[127] We expect the reason-

123. *Protagoras* 342a–343c.

124. This was exactly the explanation in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (1.2.24) and Plato's *Theaetetus* (150e) for why some who study with Socrates go astray (they leave Socrates' salubrious company and fall in with bad company).

125. This is the very kind of inference that can be taken as evidence of itself or its opposite. See the example (in this introduction, page 22) from the handbook by Corax quoted by Aristotle.

126. The most famous pithy statement of a Spartan woman was her charge to her son as she sent him off to war and handed him his shield: "With it or on it." This is, of course, hardly a *philosophical* lesson.

127. See Aristophanes' *Birds* 1281–1283 for examples of imitating Spartan manners. In the passage, Aristophanes includes in the list of Spartan qualities being imitated a verb he has invented for the occasion, *sokrateuo* ("acting like Socrates") and suggests that Socrates, with his unwashed ways, was Laconic in this unflattering sense.

ers whom Plato *attacks* to engage in this rigmarole. Why do we find Socrates engaging in it?

Perhaps this is just where we find the dialogue's lesson: Where intellectual exercise is reduced to a sporting contest the aim of which is victory and not knowledge, where honorable moral principles are invoked (when they are invoked) as simply one more means to victory but are not sought as the end of education—there true, honest teaching is not possible. The *Protagoras* focuses throughout on education—from Hippocrates' rather naive enthusiasm for learning in the prologue to the end of the dialogue, when there seems to have been a reversal of Socrates' and Protagoras' original positions on whether excellence can be taught. What the dialogue presents throughout is a dream-world vision of the nonsense that can and will arise when *logos* is used with a love not of wisdom but of victory. Plato's comic entertainment, if it was written to be diversion from the rigors of study at the Academy and was presented at an assembly for the relaxation of the academicians, surely provoked its audience, as they left the hall, to say with a sigh of relief, "And now let's get back to work."

Is the lesson that arguing for victory with creatively ingenious techniques is not the be-all and end-all of rational activity a sufficiently serious teaching for a work by Plato? Is not this lesson self-evident? Is it not self-evident at least as soon as it is articulated, without the need for an entire dialogue on the point?

The history of Greece and the history of the world since Greek times show, alas, that the lesson is *not* self-evident. The hucksterism of salesmen, the amorous pleas of seducers, the spellbinding rants of pulpit-thumpers, and the rhetorical manipulations of demagogues all show the willingness to use and abuse the power of speech. From the founding of rhetoric as a distinct subject, handbooks on the techniques of persuasion have multiplied. To be sure, a few emphasize the need to be a good person before becoming a good speaker, and Quintilian went so far as to assert vigorously and repeatedly that *only* the good man was a good rhetor—but the very fact that Quintilian felt obligated to defend this assertion testifies to its lack of general acceptance. Plato's lesson in the *Protagoras*, then, is one of *applied* philosophy, a branch of philosophy that requires continual renewal of its lessons for them to be effective.[128] As the examples of Critias and Alcibiades show, once we have forgotten what we have learned we lay ourselves open to the deepest corruption.

---

128. Plato himself renewed this very lesson in the *Euthydemus*, perhaps the dialogue most like the *Protagoras* in theme. The *Euthydemus* also deals with the nature of education, and the very condition of short question and answer that Socrates gives to Protagoras (338d) is laid down by Euthydemus to Socrates. It is not possible to detect a difference in the outward form of Socratic dialectic and Euthydemus' eristic debating; as discussed above (in this introduction, page 12), one must look deeply into the *goals* of the discussion.

*Protagoras**

The Cast

Companion
Socrates
Hippocrates
Doorman
Protagoras
Callias
Alcibiades
Critias
Prodicus
Hippias

---

*We wish to call attention to some features of our translation that try to capture peculiarities of the Greek.

In ancient Greek, as in such modern languages as Spanish and Italian, the form of the verb alone shows the person of the subject, and so no pronoun is needed to indicate that the subject is I or he or we or you or they, and the pronoun is usually omitted. When in such languages the pronoun *is* used it bears a special emphasis. In this translation we have indicated the emphatic use of the personal pronoun as subject by italicizing it. This artifice, imperfect as it is, has allowed us to convey an actual feature of the Greek without the addition of cumbersome excessive verbiage.

Another feature of conversational Greek, and present to a lesser degree in English, is the omission of words that the speaker or writer feels are easily inferred from what has been expressed. While a speaker often knows what he intends, it is not always apparent to a listener. We have indicated where we have filled out the thought by a liberal use of bracketed words and phrases. Filling in what is missing from the text is necessary in English to render complete sentences that make sense. Most other translations have simply inserted the understood words as if they appeared in the Greek. We have endeavored to indicate where we have filled out the thought. We hope that the reader will be compensated with accuracy for the initial adjustment needed to read the text.

I

Companion: [309a] Where are you showing up from, Socrates? Or isn't it obvious, really, that it's from hounding the bloom time[1] of Alcibiades?[2] And, really, when I saw him the other day, he appeared a pretty man—yet a man, let me tell you, Socrates (as, in fact, it's said among us), and he was already making a start of a beard.[3]

Socrates: What's this, then? Well, aren't *you* a fan of Homer, who says that the fairest [sign of] adolescent [bloom], [309b] which Alcibiades now has, is the downy beard under the chin?[4]

Companion: And so, what about this now? Are you showing up from that [fellow]? And how does the young fellow feel about you?

Socrates: He seemed to me, in fact, [to feel] good [about me], and not least on this very day, too; you see, he even said many things in my behalf, helping me; and so I've just come from him. I wish, however, to tell you something that is [strangely] out of place:[5] you see, though he was present, I didn't have my mind [on him], and I forgot him quickly.

---

1. The companion is speaking metaphorically of Alcibiades' blooming youth. He is suggesting that in spring a middle-aged man's fancy "lightly turns to thoughts of love."

2. Alcibiades was perhaps the most controversial Athenian of the last two decades of the fifth century B.C.E. A strong proponent of the Athenian attack on Syracuse in 415, he was suspected in the profanation of the herms on the eve of the Sicilian Expedition, a suspicion given credibility because he had already been reputed to have mocked the mysteries at private parties (Thucydides 6.27–29). Alcibiades fled to Sparta rather than stand trial in Athens. There he gave the Spartans advice that enabled them to defeat the Athenians in Sicily and, by taking his advice to fortify Decelea, to harass them in their homeland, a maneuver that—as Thucydides says (7.27)—was the ruin of Athens. Later, when, after scandalous behavior involving the seduction of a royal wife, he was compelled to flee from Sparta, he succeeded in securing Persian help for Athens, which welcomed him back. Defeated at the Battle of Notium, he fled to the Propontis and was later executed by the Persians. Aristophanes' *Frogs*, produced in 404, probably reflects Athens' feelings about Alcibiades (1425): "The polis longs for him, it hates him, and it wants him back."

3. Solon (Poem 19) expresses the old view about pubescent boys and beards:

> A beardless boy being still foolish having grown a barrier of teeth
> sheds it first within seven years;
> and when the god brings to pass another seven years,
> the signs of coming puberty appear;
> in the third [period of seven years], with limbs increasing,
> a beard is obtained, the blossom of a changing body.

The idea seems to be that a beard emerges like the buds of spring, announcing the time of greatest beauty and sexual blossoming. This is very different from our own attitudes toward adolescence, where we see the emergence of acne as heralding a period of rebellious surliness.

4. *Iliad* 24.347. In Homer the description is of the god Hermes, whom Zeus is sending to guard Priam as he goes to Achilles' camp to retrieve the body of his fallen son Hector. There is no higher compliment for a mortal's physical appearance than to have it compared to a divinity's.

5. The Greek is *atopos*, often less literally translated as "strange." Underlying the term is the idea that things have a proper place. "Out-of-place" is a term that Plato seems fond of and often uses of Socrates (e.g., *Gorgias* 494d, *Symposium* 221d). See the glossary.

Companion: [309c] What business could have happened concerning you and him [that was] so important [that you forgot him]? You haven't, of course, I don't suppose, met someone more beautiful in this city?

Socrates: Much [more beautiful], in fact.

Companion: What are you saying? [Was the person you met] a citizen or a foreigner?

Socrates: A foreigner.

Companion: From where?

Socrates: From Abdera.[6]

Companion: And some foreigner has appeared to you so beautiful that he was more beautiful than the son of Cleinias?[7]

Socrates: How, blessedly happy one, wouldn't the wisest thing appear more beautiful?[8]

Companion: But are you here with us,[9] Socrates, having met some wise [person]?

Socrates: [309d] It follows [that I met], in fact, the wisest, of those [alive] now, I do suppose, if [the one] who seems wisest to you is . . . Protagoras![10]

Companion: What are you saying? *Protagoras* has come to town?

Socrates: He's already in his third day [here].

Companion: And you've just come from being with him?

Socrates: [310a] Absolutely—both saying and hearing a lot of things, in fact.

Companion: So, unless something prevents you, why don't you describe your meeting to us? [Why don't you] sit here, [after] making the slave boy stand up?

Socrates: Well, then, absolutely! And, in fact, I'll be grateful if [all of] you listen.

---

6. This is Protagoras' natal city. It was a wealthy city on the Thracian coast, deriving its riches from its port and from grain. In addition to Protagoras, the city boasted among its sons Democritus, the father of the ancient theory of atoms. Cicero (*Att.* 4.17.3 and 7.7.4) uses the term *Abderites* as a synonym for stupidity. If any of this prejudice existed at the time Plato was writing, it would add an additional element of shock to the notion that someone could be more captivating to Socrates than Alcibiades.

7. Alcibiades is the son of Cleinias.

8. Socrates moves from sexiness to intellect. Implicit in Socrates' position is that the mind is the most sexually attractive feature. This same proposition is of course proffered in Plato's *Symposium*, where the philosopher comes off as the *objet d'amour* par excellence. Should this notion gain currency, philosophy would perhaps surpass business in the number of college majors.

9. Here and in 310a the plurals suggest that Socrates' companion is accompanied by others, and the whole group is interested in learning about Socrates' day.

10. The syntax here indicates that Socrates is dramatically saving the name of Protagoras for last, perhaps with an element of suspense in his voice—a trope we can duplicate by imagining a drum roll accompanying the ellipsis.

Companion: Really, and we to you also, if you'll tell us.

Socrates: The gratitude, in fact, would be double. But listen.

II

When last night was nearly over but it was still the dark before the dawn, Hippocrates—Apollodorus' son and Phason's brother[11]—banged very enthusiastically on my door with a stick; [310b] and when someone opened [it] for him, he came straight in, all in a rush, and speaking in a loud voice said, "Socrates, have you awakened or are you sleeping?"

And recognizing his voice *I* said, "Hippocrates—halloo there! It's not something rather new [and bad] you're reporting?"[12]

"Nothing," he said, "except good things, in fact."

"Knock on wood!"[13] I said. "But what's up, and why have you come at this hour?"

"Protagoras," he said, standing right by me, "has come."

"The day before yesterday," I said. "And *you've* just found out?"

"Yes, by the gods," he said, "in the evening, in fact." [310c] And at the same time, feeling for my cot, he sat by my feet and said, "[I found out] in the evening, actually, when I arrived very late in fact from Oenoe.[14] You see, my slave Satyrus ran away from me; and, actually, I was about to tell you that I would pursue him, but because of some other matter it slipped my mind. And when I had come [home] and we had dined and were about to rest, then my brother tells[15] me that Protagoras has come. And still I was getting ready to go straight to you, but then it seemed to me to be too far into the wee hours.

---

11. Since Hippocrates was a common name, some identifying relatives are necessary. If this Hippocrates were a real person, he is otherwise unknown, as are these purported family members. Perhaps, as in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, names beginning with "Hippo-" are proverbially used for students.

12. The text has only "something rather new," the regular Greek idiom for "something bad." The idea is that *any* news is bad news—the same view as in our expression, "No news is good news."

13. The text actually says, "You would speak well." The grammar of the expression (the optative mood) suggests that Socrates is replying with a formulaic expression to avert a possible evil. The statement would be akin to someone knocking on wood to avert a hypothetical evil, and, to catch the flavor of the superstitious remark, we have translated it into a modern equivalent.

14. This is probably a territory just northwest of Athens, on Mount Cithaeron near Eleutherae. A place near Eleutherae perhaps is ironic, for the name means "freedom," and Hippocrates has been chasing a runaway slave.

15. Hippocrates is using the tense known as the historical present: It lends vividness by making it seem as though the events being reported are taking place at the time the speaker is telling the story.

[310d] But as soon as sleep had set me free from my fatigue,[16] I immediately got up and came here."

And *I*, knowing his courage[17] and excited condition, said, "So, what's this to you? Surely Protagoras isn't treating you unjustly in some way?"

And he said, laughing, "Yes [he is], by the gods, Socrates, because he alone, in fact, is wise but is not making me [wise]."

"But, by Zeus," I said, "should you give him money and persuade him, he will make you wise, too."[18]

"If only, O Zeus and gods, it [depended] on this,[19] I wouldn't hold back any of my own [money] or [310e] that of my friends. But it's about this very matter that I've come even now to you—so that you'll speak with[20] him in my behalf. You see, *I'm* too young, and at the same time I've never seen Protagoras nor have I ever heard him. You see, I was still a child when he first came to town. But, Socrates—everybody is praising the man, you see, and saying that he is most wise at speaking. But why don't we walk over to him, so we can catch him inside? [311a] He's staying, as I've heard, at the house of Hipponicus' son Callias.[21] But let's go."

And I said, "Let's not go [quite] yet, my good [friend]. It's too early, you see. But let's go up there to the courtyard and ramble about,[22] wearing out

---

16. This grandiloquent language is from Homer, *Iliad* 2.71, where Agamemnon uses it of himself.

17. "Courage" seems rather an odd word to use here, but Socrates' language shows that he is being wittily melodramatic while pursuing Hippocrates' Homeric allusion. Socrates is milking the scene for all its possibilities. He is no doubt sarcastic about the amount of courage required to arise from sleep; and he may also be comparing Hippocrates to Agamemnon, not the most splendid of the Homeric heroes, and Agamemnon's excitement over his dream. This suggests, perhaps, that the whole dialogue is to be conceived of as an elaborate adventure yarn.

18. Plato reflects here an ambivalent attitude to taking money for instruction. In the *Apology* (19d–e), Socrates declares that he has never taken money for his instruction and forcibly denies that he is a reasoner (see introduction, page 3, and note 29 on the word we have translated "reasoner"). And yet it appears that Plato accepted tuition from those enrolled in the Academy.

19. Hippocrates here is not swearing by the gods but is directly turning to them and offering a quasi-prayer. The gesture shows the depth of his feeling: Money is nothing to him beside the wisdom that he expects to acquire from Protagoras.

20. The verb we have translated as "speak with" (*dialegomai*) is also used to mean "to engage in dialectic with," and for those in Plato's circle the word would have had this resonance. Since Socrates will in fact be engaging in dialectic with Protagoras, the term has a double sense. See *engage in dialectic* in the glossary.

21. Callias was the son of Hipponicus (another "Hippo-" name), a member of a very wealthy Athenian family. Callias is mentioned in other dialogues as committed to lessons from reasoners (*Apology* 20a, *Cratylus* 391b, *Theaetetus* 164e). Xenophon reports that Callias was an ambassador to Sparta in 371 (*Hellenica* 6.3.2–6). Athenaeus (*Deipnosophistae* 12.52) reports that he died in poverty, having exhausted his inherited fortune. If this last fact were known to Plato's audience, it would perhaps influence their understanding of the dialogue by casting a sense of waste over the whole enterprise of the reasoners: Money not spent wisely might lead to poverty.

22. From the word comes the name of Aristotle's school, Peripatetics, from the verb "to walk around."

[time] there,[23] until there should be light. Let's go, then. You see, for the most part, Protagoras wears out time inside. Be confident, as we'll likely catch him inside."[24]

III

After these things, we got up and went around to the courtyard. [311b] And *I*, intending to make a test of Hippocrates' strength, began to examine him and question him. "Tell me, Hippocrates," I said. "You are now getting ready to go to Protagoras, intending to pay him a monetary wage for yourself—to arrive at whom[25] and to become what? For example, if you had in mind to go to the man who has the same name as you, Hippocrates of Cos, [one of] Asclepiadiae,[26] and to pay him a monetary wage for yourself, [and] if someone asked you, 'Tell me, Hippocrates, you are about to pay a wage to Hippocrates—for being what?' [311c]—what would you answer?"

"I would say 'a physician,'" he said.

"In order to become what?"

"[In order to become] a physician," he said.

"And if, after arriving at Polycleitus the Argive or Pheidias the Athenian, you had in mind to pay a wage to them on behalf of yourself, [and] if someone asked, 'This money—for being what do you have it in mind to pay [the money] to Polycleitus and Pheidias?'[27]—what would you answer?"

---

23. We have translated the verb "wear out" literally to preserve the image. While it might also be translated more idiomatically as "waste," the metaphor would be lost. Writers are very often conscious of the etymological meanings of the words they use, and Plato seems particularly conscious of the verbal opportunities in etymologies; a term that means "rub away" or "wear out," moreover, seems appropriate for a professional stonecutter like Socrates. Here there may be an added joke. The same verb is used for the idle passage of time while Socrates and Hippocrates are waiting for a respectable visiting hour to arrive as for Protagoras' activity inside Callias' house.

24. Use of the term "be confident" here and the earlier use of "courage" anticipate their use later, in the argument with Protagoras.

25. *Whom* here refers to what the man is. In the *Gorgias*, when Chaerephon and Socrates are going to Callicles' house to meet the famous rhetorician Gorgias, Socrates tells Chaerephon (447d) to ask Gorgias who he is. In the case of some professions, it is not an easy thing to say just who they are, and the difficulty is Socrates' crowbar for prying open the problematic profession. What exactly is it that a reasoner or rhetorician does?

26. Hippocrates of Cos is the man most identified with the development of Greek medicine. Virtually nothing is known of Hippocrates himself, though he is treated respectfully by writers of his era. Though Plato refers to him as a typical doctor, he attributes to Hippocrates the revolutionary idea that in order to understand the body it is necessary to understand it as an organic whole—that is, as a unity whose parts function together (*Phaedrus* 270c).

27. Polycleitus and Pheidias were perhaps the most famous sculptors of the fifth century; Polycleitus was renowned for his depiction of the human form; Pheidias designed the Parthenon on the Acropolis of Athens (and produced the famous statue of Athena) as well as the Temple of Zeus in Olympia (and produced the statue of Zeus, included as one of the seven wonders of

"I would say that [I was paying them money for being] image-makers."[28]

"So that you yourself would become what?"

"It is clear that I would become an image-maker."

[311d] "Well," I said, "when once we've arrived at Protagoras' side, shall we, *you* and *I*, be ready to give him [our] money in your behalf, if our money is sufficient and we persuade him by this [money]—but if it isn't [sufficient], shall we spend, in addition, the [money] of our friends? And so if someone should ask us while we are thus wildly enthusiastic about this, 'Tell me, Socrates and Hippocrates, you have in mind to pay money to Protagoras—as being whom?'—what would we answer him? [311e] What other name do we hear said of Protagoras, in fact, as, for example, we hear about Pheidias [that he is called an] image-maker and about Homer [that he is called] a poet? What do we hear in the same way about Protagoras?"

"Indeed, it's a reasoner[29] in fact that they call the man, Socrates," he said.

"So it's a *reasoner* we're on our way to pay money to?"

"Absolutely!"

"And so, if someone also asked you this, 'You yourself, indeed—you're on your way to Protagoras to become what?'"

[312a] And blushing—you see, a bit of day was appearing so that it was apparent that this was happening—he replied,[30] "If it is like what [we discussed] before, it is clear that I shall become a reasoner."

And I said, "But, by the gods, wouldn't *you* be ashamed to show yourself before the Greeks as a reasoner?"

"Yes, by Zeus, Socrates, if of course it's necessary to say what I do think."

"But, Hippocrates, you don't think, do you, that your learning from Protagoras will be the sort [as to make you into a reasoner], [312b] but [that it will be] the sort that comes from a grammar-school teacher and a music teacher and a gym teacher?[31] You see, from these [teachers] you learned each

---

the world). Socrates is using superlatives of medicine and art as his parallels to the superlative of wisdom, Protagoras.

28. The term is *agalmatopoios*, which seems to be a less honorific term than they deserve.

29. The word translated with our coinage *reasoner* is in Greek, *sophist*. *Sophist* comes from the word *sophos*, "wise." The root is the same as that in the word *philo-soph*y ("love of wisdom"). The Western world's antipathy toward "sophists" derives chiefly from Plato. Men like Gorgias and Protagoras, of course, meant no disparagement in calling themselves *sophistai*. See the introduction, page 3, for why we have chosen "reasoner" as the translation for this word, and the glossary.

30. Why is Hippocrates blushing? Is it at the thought of becoming a wage-earner (since reasoners accept a fee) or at the thought of becoming a *reasoner*—as Plato's audience, having learned to disparage reasoners from Plato, would have understood it?

31. These teachers were responsible for elementary education: From the "reading teacher" a boy learned reading and writing; from the "music teacher" he learned singing and lyre playing; and from the "gym teacher" he learned basic exercises.

[subject] not for a technical skill,[32] so as to become a craftsman, but for an education[33] suitable for a nonprofessional[34] [person] and a free [citizen]."

"Yes, it definitely seems to me that such, rather, is the learning [to be acquired] from Protagoras," he said.

IV

"And so do you know what you're about to do now," I said, "or does it escape your notice?"

"Concerning what?"

"That you're about to hand over your own soul for treatment to a man [who], as you say, is a reasoner. [312c] And I should wonder whether you know what a reasoner is. And if you're not giving thought to [what one is], and [if] you don't know whom you're handing your soul over to, neither [will you know] whether you're handing it over to a good or bad business."

"I think I know, of course," he said.

"[Well,] indeed, tell [me]—what do you think a reasoner is?"

"*I* [think]," he said, "as the name says, that [a reasoner] is one who has knowledge of wise things."

And I said, "Isn't it possible to say this [same thing] about painters and construction workers, too—that they have knowledge about wise things? [312d] But if someone asked us, 'Of what wise things do painters have knowledge?' we would, I suppose, say to him, 'Of the [wise things related] to the working out of images and other things like that.' But if someone asked: 'And the reasoner—of what wise things [does he have knowledge]?'—what would we answer him? Of what sort of job does he have knowledge?"

---

32. This is the word *techne* in Greek, and suggests perhaps a trade by means of which one would earn a wage. The word refers to a skill that requires the specialized knowledge of a set of rules and procedures. Lyre-playing, medicine, and horsemanship would be examples of such "technical skills" (see the glossary). The word can also be translated as "art," where it is understood that a set of rules applies. Later in the *Protagoras* (318d), Plato has Protagoras include number theory, astronomy, geometry, and music among the technical skills. In the *Gorgias* Socrates talks about what a "technical skill" is at 500e–501a.

33. This is what we call a "liberal education," an education not aimed at making one capable of earning a wage but of developing one as a good human being. In the *Laws* (644a) Plato has his Athenian make a particularly disparaging assessment of the sort of teaching that has as its goal the acquisition of wealth and renders its recipient not free.

34. The term we have translated "nonprofessional" in Greek is *idiotes*. The root sense is of one who does things for himself and not for others. The sense of nonprofessional means that he is a layman and does the activity for himself. A nonprofessional, for example, might make electrical or plumbing repairs for himself and not for another.

"What *would* we say he is, Socrates? Or [would we say that] he is one who has knowledge of how to make [people] terribly clever[35] at speaking?"

"Perhaps," I said, "we would be saying the truth; but let me tell you, [we would] not, in fact, [be answering] adequately; you see, your answer requires from us a further question—what [subject] the reasoner makes one clever at speaking about. [312e] For example, the music teacher, I do suppose, makes one clever at speaking about that of which he has knowledge—about music. Eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, indeed, [as for] the reasoner—about what [subject] does *he* make [people] clever at speaking? Or is it clear that [it's] what he has knowledge about?"

"It is likely, of course."

"What, indeed, *is* this [subject] about which the reasoner both has knowledge and makes his pupil [have knowledge]?

"By Zeus," he said, "I'm not yet able to tell you."

V

[313a] And after this I said, "What, then? Do you know the sort of danger you will incur as you bet your soul? Or, if it were necessary for you to turn your body over to someone, running the [momentous] risk that it become either useful[36] or good for nothing, you'd look into many things [to determine] whether it should be entrusted [to him] or not, and you'd call on your friends and relations for advice, examining the [issue] for many days; but concerning what you think is of more [value] than your body, your soul—in which also

35. The word we have translated as "terribly clever" is *deinos* in Greek, from which we derive *deino*-saur, "terrible lizard." But the word is perhaps among the most famous pun-words in Greek, for it also means, as translated here, *clever*. So it is possible for someone, say, Hippocrates, to be using the word as "clever," and for someone else, say, Socrates, to understand the word as "terrible." Perhaps the most famous use occurs in Sophocles' *Antigone*, where the chorus sings that human beings are *deinos*, meaning both clever and terrible. To be *deinos* at speaking was what the rhetoric teachers claimed to be able to teach their students. "Terrible" works fairly well in English to capture the sense, for we speak of a "terribly handsome person" without any sense of moral badness. The term "awful" also works. Perhaps contemporary slang would work best, where such terms as *bad* (sometimes pronounced with an extra "a"—b-a-a-d—would work best ("that's a *b-a-a-d* jacket"). In the 1960s the term "crazy" was a term of both scorn and praise. No compliment was greater than "You're even crazier than me."

36. There are several Greek words which can be rendered as *good*. This particular one is *chrestos*, which here signifies "good for its job," "useful." In English we don't usually speak of bodies as useful; instead, we speak of them as "good," a sense that more often than not refers to its good looks. Here, though, the sense is a body's ability to do what a healthy body does: walk, run, lift, climb, and so forth—in short, to be of use to its owner.

resides all your [capacity] for doing either well or badly should [your soul] become useful or bad—but concerning this [—the well-being of your soul—] you'd share [your deliberations] neither with your father nor [313b] with your brother nor with any of your companions [about] whether your soul should or shouldn't be entrusted to this foreigner who has arrived, but having heard [of his arrival] in the evening, as you say, [and] coming early in the morning, you make no argument [for yourself] or counsel about this—whether it's necessary to entrust [your soul] to him or not—and you are ready to lavish your money and that of your friends [on him], as though you already fully knew that you must become in all respects a pupil of Protagoras, [a man] whom you neither know, as you say, nor with whom you have ever spoken, and whom you call a 'reasoner'—and whatever thing a reasoner is you don't appear to know [313c]—and *this* is the man to whom you are about to entrust your soul?"[37]

And hearing [me], he said, "It does seem likely, from what you say."

"And so, Hippocrates, the reasoner turns out to be a merchandiser or hawker[38] of the wares by which a soul is fed? It appears to me of course that he is someone of this sort."

"Socrates, by what *is* the soul fed?"

"By [the things] it learns, I do suppose," I said. "And how, my friend, won't the reasoner, praising what he sells, in fact deceive us [about the food *for our soul*], just as the merchandiser and hawker do about the food for our body? [313d] You see, these men themselves, I suppose, don't know what is useful or good for nothing for the body from the wares they bring [to market]—and they praise all the things they sell—nor do those buying from them [know what is useful or good for nothing], unless one [of the customers] happens to be a physical trainer or a physician. And in the same way, taking the things they teach around to the cities and selling them and hawking them to anyone who desires them, they praise all the things they sell, and some, my very good [friend], are perhaps ignorant of the very things they sell—whether it's a thing useful or good for nothing for the soul; [313e] and in the same way those who buy from them [are ignorant], unless someone happens to be a

37. At colleges and universities there is now a course evaluation form that assesses, based on student opinion, the quality of courses and the teaching. We know of no form that tries to assess whether the course has had a salutary or a contrary effect on the students' souls. Nor do we suspect that when students ask one another about a course they address this matter, choosing to ask instead whether the course will be easy or boring or at a congenial hour.

38. These words, sometimes translated as wholesaler and retailer, refer to the selling of commodities in bulk or individually. When we consider that buying and selling took place in outdoor stalls that were more like yard sales—with haggling and no fixed prices at all—than like our modern shopping palaces (where, perhaps, there is more respectability), it is more accurate to translate the Greek words with English words that carry a measure of disdain.

physician of the soul. And so, if *you* happen to be one who has knowledge of these things—what is useful and [what is] good for nothing—then it is safe for you to purchase from Protagoras and from anybody else the things taught; but if [you are] not, blessedly happy[39] one, [314a] watch out lest you're gambling and taking risks about the things dearest [to you]. And indeed, you see, the danger is much greater in the purchase of the things you learn than in the purchase of foods. You see, it is possible for the person buying foods and drinks from a hawker and merchandiser to carry them away in other vessels, and before receiving them into his body [by] drinking or eating [them], after having put them down in his house, to take counsel (calling on the one who praises [them]) about what must be drunk or eaten and what must not be, and how much and when, so that the danger in the purchase is not great. But it is not possible to carry away in another vessel the things that have been learned, [314b] but it is necessary, after putting down the money, after taking the learning into [your] soul and after having [actually] learned [it], to go away having been harmed or benefited. And so let us examine these things with our elders, too; you see, we are still [too] young to determine so great a matter. Now, as we have planned, let's go hear the man; then, when we've heard [him], we'll talk to others too. You see, Protagoras is not the only one here, but there's also Hippias of Elis; and, I think, Prodicus [of] Ceos [is here], [314c] and many other wise men."[40]

VI

With this in mind, we walked [there]. And when we were on the porch, we stood engaging in dialectic on some argument that had occurred to us on the way; and so, in order that [the argument] not be unfinished, we were going on in this way, completing [it], [and] we were engaging in dialectic while standing [there] on the porch, until we should reach some agreement with each

39. We have used "blessedly happy" for the Greek word *makarios* to distinguish it from "happy" for the word *eudaimon*. "Blessedly happy" is regularly used of the gods and of the virtuous dead who enjoy an afterlife in the Isles of the Blessedly Happy. "Happy" seems to be used for a state capable of being achieved by human effort, even if it is very rarely actually achieved. When Plato assigns this expression to Socrates there is always a heavy dose of sarcasm (cf., for example, *Gorgias* 471e). In the course of the conversation here there has been an ascending level of terms of address for Hippocrates from "my friend" to "my best friend," to "blessedly happy one."

40. Here the term is *sophoi*, "wise men," not *sophistai* (which we have been rendering as "reasoners"). On Hippias, Prodicus, and the others, see Socrates' description of his arrival at Callias' house below and the footnotes there (314e–316a). Perhaps it should be noted that, except for Aristophanes, all of the speech-makers in Plato's *Symposium* are present at Callias' house, a suggestion that the "usual suspects"—a circle of known intellectuals—congregated at these sorts of "happenings."

other. And so, it seems to me, the doorkeeper,[41] a eunuch, heard us, [314d] and it's likely that on account of the number of reasoners he was annoyed by the [people] wandering over to the house.

And so when, in fact, we knocked at the door and he opened it and saw us, he said, "Argh, some reasoners! Himself's not free."[42] And with both his hands he flung the door closed quite as spiritedly as he could. And we knocked again, and answering us through the closed door, he said, "People,[43] didn't you hear that Himself's not free?"

"But, good sir," I said, "we've not come to [be with] Callias, and we're not reasoners; cheer up: [314e] you see, it's asking to see Protagoras that we've come. So announce us." And so with reluctance the human being opened the door for us.

And when we entered, we caught [sight of] Protagoras walking around in the passageway,[44] and walking around with him on one [side] were in turn Callias, son of Hipponicus; and [Callias'] maternal half-brother Paralus, son of Pericles; and Charmides, son of Glaucon; [315a] and, on the other side, the other of Pericles' sons, Xanthippus; and Philippides, son of Philomelus; and Antimoirus of Mende, who is indeed especially well regarded of Protagoras' pupils and is learning the art so that he may be a reasoner.[45] And of those who followed behind listening to what was being said, the greater part seemed to be foreigners whom Protagoras brought from the various cities through which he traveled, charming [them] with his voice, like Orpheus,[46] and they followed [him], charmed by his voice; [315b] and there were even

41. Rich families seem to have had a special slave, a doorkeeper (or porter) who would screen visitors and keep the door safe. In Greek comedies, the doorkeeper is invariably grumpy, and in the *Protagoras* Plato follows this convention. For an analysis of the entire dialogue as an imitation of a comic play, see the introduction, pages 7–13.

42. It has long been a note of distinction to be called "Himself." The appellation was probably first given to Pythagoras by members of his school. In the Middle Ages, it was Aristotle who was called Himself. Here, *Himself* is the slave's master Callias. Slaves referred to their masters and students referred to their teachers as *He himself*. The students of Aristophanes, head of the Library at Alexandria in the second century B.C.E., referred to their teacher as *He himself* (Pollux, *Onomastikon* iii.74).

43. The doorkeeper addresses them as "people," not as "gentlemen."

44. This is, in Greek, the *prostoon*. See appendix A for the layout of the house.

45. Most of these individuals are known from other sources as well. Callias was a rich Athenian who was willing to spend his money on reasoners. Paralus and Xanthippus were both illegitimate sons of Pericles, the famous Athenian politician.

46. The term "voice" refers to the sound of his mellifluous voice, not necessarily to the content. Orpheus is the archetype of a singer whose music charms as if by magic. In myth, his songs overcome the hypnotic music of the Sirens and save the Argonauts; his songs so charm Hades that he is able to travel to the underworld; and so on. In allusions to Orpheus there is often a sense that as in our story of the Pied Piper, the listeners' enchantment with the music is often fatal. In one of the famous myths, Orpheus descended to Hades to fetch his wife Eurydice, but he disobeyed his instructions and looked back to see whether she was following, thereby losing her forever to death. Perhaps for this reason Orpheus' poems became associated with eschatological accounts of the underworld. Plato

some locals in his chorus.[47] And upon seeing this chorus, I very much delighted [at the way in which] they took special care never to get in front of Protagoras and impede him, but when Himself turned back and they with him, the [people] listening to him somehow split into two sides in an orderly way on this side and that, and, going around in a circle, always took their place in the rear—a most beautiful [spectacle]!

VII

"And after him I looked on,"[48] [as] Homer says, Hippias of Elis[49] [315c] sitting on a throne[50] in the passageway opposite; around him, sitting on benches, were Eryximachus, son of Akoumenos; and Phaedrus the Myrrhinusian; and Andron, son of Androtion;[51] and of the foreigners [there were]

---

seems to be setting the stage for his own implied humorous comparison of the scene at Callias' house with the underworld in 315c.

47. Plato is continuing his mock-tragedy comedy. He is asking his readers to imagine the kind of stylized dance a comic or tragic chorus would perform. See the introduction, page 10.

48. The quotation is from *Odyssey* 11.601, the famous scene in which Odysseus visits the underworld. In the passage, Odysseus is describing a phantom of Heracles, which is undergoing punishment (Heracles himself is in bliss with the gods). Adam Beresford, in a note to his translation of the *Protagoras* (Protagoras *and* Meno [New York: Penguin, 2005], 144), suggests that Plato is recalling Aristophanes' *Frogs* and that the passage here may be a tribute to Aristophanes, who died at about the time of the dialogue's composition. He adds that as the second half of the *Frogs* portrays a competition between two deceased playwrights, so the *Protagoras* portrays a competition between two dead philosophers. We endorse this excellent suggestion and would add only that the rivalry concerning the interpretations of the poem by Simonides also echoes the rivalry concerning language in the *Frogs*.

49. Most of our information about Hippias comes from Plato, which is like learning about Rabbi Shammai from Rabbi Hillel or about Adam Smith from Karl Marx. In the perhaps spurious dialogue *Hippias Major* (285d–e), Plato has Hippias boast that audiences listen to him with pleasure as he discourses on the genealogies of heroes and foundation stories of cities. He also boasts of being able to repeat fifty names after one hearing. A moment later in that dialogue, Hippias also boasts about a speech he gave in Sparta and is scheduled to give in Athens in which Nestor, when visited by Achilles' son Neoptolemos (486a), gives a lecture on what a man should do in his youth to win distinction. In *Protagoras* 317c, Protagoras claims to be old enough to be the father of anyone present, and it is possible that the claim includes Hippias; but apart from this claim, Hippias' age is not documented.

50. In Plato's time, this would have been the comfortable chair on which a schoolmaster sat surrounded by his pupils, who were seated on benches. Given the immediate Homeric reference to Heracles, it seems doubly likely (because of the reference to Homer and because of the reference to King Heracles) to use the Homeric sense of "throne," the chair from which a king spoke. The high-falutin use would also be funnier. Only when we arrive at the word "bench" would we realize that the "throne" was just a teacher's chair.

51. Eryximachus and Phaedrus are known only in Plato's dialogues. Eryximachus and Phaedrus (from the deme of Myrrhinus) are linked as lovers and as lovers of discourse in the *Symposium* (177a–e), where a party at Agathon's house is devoted to speeches. Eryximachus is portrayed as a competent physician (he cures Aristophanes' hiccups in the *Symposium* [185d]) and as having reliable knowledge of medicine (*Phaedrus* 268a–b). Plato portrays Phaedrus comically as a fanatic speech-lover in the *Phaedrus*, where he is enamored of speeches on the subject of love (he prefers speeches about love to love itself). So he may be a stock character for Plato. Andron is mentioned in the *Gorgias* (487c–d) as sharing the opinion of Callicles that one should not engage in too much

some [fellow-]citizens of Hippias' and some others. And they appeared to be asking Hippias astronomical [questions] about nature and the things in the heavens,[52] while he, sitting on his throne, was making judgments on each of these things and expatiating on the questions asked.

"And indeed I also looked on Tantalus."[53] You see, Prodicus the Cean was in town.[54] [315d] And he was in a certain chamber that Hipponicus before this had used as a storeroom, but now, because of the multitude of [people] lodging [there],[55] Callias had emptied it and made it a lodging for foreign guests. And so Prodicus was still lying down, as it appeared, wrapped up in skins and blankets and in very many things; sitting with him nearby on the benches were Pausanias from Cerameis and a young man with Pausanias,[56] still a teenager, as I think, fine and good in his nature [315e] and

---

philosophy lest he be ruined by becoming wiser than necessary. He may also have been one of the Four Hundred Tyrants (Plutarch, *Moralia* 833d–f). His son, named Androtion after his grandfather, would have been contemporary with Plato. He studied with Plato's rival Isocrates and was entering politics in the 380s.

52. Things in heaven include both astronomical and meteorological matters. The study of such things is fodder for comic buffoonery in Aristophanes (*Birds* 690, *Clouds* 227–229, 490, 1284, etc.). Nan Dunbar points out that to the average Athenian an interest in things in the heavens was both impious and a waste of time (*Aristophanes' Birds* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995], 434). In the introduction to this volume (pages 8–9), we have suggested that the *Protagoras* may be Plato's version of Eupolis' *Flatterers*, in which a group of "reasoners" are meeting. In that play the things of the heaven are included among the topics (*Flatterers* fragment 10).

53. Also from Homer's *Odyssey* (11.582), where Tantalus is undergoing a torture. He is standing in a lake up to his chin, and whenever he tries to drink, the water recedes.

54. Prodicus is a well attested intellectual, referred to by Aristophanes, Xenophon, and often by Plato. Aristophanes makes jokes about him in the *Clouds* (361), where his intellectual eminence is implicitly assumed to be stratospheric compared with that of Socrates, and in the *Birds* (691–692), where the chorus of birds claims to know much better than Prodicus about the origin of the gods. He is most well known for three reasons: his *Choice of Heracles*, in which the hero is educated by an allegorical figure of Virtue (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.21–34); his idea that the gods were created from what primitive people saw as things useful to human beings; and for his specialty, mocked throughout the Platonic corpus (including this dialogue), of drawing subtle distinctions between words. In the *Cratylus* (384b), Socrates jokes that if he had been able to pay for Prodicus' fifty-drachma lecture he would have understood everything about language and grammar, but, alas, he could afford only the one-drachma lecture. (Readers of this volume are similarly advised that if they had bought the $1,000 edition, they would have found in appendix Y solutions to all the mysteries of humankind, nature, and the universe.) It should be noted that Prodicus, like Simonides, whose poem will be subjected to "analysis," was from Ceos. Protagoras, Hippias, and Prodicus are spoken of in proximity in Plato's *Phaedrus* as having various rhetorical specialties.

55. Contemporary American slang allows a fortuitous translation of "crashing" for "lodging," for the etymology of the verb "to lodge" in Greek is the word that means "to destroy"—hence it would have been possible to translate it as "crashing," and to take joy in the etymological coincidence. Unfortunately, the word would be too casual for the context here. See appendix B. For where the storeroom likely was, see appendix A.

56. Pausanias is one of the characters of Plato's *Symposium*, where (193b) he is said to be the lover of Agathon (on whom see the following note). He is mentioned as Agathon's lover also in Xenophon's *Symposium* (8.32). In Plato's *Symposium*, Pausanias gives a quasi-sociological account of the laws in various places concerning pederasty (180c–185c).

very beautiful in his looks. I thought I heard that his name was Agathon,[57] and I wouldn't marvel if he were the boy-favorite of Pausanias. This was the teenager, and the pair of Adeimantuses [were there], the son of Cepis and the son of Leucolophides,[58] and some others. I was not able to learn from outside what they were saying, although I was keen to hear Prodicus—you see, the man seems to me all-wise and divine—but on account of the deepness of his voice [316a] a hum in the room was making what was said [by him] unclear.[59]

VIII

And we had just come in, and right behind us there came in Alcibiades the Beautiful[60]—as *you* say and as *I* am persuaded—and Critias, son of Kallaischron.[61]

And so, we came in, still taking [our] time on a few small matters; and when we had investigated them, we went to Protagoras, [316b] and *I* said, "Protagoras, let me tell you, we have come to you—this Hippocrates and I."

"Wishing to converse[62] only [with me] or while others are [present]?"

"It makes no difference to us," I said. "But [after] hearing why we've come, you yourself look into it."

"And so, indeed," he said, "what is it for which you've come?"

"This Hippocrates is one of the locals, a son of Apollodorus, from a great and happy house. And in his nature he seems to be a match for anyone of his age. He seems to me to wish to become esteemed in the polis.[63] [316c] He thinks this will absolutely happen to him if he should associate with you.

---

57. Agathon, in whose honor the party of Plato's *Symposium* takes place, was a popular tragedian who wrote in the style of Gorgias. Toward the end of his life he went, as did Euripides, to the court of the notorious tyrant Archelaus in Macedonia, where he died in about 401.

58. Adeimantus son of Cepis is nowhere else mentioned in Greek literature. Adeimantus son of Leucophiades served as a commander under his cousin Alcibiades. Though taken prisoner by the Spartans at Aegospotami in 406, he was spared—only to be accused of betraying the Athenian fleet (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1.4.21). He is mentioned as keeping bad company in Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1512.

59. There is surely a joke here: The master of clarifying distinctions is himself unclear!

60. On Alcibiades, see above, note 2.

61. Critias used his position to murder his rivals and opponents with impunity and then steal their wealth (see the introduction, pages 24–28). His success, however, was short-lived, for the democratic leader Thrasybulus led a successful rebellion in the Piraeus, in which Critias was killed (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 2.3.11–13). Concerning all those present at Callias' house we can declare that in all likelihood none would be regarded favorably by disciples of Plato. The scene places Socrates in the camp of his philosophical and moral enemies. There is a pun brought out by the sentence: We have Alcibiades *the beautiful* and Critias, son of *Kallaischron* (*Kallaischron* means "beautiful-ugly").

62. This is the verb that we translate, when Socrates uses it, "engage in dialectic."

63. On *polis*, see the glossary.

And so now look into this, whether you think you need to converse about these things one on one or with others [present]."

"It's right for you," he said, "Socrates, to be taking forethought for me.[64] You see, a foreign man, and one going to great poleis, and in these [poleis] persuading the best of the young men to leave the association of others, both their householders and their nonrelations, both older people and younger people, to be with him so that they might become better on account of their association with him, [316d] ought to be cautious doing this thing; you see, resentments and other enmities and plots that arise concerning this [activity] are not small. And *I* say that the reasoner's technical skill is ancient and that those ancient men who undertook it, fearing the antipathy [it would arouse], made a disguise and covered up [what they were doing], some [making their disguise] poetry, such as Homer and Hesiod and Simonides,[65] and others [making their disguise] rituals and prophecies, such as those associated with Orpheus and Musaeus.[66] And I perceive that some [have also made as their disguise] gymnastics, such as Iccus from Tarentum, and a reasoner still living—second to none—Herodicus from Selymbria, [316e] formerly from Megara.[67] And your Agathocles had made music his disguise—a great reasoner—and Pythocleides of Ceos, and many others.[68] All these, as I say, fearing resentment, used their technical skills as disguises. [317a] But *I* don't agree with all these men in this [matter]; you see, I don't think that they accomplished what they wished: you see, [I think] they did not elude the men able to act in the poleis, for whose sake indeed these disguises existed—since the many,[69] to put it briefly, perceive nothing, and whatever [the men ca-

64. The verb we have translated "taking forethought" (*prometheomai*) is the word from which the name Prometheus is derived. Given the playful use of Prometheus that will follow in Protagoras' great speech, we wish to alert the reader to future uses of this name.

65. Homer, of course, is the epic poet par excellence, known for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Hesiod is the author of *The Works and Days*, a compendium of information useful for farmers and shepherds, and of the *Theogony*, an account of the genesis of the gods. Simonides is the lyric poet whose work will be examined later in the dialogue. He is most well known for his epigrams immortalizing the glory of the Greeks who died during the Persian Wars.

66. Musaeus is usually associated with Orpheus, sometimes even identified as his son. He is said to be the author of oracles and eschatological poetry.

67. Iccus was a victor at the Olympics in 472 in the pentathlon and later became, according to Pausanias, an excellent trainer (Pausanias 6.10.2). He is said in Plato's *Laws* to have possessed courage along with self-restraint on account of his love of victory and his technical skill (*Laws* 840a). Herodicus is mentioned in the *Republic* (406a–b) as having combined physical training and medicine. Suffering from an incurable disease, he prolonged his life by suffering the tortures of those punished in Hades by imposing on himself a miserable regimen. Socrates and his interlocutor scorn him for winning a miserable old age by his technical skill.

68. Agathocles is mentioned in Plato's *Laches* as a music teacher (180d). Pythocleides is mentioned as Pericles' music teacher in Plato's *Alcibiades I* (118c). Nothing is known about the "many others."

69. As usual in Plato and Greek literature, this is a disparaging remark about the "many"—a stupid, mindless group that never includes the speaker—as distinct from the few, who are intelligent,

pable of acting] declare, they sing along with. And so with respect to the [person] running away [who is] not capable of running away but is found out, his undertaking [to run away] is a great foolishness and [317b] necessarily makes people much more hostile [to him]; you see, they think that such [a would-be runaway] is, in addition to other things, a villain. And so *I* have traveled a road entirely the opposite of those reasoners: I acknowledge both that I am a reasoner and that I educate people, *and* I think that this caution is better than that [caution that involved the use of disguises]—[I use] the acknowledgment rather than the denial;[70] and I have considered other [precautions] besides this, so that—a god willing—I may suffer nothing terrible on account of my acknowledgment of being a reasoner. [317c] And, in fact, it's already been many years I've been in this technical skill. You see, all my years are many: there's not one of all of you whose father I could not be by [my] age. So it would be most pleasant for me, if you are at all willing, to make [my] speech[71] about these [matters] while all these [men] are inside."

And *I*—you see, I suspected that he wished to put on a show[72] for Prodicus and Hippias and make himself look good since we had arrived as his admirers[73]—said, [317d] "Why don't we call both Prodicus and Hippias and the [others] with them so that they can hear us?"

---

capable of acting, and able to see through the fog of deception and convention to the true nature of things. Despite a few experiments with democracy in the ancient Greek world, no extant political theorist had much respect for it. The ancient Greeks do not seem to have recognized a collective genius arising from the multitude. Our words "bestselling" and "popular" would not have been terms of approval.

70. Acknowledgment and denial are rhetorical terms. Protagoras is very consciously and forthrightly explaining how he thinks in terms of rhetorical devices.

71. Protagoras is using the word *logos*, which can also mean conversation. But because other words are available that specifically mean "conversation" and because Protagoras would naturally think that he is required to give a speech (as in fact he does here), we have elected to translate *logos* as "speech" here. For *logos*, see the glossary.

72. The verb here translated "to put on a show" is almost the same as the technical rhetorical term "to put on a display," which, in its verbal form, is used in 328e for Protagoras' long speech. The root of the Greek word is the same as that for one of the three varieties of speeches distinguished in early rhetorical theory. The three varieties are *forensic*, which deals with the truth of what happened in the past—the variety for the courtroom; *deliberative*, which deals with what is best to do concerning a decision for what might happen in the future—the variety for legislative assemblies; and *epideictic* (the term used here), speeches primarily of praise and blame—the variety for patriotic occasions, funerals, and the sort of grand question about the origins of morality, as we find in this dialogue. In epideictic, as Aristotle points out (*Rhetoric* 1417b), the facts are taken on trust. For example, when we hear a funeral oration we do not press the issue of whether the deceased person really deserves all the good things said about him. Philosophy, of course, prefers proofs, and of proofs, what are known as demonstrative or logical proofs are best. Most subjects do not lend themselves to the precision of syllogistic reasoning, and one of the themes in this and many other Platonic dialogues is the difficulty of applying the precision of rigorous logic to the fuzziness of human life.

73. This sort of syntax is called a *hyperbaton*. A hyperbaton is the separation of words that normally go together by inserting something in between. Hermogenes, a second-century C.E. writer on rhetoric, says that we have a *hyperbaton* whenever the speaker puts into the middle of his sentence that which the audience yearns to hear. As a result, he adds, *hyperbaton* becomes an instrument of

"Absolutely!" said Protagoras.

Callias said, "And so do you want us to prepare a meeting room, where you may sit and converse?"

It seemed useful. And all of us, as though about to hear wise men, ourselves[74] gladly took up the benches and the chaises longues and arranged them next to Hippias; you see, the benches were already there.[75] [317e] [And while we were engaged] in this, [the pair] Callias and Alcibiades went leading Prodicus—getting him up from his chaise longue—and the people with Prodicus.

IX

And when we were all sitting together, Protagoras said, "Now, Socrates, indeed, please speak, since these too are now present, about the things that you were mentioning to me a little earlier on behalf of this young man."

And I said, "This, Protagoras, is what I was just now [telling you] prompted[76] me to come. [318a] You see, this Hippocrates happens to be in a passion to associate with you. And so he says he would gladly learn how he'll turn out, if he should associate with you. This is our whole story."

And so, taking up the [matter], Protagoras said, "Young man, if you associate with me, on the day you associate with me, you will have [the experience] of returning home having become better, and the next day [you'll experience] this same thing, and each day [you will] always advance toward the better."

And when I heard [this] *I* said, [318b] "Protagoras, in this you are saying nothing wondrous but [only what is] likely, since even *you*—though being of such an age and so wise—if someone were to teach you something you didn't happen to know, would become better. But that's [not what I'm asking] but something like this: If this Hippocrates, quite suddenly changing his passion, should conceive a passion[77] for associating with the young man who has just

---

lucidity (*On the Method for Being Powerful* [Spengel 1.438–39]). Chapter 22 of Longinus' *On the Sublime* discusses the figure with a great subtlety of perception. The term was current to Plato and is used by Socrates in his discussion of the poem by Simonides later (*Protagoras* 343e).

74. The eagerness of Protagoras' audience is so great that they do not wait for the slaves to perform this menial labor, which would have been the custom, but perform it themselves.

75. Perhaps this means that since the benches were quite heavy, the guests had only to shift their angle, and the chaises longues were easy to move. The setting suggests the manner of ancient lectures or dialogue readings: spectators seated around the speakers or readers.

76. The Greek term is *arche*. Socrates says literally, "this was the *arche* about which I came." Aristotle defines *arche* as a starting point, before which there is nothing and after which there is everything (*Metaphysics* 1012b34–1013a23). Identifying the starting place, especially of something bad, is a theme in Greek literature from Homer on (e.g., *Iliad* 11.604, Herodotus 5.97, Thucydides 2.12.4), where the phrase "this was the starting place of the evil" is a refrain.

77. This redundancy is the kind of jingle many ancient Greeks seemed to like.

recently arrived in town, Zeuxippus of Heraclea,[78] and coming to his side, as he has now come to you, should hear [Zeuxippus saying] these very same things [318c] that he's heard from you—how associating with him he will be better every day and improve—if he should ask him further, 'Why do you say I shall be better and in what shall I improve?' Zeuxippus would say to him [that he will be better and will improve] in painting. And if he were to associate with Orthagoras the Theban[79] and heard him say the very same things [he has heard] from you, he should further ask in what he will be better each day [from] associating with that man, [Orthagoras] would say that he will [be better] in flute playing. In the same way, indeed, *you* too tell the young man and me ([since I am] asking on his behalf) [318d], 'This Hippocrates, after associating with Protagoras, on the day in which he associates [with him], will go away having become better, and on each of the other days he will improve in the same way—in what [will he improve], Protagoras, and about what?"

And Protagoras, hearing me [say] these things, said, "*You* are asking brilliantly, Socrates, and *I* rejoice in giving answers to those who ask brilliantly. You see, [your friend] Hippocrates, when he's come to me, will not experience the very things he would experience if he associated with another of the reasoners. You see, other [reasoners] abuse[80] young men: [318e] You see, they toss the [young men] against their will into the very technical skills that they have fled from and drill them [in each and every] skill,[81] teaching [them] arithmetic and astronomy and geometry and music"—and at the same time [Protagoras] glanced back at Hippias[82]—"but, arriving at my side, he will learn about nothing other than that for which he has come. And the lesson is good counsel about his householders—how he might best manage his own house—and about the [affairs] of the polis and how, in the matters of the polis, he might be most powerful at speaking and acting."[83]

---

78. Zeuxippus is mentioned in all Greek literature only in the present passage.

79. Orthagoras is said (Atheneaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 4.184e) to have taught Epaminondas, the great hero of Thebes in its conflict with Sparta in the 370s, to play the flute. Perhaps both Zeuxippus and Orthagoras would have been well known to Plato's audience.

80. The Greek term that we have translated "abuse" is very strong, referring to the most disgraceful and outrageous actions—as for example, cowardice, taking bribes, acting like animals insatiate for killing, treachery, and failure to honor friendship.

81. This is an attempt to catch the rhyme in Protagoras' words *akontas* and *agontes*. The word we have translated as "drill" actually means "leading," so a literal rendering would be "leading them into technical skills." In Greek the words *willing* and *leading* rhyme. We have added an extra rhyme with the word *skill*.

82. These are the subjects taught by Hippias that the students going to Protagoras found distasteful. See also *Republic* 521d–534e.

83. This is the traditional distinction in Greek culture between words and deeds. The distinction is found first in Homer (*Iliad* 9.443), where Phoenix reminds Achilles that Achilles' father had given Phoenix the task of making Achilles both a speaker of words and a doer of deeds—an educational ideal that has stood the test of time.

[319a] And I said, "Am I following your account? You see, you seem to me to be speaking of the technical skill of polis-craft[84] and to be promising to make men good citizens."

"And so, Socrates, this is the very declaration that I am declaring.[85]

X

"Surely," I said, "it's a fine technical achievement you have acquired, if you've actually acquired [it]—you see, of course, to you nothing will be said at all differently from what I actually have in mind.[86] You see, Protagoras, *I* didn't think this was teachable, but I don't have it [in me] to disbelieve you as you speak. [319b] And where I get the notion that it's not teachable—or provided by human beings to human beings—it's a just thing for me to say. You see, *I* and the rest of the Greeks say that Athenians are wise. And so, whenever we [come] to speak together at the Assembly, when the polis must take some action about construction, I see that builders are summoned as advisers about the construction issues, and whenever [it is necessary for the polis to take action about] shipbuilding, [we summon] shipbuilders; [319c] and in all other [matters we do] the same for all the issues they think are both learnable and teachable. And if someone else undertakes to offer advice, [someone] whom [the Athenians] do not think to be a craftsman, even if he should be a very fine and rich man and from the nobly born, they don't accept [his advice] at all, but they laugh him down and boo until either he himself—the one undertaking to speak who's being booed down—goes away or, when the presiders order it, the city police drag him away or escort him out. And so concerning (the issues) that they [think] reside in a technical skill, they act in this way; [319d] but whenever it's necessary to plan about one of the issues pertaining to the management of the polis, rising [to speak] about these [issues of management], a carpenter and, in the same way, a smithy, a leather-cutter, a merchant, a

84. The Greek word for which we have invented *polis-craft* is *politiké*, which is usually translated as "politics." But Protagoras has in mind the sense of taking care of the city, not campaigning, the sense that our modern "politics" has. Our word *statecraft* would capture the meaning, except that "state" would not convey the meaning *polis*, which has a specific meaning (see the glossary). The invention of such words as *polis-craft* is an attempt to avoid introducing modern notions into the ancient text and of thereby minimizing the difference between the ancients and ourselves. In the absence of an exact rendering, we have chosen to err on the side of accentuating the differences rather than on the side of minimizing them. On problems involving translation, see appendix B.

85. This fulsome expression is Protagoras' and perhaps was a feature of his style. We try to capture as many of these stylistic peculiarities as we can.

86. Perhaps Socrates' passive expression is intended to diminish his responsibility for his sarcasm in the first part of this sentence: He will be candid.

ship owner, a rich man, a poor man, a nobly born man, and an ignobly born man come together to advise—and no one reproves this [array of speakers], as [he had] earlier [reproved] those [who had spoken], despite having no learning from anywhere and no teacher and [nevertheless] undertaking to give counsel. It's clear, you see, that [Athenians] don't think [wisdom about the management of a polis] is a teachable thing.

"And it's this way not only about what's in the common [interest] of the polis, [319e] but [also about what's] in our private [interest] that the wisest and best of our citizens are not able to give to others the excellence that they have. For example, Pericles, the father of these young men, has educated them beautifully and well in the matters that could be learned from [professional] teachers, but in the matters in which he himself is wise, [320a] neither does he himself educate [them] nor does he give them over to someone else [to be educated], but, going around, they graze like [animals] free to range at will, unless, I suppose, they happen upon something excellent just on their own.[87] But, if you please, this same man Pericles, serving as guardian of Cleinias, the younger brother of this Alcibiades, fearing for [Cleinias] that he might be corrupted, indeed, by Alcibiades, after separating him [from Alcibiades], put him in the [house] of Ariphron[88] and educated him [there]; and before it had been six months, [Pericles] gave him back to this [Alcibiades], not having [a plan] for what to do with him. [320b] And I am able to tell you of a whole lot of other people who, though they were themselves good, never made anyone better, neither members of their household nor anyone else. And so, Protagoras, *I*, reflecting on these things, do not think that excellence is teachable. But, when I hear you saying these things, I am bent [to your position], and I think that you are saying something because I have the thought that you are experienced in many things and have learned many things and have discovered many things.[89] And so, if you are able to show us more distinctly that excellence is teachable, don't begrudge [doing so], [320c] but show [us]."

---

87. It is hard to imagine how the sons of Pericles, who are present, would not take this as an insult.

88. Ariphron is Pericles' grandfather on his father's side.

89. Socrates' statement here, we suspect, is a formulation, either from Protagoras or some other contemporary, of the progress of education: experience, learning, and finally, the creative stage, where one makes original contributions. Perhaps Alfred North Whitehead derived inspiration from this passage when he developed his famous description of the stages of education, which he calls romance, precision, and generalization (*Aims of Education* [New York: Free Press, 1929], 18–29). We are glad to include a footnote to Whitehead, who also famously said, "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato" (*Process and Reality* [New York: Free Press, 1979], 39).

"But, Socrates, I won't begrudge [doing so]. But shall I show you [by] telling you a story like an older man to younger men, or explaining by means of an argument?"

And so many of those sitting nearby replied that he should explain in whichever way he wished.

"It seems to me, then, more elegant to tell you a story.

XI

"Once upon a time, you see, there were gods but there weren't mortal genera.[90] [320d] But when also for these [genera] the time came [that was] ordained for [their] process of coming into being, gods shaped them within the earth [by] mixing them together out of earth and fire[91] and all the things mixed with fire and earth. And when the [gods] were about to bring these to the light, they assigned Prometheus and Epimetheus[92] to organize and distribute powers to each [of the mortal genera] as appropriate. And Epimetheus asks Prometheus [to grant him the favor of] the distribution. 'But, [you,] oversee my distribution,' he said. And having thus persuaded [Prometheus] he makes the distribution. [320e] And making the distribution, to some he attached strength without swiftness, but he organized the weaker ones with swiftness; and others he armed, but when giving others an unarmed nature, he contrived for them some other power for their safety. You see, to those beings he had clothed with smallness he distributed a winged escape or a habit of dwelling underground; those he had increased in bulk he saved by means of this [bulk]; [321a] and equalizing other things in this way he continued making the distribution. And he contrived these things, being cautious lest any genus disappear from sight.

"And when he had furnished them with a means of escaping mutual destructions, he contrived a comfort for the seasons [that come] from Zeus,[93] clothing them in thick fur and solid skins, sufficient to ward off winter and even able [to ward off] heat, and for these [animals] as they go to their beds [Epimetheus contrived] that they might possess their own private home-

90. We have elected to use this word, a biological term in both Greek and English, since, as a biological term, it is less wrought with the loaded connotations of some of the possible English renderings (e.g., "race," "tribe," "kind"). See appendix B.

91. These are two of the four elements identified by Empedocles and accepted until the advent of modern chemistry. The other two elements are water and air.

92. The names are significant: *Pro*metheus means "understanding ahead of time"; *Epi*metheus means "understanding afterward."

93. Zeus is the god responsible for the weather and the seasons of the year.

grown mattresses, [321b] slipping some under their weapons, but furnishing others with thick and bloodless skins.[94]

"Then he gave out different foods to different beings; to some [he gave] grass from the earth; to others, fruits from trees, to others, roots. And there are those to whom he gave the meat of other animals as food. And to some he attached a low birthrate, but he attached a high birthrate to those captured by them, providing safety to the genus [of animals eaten as prey].[95]

"And so, inasmuch as he was not absolutely wise,[96] Epimetheus didn't notice that he had used up all the powers on the [genera] lacking reason [321c] and that the human race was still left unorganized by him, and he was at a loss of what to do.[97] And while he was at a loss, Prometheus comes to him to examine the distribution, and he sees the other animals [harmoniously] in tune in all [their provisions], but the human [animal] he sees naked and shoeless[98] and without bedding and without weapons. And already the ordained day had come in which it was necessary for humankind also [like the other animals] to go out from the earth to the light. And Prometheus, being at a loss as to what safety he might find for the human being, steals from Hephaestus and Athena technical wisdom along with fire—[321d] you see, without fire this possession [of technical wisdom] was to him without practical application [rather] than becoming a useful [possession]—and in this way indeed he makes a gift to humankind. And so in this way humankind had wisdom about the means of living, but it did not have wisdom about polis-craft; you see, [this wisdom] was at Zeus' [house]; and it was no longer possible for Prometheus to go to the acropolis to the house of Zeus; and besides, Zeus' guards were fearsome; [321e] and to the common house of Athena and Hephaestus, in which the two of them lovingly practiced their technical skills, Prometheus secretly goes, and after stealing Hephaestus' technical skill of using fire and Athena's other technical skills, he gives them to humankind, and from this [cause] a human being has an abundant

94. This entire sentence is unclear. Perhaps Protagoras is talking about the beds or sleeping quarters of animals that do not have "a mattress of fur." Those who slip under their weapons would be animals like porcupines, who sleep under their bristles; those who are furnished with thick skin would be animals like elephants or cows; those who are furnished bloodless parts would be animals like snails or turtles. An alternative translation would be "shodding some with weapons, others with thick and bloodless skins." These would be animals that used their feet as weapons and as a means of locomotion. Perhaps in this case the thick and bloodless skins would refer to hooves.

95. Herodotus makes nearly the same observation (3.108).

96. This must be a relative comment that means he is not very wise *in comparison* to Prometheus. Certainly the distribution made so far shows quite an intelligent designer!

97. "At a loss" is the verb form of *aporia*.

98. The use of "shoeless" might favor the interpretation dealing with feet above (see note 94). It might also be an oblique reference to Socrates, who was famous for going around barefoot.

means of living; but later, as it is said, a charge of theft pursued Prometheus [322a] on account of Epimetheus.

XII

"And since the human animal had a share of what was allotted to the gods,[99] because (alone of animals) he had a kinship with the god, first he established conventions about the gods and undertook to build altars and images of the gods; second, by technical skill he quickly articulated language and names, and he discovered houses and clothes and shoes and bedding and the foods from the earth. Having been thus provided for at the beginning, indeed, humans lived spread out, and there were no poleis. [322b] And so they were destroyed by beasts because they were weaker in every way. And while their craftsmanly technical skill was a sufficient help to them for food, for war with beasts it was wanting. You see, they did not yet have a technical skill of polis-craft, of which skill in warring is a part. They kept on seeking, indeed, to gather themselves together and to save themselves [by] building poleis. And so when they were gathered, they were acting unjustly toward one another because they didn't have the technical skill that concerns the affairs of the polis, so that being scattered again they were destroyed. [322c] And so Zeus, fearing for our genus, lest it be destroyed altogether, sends Hermes to bring reverential fear[100] and a sense of what is legally just[101] so that there might be both ordering principles of poleis and the bonds that bring about friendship.[102] And so Hermes therefore asks Zeus in what way he might give a sense of what is legally just and a reverential fear to humans. 'Should I distribute these in the same way that the technical skills have been distributed? They have been distributed like this: One person who has medical technical skill is sufficient for many lay people, and it's the same for the other crafts-

99. This is likely to be the ability to reason.

100. The meaning of the word that we have translated as "reverential fear" lies somewhere in between "reverence," which seems inspired by goodness, and "fear," which is an expectation of harm.

101. This is our translation of *dike*, which, though sometimes translated as "justice," more generally means "lawsuit," "action at law," even "penalty awarded," and hence has an association with a legal process or sensibility. It is analogous to our term "reverential fear," and combines a sense of what is right with a fear of suffering a penalty. See the glossary.

102. Perhaps in Protagoras' sentence we have a list of the components of polis-craft. Order and friendship are the bases of social life. These views are very ancient. In Herodotus, Deioces is the founder of kingship because he keeps his society, Media, from anarchy. The ancient arguments about strengthening the city include increasing the number of bonds (*desmoi*) between individuals. The main moral argument against incestuous marriage is that it duplicates bonds (the same man might be brother, uncle, cousin) instead of multiplying the bonds between separate families by marriage outside of one's family (by creating relatives through marriage).

men. Am I, indeed, to put a sense of what is legally just and a reverential fear into the humans like this, or am I to distribute [them] to all?'

"'To all,' said Zeus, 'and let all have a share. [322d] You see, there wouldn't be poleis, if few shared in these, as in the other technical skills. And put it down as a convention [established by my command] that [it is incumbent] to kill the one who cannot share in reverential fear and a sense of what is legally just, [killing him as] a plague of the polis.'

"In this way, indeed, Socrates, and on account of these things, both others and the Athenians, when there is an argument about the excellence of the technical skill of carpentry or about some other craftsmanship, think [only] a few should have a share in counsel, and if someone outside of this few should give counsel, [322e] they don't put up with it, as you say—fittingly, as I say; but when they go to share advice about [carrying out] the affairs of the polis excellently, [323a] which[103] must arise entirely from a practice of justice[104] and self-restraint,[105] they fittingly take up [the advice of] every man, as it is appropriate, of course, for everyone has a share in this excellence, or there wouldn't be poleis. This, Socrates, is [what's] responsible for this [phenomenon].

"And so that you don't think that you are deceived [in accepting] that all human beings really do think that every man has a share in the practice of justice and the rest of the excellence involving the affairs of the polis, consider this evidence next. In the other forms of excellence, as *you* say, if someone says that he's a good flute-player or [that he's good] at some other technical skill that he is not [good at], either they laugh him down or they make [his life] difficult, [323b] and his relatives come and warn him that he's mad; but in [questions of] practicing justice and the rest of excellence that concerns the affairs of the polis, even if they know that someone is unjust, if he himself says the truth in front of many [people: that he is unjust]—which [in the matter of other forms of excellence] they think to be self-restraint—i.e., saying the truth, *there* they think it a madness, and they say that all people need to say that they are just, whether they are or not, or the person not making a show of practicing justice is mad[106]—as though it were neces-

---

103. The pronoun *which* is ambiguous: its antecedent may be either "to share advice" or "excellently carrying out the affairs of the polis."

104. Earlier, Protagoras had conjoined the terms "sense of what is legally just" with "reverential fear." Now, instead of "sense of what is legal" he is using *dikaiosyne*, which we have translated as "practice of justice," though it, too, like *dike* (see note 101) is often rendered simply as "justice." On "practice of justice," see the glossary.

105. On the words "justice" and "self-restraint," see the glossary.

106. This is a view quite the polar opposite of that which Socrates argues in the *Gorgias*, where he persuades his interlocutor Polus that a man should denounce himself and his friends when they have done wrong and let his enemies go free (*Gorgias* 480b–481b).

sary that anyone who didn't have a share of [the practice of justice] [323c] didn't belong to the human race.

XIII

"And so this is what I'm saying: that [the citizens of the polis] fittingly accept every man as counselor about this excellence because they think that everyone has a share of it. And this I shall try to show you next: They don't think that [this excellence] is by nature or that it arises automatically but [they think] that it is teachable and that it arises from the attention one brings to it. You see, no one gets emotional [323d] about the many bad traits that human beings think one another have by nature or by chance or gives warnings or instructs or chastens those who have these [bad traits] with the aim of their not being like this, but they feel pity [for them]. For who is so mindless as to undertake to do any of these things about those who are ugly or small or weak? You see, I think they know that these things—beauty and the opposite, [ugliness][107]—arise to people by nature and by chance. But concerning the many good things that they think arise for human beings because of attention or practice or teaching, if someone doesn't have these [323e] but has the evils opposite of these, [it is toward] these people,[108] I suppose, they [direct] their emotions and chastisements and warnings. Of these [bad qualities], one is injustice and impiety and altogether everything that is the opposite of the excellence that concerns the affairs of the polis.[109] [324a] This is where indeed every person turns his emotion and warns every [other person]—clearly because the possession [of excellence] comes from attention and learning. You see, Socrates, if you're willing to turn your mind toward chastening, at what it can [do] for those who act unjustly, the [matter] itself will teach you that human beings do think that excellence is a thing capable of being provided. You see, no one who has a mind chastens those who act unjustly for this [reason] and for the sake of this—[only] because he has acted

107. This is reading Burnet's Oxford text *kala*. If the word is Ficinus' suggested *kaka*, the translation would be: "You see, I think they know that these things—*evil* and the opposite." We accept *kala* because Protagoras' natural optimism has him discussing the good qualities before the bad.

108. The shift from the singular "someone" to the plural "these people" is in the text.

109. "Injustice and impiety and altogether everything that is the opposite of the excellence that concerns the affairs of the polis" altogether are understood as one thing. A *hendiadys* is the device whereby one thing is expressed by two words (e.g., "might and main"). There is a debate about whether one idea or several distinct ideas are meant here. In Plato there is the recurrent question of whether virtue is one thing and all the apparently various virtues devolve into one single virtue. The language that Plato here gives his character Protagoras seems deliberately provocative, since Protagoras says that one of the bad qualities consists of parts, one of them exceedingly large ("altogether everything that is the opposite of the excellence that concerns the affairs of the polis").

unjustly [324b]—[that is,] whoever is not taking vengeance irrationally like a beast; and the one undertaking to punish with reason does not take vengeance for an injustice that has been perpetrated—you see, a thing [already] done cannot [be made] not to have happened—but for the sake of the future, in order that neither [the perpetrator] himself again act unjustly nor another who sees him punished. And having this in mind he has in mind[110] that excellence is a matter for education: He punishes for the sake of deterrence. And so all people have this opinion, [324c] [that is,] all who take vengeance privately and in public. And the rest of humankind take vengeance on and punish those who they think act unjustly, and not least the Athenians, your [fellow] citizens; so that according to this argument Athenians also are among those who think that excellence is a thing that can be provided and taught. And so it has been sufficiently demonstrated to you, Socrates, [324d] as of course it appears to me, that your citizens appropriately accept it when a smithy and a shoemaker give counsel on matters pertaining to the polis—[because] they think excellence is a thing that can be provided.

XIV

"There is still the rest of your perplexity concerning good men—why ever indeed good men teach their sons the other [lessons] of teachers and make them wise [in these things],[111] but in that particular excellence [of human beings] good men themselves don't make [their sons] better than anyone [else]. About this, indeed, Socrates, I shall no longer tell you a story but [I shall present] an argument. You see, consider the following:

"Is there or isn't there one thing [324e] that is necessary for all citizens to share in if there is to be a polis? In this, you see, the same perplexity that perplexes *you* is resolved, or it will [be resolved] nowhere else. You see, if, on the one hand,[112] there is this [one thing], and this one thing is not the builder's [skill] or the smith's or the potter's [325a] but is the practice of justice and self-restraint and holiness (and I am speaking of all this together as one thing itself, the excellence of a man[113]), if there is this [one thing] that it is necessary for all to have a share in (and every man, if he also wishes to learn or do something else, must act with this [one thing, the excellence of a man] and without this [he must] not [act])—or, [if there is this one excellence, then it

110. This clumsy repetition is perhaps a Protagorean attempt at eloquence.

111. In 320a.

112. Plato has Protagoras forget about the thought that would begin with "on the other hand." Protagoras never takes up the consequences of there not being one basic human excellence and gets lost in a wandering argument.

113. See above, note 109.

is necessary] either to teach and chasten the one who doesn't share in it (a child and a man and a woman) until being chastened [the person] become better; but [should it happen that] though being chastened and taught, the person does not obey [and become better], [it will be necessary] to expel this [person], as though incurable, from the poleis or to kill him [325b]—if it is this way, and if it is naturally this way, consider how strange good men are, if while they teach their sons other things, they do not teach them this. We've shown, you see, that they think it is a teachable thing both privately and publicly. And since it is teachable and a [matter] of care, while their sons are taught the other things for which death isn't the penalty if they don't know them, for what the penalty *is* death and exile to their own children when they don't learn and care for excellence, and [325c] in addition to death, the public appropriation of their possessions, and, to be brief about it, the complete overturning of their homes—look, aren't these things taught and don't they take care [to teach them] with every care?[114] It is, of course, necessary, Socrates, to think [so].

XV

"Beginning [from when] their children are small, for as long as the [parents] live, they teach and advise [their children]. As soon as a [child] understands what is said more quickly [than he did when he was smaller], his nurse and mother and pedagogue[115] and [325d] his father himself fight over this—how the child might be best—teaching and showing [him] that for every deed and word *this* is what's just, *this* is what's unjust, and *this* here's the fine, and *this* the ugly, and *this* here the holy, and *this* the unholy and 'do these things' but 'don't do these.' And if he willingly obeys . . .[116] but if not, as though he were a piece of warped or bent wood, they straighten him [out] with threats and blows. And after these things, they send [him] to the teachers' [schoolrooms] and with much greater [force] order [the teachers] to take care much more

114. Protagoras is making an argument *a fortiori*, arguing "from what is stronger." For example, if a person can lift fifty pounds (what requires greater strength), he can surely lift ten pounds. No doubt this is one of the types of argument Protagoras taught.

115. A pedagogue was the slave who accompanied a boy to school and back home again.

116. The device of deliberately foregoing the rest of a thought, to suggest that the matter is too grim to spell out and best left to the imagination, is called *aposiopesis*, and is much discussed in the ancient rhetorical schools. No doubt, this is also one of the types of figures that Protagoras taught. Perhaps the most famous aposiopesis in American oratory belongs to Patrick Henry: "Caesar had his Brutus; Charles the First his Cromwell; and George the Third ["Treason!" cried the Speaker] . . . *may profit by their example*." Here Protagoras inverts the device, by omitting the good consequences of obeying.

for the orderly behavior of their children than for their reading and writing and their lyre-playing.

[325e]"And the teachers do care for these things, and as soon as the [children] learn their letters and are about to understand what is written as [well as they had] previously [understood] articulate speech, the [teachers] in turn provide them at their benches the poems of good poets to read and compel them to learn them completely, [poems] in which there are many warnings and [326a] many detailed stories and songs of praise and encomia for the good men of old, so that the child, admiring [them], might imitate and struggle to become like them.

"And the lyre-teachers in turn, concerning other such matters, take care of [the children's] self-restraint so that the youngsters don't misbehave; in addition to these matters, when the [children] have learned to play the lyre, they teach them further the poems of other good poets—lyric poets—fitting the [poems] to the lyre-playing,[117] [326b] and they compel the rhythms and harmonies to be at home in the souls of the children, in order that the [children] be gentler, [so that] by becoming more rhythmical and harmonious they be useful at speaking and acting.[118] The whole life of a human being, you see, needs rhythm and harmony.[119]

"Then, still, in addition to these things, they send [the children] to the gymnastic teacher so that having their bodies in better [condition] they might serve good thought[s][120] [326c] and not be compelled to act in a cowardly way both in wars and in other actions on account of their bodies' bad condition. And they who do these things most are the most powerful;[121] and the most powerful are the richest; and the sons of these begin at the earliest

---

117. Perhaps this means adapting the words to the music so that they could be understood when sung, the long notes corresponding to the long syllables.

118. Again, the traditional distinction between being educated to be a speaker of words and doer of deeds. See note 83.

119. In the *Republic*, Socrates discusses extensively the role of music in educating the guardians. Music, according to Socrates, has the power to act directly on the passions, without and even against reason. The use of music, along with gymnastic, is to "tune" the soul properly—to make the soul harder or softer as necessary—to prepare the guardians for the fulfillment of their political responsibility (leading their society in peace and war) and even more for the fulfillment of their intellectual responsibility (searching for the truth of being). See, e.g., *Republic* 410a–412a.

120. Protagoras seems here to be preempting the argument that healthy bodies might be used for good or evil. In the *Gorgias*, the character Gorgias says that rhetoric is not to be accused if it is wrongly used, an argument repeated by Isocrates (*Antidosis* 252) and Aristotle later (*Rhetoric* 1355b3–7). The same notion occurs frequently today over guns—that people, not guns, are to be blamed for the damage guns do. Here, Protagoras asserts that healthy bodies are useful for serving healthy thoughts, and he does not invite the possibility of their being useful for bad actions.

121. Protagoras uses "most" three times in five words (as opposed to our eight words), a rhetorical feat not reproducible in English because English lacks some grammatical elements (such as the postpositive) that are present in Greek.

age to go to their teachers [and] quit [going to them] at the latest age. And when they quit [going to] their teachers, the polis in turn compels them to learn the conventions and to live according to them [326d] as a paradigm,[122] so that they not act for themselves at random, but [it compels them] in a simple way: Just as the writing teachers scratch the outline of letters onto a writing tablet and give the tablet to those children not yet clever at writing and compel [them] to [practice] writing between the outlined letters, so also does the polis, having drawn the outline of conventions—the discoveries of the good men of old who established the conventions—compel [the children] to rule and be ruled according to these, and the person who goes outside of these, [the polis] chastens. [326e] And the name for this chastening among you and everywhere else, since the legal penalty is corrective, is called 'correction.'[123] And so, since there is so much care about excellence, both in private and in public, do you wonder, Socrates, and are you perplexed about whether excellence is teachable? But it isn't necessary to wonder, but it would be much more [wondrous] if it were *not* teachable.

XVI

"And so why do many sons of good fathers become inconsequential?[124] Learn this in turn. You see, it's not wondrous if *I* was saying the truth in my earlier [remarks], that [327a] if there's going to be a polis, it's necessary that no one be a layman in this thing—excellence. You see, if what I say is indeed so—and of all things it is *most* so—reflect on any of the practices and things to be learned other [than excellence] and choose [one of them]. If it were not possible for a polis to exist unless all [people] were flute players—the sort [of flute player] each could be—every person [would be] teaching every person [flute-playing] both privately and publicly and reproving anyone who didn't play the flute well and not be begrudging [anyone else] this [instruction], as now no one begrudges [teaching others] things just and lawful and does not hide them as [he might hide] other technical matters; [327b] I think, you see, the practice of justice and excellence [of individuals toward] one another profits us;[125] on account of these

122. Paradigms are still a staple of education. On *paradigm*, see the glossary.

123. In the United States, we often refer to prisons as "correctional facilities."

124. The term that we have translated as "inconsequential" (*phaulos*) is a key term in Aristotle's discussion of comedy in the *Poetics* (49a 31ff.), where it refers to the kind of person that comedy portrays.

125. This is Socrates' argument in the *Apology* (25c–26a), where he claims that he would never intentionally harm another because he would render society worse and therefore, as a member of society, render his own life worse. Every criminal, of course, could use this same argument. The

things everyone eagerly talks to everyone and teaches what is just and lawful;[126] and so if in this way we shared all our enthusiasm and selflessness in teaching one another flute playing, do you think, Socrates," he said, "that the sons of good flute players would become good flute players any the more than [the sons of] inconsequential [flute players]? I think not, but anyone's son, having been born excellent-by-nature[127] in flute music, could become big and famous, and anyone's son who [327c] lacked natural [excellence] would be without fame. And often [the son of] a good flute player would prove to be an inconsequential [flute player] and the [son of an inconsequential flute player would prove] a good one. But however that might be, in fact, all [these] flute players would be adequate compared to laymen knowing nothing of the flute. And in this way, think even now that anyone reared among conventions and human beings who seems to you to be a very unjust human being [327d] is [nevertheless] himself just, even a craftsman of this, if he should need to be judged in comparison with human beings who have neither education nor law courts nor conventions nor any necessity continually necessitating[128] anyone to take care for excellence, but are wild—the sort [of people] the poet Pherecrates put on stage last year at the Lenaian [festival].[129] [If you found yourself] among such human beings, like the man-haters in his chorus, you would delight exceedingly if you fell in with Eurybates and Phrynondas,[130] [327e] and you would wail loudly, longing for the wickedness of the people here. And now you're spoiled, Socrates, because all are teachers of excellence, each to the extent that he can be, and no one appears to you to be [a teacher of it]; it's just like this:

---

trouble with the argument comes from assuming that people are always acting rationally or without error in premises.

126. This, of course, is the wild claim of Meletus in the *Apology* (25a–b), when he claims that everyone (except Socrates) teaches young people to be virtuous.

127. The grammar contains a joke not reproducible smoothly in English. What Protagoras says is more literally: "I think not, but anyone's son, [who] chanced upon having become excellent by nature in flute music"—and the construction combines chance and nature in what could be either an oxymoron or a normal idiomatic construction, or, given Plato's wit, both.

128. This repetitive expression, a cognate subject (the subject is related to the verb [e.g., the beauty beautified]) is Protagoras'.

129. In 421–420 B.C.E. the comic playwright Pherecrates produced *The Wild Men*, which survives in a very few fragments. Hermann Sauppe suggests that the "wild men" resembled Homer's Cyclopes in their barbarity. Little is known of Pherecrates, who is said to have won his first victory in 438 and to have composed twenty-one comedies. What seems clear is that the play took up in comic form the debate over nature and convention, showing once again that comedy, like Plato's dialogues—and like our own contemporary comedy—felt free to poke fun at intellectual debates. See also the introduction, page 8.

130. According to the Suida, a tenth-century C.E. compilation of earlier collections of data, the only source of information about these men, Eurybatos was a wicked man who was sent by Croesus with money on an embassy and betrayed Croesus, going over to Cyrus, Croesus' enemy. Phrynondas was a similarly wicked individual.

If you were looking for someone to be a teacher of Greek, [328a] not one would appear, nor, in fact, I think, if you were seeking someone to teach the sons of artisans the very same technical skill that indeed they learned from their fathers, to the extent that their father and their father's friends who had the same skill could still teach [them], I don't think it would be easy, Socrates, for a teacher of these [crafts] to appear, but for [young men who were] entirely inexperienced it would be easy [to find a teacher], and it's just like this in [the matters] of excellence and of all other things. [328b] But if someone differs from us a little bit in leading us forward to excellence, it is a thing to be delighted in. I think *I* am one of these and [that I] benefit a person differently from other people in becoming a fine and good man, and worthily I do this for a wage and for a still bigger [wage], as it seems [right] to the learner himself. On account of these things I have also done this about the handling of the wage. You see, whenever someone learns from me, if he wishes, [he pays] the money *I* charge, but if he doesn't [so wish], he goes to a temple and swears [328c] how much he thinks my lessons are worth, [and] that's how much he puts down.[131]

"For you, Socrates," he said, "this is the sort of story and argument *I* have told, about how excellence is a teachable [matter] and how the Athenians do think this and how it is not at all wondrous that the sons of good men become inconsequential and the sons of inconsequential [fathers] become good, since the sons of Polycleitus,[132] who are the same age as Paralus and Xanthippus here, are nothing compared to their father, and other [sons] of other craftsmen are the same. But it isn't right to accuse these [fellows].[133] [328d] You see, hopes are in them still; you see, they are young."

---

131. Aristotle, *Nicomachaean Ethics* (1164a25), would seem to confirm Protagoras' method of payment, but it is, of course, possible that Aristotle learned this from the present dialogue. Aristotle quotes Hesiod as having established the practice. In *The Works and Days* (370) Hesiod sang, "Let the wage be sufficient."

132. See above, note 27.

133. For Plato's audience, if the tales told by Plutarch (*Life of Pericles* 36) were already known, these words would be full of dramatic irony. Xanthippus, Plutarch reports, the oldest of Pericles' legitimate sons, married a young and spendthrift wife, and found himself bitter over his father Pericles' tightwad ways. So he borrowed money from one of his father's friends, claiming falsely that he was doing so on his father's bidding. When Pericles not only would not pay the man back but sued him, Xanthippus was livid with rage and began to decry his father, accusing him of indiscretions with Xanthippus' wife and claiming that Pericles wasted his time arguing with Protagoras about whether a man killed by an accidental toss of a javelin was killed by the thrower or the javelin. Xanthippus and his father never made up their quarrel, and Xanthippus died in the plague a little before his father did. Plutarch also reports that when Pericles' only surviving son, Paralus, died, Pericles, though normally unweeping at the funerals of his nearest relatives, at the funeral of Paralus broke into uncontrolled weeping for the first time in his life. Plato's Protagoras ends his speech, then, on a note of sad irony.

XVII

Protagoras, after he made this long sort of display,[134] finally paused from his speech. And *I*, still enchanted [by his every word], looked on him for a long time as [though] he had something [more] to say, desiring to listen; but when, indeed, I perceived that he had really stopped, with effort I somehow gathered myself together, as it were, and I looked at Hippocrates and said, "Son of Apollodorus, how I thank you for inspiring me to come here; [328e] I shall consider it of great importance, you see, to have heard what I've heard from Protagoras; before just now, you see, I didn't think there was [any] human care by which good [people] become good; but now I have been persuaded. But there's one small thing blocking me that it is plain that Protagoras will easily clear up, since he has clarified these many things. You see, if someone were in the company of any of the public speakers, [329a] he'd probably hear from him just such speeches, either from Pericles or from someone else competent at speaking; but if [the public speakers] were asked anything further at all, [they'd be] like books that can't answer or ask; and if someone asked even a small [question] about any of the things that had been said [by them in their speeches], just as clanging bronze [pots] echo and stretch [their sound] unless someone lays hold of them, the rhetors,[135] when asked something small, in the same way stretch out a course of speech that's ten miles long. Protagoras here is competent at delivering long speeches and fine ones, [329b] as the fact itself shows, and he is competent, when questioned, to answer briefly, and, when asking, to stay and to receive the answer—qualities provided to few [people].[136]

"And so, now, Protagoras, to have all [I want from you] I need [just] a small thing, if you would answer me this. You say that excellence is teachable, and *I*, if I'd be persuaded by any other human being, [I would] be persuaded by you too. [329c] That matter I wondered at while you were speaking—fill up my soul with it. You see, you were saying that Zeus sent the practice of justice[137] and reverential fear to human beings, and in turn everywhere in your

134. On "display [speech]," see note 72.

135. The term *rhetor*, from which we derive our term *rhetoric*, has a wider significance than any single word in English. It refers to someone who is experienced in the theory of rhetoric, like Protagoras, but also refers to people who speak in public, especially in the Assembly. Later on it is used as we use the word *politician*—that is, for someone who practices politics as a career. See appendix B and the glossary.

136. The language is perhaps deliberately ambiguously passive. *Who* has provided these qualities of speaking and listening? The gods? Nature? Parents? The environment? Socrates could have rephrased his "compliment" as "qualities possessed by few," but as phrased, the compliment is provocative.

137. Protagoras had actually used the term *dike*, which we have rendered "sense of what is legally just" (see above, note 104).

remarks justice and self-restraint and holiness and all these things were said by you to be one thing altogether—excellence.[138] Explain these very things to me accurately by an argument: whether excellence is one thing, and the practice of justice and self-restraint and holiness are parts of it; [329d] or are these things that *I* was now speaking of—are they all names of a thing that is actually one? This is what I still desire [to know]."

XVIII

"But this is of course easy to answer, Socrates, because what you are asking about are the parts of what is really one thing—excellence."

I said, "Are the parts like the parts of a face—mouth and nose and eyes and ears—or like the parts of gold—where parts don't differ from other parts (from each other and from the whole) except by largeness and smallness?"

"To me, Socrates, they appear like those in the former case, like the parts of the face to the whole face."

[329e] And I said, "And do people take hold of the parts of excellence, some people [taking] this part, other people that part, or is it necessary that if someone has one [part] he has [them] all?"

"By no means [is the latter true]," he said, "since many men are courageous but unjust, and some in turn are just but not wise."

"Well, then," I said, "are these the parts of excellence—wisdom and courage?"

"Most especially of all, I do suppose," he said, "and the greatest of the parts, of course, is wisdom."

[330a] "But each of these [parts] is different from the other?" I said.

"Yes."

"And each of these has its own particular power? For example, concerning [the parts] of the face, an eye is not like the ears, nor is its power the same; nor is [any part] like another, either in its power or in other ways. And so similarly [is it] that the parts of excellence are not alike, one to the other—neither in themselves nor in their power? Indeed, isn't it clearly this way, [330b] if of course [the answer concerning excellence] is like the paradigm [of the face]?"

"But it is so," he said.

And I said, "Are none of the [other] parts of excellence like knowledge, nor [are any] like the practice of justice, or like courage, or like self-restraint, or like holiness?"

---

138. In 324d–325e.

"No," he said.

"Come, indeed," I said, "let's examine together what sort of thing each of these [parts of excellence] is. First, [consider] the following: Is the practice of justice a thing that one does[139] or is it not a thing that one does? To me, you see, it seems [to be a thing that one does]. [330c] What about to you?"

"And to me [it seems so]. And so, what [follows]?"[140]

"If someone addressed you and me [saying], 'Protagoras and Socrates, indeed, tell me: this thing that one does that you just named—the practice of justice—is this itself just or unjust?'[141] *I*, on the one hand, would answer him that it is just; what vote would *you*, on the other hand, cast? The same as I or a different [one]?"[142]

"The same," he said.

"Then is the practice of justice a sort of thing [that is] like a just thing? [330d] *I*, of course, would answer to the one who was asking [that it was]. Wouldn't *you* also?"

"Yes," he said.

"And so, if after this he asked us, 'And do you say that holiness is something?' We would say [that it was], as *I* think."

"Yes," he said.

"And do you say that this thing is also a thing that one does? We would say this. Or wouldn't we?"

And he agreed to this [point].

"And is the thing that one does itself the sort of thing that is naturally like an unholy [matter] or a holy [matter]? *I*, in fact, would be annoyed with the question, and I would say, 'Watch your tongue, sir! Hardly would anything else be holy, in fact, if holiness itself is not holy.' And what would *you* [say]? [330e] Wouldn't you answer like this?"

"It follows [that I would]. Absolutely."

---

139. The words "thing-that-one-does" are a translation of the Greek word *pragma*, which is sometimes translated "thing" or "fact" or "matter." *Pragma* derives from the word for "to do" or "to act." When it means "thing that one does," it is something like a concert or a foot race, which is a "thing that one does," as distinct from a pebble or a shoe, each of which, in English, is a "thing," but not in the sense of a "thing that one does." See the glossary.

140. Some editors attribute "And so, what [follows]" to Socrates and have him begin his next speech with these words.

141. There is a problem here of self-predication, especially if *dikaiosyne* is translated as the abstract term "justice" and renders the question as "Is justice itself just?" and the answer as "Justice is just." The problem is that an abstraction cannot have a quality that can adhere only to a *being capable* of acting justly. In the same way, excellence cannot be excellent, glory cannot be glorious, redness cannot be red, and so on. If, however, *dikaiosyne* is rendered as "the practice of justice" and the practice is seen as embodied in someone's actual practice of justice, there would be no logical problem.

142. The terminology of voting to settle a philosophical question is used sardonically in the *Gorgias* (474a). The implication there seems to be that truth is *not* determined by a ballot of the ignorant. One might suppose, perhaps, that the use of this metaphor always constitutes a jab at democracy.

XIX

"And so, if after this, he would ask us, 'And so what were you saying a bit earlier? I did hear you correctly, didn't I? You seemed to me to be saying that the parts of excellence were like this toward one another: that no one of them was like any other.' *I*, in fact, would say, 'You heard other things correctly, but as for your thinking that *I* too was saying this, you misheard. You see, it was *Protagoras* here who was answering these things, [331a] and *I* was the one who was asking.' And so, if he said, 'Protagoras, is this man saying the truth? Do *you* say that one part of excellence is not like another? Is this *your* argument?' What would you answer him?"

"It is necessary to agree, Socrates," he said.

"And so what shall we answer him, Protagoras, after we've agreed to these things, if he should further ask us, '[Is it] then [that] holiness is not like a just thing that's done, nor is the practice of justice like a holy thing [that's done] but it's like a not-holy [thing that's done], and holiness is like a thing [that's done that is not just] but is unjust, and [the practice of justice is] a not-holy thing?' What shall we answer him? [331b] You see, *I* myself, [answering] on behalf of myself, would say that the practice of justice is a holy thing and that holiness is a just thing. And, if you let me, on behalf of you, I would answer the same—that justness is of course the same as holiness or something very similar, and, most of all, that the practice of justice is like holiness and holiness like the practice of justice. But see whether you prevent my answering [in this way] or whether it seems this way to you too."

"It does not at all seem to me so simple a thing, [331c] Socrates, to lump together the practice of justice as a holy thing and holiness as a just thing, but there seems to me a bit of difference [between them]. But why does this make a difference?" he said. "You see, if you wish, let the practice of justice be a holy thing and holiness be a just thing for us."

"Not for me," I said. "You see, I don't need these [phrases] 'if you wish' and 'if it seems well expressed to you' but [I do need the phrase, 'the argument seems right to] both you and me.' I say [this phrase] 'you and me,' thinking that the argument is best expressed if one left out the [term] *if* from it.

[331d] "But, let me tell you," he said, "the practice of justice does resemble holiness a bit. You see, anything resembles anything else in some way or other. You see, white resembles black [in some way], and the hard and the soft and other things that seem most opposite to each other [are alike too].[143] And with respect to things we at one time said have a different power and

143. J. Adam and A. M. Adam (*Plato: Protagoras* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893]) point out that Anaxagoras said that snow is black. Heraclitus, of course, asserted that opposites are

are not like one another—[namely,] the parts of the face—[they actually] *do* resemble [each other] and *are* like one another in some way or other. So in this way you might refute these things, if you wished, [and claim that] all these are similar to each other. [331e] But it is not just to say that things are similar because they are similar in one small way, [that is,] even if they should have some similarity that is absolutely small."

And marveling *I* said to him, "For you, then, the just and the holy are like this toward one another—because they have some *small* similarity toward one another?"

"No, it's not at all like that," he said, "nor, let me tell you, is it the way you for your part seem to me to be thinking."

[332a] "Still," said I, "since you seem to be vexed with me concerning this, let's leave it be, and let's examine this other thing you were saying.

XX

"Do you call *thoughtlessness* a *this*?"[144]

He said [that he did].

"And isn't wisdom entirely opposite to this thing [that's done]?"

"To me, of course, it seems so," he said.

"And when people act rightly and beneficially, [332b] do they, so acting, seem to you then to be acting with self-restraint, or [in] the opposite [way]?"

"[They seem] to be acting with self-restraint," he said.

"Don't they act with self-restraint by means of self-restraint?"[145]

"Necessarily."

"Aren't those who are not acting rightly acting thoughtlessly and not with self-restraint [when they are] acting in this way?"

"It seems so to me, too," he said.

"Is acting thoughtlessly the opposite of [acting] with self-restraint?"

He said [that it was].

"Aren't the things done thoughtlessly done with thoughtlessness, and the things [done when] acting with self-restraint [done] with self-restraint?"[146]

---

the same: Life is death, the entrance is the exit, and so on. Aristotle (*Topics* 142a22) also discusses how opposites are related. Book 7 of the *Topics* yields many other insights on similitude.

144. If *x* is a *this*, it can be discussed, and qualities can be assigned to it. To be a *this* is the starting place of a discussion, as for example, in 358d.

145. Perhaps this is to say that people are acting with self-restraint because they are calling into action the capacity for self-restraint that they possess.

146. Are thoughtless people acting thoughtlessly because they are calling into action a capacity for thoughtless action? Is there such a capacity? Is this like saying that one has a capacity to play

He agreed.

"If something is done with strength, it is done strongly, and if something [is done] with weakness, [it is done] weakly?"

[332c] He seemed [to agree].

"And if something [is done] with quickness, [it is done] quickly, and if something [is done] with slowness, [it is done] slowly?"

He said [that it was].

"And indeed, if something is done in this way, it is done by this itself, and if in the opposite way, by the opposite?"

He agreed.

"Indeed, come," I said, "Is there something beautiful?"

He agreed.

"And does it have any opposite except the ugly?"

"It doesn't."

"And what [about this]? Is there something good?"

"There is."

"And does it have any opposite except the bad?"

"It doesn't."

"And what [about this]? Is there something high-pitched in a voice?"

He said that there was.

"And does it have any opposite except the low-pitched?"

He said that it didn't.

[332d] And I said, "Doesn't each of the opposites have only one thing that is opposite and not many?"[147]

He agreed.

"Come, indeed," I said. "Let's count up the things we've agreed to. We have agreed that one thing has only one opposite and not more?"

"We have agreed."

"And the thing done oppositely is done by opposites."

He said [that it was agreed].

"And we have agreed that the thing done oppositely to what is done thoughtlessly is done with self-restraint?"

[332e] He said that it was.

"But that the thing done in a self-restrained way is done by self-restraint, and the thing done thoughtlessly by thoughtlessness?"

---

music poorly? Is this a capacity that can actually be cultivated? There are all sorts of difficulties that arise when one conjures up the negative.

147. Aristotle distinguishes five varieties of opposites (*Metaphysics* 1018a20–1018b8): contradictories (e.g., "tall" and "not tall"), contraries (e.g., "blonde" and "brunette"), relatives (e.g., "richer" and "poorer"), privation and possession (e.g., "gaining" and "losing"), and generation and destruction (e.g., "being born" and "perishing").

He agreed.

"If it is done oppositely, it would be done by an opposite?"

"Yes."

"The one thing is done by self-restraint, the other by thoughtlessness?"

"Yes."

"Oppositely?"

"Absolutely, of course."

"By things that are opposites?"

"Yes."

"Then thoughtlessness is the opposite of self-restraint?"

"It appears [so]."

"And so do you remember that in what was agreed to by us before, thoughtlessness was the opposite of wisdom?"

He agreed.

"And that for one thing there is only one opposite?"

"I say [that I agree]."

"And so, Protagoras, which of the arguments shall we let go [333a]—[the argument] that there is to one thing only one opposite or the earlier [argument] in which it was said that wisdom is different from self-restraint, but [that] wisdom and self-restraint are parts of excellence and, besides 'being different' [from one another], are also unlike in themselves and in their powers, as the parts of the face are unlike [one another]? And so which of the two indeed shall we let go of? You see, these two arguments are altogether discordant:[148] They don't sing the same tune or harmonize with each other. You see, how could they be singing the same tune, if in fact it is necessary that one thing have only one opposite, and not more, and [that] to thoughtlessness, [333b] which is one [thing], wisdom and self-restraint appear in turn as opposites? You see, Protagoras, isn't [this our dilemma]?" I asked. "Or [is it] somehow otherwise?"

He agreed, although quite unwillingly.

"And so wouldn't self-restraint and wisdom be one thing? And in what [we spoke about] earlier, the practice of justice and holiness appeared also to us almost the same. Come, indeed, Protagoras," I said, "Let's not flag, but let's thoroughly examine what's left. Does someone who is acting unjustly seem to you to be acting with self-restraint in so far as he is acting unjustly?"

[333c] "*I*, of course, would be ashamed to agree to this, Socrates, although many people do in fact [say this]."[149]

---

148. For "they are altogether discordant," Socrates has said "they don't speak musically"—that is, in accordance with the Muses.

149. Our translation with the word "although" gives the general sense. The Greek text suggests that Protagoras is suppressing a thought. Here, following H. W. Smyth (*Greek Grammar* [Cambridge,

"And so shall I make my argument with them," I said, "or with you?"

"If you wish,"[150] he said, "engage first in dialectic on this—the argument of the many."[151]

"But it makes no difference to me, if only *you* answer, of course, whether these things seem to you [to be so] or not. You see, it's the argument *I*, of course, am most of all testing. It turns out, let me tell you, that perhaps both I who ask and the one who answers are [being] tested."

XXI

[333d] And so at first Protagoras tried to make himself look good to us. You see, he blamed the argument as vexatious; then, however, he yielded and answered.

"Come, indeed," I said, "answer me from the beginning. Do some people seem to you to be acting with self-restraint when they are acting unjustly?"

"Let it be so," he said.

"And are you saying that to act with self-restraint is to be appropriately prudent?"

He said that it was so.

"And to be appropriately prudent is [for them] to plan well because they are acting unjustly?"

"Let it be so," he said.

I said, "If they do well or badly while acting unjustly?"[152]

"If they do well."

"Do you say that certain things are good?"

"I do say [so]."

"And so," I said, [333e] "are those things good that are beneficial to people?"

MA: Harvard University Press, 1920], §2380), is the full version: "I, of course, would be ashamed to agree to this, Socrates, [and I say this for myself] although many people do in fact [say this]."

150. This is just the kind of expression Socrates had said (331c) he did not wish to hear.

151. If the verb we have translated as "engage in dialectic" is rendered in the usual way as "converse," an important point in this passage is lost. Socrates has just asked Protagoras whether he should argue with people who are not present, whose hypothetical views are proffered. The problem for the dialectician is that hypothetical views may be advanced one after another, whether they be believed or not, and one may always attribute such views to imaginary people who are not present. But one can argue, *actually* argue, only with people who are present, with real human beings. One cannot engage in dialectic with "the many," for dialectic must be engaged in one on one. When Protagoras tells Socrates to engage in dialectic with the many, he is asking Socrates to do the impossible—in effect, to reconcile opposites.

152. The expression "do well" also means "prosper," and "do badly" means the opposite of "prosper." The double meanings are present in English as well.

"And, by Zeus," he said, "*I*, in fact, would also call 'good' things that are *not* beneficial to people."

And Protagoras now seemed to me to be ruffled and to be feisty and to be marshaled to answer. And so since I found him in this condition, becoming cautious I asked him gently, "Are you speaking of things, Protagoras, [334a] that are not beneficial to a single human being or of things that are not beneficial in any way whatsoever? And do *you* call such things good?"

"By no means," he said. "But, in fact, on the one hand, *I* know many things that are harmful for humans—foods and drinks and drugs and myriad other things—and, on the other hand, [I know of] things beneficial [for humans, and I know of things] neither [beneficial nor harmful] to humans but [beneficial or harmful] to horses; and [I know of other things beneficial or harmful] only to cattle, and [of still other things beneficial or harmful] to dogs; and [I know of things neither beneficial nor harmful] to any of these but to trees; and of other things good for the roots of trees that are good-for-nothing for their branches, [334b] such as the dung tossed on the roots of all plants, [which] is good [for their roots], but if you should wish to toss it onto the shoots and young twigs, it destroys them all. And [I know] even about olive oil: For all plants it is really bad, and it is very much an enemy to the hair of all animals except the human [animal], but for the hair of the human [animal] it is an ally and for the rest of the human body too.[153] And so various a thing is the good [of olive oil] and so manifold too that for some things on the outside of the body it is good for the person, [334c] but to the [parts] inside the same [oil] is very bad. And on account of this, physicians—all [of them]—forbid the weak to use olive oil in what they are about to eat except in a very small amount—only as much [as is necessary] to extinguish in the foods and spices what's really vexatious to the sensations of the nostrils."[154]

XXII

When he had said these things, those who were there cheered [him] loudly for speaking well. And I said, "Protagoras, *I* happen to be a person who is forgetful, and if someone talks at length, I forget what the talk's about. [334d] And so, just as though if I were a bit deaf you would think it necessary (were you to engage in dialect with me) to speak in a louder voice [than you'd use]

153. The metaphor of enemy and ally is part of Plato's parody of Protagoras' grandiosely metaphorical way of speaking.

154. Protagoras seems here to be imitating the scientific tone he is discussing. Perhaps he has in mind the modifying of spices that are too strong.

for others, so now, too, since you've met a forgetful person, cut short your answers and make them briefer, if I am to follow you."[155]

"And so in what way are you asking me to answer briefly? Am I," he said, "to answer you more briefly than is necessary?"

"By no means," I said.

"But [I may say] as much as is necessary?" he said.

"Yes," I said.

[334e] "Am I to answer [saying] as much as seems necessary to me, or as much [as seems necessary] to you?"[156]

"Well," I said, "I've heard that *you* yourself can teach another [person] about these things and can speak at length, if you wish, so that you never leave off the speech, and, alternatively, that [you can speak] briefly so that [when you are speaking briefly], no one [can] speak in briefer [terms] than you.[157] [335a] And so if you are about to engage in dialectic with me, use the second method with me—succinctness."

"Socrates," he said, "*I've* been in contests of words with many people, and if had done what you bid—[if] I had conversed as my interlocutor bid me to converse—I wouldn't have appeared as better than anyone [else], nor would the name Protagoras have amounted to anything among the Greeks."

And *I*—you see, I recognized that he was not pleased with himself in his earlier answers and [335b] that he did not wish to be the one answering in a dialectical exchange—[since] I thought that it was no longer my job to be present at the meeting, said, "But, Protagoras, I'm not insistent that we have this meeting [if it] seems contrary to your [wishes], but whenever *you* wish to engage in dialectic so that I can follow, then I shall engage in dialectic with you. You see, *you*, as it is said about you and as you yourself say, are able to conduct meetings both with prolixity and with succinctness—[335c] you see, you are wise—but *I* am incapable [when it comes to] these long [speeches], though I wish I were capable. But it is necessary for you, since you are capable of both, to concede to me, so that our meeting might occur; but now, since you are not willing and I have some business [to attend to] and am not able to stay with you while you stretch out long speeches—you see it's necessary for me to go somewhere—I'm going, though perhaps I'd have heard from you even these [long speeches] not unpleasantly."

---

155. Socrates' expansive repetitiveness here is a biting imitation of Protagoras' prolixity.

156. Quite comically, Protagoras and Socrates are bickering about relativism or absolutism in the appropriate length of answers. Is the appropriate length of an answer a matter of opinion or a matter somehow of objectivity?

157. Plato has Socrates report that Tisias and Gorgias also had this talent of varying the length of their speeches, not according to what the topic required, but according to their own whim (*Phaedrus* 267b). Plato has Gorgias himself boast of this skill in *Gorgias* 449c.

And at the same time that I said these things I got up to go. As I was getting up, [335d] Callias takes hold of my hand with his right hand and takes hold of this threadbare cloak[158] with his left and said, "We shall not let go of you, Socrates; you see, if *you* go away, we won't have the conversations in the same way. And so I am asking you to stay, as *I* would hear nothing more gladly than you and Protagoras conversing. But gratify us all."

And I said—you see, I had already gotten up to go out—"Son of Hipponicus, *I* of course always admire your love of wisdom,[159] and even now I praise it and love it [335e] so that I would wish to gratify you if you asked of me things [that were] possible. But now, [it's] as though you were asking me to keep up with Crison, the runner from Himera,[160] [when he's] at his peak, or to compete with and keep up with any one of the long-distance racers or couriers. [336a] Let me tell you that I, more than you, would strive to keep up with these runners, but, you see, I can't. But if there's a need to see me and Crison running in [a race], you'll need to ask him to be accommodating; you see, *I* can't run quickly, but *he* can [run] slowly. And so if you desire to listen to me and Protagoras, you'll need this [Protagoras] to answer exactly what's asked now, too, in the same way as he first answered me—briefly. [336b] Unless [he does], what will be the manner of [our] dialogues? You see, I thought that being together and engaging in dialectic was different from making speeches to crowds."

"But, Socrates, [don't] you see [the situation as it is]?" said [Callias]. "Protagoras seems to be saying what's just, thinking it right that he should be permitted to converse as he wishes and for *you* as *you* wish."

XXIII

And so Alcibiades broke in and said, "No, you don't speak well, Callias; you see, this Socrates agrees that he doesn't share in [the ability to make] long discourses and yields it to Protagoras, [336c] but in the ability to engage in dialectic and to lay down an argument—both to give and receive one—I'd be

158. As Adam and Adam point out, this was a short cloak worn by ascetic Spartans and was not something to be worn by affluent Athenians. Socrates, whose poverty was a mark of his ethos, wore it as part of his normal attire. Diogenes Laertius observes (6.13) that the Cynics wore it as a badge of their asceticism. Plato portrays some of Socrates' followers (e.g., Aristodemus in the *Symposium*) as imitating Socrates' outward habits.

159. The term in Greek is simply *philosophia*, which means, literally, "love of wisdom."

160. Crison of Himera was a famous runner who won at three different Olympic Games, in 448, 444, and 440—a remarkable feat. The present dialogue is set a decade and a half after Crison's last victory, so it is possible that by then "Crison" had become a proverbial name for an incredible athlete, like Babe Ruth or Billy Jean King for us.

filled with wonder if he yielded to any human being.[161] And so if Protagoras would agree that he is more inconsequential than Socrates in dialectic, it is enough for Socrates, but if he resists [agreeing], let him engage in dialectic, asking and answering, not stretching out a long speech for each question, frustrating the arguments and being unwilling to give an argument, but drawing out [his speech] [336d] until many of those listening have completely forgotten what the question was—[I say "many" and not "all"] since Socrates, of course, *I* swear, does not forget [a thing]—not that he doesn't play around and say that he is forgetful. And so to me it is Socrates who seems to be saying what is more appropriate; you see, it is necessary for each [of us] to make plain his opinion."

And after Alcibiades, *I* think, it was Critias who said, "Prodicus and Hippias, Callias seems to me very much to be on Protagoras' side, but Alcibiades is a booster for whatever [side] he supports. [336e] But *we* must not be boosters for either Socrates or Protagoras, but in unison we must ask [that they] not dissolve the meeting in the middle."

[337a] And when he had said these things, Prodicus said, "You seem to me to speak well, Critias. You see, it is necessary for those present at these sorts of arguments to be *impartial* listeners of the two who are engaging in dialectic, but not *equal* [listeners]. [These two words], you see, are not the same: It is necessary, you see, to listen to both men impartially, but not to apportion an equal [value] to each of them, but more to the wiser, and less to the more unlearned. *I* myself, Protagoras and Socrates, [337b] think it's right for you to concede to one another and *disagree* [with each other] about the arguments but not to *squabble*. You see, friends disagree with friends on account of good feeling, but those who are at variance and hostile toward each other squabble. And in this way we would have a most excellent meeting; you see, in this way you the speakers would be very much *esteemed* by us the listeners and not *praised*—you see, esteem is found in the souls of the listeners without deceit, but praise is often in the speech of those lying contrary to their opinion—and in turn, we the listeners would in this way be very much *contented*, [337c] not *pleased*; you see, to be contented is for one to be learning and taking in something of thought by his intellect itself, but to be pleased is for one to be eating something or experiencing something else that is pleasant for his body itself."[162]

---

161. Perhaps it is worth noting that it is Alcibiades who attributes a desire of victory to Socrates.

162. A variant of the mind-body dichotomy: contentment for the mind, pleasure for the body.

XXIV

And so, when Prodicus had said these things, very many of those who were there received [them well]. And after Prodicus, Hippias the Wise said, "Gentlemen who are present, *I* think that you are kin and members of the [same] household and all [fellow] citizens—by nature, not by convention;[163] [337d] you see, like is kin to what is like it by nature; but convention, being a tyrant over human beings, violently compels many things contrary to nature.[164] And so [I think] that it is a shame for us, on the one hand, to know the nature of things [that are done] and, on the other, to be the wisest of the Greeks, and to have come now to this same place in Greece—the town hall[165] of wisdom and to this the greatest and most prosperous house of this polis—[and] to have shown nothing worthy of [all] this worth[166] but, like the most inconsequential of human beings, to be at odds with one another. [337e] And so *I* ask and counsel you, Protagoras and Socrates, to come together as though we, [serving] as arbitrators, had brought you together to a middle ground, and [I ask] you, [Socrates,] [338a] not to seek this precise form of dialogues, [the] excessively brief [form], if it is not pleasant for Protagoras, but to let go and loosen the reins for his words, so that they may appear to us as very grandiloquent and very elegantly shaped; [and I ask you,] Protagoras, in turn, not to be stretching out all the cable, letting [yourself go] with the breeze, and escaping into a sea of words, causing land to be hidden [from sight], but [I ask that] both of you pursue something in the middle. [338b] And so do this and be persuaded by me to choose a referee and an overseer and a chairman, who will watch out that each of you observe a moderate measure of words."

XXV

This was pleasing to those present, and all praised [the plan], and Callias said he would not let me go, and they asked me to choose the overseer. And so

---

163. On the words "nature" and "convention," see the glossary.

164. Hippias' joke—that these men visiting Callias are kin *by nature* because of their common interest—is echoed throughout the dialogue (see notes 180 and 193). To be sure, many have taken Hippias' joke very seriously: see, for example, Mario Untersteiner, *The Sophists*, tr. Kathleen Freeman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 283–84, and W. C. K. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 162.

165. This is the central governing place, where the sacred fire is kept. It is not just a county courthouse where one pays a parking ticket; it is the spiritual and political center of the city.

166. The jingle and the extravagant phrasing, with the flattering description of Athens as the "town hall of wisdom," are Hippias'.

I said that it would indeed be shameful to choose a head umpire[167]of arguments. "You see, if the one chosen is worse than we, it wouldn't be right for the worse to oversee those who are better, and if a person similar to us [were chosen], in the same way [it wouldn't be right]; you see, a person similar to us will do things in ways similar to us so that he will have been chosen superfluously. But indeed, [you claim] that you'll choose [a person] better than we. [338c] In truth, as *I* think, it will be impossible for you to choose anyone wiser than Protagoras here; and if you make a choice that's not at all better, but you say [that it is], this too will be a shameful thing *for* [*Protagoras*] *here*—that an inconsequential man is chosen as overseer—since for me, with respect to my [feelings], it makes no difference.[168] But I am willing to do it in this way, so that we might have the meeting and the dialogues—what you've set your heart on. If Protagoras doesn't wish to answer, [338d] let *him* ask, and *I'll* answer, and at the same time I'll try to show him how *I* say the person answering [a question] must answer. And when *I've* answered as many [questions] as he might wish to ask, let him again defend his argument to me in the same way. And so if he doesn't seem to have his heart in answering just what is asked, you and I together shall beg of him the very thing that you begged of me—not to destroy our meeting. [338e] Nor will one overseer be needed for this, but together you will all oversee [our conversation]."

It seemed best to all that it be done in this way. And though Protagoras really didn't want to, he was nevertheless compelled to agree to do the asking, and, after having asked sufficiently, to give back the argument [to me], answering according to the short[-answer method].

XXVI

And so he began to ask something like this. "*I* think, Socrates," he said, "that for a man the greatest part of education is being clever about words. [339a] And this is to be able to go through what is said by the poets, both those [sayings] that have been put into poetry rightly and those that have not,[169] and to know [how] to distinguish them and to present an argument when asked.[170] And indeed now too [my] question will be about what *you* and *I*

167. The term refers to the judge who awarded prizes at the games.

168. The "since-clause" explains that choosing an inferior would be an affront to Protagoras (hence our use of italics). It makes no difference to Socrates, as Socrates declares, apparently because he is stoically indifferent to such kinds of slight.

169. In the *Phaedrus* (267c) Socrates tells his young friend about a work on correctness that Protagoras is said to have written, and correctness about language seems to have been a concern of the reasoners. It is often mocked in Aristophanes (e.g., *Birds* 690, *Clouds* 659, *Frogs* 1180–1181).

170. Plato opens the *Meno* with a set-up question addressed to Socrates by the title character (*Meno* 70a). The question is intended to show how reasoners and their students establish the agenda

were now conversing about—excellence, transferring it over to poetry. It will differ only in this[—that it will be applied to poetry]. You see, Simonides[171] somewhere says to Scopas,[172] the son of Creon of Thessaly, that

> [339b] On the one hand, for a man to become good truly is difficult,[173]
> Square[174] in hands and feet and mind, constructed without a flaw.

Do you know this song,[175] or shall I go through it all for you?"

And I said, "It is not necessary; you see, I know the song and I happen to have paid particular attention to it."

"That's good," he said. "Does it seem to you well composed, and rightly, or not?"

"Very well," I said, "and rightly."

"But does the poet seem to have composed well if he himself says things opposite to himself?"

"[No, he would] not [then have composed] well," I said.

"Indeed, look [at the poem] better," he said.

[339c] "But, good [friend], I've looked [at it] adequately."

"And so you see," he said, "that when the poem gets going he says somewhere:

> Nor for me is the Pittakos-view harmoniously circulated,
> although said by a wise man—he said that being noble is difficult.

---

for a discussion so that they can then dominate it and emerge victorious (all such discussions really being contests). Here, after his discomfiture in the earlier scene, Protagoras attempts to do the same. He is portrayed as having formulated a discussion about a poem of Simonides and knows very well how to prevail so long as nothing unexpected occurs. But, as in the *Meno*, Socrates gives an unexpected reply that throws his interlocutor into utter confusion. Plato's point seems to be that one has nothing to learn in a deep and meaningful way from memorized arguments, for they require no genuine understanding to repeat them or ability to deal extemporaneously with objections that arise.

171. On Simonides, see note 65, and, for modern interpretations of Simonides' ode, see appendix C.

172. Scopas' family frequently hosted Simonides, who wrote poems in their honor. Perhaps he was paid to do so. Pindar, a rival poet, is said to have called Simonides "a Muse for hire."

173. This is our attempt to preserve the squinting modifier "truly," which could modify either "good" or "difficult." On this kind of grammatical error, which, in the *Sophistical Refutations*, Aristotle calls a "solecism," see appendix D.

174. Simonides expresses a Pythagorean belief in the perfection of the number four. For Pythagoreans, ethics fell under the province of mathematics, and moral excellence was a kind of harmony (as in our expression "fair and square," in which "square" connotes moral goodness). It is impossible for us today to say exactly when Pythagorean ethical terms were strictly mathematical and when they were metaphorical, and the Pythagoreans themselves were probably sometimes uncertain on the matter.

175. What we call lyric poetry was sung to a lyre and hence the words are actually the "lyrics" of a song. For how some contemporary scholars interpret Simonides' ode, see appendix C.

Do you understand that this same [poet] says both these things and those previous things?"

"I know [it]," I said.

"And so does it seem to you," he said, "that these [statements] agree with those [previous] ones?"

"They appear to me, in fact, [to do so]." (At the same time—let me tell you—I was fearing that he might be saying something.) [339d] "But," I said, "don't they appear [so] to you?"

"Look, how could this man [Simonides] appear to agree with himself—the one who says both these things, who in fact himself established first that it is difficult to become a good man in truth, but when he had gone forward a bit in the poem forgot [this claim], and [though] Pittacus is saying the same things as he himself [had said]—that 'it is difficult to be noble'—[Simonides] blames him and declares that he does not accept Pittacus' saying the same things as he himself [was saying]? And when he blames someone who is saying the same things as he himself, it is clear that he is blaming himself, so that it's either the earlier or later statement that he does not speak rightly."

And so, when he had said these things, he caused a stir among many of those were listening, and they praised [him]. [339e] And *I*, at first, as though struck by a good boxer, almost blacked out, and I became dizzy when he was saying these things and the others were making a stir [with their applause]; then (to tell you the truth, of course), to have time for the examination of what the poet was saying, I turn to Prodicus, and, calling on him, said, "Prodicus, Simonides is your [fellow] citizen;[176] you are duty-bound to help the man. [340a] And so *I* think it best for me to call on you, as Homer says that when Scamander was besieged by Achilles, he called on Simois and said:

> Dear brother, let us both contain the man's strength.[177]

Yet *I* am also calling on you, lest Protagoras destroy Simonides for us. And so, you see, Simonides' defense needs your music too, by which you distinguish [the terms] *wish* and *desire* as not the same along with the many fine things which you were indeed now saying. [340b] And so examine whether [the matter] seems to you as it does to me. You see, Simonides does not appear to be saying things opposite to himself. Hey, Prodicus, *you*, reveal your view. Does *become* seem to you the same thing as *be*, or something else?"

"Something else, by Zeus," said Prodicus.

---

176. See above, note 54.
177. *Iliad* 21.308–309.

I said, "In his first [verses], didn't Simonides himself speak out his own view, that 'For a man to *become* good in truth is difficult?'"

[340c] "You say the truth," said Prodicus.

"He blames Pittacus, of course," I said, "not as Protagoras thinks, for saying the same things as he himself [was saying] but for saying something else. You see, Pittacus was not saying that it was difficult *to become* noble, 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. And perhaps our Prodicus here and many others would say, [340d] 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]."[178]

XXVII

And Prodicus, hearing this, praised me. But Protagoras said, "Socrates, your defense [of the verses] is making a bigger mistake than what you are defending."

And I said, "Then a bad thing has been done by me, as is likely, Protagoras, [340e] and I am a laughable physician: Applying a cure, I am making the illness greater."

"But it *is* so," he said.

"How, indeed?" I said.

"The poet's ignorance," he said, "would be great, if he had said that excellence, which, of all things, is the most difficult, as it seems to all people, was in this way an inconsequential [thing] to get."

And I said, "This Prodicus has, by Zeus, happened upon us, in fact, at a critical moment in our arguments. You see, Protagoras, Prodicus' divine wisdom is something old, [341a] either starting from Simonides or even older still. But *you*, [though] experienced in many other things, appear to be inexperienced in this, not experienced like me since I am a pupil of this Prodicus. And now you seem to me not to have learned that Simonides perhaps did

178. The passage is paraphrased from *Works and Days* 291–292. Plato quotes the passage again at *Republic* 364c–d. Coach John Wooden of UCLA, speaking of his basketball team's success, echoed Socrates' comments almost verbatim: "I say it's easier to stay there because of things you learn along the way and because of the better talent that will come to you just because of the fact you are winning" (www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=9215993).

not take the [term] *difficult* just as *you* take it, but in just the way this Prodicus admonishes me about the [term] *terrible* every time when, praising you or someone else, *I* say that Protagoras is a 'terribly wise' man, and he asks if I am not ashamed calling good things *terrible* things.[179] [341b] You see, the term *terrible*, he says, [refers to] a bad thing. And so of course no one ever speaks of *terrible wealth* or a *terrible peace* or a *terrible health*, but of a *terrible illness* or a *terrible war* and a *terrible poverty*, since a 'terrible' thing is a bad thing. And so, perhaps, with the term *difficult*, in turn, the Ceans and Simonides take it as a bad thing or something else that *you* haven't learned. And so let's ask Prodicus; you see, it is just to ask this [man] about the language of Simonides. [341c] Prodicus, what was Simonides saying with the [term] *difficult*?"

"A bad thing," he said.

"Is it on account of these things, Prodicus," I said, "that he blames Pittacus when he said that 'it is a difficult thing to be noble,' as though he had heard him saying that it was a bad thing to be noble?"

"But do you think, Socrates," [Prodicus] asked, "that Simonides is saying anything else, and isn't he reviling Pittacus because he doesn't know how to distinguish the words since he's from Lesbos and was brought up in a barbarian language?"

And I said, "Indeed, Protagoras, do you hear Prodicus here? Do you have anything to say to these [remarks]?"

[341d] And Protagoras said, "It's very far from this, in fact, Prodicus. But *I* know well that Simonides was meaning by the term *difficult* just what we others [do], not *bad* but what isn't easy and comes into being through many troubles."

"But, Protagoras," I said, "*I* also think that Simonides was saying this, and that Prodicus here knew [it], of course, but he was playing and seeming to make a trial of you, [to see whether] you could come to the aid of your own argument. [341e] A great piece of evidence that Simonides does not in fact say that the difficult is bad is the phrase immediately after this; you see, he says that

> a god alone would have this gift.

He is not, I don't suppose, saying this, of course—that it is bad to be noble—and then saying that a god alone has this and to the god alone has he assigned this gift; you see, Prodicus would be saying that Simonides was a most scandalous person and by no means a man from Ceos.[180] But I'm willing

179. On the word we have translated as "terrible," see above, note 35.

180. Ceos, an island in the Cyclades, where Simonides is said to have been from, had an excellent reputation for virtue (*Laws* 1.638b). Socrates here is joking that someone who says things as scandal-

to tell you what Simonides seems to me to have intended in this song, if—as you say—you wish to test how [capable] I am [342a] concerning verses; but if you wish, I shall listen to you."

Protagoras, hearing me say this, replied, "If you wish, Socrates, [listen to me]."[181]

But both Prodicus and Hippias were all for asking [me to speak], and the others were, too.

XXVIII

"Now," I said, "*I* shall try to go through for you what seems to me [correct] about this song. Philosophy, you see, is most ancient and among the Greeks is most [cultivated by those] in Crete and in Lacedaemon, [342b] and most of the earth's reasoners are there.[182] But they emphatically deny [their wisdom] and pose as though they were unlearned, in order that it should not be crystal clear that they are preeminent over the Greeks in wisdom (like those reasoners whom Protagoras was speaking of) but [instead] should seem preeminent in fighting and in courage, thinking that if they were known for that in which they were preeminent—wisdom—all would practice it. But, now hiding this [fact], they deceive those who act like Spartans in the poleis [of Greece], [where] some bruise their [own] ears in imitation of them [342c] and twist leather thongs [around their knuckles][183] and love to exercise and wear short cloaks, as though, indeed, it were by these things

---

ous as the things Simonides has been saying cannot be from so highly regarded a town. This joke is akin to that of Hippias in 337c–d, when he said that those who are interested in the same things are relatives *by nature*. Perhaps Socrates is capping that joke by suggesting that if one is not true to the reputation of his native land, he is then not truly from that native land.

181. Socrates has used the phrase "if you wish," asking Protagoras whether he wished for two diverse things: (1) whether he wished to make a test of Socrates' skill in verses and (2) whether he wished for Socrates to listen to him expound further on Simonides' poem. We have suggested here that Protagoras responds favorably to the second wish and that this wish is frustrated by the interruption of Prodicus, Hippias, and then the others, who would prefer to hear Socrates interpret the poem. This would perhaps be more comic, and we can imagine the discomfiture of Protagoras in having to listen to someone else's poetical interpretation. Since Socrates had earlier complained about Protagoras' speaking at length, it would be all the more annoying for Protagoras to be compelled to listen to a long speech by Socrates. It is possible however, to take the passage in a different and less funny way (as other translators have done):

> Protagoras, hearing me say this, replied, "If you wish, Socrates, [I shall listen to you]."
> And both Prodicus and Hippias were all for asking [me to speak], and the others were, too.

182. Socrates, of course, is making a wild claim and will set out to prove it. Plato has him make other similar ridiculous claims to show Socrates' persuasive ability. For example, in the *Symposium*, Socrates ingeniously shows that sexual desire is actually the same thing as philosophy and in the *Republic* that the dog is the most philosophical of animals.

183. Thongs were wrapped around the fists for boxing in order to protect the knuckles when striking an opponent's face.

that the Lacedaemonians ruled over the Greeks. And when the Lacedaemonians wish to be by themselves with their reasoners in a free and easy way and are fed up with meeting them in secret, they carry out expulsions both of the foreigners who are behaving like Spartans and any other foreigner who happens to be in the city, and, [thus] escaping the notice of the foreigners, meet together with their reasoners; and they allow none of their young men to go out to other poleis, as neither do the Cretans, [342d] so that they don't unlearn what they have taught [them]. And in these poleis not only are men proud of their schooling, but women are too.[184]

"And you'd recognize that these are true things I'm saying and that Lacedaemonians have been excellently educated in philosophy and arguments in the following way. You see, if someone wishes to meet with the most inconsequential of Lacedaemonians, he'll find [the Lacedaemonian] appearing as someone inconsequential [342e] in most of what's in his statements; then, somewhere in the things said, like a terribly clever[185] spear-thrower, he throws in a brief and nicely turned phrase worth thinking about, so that the one meeting him in conversation appears no better than a child.[186] And so there are men of today and of long ago who have realized this very thing—that acting in a Spartan way is much more about engaging in philosophy than in physical training—having seen [the Lacedaemonians] able to utter phrases of a completely educated human being.

[343a] "And of these people were Thales the Milesian and Pittacus the Mytilenian and Bias the Prienian and our Solon and Cleoboulus the Lindian and Myson the Chenian, and seventh among these is said to have been Chilon the Lacedaemonian.[187] These were all emulators[188] and lovers and pupils of the education of the Lacedaemonians, and anyone might thoroughly learn

---

184. Plato is fond of jokes about educating women. For him the notion that a woman could be educated was about as sincere as the notion that a dog is philosophical (a notion Plato has Socrates assert at *Republic* 376b). Many who have taken Plato's outrageously comic claims as sincere have attributed to the philosopher a twentieth-century feminism that is wholly unwarranted.

185. Socrates is jokingly using the word he has already discussed—"terribly" (340e–341b).

186. Finding brilliance in the most ordinary statement was the premise of the film *Being There*, in which Peter Sellers played a simple-minded gardener whose literal utterances about plants were taken as subtle metaphors concerning public policy. By the end of the film, he had risen to the highest offices of the country.

187. This is one formulation of the Seven Sages. Diogenes Laertius (1.13) includes Periander the tyrant and excludes Myson (whose name may mean "mouse" and may have been invented by Plato).

188. The term *emulation* is given a brief history by Socrates in Plato's dialogue *Menexenus* (242a). Socrates says that in the life of the polis first came emulation and then begrudgment, both consequent on the establishment of peace and prosperity. Once people had attained an orderly civic life, the principle of "degree" or "hierarchy" created ambition and emulation and envy. Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1388a30) defines *emulation* thus: "a kind of pain at the visible existence of good things that are held in honor and that are possible for us to attain, possessed by those who are like us in nature; we feel this pain not because the other person has them but because we do not."

that their wisdom was of this sort—short, memorable brief phrases spoken by each. These [men], going together to the temple in Delphi, [343b] dedicated these [utterances] in common as an offering of wisdom to Apollo, writing such [phrases] as indeed all sing hymns about—'Know yourself' and 'Nothing too much.'[189]

"Why do I say these things? Because this was the way of the philosophy of the [men] of old: a laconically Spartan brief phrase.[190] And indeed this phrase of Pittacus', praised by the wise, was carried around in private: 'It is difficult to be noble.' [343c] And so Simonides, since he was a lover of [the] honor that comes from wisdom, knew that if he could vanquish this phrase as though it were a well-esteemed athlete and could be preeminent over it, [he] would himself be esteemed among the people of that time. And so [aiming at] this [esteem] and for the sake of this plotting to bring down this very phrase, Simonides made his whole song—as it appears to me.

XXIX

"Indeed, let's all examine together whether *I'm* saying the truth. Right away, you see, the first [part] of the song would appear mad, [343d] if, while wishing to say that it was difficult for a man to become good, he then tossed in the phrase 'on the one hand.' You see, this does not appear to have been tossed in for even one reason unless someone would take Simonides as quarreling with Pittacus' phrase when Pittacus says that 'it is difficult to be noble' and disagreeing [with him]: 'No, but *to become* a good man *is* difficult, Pittacus, truly'—[343e] 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]; but it is necessary to interpret the term *truly* in the song as a hyperbaton,[191] thus somehow putting forth Pittacus' [phrase] as a premise (as though we were interpreting Pittacus as the speaker and Simonides as the answerer) [when Pittacus said], 'People, it is difficult to be good' but [the other] answered, 'Pittacus, you're not saying the truth; [344a] you see, it's not the *being* but the *becoming* a good man, square in hands and feet and mind, built without defect, [that is] difficult truly.' Thus it appears that

189. These are the famous Delphic maxims. The first, "Know yourself," advises us to reach our limits. The second, "Nothing too much," advises us not to exceed our limitations. The great Aristotelian doctrine of the golden mean, of excess and deficiency, is found everywhere in Greek culture long before Aristotle.

190. The term *laconic* derives from the adjective for "Spartan." Our redundant expression here is an attempt to convey the joke.

191. For *hyperbaton*, see note 73. The very use of this word shows that a technical rhetorical vocabulary already existed. Plato was surely conscious of the *hyperbaton* as a feature of his style!

[the terms] 'on the one hand' and 'truly,' lying at the end [of the verse], were rightly tossed in for a reason. And all the things that come next testify to this [interpretation]—that it was said like this. And there are many things about each of the points made in the song to show how well it has been composed; [344b] it is, you see, [composed] altogether gracefully and meticulously; but it would be a long [business] to go through it in this way. But let's go through the whole outline[192] and meaning of [the poem]—that more than anything, through the whole song, it is a refutation of Pittacus' saying.

XXX

"Next, after going through a few things, [Simonides] argues, as if he were arguing an argument, 'To become a good man is difficult truly'; however, it is, in fact, possible for a time; but, after having become [good], as you say, [344c] Pittacus, it is impossible and not characteristic of a human being to remain in this condition and *to be* a good man, but only a god might have this gift:[193]

> there's no way for a man not to be bad,
> whom an unmanageable misfortune takes down.

And so whom does an unmanageable misfortune vanquish when he is in command of a ship? It is clear that it isn't a lay person; you see, the lay person is *always* vanquished. And so it follows that just as one can't throw down a person lying [on the ground], but one might throw down a person who's standing at one time so as to make him lie down, but not the one [already] lying down,[194] [344d] so an unmanageable misfortune vanquishes the person who at one time is able to manage [his tasks], not the person who is always incapable of managing [his tasks]; and a great storm falling upon a helmsman would make him incapable of managing [his tasks], and a difficult season coming upon a farmer would make him incapable of managing [his tasks], and these same things [would apply also for] a physician. You see, it is possible for a noble person to become bad, as is testified by another poet, who said,

> Still, a good man at one time is bad, at another time, noble.[195]

192. "Outline" is another technical rhetorical term (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1403a 17–18).

193. This is another joke in Hippias' style: Only a *god* can be a good *man*. It is akin to Hippias' joke earlier (337c–d), where Hippias had said that those at Callias' house were kin—using a word for blood-relative—by nature and not by convention.

194. The discussion here is similar to that by Aristotle on actuality and potentiality in Book 3 of the *Physics* and elsewhere. This was surely a topic discussed at the Academy, where Aristotle would have thought about it with this formulation.

195. The poet is unknown. Adam and Adam suggest that the terms *bad* and *noble* have a political sense here, "alluding to the ups and downs of an aristocrat's life in times of civil dissension."

But it is not possible for a bad man to become [bad], [344e] but it is necessary for him always to be [bad]. So that when unmanageable misfortune vanquishes a man who can manage [his tasks] and is wise and good, 'there's no way [for him] not to be bad'; but *you*, Pittacus, say that 'it is difficult to be noble'; *the becoming* noble is difficult but possible, but *being* noble is impossible.

> You see, every man who has done well is good,
> but bad [if he has done] badly.

[345a] And so what is good action in letters, and what makes a man good at letters? It is clear that [it is] the process of learning them. And what good action makes a man a good physician? It is clear that it is the process of learning to care for the sick. 'But [he is] bad [who has done] badly.' And so who would become a bad physician? It is clear that it is he who first is endowed with the capacity of being a physician, and then of [being] a good physician. You see, this [good physician] might also *become* a bad one, but we who are lay persons—[persons having no knowledge of the craft of] a physician—wouldn't ever become people who have done badly as physicians at all or as builders or as any other such professionals; [345b] and it is clear that whoever hadn't become a physician by acting badly didn't become a bad physician.

"And in this way the good man might also at one time become bad either from time or from trouble or from illness or from some other calamity; you see, this is the only bad action—to be deprived of knowledge. But the bad man does not ever *become* bad; you see, he always *is* [bad]; but if he is about to become bad, it is necessary for him to have become good beforehand. So that [this part] of the song also tends toward this, that it is not possible to be a good man [345c]—permanently good—but it is possible to become good, and, of course, [it is possible] for the same person [to become] bad. 'The men who are best for the most [time] are those whom the gods love.'

XXXI

"And so all these [verses] are said against Pittacus, and the parts of the song that come next in fact show this still more. You see, he says

> This is why I, searching for
> what cannot come into being,
> shall never toss a portion of my life
> onto an empty impractical hope
> —[living as] a completely blameless human being [among] all of us
> who lay hold of the fruit of the generously fertile land;
> And after I've found [him], I'll announce [it] to you.

[So] he says. [345d] In this way, throughout the whole song he also goes vehemently after Pittacus' phrase:

> But I praise and love all
> willingly, whoever does no shameful thing;
> and not even the gods fight
> with necessity.

And this too was said against this very point. You see, Simonides was not so uneducated as to say that he praised those who would do no bad thing willingly, as though there were some who would do bad things willingly. You see, I would hardly think this, that any of the men who are wise thinks that a human being [345e] willingly makes a mistake or willingly does shameful or bad things for himself, but they well know that all who do shameful and bad things do them unwillingly. And indeed, Simonides does not say that he praises [the person] who doesn't do bad things willingly, but it is about *himself* that he uses this term 'willingly.' You see, he thinks that a fine and noble man often compels himself to become a friend to someone and [his] praiser, [346a] as, for example, it has often fallen to a man [to have] a monstrous mother or father or fatherland or some other such.[196] And so, as for the wicked people, whenever some such [shameful] thing falls to them, they look at [it] as though they were glad; and they blame [others], pointing out the wickedness of their parents or fatherland and accuse it, so that people not accuse [*them*—the wicked people—saying] that *they* are neglectful of their own [families and fatherland] nor revile *them* because *they* are neglectful, and the result is that [346b] [wicked people] do still more blaming and add voluntary enmities to the necessary ones;[197] but good men are constrained to hide [their views] and praise [their parents and fatherland], and should they become angry when they are being treated unjustly by their parents or fatherland, they compel themselves to become soft and to be reconciled and to love and to praise their own. And often, I think, Simonides was thinking that he too had praised and extolled a tyrant or some other [person] of this sort, not willingly, but constrained. [346c] And indeed, to Pittacus also he says this: 'I do not blame you on account of this—because I am a blame-lover—since

196. In such cases someone must compel himself to praise his parents or leaders. This is often the case in despotic regimes.

197. The necessary enmities are distinguished from those that are willed and hence voluntary and done under the yoke of necessity. A distinction between what is inevitable and what is willed is implied.

> sufficient for me is he who is not bad
> or too inept, [a man] who in fact knows polis-benefiting justice,
> a sound man;
> [him] I shall not blame;
> you see, I am not a lover of blame;
> you see, [there are] generations
> of numberless fools

so that if someone does delight in blaming, let him satisfy his appetite blaming them.

> All things are fine, in which shameful things are not mixed.

[346d] He is not saying this as if he were saying that all things are white in which no black is mixed in—you see, this would be laughable for lots of reasons; but [he is saying] that he himself accepts the [things that are] in between so as not to blame [them]. And I am not seeking

> a completely blameless human being [among] all of us
> who lay hold of the fruit of the generously fertile land;
> and after I've found [him], I'll announce [it] to you

—because for the sake of this [requirement of finding a blameless person] I would, in fact, praise no one; but he is sufficient for me—the one who's a middle [sort of person] and who does nothing bad, since

> I love and praise all

—and in this spot he uses a Mytilenian voice,[198] as though [he were] saying to Pittacus the phrase

> 'I doth praise and esteem all *willingly*'—

[346e] there, at [the term] *willingly* it is necessary for the one speaking to pause, [and then comes]

> whoever does nothing shameful,

198. The word said with a Mytilenian voice (i.e., dialectical pronunciation) is *praise*, which differs a little from the Athenian pronunciation. Socrates is being facetiously pedantic here. Our insertion of "doth" is intended to sound a bit ridiculous too.

but [there are some others] whom I praise and love unwillingly. And so, if you had spoken things appropriate and true in a measured way, Pittacus, I would never have blamed you. [347a] But now—you see, even while you are lying vehemently about the greatest [matters] you are seeming to say the truth—[and so] because of these things *I* do blame you.

XXXII

"Prodicus and Protagoras," I said, "these things seem to me what Simonides had in mind when he composed this song."

And Hippias said, "Socrates, you, too, seem to me to have gone through the song well; yet, I must say, I also have a good argument about this, [347b] which I shall display[199] for [all of] you, if you wish."[200]

And Alcibiades said, "Yes, Hippias, later, of course; but now it is just [to do] what Protagoras and Socrates have agreed with each other—Protagoras, if he still wishes, to ask, and Socrates to answer, or, if [Protagoras] wishes, to answer Socrates, who will do the asking."

And I said, "*I*, of course, bow to Protagoras [to choose] whichever is more pleasing to him; [347c] but, if he wishes, concerning songs and verses, let's leave them be, but concerning [the matters] about which *I* first asked you, Protagoras, I would gladly go to what we were aiming at, looking for [it] with you. It seems to me, you see, that engaging in dialectic about poetry is a thing very much like the drinking parties of inconsequential market people.[201] And these people, you see, because from their lack of education they can't keep company with one another over drink[s] through their own voice and their own arguments, [347d] run up the prices of flute girls, hiring a different voice—that of flutes—for a big [price], and through their voice the [party-goers] keep company with one another. But where the fellow-drinkers are fine, good men who have been educated, you wouldn't see flute girls or dancers or harpists, but the men themselves are sufficient to keep company with one another, through their own voice, without this nonsense and childishness, [347e] speaking and listening in their turn in an

199. For "display speech," see note 72.

200. For Hippias, interpretations are interesting, not true. He is like the marriage counselor in the joke: A married couple comes to him arguing with each other. The wife explains her side, to which he says, "You're right." The husband explains his side, to which he says, "You're right." The counselor's own wife comes and asks indignantly, "How can you tell both of them they're right?" And he replies to her, "You're right too."

201. At the usual drinking party, or symposium, everyone became drunk and also enjoyed the company of flute girls. This fact makes the setting of Plato's *Symposium* quite unusual, for the participants agree *not* to drink alcohol at all but to remain sober and to send away the flute girls.

orderly manner, even if they are drinking a whole lot of wine. And in this way, also, such meetings as these—if they take hold of[202] men such as many of us say we are—have no need of a different voice, not even [that of] poets, whom it is not possible to ask what they mean; and of the many [who] cite them [as authorities] in their arguments, some say the poet intends these things, and others [say that he intends] other things, engaging in dialectic about a matter that they cannot prove; but [men like us] say good riddance to such meetings and keep company among themselves through their own [resources], putting one another to trial and submitting themselves [too, to trial] [348a] in their own arguments.

"It seems to me that it's necessary for you and me to imitate such [fine and educated people] rather [than the inconsequential ones], putting the poets aside and conversing with one another through our own [resources], taking the measure of the truth and of ourselves. And if you still wish to ask, I'm ready to submit [myself] to answering you. But, if you wish, *you* submit to me, and we'll put an end [to the matters we were discussing] when we paused in the middle [of them]."

[348b] And while I was saying these and other such things, Protagoras didn't make clear at all which he would do. And so Alcibiades looked at Callias and said,[203] "Does it seem to you, Callias, that Protagoras is doing well even now, when he's not willing to make it clear whether he will give an argument or not? To me, in fact, he doesn't; but, really, either let him converse or let him say that he is not willing to converse, so that in this way we might know, and Socrates, or someone else, whoever wants to, might converse with another person."

[348c] And Protagoras, being ashamed, as it seemed to me, while Alcibiades was saying these things and while Callias and most of the others present were asking, reluctantly brought himself around to engaging in dialectic and bid [me] ask him so that he'd answer.

XXXIII

I, indeed, said, "Protagoras, don't think that I am engaging in dialectic with you because I'm wishing for anything other than to examine these things

202. There is a personification of the meeting here.

203. Perhaps Alcibiades turns to Callias because Callias is the host (perhaps even the man paying for Protagoras' presence in Athens) and would therefore be able to exert pressure on Protagoras.

about which I'm ever in perplexity. You see, I think that Homer[204] absolutely is saying something [348d] in his [verse],

> [when] two are going together, one understands first.[205]

You see, we human beings are all better able at finding our way out of perplexity in every deed and word and thought;

> but if a lone man understands,[206]

straightaway he goes around and he [keeps on] seeking (until he should meet) [someone] to whom he may show and with whom he can make certain [what he has understood]. In this way, *I* too for the sake of this engage in dialectic more gladly with you than with anyone else, since I think that you have best examined the various matters [348e] that it is appropriate for a decent man to examine, especially excellence. You see, [whom would I consider best] other than you, who, in fact, not only think that you yourself are a fine and good person, (like some others who are decent—but *the*y are not able to make others [so]; but *you* are yourself good and are also able to make others good) but also have so believed in yourself that even while others hide this technical skill, *you* in fact have openly proclaimed yourself, [349a] and named yourself a reasoner to all Greeks, and have appeared as a teacher of culture and excellence, [the] first who has thought it right to demand a wage for this. And so how wouldn't it be necessary [for me] to call on you for an examination of these things and to question [you] and to take [them] up together [with you]? There's no way around it.

"And now indeed *I* again desire, on the one hand, to be reminded by you of some of those very matters that I first questioned you about at the beginning [of our conversation], and, on the other hand, that other matters be added to our examination. [349b] This, *I* think, was the question: wisdom and self-restraint and courage and justice and holiness—are these five names for one thing, or is there one distinct being and thing underlying each of these names that has its own individual power, none of them being like the next? And so *you* said that they were not names for one being, but that each of these names was placed on one distinct thing [that's done], [349c] and that all of these were parts of excellence—not like the parts of gold, [which

204. After Socrates' rejection of the use of poetry, it must seem annoying or at least odd to Protagoras for Socrates to justify what he is doing by citing a poet, even if the poet is Homer.

205. *Iliad* 10.224. This passage is also quoted (or misquoted) in the *Symposium* (174d).

206. *Iliad* 10.226.

are] similar to each other and to the whole of which they are parts—but like the parts of the face, which are dissimilar both to the whole of which they are parts and to each other, each having its distinct power. If these [points] still seem to you as they did then, say [it]; but if [they seem] somehow different, define this [difference], since *I* am not, of course, placing a lien on your account,[207] if you now say something different; you see, I wouldn't wonder, [349d] if you were saying these things at that time to test me."

XXXIV

"But *I* say to you, Socrates," he said, "that these are all parts of excellence and that four of them are more or less similar to one another, but courage is altogether a very different thing from all these. You will know that I am saying the truth in the following way: you see, you will find that there are many people who are very unjust and unholy and lacking in self-restraint and unlearned, but, in contrast, most courageous."

[349e] "Hold on!" I said. "What you are saying, you see, deserves to be examined. Are you saying that the courageous are daring or something else?"

"And rash, too, in fact, at rushing[208] toward what the many fear."

"Come, indeed. Do you say that excellence is a fine thing, and do *you* present yourself as a teacher of this fine thing?"

"A very fine thing, in fact, unless I'm mad," he said.

"And so," I said, "is one part of [excellence] shameful and another [part] fine, or is the whole thing fine?"

"The whole of it, I suppose, is as fine as possible."

[350a] "And so do you think some people daringly dive into wells?"[209]

"*I* do, of course, because they are divers."

"[Are they daring] because they have knowledge or because of something else?"

"Because they have knowledge."

"And who are daring at making war from horses? Are they the horsemen or the horseless men?"

---

207. This would appear to be a joke based on Protagoras' charging for his wisdom, a point made a few lines earlier (349a).

208. An attempt to capture the etymological play in these words; an alternative attempt would be "hasty at hastening."

209. A risky and unattractive profession. Adam and Adam cite Sauppe as saying that the purpose of the diving may have been to clean the wells. In their note, they say that Athenians used to put jars in wells in the summer for refrigeration, and the job of the divers was to bring them up. They cite Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae* 1002 and *Plutus* 810, among others.

"The horsemen."

"And who [are daring when they fight with] light shields? The shieldmen or those who are not [shieldmen]?"

"The shieldmen. And concerning all other things, of course, if you are seeking this [agreement]," he said, "those who have knowledge are more daring than those who don't have knowledge, [350b] and they [are more daring] than themselves after they have learned than before they have learned."

"Have you ever seen people who didn't have knowledge of all these [activities] but were [nevertheless] daring when it came to each of them?"

"*I* have, of course," he said, "and, in fact, [some who were] excessively daring."

"Aren't *these* daring ones courageous, too?"

"Let me tell you," he said, "[if they were,] courage would be a shameful thing, since these [people] are mad."

"And so," I said, "what do you say about the courageous? [Didn't you say] that they are daring?"

"And [I say that] now, of course," he said.

[350c] "And so," I said, "Don't those who are daring in this way appear not as courageous but as mad? And—voilà!—those who are the wisest are in turn the most daring, and the most daring are the most courageous, no? And according to this argument wisdom would be courage?"

"Socrates," he said, "you are not doing a fine job of recalling what I was saying and answering to you. When asked by you whether the courageous are daring, I of course agreed; but I was not asked whether the daring were courageous. [350d] You see, if you had asked me then, I would have said that not all [daring people were courageous]; but with respect to the courageous—how they are not simply bold but also virtuous—you have by no means shown that I did not agree rightly when I agreed that the courageous are those who are daring.

"Then you show that those who have knowledge are more daring than they themselves were [before they had the knowledge] and [than] others who don't have the knowledge, and in this you think that courage is the same as wisdom. But going on in this way you might think that [physical] strength is wisdom, too. You see, going on in this way, if you first asked me whether the [physically] strong were powerful, I would say [that they were]; [350e] then [if you asked] whether those having knowledge would wrestle more powerfully than those not having knowledge would wrestle, and [if you asked] whether they [would wrestle more powerfully] after they had learned [how to wrestle] than before they had learned, I would say [that they would]; and while I was agreeing to these things, it would be possible for you, using these same proofs,

to say that according to what I had agreed, wisdom is [physical] strength. But by no means do *I* agree (nor did I then) that the powerful are the [physically] strong, but [I say that] that the [physically] strong are powerful. You see, power and [physical] strength are not the same, [351a] but the one—power—comes into being from knowledge, and also, of course, from madness and passion, but [physical] strength [comes into being] from nature and the good nurture of bodies. In this way, voilà, daring and courage are not the same. So it happens that the courageous *are* daring but not that *all* the daring are, in fact, courageous. [The quality of being daring], you see, arises for people from a technical skill and, [351b] like power, from passion and from madness, but courage arises from nature and good nurture of [their] souls."

XXXV

"Do you say, Protagoras," I said, "that some people live well and others badly?"

He said [that he did].

"And so does it seem to you that a person would be living well if he were in pain and grieving?"

"No," he said.

"And what if he has concluded his life living pleasantly—wouldn't he thus seem to have lived well?"[210]

"To me, of course, [he would]," he said.

"Living pleasantly is good, but living unpleasantly, bad?"

"If, of course," he said, "life were made pleasant by fine things."

[351c] "What, indeed, Protagoras? Aren't *you*, too, like the many, calling some *pleasant* things bad and some *painful* things good? You see, *I* mean that insofar as things are pleasant, aren't they good insofar as they have this [quality of being pleasant]—unless something else results from it? And again in turn, in the same way, aren't the things that are painful bad insofar as they are painful?"

"I don't know, Socrates," he said, "whether, put simply in this way, as *you* are asking, I must answer [351d] that all pleasant things are good and [all] painful things bad. But to me it seems—not only for my current answer but also for the whole rest of my life—that it would be a safer thing for me to answer that some pleasant things are not good, and in turn that there are some things from [the category of] what is painful that are not bad—and other

210. This seems a deliberate echo of Herodotus 1.32, where Solon tells Croesus that the man who ends his life "with very much grace" (*eucharistos*) or outward favor is justly called "happy." Socrates substitutes "pleasantly" for "with very much grace."

things that are [bad]—and a third [group of things] that are neither—neither good nor bad."

"And the things you call pleasant," I said, "aren't they the things that share in pleasure or create pleasure?"

"Absolutely, of course," he said.

[351e] "Now this is what I mean: [In asking] whether things aren't good insofar as they are pleasant, I am asking whether pleasure is not itself a good thing."

"As *you* keep on saying, Socrates," he said, "let's examine this, and if the examination seems reasonable, and *pleasant* and *good* appear the same, we shall be together in the same place; but if not, then we shall presently part our ways."

And so I said, "And so do *you* wish to lead the examination, or shall *I* lead [it]?"

"*You*," he said, "are the person duty-bound to lead [it]; you see, you've begun the argument."

[352a] "And so," I said, "would it become crystal clear for us in the following way? Just as when someone examining a person from his looks either for his health or some other bodily function and, after looking at his face and fingertips, would say, 'Come, indeed, uncover your chest and back and show them to me so that I might more clearly examine them,' *I*, too, am asking something of this sort for our examination. [And] having seen that this is your [position] toward the good and the pleasant, as you say, I need to say something like this: [352b] 'Come, indeed, Protagoras, and uncover this for me about your thought: how do you [stand] toward knowledge? Does it also seem to you as it does to the many, or differently? To the many knowledge seems something of this sort: [It's] not [something] in a [position of] strength or leadership or rule, and they don't think that it is this sort of thing; but [they think] that when a man has knowledge, the knowledge often does not rule him, but something else [does]—now passion, now pleasure, now pain, and sometimes sexual desire, and often fear, and they think about knowledge in a simple way, as if it were a man-slave [352c], a [thing] dragged around by everything else.[211] And so do you think something like this about [knowledge], or [do you think] that knowledge is a fine thing and able to rule a person and that if someone knows the things that are good and bad, he would not be mastered by anything so as to do something other than [what] knowledge bade [him do], but thoughtfulness would be enough to help a person?'"

211. Aristotle refers to this passage in the *Nicomachaean Ethics* (1145b24–29), where he rejects the position Plato puts in Socrates' mouth that there is no such thing as incontinence—that if a man *seems* to be incontinent, he is really ignorant of what is best.

"It does seem [to me] to be the way *you* put it, Socrates," he said. [352d] "And, at the same time, if it's shameful for anybody else, [it would be shameful] for me, too, to deny that wisdom and knowledge appear to be the strongest of all human things that are done."

And I said, "*You* are speaking beautifully, of course, and the truth. And so do you know that many people are not persuaded by me and you but say that many who know what is best are not willing to do it, though it is possible for them, but do other things? And all the people indeed whom *I* have asked what is responsible for this say that [they've been] reduced by pleasure or pain or indeed [by one of the things] that *I* was just now saying [352e]—[that] being mastered by one of these things, they do what they do."[212]

"You see, Socrates," he said, "people say many other things not rightly too."

"Come, indeed, undertake with me to persuade and to teach people what their experience is—what they mean when they say they are reduced by pleasures and [353a] other things [so that they] don't do what's best when in fact they know that it's best. You see, perhaps while we are saying [to them], 'You people don't speak rightly but you are lying,' they'd say, 'Protagoras and Socrates, if this isn't the experience of being reduced by pleasure, whatever is it, and what do *you* say it is? Tell us!'"

"But, Socrates, why must we examine the opinion of the many people, who say whatever they chance upon [to say]?"

[353b] "I think," I said, "that we have something in this for finding out about courage and for [finding out] about the various parts of virtue [and] how they relate [to each other]. And so if it seems best to you to remain in the [agreements] which just now seemed best to us—that I lead in the way [by which] *I* think things will most beautifully become clear—follow [me]; but if you don't wish [to], if [that's what] you like, I'll say 'good riddance.'"

"But you speak rightly," he said. "And continue to the end as you've begun."

---

212. For the word we have translated as "reduced," Plato seems to have chosen a verb derived from the word *hetto*, "less," a comparative of the Greek word for "small." One is made "less"—that is, *reduced*—by pleasures, and Plato has clarified this sense by glossing it with the verb we have translated as "mastered" (*karatoumenos*). The term *reduced* signifies that when a person yields to pleasures his stature is diminished; being mastered by pleasure, he becomes a smaller, lesser person. The idiom therefore conveys a related but somewhat different force from that of being defeated or overcome, for the emphasis is on the resulting effect—being a lesser human being—rather than on the process of conflict that has led to the diminution. The different idiom is philosophically important, for it suggests a moral responsibility for being "overcome" that would not necessarily apply to a defeat in combat. In addition, the quantitative sense of "being reduced" is compatible with the principle that will be put forth in 356a–357e that ethics is a technical skill of measurement. On "square," which, like "reduced," is both a mathematical and ethical term in Pythagoreanism, see note 174.

XXXVI

[353c] "Then again," I said, "if they asked us, 'And so what do you say this is—what we said was *being less than pleasures*?'[213] I would say this to them: 'Indeed, listen: you see, Protagoras and I shall try to tell you. Aren't you saying that this happens to you in these [situations]—that you're often mastered by foods and drinks and sexual allurements as actual pleasures, knowing that they are wicked but nevertheless doing them?' They'd say [yes]. And if *you* and *I* again asked them, 'In what way do you say they are wicked? [353d] Is it because each of these things is a pleasure and provides this pleasure instantly, or [is it] because later on it causes illnesses and poverty and imparts many other such [evils]? Or if later on none of these [pleasures] imparted anything [bad] at all but only made you rejoice, would the [pleasures] nevertheless be bad, regardless of how they made the one experiencing [them] have joy in some way?' Then, Protagoras, would we think that they would answer anything except that it's not for the instant gain of the pleasure itself that they are bad, [353e] but because of the things that happen later—illnesses and the other [bad things]?"

And Protagoras said, "*I* do think that the many would answer this."

"'Isn't it because in causing illnesses they cause pains, and in causing poverty they cause pains?' They would agree, as *I* think."

Protagoras concurred.

"'You people, doesn't it appear to you, as Protagoras and *I* are saying, that these things are bad for no other reason than that they end up in pains and deprive [you] of other pleasures?' Would they agree?"

[354a] It seemed to both of us [that they would].

"And again, if we asked them the opposite [question], 'You people, [you who] say that there are in turn *good* painful things, aren't you speaking of things such as these: exercises and military campaigns and the therapies of physicians by cautery and surgery and medicines and fasts—because they're *good* but painful?' Would they say [this]?"

It seemed to him also [that they would].

"'And so do you call them good because of this—because they provide extreme aches and pains at that instant [354b] or because from them later on there arise health and good bodily condition and safety of poleis and rule over others and wealth?' They'd say so, as *I* would think."

It seemed so to him too.

---

213. One is "less" than pleasure when one has been reduced, that is, overcome by it, as discussed above in 352e–353a. See note 212.

"'And indeed, are these things good for any other [reason] than that they end up in pleasures and a release from and staving off of pains? Or are you [people] able to speak of some goal other than pleasures and pains that you are reflecting on when you call these [activities] good?' They would say, as *I* think, [that they didn't have another goal in mind]."

[354c] "Nor does it seem to me [that they would]," said Protagoras.

"'And so don't you [people] pursue pleasure as a good and flee from pain as a bad?'"

This seemed so to him too.

"'Do you [people] think that this is bad—pain—and [this] good—pleasure—since you say that taking joy is itself a bad thing then when it deprives [one] of greater pleasures than all those it has itself, or when it imparts greater pains than the pleasures it has in itself: [354d] since if it's for some other reason, after reflecting on some other goal, that you call taking joy itself a bad thing, you'd be able to tell us; but you won't be able to.'"

"No, they don't seem to me [to have any other goal in mind]," said Protagoras.

"'And so, again, concerning the other thing, feeling pain, is it the same way? Do you [people] call feeling pain a good thing itself either when it releases [one] from greater pains than [those that] are in it or imparts pleasures greater than its pains? Since if you're reflecting on some goal other than what I am saying when you call feeling pain itself a good, are you able to tell us [what it is]? [354e] But you won't be able to.'"

"You are saying the truth," said Protagoras.

"'Then again,'" I said, "'if you, people, were to ask me further, "Why ever then indeed are you saying many things all over the place about this?" Forgive me, of course. First, you see, it's not easy to show what in the world this is—what you are calling *being less than pleasures*. Second, all my demonstrations depend on this. But still, even now, it is possible to retract [what you've said], if somehow you can say that something is good other than pleasure [355a] or bad other than pain. Or is it enough for you to go through life pleasantly, without pains? And if it is enough, and you're not able to say what else is a good or a bad thing that does not end up being these [pleasures or pains], listen to what [comes] after this. You see, I'm telling you that if this is so, [your] argument becomes laughable, when you say that a person, often recognizing bad things, that [they] are bad, nevertheless does them—when it's possible not to do [them]—because he's led on and knocked out of his wits by pleasures; [355b] and [it would be laughable] again in turn [when] you say that a person, knowing the good, isn't willing to do [it] because he's being reduced by instant pleasures.'

XXXVII

"And it will be crystal clear that these things are laughable if we don't use lots of names at the same time—*pleasant* and *painful* and *good* and *bad*—but, since these things have appeared as two, let's address them [in sequence] by two [pairs of] names, first by *good* and *bad*, then later by *pleasant* and *painful*. When, indeed, we've established [our procedure] in this way, let's say, [355c] 'The person, knowing that the bad things are bad, is nevertheless doing them.' And so, if someone asks us, 'Why?' we'll say, 'Because he's reduced.' 'By what?' that person will ask us, and it will no longer be possible for us to say 'by pleasure'; you see, instead of *pleasure*, a different term has been exchanged—the [term] *good*. To [that person who asks], indeed, we'll answer and say, 'He has been reduced.' 'By what?' he'll ask. 'By the good, by Zeus,' we'll say. And so, should the one asking us happen to be a hubristic person,[214] he'll laugh and say, [355d] 'It's a laughable business you're speaking of—that if someone does bad things, knowing that they're bad, when he has no need to do them, he's been reduced by good things. Then,' he'll ask, '[will this happen when he is overcome by] the good things that are *not* [sufficiently] potent to conquer the bad things or when they *are* [sufficiently] potent to conquer them]?' It's clear that we'll answer, '[This will happen] when [the good things] are not [sufficiently] potent; [otherwise], you see, the [person] who we said was less than pleasures would not be making a mistake.' 'According to what [principle],' he'll perhaps ask, 'are good things [sufficiently] potent [to conquer] bad things or bad things [sufficiently] potent [to conquer] good things? [Is it] according to some other [principle] than that when the one [of these] is greater, the other is smaller, [355e] or that when [the one is] more, the [other is] less?' We shall not be able to say anything other than this. 'It's clear,' he'll say, 'that this is what you are saying it is to be reduced—taking bigger bad things instead of smaller good things.' And so this is the way it is.

"Indeed, let's exchange the terms *pleasant* and *painful* for these again, and let's say, 'A person does painful things'—(that's what we're saying *now*; *then* we were saying that he did *bad things*)—'knowing that they're painful, because he's been reduced by pleasant things. It is clear [that this is happening because the painful things] are insufficiently potent to conquer [the pleasant things].' [356a] And indeed, what other impotence is there in pleasure as

214. "Hubristic" is the adjective of *hubris*, a term Aristotle defines (*Rhetoric* 1378b23–28) as the harming or disturbing others by shaming them, not for one's own advantage but just for the pleasure that comes from forcing them to recognize one's superior status. Aristotle's definition very accurately reflects the term's use in Greek literature.

against pain [or the other way around] except as excess and deficiency to each other? And these are [matters] of becoming bigger and smaller than each another and more and less [numerically] and greater and smaller [in degree]. You see, if someone would say, 'But these are very different, Socrates, the instant pleasure and the pleasure and pain that come later on,' I'd say, of course, 'In what do they differ other than in pleasure and pain? You see, [they don't differ] in any other way. [356b] But, like a person good at weighing, putting the pleasures together and putting the pains together, both the near and the far, and after placing [them] on the balance, say which [side] is greater. You see, if, on the one hand, you're weighing pleasures against pleasures, the bigger and more numerous ones must be taken; but if [you are weighing] pains against pains, the lesser and the smaller [must be taken]; if, on the other hand, you are weighing pleasures against the pains, if the painful things are exceeded by the pleasant things (whether the near [are exceeded by] the far-off or the far-off by the near) the activity must be done in which these [greater pleasures] are present; [356c] but if the pleasant things [are exceeded by] the painful things, the [activities] must not be done.' I would say, 'Is it different in some way, you people?' I don't know how they could say anything else."

It seemed so to him, too.

"'Since this, indeed, seems so, answer me this,' I'll say. 'In [the matter of] sight, does it appear to you, with respect to things of the same size, that those that are near seem bigger and [those] far away smaller? Or doesn't it?'"

They'll say [it does].

"'And is it like this for thicknesses and multitudes? And do voices [that are] equal appear greater [when] near and smaller [when] far away?'"

They would say so.

[356d]"'And so if doing well depended on this—on doing and taking the big amounts and on avoiding and not doing the small [amounts], what would appear as the preserver of our life? Is it the technical skill of measuring[215] or is it the power of appearances [to put notions in our mind]? Or has this [power of appearances] been leading us into error and making us often take one of these things for the other in a topsy-turvy way and [later] repent our actions and choices of what is big and small, while the [skill of] measuring would make the illusion [from appearances] powerless and, [356e] having shown the truth, would make our soul calmly steadfast in the truth and [thus] have preserved our life?' Would people agree with these

215. Protagoras is famous for his statement that *man* is the measure of all things (see the introduction, page 21). The current discussion cleverly reinterprets Protagoras' meaning, for the *technical skill* of measuring is a thing different from man.

things—that the technical skill of measuring has preserved us, or [would they say it was] some other [skill]?"

He agreed [that they would say it was] the [skill of] measuring.

"'And what if the preservation of our life depended on the choice of the odd and the even, [on] when it was necessary to choose rightly the more and when the less, either when we were [choosing the one as against] itself or the other as against itself,[216] or [when it was necessary to choose] the near or the far—what would save our life? [357a] Wouldn't it be knowledge? And wouldn't it be [a knowledge of] measuring, since it is a technical skill concerning excess and deficiency? And when [there is knowledge] of odd and even, is it anything other than number theory?"[217] Would people agree with us, or not?"

It seemed to Protagoras too that they would agree.

"'Well, you people, since, indeed, it seems to us that the preserver of our life is in the right choices of pleasure and pain and of the more and less and of the bigger and smaller and of the farther and nearer, [357b] doesn't the [preserver of our life] appear to be an examination that measures excess and deficiency and equality [of things] to each other?'

"'But necessarily.'

"'Since measuring is, I do suppose, necessarily a technical skill and knowledge.'"

"They will concur."

"What kind of skill and knowledge this [measuring] is we'll examine later; but that it is knowledge—that's as much as is sufficient for the demonstration that Protagoras and I need to demonstrate about what you asked us. [357c] And you [people] asked [us]—if you remember—[back] when we, [Protagoras and I,] were agreeing with each other that there was nothing stronger than knowledge and that it was this [knowledge], wherever it was present, that always ruled over pleasure and all other things, but *you*, indeed, were saying that pleasure often rules over even the person who knows; and when we were not agreeing with you, you asked us next, 'Protagoras and Socrates, if this isn't the experience of being overwhelmed by pleasure, whatever is it instead, and what do *you* say it to be? Tell us.' [357d] And so if we then straightaway said to you, '"[It is] ignorance,"' you'd have laughed us down; but now, should you laugh us down, you'd laugh yourselves down, too. You see, *you* have agreed that it's from a deficiency of knowledge about the choice

216. That is, when we are choosing between two odd numbers or between two even numbers.

217. English derivatives are misleading here: *arithmetiké* deals with numbers abstractly and we have translated it as "number theory"; number theory deals with the numbers abstracted from any calculations.

of pleasures and pains—these are things good and bad—that those who make a mistake make a mistake; and not only from a [deficiency] of knowledge [do they make mistakes,] but you also agreed further on [that they make mistakes by a deficiency of the skill] of measuring. [357e] And the mistaken action, you yourselves know, I suppose, is done without knowledge from ignorance. So this is [what being] less than by pleasure is—the greatest ignorance. Of this [ignorance] this Protagoras here says he is a healer, and Prodicus and Hippias [say they are, too]. And *you* [people], because you think that [being overcome by pleasure] is something other than ignorance, you yourselves don't [go] or send your children to these reasoners as teachers of these [matters]—as though the [matters] were not teachable—but in caring for your money and not giving [it] to these [men] you are doing badly in both your private and public [lives].

XXXVIII

"That's what we'd have answered to the many. [358a] But it's *you*, Hippias and Prodicus, along with Protagoras, whom I'm asking—let it indeed be your common argument—whether I seem to you to be saying the truth or to be speaking falsely."

It seemed to all that the things said were preternaturally[218] true.

"You agree, then," I said, "that the [thing that is] pleasant is good, and the [thing that is] painful, bad? And I'll beg Prodicus here to leave aside this drawing of distinctions between nouns: you see, most excellent Prodicus, whether, in making such [distinctions] you say 'pleasant' or 'delightful' or 'graceful' [358b] or 'from where and how you take joy,' direct your answer to what I want."

Prodicus laughed and agreed, and the others [agreed, too].

"What, indeed, gentlemen," I said, "about this? Are all actions fine [that are] for this [purpose]—for living without pain and pleasantly? Aren't they fine and beneficial? And is the fine deed both good and beneficial?"

It seemed so.

"Well," I said, "if the pleasant is good, no one knows or thinks [that] things other than what he is doing are better and possible [for him to do], when he does these things [that he is doing], though it is [in point of fact][219] allowable for him to be doing things that are better; nor is *being less than*

218. The word "praeternaturally" means "beyond nature," perhaps an odd statement for this earthbound comment.

219. One might *think* he is doing the most pleasant and best thing possible when in fact he is mistaken and there are actually more pleasant and better things for him to be doing.

oneself [358c] anything other than ignorance, nor is *being stronger than oneself* anything other than wisdom."

It seemed so to all.

"And, indeed, what's next? Do you say that ignorance is something like this—having a false opinion and thinking falsely about the matters that are of greatest weight?"

This, too, seemed [so] to all.

"And so," I said, "as for the other alternative, no one in fact willingly goes toward what's evil or toward what he thinks evil, [358d] nor, as is likely, is this [behavior] in human nature—to be willing to go to what one thinks is bad instead of good; and when one is constrained to choose one of two evils, no one will choose the greater [evil] when it is possible to choose the lesser."

And all of these things seemed so to all of us.

"And so, what's next?" I said. "Do you [people] call *fear* something and *fright* something?[220] And [do you call them] the very thing I [do]? I am speaking to you, Prodicus. I call this—whether you people call it *fright* or *fear*—some expectation of an evil."

It seemed to Protagoras and Hippias that fear and fright were this, but to Prodicus fear was so but fright not. [358e]

"But it makes no difference at all, Prodicus; but this [*does* make a difference]: If what we've said is true, will anyone of human beings be willing to go to what he fears, when it is possible for him [to go to] what he doesn't [fear]? Or, from what we've agreed, would it be impossible? You see, it was agreed that a person thinks that what he fears is bad and that he neither goes after nor willingly takes the things he thinks bad."

This, too, seemed [so] to all.

XXXIX

[359a] "Since, Prodicus and Hippias, this has indeed been established in this way, let Protagoras here defend for us how what he answered at first is right—not what [he said] altogether at first (you see, then indeed he said that of the five parts of excellence, not one [part] was like another but each had its own distinct power)—but I am not speaking about this point, but

220. James A. Towle, in his commentary (*Plato: Protagoras* [Boston: Ginn & Company, 1889], 159), points out the distinction drawn between these words by Ammonius, a scholar of the second century B.C.E. who wrote commentaries on Homer and Pindar. *Fear*, says Ammonius, is anxiety over a period of time, *fright*, over something immediate. One might have *fear* about global warming but experience *fright* when seeing a mountain lion.

about what he said later. You see, later he said that four [parts of excellence] were reasonably similar to each other, but one was really very different from the others—courage; [359b] and he said that I'd recognize this [fact] by this evidence: 'You see, Socrates,' [he said,] 'you'll find that while people are most unholy and most unjust and most lacking in self-restraint and most unlearned, they are [nevertheless] most courageous. By this you'll recognize that courage is very different from the other parts of excellence.' And *I* then right off really wondered at this answer, and [I've wondered] still more since I have gone through these things with you [people]. And so I asked this man whether he'd say that the courageous are daring. [359c] And he said, 'In fact, [they are] rash.'[221]

"Do you remember answering these things, Protagoras?" I said.

He agreed [that he did].

"Come, indeed," I said, "tell us, what are the courageous [aiming at] when they are rash? At what the cowardly [aim]?"

"No," he said.

"And so [they're aiming] at different things."

"Yes."

"Do the cowardly go after matters that inspire confidence, and the courageous after matters that inspire terror?"[222]

"Indeed, Socrates, [so] it is said by people."

[359d] "What you're saying is true," I said, "but this isn't what I'm asking; but [this is:] *You*, what do *you* say the courageous [are aiming at] when they're rash? Are they [aiming at] terrible things, thinking them to be terrible, [rather] than at things not [terrible]?"

"But this, of course," he said, "was demonstrated just now to be impossible in the arguments you were arguing."

"And in this regard," I said, "you're saying the truth. So if this was rightly demonstrated, no one goes after the things he thinks are terrible, since *being less than oneself* was found to be ignorance."[223]

He agreed.

"But all people—cowardly and courageous in turn—go after the things toward which they feel confidence, and in this, of course, they are going at the same things—both the cowardly and the courageous."

---

221. At 349e.

222. This is the crux-word *deinos*, on which, see note 35.

223. The statement here seems a condensed form of the argument: *being less than oneself* means "being overcome by pleasure"; being overcome by pleasure has turned out to be a species of ignorance. To aim at what one thinks is terrible would be intentionally to choose the painful, and this one would do only from ignorance.

[359e] "But, let me tell you, Socrates," he said, "the cowardly and the courageous go after things that are in fact entirely opposite. To begin with, the one [kind] are willing to go to war, but the other [kind] are not willing."

I said, "Is going [to war] a fine thing or a shameful thing?"

"A fine thing," he said.

"If it's a fine thing, we've agreed in our earlier [arguments] that it is also good [for them]; you see, we have agreed that all fine actions are good."

"You're saying the truth, and, in fact, it always seems so to me."

[360a] "Rightly, of course," I said. "But which ones do you say aren't willing to go to war, [though going is] a fine and good thing?"

"The cowardly," he said.

"And so," I said, "if [going to war] is actually fine and good, isn't it also pleasant?"

"This has been agreed—it absolutely has," he said.

"And so are the cowardly, while they know [these facts], unwilling to go to what is more beautiful and better and more pleasant?"

"But," he said, "if we are to agree to this too, we shall destroy our earlier agreements."

"And what will the courageous [person do]? Won't he go after the more beautiful and the better and the more pleasant?"

"It's necessary to agree," he said.

[360b] "And so those who are courageous, when they *are* frightened, on the whole are not frightened of disgraceful frights, nor do they feel confidence, [when they are confident,] from disgraceful things that inspire confidence."[224]

"True," he said.

"And if they're not disgraceful, aren't they fine?"

He agreed.

"And if they're fine, also good?"

"Yes."

---

224. What would constitute a disgraceful fright? Perhaps it would be the expectation of harm from something that does not cause true harm for the philosophic man. For example, if a person (Socrates) feared the fatal consequences that would result from carrying out a bad order from a tyrannical body—say, fetching Leon of Salamis for a kangaroo court—the fright would be disgraceful because the object of the fright was death rather than acting unjustly. A truly courageous man would not feel fright because of his knowledge that a proper action—ignoring the order to fetch Leon—was better, nobler, and more pleasant. Similarly, a courageous man would not feel confidence at a disgraceful thing, say, putting brass knuckles inside boxing gloves before a bout. Why wouldn't he feel confidence? Because the courageous man is virtuous and feels emotions only when they are properly stirred. Just as a virtuously self-restrained man, say, Xenocrates, does not feel enflamed erotically by the alluring but salacious Phryne, so a virtuously courageous man does not feel confidence at a puissant but corrupt set of brass knuckles.

"And those who are cowardly and rash and mad—they *are* frightened by the opposite—disgraceful frights; and aren't *they* confident in the disgraceful things that inspire confidence?"[225]

He agreed.

"And are they confident at disgraceful and bad things on account of anything other than ignorance and lack of learning?"

"It is so," he said.

[360c] "And so, what's [next]? What do you call that which is responsible for the cowardly being cowardly—cowardice or courage?"

"*I*, of course, [would call it] cowardice," he said.

"And didn't the cowardly appear so because of their lack of learning about terrible things?"

"Absolutely, of course," he said.

"Then they are cowardly because of this lack of learning?"

He agreed.

"And it is agreed by you that they are cowardly because of cowardice?"

He concurred.

"And so cowardice would be the lack of learning about the things that are and are not terrible?"

He nodded.

[360d] "But," I said, "courage is opposite to cowardice?"

He said [that it was].

"And isn't the wisdom about what's terrible and not terrible the opposite of lack of learning about these things?"

And here he was still nodding.

"And lack of learning about these things is cowardice?"

Here he nodded with absolute reluctance.

"Then the wisdom about what's terrible and not terrible is courage, since it's the opposite of lack of learning about these things?"

Here he was no longer willing to nod and was silent.

And *I* said, "Why, indeed, Protagoras, do *you* neither affirm nor refute what I'm asking?"

"Finish it yourself," he said.

[360e] "In fact, I'll be asking only one thing still," I said, "whether, as at first, there seem to you to be some people who, while being most unlearned, are very courageous."

---

225. The coward, feeling fear at not carrying out the order to bring Leon of Salamis to the kangaroo court, would carry out the order, for to the coward death is worse than disgraceful conduct. And the coward *would* feel confidence knowing that he had brass knuckles under his boxing gloves.

"You seem to me to be a lover of victory,[226] Socrates, [wanting] me to be the one who answers. And so I shall gratify you and say that from what we have agreed, it seems to me impossible."[227]

XL

And *I* said, "It's not for anything else that I'm asking all these [questions] than wishing to examine the subject of excellence and what excellence itself is. You see, I know that when this has become apparent, then that [question] [361a] about which *you* and *I* each were stretching out a long argument would become exceedingly crystal clear—when *I* was saying that excellence wasn't teachable and *you* were saying that it was teachable. And the upshot of the arguments we've just [made], like a person, seems to be accusing us and laughing us down, and if [the upshot] had a voice, it would say, 'You're out of place, Socrates and Protagoras; *you*, [Socrates,] having earlier argued that excellence is not teachable, are now hurrying to the opposite [claim], [361b] undertaking to demonstrate how all useful things are knowledge, even the practice of justice and self-restraint and courage, in which case excellence would most of all be teachable. You see, if, as Protagoras was undertaking to say, excellence were something other than knowledge, clearly it would not be a teachable thing; but now, if [excellence] as a whole will appear to be knowledge, as you are rushing [to say], Socrates, it'll be wondrous if it's not teachable. And Protagoras, in turn, after asserting at that time that it was teachable, now seems like a person rushing to the opposite [view]—that [excellence] appears as almost anything else [361c] rather than knowledge—and in this way it would least be a teachable thing. And so, Protagoras, as I look down on all these things as terribly confused [and] topsy-turvy, *I* do set my whole heart on these things' becoming crystal clear, and I'd wish that after we had gone through these things we'd come out to [a knowledge of] what excellence is, and [then] again examine it, [to find out] whether it is teachable or not teachable, [361d] so that Epimetheus won't be frequently deceiving us in [our] examination and causing [us] to fail, just as he was careless about us in his distribution [of powers], as *you* said. And so [it's evident] that Prometheus pleased me more than Epimetheus in your story; you see, using him [as an example] and foreseeing [with Promethean foresight], *I'm* arranging all my

226. Perhaps here, as elsewhere, "a lover of strife." Perhaps, too, a pun on *philo*-sopher, "lover of *wisdom*."

227. This is perhaps as gracious a concession speech as we might hope for.

life's business, and, if you'd be willing, as I said at the beginning, I'd thoroughly examine these things with you with the greatest pleasure."

And Protagoras said, "Socrates, *I* praise your enthusiasm and your course through the arguments. [361e] And in other [matters], you see, I don't think that I'm a bad person, and I'm the least grudging of human beings, since I've told many people about you—that I admire you most of those whom I have met, those of your age, absolutely; and I say, in fact, that I wouldn't wonder if you became one of the men esteemed for wisdom.[228] And we'll travel through these things again at a later time, whenever you'd like; but now it's the time to turn to something else."

[362a] "But," I said, "it is necessary to do so, if it seems [best] to you.[229] You see, as I said, it's long been the time for me to go, too, but I've stayed to please Callias the comely."[230]

Having said and having heard these things, we went away.

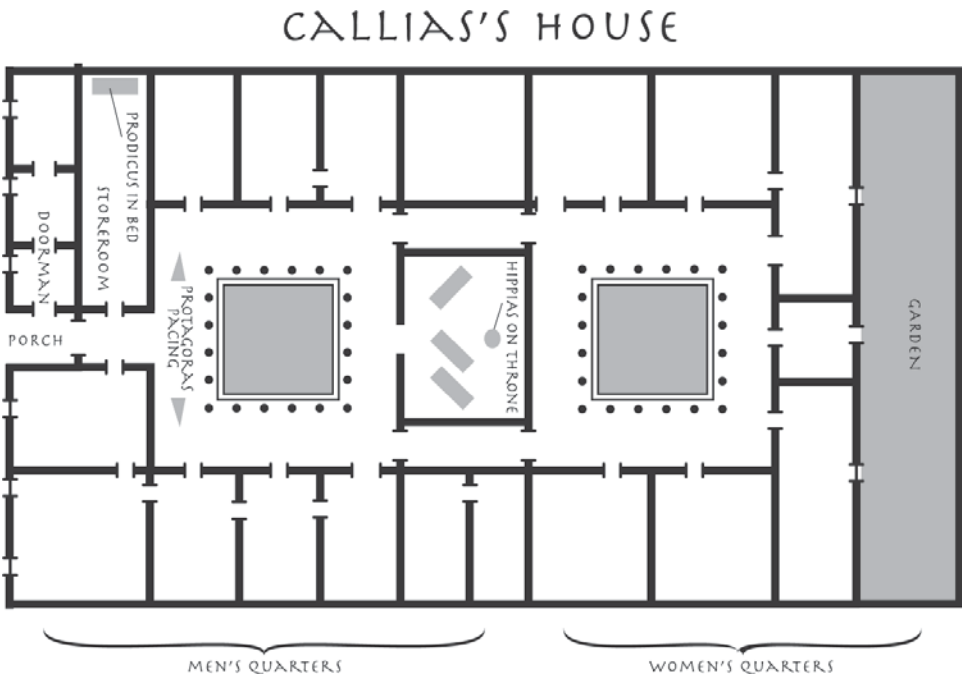
---

228. This is the same kind of "compliment" Socrates pays young Isocrates at the end of the *Phaedrus* (278e).

229. Perhaps there is a joke here on Protagoras: It is necessary to change the topic *because it seems best to Protagoras*. In other words, Protagoras himself becomes the measure, so to speak, of what to do.

230. Socrates is punning on the name "Callias" (*Kallias* in Greek and similar to the word *kalos*, which we've translated as "noble" or "beautiful"). Our use of "comely" for *kalos* is an attempt, perhaps feeble but the best we can find in English, at catching both the "k" and "l" of Socrates' alliteration.

Appendix A: Callias' House



Callias' house, which Hippias calls "the town hall of wisdom and the greatest and most prosperous house of this polis" (337d), is probably a peristyle structure—that is, a building with colonnaded courtyards. Since the men and women of a household have their own separate parts of the house, there is one such courtyard for each part. The house has a porch, the recessed entranceway where Socrates and Hippocrates stop to finish the conversation they had begun on their way to the house. After they knock on the door, the doorman comes out of his room just within the house to the left. After being admitted, Socrates and Hippocrates walk down the hallway that leads to the men's courtyard. In the courtyard, Protagoras is walking back and forth trailed by a crowd of admirers. Opposite the hallway is the large room where Hippias is sitting on a throne, surrounded by visitors on benches. He is answering questions on science and astronomy. As Socrates looks off to the left he sees a storeroom that has been converted into a bedroom. Prodicus is lying in bed there under abundant bedclothes. Sitting next to him are four young men, Pausanias, Agathon, and the two Adeimantuses.

Appendix B: On Translating

Many people have thought creatively about translation, and their general view is that while translation may be better than nothing, it is certainly never so excellent as the original. And most have used similes or metaphors to explain their thought. It is worth noting, perhaps, that someone who gives a likeness is in a sense engaging in translation, taking one reality and transferring it to another. When Robert Burns sang "My love's like a red, red rose," he was taking the reality of his beloved and transferring it to a rose, and vice versa. For a Platonist, the process is not much different for every conversation about reality, for in the Platonist system, reality starts with the idea, say, of a rose, and then moves to a physical rose, which is, so to speak, a translation of the idea; and then to the word *rose*, which is a translation into speech of the physical rose. When we move to the word for "rose" in another language, we are carrying on the process of translation a step further. We can, at least metaphorically, glimpse how much is lost in each step of this Platonic process by noting how much is lost in the last step, from one language to another. We can then reflect that this last is actually the smallest step; the first step away from the idea is the greatest, and each subsequent step becomes somewhat smaller, so that the second step from the physical incarnation to the word is smaller, and the smallest step of all, which is the one we understand best, is from one language to another.

A proverb variously attributed to Italy, France, or Russia says that a translation is like a woman: If it is beautiful, it is certainly not faithful; if it is faithful, it is certainly not beautiful. Rather less misogynistic is the statement

by the poet Hayyim Bialik that reading a translation is like kissing a bride through a veil. Cervantes has Don Quixote say that reading a translation is like looking at the back of a tapestry. The Chinese translator Kumarajiva said that translating is like chewing food to feed to others who can't chew it themselves, so that most of the taste has gone out. Then there is the Italian proverb, *Traduttore, traditore* ("translator, traitor"). Perhaps most pessimistic of all is the unattributed "Translation is death." And, of course, all translators should keep in mind the words of Alexander Pope in the preface to his splendid translation of Homer's *Iliad*:

> It is certain no literal translation can be just to an excellent original in a superior language: but it is a great mistake to imagine (as many have done) that a rash paraphrase can make amends for this general defect; which is no less in danger to lose the spirit of an ancient, by deviating into the modern manners of expression. If there be sometimes darkness, there is often a light in antiquity, which nothing better preserves than a version almost literal.

Accommodations have always been made in translation, starting with the earliest. The ancient *Letter of Aristeas* explained that the Septuagint, the rendering of the Bible from Hebrew to Greek, was produced by seventy-two translators whom King Ptolemy of Egypt confined for seventy-two days in seventy-two separate cells. At the end of this time all seventy-two translations were exactly the same word for word, with no difference at all among them. From this miracle it was understood that the translation was itself divinely inspired and therefore to be afforded the same sacred authority as the original. Yet those translators, even if divinely inspired, had no choice but to make accommodations—to take, for example, a language in which there are discrete terms for every sort of sacrifice (burnt offering, bloodless offering, peace offering, thank offering, free will offering, etc.) and accommodate it to a language with only one word for sacrifice.[1]

No one we know of has ever claimed divine inspiration for a translation of Plato (nor do the current translators). Nor do we claim that translating Plato is more challenging than translating any other author, though of course it does present its own challenges.

Unlike Aristotle, who probably endeavored to use a consistent vocabulary most of the time, Plato was content with a language that was varied and inconsistent. Now sometimes a word that can have a technical meaning within a school has a general meaning in the general population (like our word

1. James A. Arieti, "The Vocabulary of Septuagint Amos," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93 (1974), 338–47.

"self," which has a technical meaning for psychologists and a nontechnical meaning to everyone else; or "white" or "black," which are colors for most people but not for physicists). The same is true for Plato's audience at the Academy, and we have translated one such word with different meanings according to *who* is saying it in the dialogue. The word in question is *dialegomai*, which means either "converse" or "engage in dialectic," depending upon who uses it and in what context.

But even if an author uses a word consistently, it may not be possible to find a one-to-one correspondence in English. Greek may make a distinction that English does not make and have two words where English has only one, and so one English word may be needed for two different Greek words. Hippocrates Apostle, who translated many works of Aristotle into English, when he found this to be the case, employed the expedient of putting an English word into italics or into Roman to show that it was being used as the translation for different Greek words. For example, he uses "reason" for *logos* and "*reason*" for *aition*, depending on whether it means the *faculty of reason* or *cause*.

One problem with an author such as Plato is that he has been so significant a figure in our culture that he has influenced our very vocabulary. Such phrases as "platonic relationship," "swan song," "philosopher king," or even such words as "Socratic" and "academic" have entered Western vocabularies (and non-Western vocabularies too!) because of his writings. One word that translators *ought* to trouble themselves about is *sophistes*, which, mostly owing to Plato's influential animus, has been a negative term for nearly two-and-a-half millennia. We have translated this word as *reasoner* in an attempt to provide a neutral term.[2]

We have elected to transliterate several words where no single word would be entirely satisfactory. We have done so, first, because the terms have already become domesticated in English, and, second, because we have assumed that this translation will be used only by the adventurous reader who already has some familiarity with Greek literature and culture. Thus we have left *hubris*, *polis*, *rhetor*, and *genus* as they are in Greek except for inflectional changes not required by English. We have, however, included footnotes on these words. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many teachers of Latin and Greek forbade their students to translate any ancient word into its English derivative, even when the English word was a direct borrowing. Thus Latin *templum* became "church" and the Greek *poema*, "verse," instead of "temple" and "poem," respectively. We, however, have thought it prudent

2. See introduction, page 3, and note 29 of this translation.

to violate Polonius' advice about never being "a borrower" and, when it has been warranted for the sake of accuracy, to borrow these few words. We are aware that the result of following this practice to the extreme would be to leave the entire text in the original, but we have concluded that the introduction of a few Greek words is worth the sacrifice of obsessively adhering to the principle of *never* using derivatives.

There are some words of whose punning nature the Greeks themselves were well aware and loved to exploit. One notable such word is *deinos*, which comes up in the *Protagoras* as well as in many other places.[3] Another is *agamai*, which means, in a good sense, "admire," and in a bad sense, "envy" or "begrudge," and is said by Protagoras in reference to Socrates at the end of the dialogue (361e). Like the English homophones *raise* and *raze*, these words have a sense opposite to themselves, as do such other English words as *cleave* (which means both *cut*—"he cleaved the meat"—and *cling*—"he shall cleave unto his wife") or *fast* (which means both *to stay still*—"he stood fast"—and *to move quickly*—"he ran fast") or *sanction* (which indicates both *disapproval*—"he was sanctioned for his disobedience"—and *approval*—"he asked the council to sanction his plan").

Many Greek names, like many names in all languages, have significant meanings, and authors like to practice their wit by opportunistically playing on these meanings. In the *Gorgias*, for example, *Polus*, the name of one of the young and impetuous participants, means "colt," and there are frequent equine jests on the name. In the *Protagoras*, Protagoras tells a myth about Prometheus and Epimetheus, whose names bear significant meaning. At the end of the dialogue Socrates jokes about Callias' name, referring to Callias as "comely." The joke comes from the "cal" part of his name, which means "beautiful," or "comely," as we have rendered it in order to catch a bit of the sound play in the guttural "c." Translators are presented with a dilemma concerning these names. Should the name "Prometheus" be rendered as "Foresighted" and "Epimetheus" as "After-sighted" or, given that the names, at least that of Prometheus, are well known and that such invented names have a sense of being "too cute," should the Greek names be retained? We have elected to keep the traditional names and to supply a note on the etymological significance. In the case of Callias, perhaps no one would have elected to translate his name as "Cutey" or "Comely," for the pun does not seem critical to the meaning and a little touch can be produced by the alliterative resemblance. But it is clear that in translation a rich repeated sense of meaning is lost. Perhaps a translator of Henry Fielding into ancient Greek

3. See the translation, note 35.

would face an identical dilemma in rendering the names of Mrs. Slipslop or Lady Booby!

When characters tell tales in the ancient languages, they often lapse into what is known as the historical present much more often than do characters in English works. When a person is reporting an incident or a conversation and wants to convey a sense that it is happening even as he describes it, the speaker, though he has been using a past tense, may suddenly change to the present tense, creating the impression that the event is taking place as he tells it. We have elected to preserve this usage in the translation. Socrates is reporting his conversation to a friend and is attempting to be as dramatic as he can, and the historical present is one of the dramatic devices he employs.

It will be clear that it is almost impossible to be a translator. Indeed, one might describe a translator much as Imlac explains poetry to the prince in Samuel Johnson's novel *Rasselas*. In the following quotation, if for "poet" you read "translator" you will have a just sense of our challenge:

> "The business of a poet," said Imlac, "is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features, as recall the original to every mind; and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another have neglected, for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness.
>
> "But the knowledge of nature is only half the task of a poet; he must be acquainted likewise with all the modes of life. His character requires that he estimate the happiness and misery of every condition; observe the power of all the passions in all their combinations, and trace the changes of the human mind as they are modified by various institutions and accidental influences of climate or custom, from the spriteliness of infancy to the despondence of decrepitude. He must divest himself of the prejudices of his age or country; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same: he must therefore content himself with the slow progress of his name; contemn the applause of his own time, and commit his claims to the justice of posterity. He must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations; as a being superior to time and place.
>
> "His labor is not yet at an end: he must know many languages and many sciences; and, that his style may be worthy of his thoughts, must, by incessant practice, familiarize to himself every delicacy of speech and grace of harmony."[4]

4. *Rasselas*, chapter 10.

Appendix C: Simonides *PMG* 542

To become a good man truly
is difficult, in hands and feet and mind
square, fashioned without fault;

[*seven verses are missing*]

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,[1]
[the hope of] an entirely blameless man, among all of us

1. This is taking ἄπρακτον with ἐλπίδα; but it is possible to take ἄπρακτον with μοῖραν, in which case we get an interlocking word order, to be rendered: "nor shall I toss an impractical portion of my life onto an empty hope."

who reap the solidly founded earth.[2]
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.

Commentaries

We are fortunate in having several plausible and provocative interpretations of Simonides' poem. Here we shall summarize some recent views, in which it will become apparent that Socrates and Protagoras are not the only ones who can differ on the meaning of a poem—and we may wonder, as we reflect on the varied criticism of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, whether the criticism of literature put forth by the Platonic Socrates is valid: that books, like paintings, cannot explain what they mean (*Phaedrus* 275e, *Protagoras* 329a). Perhaps, finally, the analysis of the poem in the dialogue shows that in the criticism of poetry every critic can make himself the measure of a poem.

Hermann Fränkel[3] maintains that Simonides' poem is directed against the archaic scheme of values, by which a man's worth is determined wholly by his possession and display of power. Rank, health, looks, dominion, and success are marks of the favor of the gods; a lack of these goods is a mark of failure. In archaic society there was no middle way: He who was not good was bad. Pittacus had said that it is hard to be good. But Simonides is much more emphatic: It is not *hard*, but *impossible* to be good in the archaic sense. Human wit is resourceless against the overwhelming forces aligned against it. Men should not waste their lives looking for perfection, and they should no longer consider themselves good or bad through their success or failure. What ought to be the standard of good and bad is whether they willingly do what is

2. Or: among all of us mortals who enjoy the fruit of the broad-based earth.
3. *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, tr. Moses Hadas and James Willis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 307–13.

shameful. Only the actions done by a man according to his will should count in the decision of whether he is good or bad. Simonides declares beautiful that which has no admixture of what is ugly. The Greeks of Simonides' and Parmenides' generation, says Fränkel, had a logic of polarized thought.[4] Today we think of degrees of brightness; for the archaic Greeks, something moderately bright would have been a mixture of extreme opposites, so that a moderately bright day would have been composed of a mixture of total brightness and total darkness. By the same logic, if one quality is lacking, the opposite is wholly present. For Simonides, therefore, that which contains no mixture of the ugly is wholly beautiful. The idea, then, is this: It is not just the *presence* of the beautiful that makes something fair, but the *absence* of evil (i.e., bad intentions)—and in human affairs, it is not just the absolutely beautiful that is the opposite of the absolutely ugly, but it is also the absence of evil intentions. In this way, says Fränkel, Simonides uses the formal logic of polarized thought to overturn polarized thought and to substitute a relative mode of thinking. Simonides leaves behind the archaic way of thinking in terms of antitheses, though he retains the antithesis of god and man, which becomes the antithesis between the absolute and the relative. God alone is good in the absolute sense; human beings are not like this; at best they can be "the best of their kind" when the gods love them.

Walter Donlan[5] reads the poem as defining a good man in terms of his inner motivation, not his success. Since Simonides lacked a vocabulary of internal moral terms, he had to use old words in new ways. Donlan argues that Simonides is employing his new definition of the good man from the outset of the poem, so that when Simonides says that it is difficult to be truly good, the force of *truly* is to stress the internal sense of motivation as opposed to the outward, archaic sense of *successful*. The specification of a man's good, including *mind* as well as hands and feet, makes manifest this emphasis on the inner man. The old external view of goodness had been expressed by Pittacus—that though it was difficult to be good, for it entailed hardship and suffering, it was *possible*. Simonides, says Donlan, is speaking about internal goodness, the focus of which is not external achievement, and internal goodness is much more difficult to achieve. Archaic poets had never claimed that being *agathos-esthlos* (good-noble) was unattainable, nor had they called gods *agathoi*, a term reserved only for men. When Simonides uses the term *kakos* (bad), he is also referring to moral qualities and is declaring that all men by nature are morally imperfect. The term *amechanos sumphora*,

4. Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, 311.
5. "Simonides, Fr. 4D and P. Oxy. 2432," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* (1969), 71–95.

which we have translated as "intractable disaster," can also have an internal significance, says Donlan, indicating "the condition of man who is seized by passions beyond his control." Donlan concludes that Simonides is a man of his time, rejecting the aristocratic goal of success for one that is attainable by ordinary citizen of a polis: "The morally blameless man is the average citizen of good intent."

Anne Carson[6] observes that Simonides' poem is terribly mixed up in the dialogue, and Socrates makes the confusion even worse by his violent transgressions of grammar. Still, though the text and meaning are hard to get at, the subject of Simonides' poem is clear. That subject is virtue, and so it is no accident that it appears in this dialogue, in which Socrates and Protagoras discuss the teachability of virtue. Simonides was known for his pioneer work in epinician poetry, the poetry of praise for athletic victors. Since he was paid for such writing, and thus for having professionalized the poet's art, he is a fitting analogue of Protagoras, who professionalized the selling of wisdom. Simonides' poem, says Carson, turns out actually not to be about virtue but about praise. Simonides, and not only in this poem, proposes an ontological dependence of human goodness on praise: Unless an action is celebrated in song, the action does not exist. When Simonides says that "best are they whom the gods love," the real meaning is "those men become good whom the poet loves"—that is, no man is good unless a poet says so. Socrates' position in the dialogue is that one can trust neither the praise of a praise-poet-for-hire like Simonides nor the wisdom of a wisdom-seller like Protagoras, for neither does anything for the moral health of a human soul. Such health is achieved by dialectic. The *Protagoras* shows that one distinction between a philosopher and a sophist is that the sophist is the one who loses his sense of humor. As for Simonides' poem, it is misappropriated and manhandled by the philosophers, and, like all poetry in Plato's corpus, keeps itself as a thing unmixed with philosophy.

G. O. Hutchinson in his commentary on Simonides' poem[7] says that it stands closer to sophistic and post-sophistic intellectualism than to archaic poetry. The 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

6. "How Not to Read a Poem: Unmixing Simonides from *Protagoras*," *Classical Philology* 87 (1992), 110–30.

7. *Greek Lyric Poetry: A Commentary on Selected Larger Pieces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 291–306.

symposium. Unlike his lyric and non-lyric predecessors (such as Hesiod and Solon), the poet is argumentative and purposeful in the development of his thought. Simonides starts out with a self-conscious independence and boldness of position and, as he develops the poem, becomes less strenuous and more beguilingly plausible. In this way the poem's listener would succumb to the poet's animation and challenging persuasiveness.

For Glenn W. Most,[8] Simonides' poem, along with the debate over its meaning in Plato's *Protagoras*, is a case study in the problems of literary interpretation. Most is critical of Protagoras' claim that Simonides contradicts himself in the poem because, Most maintains, the claim is based on a radical decontextualization of the work. Contrasting Protagoras' pedestrian interpretation with Socrates' fanciful one, he concludes that Socrates at least takes into account the relevant textual and social contexts necessary to understand the meaning of the poem. Most largely ignores the comic nature of Socrates' interpretation and finds that Plato's serious purpose is to illustrate the crucial role of contextualization and the variety of forms it takes in literary interpretation, which is essentially the attempt to recontextualize texts that have become decontextualized, if for no other cause than their transmission beyond the time and place of their creation. Scopas was not only Simonides' paying customer, but also a brutal tyrant, and Simonides' method of dealing with this problem of praising a tyrant results in what Most calls the "systematic ambiguity" of the poem. He concludes that Simonides' poem is best understood not as a discussion of virtue and vice but as a reflection on the nature and limits of encomiastic poetry by a practitioner of the art.

8. "Simonides' Ode to Scopas in Contexts," in *Modern Critical Theory and Classical Literature*, ed. Irene J. F. de Jong and J. P. Sullivan (New York: E. J. Brill, 1994).

Appendix D: Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations* and Plato's *Protagoras*

We are fortunate that we have a good deal of the work of Plato's brilliant student Aristotle, who studied at the Academy for twenty years and probably taught rhetoric there.[1] Throughout his many books Aristotle may be presenting as straightforward philosophy many of the same views that Plato does through the drama of dialogues.[2] These views are on topics that were discussed in the stimulating environment of the Academy. If the *Protagoras* is a dramatic representation that tomfoolery of the kind exhibited by Socrates, Protagoras, Prodicus, and Hippias is ineffective in discovering truth, Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations* presents a rigorous examination of just these kinds of argumentative shenanigans. Aristotle writes of the participants in a sophistical debate (*Sophistical Refutations* 165b15–21):

> First, indeed, [the participants] must take hold of as many things that those who compete and love contests aim at. These are five in number: refutation and falsity and paradoxes and solecism and, fifth, making the interlocutor prattle (this is to be constrained to say the same thing many times), or to make each of these [five] things *seem* to occur though not [actually] occurring. Participants most prefer to seem to refute [their opponent], and second to show

1. See Diogenes Laertius, *Life of Aristotle* 5.3; also Werner Jaeger, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development*, second ed., tr. Richard Robinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 37.
2. See Arieti, *Interpreting Plato*, 9–10.

> that he has been false in something, and third, to lead him into paradox, and fourth to make him commit a solecism (this is to compel, out of the argument, the one answering to be barbarous in his diction), and, finally, to make him say the same thing with too much expansiveness.

Refutation

Both Protagoras and Socrates specifically bring up refutation in the dialogue and both show that they are well-versed in its methodology. Protagoras claims that the parts of virtue are like the parts of a face, each having its own special domain, but Socrates shows that two parts of virtue—justice and holiness—are not in fact wholly exclusive of each other (331e). Protagoras defends his position, claiming, "And with respect to things we at one time said have a different power and are not like one another—[namely,] the parts of the face—[they actually] *do* resemble [each other] and *are* like one another in some way or other. So in this way you might *refute* these things, if you wished, [and claim that] all these are similar to each other. [331e] But it is not just to say that things are similar because they are similar in one small way, [that is,] even if they should have some similarity that is absolutely small." In effect, he is accusing Socrates of having achieved a refutation, but by means of quibbling, of making a molehill into a mountain. Later, when Socrates discourses on Simonides' poem, he declares that Simonides' whole purpose is to vanquish Pittacus' phrase in the same way an athlete defeats a competitor (343c) and proclaims Simonides' poem to be nothing other than a refutation of Pittacus. He anticipates the language of the *Sophistical Refutations*: "But let's go through the whole outline and meaning of [the poem]—that more than anything, through the whole song, it is a refutation of Pittacus' saying" (344b).

Falsity

Socrates conjures a Simonides explicitly accusing Pittacus of intentionally lying when seeming to say the truth: "If you had spoken things appropriate and true in a measured way, Pittacus, I would never have blamed you. But now—you see, even while you are lying vehemently about the greatest [matters] you are seeming to say the truth—[and so] because of these things I do blame you" (346e–347a). And later (353a), Socrates accuses the people, in his imaginative conversation, of lying when they say that

they do what they know is not best because they are reduced by pleasures: "You people don't speak rightly but you are lying." In 358a, in a variation of the device, Socrates asks Prodicus and Hippias to confirm that he is speaking falsely.

Paradoxes

Aristotle observes (*Sophistical Refutations* 173a7–8) that "the widest range of commonplace argument for leading men into paradoxical statement is that which depends on the standards of nature and convention." This occurs in Hippias' lavish joke (337c–d): "Gentlemen who are present, I think that you are kin and members of the [same] household and all [fellow] citizens—by nature, not by convention; you see, like is kin to what is like it by nature; but convention, being a tyrant over human beings, violently compels many things contrary to nature."[3]

Solecism

Aristotle gives a good example of a solecism, a problem in grammar, in the *Rhetoric* (1407b13): τοῦ λόγου τοῦδ' ἐόντος ἀεὶ ἐξύνετοι ἄνθρωποι γίγνονται: "The argument being in this way always devoid of understanding are men." The example is clearer in Greek, which lacks punctuation. Where does the "always" go? Should we understand "the argument *always* being this way" or "men are *always* devoid of reasoning"? This is what modern grammar calls a "squinting modifier" and is exactly what is taken up in the discussion of Simonides' poem (*Protagoras* 339b): "On the one hand, for a man to become good truly is difficult"—does the squinting modifier "truly" go with *good* or with *difficult*? Aristotle gives an example of a discussion of solecism by Protagoras himself (*Sophistical Refutations* 173b19–22): When a speaker uses the word for "anger," which is masculine, and then refers to anger as a

3. Aristotle refers to Callicles' charge in the *Gorgias* that Socrates is constantly equivocating on nature and convention (483a): "And indeed, having observed this smart [effect], *you* work evil in words, [for] if on the one hand someone speaks according to convention, [you] reply by asking according to nature, and if on the other hand he [speaks about the things] of nature, [you reply by asking] about the things of convention. And so in these matters—acting unjustly and being treated unjustly—while Polus was speaking of the thing uglier according to convention, *you* straightaway were pursuing the argument according to nature."

destructress (i.e., a feminine noun meaning "one who destroys"), he is committing a solecism, or ungrammatical construction.[4]

Prattle (Too Much Expansiveness)

At 328d, Socrates makes it clear that he thinks Protagoras has prattled on too long. Socrates, full of sarcasm, says,

> And I, still enchanted [by his every word], looked on him for a long time as [though] he had something [more] to say, desiring to listen; but when, indeed, I perceived that he had really stopped, with effort I somehow gathered myself together, as it were, and I looked at Hippocrates and said, "Son of Apollodorus, how I thank you for inspiring me to come here; [328e] I shall consider it of great importance, you see, to have heard what I've heard from Protagoras; before just now, you see, I didn't think there was [any] human care by which good [people] become good; but now I have been persuaded. But there's one small thing blocking me that it is plain that Protagoras will easily clear up, since he has clarified these many things. You see, if someone were in the company of any of the public speakers, he'd probably hear from him just such speeches, either from Pericles or from someone else competent at speaking; but if [the public speakers] were asked anything further at all, [they'd be] like books that can't answer or ask; and if someone asked even a small [question] about any of the things that had been said [by them in their speeches], just as clanging bronze [pots] echo and stretch [their sound] unless someone lays hold of them, the rhetors, when asked something small, in the same way stretch out a course of speech that's ten miles long."

The principal objection to this sort of intellectual gamesmanship is, of course, that it aims at victory rather than at truth. As Aristotle says (165b13), the competitors must "love contests"[5]—the very charge directed at Socrates by Protagoras at the end of the dialogue (360e). If we have been correct in our analysis of the effect of Socrates on such young men as Plato, Xenophon, and the others of the Socratic Circle, that what they found inspi-

4. The discussion is somewhat confusing because although *Protagoras* claimed that the word for anger (μῆνις) is masculine, it is, according to our dictionaries, feminine. Now as Protagoras seems to have been the first to organize words according to gender, he may have had some reason, rejected by Aristotle's day, for considering the word masculine. An English analogy to Protagoras' example would be something like this: someone refers to a woman, say, Meryl Streep, and then to her profession—actor. According to Protagoras the use of "actor" would be a solecism, for the writer should have written "actress," since Meryl Streep is a woman.

5. The text is not entirely certain, and the word may be "lover of victory," which in Greek differs only by an "i" from "lover of contests."

rational and appealing about him was his persistence in actually seeking the truth and *not* looking for victory, we can take as one of Plato's points that a man as brilliant as Socrates could have participated in the nonsense of the reasoners and could very well have held his own in such contests, if only he had wished to do so. He could have "out-reasoned" the best of the reasoners. But, like Thales, who could have become rich had he wanted to but chose to pursue truth,[6] Socrates preferred to avoid passing his time in "sophistical refutations" and instead to go to the agora and to show ordinary men that they were not so wise as they supposed.[7]

6. We refer to Aristotle's famous anecdote about Thales (*Politics* 1259a10–18). Thales, having been derided as impractical and with his head in the clouds, proceeded to make a killing in the olive oil business, just to prove he could be successful in business, *if he only wanted to*.

7. It is perhaps no wonder that to the man in the street Socrates did not seem so different from a reasoner.

Glossary

convention (νόμος [*nomos*]: 337c) *Convention* comes from the Latin word meaning *to come together*. It indicates a prearranged agreement to act in a certain way, even when any given individual has no personal conviction that such action is especially good. For example, members of a certain fraternity may be expected to shake hands in a certain way on particular occasions. Because human beings become so habituated to their environment (with its conventions) that everything in it seems natural, they sometimes have difficulty distinguishing between its actually natural and conventional features. The ancients discussed this matter in the fifth century B.C.E., in what is known as the debate about convention and nature (*nomos* and *physis*). The term *convention* differs from *custom* in that with *convention* there is a prearrangement, though the distinction is thin and not always observed. For example, while it is a convention for a fraternity to shake hands in a certain way, it is a custom to shake hands.

engage in dialectic (διαλέγεσθαι [*dialegesthai*]: 333c) The verb translated as "engage in dialectic," the method of question and answer that Socrates uses, is also the verb for "engage in conversation." Since Socrates enunciates the various rules for dialectic throughout the dialogue, we have chosen the more technical meaning for this translation, for it was probably the sense that would resonate within Plato's group, which very likely constituted the original audience of the dialogue. For those outside Plato's group, the meaning "engage in conversation" would have been more natural. Since, alas, we have no knowledge at

all of Plato's actual audience, any assumption is speculative. We should, perhaps, leave open the question of whether for Socrates conversation and dialectic are distinct. Briefly stated, dialectic is a technique of question-and-answer in which the participants debate some issue that is (to them) vitally important. Dialectic rests on the assumptions that (1) truth exists; (2) truth is the agreement of two human beings following the rules of reason; (3) inconsistency, that is, contradiction, is the surest sign available that the conclusion reached is not true; and (4) both people must be willing to "stay at their posts" and argue until consistency is reached. When consistency is achieved, the participants enjoy the certainty and the calmness of soul that results from it.

inconsequential (φαῦλος [*phaulos*]: 326e) The term is contrasted with *spoudaios*, a term that signifies seriousness and virtue, qualities of the kind of person portrayed in epic and tragedy. Aristotle adds that the quality of being "inconsequential" is a kind of badness, not all badness, but the kind that involves the laughable and the ugly. Since comedy is the obverse of tragedy, the comic hero must have some goodness in him; otherwise we would not take delight in his prosperous outcome. In the *Nicomachaean Ethics*, Aristotle says that whatever is *phaulos* lacks the ability to originate action, while that which has intelligence can originate action. Hence, he says, a human being can be ten thousand times more evil than an animal (1150a). Perhaps because the person who is *phaulos* is reduced in his capacity for real injustice and harm, as well as for good, he is a proper subject of comedy.

justice, practice of (δικαιοσύνη [*dikaiosyne*]: 330b) Greek distinguishes, though not always or consistently, among the words indicating levels of abstraction and nuances of meaning in various terms for the various ideas associated with our one word *justice*. The Greek words are all similar: δίκαιον (*dikaion*: the just, the most abstract term), δίκη (*dike*: a sense of what is legally just, a legal penalty), δικαιότης (*dikaotes*: justness—the abstraction seen as a quality), and δικαιότης (*dikaiosyne*: the practice of justice). The suffix, *syne*, which we find in other words, such as *sophrosyne* (the practice of self-restraint) and *mantosyne* (the practice of divination), indicates that the key noun involves an activity along with it. The translation of the term as "practice of justice" renders much less troublesome the problem of self-predication in 330c (see note 141 in the translation). See also a sense of what is legally just.

logos (λόγος [*logos*]: 317c) *Logos* refers to the chief quality that, in ancient thought, separates human beings from other animals—the faculty of reasoning with its concomitant of speech. In paganism this is a quality shared

with the gods; in religions rooted in the Bible, it reflects the image of God, according to which human beings were created. In the ancient tradition, it takes two forms, speech and reason (in Latin, *oratio* and *ratio*), which are connected organically as they affect civic duty. Isocrates observes that we use the same *logos* in reasoning with ourselves as we use in persuading others. It is this dual nature of *logos*—internal and external—that causes modern readers difficulty in conceiving and translating the Greek word, and hence we have elected to transliterate it.

nature (φύσις [*physis*]: 337c) Nature is what art imitates, what science analyzes. Most uses of nature can be resolved into one of these three propositions: (1) nature is whatever happens; (2) nature is the statistical majority; (3) nature is what ought to be. The famous line in *Hamlet*—that art holds a mirror up to nature—rests on the assumption that nature has reality and form. Contemporary relativistic notions assume that reality consists of a series of imposed viewpoints, the sum total of which will, at any given time, constitute reality, and this totality increases with each new scientific theory or observation, with each new artistic vision. Human nature is that part of nature in which we find the operations of the human psyche—reason, free will, emotion, thought. When Stoics later speak of a "life according to nature," they often mean "according to human nature," i.e., "in accordance with reason."

out-of-place (ἄτοπος [*atopos*]: 309b) Underlying the term is the idea of a *cosmos*, an ordered whole—either of a polis or the universe—where things have a proper place. The term generally carries more negative connotations than our word *eccentric*. Nevertheless, Plato seems fond of the term *out-of-place* and uses it often of Socrates (*Gorgias* 494d, *Symposium* 221d). Perhaps Plato is suggesting that Socrates is out-of-place in this world of practical affairs and that his proper place is in the world of ideas. Thomas More uses the root *-top* in the equivocal title of his *Utopia*, where the "U" can come either from *eu* ("good") or from *ou* ("no"), yielding "Goodplace" or "Noplace."

paradigm (παράδειγμα [*paradeigma*]: 326d) A paradigm is one of Aristotle's three classes of imitation (*Poetics* 1460b). The three kinds of imitation are (1) things as they were or are; (2) things as they are said or seem to be; (3) things as they ought to be. The last is the paradigm (1461a13), of which Aristotle says, "The paradigm ought to excel." The paradigm is not the model that the artist imitates, but the imitation itself, as an electric eye is a "paradigm" of the human eye that, for the purposes for which it was designed, is superior to the human eye. In the *Rhetoric* (1393a), Aristotle says that since the paradigm resembles an induction, it is a starting

point of knowledge. He goes on to point out that paradigms may be either the invented kind found in fables or the historical kind.

polis (πόλις [*polis*]: 316b) The usual translation, "city-state"—conjuring up images of Vatican City or the principality of Monaco—does not adequately convey a sense of what a polis was. In brief, a polis embraced the entire life of a human being; in the ancient world it was to a human being what a herd is to cattle—but, of course, with all the characteristics that define humanity. Each polis was its own culture, with its own linguistic features, music, literature, history, religious rituals and local deities, weights and measures, calendar, constitution, and manner of life. To suffer exile from one's polis was to be deprived of everything and everyone that was meaningful in life—and perhaps this fact helps us to understand why Socrates (in both the *Apology* and *Crito*) chooses death rather than separation from Athens. For us, the term "city-state" is, ironically, too "political" in the modern sense of the word—focusing too much on government and bureaucracy and too little on culture.

reasoner (σοφιστής [*sophist*]: 311e) This is our translation for the word that is usually not translated but transliterated as *sophist*. But because the negative associations of the word are largely a result of Plato's apparent disesteem for those who used the term to define their own activity, we have elected to render the term in a less prejudicial way. See also the introduction, page 3.

rhetor (ῥήτωρ [*rhetor*]: 329a) In the *Gorgias*, Gorgias is called a *rhetor* (449a6), someone who understands the technical skill of persuasion (Aristotle, *Nicomachaean Ethics* 1112b13) and can teach it to others—in other words, a *theorist* of rhetoric. *Rhetor* also applies to a man who participates in the assembly and gives speeches on public policy or to someone who pleads a case in court—in other words, a *practitioner* of rhetoric. In the absence of a purely English word that can signify its dual nature, we have elected to transliterate it.

rhetoric (ῥητορική [*rhetorike*]: 448d) Rhetoric is the use of language to work on the emotions. One starts with certain aims and intentions, certain ideas, and then seeks ways to make them persuasive. The set of techniques for doing so leaves the user of rhetoric open to the charge of insincerity, of a lack of organic connection with his subject and position; hence the sustained attack by Plato on rhetoric. Inquiry into the techniques of persuasion was a sustained focus of study in antiquity, and a great many treatises on rhetoric were written. Perhaps the best was Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.

self-restraint (σωφροσύνη [*sophrosyne*]: 323a) Self-restraint refers to the Delphic injunction "know thyself"—as it is reflected primarily in knowing

one's limitations—both as a man and as a citizen. It goes beyond what we would call "moderation," the usual translation of the Greek word, for the emphasis is not so much on seeking the mean as on repressing one's appetite for pleasures. Self-restraint is also manifested in repressing *pleonexia*, the grasping for more than one's proper share. Self-restraint restrains the tendency of people to think that they are mightier than they are—whether in the myths about the men and women foolish enough to challenge the gods to contests or in the politics of the real world where polis challenges polis to war. The opposite of self-restraint is wantonness (ἀκολασία).

a sense of what is legally just (δίκη [*dike*]: 322c) The word conveys a sense of wanting someone who has done a wrong "to get what's coming to him." This can of course be justice, perfectly administered by a blindfolded goddess; it can also be a penalty applied to a criminal in a legal proceeding or to a respondent in a civil suit. It is what one aims at in a legal proceeding. When we speak of fear of the law, as when we speak of fear of the gods, a mixture of motives may be at work. One may fear the law in the sense of wishing to avoid any penalties for violating the law; or one may also think the law ought to be obeyed because it is right and honorable to do so; or one may act from a combination of such motives. The term's connotations render it somewhat less ennobling than the term *dikaiosyne*, which we have rendered as practice of justice (see above).

technical skill (τέχνη [*techne*]: 312b) The Greek word refers to a skill that requires the specialized knowledge of a set of rules and procedures. Lyre-playing, medicine, and horsemanship would be examples of such "technical skills." The word can also be translated as "art," where it is understood that a set of rules applies. In the *Protagoras* (318d), Plato has his character Protagoras include number theory, astronomy, geometry, and music among the technical skills.

thing that one does (πρᾶγμα [*pragma*]: 330b) English "thing" can refer to bits of matter, say, pebbles and stars; to ideas, say, pity and love; to animated creatures, say, trees and monkeys; to activities, say, concerts and baseball games. In short, the English word refers to any entity having a nature that stays the same long enough for its identity to be recognized. Hence even a subatomic particle that endures a nanosecond, if it endures long enough to be recognized, is called a "thing." The Greek word *pragma*, though often translated simply as "thing," retains the meaning of its root πράσσω (*prasso*) and signifies in particular a "thing that is done." When *pragma* refers to "the practice of justice," it is because "the practice of justice" is a "thing that is done."

Bibliography

Editions

Adam, J., and Adam, A. M. (eds.). *Plato, Protagoras*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893.

Denyer, Nicholas (ed.). *Plato, Protagoras*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Towle, James A. (ed.). *Plato: Protagoras*. Boston: Ginn & Company, 1889.

Translations

Beresford, Adam. *Plato, Protagoras and Meno*. London: Penguin, 2005.

Hubbard, B. A. F., and Karnofsky, E. S. *Plato's Protagoras*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Taylor, C. C. C. *Plato, Protagoras*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Recent Books About the Reasoners (i.e., Sophists)

Guthrie, W. K. C. *The Sophists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971.

Kerferd, G. B. *The Sophistic Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

O'Grady, Patricia. *The Sophists: An Introduction*. London: Duckworth, 2008.

de Romilly, Jacqueline. *The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens*, trans. Janet Lloyd. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

Recent Studies of Plato's *Protagoras*

Dyson, M. "Knowledge and Hedonism in Plato's *Protagoras*." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 96 (1976): 32–45.

Gagarin, Michael. "The Purpose of Plato's *Protagoras*." *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 100 (1969): 133–64.

Goldberg, Larry. *A Commentary on Plato's* Protagoras. New York, Berne, and Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1983.

Griswold, Charles L. "Relying on Your Own Voice: An Unsettled Rivalry of Moral Ideals in Plato's *Protagoras*." *Review of Metaphysics* 53 (1999): 283–307.

Lavery, Jonathan. "Plato's *Protagoras* and the Frontier of Genre Research: A Reconnaissance Report from the Field." *Poetics Today* 28 (2007): 191–246.

Richardson, H. S. "Measurement, Pleasure, and Practical Science in Plato's *Protagoras*." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 28 (1990): 7–32.

Santas, Gerasimos. "Plato's *Protagoras* and Explanations of Weakness." *The Philosophical Review* 75 (1966): 3–33.

Savan, David. "Self-Predication in 'Protagoras' 330–331." *Phronesis* 9 (1964): 130–35.

Wolfsdorf, D. "The Historical Reader of Plato's *Protagoras*." *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, 48 (1998): 126–33.

Woolf, Raphael. "Consistency and Akrasia in Plato's *Protagoras*." *Phronesis* 47 (2002): 224–52.

Index