

interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

May & Sept. 1982 Volume 10 Numbers 2 & 3

- 139 Patrick Coby The Education of a Sophist:
Aspects of Plato's *Protagoras*
- 159 Warren R. Brown Aristotle's Art of Acquisition and the Conquest
of Nature
- 197 Thomas Prufer Notes for a Reading of Augustine,
Confessions, Book X
- 201 Larry Peterman Machiavelli versus Dante:
Language and Politics in the *Dialogue on Language*
- 223 David Lowenthal Shakespeare's Caesar's Plan
- 251 J. Harvey Lomax Economics or Political Philosophy: Which Should
Prevail in Public Policy?
- 273 Robert Sacks The Lion and the Ass: a Commentary on the Book of
Genesis (Chapters 25–30)

Discussion

- 319 George Anastaplo Notes toward an "Apologia pro vita sua"
- 353 Stewart Umphrey *Erōs* and *Thumos*
- 423 David Bolotin Response to Umphrey

interpretation

Volume 10 numbers 2 & 3

Editor-in-Chief Hilail Gildin

Editors Seth G. Benardete • Hilail Gildin • Robert Horwitz
• Howard B. White (d.1974)

Consulting Editors John Hallowell • Wilhelm Hennis • Erich Hula •
Arnaldo Momigliano • Michael Oakeshott • Ellis
Sandoz • Leo Strauss (d.1973) • Kenneth W.
Thompson

Associate Editors Larry Arnhart • Patrick Coby • Christopher A. Colmo
• Maureen Feder • Joseph E. Goldberg • Pamela
Jensen • Will Morrisey • Bradford Wilson

Assistant Editors Marianne C. Grey • Laurette G. Hupman

Design & Production Martyn Hitchcock

Authors submitting manuscripts for publication in
INTERPRETATION are requested to follow the *MLA
Style Sheet* and to send clear and readable copies
of their work. All manuscripts and editorial correspon-
dence should be addressed to INTERPRETATION,
Queens College, Flushing, N.Y. 11367, U.S.A.

Copyright 1982 • Interpretation

The Education of a Sophist: Aspects of Plato's *Protagoras*

PATRICK COBY

Kenyon College

I

One clue to the structure of Plato's *Protagoras* lies with the figure of Prometheus.¹ This Titan god of Greek mythology serves a double purpose in the dialogue. His name means "forethought," and he generally is associated with that cautious approach to life which conduces to self-preservation and prosperity. For example, the word *προμηθής* first occurs in the dialogue when Protagoras thanks Socrates for his subtle reminder of the dangers incident to the practice of sophistry (316c). And the god himself is first identified when Protagoras cites him in the myth as the deity responsible for the gifts of fire and technical wisdom. Prometheus is credited in large part (a close examination would suggest that he is given credit entire) with the preservation of the human species. For this reason the salvific knowledge which Prometheus imparts to men may be likened to the "art of measurement" which Socrates calls the salvation of man's life (356d). The art of measurement, defined by Socrates as the weighing of aggregate amounts of pleasures and pains, represents the consummation of that Promethean knowledge introduced by Protagoras.

The second purpose of Prometheus—aside from his symbolizing cautious foresight and prudent weighing of alternatives—is more difficult to ascertain and requires a consideration of the myth in which he occurs. Protagoras relates that in the beginning all mortal races were fashioned beneath the earth by the gods; that the powers of each species were apportioned to them by the titan brothers, Prometheus and Epimetheus; that Prometheus acceded to his brother's wish and allowed Epimetheus to execute the distribution; that Epimetheus misallotted the powers, leaving the human species "naked, unshod, unbedded, and unarmed"; and that Prometheus rushed to Olympus where he stole fire and wisdom in the arts with which to accommodate the near-birth human beings. Later it is said that by virtue of these accommodations human beings "partook of a divine portion" (322a).²

One implication of the myth is that the human race, according to original design, was not essentially different from any other species: there was no

This paper was first presented at the 1980 Annual Meeting of the New York State Political Science Association, Syracuse, New York.

1. For a different treatment of the Promethean motif, see Clyde Lee Miller, "The Prometheus Story in Plato's *Protagoras*," *Interpretation*, 7 (May 1978), pp. 22–32.

2. All translations from the *Protagoras* are the author's.

homo sapiens in the divine blueprint. Whatever powers were appropriate to the human frame, they could not have included the power of reason, this having come to man by way of theft only. Thus mankind owes its specific humanity, no less than its survival, to the timely intervention of Prometheus. The human being, it would appear, belongs to an anomalous and indeterminant species that is halfway between the animal and the divine: he is mortal and like the beasts, but intelligent and like the gods. For Protagoras this intellectual capacity, or the human being's Promethean endowment, is mainly confined to the *technai* of self-preservation. To be part brutish and part divine means to the sophist that man relies on cleverness in place of instinct and physique in the struggle for existence.

But Socrates indicates that mankind's intermediate nature has a rather different meaning for him. He claims at the end of the dialogue that he is a disciple of Prometheus. Prometheus symbolizes the promise of knowledge (that is, of correct definitions) which Socrates, as a disciple, ardently seeks to attain. Socrates contends that the knowledge of good and evil, or of what is to be dreaded and dared (called simply courage in the *Protagoras*), is an indispensable preliminary to the knowledge of self-preservation and successful pleasure-seeking (313a–314b); and because Socrates lacks the former (314a), he does not pretend to possess the latter, despite its adumbration by him as the art of measurement. For Socrates then, the partaking of a divine portion means having the wisdom necessary to realize the extent of one's ignorance. A Promethean endowment of this sort occasions a lifelong investigation into the question of virtue; accordingly, the dialogue concludes with Socrates beseeching Protagoras to join him in continued inquiry.

At one other point in the dialogue Socrates alludes to man's in-between existence. This occurs in the poem analysis where Socrates makes the argument, strained in its application to the poem, that faring well or ill in life depends respectively on knowledge or ignorance. The point of contention throughout the analysis is whether knowledge can be a permanent possession of man's or is something which he acquires and loses in turn. Speaking for Simonides, Socrates concludes that perpetual knowledge is a divine prerogative and that temporary knowledge is the most that is vouchsafed man. At his best, man possesses a knowledge that comes and goes, or what Socrates in other dialogues calls right opinion.³ Right opinion occupies that epistemological half-way house between ignorance and wisdom. In the *Symposium* it designates the understanding of the daemonic man who is aware of his ignorance and desirous of the wisdom of the gods (202a, 202e).⁴ The daemonic man, we might then say, enjoys a Promethean endowment that leaves him part brutish (that is, ignorant) and part divine (that is, wise). But, like Socrates, he is Promethean

3. *Meno* 97d–e; *Euthyphro* 11b–e, 15b.

4. For an interesting examination of the In-Between and the daemonic man, see Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, trans. and ed. Gerhart Niemeyer (University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), pp. 103–109.

in the sense of being erotic, a philosopher in love with wisdom; rather than cautious, preoccupied with safety and fearful of persecution, as is the case with Protagoras.

Given this dual function of Prometheus, to represent both the cautious and the erotic, it is significant that the dialogue begins with reference to the theme of eros and then turns rapidly to the theme of caution. Socrates is introduced by an anonymous companion as the lover of the beautiful but aging Alcibiades. As if to redeem his reputation, Socrates endeavors to persuade the companion of his even greater love for the wisdom of Protagoras; and he enjoins the companion to esteem the wise man more than the handsome youth, or to prefer the soul over the body.

We notice that Socrates commends to the companion the very behavior that the young Hippocrates put into action at the beginning of the day. For having returned from chasing after the body of his slave Satyrus, Hippocrates was anxious to commence his quest for the wisdom of Protagoras. It seems that Hippocrates took to heart Socrates' protreptics on the beauty of wisdom. But Hippocrates is not applauded by Socrates and encouraged further, as might be expected. Rather he is rebuked for his efforts. The burden of Socrates' remarks to Hippocrates urge caution and moderation in place of the erotic hunt. What explains this shift in emphasis from eroticism to prudence is the character of the man from whom Hippocrates would importune instruction. Protagoras is a sophist, and a sophist is a merchant of doctrines, more interested in the profitable sale of his wares than in the education and well-being of his students. He is an educator who insists that he be dealt with on a cash basis. For this reason erotic enthusiasm on the student's part is singularly out of place. By the time Socrates completes his interrogation of Hippocrates, the two of them are more fearful of the harm to be suffered by association with Protagoras than they are desirous of the benefits to be gained. Circumspection has effectively quieted the erotic urge. As a token of the extent to which eroticism is consciously excluded from Socrates' discussion with Protagoras, there is the delightful vignette enacted on Callias' doorstep: likened to the realm of the dead (315b, 315c), the home of Callias is a residence for illustrious but erotically deficient wise men; and in attendance at the portal of this new Hades is a *eunuch*.

Protagoras then exemplifies that cautious Prometheanism the twin objectives of which are security and acquisition. Concerning the second of these objectives, Socrates never tires of chiding Protagoras for his practice of charging a fee—his money-making inhibits the erotic relationship that need obtain between teacher and student. But with respect to the first objective, a caveat is in order lest it be supposed that Protagoras is a man of modest ambition and limited energy. Perhaps what inspires and quickens Protagoras most is his desire for reputation, and he pursues reputation even at risk to his personal safety. With him the love of fame supersedes the love of life. Because the love of fame is decidedly a form of eroticism, it is incorrect to say that Protagoras is simply

unerotic.⁵ Indeed, were there no erotic component to Protagoras, Socrates would find him of little interest and would have little cause to persist with the investigation.⁶ But while Protagoras is admittedly erotic, and while his eroticism is of ultimate importance to Socrates; the direction of this eroticism, that it is aimed at fame, is a more immediate concern, and one which induces Socrates to lay stress on the cautious at the expense of the erotic. The tone of the *Protagoras* is combative: Socrates, the first challenger, pitted against Protagoras, the doyen of the sophistic trade. This contest for reputation is eroticism of a sort, but it is not the eroticism which Socrates condones. Hence the teaching of the *Protagoras* is the omnipotence of enlightened self-interest: an informed, dispassionate weighing of alternatives as the most satisfactory way to conduct one's life.

The caveat stated above anticipates and so speaks cryptically of the thesis of this essay: namely, that the intent of the *Protagoras* is to define sophistry, its limitations, and the obstacles to its improvement; to flesh out the character of Protagoras, the premier sophist, around such issues as virtue, knowledge, education, ambition, and the opinions of the multitude; and to move Protagoras, through use of his self-revelatory comments, to an understanding of sophistry (that is, sophistry as the art of measurement, or the science of pleasure-seeking) which, because of its reliance on exact knowledge,⁷ is less hostile to philosophy, and which is even open to philosophy because of its own manifest inadequacy.⁸ In a word, Socrates attempts to educate Protagoras by utilizing the sophist's cautious Prometheanism (this more than his love of fame, though not to the exclusion of his love of fame⁹) as a means of introducing him to the philosopher's erotic Prometheanism.

This project, as formulated, may seem unrealistic, given the obstacles posed by the advanced age of Protagoras, his reputation, and the general success of

5. Of course all appetites and desires could be considered as species of eroticism. But the love of fame is sufficiently exalted and plays upon emotions sufficiently distinct as to be classified apart from the desires of a lower order. An example of someone who ascends from a lower to a higher order of desires is Glaucon in the *Republic*, who begins demanding relishes and comfortable couches (372c–e) only to sacrifice these for the fame of founding the perfect regime (404d). See Allan Bloom, Interpretive Essay, in *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968), pp. 343–45.

6. As it is, Socrates' interest in Protagoras is none too pronounced. See 310b: cf. 310a.

7. Throughout Protagoras' myth and argument, or what in the scholarship is called the "great speech," Protagoras is loath to distinguish the sophistic teaching of virtue from the coercive methods of citizens. He leaves the impression that virtue is habit.

8. The art of measurement provides scientific means to ends given by opinion. For this reason it is inadequate.

9. See 357e. Having outlined the art of measurement and having christened it sophistry, Socrates makes a point of saying that its practitioners are Protagoras, Prodicus, and Hippias. The honor is divided among three and diminished accordingly. At the same time the financial rewards of sophistry are enhanced: Socrates exhorts the public to part with its money, to pay the sophist's fee, that its sons might receive this indispensable education. Money, not fame, is to be the primary inducement to the practice of sophistry.

his ways. To be sure, Socrates harbors no serious hopes of reforming Protagoras, who is at best an unobliging pupil. The cross-examining of Protagoras serves rather the larger purpose of elucidating the nature of the sophist and the pedagogy necessary for his conversion to philosophy.

II

When approached by Socrates and Hippocrates, Protagoras wastes little time in showing himself to be a competitive educator. He explains that he has surpassed all previous sophists by his ability to speak openly of his profession without incurring risks to himself. Protagoras is a better sophist than Homer, Hesiod, Simonides, and so forth, not with respect to the content of his teaching, but in the manner of its transmission. Protagoras candidly admits that he is a sophist, and he employs no “veils,” such as poetry, to disguise the instruction that he provides. In short, he boasts of being the first sophist to have combined personal safety with the reputation for wisdom. Unless we take this to be an incidental accomplishment, and take also Protagoras’ boast to be mere foolishness, we must suppose that the sophist’s desire to garner fame by public pronouncements of heterodoxy, but of such heterodoxy as would imperil him if once discussed in public, is the intrinsic, ever-present dilemma of sophistry¹⁰—a dilemma, however, which Protagoras purports to have resolved.

Socrates, we submit, in questioning the teachability of virtue, means to put this boast of Protagoras to the test. Socrates confronts Protagoras with two objections, each drawn from the behavior of Athenians. As Socrates sees it, Athenians imply that virtue is unteachable when, gathered in Assembly, they suffer anyone to address them on matters of virtue, that is, public policy, but allow only experts to testify about matters of art. If virtue were a teachable knowledge, Athenians seem to reason, there would be experts on this subject, and only the experts would then be permitted to speak. Secondly, Socrates observes that Athens’ exceptional citizens, notably Pericles, are generally unable to pass on their virtue to their children, despite the pains taken to provide them with the best education possible. If virtuous men cannot teach virtue, nor hire capable tutors, Socrates concludes that virtue must be unteachable.

These two objections voiced by Socrates have inherent in them an inconsistency that is not exactly relevant to the question of whether virtue can be taught, but which is of crucial importance to Protagoras’ reply. The first objection assumes that Athenians are equal in judging affairs of state—for which reason Athens is a democracy. But the second objection, in that it recognizes certain Athenians to be of outstanding virtue, challenges the assumption of equality and the political regime this assumption supports: Pericles, it is af-

10. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 116–117.

firmed, is more excellent than the multitude; thus Pericles, it is implied, is entitled to rule.¹¹ For Protagoras to respond to the first objection, then, is to disappoint those, like Hippocrates, who have come to him for the expressed purpose of attaining prominence and notoriety; and for Protagoras to respond to the second objection is to antagonize those who are partisans of Athens' democratic regime. This dilemma facing Protagoras is the heart of Socrates' test, for it would appear that the two objections to the teachability of virtue cannot both be *safely* refuted.

In reply to this challenge and in the condescending manner of a schoolmaster, Protagoras provides his "pupils" first with a myth and then with an argument. The myth appeals to worried democrats and pays homage to their egalitarianism, while the argument endeavors (in a somewhat covert fashion) to reassure the ambitious that sophistry offers them the ticket to success.

The legitimacy of democratic rule, the myth affirms, resides in the fact that the political art was dispensed equally to all men, in contradistinction to the unequal, Promethean distribution of talent in the other arts. That the political art, or virtue, is possessed differently than all other arts is the moral of Protagoras' tale. It demonstrates not that virtue is unteachable, as Socrates contends, but that it is taught by all and practiced by all. However, it so happens that this virtue, of which all partake, amounts to little more than the citizen's habit of rendering obedience to the law.

In proving thus that virtue is teachable, Protagoras has plainly disadvantaged himself: if virtue is universal—taught by all and practiced by all—what need has anyone for a sophist? The teaching of the myth that the political art, or political virtue, or virtue, or wisdom—whatever the name—is every man's redoubt is simply incompatible with the elitist presuppositions of sophistry. Accordingly, Protagoras in his argument must controvert what he averred in his myth. He must find some grounds on which to establish the uniqueness of sophistry's teaching of virtue or of the virtue which sophistry teaches. His procedure is to liken success in virtue, supposedly given equally by Zeus to all men, to success in flute playing, an art which along with the other arts was given unequally by Prometheus. By way of explaining the limits of education set by nature and chance, Protagoras submits that the sons of virtuous citizens are no more likely to repeat their fathers' political successes than are the sons of accomplished craftsman likely to repeat the technical and artistic successes of their fathers. The reason why virtue, unlike flute playing, seems unteachable is that the importance of virtue to the city requires that it be learned and practiced by everyone, including those who are not especially gifted. Were flute playing of equal importance to the city, it would be taught on just as wide a scale, with the same result that only those gifted by nature would rise to the upper ranks of excellence. What Protagoras implies is that virtue and art are

11. Thucydides II.65.

the same except for their respective manners of inculcation: anyone can be taught the rudiments of art just as anyone can be taught the rudiments of virtue; and accomplishment in either depends on the conjoining of a good education with a good nature. Protagoras of course offers himself as the good educator, and therewith establishes that unique place for sophistry in the pedagogic process.

We recall that at the center of Protagoras' myth is the distinction between the aptitude that all men commonly possess for *aretē* and the aptitude that some men selectively possess for *technē*. The first, to repeat, originated with Zeus, the second with Prometheus. That distinction, the very purpose and meaning of the myth, effectively disappears in the discursive portion of the speech. Protagoras' secret teaching, elitist in its implication, is that *aretē* and *technē* are one. The relevant point, however, is that because this teaching is concealed, it does not conflict with Protagoras' open endorsement of democratic egalitarianism. It thus serves to help extricate Protagoras from the trap set for him by Socrates.

A second point should be underscored: in teaching the equivalence of *aretē* and *technē*, Protagoras puts sophistry on the side of that Socratic doctrine which holds that virtue is knowledge. The form which this doctrine takes in the *Protagoras* is that virtue is the *art* of measurement, that is, that virtue is technical knowledge, or that *aretē* is *technē*. It is noteworthy that the first party to advance the proposition that virtue is knowledge is not Socrates, with whom the proposition is commonly associated, but Protagoras. Socrates returns to it later in the dialogue, we will argue, because of its efficaciousness to sophistry in general and to Protagoras in particular.

Protagoras has intimated that he is knowledgeable in a political art more advanced than the instruction tendered by the body politic. But never does he explain what this knowledge is, and his description of his teaching is pointedly modest: he "surpasses others a little in going forward towards virtue" (328b). Again, Protagoras is being cautious; but he is not being as honest as he claimed he could be. While he does admit to being a sophist, he conceals what sophistry is, implying that it is but the completion of an education in good citizenship. The extent of his concealment becomes clear once the subject of nature surfaces as a factor in the successful pursuit of virtue. Rather than elaborate on sophistry's education of the exceptional young, as might be expected, Protagoras returns to the habituated virtue of the citizen and compares it favorably to the lawlessness of the savage. He suggests thereby that the pinnacle of virtue is coerced habituation, threatened from below by human depravity; and he berates the "misanthropic" Socrates who, with an eye on some more resplendent virtue, disdains the unaffected accomplishments of ordinary citizens. In this the closing portion of his speech, Protagoras reiterates and confirms the teaching of the myth that virtue is habit.

Protagoras has performed admirably, but it would be an exaggeration to say

that he has actually passed Socrates' test. He has concealed himself throughout behind a "veil" of civic-mindedness, with only faint hints given of the real character of his profession. Based on his speech alone, it cannot be determined whether Protagoras possesses a political art which safety considerations prevent disclosing, or whether his professed teaching of virtue is a simple fraud. And if he does possess an art, there is the further ambiguity that its publication may be hazardous either because it legitimizes government by the wise (by the man who knows the common good and the means to its attainment) or because it replaces virtue with self-serving cleverness.

This second possibility has yet to be discussed, but there is every likelihood that when Protagoras identifies virtue with art, he means by art essentially two things: first, the art of rhetoric which enables its practitioners to defend themselves in the law courts and Assembly; in a litigious, democratic society such as Athens, this art mimics the virtue of courage, even superannuates it; second, the art of disguise by which students of sophistry maintain a clever pretense of piety and justice, enjoying a reputation for virtue along with the fruits of self-indulgence. Protagoras refers to this seeming virtue, excusing but not recommending it, when he defines moderation as lying about one's injustice (323b). When Protagoras is later forced to proffer such a recommendation (333d), he takes refuge in an irrelevancy, and the conversation breaks down.

Contrary to his boast, Protagoras has not been able to combine candor with safety; he has had to choose between them, and he has chosen to be cautious. As a result, there are ambiguities in his speech. Chief among these are the relationship of knowledge to virtue and of the sophist to the multitude. In subsequent sections of the dialogue it becomes Socrates' concern to sound Protagoras out on each of these questions; and on each Protagoras shows himself to be of a divided mind.

III

Following Protagoras' great speech, Socrates says nothing of substance in rebuttal. Instead he begins anew, asking Protagoras whether he regards virtue as a homogeneous whole, composed of undifferentiated parts, like so many pieces of gold; or whether virtue for him is heterogeneous, with parts as different in form and function as are the organs of perception which make up the face. When Protagoras adopts the latter depiction, Socrates launches on a comparative study of the five parts of virtue.

There is one unmistakable peculiarity about Socrates' ensuing argument. His intention generally is to prove, against Protagoras, that virtue is an undifferentiated whole whose parts all reduce to knowledge. To do this he abstracts from the just man and the just deed and considers justice in and of itself. He

reasons that justice cannot be impious, nor piety unjust.¹² But the peculiarity of his argument emerges when he submits that there can be no alternative to piety (or justice, for example) save impiety, its diametrical opposite. Because Protagoras agrees to disallow the notion of an impious justice, Socrates concludes that justice must be pious, having precluded by mere assertion the more likely possibility that justice is nonpious—a virtue distinct and separate from piety. A middle ground of moral neutrality—neither pious nor impious, just nor unjust, and so on—which it would of course seem reasonable to affirm, is herewith collapsed into the opposites of virtue and vice.

Why does Socrates adhere to so extreme and implausible a position? We think the reason is twofold. First, Socrates is responding to Protagoras' very lax definition of virtue. Protagoras defined virtue as obedience to law and as seeming justice. Like the poet Simonides, who in his ode applauds the law-abidingness of the sound man (*ὕγιής ἀνὴρ*), Protagoras regards as exemplary behavior that mode of conduct which is between virtue and vice, or between the rewards and punishments of civil society. Socrates means then to confront Protagoras with a more exacting definition of virtue, one which obviates the escape into the complacent forbearance of respectable mediocrity. In this way Socrates' extreme position reflects in reverse what has come before.

It also anticipates what comes later. Socrates favors the analogy which likens the oneness of virtue to the oneness of gold, whose division into parts is accidental and quantitative: the parts of gold differ only by greatness and smallness and are therefore essentially the same. If this analogy is to hold, the

12. Gregory Vlastos, in "The Unity of the Virtues in the *Protagoras*," *Review of Metaphysics*, 25 (1972), 444–52, recommends that the "surface grammar" of such Socratic statements as "justice is pious" and "piety is just," in which moral predicates are ascribed to universals, be disregarded and that the phrases be read as predicating pious and just behavior to particular instances of the universals: a just man who behaves justly is at once pious; a pious man who behaves piously is at once just. He reasons thusly: "moral predicates [for example, just–unjust, pious–impious, brave–cowardly] are as impredicable of a logical entity, like a universal, as of a mathematical entity, like a number or a geometrical figure: to say that justice is pious would be as absurd as to say that the number eight or a hexagon is pious." One might ask though whether God is not a logical entity and whether it is not reasonable to speak of him as just, holy, moderate, and so forth. If by God Socrates means that perfection of wisdom towards which daemonic human beings only aspire, then to suppose that divine wisdom would be imperfect were it not also just, moderate, holy, and so on, seems hardly absurd. Protagoras has articulated that some men are courageous but unjust, while others are just but not wise (329e). Protagoras already occupies the position that Vlastos would have Socrates move to, namely that of affirming the phenomenal character of virtue (with the difference that Socrates would deny the possibility of a just man being unwise—and other such combinations of virtue and vice). But it seems from the context that Socrates is attempting to induce Protagoras to consider justice as a *πράγμα τι* (some thing) transcending and informing its phenomenal occurrences. We think it is fair to say that Vlastos is generally indifferent to the context of the dialogue, inasmuch as he treats the *Protagoras* as an accidental conduit for the doctrine of the Unity of Virtue; and it is his purpose to establish the cogency of all three articulations of this doctrine, designated by him as (1) "The Unity Thesis," (2) "The Similarity Thesis," and (3) "The Biconditionality Thesis."

parts of virtue must themselves be commensurate quantities, such that an act of justice is distinguishable by size from an act of courage.¹³ As strange a proposal as this may seem, Socrates utilizes it when later in the dialogue he defines sophistry as the art of measurement.¹⁴ Introduced as a means of incorporating courage into the unity of virtue, the art of measurement is a faculty which equips its possessor to make all decisions in life according to available amounts of pleasure and pain. By this model an act of courage represents so many units of pleasure, and an act of cowardice so many units of pain. Corollary to this teaching is the fact that at every decision-making juncture, but one choice emerges as correct and good, with every alternative choice—no matter how approximate—merely incorrect and bad. Hence no middle ground between good and evil, or between virtue and vice, exists. Every decision either succeeds or fails at maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain; no decision is neutral.

The purpose of the above remarks is to show how Socrates' arguments attesting to the unity of virtue are conditioned by Protagoras, by what the sophist has said and by what he has left unsaid. He has said that virtue is habit; Socrates would have him say—or say more explicitly—that virtue is knowledge.

The reason previously given to explain Protagoras' reticence was the need for caution imposed on him by the inconsistency of the Athenian body politic—its combination of overt egalitarianism with covert elitism. The debate over the unity of virtue now offers a second reason for why Protagoras treats of virtue from the citizen's perspective.

Socrates' attempt to identify justice with piety is stymied when Protagoras objects that all things are in some ways alike, including such seeming opposites as white and black, and hard and soft (331d). So stymied, Socrates undertakes to equate the virtues of moderation and wisdom. Despite the fact that he uses the same technique of aligning things by opposites, he meets here with success. There is this one difference, however: throughout the argument (332b–332e) Socrates moves from the particular act to the general faculty producing the act. Three sets of opposites are listed, each establishing the union of the thing done with the power by which it is done: as thoughtless (immoderate) and thoughtful (moderate) doings emanate respectively from thoughtlessness and thoughtfulness, so also, reasons Socrates, things done strongly and weakly from strength and weakness, and things done swiftly and slowly from swiftness and slowness. To all of this Protagoras concurs.

Socrates next presents three additional sets of opposites which differ from their counterparts by virtue of their having dispensed with examples known by

13. See Harry Jaffa, "Aristotle," in *History of Political Philosophy*, eds. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1972), p. 111.

14. Rudolph Weingartner, *The Unity of the Platonic Dialogue* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973), p. 74.

experience. Socrates submits the contrariety of the beautiful and the ugly, of the good and the evil, and of the high and the deep of the voice without including reference to particular occurrences of things done beautifully or of persons who are beautiful. Again Protagoras concurs.

A moment earlier Protagoras resisted the unadulterated proposal that the just is opposed by only the unjust and the pious by only the impious. He replied that even opposites bear certain resemblances to each other, that white and black are not entirely dissimilar. But brought to the same point (for example, the beautiful and the ugly) by way of concrete examples (for example, things done thoughtlessly and thoughtfully) Protagoras affirms the absolute and exclusive contrariety of abstractions: moderation (*σωφροσύνη*) and wisdom are the same because each is the sole opposite of thoughtlessness (*ἀφροσύνη*).

What we discover from this Socratic interrogation is the sense in which Protagoras is similar to the multitude of men (as much as he would like to be their untouchable superior). On the experiential level Protagoras acknowledges the existence of opposites. He understands that a courageous *person* differs from a coward, a wise *person* from a fool (common sense experience—for example, “many are courageous but unjust, and many again are just but not wise” [329e]—was the basis for his saying that virtue is a heterogeneous whole).¹⁵ It is only on the conceptual level, and then only when concept is divorced from experience, that Protagoras disavows opposites, claiming rather that all things bear resemblance to one another; such a position makes intellectual clarity about good and evil quite impossible.¹⁶ Protagoras seems then out of joint with himself, for as a sophist he suggests the ultimate relativity of all moral propositions,¹⁷ but as a man he appeals to those experiential certitudes which delineate virtue and vice.

Our point is that Protagoras speaks glowingly of citizen-virtue not merely to disguise himself—this he does without doubt—but also because there is a

15. If it seems that Socrates favors the heterogeneity arising from common sense, it is only because Protagoras has granted homogeneity on terms unacceptable to Socrates: the unity of virtue is part of a nondescript sameness that penetrates all things. In effect, Socrates is returning Protagoras to square one: for example, *things* done strongly and weakly.

16. *Republic* 479a. In distinguishing knowledge from opinion, Socrates argues that there can be knowledge only of things that *are* (that is, the ideas), whereas opinion is of things that *become* (that is, phenomena between being and nonbeing). He says of the many phenomena that things beautiful look both beautiful and ugly, that things good look good and bad, and that things holy look holy and unholy. In other words, there is resemblance of opposites among the objects of opinion. At *Republic* 524e (the conclusion of the “three fingers” passage) Socrates states that this resemblance of opposites can be instrumental in compelling a soul to undertake an investigation, turning it around toward the contemplation of being. The discipline which helps to accomplish this conversion is mathematics (number, calculation, plane and solid geometry). But Protagoras, happy with things as they appear and with the obscurity of opinion (*Protagoras* 334a–c), dispenses with mathematics (*Protagoras* 318e). For an excellent analysis of the “three fingers” passage, see Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), pp. 115–17.

17. Cf. *Protagoras* 334a–c and *Theaetetus* 161c–162a, 166c–167d.

side to him in complete harmony with the experience and opinions of the city. Discerning this partial congruence, Socrates resorts to the concrete particulars of experience as a means of inducing Protagoras to accept the characteristics of difference and sameness when applied to abstract ideas—to accept in other words, the possibility of definition and real knowledge. It might further be noted that Protagoras the citizen is here more amenable to philosophy than Protagoras the sophist. At other points in the dialogue the reverse is true, and it falls to Socrates to remind Protagoras that he is a sophist, a wise man (352b–d).

The argument being advanced is that Protagoras holds basic views in common with much-despised *hoi polloi*. Evidence supporting this thesis can be found in the subsequent section of the dialogue where sophist and philosopher each tries his hand at literary criticism.

Protagoras is the first to play critic. He recites selected passages from an ode of Simonides; his general purpose is to prove the poet inconsistent. He observes that Simonides believes it difficult for men to become good. But Simonides contradicts himself, Protagoras charges, when but a few lines later he rebukes Pittacus, a sage of old, for stating that it is difficult to be good. In defense of Simonides, Socrates suggests that the poet intended a difference between his own “to become good” (*γενέσθαι ἀγαθός*) and the “to be good” (*ἔμμεναι ἐσθλός*) of Pittacus; and Socrates supports his proposal by quoting Hesiod’s *Works and Days* to the effect that *becoming* good is difficult, but that *being* good, once having become so, is easy. Protagoras greets this suggestion with an imperious rebuff: “Much would be the ignorance of the poet [Simonides],” Protagoras explains, “. . . if in this way he says that it is something trifling to possess virtue, what is most difficult of all, as it seems to all human beings” (340e).

Protagoras’ position is that virtue must be difficult or else it is a trifle (*φᾶῤλον*). That it is Protagoras’ position in addition to *hoi polloi*’s is suggested by the fact that Socrates’ use of the Hesiod quotation violates the plain sense of the poem (neither Simonides nor Pittacus holds that being good is easy). And yet it is not in light of the poem that Protagoras protests this *ad hominem* argument, but rather he complains that it runs afoul of universal opinion, an opinion which he evidently shares and takes quite seriously.

By Protagoras’ account all human beings, for whom “vulgar” (*φᾶῤλος*) is a characteristic predication (337e), disdain the vulgar opinion about virtue. Virtue, they say, is noble and for the very reason that it is difficult. The excellence of *aretē* lies in the willingness to suffer, to struggle, to persevere, to withstand the allurements of pleasure and ease. Virtue is heroic self-sacrifice, and the tragic hero is the paradigm of human excellence. In espousing the essential difficulty of virtue, human beings cling to an old, aristocratic view crystallized in the epic poems of Homer. There is said that virtue is practiced for its own beauty and splendor, and that virtue is universally admired though it does not lend

itself to calculations of profit and loss and though it does little or nothing to ameliorate the adverse conditions that brought it into play. In a tragic world, where the destruction of the individual is an ineluctable fact, the virtue of man is always hard and toilsome, being in perpetual conflict with an evil that persists within and without the soul. Because the malignancy of evil never abates, because evil itself appears desirable, virtue retains the character of a great, heroic struggle conducted against temptation, weakness, fear, pain, and ignorance.

If virtue, conceived as something difficult, leads to the glorification of heroism, of courage, of passionate intensity—in a word, of the active life and of motion; nonheroic virtue, virtue that is easy in its exercise, as maintained by Hesiod, points to wisdom, to the contemplative life, and to rest. Easy virtue is in fact of two sorts, a division which reflects Aristotle's distinction between moral and intellectual virtue. Of the first sort is the virtue of the just man, the brave man, or the temperate man, whose disposition towards justice, courage, and moderation is informed by prudence, and whose actions are graced by pleasure. Because this man knows fairly well what he is doing, he is not trammelled by the doubts and misgivings which figure so largely in heroism (for example, Achilles' tortured choice between a glorious death and an inglorious life); and because his actions are intrinsically pleasurable, he is not required to sacrifice himself in pursuit of nobility. Quite the contrary, nobility and self-love are for this man one and the same. The more he practices virtue the easier it becomes, until finally virtue is as natural to his soul as seeing is to his eyes.

The other sort of easy, restful virtue is the contemplative life of philosophy. Contemplation is man's rationality carried to its highest perfection; calm and rest become it. It is the reverse of heroism which reflects man's passionate nature at its most violent pitch. The hero seeks distinction and individuality, which he attains through experiencing and displaying the full range of his emotions, through great loves and great hates. The philosopher seeks only truth, and truth does little to distinguish him since it is not *his* truth which he seeks.

The brief analysis of the Hesiod quotation indicates the extent to which Protagoras, in associating himself with the opinion of *hoi polloi*, betrays his antipathy to the contemplative life. The conflict between difficult virtue and easy virtue raises the question of whether the hero or the philosopher is the most excellent human being and whether courage or wisdom is the most excellent human virtue. On this particular issue Protagoras is a sincere advocate of the hero and of courage, even though his professional self-interest would have him think otherwise; for if virtue is at all times difficult, there is little cause for anyone to purchase virtue from the man who purports to teach it.

Protagoras holds that Simonides could not be so ignorant as to suppose that virtue is easy. When the time comes for Socrates to play critic, he imposes a rather different injunction on Simonides: Socrates contends that the poet was not so uneducated as to believe that evil is committed willingly (345d–e). In

order for Socrates to include Simonides in the ranks of wise men, the poet must affirm that all wrongdoing is unwilling, or that vice is ignorance, or that virtue is knowledge. The difference then between what Protagoras and Socrates expect of an intelligent Simonides is a measure of Protagoras' lingering kinship with the multitude and of the distance and direction he must travel if he is to distinguish himself as a wise man. In the poem analysis which follows, Socrates attempts to chart this course by speaking discreetly to Protagoras about the importance of knowledge to virtue.

IV

Socrates' rather fantastic exegesis of the poem is preceded by an equally fantastic examination of Lacedaemonian education. The substance of this study, in which Lacedaemonians (and Cretans) are credited with highest achievements in the field of philosophy, is the contribution of wisdom to power and the incompatibility of wisdom and power with fame: Lacedaemonians are powerful because they are wise and because everyone erroneously attributes their power to courage and to training in gymnastics. This combination of wisdom, power, and fame can hardly fail to call to mind Protagoras' boast to have been the first sophist to make safe (power) the publicizing (fame) of wisdom. The Lacedaemonian example contests this claim, and with such explicitness (one could also mention the unmistakable parallel between the traditions of Greek philosophy, whose adherents include the seven sages, and that of Greek sophistry, represented by the nine "veiled" sophists) as to put Protagoras on notice that the ensuing analysis, like its prelude, will be addressed to him personally. Socrates' poem analysis, strange as it may seem, reveals its logic, we suggest, when viewed as a private communication to Protagoras, with all remarks made about Simonides applicable to the sophist and his profession.¹⁸

A detailed study of the Socratic exegesis is not here appropriate. The essay's limited objective permits only a brief discussion of its most salient feature:

18. The similarities which tie Simonides and Protagoras together are numerous enough to justify the contention that the former is a stand-in for the latter: (1) By Protagoras' testimony, both men are sophists (316d). (2) Both engage in a mode of speech that is deaf to questioning: Simonides is a poet whose work *per se* forbids investigation (347e), and Protagoras is a rhetorician, a practitioner of *makrologia* (lengthy speech), whose orations are like resounding vessels (329a) and full-sailed ships racing across the sea (338a). (3) Protagoras and Simonides are both ambitious, preferring reputation to truth (335a; 343c). (4) Both assail the giants of the past as a means of establishing their reputations (316d–317c and 339d; 343c). (5) Both tolerate a reduced standard of human excellence (321c–d; 346d); accordingly, both substitute the acquisitiveness and ambition of the moderns for the moderation of the ancients (343b). (6) Both are flatterers (328c; 346b). (7) Both are itinerant teachers (315a; 346a–b and Xenophon's *Hiero*). (8) Both teach for pay (328b; *Hipparchus* 228c). And (9) both teach that virtue is difficult: Simonides teaches that it is difficult to become good, while impossible to be good (339b); Protagoras teaches that the easy possession of virtue is impossible (340e).

namely, the observation, repeated some five times by Socrates, that throughout the ode Simonides is solely concerned to discredit Pittacus and steal from him his reputation for wisdom. By way of substantiating the claim that Simonides is a surrogate for Protagoras, we note in passing that Protagoras is guilty of the very same offense, that he attacks the artistry of Simonides for the purpose of discrediting a rival sophist.¹⁹ What Socrates then charges against Simonides, and Protagoras too, is the prostitution of their crafts—the subordination of poetry and pedagogy to the cause of personal ambition.

The sophist is an ambitious man; this trait is at least as important as his deficient eroticism and his partial orthodoxy. He is competitive, for he sees in his profession the opportunity to grow rich and famous. In fact his competitive nature may well explain his attraction to heroism. By means of wit, subtlety, and persuasion, the sophist defends himself and subdues his opponents. Like the heroes of epic poetry, his principal virtue is manliness—except that he replaces the crude force of the martial arts with the “sophisticated” employments of the mind. For reason of this substitution, he may even come to despise the unrefined simplicity of courage. Protagoras plainly adopts this attitude, defining courage as a subrational nurturing of the soul which is positively outside the *technai* taught by sophistry (351b). Protagoras apparently believes that courage is superseded by other forms of boldness (351a), specifically by the art of *euboulia*, good counsel, which enables its practitioners to protect themselves, to advance their interests, to do all the things that courage purports to do, but by the more effective and more sophisticated means of clever speech. Nevertheless, Protagoras, and those whom he tutors, retain a vital element of the heroic model in that their reputations as wise men depend on the vanquishing of rivals.²⁰

Socrates’ position, made evident by his arbitrary reading of the poem, is that this “heroism” of sophistry is the chief obstacle between the sophist and philosophy, that it even prevents the sophist from taking seriously his own art. At his best the sophist possesses a knowledge which he teaches for pay, and he calls this knowledge virtue. At his best he subscribes in some manner to the Socratic doctrine that virtue is knowledge. But Socrates implies that the ambitiousness (*φιλονικία*, meaning love of victory) of the sophist dissuades him from ever reaching his best. This Socrates does when he accords Simonides the designation wise,²¹ but on condition that the poet join other wise men in

19. No other explanation is possible since Protagoras quits command of the conversation the moment he has exposed Simonides contradicting himself and has confronted Socrates with his ill-considered judgment that the poem is artistically sound.

20. See Frederick Nietzsche, “Homer’s Contest,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1968), pp. 36–38. Cf. pp. 557–59 of *Twilight of the Idols*, “What I Owe to the Ancients,” from the same volume.

21. In one of his several paraphrases of the poem (344c–345a; cf. 339c), Socrates deprives Pittacus of this same designation. As a daemonic philosopher convinced of his ignorance, Socrates is closer to Simonides who says that it is difficult to become good (that is, to possess the in-

avowing that evil is never committed willingly. As stated before, the corollary to this proposition is that virtue equals knowledge. The reason why it is difficult for Simonides, and for Protagoras, to endorse this proposition (apart from the fact that in proportion as virtue is knowledge, virtue also is easy) is that involuntary and unintentional wrongdoing is not blameable.²² But Simonides blames Pittacus (in Socrates' liberal paraphrase) for "lying exceedingly about the greatest things" (347a). If Pittacus indeed lies about the greatest things, and if lying is evil, Pittacus must have lied unwillingly; and unwilling evil is exculpatory. Thus Simonides is not entitled to blame Pittacus, and his entire poem—one long censuring of the sage—is an unfortunate miscarriage. To accept that evil is unwilling, and therefore to be wise in Socrates' judgment, requires of the sophist that he forego the quest for fame through intellectual conquest. Nothing less than a fundamental reformation of sophistry is anticipated.

The sophist is untrue to his art because he adopts unwittingly certain opinions and attitudes from the many, most especially the admiration for heroic virtue and the belief in its importance to the good life; because he appeals to this belief by shaping his art into a form of intellectualized manliness; and because he rests content with a standard of excellence drawn from heroism, namely victory in debate, and so excuses himself from the pursuit of knowledge. With these shortcomings of the sophist in mind, Socrates' subsequent discussion of the art of measurement takes on the character of a deliberate rectification.

V

In the concluding section of the dialogue, Socrates returns to the question of the unity of virtue. He finds Protagoras now ready to concede that all virtues, save courage, are "fairly near akin to one another" (349d). But when Protagoras repels Socrates' ensuing effort to make virtue one throughout, Socrates takes the circuitous route of (1) equating the good with the pleasant and the pleasant with the noble; (2) contesting the experience of *akrasia* (incontinence); (3) explaining virtue as correct reckoning of pleasure and pain; and (4) granting to sophistry, defined as an art of measurement, sole responsibility for the teaching of virtue.

Having previously declared that virtue is unteachable, Socrates now affirms that virtue can be taught and that it is taught by the sophist. The context of this assertion, we note, is hedonism: pleasure is the good, and virtue is the art of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. Also, the argument disputing

between knowledge of right opinion) than with Pittacus who says that it is difficult to be good (that is, to be wise like the gods).

22. *Apology* 26a.

akrasia, on which everything depends, from the unity of virtue to the revised definition of sophistry—this argument is fallacious and plainly so: it relies on the notion of a homogeneous soul, one in which passions are rational and have no interests aside from the general welfare of the soul; it presumes that the soul's welfare, made known by the activity of weighing alternatives, is readily supported by the passions and appetites, even when the good of the whole is at variance with the good of the parts.²³ The psychology articulated by Socrates in the *Republic* is profoundly different, in that it recognizes the contribution of discipline to virtue. In the *Protagoras* Socrates maintains that knowledge is both the necessary and *the sufficient* cause of virtue. The extremity of the argument can be accounted for, we submit, only in light of the person to whom it is addressed. Protagoras has done his utmost to obscure the linkage between knowledge and virtue—thus Socrates exaggerates their ties. On the other hand, Protagoras has implied that sophistry is the art of virtue and that mastery of this art is all that one needs to prosper in life (318e–319a)²⁴—thus Socrates makes explicit sophistry's embrace of the doctrine that virtue is knowledge by designating sophistry as the art of measurement. For the sake of a sophist who has eschewed knowledge, partly for safety considerations and partly as an expression of his own true opinion, Socrates ignores the role which habit plays in virtue (something which he admits elsewhere) and makes virtue instead synonymous with knowledge.²⁵

23. For a similar explanation of the fallaciousness of Socrates' argument, see Terry Penner, "Thought and Desire in Plato," in *Plato, II: Ethics, Politics, and Philosophy of Art and Religion*, ed. Gregory Vlastos (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1971), 103–08. Penner argues that the statement in the *Republic* at 438a ("no one desires drink, but good drink, nor food, but good food") expresses accurately the Socratic doctrine found in the *Protagoras*, a doctrine which Plato explicitly disavows at *Republic* 437e ("But thirsting itself will never be a desire for anything other than that of which it is naturally a desire—for drink alone—and, similarly, hungering will be a desire for food?") [This quotation and the one above are from the Bloom translation, *The Republic of Plato*]. Penner's explanation is as follows: "Plato refuses to allow that thirst can be thirst for drink which is thought to be good in that situation. For to grant that would be to grant that thirst, like desire to not drink, could be analyzed as a desire for good which has associated with it a calculation of advantage, advocating drinking. Therefore, thirst must be for drink *simpliciter*. This stops Socrates from redescribing such cases of conflict as cases of a single desire for good wavering between two answers to the question what the good is in this situation" (p. 107). Vlastos, in "Socrates on Akrasia," *Phoenix*, 23 (1969), 82, makes a similar observation, although he does not pursue it in this manner. Concerning the ridiculousness of *hoi polloi* in affirming *akrasia*, he states, "So while there is a contradiction in 'I choose this action, knowing it to be bad on the whole, because I want good,' there is no contradiction in 'I choose it, knowing it to be bad on the whole, because I want this particular good' (which I can get only by choosing this action)."

24. If virtue is confused with the equipment of virtue, for example, power, wealth, reputation, then it is indeed the claim of sophistry that virtue is knowledge; for sophistry purports to transmit a knowledge which can procure the equipment of virtue single-handedly. See *Gorgias* 452e.

25. Justice in the *Republic* is not so much a virtue as it is the condition for all virtue—that hierarchical structuring of the soul in conformity with nature which establishes the government of reason over passions and appetites. The teaching of the *Republic* is that reason cannot govern appetite directly, by means of instruction and persuasion, but must employ the coercive powers of a disciplined and habituated spirit. The teaching of the *Republic*, in other words, is that virtue is not

That Socrates tailors his remarks on virtue to Protagoras his addressee is an interpretation supported by some of the more gratuitous particulars of the poem analysis. For example, we observe that the Lacedaemonian model bears a notable resemblance to the discussion of *akrasia* and the art of measurement. Socrates reports that among the Lacedaemonians wisdom is a source of power; wisdom is choiceworthy because it is powerful and for no other reason. Likewise, the substance of Socrates' refutation of *akrasia* is that the knowledge of the art of measurement is too *powerful* to be overcome by appetite and desire; hence *akrasia* is a ridiculous explanation for wrongdoing. Socrates takes up the subject of *akrasia* in order to persuade Protagoras of the utility of knowledge, something which Socrates has dealt with previously, albeit fancifully, in his speech about Lacedaemonian customs.

One drawback to Lacedaemonian power is the stipulation that its source remain secret, lest this power be neutralized through imitation. The price Lacedaemonians pay for military prowess then is the reputation for wisdom. Even so, Socrates seems to recommend Lacedaemonian esotericism over against the exotericism practiced by Protagoras.²⁶ But as the poem analysis makes abun-

knowledge (simply), but knowledge (reason/the philosopher) in alliance with habit (spiritedness/the warriors). This is true of everyone, it would seem, because it is true of the human soul: appetites can only be controlled by the spirited passions (anger, shame, honor), and the spirited passions can only be trained by a mixture of force (communism) and fraud (noble lies).

However, Socrates does make an exception for the philosopher who fortifies himself against his appetitive nature not by the hard-won habits of restraint but by his predilection for the pleasures of the soul. The philosopher seems not to need spiritedness because his eroticism for learning (485d) overpowers every other desire. For him it is conceivable that virtue is knowledge because the desiring part of his soul is naturally disposed to learning.

The number of human beings for whom virtue is knowledge is restricted even further when Socrates explains that the philosophic nature is singularly prone to corruption. The corruption stems from the laws and opinions of defective regimes. No private education, Socrates confesses, can withstand the flood of praise and blame that pours forth from assemblies, courts of law, theaters, and sundry gatherings of people (429b–c). The potential philosopher is a rare and delicate specimen, and his proper rearing requires a perfect political order such as Socrates describes in the *Republic* but which *nowhere* exists in practice.

There are still other philosophic natures, those reputed “useless” (490e), who keep company with philosophy because circumstance (for example, exile, or ill-health) has prevented their corruption (496a–c). Mainly, it seems, their spirited desires are not excited by the blandishments of admiring crowds; hence they escape the fate of those whose talents, birth, beauty, and fortune conspire to mark them as natural leaders.

Socrates designates the two kinds of philosophers discussed above as “human,” and he distinguishes them from the “divine” philosopher (492e). The divine philosopher is independent of the external supports of politics and accident because he is assisted by a god (492a). In speaking of his own intellectual life, Socrates attributes his loving devotion to philosophy to the daemonic sign (496c); he thereby identifies himself as the one divine philosopher.

In summation, the Socratic doctrine that virtue is knowledge, or that knowledge is the sufficient cause of virtue, seems true of very few human beings; and it applies with full force to Socrates alone (though perhaps he will admit one other into his company, cf. 496c).

26. The contrast between the Lacedaemonians and Protagoras is far too striking to be accidental. For instance, the Lacedaemonians remain at home; Protagoras is itinerant. They educate only their own citizens; Protagoras has no fellow citizens from Abderos with him (315a; cf.

dantly clear, a sophist is not about to be deprived of his reputation. Thus the Lacedaemonian example of wisdom producing power, but at the expense of fame, has little chance of appealing to a sophist. Here we note that the art of measurement, as described by Socrates, corrects this very deficiency; for the sophist is invited to become the tutor of *hoi polloi* (357e). Unlike the Lacedaemonians who are esteemed wise by a select few, the sophist is permitted to enjoy the good opinion of nearly all mankind.

The reason why the art of measurement may be taken to the marketplace and sold indiscriminately²⁷ is that it contains little of the competitiveness of the art of good counsel, or Protagoras' *euboulia*. Socrates reveals that Hippocrates expects from Protagoras the kind of instruction that will make him *ellogimos*, notable, in the city. His notoriety clearly presupposes the anonymity of many others—if Hippocrates is to succeed, others must fail. But the art of measurement promises happiness through skillful decision-making, and this anyone can do, from any station in life, using whatever resources are at hand. Happiness then is every man making the best of his situation (maximizing pleasure, minimizing pain), rather than one man rising to the top of the heap. The point, however, is less the egalitarianism of the art of measurement than the stress it gives to the acquisition of exact knowledge. Socrates goes so far as to say that knowledge is the salvation of life.

It is worth remarking that Socrates hereby accomplishes for sophistry what Protagoras could only boast of providing. By redefining sophistry as the art of measurement, and by explaining the urgency of sophistic training for all, Socrates devises a way to reconcile the dissemination of wisdom with the requirements of personal safety. It is Socrates, then, not Protagoras, who resolves the one great dilemma of sophistry.

The digression on *akrasia* and the effort to unify virtue under wisdom culminate in the art of measurement, and the art of measurement, like the Lacedaemonian model, shows signs of being uniquely suited to the needs of Protagoras. Socrates wishes to impress on Protagoras the importance of knowledge. This knowledge, which conduces to salvation in life, reminds one of that cautious Prometheanism spoken of earlier. The art of measurement is a vulgar kind of knowledge, concerned solely with the pursuit of pleasure. Still it is a knowledge which Protagoras cannot honestly claim to possess, and yet his need for it is acute, both as a sophist and as a man. Hence Protagoras is made aware of his ignorance and of the urgency of its rectification through wisdom. Erotic Prometheanism is at least within his grasp. More importantly, the prac-

315c). They frustrate imitation by foreigners; Protagoras advertises his wisdom to all. They are admired and honored by wise men; Protagoras is admired by the many—by Hippocrates but not by Socrates. And they speak freely among themselves, but circumspectly among strangers; Protagoras prefers public gatherings.

27. One of Socrates' purposes in the dialogue is to correct sophistry so as to make it a suitable "purchase" for Hippocrates. Cf. 313c–314b.

tice of scientific pleasure-seeking must eventually confront the question of what is truly pleasurable, or the philosopher's question of the good. Here it is that the cautious Prometheanism of the art of measurement gives way to the erotic Prometheanism of Socratic philosophy. Protagoras clearly does not come this far; preoccupied with saving face, he breaks off the conversation midstream. But the bridge is nonetheless in place for his conversion to philosophy should he, or someone like him,²⁸ elect to traverse it.

28. There is in attendance a "someone" of particular importance; he is Alcibiades. But the extent to which the dialogue is directed to him and conducted for his sake is a separate "aspect" of the *Protagoras*.