

A Lacuna in the Self: Foresight & Forgetting in Plato's *Protagoras*

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A dissertation
submitted to the Faculty of
the department of philosophy
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Boston College
Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences
Graduate School

May 2023

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Abstract:

If Plato's dialogues offer recollection as a paradigm for human knowing, then, forgetfulness as the opposite of recollection, would seem to be ignorance, or the destruction of knowing. However, forgetfulness is not simply recollection's opposite, but it also serves as its precondition; to recollect something, one must first forget it. Forgetfulness involves an absence that may re-present itself. This dual nature of forgetfulness as, on the one hand, a precondition for philosophical recollection and, on the other, characteristic of ignorance and destruction of knowledge, mirrors the experience of perplexity (*ἀπορία*), which can serve either as the impetus for philosophical inquiry or as the ground to foreclose any further questioning. My dissertation considers the implications of forgetting, foresight, and oversight, in Plato's *Protagoras* as a new way to shed light on the relationship and difference between the sophist and philosopher. I propose that both philosophy and Protagorean sophistry understand something about the nature and limits of human understanding in light of our tendency to forget. Protagorean sophistry, however, attempts to overcome human limits in its aim at perfect foresight. Protagoras ultimately capitulates to *ἀπορία* by refusing to inquire earnestly, thereby avoiding the problem posed by our tendency to forget. Socratic philosophy, on the other hand, cultivates and maintains *ἀπορία* in its recognition that forgetting is a limitation that is at once intrinsic to human understanding and the necessary occasion for learning that underlies all philosophical inquiry. Socratic foresight, in opposition to Protagorean foresight, is characterized by its recognition that *ἀπορία* and oversight are persistent and unavoidable conditions of all human inquiry. Rather than attempt to overcome human nature either by capitulating to or resolving *ἀπορία* in a definitive answer, Socratic philosophy is depicted as an aporetic way of living, which thus remains open to what is yet to be known. In this way, Socratic foresight comes to light as superior to that of Protagorean sophistry both in its self-knowledge and in its implicit affirmation of what would otherwise seem to be a mere weakness in human nature. Socratic foresight welcomes *ἀπορία* as the condition for all human inquiry and achievement.

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To every teacher who has perplexed me.

INTRODUCTION

Plato's *Meno* poses a problem for inquiry: how can one inquire into the unknown? (80d–e). If the object of inquiry is truly unknown, how should anyone recognize it once it is found? On the other hand, if the object of inquiry is already known, then there is no reason to seek it. Inquiry, on this reasoning, is either absurd or simply impossible. At a basic level, the problem for inquiry asks how it is in fact possible to ask a genuine question. On another level, it is an attack on the very act of inquiring that is characteristic of both human experience in general and the activity of philosophy itself. It is what we might, to borrow from Nietzsche, call “a strange, wicked, questionable question.”¹ It is a strange question since it performs the very act of inquiry, whose possibility it interrogates. As an attack, it is a wicked one since it undermines itself and all possible avenues of investigation that could respond to it. But it is also itself, questionable, which is to say that it is worthy of question. The problem of inquiry raises what is often taken for granted to the level of a perplexity (an ἀπορία), and one which underlies all further inquiry. What *is it* to ask a question?

When faced with this or any other ἀπορία, there are a number of possible responses. One is dogmatically to resist suffering perplexity by “doubling down” and putting even firmer trust in one's formerly held beliefs or experiences. Someone who resists

¹ Nietzsche 1966, 9.

philosophical inquiry altogether might hear the problem of inquiry and dismiss it as meaningless talk since, in fact, questions happen all the time. It is taken for granted that, as such, questions are manifestly possible, and thus inquiring into their possibility is child's play at best or dangerous deceit at worst. I already know that questioning is possible, why should I interrogate further?

Somebody else who encounters the perplexity of inquiry could capitulate to it and convince herself that inquiry is indeed impossible. This is, in fact, the result that Meno seems to anticipate in posing the question. This response looks like an advantage over the first insofar as it recognizes the weight of the problem and acknowledges the present perplexity. However, such an interlocutor would conclude that inquiry serves no purpose since there is no ultimate answer, or at least, none that we could access. The truth of what is unknown could never be found, so why bother asking? In the end, these two responses amount to the same thing, despite at first sounding as though they have reached opposite conclusions. Both deny the purpose of further inquiry, and both come to light as a dogmatic effort to resolve or avoid perplexity rather than to suffer it.

Finally, someone might encounter the perplexity and respond with wonder. This, I propose, is the philosophical response that Socrates routinely undertakes in the Platonic dialogues. In the *Meno*, Socrates responds to the problem of inquiry with a mythological account of recollection, which proposes that inquiry is possible since all knowledge is recollection whereby the inquirer remembers what she had previously forgotten. Leaving aside the details of the account, Socrates describes the upshot as follows:

As for the other points, at least, I wouldn't insist very much on behalf of the argument; but that by supposing one ought to inquire into things he doesn't know, we would be better and more manly and less lazy than if we should suppose that it's impossible to discover those things that we don't know or that we ought not

inquire into them—about *this* I certainly would do battle, if I could, both in speech and in deed (86b–c, Bartlett 2004 tr.).

Socrates' myth of recollection does not resolve the perplexity at the heart of inquiry but rather reinterprets perplexity as an invitation and occasion to seek further. Socrates characterizes the person who inquires while in perplexity as courageous, good, and active. Rather than fleeing perplexity, inquiring further empowers one to face it. Rather than resting content with our own knowledge, inquiring further aims at learning and becoming better. Rather than capitulating to the passive condition of mere acceptance of our limitations, inquiring actively aims to respond to those conditions. It is the intrinsic value of inquiry on behalf of which Socrates vows to do battle.

It is this battle in speech and deed that characterizes the dispute between the sophist, Protagoras, and Socrates himself in Plato's *Protagoras*. This dissertation traces themes of foresight and oversight in order to interrogate how both thinkers respond to ἀπορία and inquiry. Using Protagoras' myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus as a frame by which to read the dialogue's dramatic action, I argue that both thinkers resemble both Titan gods, albeit in importantly different ways. Protagoras, favoring Prometheus, aims at a total foresight by pursuing his own glory and material well-being without incurring risk. But his refusal to acknowledge his ignorance and submit to inquiry repeats Epimetheus' mistake of self-forgetting. In the Great Myth, Protagoras describes Prometheus as "acting in perplexity" after Epimetheus overlooks human beings. The contrivances that Prometheus devises for human beings are a response to their original limitations occasioned by Epimetheus' oversight. Socrates resembles Prometheus in this way, namely, in that he responds to human limitation by continuing to inquire while in ἀπορία. In so doing, his foresight is characterized by his acknowledgement that human nature resembles

Epimetheus to the extent that it is conditioned by limitations. Socrates advances beyond Protagoras not just in his awareness of his limitations, but in his ability to recognize limitations as an occasion for further inquiry. Rather than despair or capitulate to human limitations, we can now recognize them as the very condition for all human achievement and contrivance.

In Chapter 1, I observe how Socrates' guidance of Hippocrates encourages the young man to undertake self-reflection by inquiring into the desire that motivates his urge to meet Protagoras. In a line of thinking that is similar to the *Meno*'s problem of inquiry, Socrates warns the youth that he cannot evaluate what the sophist will teach before he learns it, and this learning will affect his soul, so that the greatest caution is warranted. Nevertheless, he encourages Hippocrates to seek Protagoras together with him, rather than avoid inquiry altogether on the basis of these dangers. This is the earliest indication we see of Socratic foresight.

In Chapter 2, I develop the parallels between Socrates and Protagoras, on the one hand, and Prometheus and Epimetheus, on the other. I argue that Protagoras' great myth depicts human nature as both Promethean and Epimethean: human foresight depends on the condition of oversight. If Protagoras' praise of foresight betrays his desire to overcome this condition, Socrates embraces it. While Protagoras repeats Epimetheus' mistake of forgetting his own nature by aiming to overcome the risks of oversight, Socrates' foresight consists in his recognition that oversight is intrinsic to human nature.

In Chapter 3, I argue that self-knowledge is a thematic concern for the dialogue as a whole and that philosophy, in particular, is characterized by a continuous pursuit of self-knowledge. The dispute over the unity of the virtues reflects the conflicting notions of the

self and the human good held by Socrates and Protagoras. It culminates in an analysis of the dispute over method, which I argue is predicated on a deeper disagreement about the nature of the human good itself. Protagoras understands the human good as acting to one's advantage in order to satisfy desires, ensure survival, and glorify reputation, while Socrates sees it as a psychic good that is nourished through inquiry. Protagoras' view of λόγος is competitive, while Socrates' is cooperative and oriented toward wisdom.

In Chapter 4, I argue that despite Socrates' concluding dismissal of poetic interpretation, his interpretation of Simonides' poem reveals that λόγος ought to be treated as poetic in nature in light of the provisional and aporetic character of human wisdom. That is, language is poetic in light of our Epimethean limits. By "poetic in nature," I mean that, for Socrates, that λόγος should point beyond itself in order to signal that it is incomplete. Given the necessarily poetic nature of speech, Socrates' dismissal of poetic interpretation dismisses only a sophistic mode of poetry interpretation, as one that aims at the appearance of wisdom rather than at earnest self-disclosure. However, Socrates' account leaves room for a philosophical mode of speech that is nonetheless poetic in the way that I describe.

In Chapter 5, I argue that the mentions of nobility (τὸ καλόν) that pervade this section illuminate what is at work in this section of the dialogue concerning hedonism and courage.² Rather than Socrates himself endorsing the hedonistic view *or* the straightforward understanding of virtue as knowledge by which we would unfailingly fare well, I propose that both of these arguments reveal and follow from Protagoras' desire to

² A full account of this feature would require pairing the dialogue with the *Symposium* as its counterpart, which I leave to a continuation of this project. I find myself sympathetic to Ahbel-Rappe's proposal that Socrates means by "virtue is knowledge" that virtue is self-knowledge, for reasons that will become clearer still in what follows (2019, 2).

gain glory while securing personal safety.³ Protagoras, Socrates reveals, fails to articulate a τέλος for human action by which to distinguish good from bad pleasures in such a way that would preserve the nobility of courage. Nevertheless, throughout, τὸ καλόν comes to light as the largely unarticulated good that could serve as such a τέλος, and which would disrupt Socrates' hedonistic argument. Rather than advancing this view directly, Socrates allows it to emerge from their λόγος in order to signal the dialogical relationship that human beings, as non-knowers, have with that τέλος.

³ In this sense, my argument follows that of Bartlett 2016, Coby 1982, German 2022, Grube 1933, Hemmenway 1996, and McCoy 1998 and 2008. It also coheres with Gonzalez's account, which proposes that Socrates undermines Protagoras' claim to teach an art that saves human lives by "playing up to it" (2014, 49). It departs from scholars who attribute hedonism and its calculus to Socrates or Plato (see, for example, Hackforth 1928 and most especially Nussbaum 1986). I also depart from Davies who wishes to deny that the hedonistic calculus should be ascribed to anyone in the dialogue, since this seems to me to undermine its dramatic effect on Protagoras (2017).

1.0 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE *PROTAGORAS*

The main drama of the *Protagoras* consists of a conversation between Socrates and the eponymous sophist. Two conversations preface this primary drama. The dialogue opens with Socrates meeting an unnamed companion. After a brief banter, Socrates undertakes to narrate the entire conversation, which he has only just concluded prior to meeting the companion (310a). But rather than beginning straightaway by relaying Socrates' conversation with Protagoras, Plato has Socrates begin by relaying his preceding conversation with Hippocrates, who provides the occasion for Socrates to meet the sophist. If the conversation with Hippocrates reveals Socrates' reasons for meeting with the sophist and his concern which drives their discussion, perhaps Socrates' conversation with the unnamed companion can provide us a hint about Plato's reason for writing the dialogue and some primary concerns at play within it.

In what follows, I propose that the conversation between the unnamed companion reveals that a concern for appearance and concealment serves as the context for the conversation between Socrates and Protagoras that follows. I explicate this concern by connecting it to a related concern, recollecting and forgetting. I also argue that the conversation between Hippocrates and Socrates reveals a concern for desire, learning, and self-knowledge as the driving forces that occasion the conversation with Protagoras. I conclude this chapter by proposing that the unstated idea of learning as recollection provides a helpful way of understanding the concerns about education which Socrates conveys to Hippocrates. I also argue that ignorance and oversight are structural to the project of learning as Socrates outlines it in these early sections of the text.

1.1 SOCRATES AS NARRATOR

With the very first word of the *Protagoras*, an unnamed companion attempts to locate Socrates, or more precisely, Socrates' appearance, in space: "From where, Socrates, are you making your appearance? (πόθεν, ὃ Σώκρατες, φαίνῃ); Or is it clear indeed (δῆλα δῆ) that it is from the hunt for Alcibiades in his prime?" (308a).⁴ Strangely, given the companion's attempt to discover Socrates' previous location and his interest in Socrates' character indicated by his guess about Socrates' intentions for Alcibiades, the companion is himself unnamed and their current location undisclosed to readers of the dialogue.⁵ The dialogue's first lines implicitly raise the question of appearance, and appearance in relation to others, as a concern. Rather than simply asking where Socrates is coming from, the companion's way of phrasing his inquiry allows the reader to reflect on how Socrates appears to others within this dialogue and to its readers. The implication that Socrates' appearance is in question, I propose, anticipates the reduction of the self to its appearances that results from Socrates' conversation with Protagoras, from which Socrates is making his appearance. In a way, then, the question indirectly implied in the Companion's first

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. Robert Bartlett's 2004 translation of the *Protagoras* was consulted most frequently. Altman infers from the appearance of Alcibiades in the opening question that Alcibiades' relationship with Socrates is an implicit thematic concern of the dialogue (2020, 35). While this may well be true, and his interpretation of the reading order of the dialogues does much to suggest that it is, our interpretation will reflect more generally on the danger that Protagorean sophistry poses to potential philosophical students. Alcibiades may be an exemplary instance of this danger, but he, on my view, represents a more basic danger that attends all young students of philosophy.

⁵ In his discussion of these indeterminacies, Bartlett points out that we can assume their current location is more public than the house of Callias from which Socrates appears and the scene of the get-together he will soon recount. From this, Bartlett proposes that the recitation of the day's conversation is a more public act than the conversation itself which takes place indoors at the sophist's private and guarded house (2016, 8).

words unknowingly anticipates its answer, which must be explored in this chapter: Socrates appears from a conversation in which the self is reduced to its appearances.⁶

Through his assumption that Socrates makes his appearance from the hunt after Alcibiades, the companion playfully suggests that his own concern for Socrates' appearance consists primarily in a concern for his reputation.⁷ Alcibiades is past the appropriate age for Socrates' erotic intentions, as the companion assumes Socrates' intentions to be. Rather than deny explicitly that his intentions towards Alcibiades are erotic, Socrates appeals to Homer as a defense for his interest in Alcibiades: "And what is this? Are you not, to be sure, a praiser of Homer, who said that the most gracious (χαριεστάτην) bloom of youth belongs to one first getting his beard, which [bloom of youth] Alcibiades now has?" (309a–b). This is the first time a word related to χάρις appears in the dialogue, but χάρις will soon appear twice more in this very brief framing discussion between Socrates and the companion. Socrates states that he would be "grateful" (χάρις) to the companion for listening, and the companion agrees that he and the rest listening in would be likewise χάρις to hear Socrates speak, rendering the χάρις twofold (310a).⁸ In this way, χάρις serves as an enabling condition for Socrates' narration to occur.

⁶ If the foregoing is true, it is worth noting that it all happens "behind the backs" of the players in this scene. On the dramatic level, the unnamed companion simply asks where Socrates comes from in a not unusual way. But that we as readers can return to these lines in light of Socrates' narration of the conversation with Protagoras and uncover such foreshadowing points to Plato's poetic act as author of the dialogue. If this reading uncovers something fruitful then we might well suppose we have caught a glimpse of Plato in the poetic act.

⁷ See Bartlett 2016, 8–12. I am indebted to Bartlett's account for my analysis of this dynamic. At the same time, I add to his account some more general questions regarding the self and its appearances that the companion's way of phrasing his questions can lead readers to consider. I propose that these are likewise significant in understanding the relationship between the dialogue's framing discussion between Socrates and the unnamed companion and Socrates' narration which follows. I also add to Bartlett's claim that Socrates' interest in young men such as Alcibiades follows from his recourse to *logoi* my further considerations about Alcibiades' precise age—between youth proper and adulthood—as being particularly well-suited to this concern.

⁸ McCoy likewise concludes from this passage that listening is of prime importance to the dialogue, a point to which we will return in our discussion of Socratic questioning in the next chapter (2008, 78–79).

Socrates defends his interest in Alcibiades on the grounds that his is the most gracious (χαριεστάτην) bloom of youth, the one in which he first grows a beard, marking the transition—not yet completed—between his being a boy and becoming a man. Robert Bartlett quite plausibly proposes that Socrates’ interest in Alcibiades follows from Socrates’ recourse to λόγοι, and he distinguishes Socrates’ interest in his young interlocutors like Alcibiades from his interest in the unnamed companion.⁹ If Socrates recognizes in young men an aptitude for λόγοι, he recognizes in the companion an aptitude for listening; the former are interlocutors, while the latter is an audience. But, in addition, Plato’s repeated mentions of χάρις connects Socrates’ interest in the young men with his interest in the unnamed companion. Perhaps the companion’s indeterminacy signals what distinguishes the bloom of youth possessed by Alcibiades and the like. That is, the fact that such youths are not yet fully formed adults, in some way yet to be determined may be what attracts Socrates to them.

Put differently, what may render those of such an age particularly well-suited for λόγοι is precisely that they are old enough to converse seriously but young enough to be readily open to philosophical conversation. Not yet so sure of themselves as to be steadfastly committed to their own opinions, such men, in their openness to philosophical conversation, are still willing to listen.¹⁰ Those in the bloom of youth have not yet made their appearance.¹¹ Their opinions and judgments may still be open-ended, and Socrates may recognize in such young men an opportunity to encourage an habituation toward philosophical inquiry before their opinions take full shape and become fixed positions.

⁹ Bartlett 2016, 9–11.

¹⁰ See McCoy on the importance of listening as a precondition for philosophical openness (2008, 77).

¹¹ See also Arendt 1990, 439 and Ewegen 2020, 106.

When we recall that Plato opens the dialogue with Socrates encountering a companion whose person is never fully disclosed, indeterminacy comes to light as another thematic concern in the dialogue.

That Alcibiades has not made his full appearance—what I am calling his “indeterminacy”—is further tacitly implied in the dialogue’s first mention of forgetting (ἐπιλανθάνομαι). The unnamed companion accepts Homer as Socrates’ defense and ceases teasing him, turning instead to ask once more whether Socrates makes his appearance from Alcibiades and how things fare between the two (309b). Socrates confirms that he has indeed come from Alcibiades and that the young man seemed well-disposed towards him (309b).¹² But, Socrates explains that, despite this, Alcibiades did not capture Socrates’ attention in the previous scene: “However, it is an absurd (ἄτοπον or “placeless”)¹³ thing that I am willing to say to you: for while that man was present, I was both not paying attention to him, and I was even forgetting him often” (309c).¹⁴ Socrates does appear from being with Alcibiades, but during their get-together, Alcibiades did not always appear to Socrates. Socrates emphatically calls his inattention to Alcibiades, along with his tendency to forget him through the course of the conversation, ἄτοπον τι, something absurd, strange, or, placeless. Speaking plainly, that Socrates should ignore and forget one as beautiful and captivating as Alcibiades is absurd. Speaking literally, forgetting involves an absence of something that is nevertheless present in some sense. What is forgotten is thereby ‘placeless.’ In this case, even though Alcibiades is physically present, Socrates claims that

¹² Notably, Socrates states simply that he comes from Alcibiades (ἐρχομαι), dropping the mention of appearance in reference to himself while maintaining language of “seeming” in describing Alcibiades’ disposition to him (i.e. “He seemed (ἔδοξεν) well-disposed to me” (309b).

¹³ Offering an additional, if unconventional, translation of ἄτοπον as “placeless” preserves the etymological root of τόπος as “place.” Something absurd is something that has no real presence, something that cannot be.

¹⁴ ἄτοπον μέντοι τί σοι ἐθέλω εἰπεῖν: παρόντος γὰρ ἐκείνου, οὔτε προσεῖχον τὸν νοῦν, ἐπελανθανόμην τε αὐτοῦ θαμά.

his mind is turned elsewhere, away from him. Forgotten, Alcibiades is nowhere for Socrates.

On the one hand, that Alcibiades in some sense fails to appear to Socrates once again recalls the unnamed companion's lack of appearance. On the other, as we will see in the next section, Socrates' care of another young man, Hippocrates, which occasions his conversation with Protagoras in the first place, signals to the reader that Socrates' insight here may not be simply honest. Although Hippocrates fades into the background and Alcibiades only briefly figures prominently during the primary conversation with Protagoras, they are nevertheless very much on Socrates' mind, as the impressionable, yet-to-be determined, young audience of the contest between the two thinkers.¹⁵ Hippocrates' desire to study with Protagoras shapes the conversation between Socrates and Protagoras that follows. That Socrates continuously challenges Protagoras to make manifest what he teaches reveals Socrates' abiding concern (at least in part) with Hippocrates and any other prospective students listening. The preceding conversation with Hippocrates, in which Socrates urges the young man to explore the nature of his desire to converse with the sophist, is continued rather than forgotten in the succeeding conversation with Protagoras. Moreover, it is Socrates who attributes to Protagoras the art of teaching political excellence (319a), an art that would be of the utmost concern to the ambitious young Hippocrates and Alcibiades, among many others present. In making explicit the political ends at stake in conversing with Protagoras, Socrates tacitly piques the interest of the young, ambitious audience members, revealing his attention to their concerns, desires, and ambitions.

¹⁵ The fact that Alcibiades and Hippocrates seldom appear during the narrated conversation further emphasizes the link between the young men and the unnamed companion who never speaks again once Socrates begins his long narration.

It is also worth emphasizing that the verb ἐπιλανθάνομαι is a deponent verb, occurring only in the middle/passive voice. Deponent verbs are often those where the actor cannot be exclusively said to be the cause of the action. Such verbs can often as justly be said to happen to the actor as much as they can be said to be performed by the actor, thus having a passive sense. This is why verbs of perception (i.e., αἰσθάνομαι) are so often deponent. It is intuitive, then, that “forgetting” should be a deponent verb, since forgetting, in its most ordinary sense, is not something done willingly. Often, someone who forgets is unaware of having forgotten something until another person or occasion calls that fact to her attention. To illustrate this point, if we abstract from the context of Socrates’ care for Hippocrates and young men, we could read this exchange as just such an occurrence. It would be possible, given only what Socrates says here, that until the companion asks about Alcibiades, the presence of Alcibiades in the conversation might not have been on his mind at all. Socrates might have forgotten Alcibiades’ presence altogether had the companion not reminded him.¹⁶

But in addition to the passive sense described above, deponent verbs also have a middle sense wherein the actor can be said in some sense to perform the action on herself or for her own benefit. Michael Davis, in his discussion of deponent verbs, uses perceiving (αἰσθάνομαι) as the clearest example of a deponent verb whose passive and middle sense is always entailed. According to Davis, what is perceived simultaneously affects the perceiver: to feel a hot stove requires getting burned; to hear music requires the notes’ vibrations striking the hairs of our ears, and so on. But at the very same time, perceivers thus perceive the object’s effect on them. In its middle sense, just as we perceive, Davis

¹⁶ Again, just as readers might forget the continued presence of the unnamed companion until Socrates breaks the narration to speak to him directly (cf. 316a and 339e, in particular).

notes, we perceive ourselves in our act of perceiving. Davis' example of this is in the exchange: "Do you see her? / No, but I am looking." We are aware of ourselves as perceivers in our act of perceiving: when the stove burns us, we sense ourselves feeling the heat. If the foregoing holds true of perception, then it holds likewise for forgetting. To forget something is simultaneously an act of self-forgetting. The one who forgets loses something that had belonged to her; it is a moment within her own mind that is unavailable to her. A little playful translation of the Greek text where Socrates describes forgetting Alcibiades brings this out even further. In forgetting Alcibiades, Socrates says ἐπελάνθανόμην τε αὐτοῦ θαμά. In context, αὐτοῦ clearly refers to the preceding demonstrative ἐκείνου standing in for Alcibiades, such that the straightforward translation is, as we have seen above "I was even forgetting him often." But in general, αὐτοῦ without a definite article can mean either "that man" or "him" as it does here, or "self." It could even mean "myself" if the breathing mark, which would have been added after Plato composed the dialogue, were rough. So, in what is, granted, a stretch that is nevertheless not grammatically impossible, at the same time that Socrates forgets Alcibiades, we see, too, that to do so is also, in a sense, to forget himself.¹⁷

In a certain sense, the middle voice, the "nowhere" of what is forgotten, and the bloom of Alcibiades' youth in which he is neither a boy nor a man are all similar in structure. Specifically, all three cases are instances of being "in-between." The middle voice is between active and passive, what is forgotten is between presence and absence, and Alcibiades' bloom of youth is between childhood and adulthood (and concealment and

¹⁷ Socrates has at least once explicitly connected his own self-knowledge with his knowledge of an interlocutor, in claiming that if he fails to know Phaedrus, he likewise fails to know himself, see *Phaedrus* (228a).

appearance). We see, too, that Socrates seeks out those in this bloom of youth between childhood and adulthood as his primary interlocutors due to their being most gracious (χαριέστατην). We have suggested that this is due to their openness to philosophical discourse, having not yet made their full appearance in society with their opinions not yet fully formed nor their judgments fully fixed. But certainly, forgetting would seem to be derivative of some prior or else more favorable state, be it either knowing or learning, on the one hand, or remembering or recollecting, on the other. For now, we must only note the relationship between these states of being in-between as they are developing in this early stage of the dialogue.

In response to Socrates' revelation that he had forgotten Alcibiades, the companion expresses surprise and curiosity as to what could have caused such an absurdity: "And what πρᾶγμα could have come to be between you and that man, who is so great? For surely you did not chance upon another man more beautiful in this city at least" καὶ τί γεγονὸς εἴη περὶ σὲ κάκεῖνον τοσοῦτον πρᾶγμα; οὐ γὰρ δήπου τινὶ καλλίονι ἐνέτυχες ἄλλω ἔν γε τῇδε τῇ πόλει (309c). Again, the meaning of this sentence is not so mysterious. Bartlett's translation hits upon it clearly: "And how could so great a thing have happened between you and him?" Most translations opt to attribute τοσοῦτον as modifying πρᾶγμα, but any translation necessarily simplifies a subtle ambiguity in the Greek. The adjective τοσοῦτον could be either masculine or neuter and is placed in the medial position between κάκεῖνον and πρᾶγμα. Accordingly, in the Greek, it is not immediately clear whether it is Alcibiades or the as-yet-unknown πρᾶγμα that is "so great." Socrates will soon reveal that the πρᾶγμα which distracted him from Alcibiades' presence in the conversation is Protagoras' arrival in Athens. Moreover, within the narration, Socrates will refer to sophists in general as

πραγμάτα (312c) reinforcing the point that it is the sophist Protagoras himself being referred to here. So, the ambiguity turns out to be whether Protagoras or Alcibiades is so great, and it is Protagoras himself who Socrates claims causes him to forget Alcibiades while he is in their midst.¹⁸

Before revealing Protagoras as the source of his distraction from Alcibiades, Socrates confirms that a certain foreigner was not only more beautiful but much more beautiful than Alcibiades, leading the companion to ask: “And some foreigner seemed (ἔδοξεν) to you to be so beautiful so as to appear (φανῆναι) to you more beautiful than the son of Cleinias?” (309c). The companion’s question suggests that what Socrates opines (ἔδοξεν) as beautiful will therefore appear to him as beautiful, implying that individual opinion about what is beautiful may be one cause of what seems beautiful. This implication is reinforced again by the nature of the passive verb φανῆναι. That the verb “to appear” is passive here suggests that Protagoras is not the sole cause of his appearance as beautiful. Socrates, rather than Protagoras, is primarily responsible for Protagoras’ appearing to be beautiful to Socrates since it is Socrates who opines him to be such (if indeed he were to do so unironically, which cannot be assumed here). Protagoras’ appearance depends on how others perceive him.

Socrates responds, reinforcing the causal relationship between individual and what appears beautiful, by identifying what is wisest with what is most beautiful: “And how, blessed one, will not what is wisest appear most beautiful?” (309c). As Gonzalez argues,

¹⁸ Readers of the dialogue know that Socrates will ultimately fail to persuade Alcibiades, whose political actions seem at odds with the virtues Socrates emphasizes throughout the dialogues. Perhaps we can glean a hint as to the cause of that failure here: a *πρᾶγμα*, sophistry, perhaps Protagorean sophistry itself, comes between Socrates and Alcibiades, and perhaps causes Alcibiades to forget Socrates just as, or perhaps more permanently, than Socrates forgets Alcibiades in his conversation with Protagoras.

this identifies Socrates with the erotic pursuit of wisdom as what is most beautiful.¹⁹ Following from the companion's suggestion that what seems beautiful to someone will also appear so to them, since Socrates opines what is wise to be beautiful, what is wisest will appear most beautiful to him. Here, it is a meeting of two natures which determines an object's appearance. What has a wise nature will appear beautiful to one who is of a nature to esteem wisdom beautiful.

Socrates playfully conditions Protagoras' appearance as most wise on the companion's opinion when he finally reveals Protagoras as the *πραγμα* beautiful enough to distract him from Alcibiades: "The wisest of the men now at least, if Protagoras seems (*δοκεῖ*) to you to be most wise" (309c). If the unnamed companion playfully seeks to cast Socrates as lusting after Alcibiades, Socrates suggests that Protagoras' apparent wisdom is the true object of his desire.²⁰ Socrates seems to speak ironically through much of the exchange with the companion here despite what truth it reveals. Truly, Socrates does come from a get-together with Protagoras. Truly, meeting Protagoras was a significant *πρᾶγμα*, even if it was not sufficient to serve as a distraction that would cause Socrates to forget Alcibiades. Finally, Socrates does seem truly interested throughout the Platonic dialogues in the connection between what is beautiful and what is wise. But it is doubtful from what follows that Socrates truly opines Protagoras so wise as to appear most beautiful. The double-meaning of *σοφός* as the root of both wisdom (*σοφία*) and sophist (*σόφιστης*) underscores the irony. Throughout the exchange, Socrates could be read as believing that Protagoras is the cleverest (*σοφώτατος*) and therefore appears most beautiful without that

¹⁹ 2014, 35.

²⁰ See Gonzalez 2000, 113–154.

opinion entailing that Protagoras is the wisest (σοφώτατος) and therefore truly most beautiful.

So far, then, we have uncovered in these opening pages a tacit concern for the matter of appearance. The dialogue's opening words interrogate Socrates' appearance in relation to others, namely, Protagoras and Alcibiades. The unnamed companion never makes his own appearance, which we have suggested connects him to young men such as Alcibiades, who as neither boys nor yet men have not yet fully appeared themselves. Third, the companion and Socrates seem to join opinion and appearance, suggesting that appearance depends on the opinion of the person to whom someone or something appears. This brings us to the consideration of deponent verbs and the middle voice where such verbs suggest the actor is not the sole cause or origin of her actions. Such actions affect the actor just as they perform them. Finally, we have indicated that this structure shares something in common with the transition from childhood to manhood and with forgetting. All three are states of being "in-between." For now, we can only introduce these concerns as questions, which the rest of our reading will aim to address. How does Socrates' understand the relationship between appearance, that which appears, and others to whom what appears does so? How does his understanding of that question differ, if it does, from that of Protagoras? What, exactly, is the importance of being in-between, both in itself and in relation to the question of appearance? And, finally how does forgetting, as one kind of failure of appearance help us to address these questions? With these questions in mind, we turn to Socrates' narration.

1.2 HIPPOCRATES AS OCCASION

That Socrates should begin his narration not with his meeting Protagoras, but with Hippocrates' visit to him suggests that the visit with Hippocrates illuminates his conversation with Protagoras.²¹ First, if Socrates depicts himself to the unnamed companion as a lover of Protagoras' apparent wisdom, then the exchange with Hippocrates subverts that picture by revealing Hippocrates' desire to get together with the sophist as the occasion for Socrates' meeting him. Second, the content of the exchange with Hippocrates reveals that Socrates' intent in meeting the sophist is to remind Hippocrates to care for his soul by inquiring into his own desire to meet with Protagoras, lest he walk unknowingly into harm.

Socrates begins his narration with Hippocrates' visit to him, which he describes as taking place within the past night, just before the break of dawn. Socrates thus describes Hippocrates' visit as occurring during the twilight hours before the morning's break. Twilight is yet another instance of being in between, being between night and day, darkness and light, and concealment and appearance. Socrates emphasizes the link between these transitions when he describes Hippocrates' blush, "He blushed—for dawn had just broken so that he became distinctly visible" (312c). Just when the day breaks, Hippocrates, who had previously been concealed in darkness, now appears to Socrates in the light of day. If the daylight is what occasions Hippocrates here to appear to Socrates, we recall that before it was Socrates' own (ironically stated) opinion of Protagoras that occasions Protagoras' appearing to Socrates as most beautiful. Might Plato be suggesting that, with Protagoras,

²¹ See also Gonzalez 2000, 114.

opinion replaces the function of daylight, allowing things to appear to others otherwise than they are?

We learn, too, that Hippocrates is at a similar point in life to that of Alcibiades, likewise no longer a boy but not yet a man.²² He arrives at Socrates' door to entreat the philosopher to introduce him to Protagoras. Before, he was too young to converse with the sophist, as he was "still a boy when [Protagoras] came to town before" (310e). But now, he asks Socrates to accompany him, as he puts it to Socrates, "in part because I am too young..." Thus, Hippocrates identifies himself as no longer a boy but not yet a man, unable to act fully for himself. Hippocrates then, himself between a boy and a man, appears to Socrates at the twilight hour between nighttime and daybreak. If the twilight of the day serves as the setting for Socrates' conversation with Hippocrates, then the twilight of adulthood serves as the setting for Socrates' conversation with Protagoras. Hippocrates' age serves as the occasion for Socrates getting together with Protagoras, for otherwise Hippocrates could not meet the sophist at all or else he would do so without Socrates' company.

The dialogue's second mention of forgetting occurs during Socrates' meeting with Alcibiades, too, and we recall once again the status of forgetting as in between presence and absence. Hippocrates explains that he had heard of Protagoras' arrival the previous evening, having been distracted earlier in the day by the escape of his slave: "For you know, my slave, Satyrus, escaped: and while of course I was going to indicate to you that I was pursuing him (or, literally, "I was causing myself to pursue him," *δωξοίμην*), I forgot

²² Despite the companion's playful insistence to Socrates that Alcibiades is already a man (309a). While Hippocrates is called "manly" (*ἄνδρεια*, 310d), he implies only that he is no longer a boy and is not described as a man (*ἄνθρωπος*), still being too young to approach Protagoras alone (310e).

because of someone else (or, “because of something else,” ὑπό τινος ἄλλου ἐπελαθόμεν)” (310c). First, as Anne-Marie Schultz points out, that Hippocrates mentions his slave draws a parallel between the unnamed companion, who had just ordered his slave to make room for Socrates (310a).²³ Schultz also argues that the slave’s name, Satyrus, further develops the erotic theme that pervades the dialogue’s early pages.²⁴ Satyrs were erotic (and comic) figures, associated with Dionysus, the god of wine-making, fertility, and madness. Finally, Schultz also points out in this vein that Alcibiades famously calls Socrates a satyr in the *Symposium* (215c). Socrates has just taken the seat of the companion’s slave, and Hippocrates further associates him with his own slave, Satyrus, as “of course” (δῆτα), he had intended to tell Socrates that he was chasing after the slave.

We can add several observations to the insightful analyses offered by Schultz. As other commentators have argued, there are clear allusions to Aristophanic comedy, both in this early scene between Socrates and Hippocrates, and in the following scene where Hippocrates and Socrates first encounter Protagoras in Callias’ home.²⁵ In addition, the allusion to satyrs in Hippocrates’ slave’s name, evokes the image of satyr plays, which were a comic parody of tragedy. Perhaps what follows, then, may in some way comically present something tragic.²⁶ Containing elements of both, perhaps the *Protagoras* as a dialogue, is in some sense between comedy and tragedy, even if comedy is the prevailing mood or tone the dialogue takes. As erotic figures, Satyrs were primarily seducers,

²³ 2014, 122.

²⁴ 2014, 122.

²⁵ See, for example, Capra 2001. See also McCoy 2017, who likewise relates the use of comic tropes to Plato’s concern for self-knowledge. Strauss, too, argues that Platonic dialogues as a whole tend more toward comedy than tragedy insofar as Socrates regularly laughs but never weeps (1964, 61).

²⁶ Invoking Aristotle’s later remarks on tragedy, we can and will certainly observe several moments of recognition and reversals throughout the dialogue (see Aristotle *Poetics* 11). Hyland argues that philosophy as such is a kind of tragicomic movement that involves recognizing and accepting human finitude without thereby accepting defeat but continuing to strive toward wholeness (1995, 137).

implicitly painting a portrait of Hippocrates, pursuing a seducer. Seducers, as such, desire. But to pursue a seducer suggests that what Hippocrates desires is indeterminate and not properly oriented toward some end.²⁷ Indeed, Hippocrates will reveal that his desire is at least in some sense underdetermined and lacking self-reflection in the present conversation, until Socrates articulates it on his behalf at 316b–c. Perhaps, this preliminary observation gives us a hint that such a pursuit of aimless desire is precisely the kind of tragedy that the *Protagoras* comically portrays. Such a pursuit’s tragic character and its comic portrayal will need to be further disclosed in what follows, and we will return to it explicitly in chapter 5. Moreover, Hippocrates’ eager pursuit of his slave parallels his eager pursuit of Protagoras, further developing the connection between the two thinkers. In addition to being depicted as erotic figures, it was also believed that however ridiculous satyrs appeared, they were nevertheless very knowledgeable, and conversing with one could help the interlocutor herself become knowledgeable, too. That Hippocrates pursues both his slave-satyr and Protagoras implies a kind of parallel between the two. However, the ambiguous character of the satyr’s wisdom, along with its portrayal as a seducer could, in different ways, describe either Socrates or Protagoras.²⁸ Socrates, at times, appears ridiculous to others—and to himself—but nevertheless offers wisdom should one seek it (cf. 340d–e and 361a).

Next, we can add to the parallels Schultz establishes between Hippocrates and the unnamed companion on the one hand, and Socrates and his interlocutors’ slaves on the

²⁷ Gonzalez similarly argues that while Socrates represents somebody who understands the true object of his desires, Hippocrates represents crude, misdirected ἔπος (2014, 37). While Plato has Socrates interpret Hippocrates desires as politically driven at 316b, Hippocrates is unable to account for what exactly drives him to study with Protagoras throughout this section.

²⁸ For a further account of the role of satyrs in Greek myth, see West (2007, 293).

other, a third parallel between Protagoras and the ὑπό τινος ἄλλου that causes Hippocrates to forget Socrates in his pursuit of his slave. A passive verb accompanied by ὑπὸ with a genitive usually implies a personal agent, whereas an object-agent would be in the dative case. So, it would first strike the Greek ear as “because of someone else” and only in context might be re-interpreted as “something else.” Just as Protagoras distracts Socrates, causing him to forget Alcibiades, so also ὑπό τινος ἄλλου distracts Hippocrates, causing him to forget Socrates. Notably, we can observe that Hippocrates being solely determined to study with Protagoras fails to notice what benefit attending Socrates could bring.

Finally, Hippocrates describes himself as pursuing, or more precisely, as causing himself to pursue (διωξοίμην) his slave, Satyrus. The slave, like something forgotten, has escaped Hippocrates and once aware of that fact, he causes himself to pursue what is lost. For an unstated reason, he wanted to tell Socrates about his pursuit. His tendency to overshare with Socrates along with his impetuous drive to rush to his and Callias’ home at all hours of the night signal Hippocrates’ immoderation. But perhaps, too, Hippocrates desires Socrates’ assistance in this pursuit of his slave, Satyr, in addition to seeking Socrates’ help in his pursuit of Protagoras. Hippocrates, implicitly conceives of Socrates as someone who can help him achieve his desires and connect him to others who will do the same. However, as Gonzalez points out, Hippocrates errs by seeing Socratic conversation as instrumental to his education rather than constitutive of it.²⁹ On one level, Hippocrates seeks Socrates’ help in pursuing his slave. More figuratively following from the slave’s name, Satyrus, Perhaps Hippocrates seeks Socrates’ help in some erotic matter. Or, still figuratively, perhaps we can take the liberty once more of reading διωξοίμην

²⁹ 2014, 40.

together with the demonstrative αὐτόν and ask whether Hippocrates might enlist Socrates' help in pursuing himself. Moreover, he never enlists Socrates' help in this first pursuit, since, distracted by someone or something else, he forgot (ὕπο τινοῦ ἄλλου ἐπελαθόμεν).³⁰ While the foregoing is quite subtextual it reveals that Hippocrates unreflectingly pursues self-knowledge in pursuing Socrates, despite his misdirected desire to pursue Protagoras.

We get a sense of Hippocrates' character here, which could provide us a hint as to what might have distracted him from enlisting Socrates' help in pursuing his slave. Socrates describes Hippocrates to the unnamed companion as possessing courage (ἀνδρείαν) and impetuosity (πτοίησιν). As Bartlett observes, the combination causes young Hippocrates to act rashly.³¹ While he exercises some restraint in not rushing to Socrates straight after he hears of Protagoras' arrival, he does so the minute he woke up, heedless of the hour. Likewise, he rushes after his slave without pausing to enlist help. And now, he rushes to Protagoras, without pausing to consider why or what he desires to achieve in so doing. Bartlett, musing on Hippocrates' combination of courage and impetuosity, states, "One might go so far as to say, in anticipation of what is to come, that Hippocrates has as his patron saint Epimetheus, the "After-thinker...."³² It is unsurprising then, that something—anything—should distract such a daring and impetuous youth, since he is quick to pursue what desires occur to him without much, or any, delay for forethought as to what grounds his desires or how best to pursue them.

And so, it is Hippocrates' very combination of courage and impetuosity that spurs him to study with Protagoras, without taking adequate forethought for what drives his

³⁰ We never discover whether Hippocrates succeeds in recovering his slave. We might infer, however, that he does not since he continues his account in the first person singular only "When I arrived..." (310c).

³¹ Bartlett 2016, 13–14.

³² 2016, 14.

desire to meet with the sophist. But still, Socrates' characterization of Hippocrates as courageous is not wholly ironic. There is something admirable in a young man boldly rushing to the most famously wise person in Greece to ask to become his student.³³ Socrates responds to Hippocrates' desire both aware of the potential it signals and wary of its potential downfalls.

When Socrates teasingly asks whether Protagoras has done Hippocrates some injustice that makes him so eager to meet the sophist, Hippocrates, with a laugh, comically replies: "Yes, by the gods, Socrates, that he alone is wise and does not make me so!" (310d). Hippocrates' claim that Protagoras alone is wise should invoke a chortle in its readers and cause us to recall the Delphic Oracle's claim that no one is wiser than Socrates in the *Apology* (21a). We recall that an opinion of Protagoras as wisest might cause him to appear most beautiful to the one holding that opinion, as Socrates ironically claims to believe in his conversation with the unnamed companion. Here, Hippocrates reveals himself to share such an opinion, Protagoras alone is wise, apparently disregarding or dismissing the wisdom of Socrates.³⁴ Apparent wisdom and its attending beauty, it appears, suffice to distract Hippocrates from true wisdom and its own beauty. Hippocrates, in his pursuit of desire without reflecting on its ultimate end, fails to distinguish between what appears beautiful and what is truly wise and therefore beautiful. Hippocrates again reveals his impetuosity and daring when he affirms that were it just a matter of money, he would yield everything he and his friends have to convince Protagoras to teach him. This, in spite

³³ I am indebted to Davis' comments on the dialogue in making this observation. As Davis said in his own informal remarks on the dialogue, "You can see why Socrates might kind of like this kid." Griswold, too, sees in Hippocrates "nascent" courage and capacity for shame a sign of his philosophical potential (1999, 297–298). See also McCoy 2008, 79.

³⁴ See also Segvic 2006, 253. Socrates, on Hippocrates understanding, may well be a nice person willing to and capable of giving advice, but hardly himself a source of wisdom.

of the fact that he has never even met Protagoras, and thus his zeal is apparently prompted only by the opinion of others: “But indeed, Socrates, all praise the man and say that he is wisest at speaking” (310e).

Socrates checks the young man’s zeal both by delaying their physical departure for Callias’ house where Protagoras is staying and by questioning Hippocrates about what he hopes to achieve by meeting with Protagoras: “Let’s not go there yet, good one, for it’s early. Instead, let’s get up and go into the courtyard here, here we’ll pass the time strolling about until daylight. Then let’s go. For Protagoras spends most of his time indoors, so, not to worry, we’ll catch him in all likelihood” (311a, Bartlett 2004 tr.). Socrates guides Hippocrates outside into the courtyard, foreshadowing the gods guiding human beings into the light of day in the myth that Protagoras will soon tell. Socrates performatively distinguishes himself from Protagoras here by moving outdoors with Hippocrates while indicating that Protagoras most often stays inside. Recalling the themes of appearance and concealment, we might infer that Protagoras prefers to remain concealed.³⁵ Socrates presents himself as, on the one hand, fully open, and, on the other hand, as capable of guiding others to likewise disclose themselves. By physically guiding Hippocrates out into the courtyard, Socrates simultaneously begins questioning him in a way that will cause him to reflect on and disclose himself.

Socrates’ method for quelling Hippocrates’ zeal to meet with Protagoras hinges on causing the youth to consider the nature of his desire. As he encourages Hippocrates to consider who exactly is this teacher he so wishes to meet, Socrates simultaneously urges

³⁵ See also Ewegen 2020, 108–109.

Hippocrates to consider who he himself wishes to become as a result of studying with the sophist:

And I making trial of Hippocrates' confidence, was considering him well and asking him, 'Tell me,' I said, 'Hippocrates, you are now attempting to go beside Protagoras, so that you arrive beside whom and so that you become whom? Just as if you had in mind to go beside your namesake, Hippocrates the Cosian, one of the Asclepiads, to pay him a wage, if someone should ask you, 'Tell me, for being whom are you about to pay Hippocrates, Hippocrates?' what would you answer?' (311b–c)

Socrates here employs a version of what is often referred to as his “τέχνη-analogy.” Roochnik has argued that Socrates' τέχνη-analogy typically serves one of two dialectical purposes, exhortation or refutation.³⁶ Here, Socrates uses the τέχνη-analogy to exhort Hippocrates to consider who Protagoras is and what the sophist teaches alongside whom Hippocrates wishes himself to become and what he wants to achieve by studying with the sophist.³⁷ As Roochnik argues, this effectively quiets—I add, without altogether condemning—Hippocrates' eagerness to study with Protagoras.³⁸ While Hippocrates desires Socrates' help in pursuing Protagoras, Socrates instead urges Hippocrates to consider how this pursuit will affect him. In this sense, Socrates first assists Hippocrates in learning to pursue self-knowledge and an understanding of his own desires.³⁹ By drawing on Hippocrates' namesake, in constructing the τέχνη-analogy, he reinforces for

³⁶ Roochnik 1992, 303.

³⁷ Cf. Roochnik 1992, 308.

³⁸ Roochnik 1990, 53.

³⁹ Gerson likewise identifies knowledge of what one desires with self-knowledge (2019, 16). But by emphasizing knowledge of the Good as the object of our desires which would obliterate residual doubt: “The achievement of the Good consists in comprehensive knowledge of intelligible reality. Such knowledge amounts to cognitive identity with intelligible reality. In the self-reflexive knowledge of that, one knows exactly what one's true self is” (2019, 17). My project aims to problematize this goal for human inquiry by pointing to moments where Socrates indicates limitations to our ability to achieve such perfect self-knowledge, while nevertheless encouraging further inquiry.

Hippocrates that his desire to study with Protagoras will affect him personally so that Hippocrates must pause to consider the nature of that effect.

Hippocrates responds that he would study with his namesake because the latter is a physician and thus for the purpose of becoming a physician himself. He responds similarly by analogy with practitioners of other τέχναι (311c). Socrates then instructs Hippocrates to complete the analogy:

“Well then,” I was saying, “In going now to Protagoras, you and I, we’ll be ready to pay him money for his fee on your behalf, if our money is sufficient and we persuade him with it; if not, we’ll pay what belongs to our friends as well. If then, someone should ask us, who are so exceedingly zealous about this, ‘Tell me, Socrates and Hippocrates, you have it in mind to pay Protagoras money on the grounds that he is what?’—what answer would we give him? What other names do we hear spoken of Protagoras? Just as we hear ‘sculptor’ about Pheidias’ and ‘poet’ about Homer, so what sort of thing do we hear about Protagoras?” (311d–e)

Socrates here joins himself to Hippocrates’ pursuit as a partner; the two will approach Protagoras together, suggesting that while Socrates seeks to quell Hippocrates’ zeal here, he does not do so combatively, but out of friendly care for the youth. At the same time, Socrates here shifts away from his direct inquiries about the other craftsmen where he asks Hippocrates directly what they do and thus who Hippocrates would wish to become in studying with them. Now he asks Hippocrates what others call Protagoras, expanding their consideration beyond Hippocrates’ own judgment to the perceptions and opinions of others.

Hippocrates seems at first somehow to miss Socrates’ point and only recognizes the implications of Socrates’ analogy at its completion. Hippocrates continues the analogy with apparent confidence, “Precisely (δὴ) a ‘sophist,’ you know (τοί), is what they call the

man indeed (γέ), Socrates” (311e).⁴⁰ When Socrates continues the analogy, asking whether, accordingly, they visit Protagoras because he is a sophist, Protagoras responds emphatically, “Most of all” or “certainly” μάλιστα (311e). Finally, as the dawn continues to break, Hippocrates recognizes the consequences of the analogy, but only once Socrates drives his point home:

If then someone should ask you this in addition: “And *you*, for the purpose of becoming whom exactly are you attending Protagoras?” He spoke, blushing—for already the daylight had just broken so as for him to become clearly apparent—“If, on the one hand, it is in any way like the things that came before, it is clear that [I attend him] for the purpose of my becoming a sophist” (311e–312a).⁴¹

Hippocrates sees the light of Socrates’ analogy shortly after the daylight itself breaks (ὕπεφαινεῖν), rendering him clearly visible (καταφανῇ) to Socrates. There is a strong etymological connection between the words for dawn’s break and Hippocrates’ being made manifest to shine forth. Both are derived from the verb, φαίνω, to appear or show forth. Stretching the etymology, the day in some way makes appearance possible from concealment. Socrates sees clearly that Hippocrates blushes, signaling that Hippocrates sees clearly where Socrates’ analogy leads. In the light of day, he is ashamed to say what before he said shamelessly, that he wants to meet a renowned sophist. Socrates brings to

⁴⁰ The particles, δὴ, τοι, and γέ could each signify either confidence or hesitation in Hippocrates’ response. Δὴ most typically signifies exactness in modifying a noun or adjective, as we have here “precisely a sophist,” suggesting Hippocrates’ confidence in his grasp of the analogy so far. But it could also simply introduce a response to a question as in Bartlett’s “Well...” which sounds much more hesitant. Τοι includes the listener to one’s speech, “you know” or “mark you,” and can be read either with confidence or hesitation, as in “of course you know” or “well, you know....” Finally, γέ means either the confident “indeed” or the hesitant “at least,” and can signal a sense of irony. I interpret Hippocrates here to speak confidently given what follows. But I point out the ambiguity because the reader, at least, should see, even if Hippocrates does not, where the analogy leads next. Plato thus puts into the mouth of Hippocrates the foresight he lacks even in his expression of courage and impetuosity.

⁴¹ Καὶ ὃς εἶπεν ἐρυθρίασας--ἥδη γὰρ ὑπέφαινέν τι ἡμέρας, ὥστε καταφανῇ αὐτὸν γενέσθαι—εἰ μὲν τι τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν ἔοικεν, δῆλον ὅτι σοπηιστὴς γενεσόμενος.

light for Hippocrates that the implications of that desire for who he himself is to become by such an affiliation.

Socrates exploits Hippocrates' sense of shame by again appealing to others' perceptions: "'And *you*,' I said, 'in the name of the gods, wouldn't you be ashamed to present yourself to the Greeks as a sophist?'"⁴² Socrates twice in a row emphatically begins his questioning directly to Hippocrates with the second person singular pronoun. Even if he appeals to others in order to shame Hippocrates, Socrates nevertheless emphasizes that his concern is with Hippocrates' own self and who he will become. Finally reflecting, Hippocrates admits, "Yes by Zeus, Socrates, if indeed at least it is necessary to say what I think" (212a). Now, of course, there is a clear weakness in this analogy. Protagoras is a sophist so famous that Hippocrates grew up hearing about his visit to Athens, despite being too young to attend it himself. Many people might desire to meet someone so famous without any desire to become like the famous person themselves. One might eagerly meet a famous athlete, actress, or politician, without thereby having an interest in learning the craft. Hippocrates, however, has admitted that he covets Protagoras' wisdom, signaling that he wishes not only to meet the sophist, but to learn from him, too. To the extent that this is so, Socrates seeks by way of this analogy to discover exactly what the young man wishes to learn.

Again, in a way that minimizes any combative tone, Socrates provides Hippocrates a way out of this shameful recognition.⁴³ He suggests that perhaps Hippocrates does not wish to become a sophist like Protagoras, but rather to achieve instruction (μαθήσιν) from

⁴² Bartlett's translation with emphasis added.

⁴³ Gargarin supposes that Socrates' lenience with Hippocrates here implies that Socrates is not as prejudiced against the sophists as other Athenians are (1969, 137). I argue that Socrates' gentleness with Hippocrates here signals his care for the young man rather than his attitude toward the sophist.

the sophist that would be fitting (πρέπει) for a private and free person (τὸν ἰδιώτην καὶ τὸν ἐλεύθερον). Perhaps Protagoras does not teach a trade as would a physician or a sculptor, but something more resembling a liberal education, as a teacher of arts and letters. Still mindful of Hippocrates' care for appearances, Socrates grants that Hippocrates' desire would at least be fitting if Protagoras were an instructor of the latter kind.

However, Socrates quickly disrupts the comfort Hippocrates finds in this possibility: "Do you know (or, "have you seen," οἶσθα) then what you are about to do now, or does it escape (λανθάνει) you?" This is the dialogue's first mention of λανθάνω, the root of forgetting, ἐπιλανθάνομαι. Socrates here urges Hippocrates to try to see (οἶσθα) with foresight what he does in seeking to study with Protagoras, lest the danger involved escape his notice. When Hippocrates asks what Socrates is talking about, Socrates explains the danger:

That you are about to hand over your own soul (τὴν ψυχὴν τὴν σαυτοῦ) to that man, as you say a sophist, to treat: and whatever the sophist is, I should wonder if you know (or, 'have seen,' οἶσθα). Moreover, if you are ignorant with respect to this, then you do not even know (οἶσθα) to whom you are giving over your soul, whether to a good or an evil πρᾶγμα (312b–c).

The light of day permits Hippocrates to see the danger that attending Protagoras poses to his reputation; others may call him a sophist too, and this would be a shameful thing. But Socrates repeatedly asks Hippocrates whether he has seen (οἶσθα) the further danger to his person that such a meeting poses to his person. Hippocrates' care for himself is only partial so long as it remains a care for his appearance to others only. Socrates entreats Hippocrates to see that care through to its end, consisting in a care for his soul. What still escapes Hippocrates' notice is that he may lose himself, forgetting to take care for his soul, in

seeking out Protagoras' instruction.⁴⁴ In shaming Hippocrates, Socrates thus urges Hippocrates to remember himself and the true nature and ultimate purpose of his desires and their ultimate effect on who he becomes. Hippocrates' blush signals that he has overlooked the damage to his reputation that studying with Protagoras may cause. But that he is capable of feeling shame signals to Socrates that he can be guided toward a greater understanding of what is really shame-worthy: overlooking the self and its ultimate good.

We might at this point pause to apply the τέχνη-analogy to Hippocrates' pursuit of Socrates. Hippocrates pursues Socrates on the grounds that he is whom, and for the sake of becoming whom? If the dialogue between Socrates and Protagoras amounts to a contest between philosophy and sophistry, then what is the benefit that Socrates confers upon Hippocrates, and how does this benefit affect Hippocrates' soul? Provisionally, we can observe that Socrates seeks to endow Hippocrates with something of his own. That is, he wants to give Hippocrates the tools to recognize his own ignorance. He urges Hippocrates to inquire into the nature of his own desires and to recognize that he has not fully thought through the implications of his desires. Socrates wants to make Hippocrates aware that he is ignorant by bringing him into a state of ἀπορία regarding his desire to study with Protagoras. At first, Hippocrates can only respond with shame and confusion at being compelled to recognize his ignorance and the unseemly implications of his desire to study with the sophist. However, Socrates is not paralyzed by ἀπορία, but he recognizes it as an

⁴⁴ In a different context, Bell too associates self-forgetting with a failure to understand the nature of one's own desires as what is truly good for the soul (2019, 133).

Socrates' warning that Hippocrates does not know whether he gives his soul over to a good or evil *pragma* in attending Protagoras recalls the dialogue's opening lines where the narrator asks what *pragma* could have been amidst Socrates and Alcibiades such that Socrates forgot Alcibiades' presence. Since readers of the dialogue know of Alcibiades' tyrannical acts, we might wonder whether Plato indicates here that Socrates fails to persuade Alcibiades of the kind of care for self that he urges Hippocrates to take on here.

opportunity for further discovery. Only upon recognizing one's ignorance can one endeavor to seek further.

Socrates tries to spur Hippocrates to wonder along with him about who exactly the sophist is and what is the nature of his wisdom. Hippocrates first offers that Protagoras is, as the name “sophist” implies, a “knower of wise things” (τὸν τῶν σοφῶν ἐπιστήμονα) (312c, Bartlett 2004 tr.). Socrates continues to employ his τέχνη-analogy, exhorting Hippocrates to specify what wise things the sophist knows, or what the sophist's expertise concerns. Hippocrates then offers that the sophist is “an expert at making one clever (δεινὸν) at speaking” (312d). We recall that Socrates claims that he, too, is accused of being a δεινὸν speaker in the *Apology* (17b). But the claim is an ambiguous one. To be δεινὸν at speaking is, in its positive sense, to be skilled or clever. But δεινὸν also has the sense of fearful or terrifying, or else powerful or marvelous. To be δεινὸν, thus, seems to be associated with containing multitudes. To be δεινὸν at speaking would thus be to be able to speak in multitudes, or to say many things while appearing (when advantageous) to say just one. This ability is at once a skill and also something marvelous and terrifying. The power to speak to many at once can be a powerful philosophical tool to guide diverse interlocutors to care for themselves. But it can also be a political weapon used to appease the many while serving only the few.

Rather than indicating the ambiguity of δεινὸν directly, Socrates, continuing the τέχνη-analogy, asks Hippocrates to specify further about what kinds of things Protagoras makes others δεινὸν at speaking. But Hippocrates is unable to answer “‘By Zeus,’ he said, ‘I do not have it in me to tell you further’” (312e). In one sense, it is neither surprising nor damning that Hippocrates should struggle to specify the point further. By Socrates' own

supposition that Protagoras' instruction may be more akin to the liberal arts, the τέχνη-analogy may meet its limits here. Protagoras' ability to make others δεινόν is no more limited to one field as is Socrates' ability to make others inquire. But, if Roochnik is correct, the point of the τέχνη-analogy is not to reduce such practices to the limitations of craft knowledge, but rather to cause interlocutors to recognize their ignorance and to become perplexed about the matter at hand.⁴⁵ Hippocrates' earlier claim to knowledge about Protagoras' wisdom ("I suppose, at least, that I know" 312c), reinforces this point. If Hippocrates really did grasp the nature of Protagoras' wisdom, he would either complete the analogy or else object to Socrates that the analogy is insufficient.

Socrates emphatically warns Hippocrates of the risks to his soul posed by attending Protagoras while ignorant of what Protagoras teaches.⁴⁶ Socrates once again points out that Hippocrates lacks the basic foresight and care that he would take in other areas of self-improvement. For instance, he would not hand his body over to someone else's care without consulting other and considering the matter carefully (313a). But Hippocrates is willing to risk his soul's becoming "useful or worthless" (χρηστὸν... ἢ πονηρόν) in consorting with Protagoras. Hippocrates acts as someone who has "already having discerned that there must be a get-together with Protagoras," even though he has already admitted to Socrates that he has neither the familiarity with nor experience of the sophist or his teachings necessary to judge the meeting useful or advantageous (313b–c).

When Socrates first warns Hippocrates of this risk, he uses two compound verbs, complaining that Hippocrates hands over (παρασχεῖν) and gives over (παραδίδως) his soul to Hippocrates for treatment (312b–c). But here, Socrates uses a third verb, ἐπιτρέπειν, and

⁴⁵ 1992.

⁴⁶ Hemenway points out that words related to danger, κίνδυνος, recur four times in this brief speech (1996,4).

claims now that Hippocrates turns himself (σᾶυτόν) over to Protagoras, with the effect that his soul will become χρηστὸν or πονηρόν. Socrates' emphasis here on Hippocrates' turning himself over to Protagoras suggests that the cure is at least partially a matter of reorientation. Rather than blindly and eagerly giving over his soul to the sophist's care in pursuit of his desires as such, Socrates attempts to turn Hippocrates' attention to himself and to reconsider his own desires. And it appears that Socrates is at least partially successful. For Hippocrates not only admits that it seems that what Socrates says is true, but he also pauses to ask Socrates a question, "By what is a soul nourished?" (313c). Hippocrates at length, with Socrates' persistent questioning, develops a modest curiosity about the nature and effects of education.

Hippocrates has asked three questions before this one, which signal his progression in self-knowledge throughout his conversation with Socrates. First, he asks impetuously why they do not leave now to catch Protagoras at Callias' home (310e). Here, Hippocrates' question signals his impetuosity, lacking forethought and reflection. Second, when Socrates suggests that what Hippocrates does in attending Protagoras escapes him, Hippocrates asks, "What is that?" This second question signals the moment that that he recognizes there may be something that escapes him. Third, when Socrates asks what expert knowledge Protagoras has, Hippocrates asks, "What could we say that he is, Socrates, except an expert at making one clever at speaking?" (312d, Bartlett tr.) The first question signals that Hippocrates simply doesn't know what he desires in seeking to study with Protagoras. The second question signals his coming to recognize that he is unaware of his desires. The third question begins his inquiry together with Socrates about the nature of Protagoras' teaching. Finally, the fourth question goes beyond his interest in Protagoras

to a general question about what is good for the soul. The trajectory of Hippocrates' questions follows the structure of ἀπορία as outlined by Hyland, wherein ἀπορία is a mode of self-knowledge that promotes further inquiry (see Hyland 2008, 8 and 2019, 58). Socrates has successfully guided Hippocrates to some measure of self-knowledge by guiding him beyond mere ignorance to a nascent search for wisdom.⁴⁷

Socrates responds to Hippocrates' question about what nourishes the soul by saying the soul is nourished "by learning, doubtless," μαθήμασιν δήπου (313c). However, even when Socrates appears to be a plain speaker, he remains a δεινός one. While in the Attic dialect in which Socrates speaks δήπου means "doubtless," it originally indicates hesitation, meaning either "perhaps" or "it may be the case." The reason that Socrates so qualifies his speech here would seem to be that while the soul is doubtless nourished by learning nevertheless what learning consists in is precisely what Socrates wants Hippocrates to question. Socrates must be a δεινός speaker since to speak plainly would conceal the ἀπορία underlying their investigation. While there may be no doubt *that* learning nourishes the soul, *what* that learning which nourishes the soul consists in is very much at question.

To bring Hippocrates to recognize both that he does not know what such learning consists in and, more importantly, what danger his ignorance poses to his person, Socrates compares sophists to salespeople who sell nourishment for the body. Socrates supposes that such merchants do not know any better than their customers do whether what they sell is actually χρηστόν or πονηρόν for the body. Instead, they praise anything they happen to

⁴⁷ Ewegen, too, interprets Socrates' tactics as successfully quelling the young man's eagerness (2020, 109). The extent to which Hippocrates maintains this curiosity is unclear, but at the very least Plato presents an image of Socratic success in this early exchange, an image which will be in stark contrast to his failed attempt to guide Protagoras toward an interrogative exchange in what follows.

have for sale. Sophists too, Socrates continues, travel city to city selling their “learning” to anyone who desires it and indiscriminately praise all things which they sell. But while Socrates implies that no merchants who sell what nourishes the body know whether what they sell is *χρηστόν* or *πονηρόν*, Socrates speaks less generally about the sophist: “...but perhaps too, best one, some of these might not know what of those things which they sell is useful or wicked to the soul” (313d–e). While the comparison undermines sophistic expertise, Socrates leaves open the possibility that some might indeed know whether the learning that they sell is useful or not. He thus leaves open the possibility that a teacher could be either good (*ἀγαθός*) in knowingly selling what is *χρηστόν* for the soul or evil (*κακός*) in knowingly selling what is *πονηρόν* for the soul. Once again, Socrates indicates to Hippocrates that in submitting his soul to a sophist he does not know—regardless of whether Protagoras does—whether he does a good or bad thing (cf. 312c).

In drawing this parallel between sophists and merchants, Socrates depicts education as a kind of problem. In indicating that peddlers of goods do not know whether what they sell benefits or harms, he indicates that Hippocrates needs a method of evaluating what one intends to purchase, consisting in a kind of knowledge about what benefits or harms the soul.⁴⁸ Socrates emphasizes three times that only someone who is already an expert regarding what nourishes the body and soul is able to judge which of these various merchants peddles what is truly *χρηστόν* (313d–313e). But an expert physical trainer or physician should be able to tend to herself. If she does seek a merchant, it will be because she lacks either medicine or equipment necessary to administer self-treatment. But she already possesses knowledge of that nourishment itself. So, continuing the analogy

⁴⁸ See also Gonzalez 2000, 114. Gonzalez reads Socrates to be more unequivocally critical of the sophists than I do here, though we are in general agreement about the meaning of this section.

Socrates explains “If on the one hand then you chance upon knowing which of these things is χρηστόν and πονηρόν, it is safe for you to buy learnings both from Protagoras and from whoever else: if not on the other hand, see, blessed one, lest you should roll the dice and run the risk about what is dearest” (313e). In the case of the body, doctors or physicians might know without possessing what they need to treat themselves. But it is less clear that someone who is a knower of what is useful for the soul could know without possessing it in a similar manner. What φάρμακον for the soul would a knower need to seek from the sophist and which takes the form of a learning (μαθήμασιν) of what one already knows?

As the next step in Socrates’ analogy illustrates, nourishment for the body involves goods external to it while nourishment for the soul is necessarily administered or cultivated internally. Socrates warns that the danger in submitting to a treatment for the soul without knowing what such treatment consists in is greater than doing so for the body

It’s possible to buy food and drink from the retailer and wholesaler and to take them off in other containers; and it’s possible, before taking them into the body by drinking or eating them, to set them down at home and take counsel by calling upon someone knowledgeable as to what one should eat or drink and one shouldn’t and how much and when. As a result, the risk involved in the purchase isn’t great. But it isn’t possible to carry off learning in another container. Instead, for one who has paid the tuition and taken the instruction into the soul itself through having learned it, he necessarily goes off having already been harmed or benefited thereby (314a, Bartlett 2004, tr).

While elsewhere, Socrates distinguishes persuasion from learning on the basis that the former generates mere opinion while the latter generates true knowledge, Socrates speaks here from the position of a non-knower who seeks to learn (cf. *Gorgias* 455b). Non-knowers cannot so easily distinguish knowledge from opinion. Ignorance is not merely the absence of knowledge, but the presence of false opinions that are mistaken for knowledge. The main point that Socrates makes here is clear enough. Hearing a particularly persuasive

advertisement for some over-the-counter medication, for instance, a consumer could easily rush to the nearest pharmacy and purchase it. But at worst, until one takes the drug, it only occupies space in the medicine cabinet. It is possible at this point to investigate the matter further: conducting one's own research online, consulting with a doctor or other medical expert, or else consulting with someone who has direct experience taking the drug.

Of course, this does not altogether resolve the problem alluded to above. Without adequate and direct knowledge of the drug and its effects itself, how could the patient evaluate any additional information acquired? If she does not have the requisite knowledge to recognize whether the drug is beneficial or harmful, then presumably her research would be likewise uninformed. Likewise, she would not have the relevant criteria to discern for herself which expert to consult about whether and when to take the drug. The person with direct experience of the drug could speak to that experience, but neither one has any way of knowing whether it would affect both users in the same way. In absence of such sure knowledge, consumers need recourse to a combination of prudence and trust in expertise. In the case of the body's nourishment, there is a practical way around the dilemma of education but not yet a resolution.

Still, nourishment of the soul is different in kind and the dangers of ignorance, accordingly, more severe. To purchase learning—if one takes this act at all seriously—is to submit to it. One can imagine a student memorizing what a teacher says and testing it by repeating to others, without thereby taking it into her soul. But then it would seem the student has not yet really learned from the teacher and thus does not yet truly possess the learning for herself in a meaningful way. To take in a learning is to be transformed in some way by it. Learning, here conceived as nourishment for the soul, should cause the soul to

perform its work differently, which would mean that learning causes one to think and live differently. But the student cannot know beforehand whether her transformation will be for the better, such that she thinks and lives well, or for the worse. Socrates does not resolve this dilemma either. Instead, he proposes that the two men submit to multiple teachers, consorting not only with Protagoras but also with Hippias, Prodicus, and others while at Callias', too (314b–c). Here then, we witness Socrates warn Hippocrates of the risk that inquiry poses to his soul, while nevertheless encouraging him to inquire together with him while being in perplexity.

While Socrates does not appeal to recollection here, the attentive reader might at this point consider the notion of recollection as a way of understanding how learning is possible given the problems that Socrates articulates here. The notion that all learning is recollection would allow one to understand that a learner may in some sense know without yet possessing the learning that they seek from the teacher. Still, this situation is different from that of the doctor or the physical trainer, who has technical knowledge and thus can know precisely which nourishment is needed beforehand. The learner's knowledge is neither technical nor precise. On the model of recollection, even though the learner *knows* what she will learn in some sense, she has forgotten it and thus requires the teacher as the occasion by which she recollects what she has forgotten. She cannot anticipate beforehand what will be disclosed through the process of learning or recollecting. But this understanding of learning as recollection could also make sense of what appears to be Socrates' peculiar proposal to consult not just Protagoras but anyone the two men encounter while at Callias'. If learning is recollecting, then the learner is in some sense a measure of what they learn. If the learning they seek is in some sense already present within

their soul, then uncovering it is a matter of finding the right occasion or teacher who can help them to recollect it. Through consulting a number of different teachers, the two can test the effects of each on their soul and to see whether the student-teacher pairing is a match or not.

Since Socrates leaves this connection unstated, we cannot yet state definitively that this is what he has in mind. However, we can observe that Socrates has primed Hippocrates for the encounters that will follow by causing Hippocrates to recognize his own ignorance. Moreover, Socrates has made Hippocrates aware of the fact that as a learner, he is in principle ignorant of what he is to learn. Since learning is a nourishment for the soul, this ignorance is dangerous since any learning runs the risk of making the soul either better or worse. Made aware of this, Hippocrates can approach potential teachers in a more measured way. Instead of blindly trusting Protagoras with his soul, he can measure Protagoras and any number of other teachers against his soul to see whether he thinks and lives better or worse as a result of meeting with them.

Note, however, that Socrates still encourages Hippocrates to seek and accompanies him to Callias' house to meet Protagoras and the other sophists there. While one might interpret this as signaling a limit to Socrates' success in persuading Hippocrates—after all the young man still desires to meet the sophist after hearing from Socrates about the dangers involved—this slightly misjudges the goal of Socrates' exchange with Hippocrates. Socrates doesn't intend to stop the young man from attending Protagoras. Rather, he wants to prepare Hippocrates to meet not only Protagoras, but the other sophists—and Socrates too—as potential interlocutors in a joint inquiry into what is good for the soul. By causing Hippocrates to reflect on the nature of his desires, *and by*

emphasizing the dangers involved in any inquiry into what is unknown, Socrates encourages Hippocrates to act as Socrates does. That is, he encourages Hippocrates to seek anyway in a position of ἀπορία, rather than to avoid inquiry altogether in light of the risks.⁴⁹ He implicitly refines Hippocrates' ἀνδρεία to be oriented toward the courageous pursuit of what is truly his own good from within the ἀπορία suffered by one who cannot know what one hopes to learn by such a pursuit.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ See Hyland 1995, 6–7 and McCoy 2017, 160–161.

⁵⁰ Naturally, this section raises the question of how Hippocrates responds to Socrates' efforts, and the dialogue's conclusion leaves this underdetermined. We will attend to this question in chapter 5.

2.0 CHAPTER 2: THE CHARM OF PROTAGORAS

In the course of the dialogue, Socrates repeatedly guides Hippocrates through physical spaces. First, Socrates guides Hippocrates from within his house into the courtyard just prior to the first light of dawn (311a–b). Second, Socrates, likening himself to Odysseus descending to the underworld (315b, cf. Homer, *Odyssey* 11.601), guides Hippocrates into the house of Callias to converse with Protagoras and the assembled sophists (314c ff.). Finally, we are left to wonder whether Socrates successfully guides Hippocrates back out of Callias' house at the dialogue's end. Plato leaves this last instance unspecified, having Socrates say only "Having said and heard these things, we departed" (362a), remaining ambiguous as to whether Hippocrates is part of the "we" who leaves with him.⁵¹ Nevertheless, that Socrates is depicted as a guide, shepherding Hippocrates outside and inside, from darkness to light, foreshadows Protagoras' myth where the gods are said to guide human beings from within the earth into the light of day.⁵² This similarity, in turn, foreshadows Socrates' repeated association with Prometheus throughout the dialogue (cf. 316c and 361d). I will argue that Socrates' guidance of Hippocrates is Promethean, not in that Socrates exercises perfect forethought and thus altogether avoids the threat of afterthought, but rather in his anticipation and acknowledgement of the risks

⁵¹ Although, it is worth noting immediately that Socrates appears to be alone in the present conversation with the companion. Plato's depiction of Socrates' success with Hippocrates is ambiguous, to be sure. I delay my own interpretation of this ambiguity and a discussion of the debate surrounding it until chapter 5.

⁵² Sommerville observes a different, but interesting, parallel between the dramatic action in the *Protagoras* and the "Great Myth," arguing instead that the sophists assembled in Callias' house parallel pre-political human beings (see Sommerville 2019). While his analysis is creative and offers many helpful insights, mine complements it by indicating what more can be revealed by tracing the further parallel between Socrates and the gods in the myth.

of ignorance posed by the intrinsic nature of forgetting and afterthought in human inquiry. While Protagoras repeats Epimetheus' mistake of forgetting his own nature by aiming to overcome the risks of afterthought, Socrates' forethought consists in his recognition of afterthought as intrinsic to human nature.⁵³ This contrast, in emphasizing the importance of forethought and calculation in Protagoras' self-presentation, provides a new argument reinforcing interpretations that Protagoras conceals the undemocratic implications of his teaching under the cover of his mythological defense of civic virtues as a precondition for political society.⁵⁴

2.1 MYTHOLOGICAL SETTING

Now aware of the inherent dangers involved in accepting new learning into one's soul, Socrates and Hippocrates set out to meet Protagoras at the house of Callias. In his narration to the unnamed companion, Socrates still delays relaying the meeting itself, choosing instead to describe the scene that greets them just prior to their entering the house

⁵³ There are other thinkers who have noted that both Protagoras and Socrates in some way resemble Prometheus. Gonzalez links Protagorean foresight with an interest in survival and links Socratic foresight with the practice of becoming good (Gonzalez 2000, 141–142). Patrick Coby argues that Prometheus ambiguously represents both Socrates and Protagoras in the dialogues, and his analysis is extremely helpful in this regard (Coby 1982). He argues that Protagoras is Promethean insofar as Promethean wisdom amounts to the kind of foresight that ensures survival through technical arts while Socrates is Promethean insofar as Promethean wisdom represents an erotic striving to know more (Coby 1982, 139–141). I agree with this claim, but Coby's analysis, although it attends well to the shortfalls of Protagoras' wisdom, falls short of explaining how Promethean wisdom can represent erotic striving. I mean here to flesh out and defend these claims further by reintroducing the sense in which both thinkers likewise ambiguously represent Epimetheus. Protagoras is Epimethean insofar as he forgets his own limits in seeking perfect foresight. But Socrates is Epimethean insofar as he accepts these limitations and acts from within them.

⁵⁴ I here contribute to the tradition of scholarship that includes that of Bartlett, Coby, Gonzalez, Hemenway, McCoy, Roochnik, and Weiss against interpretations that read Protagoras unambiguously to defend democratic values such as those of Balla, Barney, Beresford, Manuwald, Nussbaum, and Woodruff.

itself. These narrative choices on Socrates' part—and, indeed, on Plato's—are remarkable for what they include and for what they exclude. First, Socrates mentions to the companion that Hippocrates and Socrates do not enter Callias' house immediately upon arrival but pause at the door in order to complete some λόγος they had begun on their walk over.⁵⁵ Given that Socrates does not recount for the companion the subject matter of that λόγος, one wonders why he should include this apparently trivial detail in his narrative at all.

Two possible reasons for including their unspecified conversation present themselves. On a dramatic level, that Hippocrates now apparently willingly delays meeting Protagoras reinforces our observation that Socrates succeeds—at least partially—in checking Hippocrates' eagerness to meet Protagoras.⁵⁶ This reading seems especially plausible since Socrates repeats the device once more just before they speak with Protagoras, remarking that the two “pass time on small matters” before finally turning to the sophist (316a). Just a little before, Hippocrates was all too eager to rush to Protagoras for instruction (see 310c–d and 311e–312a). But now, it seems that Hippocrates' excitement is to some degree more measured, even though he still chooses to converse with the sophist. On this reading, Plato presents Socrates presenting himself to the companion as wielding persuasive rhetoric successfully. If Hippocrates wants to learn from Protagoras how to speak wisely on the grounds that Protagoras alone is wise (310d), Plato has Socrates signal that he, too, is competitive in the practice of speaking, so characteristic of Protagoras' wisdom. But whereas Protagoras' rhetoric might aim at making others

⁵⁵ Nicholas Denyer points out that we are told in the *Symposium* that Socrates has a habit of lingering in doorways to complete a train of thought. He likewise connects this biographical detail to Socrates' claim in the *Theaetetus* that leisurely consideration of arguments is the ideal of philosophy. These connections reinforce our second interpretation of the delay's significance below. Nicholas Denyer, ed. 2008. *Plato Protagoras*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 78.

⁵⁶ See also Ewegen 2021, 109.

politically powerful (see 319a), the previous scene indicates that Socrates' rhetoric aims at causing Hippocrates to know himself by better understanding the nature of his own desires. If Protagoras empowers his students to influence others, Socrates empowers his interlocutors to know themselves. By causing his interlocutors to recollect the ultimate good at which their desires aim, along with their ignorance of what that good is, Socrates attempts to persuade his interlocutors to recognize the primacy of self-knowledge.⁵⁷ Hippocrates' desire to meet Protagoras is moderated to the extent that he now recognizes that he does not know the ultimate end driving his desire to meet the sophist. He still wishes to meet Protagoras, to be sure, but Socrates signals that his urgency in doing so has been curbed.

Second, while Socrates does not reveal the content of the particular λόγος that delays their entering Callias' house to the unnamed companion, he nevertheless indicates something of his own understanding of the nature of λόγος.⁵⁸ As Socrates puts it, a reluctance to leave the λόγος ἀτελής necessitates their delay: "But when we came upon the porch, standing, we were conversing about some λόγος, which fell to us along the road: therefore, in order that it might not become incomplete (ἀτελής), but bringing it to a conclusion in this way we entered, standing on the porch we were conversing until we agreed with each other" (314c). In simple terms, Socrates and Hippocrates desired to finish their conversation rather than leave the matter unsettled. Despite leaving the subject-matter of the conversation unspecified, Socrates provides several details about the conversation.

⁵⁷ See Ewegen 2021, 132–133.

⁵⁸ Gonzalez, too, reads this brief account as foreshadowing the difference between Socratic dialogue as collaborative inquiry into the good and Protagorean discourse as competitive debate (Gonzalez 2000, 115). See also Burnyeat 2013, Griswold 1999, and Senteny 2020 on the conceptions of dialogue at play in the dialogue.

First, the λόγος they seek to complete “fell to them along the road.” Socrates here subtly alludes to the question of where thoughts originate. Often, the most gripping thoughts demanding our attention are ones that apparently occur to someone rather than ones that originate of one’s own volition.⁵⁹ Neither Socrates, Hippocrates, nor the pair of them are said to have raised the topic purely of their own volition.

The ambiguous origins of our own thoughts indicate a limitation to our self-understanding. If thoughts “fall to us,” but nevertheless belong to us, then something about thought escapes our self-understanding. Nevertheless, it seems that the two have some say in the fate of the λόγος. If they leave the matter unresolved, the λόγος will become ἀτελής, incomplete, at least as far as they are concerned. Socrates indicates here a tendency to allow a λόγος to reach its end, which would imply that λόγος in itself is not of necessity incomplete.⁶⁰ Λόγος, Socrates implies, is capable in principle of being brought to completion. Here, Socrates suggests that reaching agreement is what would allow the λόγος to reach completion.⁶¹ In effect, Socrates describes, albeit in the most general terms, a successful philosophical dialogue. Two or more people with different opinions regarding some λόγος converse until they reach agreement about the matter at hand, forsaking their

⁵⁹ As Davis provocatively suggests, “Muses are the poetic sign that we are not simply the author of our own thoughts” (2020, 2). Ewegen, too, seems to have something like this in mind when he describes philosophical dialogue as rooted in ignorance wherein in recognizing one’s lack one allows the λόγος to speak by quieting one’s own voice (2018, 47).

⁶⁰ Note, however, that in reality Socrates regularly leaves λόγοι unfinished, as at the dialogue’s end. While λόγος aims at completion, it rarely if ever achieves it. As such λόγος in its incomplete state is something that points beyond itself to the completion at which it aims. Michael Davis argues a similar point in his remarks on the dialogue presented at Tufts University in 2022.

⁶¹ See also Burnyeat 2013, 422 and Sefergolu 2019, 348. I part ways with them in that I take the goals of agreement and completion to be necessarily provisional whereas they seem to think that such completion and agreement is not only desirable but possible.

previously held private judgments for the sake of the newly found shared opinion regarding that same λόγος.⁶²

Socrates presents himself to the companion as someone who is not interested in idle chatter. Λόγος has a purpose, and to engage in λόγος in good faith requires a willingness to seek out its end, or to allow the λόγος to reach its end.⁶³ But this claim needs to be qualified. In this brief aside, Socrates does not prove that all questions have a final answer, or one that could be articulated in λόγος. Rather, he indicates that he takes it for granted that λόγος can be brought to an end through agreement in conversation. Socrates in effect signals that such an assumption is an unstated presupposition of most, if not all, serious conversation, assuming a kind of implicit trust in λόγος.⁶⁴ Moreover, Socrates does not prove that reaching agreement through conversation would end the λόγος with finality. If the λόγος ends in truth about the matter at hand, discovering the truth should lead to common knowledge on the part of the two previously in disagreement. However, one can imagine a conversation in which people agree but still on the basis of opinion only, leaving its fidelity to truth and claim to knowledge itself unresolved.⁶⁵ Agreement may be a necessary condition for a λόγος between two people to be brought to resolution, but it has not been established as the sufficient condition for the λόγος to be brought to completion. Socrates in this way leaves incomplete the question of how to bring a λόγος to completion, while nevertheless indicating his own desire to achieve such completion in λόγος. Socrates

⁶² Ewgen describes philosophical dialogue similarly and emphasizes the importance of all participants being willing to change their minds (2018, 45). The dialogue's frame indicates the importance of receptivity when Socrates and the unnamed companion jointly agree and express "gratitude" to speak and to listen (310a). Contrast this with Protagoras' apparent reluctance to continue the conversation at key points (see, for example, 338e).

⁶³ Roochnik 1990, 33.

⁶⁴ Roochnik 1990, 142. Cf. *Meno* 86b–c.

⁶⁵ This is what Glaucon complains is deficient about the end of *Republic* I. He demands they not merely opine that justice is good in itself, but that Socrates provide further demonstration that this is true (357a–b).

indicates here that λόγος even if it remains incomplete, nevertheless points beyond itself to the completion at which it aims, culminating in truth about the matter at hand. And precisely this kind of λόγος is what we see Plato practice when he, too, ends this dialogue before its interlocutors bring it to completion. Philosophical dialogue is depicted in this early aside as a striving toward a complete λόγος with the implicit recognition that such a goal might be unachievable due to limitations in human knowledge.⁶⁶

Gonzalez likewise proposes that this brief passage offers a picture of Socratic philosophy as “engagement in dialectic with the goal of arriving at a common understanding” in contrast with the picture of Protagorean rhetorical contest about to be displayed.⁶⁷ He plausibly offers dialectic as just such a method to test whether a λόγος benefits or harms the soul, and his reading bears out in the dialogue between Protagoras that follows wherein Socrates tests Protagoras’ λόγοι for the mutual benefit of Hippocrates and the rest. Nevertheless, Socrates’ trust in λόγος having a completable end might seem to be in tension with his suggestion that thoughts fall to us. If the origins of thought remain unknown, then it is unclear how a λόγος of such a thought could be completed. In fact, agreement is more often than not the starting point for Socratic inquiry rather than its culmination. While Gonzalez’s view that dialectic can test what benefits or harms the soul emphasizes the positive achievements of philosophical inquiry, this tension points to the aporetic character of those gains. That Gonzalez too recognizes the aporetic character of philosophical inquiry is evident in his characterization of philosophy as a middle point between knowledge and ignorance, always striving to be—becoming—good without ever

⁶⁶ See Ewegen 2018, 53.

⁶⁷ Gonzalez 2000, 115.

remaining so.⁶⁸ By focusing on forgetting and the aporetic character of philosophical inquiry, I do not mean to undermine its positive achievements, but only to further complicate the relationship between genuine philosophical inquiry as a continuous striving toward knowledge and Protagorean sophistry. Underemphasizing the ἀπορία intrinsic to philosophical inquiry risks painting too simple a contrast between philosophy and Protagorean sophistry. Even when this tendency avoids the trap of dogmatic faith in philosophy—as Gonzalez’s reading clearly does—it risks not adequately accounting for the difficulty Socrates routinely faces in conversation with sophists who hold relativistic positions of various degrees and kinds.

While neither we readers nor Socrates’ unnamed companion witness the conversation between Hippocrates and Socrates, Callias’ doorman does overhear them:

Now in my opinion the porter, a certain eunuch, was overhearing us, and it’s likely that he was annoyed by the frequent entries into the house, on account of the number of sophists there. At any rate, when we knocked on the door, he opened it and said upon seeing us, ‘Ugh! Sophists! He’s not at leisure!’ At this he slammed the door with both hands as hard as he could (314c–314d, Bartlett 2004, tr.).

Whatever was said, to the doorman’s ears, sounded indistinguishable from the sophistic conversations taking place inside Callias’ house. Or, as Bartlett puts it, “To the mostly (but not entirely) uninformed, Socrates and the sophists are one. There is a superficial kinship between philosopher and sophist.”⁶⁹ Considering the erotic themes developed in the preceding chapter, it is worth noting here that it is a eunuch who attempts to stop Hippocrates and Socrates short in their pursuit of Protagoras. Someone incapacitated with respect to desire is unable to distinguish between philosophy and sophistry. Unable to bring his own desires to completion, perhaps the eunuch is unable to recognize the erotic longing

⁶⁸ See Gonzalez 2000, 130 and. 141.

⁶⁹ 2018, 17–18. See also McCoy 2007, 80, Benitez 1992 (229).

that might separate philosophy from a certain form of sophistry.⁷⁰ On the other hand, perhaps the tendency to express a desire for completion while nevertheless leaving conversations incomplete might also seem sophistic to the “most (but not entirely) uninformed.”⁷¹ From the outside, Socrates’ conversational habits might resemble either Protagorean sophistry in their tendency to end in ἀπορία or else dogmatic certainty when they reach apparent conclusions on tenuous grounds.⁷²

At any rate, Socrates denies the identification of the philosopher and the sophist, and the eunuch reluctantly allows the two to enter the house. Socrates then describes poetically and at some length the scene and cast of characters who greet them upon entering the house of Callias. As many others have pointed out, Socrates repeatedly quotes from Book XI of Homer’s *Odyssey*, describing Odysseus’ descent into Hades (see 315b and 315d). Socrates thereby implicitly identifies himself as Odysseus, Callias’ house as Hades (and therefore, the eunuch guarding the front door as Cerberus guarding the underworld), and at times explicitly identifies others with mythical figures.⁷³ Socrates spots Protagoras first and describes an inner and outer circle of followers surrounding him.⁷⁴ The inner circle, following the sophist closely, is composed of Callias, prominent Athenian youths, and Antimoerus, who, Socrates tells us, is the most highly reputed of Protagoras’ students

⁷⁰ Gonzalez makes a similar observation (2014, 41).

⁷¹ Bartlett 2018, 18.

⁷² Several interlocutors point out this tendency for Socratic eristic to seem deceptive or dogmatic. For example, Glaucon in *Republic* II claims Socrates has not really proven that justice is good in itself (357a–b), while Callicles complains that Socrates jokes defending a view that cannot really be his and deceiving his interlocutors rather than earnestly inquiring (see, in particular, 489b–c).

⁷³ I am indebted to many in my discussion of the mythological allusions present in this section of the text. See, for example, Bartlett 2018, 20 and Benardete 2000, 186. Segvic and McCoy both point out that these allusions are comical insofar as they compare the sophists to incomparably exalted figures against to whom they cannot possibly measure up (Segvic 2006, 257 and McCoy 2017, 158–159).

⁷⁴ My analysis is indebted to Bartlett’s extended treatment of the inner and outer circle of Protagoras’ followers 2018, 18.

and who has the intent of becoming a sophist himself.⁷⁵ An outer circle composed mainly of foreigners follows behind. Socrates further indicates the division between the inner and outer circle by suggesting that Protagoras, like Orpheus, charms such foreigners (and some Athenians, too) so that, charmed, they follow his voice from city to city. Bartlett proposes that this distinction among Protagoras' followers might indicate that part of Protagoras' wisdom or cleverness at speaking consists in his ability to speak differently to different people, depending on whether they are members of the inner circle, apt to hear and learn more from his teaching, or those of the outer circle, who remain charmed without perhaps taking in as much as those in the inner circle.⁷⁶ Indeed, Socrates says of those in the outer circle that they follow behind "hearing the things being said" (ἐπακούοντες τῶν λεγομένων), suggesting that they do not even hear all that Protagoras has to say.⁷⁷ As if to emphasize this point, those in the outer circle follow Protagoras' charming voice, the sound or timbre of his speech, rather than either the man or his λόγος directly (315b). This fact serves as an early indication that even after listening to the sophist himself one may come away without thereby learning who the sophist is and what he does.⁷⁸

Directly after thus introducing Protagoras, Socrates quotes Homer's *Odyssey* taking on the voice of Odysseus describing Heracles: "'After him, I noticed,' as Homer said, Hippias the Elean" (315b). By likening Protagoras to Orpheus, Hippias to Heracles, and himself to Odysseus, Socrates draws an implicit parallel between the three men on the basis of their mythological counterparts. Orpheus, Heracles, and Odysseus are all mortals—

⁷⁵ Denyer points out this might be a slight insofar as we have no records of Antimoerus beyond what the text reveals here, suggesting that he did not come to acclaim despite being the most promising of Protagoras' students. Denyer 2008, 81.

⁷⁶ Bartlett 2018, 18.

⁷⁷ See also Denyer 2008, 81 on the implications of the genitive object here.

⁷⁸ See Bartlett 2018, 18.

albeit Heracles only half-mortal—who descend to the underworld while alive and who manage to reascend. All three mortals are said to have godlike capabilities, but this power derives from different faculties in each. Orpheus’ musical ability is second to no other mortal, and his particular power is to move and persuade others through mere sound (compare with Protagoras’ followers chasing his voice at 315b). Heracles, though lacking in intelligence, has an overabundance of physical strength and daring. Homer depicts Odysseus as πολύτροπος, ever-resourceful, and clever, someone who is capable of learning and adapting to the minds and ways of others. If the former two possess a kind of positive power of influencing others through either charm or brute force (see 319a), Odysseus’ power is in the first place receptive and adaptive. This comparison, in particular, foreshadows Socrates’ repeated association with Prometheus as the god with forethought who renders humans resourceful (εὐπορία) through his stolen gifts. All three figures are capable of moving between the realms of the living and the dead, displaying godlike abilities while remaining mortal all the while. Perhaps one link between the sophist and philosopher, then, is this certain godlike capability to maneuver between diverse spaces and perspectives. What distinguishes them, then, may relate to the sophists’ being primarily directed outward toward persuading others, while the philosopher’s power is in the first place receptive and occasions receptivity in others, as I have argued elsewhere, and as we have seen already in Socrates’ conversation with Hippocrates.⁷⁹

While Gargarin argues that both Socrates and Protagoras through their mythological counterparts are depicted as alive and capable of leaving Hades, within the context of his own narrative allusion, Socrates as Odysseus alone is alive, visiting

⁷⁹ See Winn (Barry), 2021 and Ewegen 2021, 52.

Protagoras as a kind of shade of Orpheus in the Hades-house of Callias.⁸⁰ As others have pointed out, the depiction of Socrates as Odysseus and the sophists as shades in Hades indicates that while Socrates is lively, the sophists are lifeless, requiring money just as the shades require blood to speak.⁸¹ I add that Socrates, who physically moves inside and out, from darkness to light, is both engaged in the Hades-world of shadow-appearances and invested in the reality beyond which they point. This points to the fact that while Protagoras may give off an Orphic appearance of flexibility, he remains always inside, content to dwell in appearances (see 311a).

Next, Socrates likens his own teacher, Prodicus, to Tantalus before praising him, whether earnestly or ironically, as a man who is “altogether wise.” Given this praise, it is puzzling that Socrates should liken the sophist to the most loathsome mortal of the mythological foursome. Gonzalez plausibly argues that the depiction of Prodicus as Tantalus reinforces the dialogue’s erotic theme,⁸² suggesting that the sophists are lifeless in that their cleverness is without ἔρως, while Socrates remains fully animated by erotic longing.⁸³ While the sophists forget the erotic origins of inquiry in treating dialogue as a mere means to conquer others in debate, Socratic dialogue erotically aims at wisdom. On Gonzalez’s reading, the eunuch doorman and Prodicus as Tantalus both reinforce the distinction between frustrated and inept ἔρως in the sophistic world in contrast with

⁸⁰ Gargarin 1969, 140. He takes this similarity to suggest that Plato presents a sympathetic portrait of Protagoras, and this to me remains dubious. Rather, the similarities between Protagoras and Socrates indicate rather the genuine alterity between them underlying these apparent similarities and that Protagoras poses a considerable threat to Socratic philosophy.

⁸¹ See, for instance, Gonzalez (2014, 40–41).

⁸² Perhaps, as Bartlett suggests, Prodicus, too, has some access to immortal truth but nevertheless insults the gods, but this interpretation would seem to require extratextual evidence to support and cannot be fully addressed here (2018, 20).

⁸³ Gonzalez 2000. Roochnik likewise and more generally distinguishes sophistry from philosophy because philosophy is fundamentally erotic while sophistry renders *eros* inept by denying the ultimate object of longing (Roochnik, 1987).

Socrates' erotic depiction in the opening scene with the unnamed companion and his conversation with Hippocrates. It is surprising that, in this connection, Gonzalez does not note the support that the depiction of Protagoras as Orpheus lends this interpretation. Orpheus turns around too quickly to achieve the ultimate object of his desire, which would seem to foreshadow Protagoras' own turning away from the question of virtue's nature at the dialogue's end, to be discussed further in chapter 5 (361e).

Prodicus' voice reinforces the theme of unfulfilled and frustrated desire or intention. While Socrates characterizes Protagoras' voice as similar to Orpheus' music in its penetrating charm, he remarks that Prodicus' voice is so deep that it conceals what he says amid the rumble of voices and movement in the room (315e–316a). Younesie has pointed out that words related to the voice recur frequently in this dialogue, arguing that the question of voice in relation to person is of special concern.⁸⁴ Voice, he argues, originates from within each speaker and can either reveal who speaks or can change according to context or situation.⁸⁵ This, it would seem, should relate to the more general concern noted in the previous chapter between appearance and concealment, and between what appears and its way of appearing. Remarkably, Socrates makes no mention of what Protagoras says to the inner and outer circle, whereas he remarks specifically that the nature of Prodicus' voice (in the loud room) conceals what he says. Here, Younesie points out, Prodicus, who specializes in distinction, ironically has an indistinct voice.⁸⁶ This could, as Younesie implies, belie Socrates' implicit criticism of Prodicus' claims to clarity, or it could reflect that they are in a context in which clarity is thwarted, or both. It seems to Socrates that

⁸⁴ Younesie 2019.

⁸⁵ Younesie 2019, 183.

⁸⁶ Younesie 2019, 184.

were the room quieter, he could discern whether Prodicus' words are wise or not. Perhaps this is an indication that, regardless, Protagoras' words, for all the beauty and charm of his voice, amount to his saying nothing. Or else it could be that Protagoras conceals himself and his λόγος so thoroughly as never to fully appear to others. In what follows, we will have reason to suppose that both statements are true of Protagoras' speech.

2.2 MEETING PROTAGORAS: DISCLOSURE AND CONCEALMENT

When the two finally speak with Protagoras, the sophist indicates early in their conversation that he practices some form of self-concealment. This indication gives some credence to the second interpretation of Socrates' description of Protagoras' voice offered above. Protagoras almost immediately alludes to his interest in self-concealment, and Socrates responds accordingly:

“And I said, ‘Protagoras, you know, we have come to you, both I and Hippocrates here.’

‘Do you wish,’ he said, ‘to converse alone or with the others?’

‘To us, on the one hand,’ I was saying, ‘it makes no difference: on the other hand, hearing why we have come, you yourself consider it’” (316b).

That Protagoras asks whether Socrates and Hippocrates wish to converse alone with the rest of those present at Callias' house suggests that the audience of his speech is a concern for him. Socrates recognizes this at once and implicitly contrasts his own stance with that of Protagoras, claiming that whether they speak alone or before the rest makes no difference to him or to Hippocrates. Socrates presents himself here, in contrast to

Protagoras, as someone whose speech will not be affected by his audience. At the same time, Socrates makes a show of sensitivity to Protagoras' implied concern, urging Protagoras to consider for himself whether he would prefer to speak alone or with the rest once he hears why they have come. However, Socrates will promptly demonstrate that he misrepresents himself here. His speech does indeed alter when he speaks with Protagoras alone as opposed to when he speaks with the assembled group (compare 316b–316c with 318a).⁸⁷ Moreover, he repeatedly narrates the audience's response to the conversation that ensues, betraying his own interest in their participation. It would seem, then, that Socrates, too, practices a form of self-concealment, in appearing to separate himself from the sophist with respect to an ability that the two share to alter their speech to suit their intended audiences.

When speaking only with Protagoras, Socrates discloses certain details about Hippocrates to Protagoras that he will soon conceal when speaking to the assembled group. Socrates first describes their intent in coming to Protagoras as follows:

Hippocrates here is a son of Apollodorus, one of the natives, from a great and fortunate household, and he himself seems, with respect to his nature, to be a match to those equal to him in age. And to me he seems to set his heart on becoming held in high regard (ἐλλόγιμος) in the city, and this he supposes will come to be above all if he should get together with you: therefore, now consider these things, whether you suppose that it is necessary to converse about them only to us alone or with others (316b–c).

Socrates here presents Hippocrates as a promising and desirable prospective student. Socrates notes his esteemed lineage, his family's prosperity, and his nature, which, though middling—Socrates says only that he is a match with others of his age—is by no means

⁸⁷ See Bartlett 2018, 22 and 24–25. Elsewhere, Socrates indicates his preference for private encounters over public displays, in particular, throughout the *Apology*, where he suggests he is unaccustomed to the manners of public speaking.

indicated as inferior. As importantly, Socrates discloses finally what he perceives to be Hippocrates' ambition in studying with Protagoras. Namely, Hippocrates desires to become held in high regard (ἐλλόγιμος) in the city. That the word ἐλλόγιμος can also mean "eloquent" suggests a connection between the art of rhetoric associated with sophistry and Hippocrates' perceived political aspirations. In a democratic city such as Athens, eloquence would seem to be a crucial characteristic for one hoping to be held in high regard.⁸⁸ While Hippocrates blushes at the idea of becoming a sophist (312a), his desires as Socrates describes them seem to demand that he should acquire at least this sophistic expertise at persuasive rhetoric.

Protagoras appreciates Socrates' sensitivity and willing discretion. His response foreshadows the myth he will soon compose and reintroduces our theme of forgetting more explicitly: "‘Correctly,’ he said, ‘you take forethought (προμηθῆ), Socrates, on my behalf’" (316c). The word προμηθῆ is etymologically connected to the name of the mythical hero, Prometheus, whom Protagoras will soon discuss in his myth. Moreover, forethought is a kind of anticipation, a counterpart to forgetting. If forgetting often signifies a failure to remember something past, then the anticipation involved in forethought often signifies an ability to recognize something about the future. Protagoras' words indicate that Socrates might possess that faculty of forethought which will be seen in the myth as a corrective to Epimethean afterthought, a kind of forgetting. Ironically, Prometheus acts in the myth only after his brother, Epimetheus. Forethought in the myth is a corrective that takes place only after afterthought forgets. Here, however, Protagoras praises Socrates for taking forethought before any offense has been committed, or in such a way that anticipates the

⁸⁸ See also Versenyi 1963, 7.

danger that Protagoras faces, rather than forgetting and only after-the-fact responding to the danger. If Socrates' likening himself to Odysseus indicates that he might possess a resourceful intelligence and an ability to adapt to the minds and ways of others, perhaps Protagoras' praise that Socrates takes Promethean forethought links Odyssean resourcefulness with Promethean forethought.

Socrates' forethought is appropriate due to the dangers of hostility and jealousy that Protagoras claims attends foreigner sophists like himself who travel to various cities and persuade the young there to associate with them rather than their own company of natives (316c–d). This danger is nothing new, according to Protagoras, and so long as sophists have practiced their crafts, they have also developed devices to protect against the associated risks. Protagoras takes pride in distinguishing himself from his counterparts in the measures that he takes to protect against the dangers involved in sophistry. Other sophists, he tells Socrates, attempt to conceal themselves and their sophistic art in order to avoid these dangers:

And I declare, on the one hand, that the sophistic τέχνη is ancient, on the other hand that those of the ancient men practicing it, fearing the offense of it, made and put over themselves a cloak. For some, on the one hand, [the cloak was] poetry, such as for Homer, Hesiod, and Simonides, for others, on the other hand, in turn, initiations and prophecies for Orpheus, Muses, and their followers... All these men, just as I say, being afraid of ill-will, made use of these τέχνηαι as curtains (316d–e).

While Protagoras signals that something might be unsavory about sophistry by claiming that others who practice it conceal that they do so, his inclusion of widely respected Greek figures like Homer and Hesiod would appear to legitimate the practice. Protagoras here plays on the ambiguous meaning of sophists as either any wise person—including skilled practitioners of τέχνηαι—or men such as Protagoras himself who wander from city to city

teaching rhetoric and other skills for a fee.⁸⁹ If Greeks are nearly unanimous in praising the likes of Homer, and the poet is in fact a sophist like Protagoras with his own way of teaching wisdom, then it would seem that the Greek suspicion of sophistry is mere prejudice. But without an adequate picture of what Protagoras takes sophistry to be, his inclusion of the famous poets cannot be assessed. Nevertheless, what Protagoras makes clear is that sophistry is a dangerous art, and its practitioners are subject to ill-will should others recognize them as such. Protagoras thereby implies a distinction between himself as a member of the few who recognize the value of sophistry and the many who seek to shun it. According to Protagoras, his predecessors have guarded themselves against the hostility of the many by adopting other, more respectable τέχναι as cloaks or curtains behind which to conceal themselves and their sophistry. When we praise Homer as a poet, we fail to notice, according to Protagoras, his sophistic teaching.

Nevertheless, Protagoras critiques the ancient sophists' cloaks on the grounds that they failed both as cloaks behind which to hide and as a means of avoiding others' ill-will:

For I hold that they did not obtain anything that they wished for—for they did not escape the notice of those among human beings able to act in the cities, for the sake of which very thing these cloaks exist: since the many, at least, so to speak, perceive nothing, but whatever these men proclaim, these things they repeat—therefore, to run away, for one running away who is not able to do so but is clearly seen (καταφανής), is even a great folly of an attempt, and, by necessity, it furnishes much more hostility for the human beings, for they hold such a man, in addition to the rest, to be a rogue (πανοῦργον: more or less literally, “all-daring”) (317a–b).

Protagoras identifies a twofold failure on the part of his predecessors. Most basically, the cloaks that they furnished as curtains behind which to hide their sophistry did not adequately conceal their practice. While the device sufficed to deceive the many, it failed

⁸⁹ On the ambiguity of “sophistry” in 4th and 5th century BCE Greece, see Versenyi 1963, 6–7; Denyer 2008, 1–2; and Kerferd 1981, 24–39.

to deceive those for whom it was intended, the powerful few capable of action in the city. But it appears that the most damning failure is the act of concealment itself. Indeed, it is on this very point that Protagoras distinguishes himself most clearly from his predecessors: whereas they sought to hide their sophistry behind other arts, Protagoras openly acknowledges his sophistry (317b–c). But despite all this, concealment need not be a failure in and of itself. Rather, Protagoras states only that it is a failure to run away through self-concealment for the sophist who is unable to do so effectively. Only if the sophist fails to conceal her sophistry adequately, remaining instead *καταφανής*, clearly apparent or seen, is her attempt to conceal herself a folly. Presumably, were the sophist able to conceal herself thoroughly, her attempt would be justified, given that she would likewise hit upon what she wishes, escaping the notice of the powerful few. Failing complete concealment, however, she doubles her risk. For, the sophist who is perceived not only as a sophist but also in her attempt to conceal herself as such suffers much more hostility. Not only do those who judge her blame her sophistry, but they perceive her in addition as a *πανοῦργον*, a doer of all deeds and thus a roguish transgressor.

Protagoras critiques his predecessors for revealing themselves to be both cowards in attempting to escape and fools for attempting to do so despite their incapacity to flee without being caught. It is no wonder then that Protagoras characterizes his break from his predecessors as absolute: “Therefore, I have walked the altogether opposite road, and I grant both that I am a sophist and that I teach human beings, and I suspect that this caution is better than those, agreeing rather than denying” (317b).⁹⁰ Protagoras presents himself, in absolute contrast to his predecessors, as neither so cowardly as to flee the masses’

⁹⁰ See also how he further distinguishes himself from his predecessors at 317a “But I don’t concur with them in any of this.”

hostility through self-concealment nor so foolish as to attempt and fail to do so. Instead, he openly, and with apparent courage given the risks, admits that he is a sophist and teaches others. But that he characterizes this very openness as a “caution” (εὐλάβειν) signals that his course is not so different from his predecessors’ course as he suggests. Rather than being an unambiguous mark of courage, Protagoras’ openness is as motivated by the concern for self-preservation as is the others’ concealment.⁹¹ Indeed, he even mentions having considered and adopted “other measures” with the stated result (ὥστε) that he has avoided suffering despite openly professing his sophistry (317b–c). Self-preservation is very much on Protagoras’ mind.

We are left to suspect that one of two things follows from what Protagoras says here. First, we might infer that Protagoras recognizes that he is unable to conceal himself, and thus his openness is no measure of courage, but rather a mere act of self-preservation to avoid much more hostility for being caught in the act of self-concealment. Or else, perhaps Protagoras’ openness is a more complete—and therefore more successful—form of self-concealment, his own cloak.⁹² By professing that he is a sophist without revealing plainly what exactly his sophistry consists in, Protagoras can escape the hostility of both the many and the powerful few.⁹³ The dramatic arrangement of Protagoras’ inner and outer circle of followers suggests that both might in some sense be true. Perhaps Protagoras reveals more to those in the inner circle, while for the rest, he gives the appearance of being transparent while remaining always concealed and keeping himself at a distance. Those in the outer circle follow only Protagoras’ voice, but perhaps they understand neither his

⁹¹ See Hemenway 1996, 7; McCoy, Bartlett, Gonzalez, Ewegen, etc.

⁹² See also Hemenway 1996, 4–5 and Ewegen 2021, 112.

⁹³ See also Coby 1982, 144 and Bartlett 2018, 23.

words nor the man himself. Moreover, the presence of the inner and outer circle recalls the initiation rites that Protagoras notes Orpheus uses, wherein the inner circle might be those initiated into Protagoras' teachings. As Nightingale explains, initiates in the Orphic mysteries were said to dwell together with gods in a separate realm of Hades from those who were uninitiated in the mysteries, similar to Protagoras' inner and outer circles.⁹⁴ Moreover, Orphic poems were said to "speak in riddles" by which he could at once reveal truths to those who were initiated while remaining concealed to those who were not.⁹⁵ Recalling that Socrates has just compared Protagoras to Orpheus, perhaps such an initiation and way of speaking are some of the "other measures" Protagoras employs in addition to his apparent openness. In any case, while Protagoras may depict himself as no fool, neither is he so bold as he would have the audience believe, a failure which will become central to the conversation about courage later in the dialogue.

Having thus claimed total transparency, Protagoras at last responds to Socrates that he would take much pleasure in making a speech before all those present (317c). Protagoras presents his willingness to speak to all as a mark of his courage and confidence despite simultaneously revealing self-preservation as his abiding concern. Socrates' narration to the companion further undermines Protagoras' noble-self presentation: "And I—for I was suspecting that he wished to make a display for both Prodicus and Hippias, and to pride himself that we were coming as his lovers—"What then," I said, "shall we not call Prodicus

⁹⁴ Nightingale 2021, 146. Nightingale's own focus in her work is on the fruitful connections between Orphic traditions and Socrates' practices and accounts of human life in other dialogues. This cannot be attended to here, since doing so would take us too far afield from the unique context of the Protagoras, but her analysis would seem to open up further interesting questions about the relationship between Protagoras and Socrates, worth exploring elsewhere. Here, I would remark only that Nightingale largely emphasizes parallels in content between Orphic teachings and Socratic philosophy (especially in the *Phaedo*), while the parallels between Protagoras and the Orphic tradition here seem to center more on their methods.

⁹⁵ Nightingale 2021, 140–141.

and Hippias and those with them, in order that they may hear us?’” (317c–d). Far from Protagoras’ preference being a selfless and courageous act for the benefit of the others present, Socrates suggests rather that Protagoras merely wanted to show off. Socrates implies, too, that he has adequately appeased Protagoras’ pride in presenting himself and Hippocrates as his lovers, students in pursuit of his wisdom. Thus, while Protagoras presents himself as courageous and prudent, he reveals his prudence to be motivated by self-preservation,⁹⁶ and Socrates’ narration corroborates and expands Protagoras’ self-interest to include an immoderate interest in self-aggrandizement.

But Socrates’ self-presentation here is complicated too. As we saw, he initially pretended that, in contrast to Protagoras, it makes no difference to him whether they speak privately or in public (316b). While one might infer from this statement that Socrates’ speech would not differ whether speaking with Protagoras alone or together with the rest, what follows reveals this inference to be false. Protagoras asks Socrates to repeat once more why he and Hippocrates have come, to which Socrates responds:

And I said that my beginning is the same, Protagoras, as the very thing which I said just now, about those [reasons why] we came. For Hippocrates here happens to be in desire (ἐπιθυμία) of your company (τῆς σῆς συνουσίας): whatever therefore will turn out for him (αὐτῷ ἀποβήσεται), if he is in your company, he says that he would learn with pleasure. Such was our λόγος (318a).

Left out of the public explanation is the details of Hippocrates’ lineage and prospects as a student, as well as his desire to become held in high regard in the city. As Bartlett suggests, the former seems unnecessary to repeat and might be impolite to state before all.⁹⁷ On the other hand, withholding Socrates’ interpretation of Hippocrates’ desire to become great in the city and replacing it with a question about what Hippocrates would achieve by getting

⁹⁶ To that extent, Protagoras’ pretense to courage is in fact rather cowardly.

⁹⁷ Bartlett 2018, 24–25.

together with Protagoras allows Socrates to put Protagoras to the test and to inquire more directly about Protagoras' teaching.⁹⁸ If Protagoras had hoped that his openness would allow him to remain hidden in plain sight, Socrates will nevertheless try to lead Protagoras to reveal himself. Socrates, too, it seems, wishes to put on a show. But while Protagoras' apparently bold openness betrays his underlying caution, Socrates' apparently modest display is rather courageous. Here, Socrates is a young man, rising in recognition, courageously willing to combat an established figure renowned for his wisdom in front of others.⁹⁹ Moreover, while Protagoras' aims are self-interested, Socrates' aims are at least in part oriented toward the audience, so that they may learn for themselves who Protagoras is and what effect his teachings will have on their souls.

Further, by questioning what Protagoras teaches, Socrates recalls for Hippocrates (and readers) the conversation that the two had prior to their arriving at Callias'. Hippocrates, Socrates tells the group, desires to be together with Protagoras (τῆς σῆς συνουσίας). The word, συνουσίας, has a range of meanings, from being-together with someone, to attending someone as a student, to engaging in dialogical or sexual intercourse. Accordingly, the word brings together several themes introduced in the earlier scene between Socrates and Hippocrates. First, together with the mention of desire (ἐπιθυμία), συνουσία recalls the dialogue's erotic themes. Here, Socrates presents Hippocrates as a young lover in pursuit of Protagoras. At the same time, Socrates indicates that Hippocrates' desire is not so much for Protagoras himself, but in seeking to be his student, Hippocrates wants to learn what will turn out for him (αὐτῷ ἀποβήσεται) as a result of being-together with Protagoras. This recalls for Hippocrates both the importance of recognizing the true

⁹⁸ Bartlett 2018, 25.

⁹⁹ Davis made this observation in his 2022 remarks on the dialogue at Tufts University.

object of his desire and the discovery that he made in the previous conversation that he puts himself at risk in studying with Protagoras without knowing beforehand what “learning” Protagoras offers. The verb ἀποβήσεται in its decidedly middle form, suggests that what turns out for Hippocrates will not be simply passive or instrumental, but rather that it is something that will issue within him and for him. Hippocrates himself will change as a result of meeting with Protagoras, and Socrates asks on Hippocrates’ behalf what exactly the nature of that change will be.

The implication would seem to be that if Hippocrates could recognize the true object of his desires, then he would be better able to measure whether the learning that Protagoras offers will help him to achieve those ends. This would also indicate why Socrates does not repeat his belief that Hippocrates wishes to become ἐλλόγιμος in the city. Perhaps Socrates indicates that this desire itself is not fully thought through: Hippocrates still needs to inquire further to find out what drives that desire, or for what purpose he desires to become great in the city, and in what such greatness would consist. Further self-knowledge is required for Hippocrates to become a measure of Protagoras’ teaching. Once again, Socrates exhibits Promethean foresight but this time on Hippocrates’ behalf, in seeking to discover beforehand or to anticipate what change will take place and in service of what end. At the same time, we recall that insofar as such learning cannot be “carried off in a vessel,” Socrates’ own account of the learning he seeks to examine undermines the possibility of the impartial scrutiny he pretends (314a–b). Once more then, even when exercising forethought, Socrates indicates its limits.

Protagoras’ initial answer is that Hippocrates will return “in a better state” as a result of getting together with him, and that so long as he studies with Protagoras, each day

he will become better by degree (318b). This answer is too general to satisfy Socrates' demand for—and Protagoras' claim to—transparency.¹⁰⁰ Protagoras' initial statement that Hippocrates will become better by studying with him does not suffice, according to Socrates, because it is nothing wonderful (οὐδὲν θαυμαστόν). This signals that a satisfying answer would begin the process of learning by sparking wonder in the interlocutor who seeks to learn.

While Socrates aims to anticipate the transformation that will take place within Hippocrates from studying with Protagoras, his expectation that an adequate answer would invoke wonder once again implies that such anticipation might not strictly speaking be possible. As Socrates emphasized in the previous conversation with Hippocrates, the learning by which a soul is nourished cannot be evaluated impartially beforehand but must be something undergone. If Gonzalez proposes that dialectic can serve as the method by which to test whether something benefits or harms the soul, perhaps we can add wonder as a necessary component to dialectic so construed.¹⁰¹ For one lacking perfect self-knowledge, wonder would seem to stand in for a criterion by which to judge what is learned since wonder would prompt the student toward further inquiry. Wonder, it seems, could serve as a corrective to the danger posed in seeking to learn. Through wonder, what is learned is not yet accepted into the soul in such a way as to alter the learner with finality. Instead, wonder allows the soul to be altered in a way that promotes further inquiry and alteration. This continuous transformation through wonder parallels the structure of a λόγος striving for (without necessarily achieving) completion that seems to mark philosophical discourse. Socrates demonstrates this practice in his conversation with Hippocrates prior

¹⁰⁰ See also German 2022, 50–51.

¹⁰¹ Gonzalez 2000, 114.

to entering Callias' house. Perhaps Socrates' appearance of seeking total foresight, then, itself conceals his own recognition of the primacy of forgetting or concealment. Put differently, while Socrates urges Hippocrates to seek what he will learn from Protagoras by emphasizing the importance of forethought, his own sense of wonder as a *striving* for completion signals rather that something always remains concealed.

In an attempt to lead Protagoras to specify what precisely he teaches and thus in what way Hippocrates will become better, Socrates once more employs the τέχνη-analogy (318b–d). Just as Hippocrates would become better in painting by studying with Zeuxippus, or better in aulos-playing by studying with Orthagoras, Socrates asks in what exactly Hippocrates will become better by studying with Protagoras. While the τέχνη analogy readily exposes Hippocrates' weakness and lack of foresight in his failure to find an adequate response in their earlier conversation, here Protagoras believes it affords him an opportunity to demonstrate his strengths. Protagoras' excitement is evident in his response to Socrates: "And Protagoras, hearing these things from me, said, 'You ask beautifully (or "nobly," καλῶς), Socrates, and I rejoice at giving a response to one who asks beautifully'" (318d).

While Hippocrates has heard that Protagoras can make others skilled or uncanny at speaking (δεινὸς λέγειν, 312d), Protagoras here commends Socrates for being beautiful or noble at asking. We have noted in the previous chapter that both Socrates and Protagoras are described as being δεινὸς λέγειν. We suggested that for Socrates, this consists in guiding interlocutors toward philosophical reflection while for Protagoras, this consists in a power of political persuasion. Protagoras' words seem to hit upon this point further if it can be said that what makes Socrates δεινὸς λέγειν is, in part, his ability to ask questions

beautifully or nobly. That is, Socrates asks questions in such a manner that guides friendly interlocutors toward philosophical reflection by occasioning and cultivating wonder in them, as we witnessed him attempt in his prior conversation with Hippocrates, or else in such a manner that seduces hostile interlocutors to expose themselves unknowingly. Of course, Protagoras knows not what he says, for his compliment is motivated by his own gratification at Socrates' questioning. Recalling that Protagoras had accused the other sophists of hiding behind τέχνη as shields, Socrates' τέχνη-analogy affords Protagoras the perfect opening to further distinguish himself from his sophistic counterparts. Perhaps another feature of Socrates' δεινὸς speaking is that he is able to ingratiate himself with his interlocutors by asking questions that appear to be asked beautifully (καλῶς) to them but that likewise nobly (καλῶς) lead interlocutors to expose themselves to further reflection.

Protagoras happily takes the opening offered by the τέχνη analogy to further distinguish himself from his counterparts who, he claims, mistreat the young by coercing them to study τέχνη in which they have no interest:

Coming to me, on the other hand, he will learn for his part nothing other than about that for the sake of which he has come. And the learning is good counsel about domestic affairs—how he might best manage his house—and about the things of the city—with respect to the things of the city, how he might be most able (δυνατώτατος) both to act and to speak (καὶ πράττειν καὶ λέγειν) (318d–319a).

Protagoras suggests that Hippocrates will learn nothing but exactly what he desires from Protagoras, namely, to be ἐλλόγιμος in the city. Protagoras interprets both senses of ἐλλόγιμος, promising that Hippocrates will become δυνατώτατος, most able or powerful in action and speech. But in his promise that Hippocrates will learn from him “good counsel” both about domestic affairs and the city, Protagoras offers in addition that Hippocrates will learn from him how to manage his own domestic affairs as well. The

inclusion of domestic affairs, coupled with the claim that Hippocrates will learn *only* about that for which he comes to Protagoras, would suggest a connection between domestic and public affairs upon which Protagoras does not expound here. And, in fact, he loses the opportunity to do so when Socrates reinterprets his teachings with reference only to the public sphere: “I said, ‘Am I following your speech? For you seem to me to speak regarding the political art and to take it upon yourself to make men good citizens’” (319a). As others have pointed out, then, it is Socrates and not Protagoras who first brings up the notion of political τέχνη as Protagoras’ domain.¹⁰² In doing so, Socrates prescinds from half of what Protagoras offers, attending only to the good counsel about the city and leaving behind or allowing all to forget good counsel about domestic affairs.¹⁰³ We remember that it is also Socrates who first formulates Hippocrates’ desire to become ἐλλόγιμος in the city, and thus restricts Hippocrates’ interests to the public sphere. Hippocrates explicitly states only that he wishes to study with Protagoras on the basis of his reputation for wisdom, generally.¹⁰⁴ Thus, it would appear that Socrates himself restricts the scope of investigation to public affairs, although with the implicit consent of Hippocrates, who does not oppose Socrates’ characterization of his interests, and the explicit consent of Protagoras, who replies emphatically, “‘Then, this is the very profession,’ he said, ‘that I profess.’”¹⁰⁵

It is striking that Socrates seems to drive the exclusion of domestic affairs from their conversation and all the more so that his interlocutors permit his doing so. By effectively leaving domestic life forgotten, Socrates and his interlocutors attend solely to

¹⁰² See Bartlett 2018, 25–26.

¹⁰³ See Roochnik 1990, 53.

¹⁰⁴ Although he does reveal his interest in reputation and clever speaking.

¹⁰⁵ Notably, Protagoras’ use of the *men solitarium* suggests but leaves unstated the “other hand” of his profession, domestic affairs.

the public world of politics, reputation, and appearances. At the very least, this exclusion would suggest that the conversation is a partial one, since a full conversation of what Protagoras professes to teach would involve consideration of domestic affairs. But, in addition, it would seem that such an exclusion risks distorting the conversation at hand. If political life and excellence are in some way related to or even dependent on domestic affairs, then perhaps the following conversation, which seeks to understand whether the political art is something teachable is doomed to fail from the start.

We need only recall the various tensions between the public and domestic spheres depicted in Greek tragedy to note that a full discussion of political excellence requires an account of its relationship to domestic excellence. Socrates' concluding critique that they asked first whether political art is something teachable before first asking what it is (361a), might be a necessary failure on the basis of their exclusion of domestic affairs. An understanding of political art would seem to have necessary recourse to domestic affairs as its counterpart. Moreover, one thinks of the striking opening scene of Sophocles' *Antigone*, where Antigone and Ismene converse out in the open, bringing the traditionally enclosed and private feminine action into the open and anticipating the dramatic conflict between Antigone's domestic concern for burying her brother and Creon's political demand that all traitors be denied ritual burial (*Antigone* 18–19). Here, the sophists remain inside the guarded house of Callias, discussing political affairs without ever physically entering the public sphere. Contrast this scene, too, with the previous one at Socrates' house into which Hippocrates freely bursts before dawn. As if to emphasize this contrast, as Socrates and Hippocrates move outside to the courtyard, Socrates tells Hippocrates that Protagoras

spends most of his time indoors (311a). For all Protagoras' claim to being utterly transparent, Socrates' private dwelling seems more hospitable to public discourse.¹⁰⁶

Restricting the scope of their conversation to the political sphere prescinds from the guarded, private context of their discourse. A question occurs: why does Socrates effect a forgetting of the domestic sphere, which seems so important? To begin an answer, perhaps Socrates' omission reveals something true about his interlocutors. Hippocrates might say he is interested in Protagoras' wisdom generally, but his interest follows solely from others' opinions and thus from Protagoras' mere reputation and public appearance to others. Socrates therefore infers that Hippocrates is interested more in reputation, in being ἐλλόγιμος in the city, than in what greatness grounds such a reputation. To be sure, the privacy of Callias' house reinforces the subversion of Protagoras' claim to openness given his interest in self-preservation. But its similarity to Hades and the implied depiction of its inhabitants as shades, might suggest further that the sophists lack the depth of soul to attend to both the political and private spheres, and therefore to either one adequately.

In his lengthy response to Protagoras' assent that he teaches the political art, Socrates questions the art's teachability using the τέχνη-analogy, drawing from both political and domestic examples, and complicating his own exclusion of the domestic sphere.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Socrates begins with his own claim to frankness by which he signals his doubt that Protagoras has spoken plainly: “Surely a beautiful (or “noble,” καλόν)

¹⁰⁶ Bartlett 2018, 18.

¹⁰⁷ It is worth noting that there is some debate about whether or not teachability is a necessary condition for something to be a τέχνη. Thus, Gonzalez suggests that by questioning the teachability of political τέχνη, Socrates implicitly questions whether there is such a thing as a τέχνη corresponding to political affairs. See Gonzalez 2000, 116. On the other hand, Adkins suggests that Socrates and Protagoras continue to assume a τέχνη for political affairs even while questioning its teachability since on his view a τέχνη is “any activity which reliably attains to an end” (Adkins 1970, 5). Since Socrates does not explicitly raise here as he does in the *Gorgias* the status of the political art as a τέχνη, we will attend to its teachability and leave this debate to the side.

artifice, then,’ I was saying, ‘you have procured for yourself, if indeed you have procured it: for I will tell you nothing other than the very thing which I have in mind’” (319a). Socrates’ indication that he will speak openly, coupled with his expressed doubt about whether Protagoras has procured the “beautiful artifice” he professes to teach, together suggest that he doubts whether Protagoras has been altogether direct and honest thus far about his ability to teach the political art.¹⁰⁸ Socrates’ basis for his doubt rests on his experience in both the political and the domestic spheres. Politically, he says, those in the assembly consult only experts in matters of τέχνη but anyone indiscriminately in matters of general political concern (319c–d). A shoemaker would be mad if he were to intervene in a matter related to shipbuilding, but both she and the shipbuilder alike would be welcome to voice their opinions in matters of general political concern.

In the domestic sphere, Socrates indicates that those “wisest and best” citizens of Athens hire experts to teach their sons other arts but do not seem able to transmit their own political excellence to their sons (319d–320b). He notes that Pericles evidently hired experts to teach his sons—who are present during this conversation—many subjects, but apparently could not impart his own excellence to them: “with respect to the things in which he himself is wise (αὐτὸς σοφός ἐστιν), neither does he himself teach [them] (αὐτὸς παιδεύει) nor does he give them over to someone else (320a).” As Kerferd notes, Protagoras and Pericles were quite close, so this is no small remark from Socrates.¹⁰⁹ If Pericles were to give his sons over to anyone, it would likely be Protagoras, and their presence here suggests that he did just that. Instead of meaning that Pericles makes no such attempt to teach his sons his own excellence, Socrates here rather boldly observes that such efforts

¹⁰⁸ On the ways in which Socrates softens the potential insult, see Denyer 2008, 96.

¹⁰⁹ Kerferd 1981, 43.

seem to have failed. Compared to their father, the young men are simply unremarkable. Pericles has not taught them, and neither, it seems, has Protagoras, what exactly it is that makes Pericles great.

If Pericles here is said to be wise (σοφός ἐστίν) and we take that comment unironically in light of his evident greatness, then it would seem that something about wisdom itself escapes being teachable. His sons, who presumably know their father as well as anyone else, would surely *know* in some sense what makes him great, and yet still be unable to become similarly great themselves. Musicians who study music theory might know well enough what makes Beethoven great without being able to compose music as great as his. Or more to a point that will become central later in the dialogue, someone might know quite well what the courageous action in a given situation would be and still fail to choose it at the critical moment. Pericles' greatness is singular; he himself is wise. Knowing, Socrates surprisingly implies here, might not suffice for true wisdom in excellent action, which seems to require that one become excellent in deed, too.

Socrates infers from the evidence provided by both spheres that such excellence is not teachable:

Therefore, Protagoras, looking into these things, I do not consider virtue to be teachable: on the other hand, hearing you saying these things, I bend (or “submit;” κάμπτομαι) and I suppose that you say something, because I consider that you become experienced in many things, and have learned many things. If then, you have it in you to show (ἐπιείξαι) us more clearly that virtue is teachable, do not begrudge (μὴ φθονήσης) us, but show us (ἐπιδείξον) (320b–c).

In both of his reasons for doubting the teachability of political τέχνη, Socrates appeals to the views and opinions of the many in order to emphasize the contrast with Protagoras' own view on the political τέχνη implied in his claim to teach it. Moreover, Socrates' appeals to both public and private spheres to show that virtue is not teachable, and this

implies once more a connection between domestic and public life.¹¹⁰ The ἀρετή that one learns at home might inform the kind of citizen one becomes, and the kind of citizen one is might influence one's behavior at home. If, like Homer, Greek tragedians teach a certain wisdom, then the claim to teach both political and domestic excellence becomes all the more dubious. As noted above, Greek tragedies often depict tension between the aims of political and domestic life, such that excellence in one sphere might directly infringe upon excellence in the other. It is in part Agamemnon's civic commitment to his πόλις that leads him to take pride in his abhorrent paternal decision to sacrifice Iphigenia.¹¹¹ Antigone's devotion to her brother emboldens her transgression against the city.¹¹²

Socrates begins by discussing πολιτικὴ τέχνη in particular but switches to a discussion of ἀρετή in general when he discusses whether great men like Pericles can bestow their own ἀρετή on their sons.¹¹³ All of this might suggest a further complex connection between moral and political ἀρετή, which Socrates neither expounds nor insists on here. Nevertheless, Socrates subtly transitions from challenging whether Protagoras teaches πολιτικὴ τέχνη in particular to examining whether he teaches ἀρετή in general, suggesting that political affairs primarily concern ἀρετή rather than τέχνη and that ἀρετή underlies or ought to underly true political prowess.

¹¹⁰ In entreating Protagoras to demonstrate the teachability of ἀρετή, Socrates asks him not to begrudge (μὴ φθονήσης) his listeners as the many hold grudges against the sophists, (cf. 316d).

¹¹¹ See Nussbaum 1986, 34–39.

¹¹² Hegel 1977, 284.

¹¹³ A. W. H. Adkins analyzes the historical ambiguity of both τέχνη and ἀρετή at length. He proposes that the sense of ἀρετή was under development in the late 5th century Greece. Whereas ἀρετή originally meant a collection of competitive excellences by which individuals achieved and sustained success and prominence, it was coming to mean in addition those “co-operative” excellences that together amount to ἀρετή in the sense of virtue. By playing on the ambiguity himself, Socrates provides Protagoras to further exploit the ambiguity to advertise the universality of ἀρεταί such as justice in such a way that appeases democratically inclined listeners while promising to teach a τέχνη that can promote the competitive ἀρετή of political excellence that distinguishes people like Pericles and might lead to rather undemocratic conclusions. Adkins, A. W. H. 1973. “Ἀρετή, τέχνη, Democracy and Sophists: Protagoras 316b–328d.” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 93: 3–12. For a contrary view, see Kierstead 2018, 70.

2.3 PROTAGORAS' MYTH

Protagoras responds by asking those assembled how he should demonstrate virtue's teachability: "But, Socrates, he said, I will not bear a grudge: but in which way am I to show you: as an older man to younger men, by telling a myth (μῦθον λέγων) or by going through a λόγος" (320c).¹¹⁴ Protagoras implies here both that he can separate myth from λόγος and that the two are somehow interchangeable.¹¹⁵ He can convey the same meaning through myth or λόγος, suggesting that the manner of speech does not alter its content.¹¹⁶ While ἐπιδείκνυμι often occurs in the middle/passive voice, Protagoras' use of the active voice here suggests that he sees himself as showing others what he knows without thereby revealing himself in the process. Despite all his claims to openness, Protagoras avoids putting himself on display by stating his own beliefs and convictions plainly.¹¹⁷ His reluctance to reveal himself is understandable. As others have noted, Socrates' challenge demands that Protagoras both defend the egalitarian principles underlying Athenian democracy and his own promise to teach some to excel.¹¹⁸ Denying the former would

¹¹⁴ Earlier, Socrates had used the less common active form of ἐπιδείκνυμι in his entreaty to Protagoras to show the teachability of virtue, presumably because the ὥς clause served as a direct object. Protagoras here preserves Socrates' use of the less common active voice despite the absence of a direct object. In itself, this is not altogether uncommon in the Greek, since the direct object from Socrates' command can be inferred. However, given that ἐπιδείκνυμι does occur more often in the middle/passive voice, especially when a direct object is missing, it seems worth noting that Protagoras uses only the active voice, while Socrates uses the middle/passive form exclusively following this exchange. Hippias/Prodicus too uses the active voice when he offers to make his own display. Cf instances where Prot. Uses active and Soc uses middle. See also Denyer 2008, 99 on the implications of ἐπιδείξει.

¹¹⁵ See Benardete on this point (2000, 186). One might wonder whether the very nature of the Platonic dialogue, which weaves together myth and λόγος both in its narrated depiction of philosophical arguments and often within those arguments themselves, implies Plato here critiques this assumption on Protagoras' part.

¹¹⁶ In this way, Protagoras anticipates the later elision he makes between giving a λόγος of virtue and its poetic treatment, to be discussed in chapter 4 (cf. 339a).

¹¹⁷ See also Golub 2021, 310.

¹¹⁸ See Kerferd 1953, 42 and 1981, 133; Hemenway 1996, 7; Sommerville 2019, 128.

imperil the sophist by upsetting Athenian democrats while denying the latter would disappoint ambitious students like Hippocrates. Protagoras finds a way out of this difficulty, it seems, by first telling a myth in which virtue is shared by all and following up with a λόγος in which he tacitly suggests that he may nevertheless teach a trade that ensures safety and success for his students.¹¹⁹

Stating that it would be more graceful to tell a myth, Protagoras begins.¹²⁰ “Once upon a time, there were gods, on the one hand; there was not yet the mortal race, on the other hand. But when the apportioned time for their origination came, the gods molded them within the earth mixing from earth, fire, and as many things as are compounds of fire and earth” (320c–d). As others have pointed out, the generation of human beings and other mortal creatures seems to have no intrinsic purpose on Protagoras’ rendering.¹²¹ The gods merely form them at the apportioned time (χρόνος εἰμαρμένος) of their coming into being, suggesting that even the gods are subject to this unspecified necessity. The earth and fire

¹¹⁹ See Coby 1982, 144; Bartlett 2018, 36; and Weiss 2006, 136.

¹²⁰ Presumably, he decides this in accordance with his status as an older man, although McCoy has pointed out that the subject matter likewise justifies a mythological setting. To explain whether ἀρετή is teachable entails an account of human nature with recourse to the origins of humanity, which is a necessarily mythological subject matter. McCoy 1998, 22. For a different, but likewise interesting take on Protagoras’ choice to tell a myth, see Bartlett 2018, 29. There are a series of rather large and complexly related debates about whether Protagoras’ myth means to indicate an atemporal, philosophical truth or whether it contributes to a tradition of *kulturegeistiche*, or a narrative about the development of cultures or else whether it presents a contractualist or naturalist account of human society. Versenyi (1963), Barney (2019), Bonazzi (2022) argue that Protagoras speaks ahistorically, attempting to disclose something essential about the human condition. Beresford (2012) represent the view that Protagoras has a naturalist conception of human society. Güremen (2017) seeks to resolve the debate by noting how Protagoras makes developmental and contractualist claims. See also Kierstead 2018, 71. The nuances of such debates are tangential to our purpose here, but I will address them implicitly in observing Protagoras’ habit of switching between the imperfect and historical present tenses. In sum, my position is closer to Güremen in his reluctance to take sides in such matters. Although, rather than aiming to resolve contractualist and naturalist accounts in Protagoras’ argument, I think the myth indicates truths about human nature that remain unchanged from our original condition as products of the gods’ oversight. Benardete observes that preceding his λόγος with a myth mirrors the narrative frame of the dialogue, which presents the account as a story told to the unnamed companion (2000, 186). We add to this observation the further parallels between Protagoras’ myth and the dialogue’s dramatic action, opening and concluding this chapter.

¹²¹ Versenyi 1963, 24; McCoy 1998, 24; Roochnik; Beresford 2013, 145 and 147.

from which humans and other mortals are composed are wholly physical and natural elements, although as McCoy points out fire comes to be associated with the technical arts which Prometheus will eventually procure for humans.¹²² Still, that human beings share the same physical compounds with other mortal creatures emphasizes humanity's merely natural, material origins.

Protagoras continues:

But when [the gods] were about to lead [the mortals] toward light, they commanded Prometheus and Epimetheus both to order and to distribute (κοσμήσαι τε καὶ νεῖμαι) powers (or “capacities” δύνάμεις) to each as fitting. But Epimetheus begs¹²³ Prometheus for permission for himself to distribute (αὐτὸς νεῖμαι), ‘After my distributing (νείμαντος δε μου),’ he said, ‘you review’ and persuading in this way, he distributes (νέμει)” (320d).

Since humans have no intrinsic purpose, they cannot be distinguished from other mortal creatures on this basis.¹²⁴ Any such distinction is provided only extrinsically and under apparently contingent guidance from Prometheus and Epimetheus. The gods command the brothers both to order (κοσμήσαι) and to distribute (νεῖμαι) powers, but the brothers attend more to the distribution of powers than to their ordered arrangement. Protagoras names Prometheus first and Epimetheus second and says that the gods requested the brothers first order and second distribute the powers. Had the brothers ordered their own distribution, with Prometheus ordering the powers and Epimetheus distributing them, presumably powers would have been distributed to mortals in accord with an ordered foresight. However, words related to κοσμέω occur only three times in the myth (their only mention in the dialogue), while words related to νέμω occur 11 times in the myth, as well as once

¹²² McCoy 1998, 24. Despite our material origins, Benardete suggests human beings are solely mind on Protagoras' reading, emphasizing the absence of women in the myth as a further indication of his disembodied account (2000, 188).

¹²³ At this point, Protagoras switches to the narrative present.

¹²⁴ Cf. Roochnik 1990, 62; Coby 1982, 140; McCoy 1998, 24 and 2007, 63, and German 2022, 52.

before and twice after it.¹²⁵ Indeed, the dialogue's only occurrence of "unordered" (ἀκόσμητον) describes Epimetheus' failure to distribute powers to the rational beings, emphasizing that the distribution has been carried out without order (321c).

The only time a relative of νέμω appears prior to the myth, Socrates uses it to describe the sons of Pericles and other excellent men, who, "going about graze just as if let loose (περιύοντες νέμονται ὥσπερ ἄφετοι) (320a)," where νέμονται means to "graze" or "dwell."¹²⁶ In context, Socrates uses this phrase to illustrate the failure and presumed inability of excellent men to train their sons, who instead of becoming excellent themselves, roam about as their appetites suit them in an apparently disordered manner.¹²⁷ Given the prevalence of νέμω in Protagoras' myth, we might suppose that he was inspired by Socrates' image of grazing sons. This seems all the more likely when one realizes that περιύοντες can mean not only "going around" but also "surviving, remaining alive, existing," wherein the sense would be that the sons of great men dwell in a state of mere survival as if "let loose" or lacking direction ordered toward a purpose. Taken in this way,¹²⁸ Socrates' statement about sons of excellent men foreshadows the picture of human nature suggested in Protagoras' myth.

¹²⁵ Denyer likewise remarks on the frequency of words related to νέμω in the myth but his account does not connect these instances to the others in the dialogue (2008).

¹²⁶ Νέμω is also the root of the Greek words νόμος and νομός, where the former designates law, custom, or tradition and the latter designates pasture, field, or food.

¹²⁷ It is worth noting with Denyer (2008, 99) and Bartlett (2004, n52) however, that the allusion in Socrates' phrase is to sacred cattle and would not have been an insulting one.

¹²⁸ Interestingly, the grammar permits that it may be taken still a third way by translating περιύοντες as "succeeding" wherein the sons of excellent men "succeeding, distribute themselves just as if unimpeded." While context would suggest against this reading and even what I take to be Protagoras' reinterpretation seems like a more severe indictment than Socrates intends here, the picture is nevertheless worthy of reflection. Someone with a sunnier view of the human condition than Protagoras has might have distorted Socrates' view to mean that excellence, though perhaps not teachable, is acquired through leisure.

It is precisely when Protagoras recalls the brothers' discussion of distribution that he switches from the past tense when discussing the gods and generation of mortals to the narrative present. Perhaps, then, for Protagoras, humanity's current situation is one of living in accordance with arbitrary, unordered powers dwelling in a world without purpose beyond mere survival.¹²⁹ Our world, for Protagoras, is Epimethean in nature, where the basic human condition is characterized by disorder and lacking foresight.¹³⁰ We already have evidence to corroborate this picture: Hippocrates is unable to judge beforehand whether or not attending a sophist will benefit or harm him. If indeed he can evaluate his experience at all, he can only do so from a stance of afterthought, retrospectively, having already undergone the harm or benefit. We saw too that Socrates does not offer a way of avoiding this difficulty but rather exhorts Hippocrates to beware of the dangers and investigate together with him and others.

Protagoras next describes Epimetheus' distribution, returning to the past tense:

And, distributing (νέμων), he was granting strength to some without swiftness, he was adorning (ἐκόσμηι) others, weaker ones, with swiftness: and he was arming some, and while giving others an unarmed nature, he was contriving some other power for their preservation. To those whom he was restraining with smallness, he distributed (ἔνεμεν) winged flight or an underground dwelling: and those whom he was increasing with greatness, by this means he was preserving them: and in this way he distributed the rest, making [them] equal. And he was contriving these things having good counsel (εὐλαβεῖν ἔχων) lest any race be annihilated (or "unseen" αἰστωθείη) (320d–321a).

The second mention of κοσμέω occurs in Protagoras' description of Epimetheus' distribution, wherein while Epimetheus granted strength to some without swiftness, he "adorned" (ἐκόσμηι) weaker creatures with speed. The ordering with which Epimetheus is

¹²⁹ Beresford argues that Epimetheus represents a total lack of design involved in creature generation and therefore our total dependence on luck (2013, 144).

¹³⁰ See also Bartlett 2018, 37.

concerned—as befits his name—follows after his distribution, where what is distributed to some must be arranged for by adorning others with different characteristics or capacities, so that he maintains an equilibrium among all the species. Protagoras emphasizes repeatedly the goal of preservation (σωτήριαν) or avoidance of annihilation (αἰστώω). Epimetheus’ distribution to all must make all equal lest any one species have great enough power to annihilate any of the others. But it appears that this takes place reactively rather than proactively; once he distributes a certain power (such as speed) to one creature, he must counterbalance that advantage through his distribution of a different power to another.¹³¹

In addition to contriving means for the creatures to avoid mutual destruction, Epimetheus also provides them protection against the elements commanded by Zeus and apportions means for the nourishment and reproduction of each species. The distribution is reactively ordered toward the survival of each mortal species. Moreover, the verb for the annihilation Epimetheus wishes to avoid, αἰστώω, can also mean “unseen.” Recalling that the gods asked Prometheus and Epimetheus to provide for the mortal creatures in anticipation of their being brought to light, we see that this suggests a correlation between appearance and existence. All that exists is capable of being seen, of being brought to light, and death or annihilation is to disappear from sight forever. This again recalls the depiction of Callias’ house as Hades, Protagoras’ claim to utter transparency, and his equivalence between myth and λόγος. In all these instances, Protagoras’ world is depicted as one of appearance, either suppressing or failing to recognize the distinction between seeming and being so that to be is to appear to others.

¹³¹ See also Golub 2021, 317.

Despite the reactive care that Epimetheus takes to ensure the equitable power distribution and self-preservation of all the nonrational beings, he forgets to provide for the rational beings: “So then, inasmuch as Epimetheus was not entirely wise (σοφός), it escaped him (or, awkwardly in English, “he escaped himself”: ἔλαθεν αὐτὸν) that he used up the powers for the nonrational beings: the race of human beings remained precisely unordered (ἀκόσμητον) by him, and he was perplexed (ἠπόρει) as to what he might make of them” (321b–c). While Protagoras often uses the imperfect tense to describe Epimetheus’ action throughout the myth, he uses the aorist to describe the moment of oversight (ἔλαθεν) with respect to human beings, suggesting that this error is final and the situation that results from it is irreversible. Denyer notes that ἔλαθεν αὐτὸν can also indicate a more fundamental failure by Epimetheus: that he escapes himself or fails the Delphic command to know himself.¹³² To Denyer’s analysis, we can add that the verb λανθάνω is the root of forgetting (ἐπιλανθάνομαι) such that Epimetheus, in escaping himself, forgets that it is in his nature to forget. Moreover, Epimetheus’ oversight results in humans being forgotten in the cosmic distribution. Human beings are unprovided for, by nature or by gods, and remain fundamentally unordered (ἀκόσμητον), outside of even the haphazard, reactive order toward survival set out by Epimetheus, let alone a divinely ordered cosmos.

Epimetheus’ error, Protagoras suggests, follows from his lack of wisdom. McCoy points out that Protagoras seems to hold Epimetheus responsible for the oversight to the exclusion of allotting any blame to Prometheus.¹³³ After all, it is Epimetheus who persuades his brother to let him make the distribution in the first place. McCoy also looks

¹³² Denyer 2008, 103.

¹³³ McCoy 1998, 24–25.

to this very capacity for persuasion as a hint to what Protagorean wisdom might consist in, since a positive account of wisdom is conspicuously absent in the myth.¹³⁴ That skill in rhetoric and persuasion plays a fundamental role in Protagorean wisdom is almost indubitable, and McCoy's proposal that Epimetheus' act of persuasion should point in that direction is likewise plausible, despite Protagoras' criticism here. Epimetheus' ability to persuade his brother singlehandedly shapes the course of human history on Protagoras' read.

However, we see here already that such persuasive rhetoric and power does not exclusively constitute wisdom according to Protagoras. Epimetheus' persuasion fails to benefit human beings directly. Epimetheus' distribution singularly strives for species-preservation. He achieves that goal for non-rational animals and fails at it for human beings. Moreover, his failure consists precisely in his nature which lacks foresight, a nature which he forgets in his very act of persuasion. Left only with Epimetheus' oversight, human nature is wholly negative, characterized by a lack of contrivance for their own survival. True enough, as a result of Epimetheus' oversight, this negativity becomes an open-endedness that allows human beings to surpass mere animality. But this transformation happens only after Prometheus responds to Epimetheus' oversight by

¹³⁴ Although the term σοφία appears at 321d. Grube likewise notes that wisdom is conspicuously absent in the myth. He connects this to Protagoras' rejection of the technical sciences practiced by other sophists in order to suggest that Protagoras has no clear sense of wisdom at all (1933, 204). Given Protagoras' admitted need for concealment, it is at least as plausible to conclude, with McCoy for instance, that he does have an implicit though unstated notion of his own wisdom, whether or not he would intend to teach that wisdom to others (cf. Hippocrates' statement at X). Whether his notion amounts to a "clear" conception will need to be evaluated at a later point. Benitez, too, infers from Protagoras' account that persuasion is included in his political art, but he infers this from Protagoras' claim that the many follow whatever the powerful few say (1992, 235). Coby, too, assumes that persuasion contributes to Protagorean political wisdom and adds to persuasion the art of self-concealment as the complimentary political virtue (1982, 146). We will substantiate that claim through attending to Protagoras' discussion of prudence as the virtue that ensures survival and orders rhetorical persuasion.

providing human beings further contrivance to provide for their own survival. Thus, we might add to McCoy's characterization of Protagorean wisdom that such a power of persuasion depends for Protagoras on the foresight with respect to what confers benefit. This may well be the εὐβουλία that Protagoras claims to teach, an ability to anticipate and thus to avoid any danger to one's survival. This is both the very foresight for which he praises Socrates just before he begins this account and for which he prides himself in openly professing his sophistry (316c and 317b).

There is another complication to the story, however, and that is the fact that Prometheus' foresight doesn't prevent him from being persuaded by his brother, Epimetheus.¹³⁵ We know from all versions of the myth that Prometheus is, on the one hand, resourceful to the point of deception, but on the other hand, that he is a loving and kind-hearted god. It is, perhaps, because of a love and care for his brother that Prometheus allows Epimetheus to make the distributions, resulting in human beings' oversight. Then, out of love and care for human beings, Prometheus steals fire and technical wisdom from the gods for their benefit to his own ruin. At the same time, his foresight doesn't prevent his suffering ἀπορία in facing the consequences of Epimetheus' oversight. Protagoras, in praising Prometheus' forward-looking resourcefulness without attention to its motivating care and outward-looking benefit, aims at a foresight that is more perfect even than that of his hero in the myth.

If love and care is what momentarily blinds Prometheus, then the myth suggests that perfect foresight, if possible at all, is most achievable if oriented toward one's own survival, forsaking others who may prove distracting. To avoid incurring risk from others

¹³⁵ I am indebted here to correspondence with Bartlett, whose comments caused me to place more emphasis on this element of the story.

likewise avoids being open and vulnerable toward others. Plato depicts Socrates, on the other hand, as being so wholly oriented toward the care of his interlocutors, willing to resort to rhetorical tricks to elevate their self-awareness, that he incurs their hatred, resulting in his own ruin. Prometheus' and Socrates' fates might make them look weak to Protagoras. But Prometheus is the god of foresight who lets himself be persuaded by his brother and who steals from the gods knowing what punishment he will for his theft. Likewise, Socrates continues his philosophical inquiries well-aware of the hostility that he incurs in doing so. It might, in fact, be the case that Socrates and Prometheus both recognize and accept the risks of vulnerability and act anyway, just as we see Socrates encourage Hippocrates to seek wisdom despite the risks any such inquiry poses to his soul.

Having forgotten to distribute powers to human beings and thus excluding them altogether from any semblance of being ordered even toward mere survival, Epimetheus is in ἀπορία as to what to do with human beings (ἡπόρει ὅτι χρήσαιτο, 321c). Elsewhere in the Platonic dialogues, ἀπορία often results from interlocutors' inability to find or articulate the nature of something under investigation.¹³⁶ Here, Epimetheus' ἀπορία follows from the absence of any given nature with respect to human beings along with his own oversight, which results in their having no special powers belonging to them. His ἀπορία signals his inability to contrive of any means by which to provide for their survival. At root, due to Epimethean oversight, human beings are defenseless against the at best indifferent and at worst hostile world in which they dwell. Epimetheus renders human beings like himself, an afterthought. If Epimetheus' nature is to forget, and this forgetting puts him in ἀπορία,

¹³⁶ In fact, this dialogue concludes aporetically in that sense, since Protagoras and Socrates never decide whether or not virtue is teachable (361?)

then we might conclude that forgetting and ἀπορία characterize humanity, too, insofar as human beings resemble this Titan.

Protagoras speaks again in the present tense, and I preserve the transition between the tenses in my translation, though awkward in English:

And Prometheus came to [Epimetheus], who was perplexed, (ἀποροῦντι δὲ αὐτῷ) for the purpose of reviewing his distribution (τὴν νομήν). And he sees,¹³⁷ on the one hand, that the other animals are entirely harmonious; on the other hand, the human being is naked, barefoot, without beds, and unarmed: And already, too, the destined day was present, on which human beings, too, needed to go out from the earth into the light. Therefore, Prometheus, being perplexed (ἀπορία οὖν σχόμενος) as to whatever salvation he could find for the human being, steals from Hephaestus and Athena their technical wisdom together with fire—for [the technical wisdom] was by no means without fire to become possessable itself or useful for anyone—and in precisely this way he gifts (δωρεῖται) to human beings... From these, εὐπορία came to belong to human beings for their life (321c–e).

Protagoras' use of the present tense suggests that the human situation remains today as it was then. Just as our natures remain unclad and unprovided for, so also we retain the means for our preservation described here. That the νομήν Prometheus observes could mean either distribution or "pasturage" again recalls Socrates' image of sons grazing like cattle. The human condition is in no privileged position, to put it mildly, and we have no special role or τέλος in life besides survival. Indeed, nonrational animals are in an "entirely harmonious" state; their physicality befits their survival in the world and in relation to other creatures on the whole, and the world provides sufficient nourishment for them.¹³⁸ If anything, the roles of nonrational animals and human beings are reversed, where nonrational animals are in the privileged position prior to Prometheus' interference. The situation puts Prometheus, too, in ἀπορία.

¹³⁷ Here Protagoras switches once more to the narrative present.

¹³⁸ Granted, nonrational animals kill and eat each other, but as indicated within the myth itself, their physical natures are well-equipped for these contests without further contrivance.

The human condition is altogether different from that of the other animals and remains so; our physicality is unsuitable to brute nature and unequipped for survival.¹³⁹ Epimetheus has inadequately attended his flock. It is only because Prometheus—still in ἀπορία—steals fire and technical wisdom from Hephaestus and Athena that humans have any means for survival.¹⁴⁰ It is worth noting once more that humans, like other animals, are composed of earth and fire, which would suggest that while their physicality is not readily equipped for their own survival, they nevertheless have within them the capacity to wield the arts stolen for them by Prometheus. Perhaps the fire stolen by Prometheus signifies the enacted capacity by which humans actually do wield the arts, while nonrational animals continue not to practice the arts—or at least not at the same level—despite fire composing part of their physical nature, too.¹⁴¹ Lacking a physicality harmonious with the world and oriented toward their own survival, human beings' only recourse is to develop technical wisdom by which to procure other means for their own survival. While nonrational animals are harmonious with the world, human beings are essentially in ἀπορία within it while technical wisdom provides them εὐπορία, a way to resolve that ἀπορία with a view to their survival. To this extent, we come to resemble Prometheus in his resourcefulness. The verb to describe his gift (δωρεῖται) is in the middle voice, reinforcing that he gives something of himself to human beings. At the same time, he steals the gifts being perplexed (ἀπορία οὖν σχόμενος), recalling his brother's oversight.

¹³⁹ It is worth noting once more that humans, like other animals, are composed of earth and fire, which would suggest that while their physical natures are not readily equipped for their own survival, they nevertheless have within them the capacity to wield the arts stolen for them by Prometheus.

¹⁴⁰ Note the implication then that all especially human rational capacities are oriented only toward survival. We think in order to live. See German 2022, 55.

¹⁴¹ See also Bartlett 2018, 33.

Human beings do not overcome their Epimethean nature, but rather their nature is aporetically composed of both Titans.

Protagoras unilaterally blames Epimetheus for the human condition and implicitly defends Prometheus' theft, presumably since it hits upon the goal of providing for human survival (321e–322a).¹⁴² The technical arts that Prometheus procures for human beings enable them to contrive for their own survival, and doing so requires foresight. The contrivances that Protagoras mentions humans undertaking—erecting altars to the gods, inventing dwellings, clothes, shoes, and beddings, and means for procuring nourishment from the earth—require foresight and planning. To make a house, for example, one must anticipate the finished product and follow ordered steps that will bring it about. Speech and names, presumably, would likewise be necessitated by and directed toward these efforts. However, Epimetheus' failure is precisely what occasions Prometheus to grant human beings his gifts. Only because Epimetheus forgets human beings do they now come to share in the technical arts formerly reserved for the divinities.¹⁴³ As a result of being forgotten, and therefore not immediately provided for by the earth on which they dwell, human beings acquire the foresight necessary to provide for their own survival, a kind of divine ability to wield the technical arts. Prometheus' gifts are predicated on Epimetheus' original oversight. Human contrivance and open-ended possibility is predicated on their original perplexity.

¹⁴² Miller, too, points out that Protagoras' retelling paints a more favorable picture of Prometheus by playing down the enmity between Prometheus and Zeus (1978, 24)

¹⁴³ I am indebted to Shane Ewegen for first suggesting this possibility to me in correspondence regarding the positive aspects of forgetting for human knowledge. See also Manuwald 2013, 171. McCoy also indicates that all particularly human aspects are “only incidentally” as a result of Epimetheus' failure (2007, 63; cf. 1998, 24). German, too, claims that the development of human progress comes about out because we are originally “unadorned” (2022, 53).

In any case, Protagoras does not end the account there; human beings need further provisions to ensure their survival. Since political wisdom (σοφίαν πολιτικὴν) resides with Zeus (321d), Prometheus is unable to procure that knowledge for human beings. As a result, having provided contrivances for their own individual survival, they nevertheless lived scattered and perished at the hands of wild beasts (322a–b). While the technical arts afforded them sufficient contrivance to provide for their own survival against the elements and through procuring nourishment from the earth, they remain unable to wage war effectively against the wild beasts, who continue to threaten their survival. This threat to their survival motivates humans to form cities, but without political wisdom, this effort is doomed to fail: “Then, when they were gathered together, they wronged each other inasmuch as they did not have the political art (τὴν πολιτικὴν τέχνην), so that, again being scattered, they were being destroyed” (322b). Again, as others have pointed out, humans have no intrinsic political or social nature according to Protagoras but are naturally self-interested and disinclined to living cooperatively.¹⁴⁴

Because humans’ inability to live cooperatively threatens their survival, Zeus steps in to give a portion of the political τέχνη to human beings.¹⁴⁵ Just as Epimetheus’ original oversight regarding human beings occasions and necessitates their acquisition of Promethean foresight, so also humans’ original injustice occasions and necessitates their acquisition of justice and shame from Zeus. In both cases, a deficit precipitates higher-order capacities than humans would otherwise possess were they included in Epimetheus’ original distribution by which they would merely live harmoniously. Human nature, along

¹⁴⁴ Cf. McCoy 2008, 66 and 1998, 27. Contra Nussbaum 1986, 102. I also part ways with Balla, who like Nussbaum, reads Protagoras to affirm and defend democratic practices (Balla 2018).

¹⁴⁵ Bonazzi points out that insofar as Protagoras professes to teach the political arts, he rather immodestly links himself to Zeus (445).

with its achievements and potential, are predicated on a fundamental lack.¹⁴⁶ This lack, in turn, occasions indefinite potential. It is only because of and from within our limitations that we can begin to transcend them.¹⁴⁷ Here, I follow Hyland's account of "finite transcendence." As he explains it, when confronted with limitation there are three possible responses: one is to attempt to overcome the limiting condition, one is to capitulate to it:¹⁴⁸

There is a third strategy, however, one that on the one hand does not pretend that our finitude can be comprehensively overcome, yet does not on the other hand passively capitulate to it. This is to acknowledge and understand the finitude as what it is, to recognize it in its depth and complexity, but to respond to that limiting condition by transforming it into possibility, to engage in what we may call "finite transcendence."¹⁴⁹

Prometheus' theft responds to the limits imposed by Epimetheus' oversight by raising human beings above their natural station to a kinship with the gods. This act mythologically represents such a finite transcendence. This, it seems, is part of what it means that human beings are both Epimethean and Promethean in nature. To be solely Epimethean would be to capitulate to ἀπορία as a paralyzing limitation, on the other hand to be solely Promethean would be to attempt wholly to overcome ἀπορία and thus transcend limiting conditions altogether. Human beings can undertake to overcome their limitations through their resourcefulness and contrivance, thanks to Prometheus. However, they are only capable of self-transcendence because they are limited in the first place, thanks to Epimetheus. Human beings act while being in, and in response to, ἀπορία.

¹⁴⁶ See Benardete 2000 (188).

¹⁴⁷ Here, I follow Drew Hyland's account of "finite transcendence," developed in detail in his 1995 *Finitude and Transcendence*. As he explains it, when confronted with limitation there are three possible responses: one is to attempt to overcome the limiting condition, one is to capitulate to it. A third strategy, however, "does not pretend that our finitude can be comprehensively overcome, yet does not on the other hand passively capitulate to it. This is to acknowledge and understand the finitude as what it is, to recognize it in its depth and complexity, but to respond to that limiting condition by transforming it into possibility, to engage in what we may call 'finite transcendence.'"

¹⁴⁸ 1995, 28–29.

¹⁴⁹ 1995, 29.

With Zeus' gifts, humans at last achieve a kind of order oriented to their own survival:

Then Zeus fearing that the race of ours might be destroyed entirely, sends Hermes, bringing both shame and justice (αἰδῶ τε καὶ δίκην) to human beings, in order that there might be both orders (κόσμοι) of cities and uniting bonds of friendship. Then, Hermes asked Zeus in what way he should give justice and shame to human beings: "In which way: as the arts have been distributed (νενέμονται), so too shall I distribute (νείμω) these? They have been distributed (νενέμονται) in this way: one person possessing the healing art is sufficient for many individuals, so also with respect to the other craftsmen. Shall I place justice and shame among the human beings in this way, or shall I distribute (νείμω) [them] to all?" "To all," Zeus said, "and with all partaking, for cities would not come to be, if a few of [the human beings] were to partake just as they do of the other arts. And establish as a law (νόμον) from me that the one who is not able (μὴ δυνάμενον) to partake of shame and justice shall be killed as an illness of the city" (322c–d).

Zeus is said only to send shame and justice to human beings, not political τέχνη or σοφία in general. Zeus gives exactly what is sufficient to enable humans to join together in cities and friendship for their own survival; Zeus' gifts have no higher stated purpose. Zeus signals the limitation to his gift in his further demand that Hermes establish as law that anyone lacking a capacity for justice and shame be killed. The gifts, justice and shame, are not sufficient by themselves to ensure our political harmony, but humans must cultivate these gifts further.¹⁵⁰

Another signal that justice and shame are oriented only toward species survival is that their distribution to all will result in orders of cities, but not necessarily perfect, or perhaps even just, cities.¹⁵¹ The presence of justice and shame in human beings makes

¹⁵⁰ This leads many to question what exactly it is Zeus has Hermes give to human beings, since it is certainly not the whole of political virtue. That it be some special capacity for justice seems most plausible, and I tend to agree with accounts that offer this interpretation. Barney's argument that this capacity for political virtue consists in the capacity for discourse (λόγος) about justice is quite persuasive, as it unifies the account with Protagoras' wider interest in rhetoric.

¹⁵¹ For an opposing view, see Kerferd 1953, 44. While Moser and Kustas are correct to say that Protagoras does not hereby foreclose the possibility of holding city's education program to standards, neither does he consider it (1966, 112). It is the fact that he does not consider it that leaves his account ambiguous, and it is

possible political organization, but not necessarily a political wisdom. A further political τέχνη, of which Protagoras makes no mention, would be needed to bring about a harmonious city that is oriented to the collective good of its citizens.¹⁵² The city comes into being and exists for the sake of living, but as of yet Protagoras makes no mention of living well.¹⁵³ It is therefore my view that Barney reads an interest in human flourishing into Protagoras' account when she says that "Demythologized, the Myth of the Great Speech is easily read as a clear and philosophically powerful argument—a kind of thought experiment, in fact, to help us identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for human flourishing."¹⁵⁴ Barney's conclusion that Protagoras is a "metaethical realist" rather than a relativist indicates in fact the rhetorical strength of his account.¹⁵⁵ Listeners who assume—as Barney does—that the criterion of living well underlies Protagoras' account risk missing its ambiguous and potentially unjust and moderately relativistic implications. The τέλος of "living" can be achieved through many and diverse principles of organization but it is not yet clear whether all of these arrangements are equally good for human well-being, or

this ambiguity which I emphasize against their account which interprets his myth as conclusively non-relativistic.

¹⁵² Moser and Kustas argue that social harmony is an implied universal standard against which we can measure a city's laws (1966, 115). If what is meant by social harmony is taken loosely to mean that a city is without faction or public dissent, then this seems correct. But this does not justify their claim that this is any kind of moral standard by common recognition. Anticipating the account of how cities punish those that go against its laws, we can infer that authoritarian regimes may well be capable enough of ensuring public obedience without thereby promoting common good or civic liberties through fear of reprobation.

¹⁵³ Clearly, this is in stark contrast with Aristotle's eudaimonic notion of civic life: "coming into being for the sake of living, [the πόλις] exists for the sake of living well" (1252a8). Cf. McCoy 1998, 30 and Beresford 2013, 147.

¹⁵⁴ Barney 2019, 136. Bonazzi similarly assumes a concern with human flourishing on Protagoras' part (Bonazzi 2022, especially at 432–434 and 438). Given that Zeus explicitly orders the distribution of political virtues to ensure human survival it is unclear why Bonazzi concludes "The political art seems to be not only an instrument which is discovered for improving the conditions of life, but an essential element of human existence" (2022, 434).

¹⁵⁵ Barney 2019, 146. For more details on the ambiguity inherent in Protagoras' account that he exploits here, see also Hemenway 1996, 2 and 7 and German 2022, 56.

whether Protagoras would insist that they should be.¹⁵⁶ The word for the law that Zeus establishes, νόμος, derives from the verb for distribution, νέμω, used throughout the myth. Protagoras signals through Epimetheus' failure to distribute powers to human beings, and Zeus' distribution of shame and justice, the necessity for human beings to live according to νόμοι. With no special powers belonging to them and no special characteristic uniting them, humans live according to customs and laws that keep them together. The plurality of possible orderings reinforces the customary condition of human living.

Before turning to Protagoras' explication of the myth, we can observe already that Protagoras explains the presence of justice and shame, and thus the capacity for political τέχνη in all people. This allows him to account for Socrates' observation that Athenians seem to assume that all are capable of political judgment and to affirm the view of the many that everyone has some share in political virtue.¹⁵⁷ At the same time, by restricting the scope of Zeus' gifts to all mankind and suggesting that humans still must cultivate those gifts further, Prometheus indicates the need for political education, which his teaching would fill. That political education is possible is a matter of command—mythologically this is a divine command from Zeus; non-mythologically it is a matter of social norms—and that it is desirable is a matter of survival. While apparently defending democratic principles of the universality of justice and shame, Protagoras simultaneously suggests that the end of the city is merely survival and that this can come about through various—not just democratic—means. Protagoras indicates in his myth a plurality of social orders that

¹⁵⁶ Of course, if living-well did provide the criterion for what makes one regime “better” than another, then Kierstead's conclusion that Protagoras' political theory admits ranking and ordering regimes would hold true, and the relationship he uncovers between democracy and relativism on that interpretation is provocative and interesting (2021, 206–207).

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Gonzalez 2008, 117.

may undertake radically different means for ensuring their own survival according to their own νόμοι. Protagorean political τέχνη or wisdom, one might suppose, will consist in a sensitivity to that plurality. And, as we have seen in his praise of Prometheus and his critique of Epimetheus (and his sophistic counterparts), it would also consist in the foresight requisite to hit upon the desired end of survival regardless of the context in which one finds oneself. This is the exact foresight that Protagoras himself displays in openly professing his sophistry, having calculated the risks involved in such exposure and in presenting a myth that appears to justify democratic practices while also implying other means might promote individual survival just as well if not better.¹⁵⁸ If political τέχνη aims merely at living and not at living well, then excellence seems to be reduced to shrewd self-interest, a point which Socrates will attempt to make explicit in their later discussion of courage. Moreover, as will be discussed in chapter 5, both Protagoras and Socrates will agree that knowledge of some kind is required for human flourishing. However, Protagoras' pursuit of total foresight implies that knowledge might suffice for living well, while Socratic foresight remains attentive always to the limits that disrupt human effort and achievement, as will be further developed in chapter 4.

2.4 EXPLICATING THE MYTH

In his own summary of the myth's teachings, Protagoras suggests the first point above:

In precisely this way, Socrates, and on account of these things, both the others and Athenians, whenever there is a λόγος about the virtue of building or some other skilled practice, they suppose few to share in counsel, and if someone apart from

¹⁵⁸ See also Hemenway 1996, 6.

the few gives counsel, they do not bear it, as you say—suitably, as I say—and whenever they go into counsel about political virtue (πολιτικῆς ἀρετῆς), which must as a whole follow the path of justice and moderation (σωφροσύνην),¹⁵⁹ every man suitably bears himself, as it is fitting for all to partake of this virtue or there will not be cities (322d–323a)

Athenians and others rightly suppose that only a few have knowledge in matters of technical expertise, but in political matters involving moderation and justice, it befits all to partake of such virtue. The very existence of cities, Protagoras suggests, presupposes the shared possession of some measure of the political virtues in its citizens. Presumably, the city's virtue corresponds to how united the city is, or how resistant to faction it may be. Perhaps, then, Protagorean political wisdom nobly construed would consist in the power of persuasion based on an expertise of what would ensure that cities stay united, considering their individual constitutions. But that Protagoras himself gives no indication of being concerned with such things suggests rather that it serves as a red herring to distract from the myth's ignoble implications.

Protagoras' account implies a potential tension between individual survival and collective interest.¹⁶⁰ Political virtues are so integral to relations among citizens that anyone who admits to being unjust and lacking political virtue, and thereby unfit for political life, is manifestly mad. Pretending expertise in technical affairs amounts to shameless madness, while admitting ignorance is a sort of prudent sanity. In political matters, it is exactly the reverse.

But in justice and in the other political virtue (τῇ ἄλλῃ πολιτικῇ), even if they know that someone is unjust, if this same man says true things about himself face to face with many, that which there they would consider to be moderation (σωφροσύνην), to speak true things, here, is madness, and they declare it necessary for all to say that they are just, whether they are or not, or that he is mad who does not pretend

¹⁵⁹ This clause is Bartlett's 2004 tr.

¹⁶⁰ McCoy 1998, 27 and 29.

justice: as it is necessary that there not be anyone who does not to partake of it in any way whatsoever, or else he is not to be among human beings (323b–c).¹⁶¹

While some such as Martha Nussbaum take the concluding clause of this passage to suggest that human nature has fundamentally changed with the presence of justice and political virtue in human life, this seems to be overinterpret Protagoras' claim here.¹⁶² I part ways here with a number of scholars, in addition, who read Protagoras' claim in earnest that we are naturally just as part of his serious effort to either defend democratic values or civic virtues.¹⁶³ While Barney's account, in particular, of the overall structure of Protagoras' myth provides a helpful explication of the myth's content, such thinkers who read Protagoras' defense of civic virtues earnestly overlook some of his account's key rhetorical features, which I emphasize here.

For instance, I tentatively agree with the sentiment behind Barney's claim that "for human beings, *nomos* IS *physis*" and that this is true to Protagoras' account, too.¹⁶⁴ Despite human beings having indeterminate nature prior to Prometheus' intervention, the myth largely shows how difficult it is to define human beings independently of their social-

¹⁶¹ ὥς ἀναγκαῖον οὐδένα ὄντιν' οὐχὶ ἀμῶς γέ πως μετέχειν αὐτῆς, ἢ μὴ εἶναι ἐν ἀνθρώποις.

¹⁶² Nussbaum 1986, 102. While Adkins suggests that we might expect such a change to take place with Zeus' universal distribution of justice and shame, he avoids either this conclusion or the weaker conclusion that human nature receive the capacity of shame and justice as a result of Zeus distribution (Adkins 1970, 7). Instead, Adkins argues that Protagoras is intentionally ambivalent about this given the historical assumptions involved in claims about *physis*. Adkins argues that possessing *aretai* by *physis* traditionally implied that Greeks of a certain social class were endowed with desirable qualities that set them over against the rest. The claim that such *aretai* might be teachable is appealing to both someone democratically inclined and a wealthier member of Athenian society who is nevertheless not a member of the highest social and political elite. Thus by remaining ambiguous about what belongs to human nature, Protagoras avoids offending either the Athenian political elite or the democratic masses while nevertheless implicitly appealing to prospective students (Adkins 1970, 10–11). This analysis is helpful and doubtless true, but given that he professes to teach such virtue even implicitly we can nevertheless see past his ambivalence to the implication that as such human nature does not fundamentally change with Zeus' distribution.

¹⁶³ These include Alford 1988, Balla 2017, Barney 2019, Beresford 2013, Kerferd 1953, Kierstead and 2021, Manuwald 2013, and Nussbaum 1986.

¹⁶⁴ Barney 2019, 139.

political relations.¹⁶⁵ While human beings are said to be already “λόγος-having” prior to the gods’ distribution (321b–c), that λόγος only takes shape as they come to acquire technical and political skills. However, Barney demonstrates the power of Protagoras’ rhetoric when she claims further that on his view justice is natural to human beings and that it is what places human beings higher than other animals.¹⁶⁶ To start, anyone bereft of justice does not cease being human according to Protagoras, but rather such a person does not belong among other human beings. This notion coheres with Protagoras’ mythological account wherein Zeus’ νόμος demands that anyone incapable of justice be killed as an illness for the city (322d). Excluding one who is incapable of political virtue from the human sphere contributes to the preservation of the species by ensuring the preservation of the city, which provides for human survival. Moreover, as we will see below, Protagoras leaves room for those who are unjust to exercise σωφροσύνη to conceal their injustice and thereby continue to live among human beings anyway.

Second, Protagoras’ explication adds to the myth that it is not the unjust person’s injustice that signals her madness, but rather her admission that she is unjust.¹⁶⁷ While it is moderation (σωφροσύνη) to tell the truth if one lacks expertise in a given τέχνη, it is madness to tell the truth if one lacks justice. Protagoras does not say that it is imprudent to be unjust so long as one adequately conceals her injustice from others. This recalls Protagoras’ implication that while it is folly for sophists to conceal their sophistry if they

¹⁶⁵ See also Versenyi 24 and 31–32.

¹⁶⁶ Barney 2019, 139–140. Alford defends Protagoras on a different front. He argues that because many if not most Athenian citizens held administrative positions, it’s not inherently deceptive for Protagoras to elide the difference between civic virtues and excellence in leadership (Alford 1988). This is well enough, but he does not account for other deceptive elements of Protagoras’ rhetoric, such as his claim, to be discussed below, that it is admitting injustice—and not doing injustice—that characterizes individuals as mad.

¹⁶⁷ See also Bartlett 2016, 38.

will be discovered, it is not folly to conceal their sophistry if success is ensured (317a–b). Difficult to translate, σωφροσύνη could also have mean something like “sensibility,” “soundness of mind” or “prudence.” The kind of sensibility Protagoras describes here is perhaps even more critical than justice for ensuring the city’s survival. For cities can survive so long as unjust people are prudent enough to conceal their injustice and thus appear not to threaten the city’s survival. That σωφροσύνη replaces shame in the myth signals the potentially unjust implications of Protagoras’ account. While shame requires suffering on the wrongdoer’s part, σωφροσύνη requires knowledge of what is regarded by the many as shameful. Either one can motivate the necessary behavior for civic unity. For instance, someone might act justly either out of a sense of shame or a desire not to be caught and punished for acting in a shame-worthy manner. Likewise, someone might conceal their injustice because they are ashamed of it, or because they know it is prudent to do so to avoid punishment.

Protagoras’ explication reinterprets the myth: really being just and suffering shame are not necessary for the city’s survival, but only knowing what is just and shame-worthy so as to appear just or at least capable of shame. Σωφροσύνη, made possible by such knowledge, comes to light as the political virtue *par excellence*. Recall that above, Socrates doubted whether Protagoras could teach Pericles’ sons to become excellent like their father, since it seems possible to teach only what such excellence consists in. Here, Protagoras implies that such knowledge might be sufficient, at least to become ἐλλογιμος in the city,

so long as one uses it well in an exercise of εὐβουλία. One need not become Pericles, if only he can seem like him to others.¹⁶⁸

Protagoras then turns to explain that while the capacity for political virtue is universally assumed by all, it is nevertheless not fully possessed by nature but something teachable, thereby justifying his own practice as a teacher: “But that they don’t believe it to be by nature (φύσει) or spontaneous (τοῦ αὐτομάτου), but rather something teachable (διδασκτόν) and present in those in whom it is present as a result of diligence—this I’ll try to demonstrate to you next” (323c, Bartlett 2004, tr.). That political virtue is neither by nature nor self-generated further supports the view that Zeus’ supposed gifts leave human nature fundamentally unchanged.¹⁶⁹ Although capable of developing political virtues, human nature is not essentially political. Protagoras’ evidence of the fact that political virtue is generally held to be teachable and acquired through diligence is that people punish wrongdoers.¹⁷⁰ On Protagoras’ view, punishment is fundamentally forward-looking:

For if you wish to bear in mind (ἐννοῆσαι), Socrates, whatever is possible (τί ποτε δύναται) while punishing the unjust, [doing so] will teach you that the human beings, indeed, consider virtue to be procurable. For no one punishes the unjust putting his mind to, and for the sake of, this: that he was unjust, unless whoever does so just as a wild beast irrationally (ὥσπερ θηρίον ἀλογίστως) avenges himself. On the other hand, in punishing one who attempts to do so with reason (μετὰ λόγου) not for the sake of the past wrong done—for with this having taken place, it would not be undone (ἀγένητον)—but gracefully for the sake of what is to come (τοῦ μέλλοντος χάριν), in order that, in turn, he may not act unjustly neither this man himself nor another man who sees this man having been punished (324a–b).

¹⁶⁸ Of course, it is not necessary that all Protagoras’ students pretend Periclean excellence. One might just as well rest content with smaller or less public acts of injustice to fare well in their daily life without ascending to political esteem.

¹⁶⁹ See also McCoy 1998, 27. Manuwald, who nevertheless thinks that Protagoras means earnestly to defend the universal possession of virtue still reaches the same conclusion that Zeus leaves human nature unchanged and that this universal possession of virtue is instead a normative command (2013, 175).

¹⁷⁰ McCoy argues that this is further evidence of the potential tension between individual self-interest and collective self-interest. That people need be so harshly directed away from unjust acts and toward the common good suggests people are intrinsically self-interested and that that self-interest often occurs in tension with the common good (1998, 27).

Protagoras' claims here are striking in several ways. First, his claim that no generally reasonable person punishes a wrongdoer with a mind to avenging the wrong done seems utterly contrary to common sense and experience. Achilles does not wish to prevent Hector from killing others, but to avenge Patroclus. While, as Protagoras suggests, such a motivation might not be rational or desirable, it is surely a common motivation for many otherwise reasonable people. For this reason, Bartlett refers to Protagoras' account of punishment as "remarkably rational."¹⁷¹ Rather than being a descriptive account of the way punishment works, then, we can read Protagoras' comments here—like Zeus' universal distribution of justice and shame—as prescriptive, and indeed, what he says gives us good reason for doing so.

He tells Socrates to bear in mind (ἐννοῆσαι) what punishment is capable (δύναται) of bringing about. Any harm done will not be made undone (ἀγένητον) through punishment. Thus, wishing for vengeance is a mindless enterprise, since it amounts to wishing for an impossibility. When we seek vengeance, according to Protagoras, we act irrationally, just like a wild beast (ὥσπερ θηρίον ἀλογίστως), in merely reacting to a past wrong. Acting with good sense (σωφροσύνη), with a mind to what punishment is capable of, Protagoras suggests, is forward-looking. Punishment should involve foresight, the very capacity which we argued distinguishes human beings from animals in the myth, in their use of τέχνη. Rational punishment is for the sake of what is to come (τοῦ μέλλοντος), lest the wrongdoer continue to act unjustly, or another copy her. Protagoras repeatedly associates mind and reason with foresight, suggesting that humans are (or ought to be) fundamentally forward-looking, that the god we resemble most closely is Prometheus, and

¹⁷¹ For this reason, Bartlett refers to Protagoras' account of punishment as "remarkably rational" (2018, 35).

that when behave reactively like Epimetheus, we risk behaving animalistically. If human nature changes fundamentally in Protagoras' mythological account of our origins, that change consists not in its new political nature and aspirations, but in acquiring foresight which introduces a horizon of possibilities for their individual and collective actions.¹⁷² Miller argues that the dialogue as a whole closely associates foresight with ἀρετή and seems to attribute the value of foresight to Socrates especially in light of his concluding remarks that the two should have exercised forethought in questioning the nature of virtue before questioning its teachability.¹⁷³ But as I have argued here, it is Protagoras who exclusively praises forethought, and as I will continue to argue, does so to the point of distortion.

Protagoras' unilateral blame of Epimetheus, his exclusive attribution of human nature to Prometheus, and his suggestion that an orientation to the past is animalistic and irrational leads him to overlook or underemphasize another feature of his myth. Human foresight is acquired only as a result of an original afterthought. Epimetheus' forgetting thus plays a positive role in the formation of humanity and remains part of the human condition.¹⁷⁴ To deny this is to aim at being wholly Promethean in a way that not even

¹⁷² German puts the point well when he says that τέχνη develops and fulfills our original lack “thus forming human nature in ways that only the future can reveal. Our being is always to become; this plasticity is the fact about our humanity” (2022, 53). Bonazzi avoids this conclusion since Prometheus is so closely associated with τέχνη (2022, 437–438). On thinkers like Bonazzi's view, Protagoras mounts an “attack” against τέχνη, both within the myth, where τέχνη is insufficient to ensure human survival—and on his view, flourishing—and in his discussion preceding the myth where he distinguishes himself from other sophists on the basis of their overspecialization in τέχνη (see also Sommerville 2019). While such reasoning is compelling, this seems to be part of the tension or inconsistency in Protagoras' account that Socrates' ensuing ἐλεγχος will aim to expose, particularly in their discussion of hedonism. While Protagoras at times signals some awareness that human life cannot and should not be reduced to matters of τέχνη, his admiration for Prometheus and particular interest in prudence risks making exactly such a reduction. Coby likewise sees this tension in Protagoras' account when he claims that Protagoras wholly reduces ἀρετή to τέχνη (1982, 140 and 144).

¹⁷³ Miller 1978, 26 and 28.

¹⁷⁴ See, for example, Benardete's observation that human beings only become fully rational and political in response to Epimetheus' failure (Benardete 2000, 188).

Prometheus himself achieves, who must still respond to the limitations occasioned by his brother. While foresight responds to this condition, Prometheus acts being himself in ἀπορία. If Socrates is the mediator between the impetuous Hippocrates, who resembles Epimetheus, and Protagoras, who in his prudent concern for self-preservation aims to resemble Prometheus exclusively, perhaps Socrates must be seen as neither wholly Promethean¹⁷⁵ even if he is not therefore Epimethean. Instead, as I have argued, we see a Socrates who takes care to introduce foresight to Hippocrates by causing him to question the nature of his desires, while nevertheless indicating the insurmountable difficulties involved in such an inquiry into and pursuit of the good. This amounts to a difference in how both thinkers conceive of and respond to ἀπορία. Protagoras views ἀπορία negatively as something to be avoided altogether and uses rhetorical tricks to do so. Socrates, by continuously aims to draw ἀπορία out into the open, treating ἀπορία as a positive advance in inquiry. We see a Socrates who, for all his foresight, recognizes his Epimethean limits, a Socrates who acts being in ἀπορία.

Protagoras' Promethean ambition, we might now say, involves simultaneously separating knowledge from experience, on the one hand, and seeming from being, on the other. One need not feel shame or become just to become ἐλλογιμος in the city, so long as one has the knowledge of what is regarded as just and shame-worthy in order to exercise prudent εὐβουλία. This, in turn, allows one to appear just and politically virtuous, without actually needing to become dedicated to the pursuit of a common good at the expense of individual self-interest. All of this is concerning enough from a moral and political

¹⁷⁵ By "wholly Promethean," I mean a Prometheus who is more "Promethean" than Prometheus himself. Prometheus as it stands demonstrates some Epimethean characteristics in his willingness to be persuaded by his brother and self-ruinous care for human beings, as does Socrates.

perspective. But there are other philosophical stakes, too. Protagoras' example of punishment recalls the punishment that Prometheus suffers for stealing from Athena and Hephaestus. Presumably, and as poets like Aeschylus suggest, Prometheus, god of foresight, knew beforehand what the punishment for this theft would be, and he knew that he would be caught. What makes Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* tragic, then, would have to be that Prometheus knew that he would suffer, but he did not know how that suffering would feel; he did not have the experience of suffering.¹⁷⁶ Knowledge without experience, Prometheus without Epimetheus, does not give a full picture of human life and meaning. Socrates points to this repeatedly in emphasizing to Hippocrates that any investigation submits the soul to a kind of suffering that cannot be evaluated impersonally beforehand. Even if we knew what the sophist taught, without suffering it ourselves, we would not know *how* that teaching affects us and therefore could not perfectly measure its effect on our soul. This sensitivity to the relationship between knowledge and suffering is one thing that separates Protagoras from Socrates in their aims and hopes for human achievement.

2.5 PROTAGORAS' ΛΟΓΟΣ

Having thus used his myth to illustrate that political virtue is in some sense common to all while nevertheless teachable and not simply natural, Protagoras turns to λόγος to address Socrates' concern that great men do not teach their sons virtue.

Still then an ἀπορία is remaining, with respect to which you are at a loss (ἀπορεῖς) about the sons of good men: why ever, indeed, good men, on the one hand, teach their sons other things from teachers and make them wise (σοφοὺς), on the other

¹⁷⁶ Michael Davis makes this point in his 2022 presentation at Tufts University on the dialogue.

hand, with respect to which virtue, good men make them better than no one. About precisely this, Socrates, I will no longer tell a myth to you but a λόγος. For bear in mind (ἐννόησον) this: is there or is there not some one thing, of which it is necessary for all the citizens to partake, if, indeed, the city is going to exist? For with this, this ἀπορία with respect to which you are at a loss (σὺν ἀπορεῖς), is solved and in no other way. For if there is, on the one hand, and this one thing is not artifice, smithing, or pottery, but justice, σωφροσύνη, and the sort, and collectively one thing itself which I call “the virtue of a man” (ἀνδρὸς ἀρετήν)—if this is that thing of which it is necessary for all to partake and with which all men, if it is desired to learn or do anything else, are to do in this way, but not without this... if it is in this way, and with it having been so by nature (αὐτοῦ πεφυκότος), that the good men teach their sons other things, and not this, consider how worthy of wonder (θαυμασίως) the good men become (324d–325b).

Protagoras suggests that we should assume, contrary to Socrates’ claim, that good men do, in fact, teach their sons virtue, otherwise they would be quite “worthy of wonder” (θαυμασίως). Put plainly, having established both that people widely believe that virtue is teachable, and that it is necessary for the cities’ (and their sons’ individual) survival, it would be unthinkable strange if excellent men did not teach their sons virtue, while nevertheless teaching their sons all other kinds of relatively superfluous trades or skills.

On the one hand, Protagoras suggests simultaneously that there is some one thing, the virtue of a man (ἀνδρὸς ἀρετήν), in which all must partake if cities are to exist. But he also says that numerous virtues, taken collectively, justice, prudence, and things of that the sort are precisely what such manly virtue consists in. It is surprising that Protagoras switches from discussing political virtue in his mythic treatment to the “virtue of a man” in his λόγος. In doing so, he follows Socrates’ lead when Socrates switched from discussing political τέχνη to discussing virtue generally in asking about the sons of good men. At the very moment he turns to that question, Protagoras, too, switches from discussing political virtue to manly virtue. One reason for Protagoras’ change of terms might be that he interprets Socrates to ask about virtue more generally, rather than virtues specifically

geared toward cities' survival. But given that Socrates is the one driving the discussion's political emphasis, another explanation might be that the very notion of political virtue as such is in some sense mythical on Protagoras' read. This interpretation has the added benefits of explaining the relationship between the myth and the λόγος that follows and of motivating Socrates' abstraction from domestic or private affairs. Insofar as the myth reveals that survival is an abiding concern of political action on Protagoras' view, human excellence would consist in part in ensuring one's own survival, and political virtue is desirable only insofar as it ensures a man's individual survival.¹⁷⁷

Moreover, Protagoras emphasizes that what must be universally shared for cities' survival is some singular thing, despite listing several virtues in his discussion. He does not elucidate what the relationship is between the various virtues he mentions and the one particular virtue necessary to the cities' survival. If the myth and its explication above intimates Protagoras' true position, then σωφροσύνη is the political virtue *par excellence* that ensures both the city's survival and promotes one's private interests. The other civic virtues, including justice and piety, then would be "political" virtues in the ordinary sense that they promote the common good, but not necessarily one's own. By refraining from articulating the relationship between the one thing required for the cities' survival and the many virtues mentioned, Protagoras demonstrates the kind of prudence he describes. He conceals his suggestion that σωφροσύνη alone—and not justice or other virtues—is necessary either to teach or to possess, lest he be recognized as advertising the prudence of acting unjustly wherever one can reasonably expect getting away with it.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ See also McCoy 1998, 26.

¹⁷⁸ See also Gonzalez 2000, 121. Hemenway's analysis is particularly useful on this point. He distinguishes between demotic virtues, which is what Protagoras seems to refer to throughout his account of virtue and elite virtues, to which Protagoras tacitly alludes throughout (1996, 2). Demotic virtue, practiced by the many,

Instead, while describing the standard education of the young, Protagoras focuses not on σωφροσύνη but on justice and virtue in general. His account of children's moral upbringing resembles his account of legal punishment. In both, law courts and parents use words and punishment as tools for teaching acceptable and unacceptable behavior to citizens or children who seek to avoid punishment (325d). Parents then send their children to teachers to learn models for good action in poetry or to learn harmonious living through musical education (325e–326b). Finally, they train their bodies only after this “musical” education so that their bodies may serve their now well-trained minds to avoid cowardice (326b–c). Σωφροσύνη, despite its clear importance to Protagoras' conception of political virtue, is conspicuously absent from the routine education that Protagoras outlines, and thus, the savvy prospective student might infer, σωφροσύνη is precisely what students would learn from him. McCoy argues that Protagorean wisdom consists in persuasive rhetoric, and Gonzalez argues that the prudence to conceal one's vices does.¹⁷⁹ Reading the σωφροσύνη to conceal one's vices as the chief political virtue which Protagoras' students will learn affirms both interpretations such that σωφροσύνη supplies the content to the rhetorical form of Protagorean wisdom.

But education, Protagoras suggests, does not end in youth. Rather, cities, too, continue to educate their citizens. “And when they are set free from teaching, the city in turn compels (ἀναγκάζει) them to learn the laws (τοὺς νόμους) and to live according to these as according to paradigms, in order that they not act by themselves (or perhaps “in

consists in simple-minded self-restraint and law-abidingness. Hemenway contrasts demotic virtue with elite virtue, which he suggests Protagoras tacitly alludes to throughout, consisting in boldness and prudence, or prudent boldness, in pursuing self-interest while avoiding risks that attend being caught doing so. For an opposing view, see Kierstead 2018, 70.

¹⁷⁹ McCoy 1998, 30 and 32; Gonzalez 2000, 120.

their own interest,” ἐφ’ αὐτῶν) without plan (or “at random,” εἰκῆ) (326c–d). That the city still needs to force or compel its citizens to live according to its laws after the extensive training provided in youth further reinforces Protagoras’ suggestion—*contra* Nussbaum—that the impulse to act in their own interest is overwhelmingly strong.¹⁸⁰ The customs or laws of the city provide direction and guidance for citizens’ actions. Like teachers who provide traces of letters for unskilled students to copy “artlessly,” so also the city provides traces, its laws, to guide a correct course of action for its citizens to follow (326d). Protagoras implies that this guidance is largely beneficial to citizens. It is, generally speaking, in individuals’ interest to follow prescribed laws of the city, since otherwise they might live “artlessly” (ἄτεχνῶς) and without plan (εἰκῆ), recalling humanity’s unordered Epimethean condition prior to Prometheus’ and Zeus’ interventions. Balla concludes from this that Protagoras means to emphasize the benefits that law and custom afford individuals.¹⁸¹ But Balla’s interpretation holds only for individuals who are incapable of acting in their own interest and getting away with it. Such guidance is of particular importance for citizens lacking resource and foresight. However, Protagoras implies that the situation is rather different for those who are so capable.

I further part ways from Balla in that she supposes that such customs only help rather than infringe on human nature according to Protagoras.¹⁸² Her account underemphasizes the persistent resistance to moral training that Protagoras indicates throughout. Individuals who stray from the lawful path may well incur punishment from

¹⁸⁰ Nussbaum 1986, 102. The brutality of this account leads Benardete to conclude that political virtue results from terror and pain, and that the city in fact teaches its citizens not to get caught acting justly more than it teaches them to behave justly (2000, 196).

¹⁸¹ Balla 2018, 98–99.

¹⁸² Balla 2018, 98–99.

the state, a punishment which Protagoras explains, Athenians and many others name “setting-straight” (ἐϋθύνω) (326d–e). Once more, as Protagoras’ sets out to prove virtue’s teachability (326e), he simultaneously describes individuals’ persistent resistance to such training.¹⁸³ This resistance, Protagoras implies, comes about from our own self-interested natures perhaps especially when the prescribed lawful path or collective interest is in tension with our perceived or real self-interests. Moreover, the comparison between law-abiding citizens and school children artlessly tracing letters is less than flattering and might indicate another course for those ambitious Protagorean students who are able to guide themselves. In those cases where individuals possess adequate foresight and good sense to conceal their injustice, such individuals might prudently choose to do so given what all Protagoras says.

Protagoras concludes his λόγος by explaining that the reason that Socrates has trouble perceiving the youths’ education in virtue is that such virtue and education are so ubiquitous as to be easily missed. The only people truly without virtue, Protagoras suggests, are savages who live outside civilization. Protagoras borrows Socrates’ τέχνη-analogy to compare the case to aulos players. Were it necessary for all to become aulos players for a city to persist, everyone would teach their sons to play the aulos (327a). However, Protagoras suggests, it would still be the case that people are differently skilled at playing the aulos, and that great aulos players might have sons who are less great than they: “But whoever’s son happened to have the best nature for aulos playing would grow to become renowned, and whoever’s was without that nature would be without that fame” (327c). The point appears to be that while everyone has an innate capacity to learn virtue,

¹⁸³ McCoy makes a similar point (1998, 27).

just as all human beings are capable of learning to play an instrument, some have a greater capacity which allow them to far exceed the others through their training. While everyone might be capable of learning cello sufficiently for a pleasant open-mic performance, only a very few become as excellent as Yo-Yo Ma. This point would seem to be in tension with the myth's claim that Zeus bestows justice and shame to all. In fact, this is precisely what drives Kierstead to distort Protagoras' account in order to maintain the coherence of its apparent defense of democratic values. Kierstead concludes that Protagoras' account is stronger without the claim that private instruction meaningfully improves performance and virtue.¹⁸⁴ But even in the myth, as here, Protagoras suggests that not all share in ἀρετή in equal measure since those who fail to cultivate justice and shame must be killed according to the wish of Zeus. Moreover, as Hemmenway points out, it is unlikely that the virtue that marks some men as excellent consists primarily in obeying the city's laws and customs.¹⁸⁵ Rather, it would seem to consist rather in directing the laws and customs themselves, whether nobly or ignobly, or in being able to decide for oneself how to act. Notably, again, if σωφροσύνη is the highest political virtue, we might reasonably conclude that a few prudently feigning virtue suffices to keep the city together and thus would be the political art that Protagoras truly teaches.¹⁸⁶

Lest Protagoras persuade the rest that his own work is unnecessary in his claim that everyone teaches virtue, he continues to say that if anyone is an even slightly better guide

¹⁸⁴ Kierstead 2021, 204–205. Kierstead rather pointedly distorts Protagoras' account: "The argumentative context that the Great Speech is placed in thus obscures and weakens the democratic theory contained within it" (204). Therefore, his critique that reading such as the one offered here are "cynical" in emphasizing the rhetorical context in order to bring out the undemocratic implications rings hollow. Bartlett also notes that Protagoras' speech does a poor job of justifying his claim to teach virtue, but therefore emphasizes its rhetorical context and hidden implications (2018, 30).

¹⁸⁵ Hemmenway 1996, 12. For an opposing view, see Kerferd 1953, 44.

¹⁸⁶ See Benardete 2000, 192 and Gonzalez 2000, 121.

toward virtue than the rest, as he esteems himself to be, then just because virtue is necessary for all to possess, one ought to rejoice to find such a gifted teacher (328a–b). Protagoras justifies the fee he charges on this ground. As if to further prove his efficacy, he discloses his collection policy whereby students confess to the gods what they believe Protagoras deserves and pay him only so much (328b–c). At the same time, Protagoras thereby suggests that students not only value his education in helping them become noble and good, but they also attest to his success by justly paying his dues. One wonders, of course, whether such a method persuades lesser students to feel shame rather than displaying their nobility. But in either case, Protagoras claims to have thus established both that virtue is teachable and that he himself teaches it. Benitez points out that each student is thereby the measure of the value of Protagoras’ teaching.¹⁸⁷ We can distinguish this from the sense in which Socrates and Hippocrates aim to test the nature of Protagoras’ teaching by recognizing its effect on the soul. While Protagoras’ students quantify the value of Protagoras’ teaching, Socrates and Hippocrates seek to discover its nature by noting the qualitative change in their souls his teaching effects.

Protagoras teaches εὐβουλία, and it seems from what we have found here that this consists in σωφροσύνη.¹⁸⁸ This σωφροσύνη, in turn, consists in either the good sense to act justly if one must or to feign acting justly if one can conceal that injustice. To act justly is sensible if—only if?—one cannot avoid being caught acting unjustly. To feign justice, however, may well be all the more prudent if one can get away with it. Similarly, the

¹⁸⁷ Benitez 1992, 235.

¹⁸⁸ For a rather different and extended interpretation of the prudent good counsel Protagoras proports to teach, see Woodruff 2013. While I agree that the kind of intuitive sense of good counsel Woodruff describes is likely what Protagoras wants most listeners to take him to mean, I have argued here that the rhetorical context along with some key passages throughout signal that we should not take his offerings to be by nature nobly construed as Woodruff’s analysis suggests.

sophists' self-concealment is no folly in itself, but only if they fail to conceal themselves entirely. Self-concealment requires foresight. The foresight required for the most excellent form of prudence, the one which guarantees individual survival and self-interest, on Protagoras' account, seems to require, in turn, a twofold separation. One must separate knowing from suffering, on the one hand, and seeming from being, on the other. To prudently feign injustice requires knowing what is just and shame-worthy without thereby necessarily being just or suffering shame. In fact, all that is needed, and perhaps even the most desirable thing for the most shrewdly prudent individuals, is to appear just without really being so.

But Protagoras' myth says more. It indicates that human beings have a split nature, both Promethean and Epimethean. Reducing experience to knowledge and being to seeming flattens humanity. Socrates, it seems, anticipates this move when he prescinds from domestic counsel and asks Protagoras only about political counsel. If tragedy indicates the problem with this separation in its depictions of the conflict between the political and domestic spheres, then Protagoras—and not Socrates—aims to avoid tragedy at all costs by creating a situation in which these conflicts could not meaningfully occur by focusing exclusively, if only implicitly, on individual self-interest.¹⁸⁹ If foresight meant we could know perfectly without having to suffer, we would never err. If we were only our public selves, our reputation, then other claims on our actions from the domestic sphere or even moral claims from the political sphere would have no real hold on us. While the prospect of avoiding tragedy might seem desirable enough in itself, the cost seems to be both the depth of human existence in its complexities of knowing and suffering, and

¹⁸⁹ Contra Nussbaum (1986).

seeming and being. In addition, this carries ethical implications. If reputation and material well-being is our primary concern, then our relationship to others is purely instrumental and oriented toward self-interest. We might act civically when doing so is unavoidable or else immediately beneficial to us, but we would do just as well not to if we could get away with seeming alone.

2.6 CONCLUSION

Protagoras concludes by suggesting that the sons of Pericles should not yet be faulted for being less virtuous than their father, as they are still young and have hope to become better (328d), reintroducing the significance of age and public appearance established in the first chapter. If the *Protagoras* takes place between 433–432 BCE,¹⁹⁰ then it would be only three to four years before both brothers perish in the Plague of 430 BCE,¹⁹¹ by which Plato introduces mortality as a limit to their becoming excellent. Mortality is also the ultimate limiting condition of human life that disrupts the exercise of the forethought that Protagoras celebrates. True, humans have the foresight to know that we are mortal, but that knowledge hardly overcomes the limits that mortality imposes upon us. Rather, knowledge of mortality is perhaps the foremost example of what it means that humans are at once Promethean and Epimethean, that we act from within ἀπορία. Through

¹⁹⁰ For details supporting the dialogue's dramatic date, see Denyer 2008, 66; Nails 2002, 256; and Walsh 1984 argues for it taking place in the 420s BCE, albeit drawing from both of Protagoras' visits, but his reading would make the attendance of Pericles' sons impossible.

¹⁹¹ Denyer 2008, 66.

this dramatic irony, Plato underscores Socrates' repeated emphasis on human finitude and limitation, tacitly calling into question Protagoras' aim of total foresight.

Returning to the parallel with which we opened this chapter, the myth's repeated allusions to human beings' movement from concealment within the earth to being revealed in the light recall the recurring theme of appearance and concealment. In the myth, it is the gods who bring human beings from the earth into the light and appoint Prometheus and Epimetheus to distribute powers and order before their doing so. But the movement from within to without recalls further Socrates' leading Hippocrates from within his home, out into the portico, and finally into Callias' home. If Socrates takes the place of the gods in the myth, then Protagoras takes the place of either Prometheus or Epimetheus. But perhaps the parallel is still more complex than that. If Socrates in the previous scene at his own home acted as the gods in bringing Hippocrates to light through interrogating what it is he desires to learn from Protagoras, then perhaps he has another role to play in leading Hippocrates into—and perhaps out of—the house of Callias.

Moreover, throughout the conversation with Protagoras, Socrates examines what teaching Protagoras offers Hippocrates, thus taking on the role of Prometheus examining Epimetheus' distributions. We have then a twofold leading from concealment to appearance, within to without, and from darkness to light. Prior to leading Hippocrates inside Callias' house, Socrates brings him outside of his own dwelling, before dawn breaks, while still concealed in darkness. What are we to make of this repetition and these details? The picture we get of Socratic enlightenment is a continuous movement from within obscurity toward further elucidation rather than a movement fully completed. Once more,

we see wonder and a striving for completion in action as the model for philosophical thinking. We see Socrates, like Prometheus, act in response to and yet still within ἀπορία.

If we read the allusions in the text to associate Socrates with Prometheus and Protagoras with Epimetheus, we need not read repeat Protagoras' mistake by taking this as a simplistic identity between each thinker and their mythological counterpart. Rather, Protagoras' praise of foresight is directed toward the self-preservation made necessary by humanity's Epimethean limits. Protagorean foresight is an attempt to overcome those limits by prudently providing for one's own preservation through whatever means necessary and available. Epimetheus forgets himself and his own nature when he fails to provide for human salvation. Epimetheus forgets that it is in his nature to forget. Protagoras' desire to overcome humanity's Epimethean limits by means of prudent foresight repeats the very mistake that Epimetheus commits in the myth. Protagoras fails to recognize forgetting as an intrinsic limitation to—and occasion of!—human foresight. When we recall that Protagoras identifies the goal of human life—and all mortal life—as self-preservation, then this failure amounts to a base and futile attempt at immortality, failing to recognize his finitude. The myth shows us, instead, that human beings resemble both Titans. If Socrates is Promethean, then his foresight consists in precisely the self-knowledge that Protagoras-as-Epimetheus lacks.¹⁹² Socratic foresight recognizes its limitations and acknowledges forgetting and ignorance as intrinsic to human nature, recalling always his semblance to Epimetheus.

¹⁹² Gonzalez argues something similar in connecting Socrates' foresight to his admission of ignorance and the erotic nature of Socratic inquiry (2000, 141).

3.0 CHAPTER 3: PROTAGORAS EXPOSED

This chapter argues that self-knowledge is a thematic concern for the dialogue as a whole and that, in particular, philosophy is characterized by a continuous pursuit of self-knowledge. The dispute over the unity of the virtues reflects the conflicting notions of the self and the human good held by Socrates and Protagoras.

In section one, I argue that Socrates' response to Protagoras' great speech reinforces that self-knowledge is a thematic concern within the dialogue. In particular, I lay the groundwork for our claim that philosophy is characterized by a continuous pursuit of self-knowledge. This philosophical pursuit of self-knowledge is characterized by Socrates' aporetic and questioning way of speaking in contrast to assertoric or Protagorean evasive speech that characterizes sophistic rhetoric. In section two, I argue that Socrates' inquiry into the unity and multiplicity of the virtues continues the effort of self-inquiry by further distinguishing philosophy from sophistry. It proposes that Protagoras must keep the virtues distinct in light of his understanding of the self and its goals. The multiplicity of the virtues reflects the self's multiple interests which must be served on Protagoras' relational view of what is good. Protagorean σωφροσύνη consists in the prudent foresight to feign civic virtues in order to appear good to others while serving one's own self-interests.

In section three, I demonstrate that Protagoras' pursuit of self-preservation and reputation motivates his using long and evasive speech that prudently conceals both his self-interested motivations from hostile listeners and potential gaps in his understanding from prospective students. It argues that Socrates' demand for Protagoras to speak briefly amounts to a demand for Protagoras to submit to the risks involved in inquiry. The dispute

over method is predicated on a deeper disagreement about the nature of the human good itself. Protagoras understands the human good as acting to one's advantage in order to satisfy desires, ensure survival, and glorify reputation, while Socrates sees the human good as a psychic good that is nourished through inquiry. Finally, in section four, I consider the political implications of the distinction between philosophy and sophistry so construed by attending to the dramatic intervention of the auditors at Callias' house as a parable for disputes over the nature and purpose of democratic discourse.

3.1 ON QUESTIONING

In his response to Protagoras' speech, Socrates indicates straightaway that, bewitching though Protagoras' charms might be, the sophist has not escaped Socrates' notice:

Protagoras, having shown forth¹⁹³ so much and in such a way, ceased from his λόγος. And I, after much time, having been charmed, was still looking for him to say something, longing to hear: when, indeed, I perceived that he had really ceased, with difficulty somehow, just as if collecting myself, I spoke... (328d).¹⁹⁴

On Socrates' view, Protagoras stops short (ἀπεπαύσατο) of providing a complete λόγος. Socrates waited for much time before responding, expecting to hear more. Socrates' word choices here echo *Odyssey* I. The poet Phemius sings a version of *The Return from Troy*, with themes too painful for Penelope awaiting Odysseus' return—a pain which, she

¹⁹³ While Protagoras describes his display in the active voice (320c), Socrates describes it here in the middle voice, suggesting that Protagoras, despite his efforts, reveals himself to some extent.

¹⁹⁴ Πρωταγόρας μὲν τοσαῦτα καὶ τοιαῦτα ἐπιδειξάμενος ἀπεπαύσατο τοῦ λόγου. Καὶ ἐγὼ ἐπὶ μὲν πολὺν χρόνον κεκλημένος ἔτι πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔβλεπον ὡς ἐροῦντά τι, ἐπιθυμῶν ἀκούειν: ἐπεὶ δὲ δὴ ἡσθόμην ὅτι τῷ ὄντι πεπαυμένος εἶη, μόγις πῶς ἑμαυτὸν ὥσπερ εἰ συναγείρας εἶπον

complains, cannot be forgotten (*Od.* 343). She asks him, therefore, to cease from this song (ἀποπαύε) and instead sing the other charming (κλείουσιν) songs he knows of gods and mortals (*Od.* 337–342). Telemachus responds by entreating her to endure hearing the song (θυμὸς ἀκούειν) without blame for the poet who sings it, since Zeus alone is responsible for their loss (353). That Socrates has just paired Protagoras with Orpheus, whose music charms like Protagoras’ voice, reinforces the parallel.

The song painfully reminds Penelope of Odysseus, the hero to whom Socrates earlier likened to himself (314e). Perhaps, then, Socrates is charmed (κεκλημένος) and desires to hear more (ἐπιθυμῶν ἀκούειν) because Protagoras’ speech in some way resembles his own. He must respond to Protagoras’ speech, “as if painfully collecting himself together.” Indeed, the semblance between the two thinkers will become striking in what follows, to the point where they seem to switch places throughout the argument or else, where Socrates argues for or against things he seems to dismiss or endorse elsewhere both in this same dialogue and in others. I propose that the likeness between the two thinkers results from their shared recognition that oversight threatens human striving and that foresight must, therefore, play a decisive role in human life.¹⁹⁵ But Protagoras’ λόγος, on Socrates’ read, is incomplete insofar as the sophist aims to purify foresight of the oversight that serves as its condition.¹⁹⁶ That is, Protagoras’ dedication to reputation without risk leads him to speak in such a way that he avoids any potential risk. He speaks evasively so as to avoid appearing ignorant, which would cause him to lose potential students, and to avoid opposing the opinions and values of influential listeners, which

¹⁹⁵ This much, Nussbaum too observes in her own way (1986, 91).

¹⁹⁶ Contra Nussbaum, who believes that Socrates and not Protagoras aims at wholly overcoming contingency in human action (1986, 90).

would cause him to incur the hatred of such listeners. But Protagoras' evasive speech makes his account impervious to refutation or scrutiny in such a way that conceals what is missing in the account. He presents a speech that seems complete without actually arriving at a truth that can be put to the test and submitted to further inquiry.

To collect himself, before responding to Protagoras, Socrates first expresses his gratitude to Hippocrates, recalling the purpose of his visit: "I said, looking toward Hippocrates (βλέψας πρὸς τὸν Ἱπποκράτη), 'O son of Apollodorus, I have such gratitude (χάριν) for you, that you urged me (or, literally, "turned me toward"; προύτρηνσας) to come here" (328d). "As if collecting himself," Socrates turns the direction of his gaze from Protagoras to Hippocrates. In so doing, he turns his gaze from Protagoras' apparent wisdom to Hippocrates' pursuit of wisdom, however impetuous and misdirected it may be in the person of Hippocrates. To collect himself, Socrates remembers—just as he advises Hippocrates to do in their initial conversation—the pursuit of wisdom that motivates their meeting the sophist.¹⁹⁷ Socrates also echoes here the twofold gratitude between himself and the unnamed companion that occasions his narration of the dialogue. Here, Socrates expresses his gratitude not to Protagoras but to Hippocrates for occasioning his arrival. He is grateful to Hippocrates for turning him toward this meeting. We might conclude from the direction of Socrates' gratitude that he is grateful for the self-reflection that his meeting the sophist occasions.¹⁹⁸

Socrates first reconsiders whether virtue can be learned by human effort alone:

¹⁹⁷ Hence, I disagree with Golub who takes Socrates to be indifferent toward Hippocrates and Alcibiades in the dialogue with Protagoras (2021, 313). While he claims to forget Alcibiades often, he continuously demonstrates that he remembers Hippocrates as the occasion for his getting-together with Protagoras and his inquisition of the sophist appears to be motivated by exposing the risks of sophistry to Hippocrates and other ambitious youths, Alcibiades included, who might undertake to study with the sophist.

¹⁹⁸ In this, I agree with Gonzalez who claims that Socrates is enchanted not with the wisdom that Protagoras offers but with the dialectic by which he can evaluate what Protagoras offers (2014, 39–40).

For I make much (πολλοῦ γὰρ ποιοῦμαι) of having heard the things that I have heard from Protagoras. For, before, I myself considered (ἐγὼ... ἡγούμην) it not to be by human care (ἀνθρωπίνην ἐπιμέλειαν) that good [human beings] became good: now, I have been persuaded (πέπεισμαι) (328d–e).

Protagoras never says explicitly that human beings become good through human effort, but only that all teach all to become good. At the same time, Protagoras singles himself out among the sophists by claiming that he walks the entirely other course in employing the σωφροσύνη that will ensure his survival. He likewise implies that this is the art that he will teach to others. The verb that Socrates uses for “consider,” ἡγούμην, has an etymological connection to leading or guiding. Taken literally, it suggests that, before, Socrates did not lead himself to become good through his own human effort. If Socrates is one of the good human beings who must have become good, Socrates indicates here that he became good from a source outside himself. Persuaded—however playfully—by Protagoras, he leads himself to the consideration that human beings become good through themselves, by means of human care.¹⁹⁹

However, Socrates’ demonstrated care for Hippocrates implies that he knows beforehand that human care contributes to human beings becoming good.²⁰⁰ He cares for Hippocrates in the hope that Hippocrates will become good or at least more cautious and discerning in his pursuits. Rather than indicate Protagoras’ successful persuasion, Socrates’ statement and actions imply that his own nuanced understanding of human goodness to

¹⁹⁹ Bartlett points out that the claim that Protagoras has persuaded Socrates need not entail that Protagoras teaches anything insofar as persuasion need not yield knowledge (2016, 40).

²⁰⁰ Altman refers to moments in the dialogues such as this as Plato’s use of “Performative Self-Contradiction,” which he argues, as Plato’s most pervasive kind of joke, are instructive in indicating how we should read the dialogues. Moreover, Altman points out that Plato’s own practice of teaching in the Academy would be a kind of performative self-contradiction of Socrates’ expressed doubt that virtue is teachable. These performative self-contradictions indicate, for Altman, the need for poetic interpretation to explain the self-contradiction, a point to which we will return in detail in the next chapter (2020, xi and 36–37, in particular).

depends on a combination personal effort and outside influence. Socrates indicates his own sense of teaching as a dialectical relationship between the teacher and student through which the student comes to lead herself. If Socrates indicates more self-sufficiency in human moral achievement than Protagoras' account implies, perhaps he expresses not so much persuasion as skepticism that human beings can really become so self-sufficient as Protagoras' σωφροσύνη might imply. Socrates playfully here indicates that this is to make much, perhaps too much, of oneself (πολλοῦ... ποιοῦμαι). Moreover, if Socrates possesses the self-knowledge to recognize that he did not become good through his own efforts *alone*, he likewise implies Protagoras lacks that self-knowledge. While individual nature might play some role in becoming good for both Protagoras and Socrates, Socrates seems to deny Protagoras' implication that perhaps the best natures could or should ever overcome their dependence on others to act exclusively in their own interest.

Socrates then indicates that despite his professed admiration of Protagoras' speech, a small thing stands in his way. He then, rather ironically, provides a lengthy preface to his small question in which he preemptively exhorts Protagoras to speak briefly in response (328e–329b). Praising Protagoras, Socrates claims that other public speakers—like Pericles—make excellent speeches but are then “like books,” unable either to answer small questions briefly or to ask questions themselves.²⁰¹ He compares such speakers to bronze that, when struck, rings out continuously unless someone should stop it from ringing.²⁰² Popular speakers, too, Socrates claims, respond to small questions by making inappropriately long speeches. Anticipating his later critique of Protagoras on this very

²⁰¹ There are notable parallels here with Socrates' critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*. See, for example, the comparison between painting and writing at 274d.

²⁰² This metaphor recalls the *Ion*'s comparison between rhetors and copper rings who lack knowledge but are divinely inspired and perform their poems without adequate knowledge of their sayings.

point (cf. 334d), Socrates contrasts Protagoras' skill from such popular speakers in that Protagoras is capable not only of making long beautiful speeches, but also of answering questions briefly and asking them, too:

And Protagoras here is competent at speaking long and beautiful λόγοι, as these are manifest (αὐτὰ δηλοῖ), and he is competent too, as one being asked, at giving a response²⁰³ in brief, and, as one asking for himself, at waiting for and accepting an answer, which [competencies] have been procured by few [people] (329b).

Socrates here once more suggests that Protagoras himself remains concealed in his speeches, which, as he puts it, are themselves manifest (αὐτὰ δηλοῖ), but not necessarily their speaker. This capacity for long speeches to conceal their speaker, I propose, motivates Socrates' preference for brief λόγοι more than a concern for victory or arbitrary preference.²⁰⁴ However, it is not the length of speech as such that renders them deceptive. Instead, it is their assertoric and evasive rather than questioning and self-disclosing nature to which Socrates objects.²⁰⁵ Socrates introduces here a peculiar thematic concern of the dialogue that will recur and develop throughout. Some characterize this concern as the norms that govern dialogue and conversation.²⁰⁶

But few scholars who discuss this dispute attend to the value Socrates places not only in answering questions briefly, but in the ability to pose questions, too.²⁰⁷ Since the

²⁰³ I translate middle forms of ἀποκρίνω “to give a response” and active forms “to answer” in order to preserve a subtle distinction between responding and answering suggested by Hyland in which answering presents itself with finality while responding opens the door to further questioning. Moreover, “to respond” preserves better the middle sense of ἀποκρίνω insofar as responding involves taking into account who asks and what is asked in a way that answering need not involve. To fully respond to something, I must take it seriously as a matter of care. To answer, I need not meaningfully reflect on my original position so much as to rephrase or clarify some point.

²⁰⁴ McCoy suggests similarly that Socrates prefers brief speeches because they signal an openness to one's interlocutor while long speeches indicate an obsession with one's own views (2007, 78). I add that in Protagoras' case, this self-obsession amounts to his self-erasure and evading the argument altogether, which exacerbates Socrates' objection.

²⁰⁵ See also Griswold 1999, 291–292.

²⁰⁶ See Sentese (2020 and 2015), Griswold (1999), Gonzalez (2014), and Seferoglu (2019).

²⁰⁷ Although not with reference to this dialogue, notable exceptions include Hyland, who characterizes Socrates' entire way of philosophy as proceeding in an aporetic questioning stance (Hyland 2021) and

preference for either long or short speeches seems rather arbitrary as such, the other feature of speech that Socrates praises—the ability to ask and respond to questions—must be what motivates his own stated preference for short speeches, now and in the discussion that follows. Indeed, answering briefly and asking questions are presented jointly, governed by the consequent *δὲ* clause, in contrast to making long speeches, governed by the antecedent *μὲν* clause. The grammatical arrangement suggests that Socrates distinguishes one single skill of questioning from another skill of making long speeches when he claims that Protagoras is proficient at both.

The chief complaint Socrates wields against popular rhetors is that their manner of speech betrays an incapacity or unwillingness to entertain further questions. Socrates himself makes great and lengthy speeches, such as the present one ranging from 328d–329d, not to mention Socrates’ narration of the whole exchange between himself and Protagoras, amounting to the dialogue’s longest speech by far. What distinguishes Socratic speech from rhetorical speech is neither its length nor even necessarily a set of methodological characteristics.²⁰⁸ Rather, what distinguishes Socratic speech from sophistic speech is the former’s orientation toward questioning.²⁰⁹ Socrates’ praise of the art of questioning would reinforce our claim in the previous chapter that Socrates’ capacity for *δεῖνος* speaking consists in his practice of *καλῶς* asking. Socratic *λόγος* remains aporetic.

Roochnik (1987 and 1990, 200–201). On a closely related note, and in reference to this dispute between Protagoras and Socrates, McCoy observes that the dialogue repeatedly indicates the importance of listening and receptivity, which I emphasize are prerequisite comportments for possessing the skill of questioning that Socrates highlights here (2007, 77–78). Likewise, Ewegen emphasizes Socratic receptivity (Ewegen 2020).

²⁰⁸ Contra Seferaglu 2019.

²⁰⁹ Bowen argues more general argument that Platonic dialogues as such are vehicles for philosophical inquiry rather than discursive systems of thinking (1988, 56). This claim finds support in our observations that in his attempt to distinguish philosopher from sophist, Plato routinely depicts inquiry as the former’s primary concern and demand of the latter.

It is also worth noting that Socrates' questioning and aporetic way of speaking develop further the Socratic sense of foresight expounded in the previous chapter. Non-aporetic speaking conceals what remains question-worthy in its account in one of two ways. Either it presents itself as a complete account, or else it avoids giving an account altogether. Aporetic speaking, in being oriented toward questioning, acknowledges that something remains unknown in what is spoken. Such a way of speaking anticipates the oversight that disrupts our efforts toward completion. At the same time, this recognition, in turn, motivates the dialogue to continue. A speaking that is oriented toward questioning remains aporetic in such a way that promotes further inquiry into truth without thereby mistaking its own account for the completion that it seeks or evading the serious task of inquiring. Indeed, Socrates concludes the preface to his question by once more appealing to his pursuit of completion in λόγος: "Now then, Protagoras, I am in need of something small to *have everything*, if only you were to give this response to me" (329b, my emphasis). At the same time, by insisting that Protagoras demonstrate his skill in questioning, Socrates here anticipates that Protagoras' interest in pure foresight likewise forecloses further inquiry. In seeking to anticipate the interests and threats of his audience, Protagoras seeks to provide shrewd and calculated answers to those interests that ward off genuine questioning.

We have argued so far that Socrates' response to Protagoras' great speech reinforces that self-knowledge is an abiding concern in philosophical inquiry. We have proposed that the dramatic action of this section of the dialogue consists in part in Socrates' earnest efforts to "recollect himself" in opposition to the sophist as a reflection of the continuous pursuit of self-knowledge that characterizes philosophical inquiry. In section

two, I now turn to the way in which the dialogue's explicit interrogation into the unity or multiplicity of the virtues reflects this concern by tacitly questioning whether the self itself is a unity or multiplicity.

3.2 POSING THE QUESTION: ON THE UNITY OF THE VIRTUES

As it turns out, “the small thing” that Socrates asks governs much of the remaining dialogue, leading some scholars to identify the unity of the virtues as the dialogue's most pervasive theme.²¹⁰ By posing the question of the unity of the virtues, Socrates aims both at drawing Protagoras out into the open and at continuing the inquiry into what makes a soul become good that he began with Hippocrates.²¹¹ Socrates recalls that in his myth and λόγος, Protagoras refers to ἀρετή as some one thing while simultaneously referring to several virtues such as justice, σωφροσύνη, and piety. In the previous chapter, we connected this ambiguity to the relationship between σωφροσύνη in particular—as the single virtue by which one pursues individual self-interest while appearing to serve collective interest—and the other (civic) virtues that promote collective interest such as justice. In posing this question, Socrates aims to compel Protagoras to admit the potential tension between individual and collective self-interest implied in his account, while at the

²¹⁰ See, for example, Benitez 1992, 225.

²¹¹ I hereby depart from Gargarin's argument that Plato's purpose in writing the *Protagoras* is for Socrates to advance Protagoras' views from a sociological plane onto an ontological one (1969, 144–145) and from thinkers who suppose Protagoras' views are in accord with morality typically understood (cf. Kerferd 1953 and Vlastos 1956 viii–ix). On my view, the two thinkers are not continuous, as Gargarin proposes, but radically opposed. On this reading, I follow thinkers such as Bartlett (2004 and 2016), Gonzalez (2008), Hemmenway (1996), McCoy (1998 and 2007), et al. who identify the conflict between the two thinkers on a subtextual level. I also depart from Golub who thinks Socrates' nit-picking over the unity of the virtues expresses indifference to the details of Protagoras' myth, since on my view the question aims to expose key details of the myth that betray its subtextual teachings (Golub 2021).

same time specifying what exactly Protagorean εὐβουλία consists in—be it σωφροσύνη, the civic virtues, or something else.²¹² Socrates here makes manifest a problem concealed within Protagoras’ account so as to continue his λόγος, which might have otherwise seemed complete. Socrates’ appeal to wonder (ἐθαύμασα) and yearning (ἐπιποθῶ) for what is still missing that would fill his soul (τῇ ψυχῇ ἀποπλήρωσον) reinforces his effort to render Protagoras’ λόγος open to further inquiry and to measure its effect on their souls (329c).

If Socrates’ question is a larger affair than he let on, as the extent of their discourse will reveal, Protagoras’ initial response maintains its pretended insignificance: “‘But as to this, at least, Socrates,’ he said, ‘It is easy to give a response, because the things which you ask are parts of the single being of virtue’” (329d).²¹³ Given the difficulties that follow, Protagoras is either unaware of the magnitude of what Socrates asks—betraying that he is not as competent at questioning as Socrates suggests—or else he makes a show of giving a response as if the matter were as small as Socrates claims, lest its implications for his account come to the fore. In either case, Protagoras immediately fails to meet Socrates’ appeal to give a response (ἀποκρίνασθαι), if indeed giving a response involves some form of acceptance (ἀποδέξασθαι) that the question might influence or shape the response, as Socrates suggests. Protagoras meets the form of Socrates’ demand in that his reply is brief, but he fails to cede to the underlying demand to open himself up to further inquiry in the dismissive tone of his reply.

Still, Protagoras’ brevity allows Socrates to press on, revealing why Socrates favors brevity over lengthy λόγοι. Brief λόγοι at least permit the questioner to expose the

²¹² See also Bartlett 2016, 41–42.

²¹³ ἀλλὰ ῥάδιον τοῦτό γ’, ἔφη, ὃ Σώκρατες, ἀποκρίνασθαι, ὅτι ἐνὸς ὄντος τῆς ἀρετῆς μούριά ἐστιν ἡ ἐρωτᾶς. The Greek word order emphasizes the ease with which Protagoras makes his response.

interlocutor's evasion. Accordingly, Socrates continues by asking in what sense ἀρετή should be construed as "one" by way analogy. Socrates asks whether the various virtues are parts of a single ἀρετή like parts of a face or like parts of gold (329d).²¹⁴ In the former case, it would seem that each has its own power or function, such that the eyes see while the ears hear. On the other hand, the gold analogy would mean that virtues do not substantially differ from one another, being identical in kind, if spatially differentiated or different in size. Protagoras responds, preferring the face analogy over the gold analogy, thus maintaining different functions for the virtues (329d–e). Protagoras' choice is intuitive insofar as the virtues appear oriented toward different spheres. For instance, whereas justice concerns humans' interpersonal relations, piety concerns humans' relation to the gods. Moreover, adopting the face analogy enables Protagoras to maintain the covert distinction between virtues that promotes self-interest and those that promote civic interest, by implying that virtues perform different functions.

Socrates presses on, still aiming to expose this last point: “‘Then,’ I was saying, ‘do the human beings partake of these parts of ἀρετή, some on the one hand one [part] (ἄλλο), others on the other hand another (ἄλλο), or is it necessary, if someone undertakes one [part], to have all [parts]?’” Socrates' use of the term ἄλλο in contrast to the term ἕτερα in the gold analogy, reinforces the sense in which the virtues are different in kind from one another, whereas in the gold analogy, they would be others of the same kind. This, in turn, underscores the meaning of his question here, which asks whether individuals can possess

²¹⁴ Gargarin (1969, 146) and Vlastos (1972) both discuss the sense in which the paradigms Socrates offers both represent extreme senses of the relationship between the virtues and likewise both praise Protagoras for seeking a middle course. However, both thinkers miss the rhetorical element involved in Socrates' approach. Just as when he attempts to corner the sophist into expressing what he teaches by implying the rather extreme view that political virtue is unteachable, so now Socrates proposes to extremes in an attempt to corner the sophist into admitting what the relationship is between the virtue(s) *he* teaches and those civic virtues by which the city fares well (see also Hemmenway 1996, 15).

any one ἀρετή in isolation from the others, or if the virtues must somehow entail each other such that possessing one ἀρετή requires possessing them all. Again, Protagoras answers intuitively that each can be possessed singly, inching closer to the self-revelation that Socrates seeks: “‘In no way,’ he said, ‘Since many are courageous but unjust, and just, in turn, but not wise’” (329e).²¹⁵ Protagoras’ claim here need not endorse those who are courageous but unjust, but that it is his first example is telling. Recalling his claim that it is madness to admit one’s injustice, might those individuals who conceal their injustice demonstrate such an unjust courage on Protagoras’ view? If Protagoras’ predecessors are cowardly in hiding their sophistry behind other arts, might Protagoras’ open admission that he is a sophist without disclosing what his sophistry consists in be for him yet another instance of unjust courage? Here, at least, is Protagoras’ most direct indication that this may well be a plausible interpretation of his display.

Having gotten Protagoras to admit this much, Socrates summarizes their findings before moving forward with his inquisition. After having Protagoras confirm that the two virtues mentioned in his last reply, wisdom and courage, are likewise parts of virtue, with Protagoras emphasizing that wisdom is the greatest of the parts (329e–330a), Socrates summarizes the implication of the face analogy:

And does each of them have their own ability (or “their own power”; ἰδίαν δύναμιν)? Just as the parts of the face: an eye is not such as the ears, nor is the power of it the same, nor is any one of the rest (τῶν ἄλλων) such as the other (τὸ ἕτερον) neither according to its ability nor to the rest (τὰ ἄλλα): then in this way also are the parts of ἀρετή not the one such as the other (τὸ ἕτερον οἷον τὸ ἕτερον), neither it (αὐτὸ) nor its ability? Or is it clear that it is precisely in this way, if indeed it is like the example? (330a–b)

²¹⁵ Bartlett points out that Protagoras’ separation of justice from wisdom puts forward the possibility that justice may rather be the practice of fools (2016, 43).

First, Socrates establishes that just like parts of a face each have their ability, such that the eye's is to see while the ear's is to hear, so also will the virtues each have their own ability. This recalls Protagoras' myth wherein the mortal creatures come to be distinguished from each other by the abilities that Epimetheus distributes. So too, the virtues will be distinguished on the basis of their abilities.

Second, in his summary, Socrates switches between the two words for "other," ἕτερον, meaning another of the same kind, and ἄλλα, meaning other in kind. In doing so, he likewise recalls the ambiguities of the myth's distinction among the species: while the abilities served to distinguish each creature from the other, the abilities were all directed toward the single end of self-preservation so that the distinction remains to that extent superficial. While each creature seems differentiated on the basis of its ability, no purpose provides an ultimate ground for this distinction. If each creature shares survival as its ultimate purpose, then they remain ἕτερον even though their distinct abilities make them seem ἄλλα. In the present context, Socrates simultaneously indicates what would make something ἄλλα: that nothing is such as another (ἕτερον) either in its power or in itself. That is, to be ἄλλα requires radical isolation so that the being itself (αὐτὸ) exists totally independently in itself with its own unique ability and thus *not to be such as another* (ἕτερον). The parts of the face do not even seem to have this kind of total independence, since the power of each, while distinct, is nevertheless oriented toward a shared object of perception.²¹⁶ Socrates simultaneously indicates the kind of radical independence and self-sufficiency that Protagoras' account implies while undermining the plausibility of the virtues' independence on the basis of their own paradigm.

²¹⁶ See also Bartlett 2016, 42.

When Protagoras affirms the independence of the virtues and their powers, Socrates drops the use of ἕτερον, and replaces Protagoras' mention of wisdom (σοφία) with knowledge (ἐπιστήμη): "And I said, 'Is no other (οὐδὲν... ἄλλο) of the parts of virtue (ἀρετῆς) such as knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), nor such as justice, nor such as courage, nor such as moderation (σωφροσύνη), nor such as piety?'" (330b). Socrates' transition from σοφία to ἐπιστήμη parallels the transition from ἕτερον to ἄλλο. Perhaps, then, Socrates means to signal that ἐπιστήμη somehow replaces σοφία when each virtue is understood radically independently of the others. Wisdom then, for Socrates, might concern the relationship between the parts with each other and with ἀρετή as the whole, while knowledge concerns independent objects.²¹⁷ Protagoras, in any case, either ignores or overlooks Socrates' substitution of knowledge for wisdom, agreeing that no part of ἀρετή resembles the rest.

Having fleshed out Protagoras' sense that each ἀρετή is distinct from the rest, Socrates changes course by joining together in common (κοινῇ) with Protagoras to examine (σκεψώμεθα) each virtue in turn (330b). If before, Socrates was asking and Protagoras responding, for the present moment, Socrates joins Protagoras in responding. If part of the purpose of this section is for Socrates to collect himself together by distinguishing his own views from those of Protagoras, this joint effort will provide the opportunity to do just that.²¹⁸ Socrates first asks whether justice is a certain πράγμα or not, to which he and

²¹⁷ Since Socrates seems to elide the distinction here, this suggestion can only be provisional. As Hyland pointed out to me in correspondence on this issue, it is instructive that the *Theaetetus* questions this relationship directly. In it, Socrates explores first what ἐπιστήμη is but the dialogue concludes before returning to the question of wisdom. Again, provisionally, I would suggest that this is because wisdom has to do with the act of inquiry performed within the dialogues rather than the discrete arguments that yield positive propositions in them.

²¹⁸ Senteny points out that Socrates' attempt to join with Protagoras in pursuit of a common goal anticipates his later attempt to restructure Protagoras' agonistic conception of conversation into his cooperative sense in pursuit of a common good (2020, 289). However, the fact that their common goal here is distinguishing philosophy from sophistry complicates the sense of community proposed by maintaining distance between the two thinkers. Socrates recognizes from the start the implausibility of forming community with Protagoras.

Protagoras both respond that it seems so (δοκεῖ) to them. The question itself is ambiguous since *πρᾶγμα* has a range of meanings. Meaning in general “a matter of concern,” calling justice a *πρᾶγμα* could signify that justice is an act or deed one performs, a thing with concrete reality, or else an affair or circumstance. As such, without specifying the sense of *πρᾶγμα* intended, their agreement remains ambiguous. If, for example, Socrates believes that justice is a thing with concrete reality while Protagoras believes justice is a circumstance or affair, their views on its nature are quite different.

As if to occasion his own distinction from Protagoras, Socrates withdraws from the act of questioning and introduces an imagined questioner to whom he and Protagoras each respond, in turn:

What then, if someone should ask both you and me, ‘Protagoras and Socrates, tell me, this *πρᾶγμα*, which you both named just now, justice, is this itself (αὐτὸ τοῦτο) just or not?’ I myself, on the one hand, would respond to him that it is just: you, on the other hand, what vote would you cast? The same as me or otherwise (τὴν αὐτὴν ἐμοὶ ἢ ἄλλην)? ‘The same,’ he said” (330c).

In asking Protagoras explicitly to cast a vote with or against him, Socrates seems to sacrifice his appeal to examine the issue together in common. Rather, with each responding in turn, Socrates seeks to find out whether Protagoras and he are the same (τὴν αὐτὴν) or otherwise (ἄλλην) and thus to differentiate the sophist’s views from his own. Socrates repeatedly distinguishes his response from Protagoras’ by emphatically including the first-person singular pronoun ἐγώ in his response four times (330c–e). Even though Protagoras agrees that justice is such a thing as to be just, that piety is something (τινά), and that piety is not by nature of such a sort such as to be impious, Socrates indicates clearly that he holds these views independently of Protagoras’ agreement. Only once, when the unnamed questioner asks if piety is a certain *πρᾶγμα*, does Socrates drop the use of the singular

pronoun. Instead, he asks in the first-person plural (φάμεν) whether the two men would say that it is, to which Protagoras assents (συνέφη) (330d). Once more, when the ambiguity of the term πράγμα obscures their agreement, Socrates speaks together with Protagoras. Thus far, Socrates maintains his distinction from Protagoras without yet specifying their point of disagreement.

The strangeness here of Socrates' asking things like whether justice can be just, or the issue of "self-predication," has been discussed extensively, so we will address it only briefly here. Vlastos' proposal that Socrates applies "Pauline" rather than "Ordinary" predication here makes sense of the matter by suggesting that Socrates' claim that "justice is just" means that all people and actions that possess justice are just rather than the notion that justice itself is just.²¹⁹ Bartlett suggests that Socrates asks about the self-identity of justice and piety in particular because Protagoras presents them as conventional notions rather than ideas with their own being or reality.²²⁰ This interpretation has the advantage of explaining the question's rhetorical context. If piety and justice are merely conventional, the same act or person that is considered "just" or "pious," along with the act of possessing justice or piety, in one context may well be at the same time unjust or impious elsewhere. Socrates' question then, would rather aim to draw this implication out from Protagoras' account. This, in turn, motivates Socrates' desire to maintain his distance from Protagoras. While Socrates may recognize along with Protagoras that opinions about justice and piety differ across various social contexts, he nevertheless may want to maintain that all of these opinions concern and aim at the self-same justice and piety. Protagoras, however, refuses to take the bait.

²¹⁹ 1972, 448–449.

²²⁰ 2016, 46.

Having thus maintained his distance even when in agreement with Protagoras, Socrates separates himself from Protagoras entirely when he has the questioner recall Protagoras' distinction between the parts of ἀρετή:

If then after this, he should say, asking us: 'How, then, were you talking a little bit ago? Did I not hear (or "overhear;" κατήκουσα) you correctly? You both seemed to me to say that the parts of virtue hold in this way toward each other, that the one of the rest (τὸ ἕτερον αὐτῶν) is not such as the other (τὸ ἕτερον):' I myself at least (ἐγώ γε) would say 'you heard (ἤκουσας) on the one hand, the rest (τὰ μὲν ἄλλα) correctly, on the other hand, since you suppose that I say this, you misheard (παρήκουσας): for Protagoras here responded (ἀποκρινάσατο) in regard to these things, and I was asking (ἐγὼ δὲ ἠρώτων).' If then he should say: 'does this man here speak truly (ἀληθῆ), Protagoras? Do you say that the one part (τὸ ἕτερον μῦθον) is not such as the other (τὸ ἕτερον) of the [rest] of virtue? Is this your (σὸς) λόγος?' What would you respond to him?" (330e–331a)

By having the unnamed questioner ask if he heard the two thoroughly (κατήκουσα), Socrates recalls the eunuch who overheard (κατήκουεν) Socrates and Hippocrates speaking and incorrectly inferred that they were sophists. Socrates implies through this repetition that sophistry and philosophy sound alike to those who do not hear thoroughly. Socrates corrects the unnamed questioner that while he heard the content of their speech correctly, he misheard the role each played in shaping the content. Protagoras was the one responding, while Socrates was the one questioning. In a way, Socrates' withdrawal from the content of Protagoras' λόγος is a bit odd if not disingenuous. Does questioning really play no role in shaping the λόγος that follows? Perhaps instead, Socrates means to correct the unnamed questioner by indicating the underlying distinction between himself and Protagoras that they live out in their conversation. Socrates, as we proposed, maintains a stance of questioning. This stance is irreducible to the proposition that such questioning yields. Protagoras, it seems, avoids submitting himself to inquiry, while feigning complete openness. Might this evasion betray his concealed dogmatism? Insofar as neither thinker

reveals himself in the conversation's propositional content, the unnamed questioner's confusion is warranted.²²¹ But the reason for their evasion, Socrates implies, is different.

Socrates, by withdrawing from their conversation's content, means to compel Protagoras to identify himself with his responses in such a way that will reveal the distinction between the two men. Protagoras registers the sense of compulsion in his response, “‘It would be necessary (ἀνάγκη),’ he said, ‘to agree’ (ὁμολογεῖν)” (331a). Protagoras stops short of directly agreeing and thereby fully identifying himself with his λόγος. As if detecting Protagoras' reluctance, Socrates resumes his role as Protagoras' ally, joining to answer together with Protagoras given that they agree to these things (ταῦτα ὁμολογήσαντες, 331a). It seems clear considering both what precedes and follows this statement of agreement that they do not agree about the relationship between the parts of ἀρετή. Instead, it seems that Socrates agrees that it is necessary for Protagoras to agree with himself and thus to commit himself to his own λόγος. Thus, his return as Protagoras' ally is short-lived. When asked relentlessly (ἐπανέρηται) by the unnamed questioner about whether it is really the case that, for example, the just is such as to be impious or the pious to be unjust, Socrates responds:

For, on the one hand, I myself on my own behalf, at least (ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ αὐτὸς ὑπὲρ γε ἑμαυτοῦ) would say that both the just and the pious are just: and, on your behalf, too, if you would permit me, I would respond these same things, that surely justice is the same as piety or that they are as similar as possible, and most of all justice is such as to be piety and piety such as to be justice. But see (ὄρα) if you prevent [me] from giving this answer, or if it seems (συνδοκεῖ) to you in this way (331b).

The unnamed questioner's relentless questioning resembles Socrates' own habitual inquiries. Socrates doubles himself in order simultaneously to submit Protagoras to his own

²²¹ Benitez makes a similar observation when he notes that neither Socrates nor the sophists offer positive teachings which obfuscates attempts to distinguish Socratic philosophy from sophistry on the basis of content (1992, 232).

form of questioning, while also modeling his own form of question and response that distinguishes him from Protagoras. Socrates' self-distinction is unmistakably emphatic here: he speaks himself on his own behalf (ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ αὐτὸς ὑπὲρ γε ἑμαυτοῦ).

It is tempting to look for a declaration in what Socrates would say (φαίην) by which to distinguish the content of his own beliefs from that of Protagoras, but this would yield only partial success. Socrates declares that justice is such as to be pious and piety, just. This is clearly opposed to Protagoras' responses and thus distinguishes the two in terms of their λόγοι's content: for Protagoras, the virtues appear to be independent of one another, whereas for Socrates, they appear to be intrinsically connected. However, Socrates maintains his questioning stance by admitting an ambiguity in his understanding of the relationship between the virtues. He says they are either the same (ταὐτόν) or as similar as possible (ὁμοιότατον). Socrates thereby gives a response that befits a questioner who asks again and again. That is, he gives a response that promotes and invites further inquiry. He demonstrates his openness further by asking whether Protagoras would prevent him from giving this same account on his behalf or if it seems in the same way to him, too.

Despite Socrates' repeated and emphatic demonstration of identifying with a λόγος, even when that λόγος remains open to inquiry, Protagoras refuses to submit:

"It does not seem to me entirely, Socrates," he said, "in this way, to be so simple (ἀπλοῦν), as to concede that justice is pious and piety, just, but something in it (ἐν αὐτῷ) seems to me to be different (διάφορον). But what is the difference (literally: "But what is this difference?" ἀλλὰ τί τοῦτο διαφέρει)?" he said, "For, if you wish, let it be for us that both justice is pious, and piety is just." (331c)

Protagoras accuses Socrates of simplifying what is in reality a complex relationship between the virtues. Or, if we take ἀπλοῦν in relation to its opposition, διπλόος, then Socrates, according to Protagoras, compels what is by nature two to become one. Precisely

this kind of simplification or violent unification is exactly what we argued Protagoras does to human nature in his myth, when he reduces our two-fold likeness to Prometheus and Epimetheus to a single god (Prometheus). That Protagoras accuses Socrates of the same violence makes one wonder whether Socrates' simplification of the virtues is yet another way of drawing Protagoras out into the open. Protagoras cannot concede that justice is piety, and piety just because something (τί) in it (ἐν αὐτὸ) seems to be different. We might expect the "it" here to appear in the feminine and thus to refer to either of the feminine nouns, piety or justice so that Protagoras says simply that something in justice seems to differ from piety or *vice versa*. However, the referent for αὐτὸ in the neuter appears to be the same "it" as the indirect statement that opens his response. Something in the λόγος seems to be different. That is, Socrates' λόγος seems to differ from Protagoras.²²² The natural question then follows, "But what is this difference? (ἀλλὰ τί τοῦτο διαφέρει;)" (331c).

In his very posing of this question, ἀλλὰ τί τοῦτο διαφέρει, Protagoras dismisses it. Idiomatically, the phrase means "But what is the difference?" and has the force of asking "Who cares?" Socrates narratively emphasizes that Protagoras asks this question with an unusual second "he said" disrupting the quote. Protagoras dismisses the central question that guides their entire exchange in a way grammatically indistinguishable from posing it genuinely. Might the grammar here be Plato's way of signaling to the reader the difference between Protagoras and Socrates? If both thinkers ask the same questions, perhaps they differ in part in their *attitudes* toward inquiry. Moreover, while Socrates expresses gratitude

²²² Given the unspecified referent for αὐτὸ we might even stretch the grammar to read that something in *self* seems to be different, so that the difference in their λόγος points to a further difference in the two thinkers themselves, a point which Socrates response will soon reinforce.

at the self-understanding that distinguishing himself Protagoras affords, Protagoras expresses indifference toward this very self-understanding.

Socrates' response reinforces this interpretation: “‘Not for me,’ I was saying, ‘For I have no need to cross-examine (τὸ... ἐλέγχεσθαι), this ‘If you wish’ and ‘if it seems to you,’ but both me and you: and I say this ‘both me and you’, supposing in this way that the λόγος would be better cross-examined, if someone should remove the ‘if’ from it (αὐτοῦ)’” (331c–d). Socrates here effectively answers both the idiomatic and literal meaning of Protagoras’ ἀλλά τί τοῦτο διαφέρει. It matters whether or not Protagoras identifies with his λόγος because Socrates takes the λόγος seriously. Speaking in the middle voice, he wants to put each thinker, along with their λόγος to the test (ἐλέγχεσθαι). If the λόγος is merely hypothetical and neither signals nor measures the speakers’ own views, then this test along with the λόγος itself loses its significance.²²³ Socrates assumes, as we have seen, that λόγοι aim at completion, and we can add to his assumption here that λόγοι intend something meaningful to their speakers.²²⁴ Without meaningful intention, λόγος, rather than being necessarily paired with μῦθος, comes to be fully reducible to μῦθος, and neither disclose the speaker at all.²²⁵ Protagoras’ indifference toward the λόγος points to a major difference

²²³ Griswold helpfully links Socrates’ demand of Protagoras to speak in his own voice with responsiveness and here we see why (1999, 290). Both men can only be put to the test if their words in some meaningful way put them on display. Ewgen, by contrast, characterizes philosophical inquiry as “quieting” one’s own voice to allow the λόγος to speak (2018, 49). While this does seem to be an important component of the epistemic openness required for discovery, it underplays Socrates’ regular insistence on eliciting his interlocutors’ opinions, perhaps most emphatically so in this dialogue with Protagoras. We can therefore add to Ewgen’s account of philosophical dialogue that fully articulating one’s views is a prerequisite to quieting them by submitting them to scrutiny. The biases one brings to the λόγος must first be made manifest before they can be effectively quieted. For the “self-erasure” that Ewgen cites as the heart of philosophical inquiry to be recognizable as self-knowledge, the self must become manifest prior to its erasure (2018, 50).

²²⁴ See also McCoy on the sense in which language, for Plato, must be directed toward disclosing reality (2007, 76).

²²⁵ Benitez suggests that this characteristic of Protagoras’ speech follows from an implicit commitment to the man-measure doctrine, which would render dispute about virtue’s “nature” meaningless insofar as virtue would just be what seems to each (1992, 237). While Golub argues that Socrates expresses and displays indifference in this dialogue, any such indifference is performative and directed at exposing precisely this

between himself and Socrates: Protagoras seeks comfort in the “if” that Socrates wishes to banish. As we saw in the last chapter, Protagoras values foresight above all else as the defining characteristic of human thought. His tendency to speak in hypotheticals reinforces that value. He wishes to anticipate the λόγος to its completion before, if ever, ascribing to it, while Socrates impels him to inhabit his λόγος as it unfolds.²²⁶ Once more, Socrates disrupts Protagoras’ attempt to purify foresight of the risks posed by our tendency toward oversight.

Thus urged once more to identify with his λόγος and thereby to reveal himself, Protagoras once more responds with apparent directness while nevertheless remaining thoroughly vague:

“Well,” he said, “justice does resemble piety in some way. For anything whatever resembles anything else in some way or other: white resembles black in some way, and the hard the soft, and the other things that are held to be most contrary to one another. And the things that we previously asserted to have a different power and not to be such as one another—the parts of the face—they too resemble and are such as one another, at least in some way or other. So, you might cross-examine (ἐλέγχοις) these things too in this way, if you like, on the grounds that *all* things are similar to one another. But it isn’t just to call things having some similarity ‘similar,’ nor to call things having some dissimilarity ‘dissimilar,’ even if the similarity they have is very small.” (331d–e, Bartlett’s translation with modifications).

If Protagoras formerly treated the virtues as wholly independent and self-sufficient beings so that none relate to the others, here Protagoras walks the entirely opposite road in claiming all things relate to one another. Even apparent opposites, such as black and white or hard and soft, Protagoras now claims, resemble each other in some way. White and black

indifference that Protagoras displays (Golub 2021). Protagoras’ indifference to the λόγος is presented in stark contrast, contra Golub’s interpretation, to Socrates’ insistence on taking the λόγος entirely seriously.

²²⁶ In some ways, Protagoras’ disinterested stance resembles much contemporary scholarship more than Socrates’ existential questioning. By appealing to existential import, Socrates points to a tendency that Protagoras exhibits for such professional disinterest to avoid inquiry altogether. Insofar as philosophy’s inquiries concern human nature and excellence, Socrates urges that these questions cannot be asked disinterestedly but always already implicate their speaker in both the posing and the responding.

are both colors, hard and soft are both textures; even—or precisely—opposites in this way relate to each other. We might apply this principle to Protagoras’ own λόγοι, which now appear contrary to each other. Protagoras presents ἀρετή as something that can be spoken of in opposing ways, as being either different or similar to each other.²²⁷ At the same time, he presents himself as a speaker capable of speaking on both sides and thus of avoiding refutation by cross-examination on the basis of either one. Both λόγοι allow Protagoras to speak skillfully while avoiding giving an account for exactly how he understands the virtues. In the former case wherein the virtues can be possessed independently of each other, one might wonder, which do Protagoras possess and teach, and what comes of those he doesn’t? In this case, what exactly constitutes the relation between the virtues for Protagoras and how does that relationship bear out in his own life and teaching? Protagoras thinks that λόγοι measure a speaker’s skill in avoiding refutation, while Socrates means to measure the speaker’s soul. Accordingly, Protagoras misunderstands Socrates’ purpose in cross-examination, taking him to aim at winning his case rather than measuring whether Protagoras and his λόγος disclose something true.²²⁸

Socrates responds to Protagoras’ inconsistency once more with wonder, so that he interrogates once more how exactly the relationship between the virtues hold for the sophist: “And I, being in wonder, said to him: what, do the just and the pious hold in this way toward each other for you, so as for them to have some small similarity to each other?” (331e). Socrates’ wondering at Protagoras’ inconsistent speech recalls the wonder with

²²⁷ For more detail on the sophistic practicing of opposing λόγοι, see Kerferd 1981, 63 and Versenyi 1963, 21–22. For an account of how the dialogues themselves often reflect the sophistic practice of opposing λόγοι to each other, see McCoy 1998, 17.

²²⁸ I am indebted to McCoy for bringing my attention to the dual-purpose of cross examination in this context. Textual evidence reinforces the present interpretation of the sophist’s misunderstanding: while Socrates speaks of cross-examination in the middle voice, Protagoras speaks of it in the active voice, underscoring his refusal to commit to and thus be measured by his λόγος.

which he began his questioning. We supposed there that Protagoras' speech sounded in some way similar to that of Socrates' and here too we might infer the same. While inconsistency provides a means of evasion and avoids refutation for Protagoras, it causes wonder and invites further inquiry for Socrates. Protagoras remains characteristically vague in his reply, saying that he neither thinks they hold exactly like contraries to each other nor how they seem to hold for Socrates (331a–b).

For Socrates, Protagoras' continued evasion marks an impasse, leading him to change course: “‘Well now,’ I said, ‘Since you seem to me to be annoyed at this (δυσχερῶς), on the one hand, let us leave this be, on the other hand, let us look upon this other thing that you were saying. Do you call ‘senselessness’ (ἄφροσύνην) something?’” to which Protagoras assents (332a). Socrates' desisting from the previous line of questioning here could be read either earnestly or performatively. Some take such moves on Socrates' part as evidence of a kinship to or earnest respect for Protagoras.²²⁹ While it is true that Socrates does not seem as overtly hostile as he does with Calicles in the *Gorgias*, for instance, we need not read his comments here to indicate that he wholly admires the sophist. Having just asked how the virtues hold toward (ἔχειν πρὸς) each other for Protagoras, Socrates remarks that Protagoras holds toward (ἔχειν πρὸς) their line of inquiry δυσχερῶς, with difficulty or annoyance. If Socrates earlier distinguishes questioning as indicative of a kind of virtuous way of living, his remarks here imply that Protagoras acts unvirtuously in evading and responding with annoyance or hostility to their inquiry. As much as this remark might indicate a kind of care for his interlocutor, it also

²²⁹ Readers who interpret the exchange between Socrates and Protagoras as purely collegial include Gargarin 1969, Seferoglu 2019, and Sommerville 2019. Golub, by contrast takes this as a sign that Socrates is disinterested in the conversation which we dismiss elsewhere (2021, 314).

serves to heighten the contrast between himself and Protagoras. Wherein Socrates responds to inquiry with wonder, Protagoras responds to inquiry with irritation.²³⁰

Protagoras' response has to do with the fact that Socrates has just led him into an ἀπορία about the relationship between the virtues. Protagoras does not want to admit that they are all the same, but he struggles to articulate the sense in which they are different. He responds to this ἀπορία with annoyance. Given Protagoras' concern for his reputation, we could reasonably infer that his annoyance stems from embarrassment at being outmatched in argument by the young Socrates. He avoids giving an answer to avoid being demonstrably refuted. Interlocutors often respond to Socratic questioning with annoyance upon being led into an ἀπορία. Socrates describes this tendency at length in the *Apology* (cf. *Apology* 23a). Like Sophistic teaching, Socratic questioning involves some risk. But while Protagoras undertakes this risk for glory and material well-being, Socrates undertakes it for the benefit of his interlocutors. We can recall that two-fold gratitude at speaking and listening between Socrates and the unnamed companion that opens this dialogue in contrast to the competitive hostility between Socrates and Protagoras that pervades it. Socrates' insistence that Protagoras submit to the λόγος, along with his insistence in the *Apology* that he confers the greatest benefit to humankind (cf. *Prot.* 310a and *Apol.* 36c–d), suggests that interlocutors ought to be grateful for being raised to the condition of ἀπορία. As we saw in the previous chapter, only from a condition of ἀπορία can one undertake to seek further.²³¹

²³⁰ Protagoras' response here is similar to the way Socrates describes those he examines in the *Apology* who get angry (ὀργίζονται) at Socrates for exposing their ignorance rather than at themselves for being ignorant. Protagoras' irritation doesn't reach the point of anger since he won't submit himself to Socrates' test enough to reckon with the consequences of the questioning.

²³¹ I am indebted to correspondence with Hyland for the idea that the ideal Socratic interlocutor might respond gratefully to being made aware of her ἀπορία.

Socrates pounces on Protagoras' appeal to opposites to examine the nature of the virtues further. Ἀφροσύνη is etymologically opposed to σωφροσύνη. It means something like “folly, foolishness, thoughtlessness, or senselessness” or, that is, to be without σωφροσύνη, be that prudence, good sense, or moderation. But rather than oppose ἀφροσύνη to σωφροσύνη immediately, Socrates asks first “Isn’t wisdom altogether opposite to this πράγμα?” to which Protagoras again affirms that it seems so to him (332a). The words σοφία and σωφροσύνη derive from differently but sonically similar etymological origins. Σοφία derives from σοφός meaning either “wise” or “clever.” Σωφροσύνη derives from σώφρων meaning of “sound mind” (literally “safe,” σῶς and “mind” -φρων). To oppose ἀφροσύνη to either or both would be sensible, although its etymology supports the opposition to σωφροσύνη more naturally. The connection between these two virtues that Socrates is about to exploit reinforces our argument from the previous chapter that Protagorean σοφία consists at least partially in the σωφροσύνη to act in one’s own interest without getting caught doing so. Socrates here seems to be leading Protagoras to admit the identity between at least these two virtues implied in his account despite his continued insistence that the virtues are in large part independent of each other. Rather than desisting from his previous line of inquiry, Socrates is advancing in his attack.

Socrates’ next series of connections begins to make manifest the relationship between σοφία and σωφροσύνη implied in Protagoras’ account:

“Whenever human beings act (of “fare” πράττωσιν) both correctly and beneficially (ὠφελίμως), at that time do they seem to you to act soundly in so acting (σωφρονεῖν... οὕτω πράττοντες), or do they act (ἑπράττον) in the opposite way?”

“To act soundly (σωφρονεῖν),” he said.

“Don’t they act soundly σωφρονοῦσιν by means of moderation σωφροσύνη?”

“Necessarily (ἀνάγκη)”

“Don’t the ones not acting (πράττοντες) correctly act foolishly and not soundly so acting (ἀφρόνως πράττουσιν καὶ οὐ σωφρονοῦσιν οὕτω πράττοντες)?”

“It seems so also to me,” he said.

“Is acting foolishly (ἄφρόνως πράττειν) opposed to [acting] soundly (σωφρόνως)?” He said so. “Aren’t, on the one hand, things being done foolishly done by means of foolishness (τὰ μὲν ἄφρόνως πραττόμενα ἀφροσύνη πράττεται), on the other hand things [being done] soundly [done] by means of moderation (τὰ δὲ σωφρόνως σωφροσύνη)? He agreed (332a–b).

Having established that foolishness (ἀφροσύνη) is opposed to σοφία, Socrates turns to examine ἀφροσύνη’s relationship to σωφροσύνη. He leads Protagoras to agree that to act soundly (σωφρονεῖν) consists in acting correctly and beneficially, while to act in the opposite way (ἄφρόνως) would thus be to act incorrectly and harmfully. He thereby leads Protagoras to conclude that acting foolishly is opposed to acting soundly.

Etymologically connected to πρᾶγμα, the verb “to act” throughout this section, πράττω, contains the same ambiguity as the noun, wherein Socrates could mean throughout that humans *act* correctly and beneficially or *fare* well or beneficially. This corresponds to the ambiguity wherein πρᾶγμα could mean either “act/deed” or “circumstance/affair.” Both words imply a close connection between one’s action and one’s state. Εὖ πράττειν means simultaneously to act well and to fare well. To call any particular virtue a πρᾶγμα, as both men have, is thereby to imply such a connection.²³² The extent to which this identity is questionable will be a central concern in the next chapter. For now, Socrates recalls this implication here. At this point, there is no problem for Protagoras. Socrates’ characterization of these relationships is sufficiently ambiguous to maintain his cloak. To act soundly (σωφρονεῖν) may well consist in a kind of civic-minded modesty that acts correctly in following the law and beneficially toward the common good. At the same time,

²³² Recall that the dialogue’s first mention of πρᾶγμα occurs when Socrates warns Hippocrates that in giving his soul over to Protagoras, he doesn’t know whether he does so to a good or evil πρᾶγμα, and thereby whether he himself will become good or worthless in the process. The earlier scene thereby anticipates the connection between action and one’s own state made explicit here.

he can still imply that to act soundly (σωφρονεῖν) for those few wise enough to do so, is to act correctly for one's own benefit by prioritizing their own interests over civic interests and concealing their efforts in doing so. Protagoras can maintain that σοφία and σωφροσύνη together oppose ἀφροσύνη without specifying either what kind of actions any of these terms promote or in what sense those who act accordingly fare correctly and beneficially.

However, the safety Protagoras seeks for himself is short-lived. Socrates quickly introduces a series of contraries such as speed and slowness, nobility and shame, good and bad, high- and low-pitch, asking in each case whether each term has any contrary other than the one proposed (332b–c). Protagoras affirms each of Socrates' points in turn: 1) each thing has only one opposite, 2) whatever is done in an opposite way is done through the opposite, 3) that which is done foolishly is done through foolishness while that which is done soundly is done through σωφροσύνη, 4) that which is done foolishly is done in an opposite way to that which is done soundly, 5) that ἀφροσύνη is opposed to σωφροσύνη (332d–e). Whatever deductive errors there may be in a formalized version of Socrates' argument, Protagoras assents at every step, albeit with varying degrees of enthusiasm.²³³

Socrates points out Protagoras' oversight: “Do you remember (μέμνησαι) then that among the things that were agreed by us before was that foolishness (ἀφροσύνη) is opposed to wisdom?’ He was agreeing too. ‘And that only one thing is opposed to one thing?’ ‘I declare so’” (332e–333a). Protagoras acts as Epimetheus in overlooking the distribution of his λόγοι, unable to avoid the obvious contradiction toward which Socrates is guiding their

²³³ Vlastos takes particular care to identify the logical fallacies in Plato's argument (1956 and 1972). But in assuming that Plato would never have Socrates willingly commit logical fallacies because on his view, this would amount to having Socrates “fight sophistry with sophistry,” Vlastos overlooks the rhetorical purpose of Socrates' arguments and thereby the rhetorical element of Socratic philosophy (1972, 416–417).

conversation. Protagoras has now agreed that each thing has only one opposite and has claimed that ἀφροσύνη is opposed to both σοφία and σωφροσύνη. Socrates presses the point:

“Which, then, Protagoras, of the λόγοι shall we let go? That only one thing is opposed to one thing, or that in which wisdom was said to be other (ἕτερον) than moderation (σωφροσύνης), and each a part of virtue (ἀρετή), and that in addition to its being other (ἕτερον), also both themselves and the powers of them are dissimilar, just as the parts of the face? Which exactly, then, shall we let go? For both of these λόγοι are not spoken entirely musically: for they neither sing nor harmonize with each other. For how could they sing, if indeed it is necessary for, on the one hand, only one thing to be opposed to one thing, and not more, and on the other hand, in turn it is said that wisdom and moderation (σωφροσύνη) are opposed to foolishness, being one thing: Protagoras,” I myself said, “Or how else is it?” (333a–b).

Socrates here reveals multiple tensions within Protagoras’ λόγοι.²³⁴ His claim that each thing has only one opposite conflicts with his claim that both σοφία and σωφροσύνη oppose ἀφροσύνη. These λόγοι could be sung together if σοφία and σωφροσύνη were somehow one. However, that σοφία and σωφροσύνη should be a unity conflicts with Protagoras’ claim that the virtues exist independently of one another. Σοφία and σωφροσύνη are both virtues, on Protagoras’ account and thus he must deny that they are a unity. In bringing these tensions to the fore, Socrates suggests that Protagoras, like Epimetheus, has overlooked the distribution of his claims, leading to their irreconcilability.

Protagoras’ λόγοι sing together only if σοφία and σωφροσύνη are somehow one, but altogether different (ἄλλα) from the other (civic) virtues. Perhaps while good counsel, σοφία, and σωφροσύνη may be either a unity or others of the same kind (ἕτερα) to each other, they are totally different (ἄλλα) from and can be possessed independently of civic virtues such as justice and piety. This would seem to follow if Protagoras admits that the

²³⁴ Arendt identifies avoiding self-contradiction as the single most important norm that Socrates demands of his interlocutors (1990, 437–438).

good counsel he claims to teach and the wisdom he claims to possess amount to the σωφροσύνη that enables one (secretly) to prioritize one's individual interests over the civic good.²³⁵ Such a practice need not entail civic virtues like justice, which may in fact conflict with one's own interests. Socrates compels Protagoras to confront and expose the implications of his λόγοι or else to admit a contradiction in his λόγοι. In either case, Socrates constrains him to give up his model of foresight and expose himself to the risks of oversight. Or, as Gonzalez helpfully puts it, "Not the caution of skill, but the risk of inquiry is what Socrates advocates."²³⁶ In admitting the implications of his λόγοι, Protagoras risks exposing himself and thereby alienating and incurring hatred from the democratically inclined Athenians listening. In admitting the contradictions, he appears Epimethean in his failure to anticipate Socrates' questioning and an unfit teacher for the assembled prospective students. It is therefore understandable that Protagoras most involuntarily (μάλ' ἄκόντως) chooses the latter option, agreeing to Socrates' characterization of his λόγοι's disharmony.²³⁷ All the same, from Socrates' perspective, admitting the contradiction would ultimately be good for the sophist by providing him the impetus to seek together with Socrates.

In pressing on, Socrates turns directly to the relationship between σωφροσύνη and justice: "Wouldn't moderation (σωφροσύνη) and wisdom be one? And before, in turn, it appeared to us that justice and piety were nearly the same thing. Come then, Protagoras' I

²³⁵ While Protagoras' repeated evasion leads Golub to conclude that the sophist is disinterested in truly possessing wisdom at all satisfied only to feign it, I argue here that he operates on a different assumption of what wisdom consists in but nevertheless truly takes himself to be wise on that basis (2021, 310). Wisdom for Protagoras involves the ability to feign other virtues when necessary but this ability is characteristic of true (Protagorean) wisdom.

²³⁶ Gonzalez 2014, 52.

²³⁷ As Bartlett observes, "any sensible fellow would, if forced to do so, choose the reputation for confused incompetence over that of clear-sighted viciousness" (2016, 440). See also Hemmenway 1996, 15.

was saying, let us not grow weary but let us look through the things that remain. Does any human being, acting unjustly (ἀδικῶν), seem to you to act soundly (σωφρονεῖν), because he acts unjustly (ἀδικεῖ)? (333b–c). Picking up on the previous thread of questions, individuals act soundly by means of σωφροσύνη (or wisdom). They would then act unjustly (ἀδικέω) by means of injustice. Socrates is guiding Protagoras ever closer to claiming directly that σωφροσύνη need not have anything to do with civic virtues. If σωφροσύνη and wisdom are a unity, then it would follow that Protagoras’ own expertise is likewise unrelated to training in civic virtue, despite the appearances to the contrary presented in his myth. Indeed, Socrates underscores this possibility by asking Protagoras directly if a human being who acts unjustly seems *to Protagoras* to act soundly *because* he acts unjustly. Admitting this would be tantamount to praising injustice, the very admission that Protagoras scorns as madness (323b). On the other hand, to conceal one’s injustice is an act of σωφροσύνη. To speak plainly and resolve the tensions in his speech would require Protagoras to sacrifice the very σωφροσύνη his students might hope to learn from him.

Clearly perceiving the risks, Protagoras responds by evading once more and recalling the relationship between σωφροσύνη and shame: “I myself at least would be ashamed (αἰσχυνοίμην), Socrates’ he said, ‘to agree to this, although (or “since;” ἐπεὶ) many of the human beings at least say so” (333c). If the above characterization of Protagoras’ notion of σωφροσύνη is correct, then his statement here amounts to revealing that Protagoras would be ashamed to admit in λόγος what he does and teaches in practice. Indeed, it is impossible to put his teaching and practice directly into words without thereby undermining himself. If Protagoras teaches the σωφροσύνη that enables one to escape others’ notice while acting in their own self-interest (often unjustly), then admitting that

one acts soundly (σωφρονεῖν) by acting unjustly would undermine the purpose. Protagoras' joining together of myth and λόγος is a necessary one. Only by speaking indirectly can Protagoras practice the σωφροσύνη he professes to teach to others. When constrained to give up the myth, he employs other cloaks, such as here, allowing the many to speak for him. Protagoras' shame extends only to the prospect of admitting injustice, the very admission that characterizes madness on Protagoras' view. Acting unjustly, provided one only perceive what is shame-worthy sufficiently to conceal her injustice with σωφροσύνη, may well be, put simply, good counsel (εὐβουλία).

In response to Protagoras' evasion, Socrates asks whether he should speak to the many or to Protagoras himself, to which Protagoras responds that he should speak first to the many. In clear tension with his recent claim that he wishes to examine himself and Protagoras, Socrates responds with indifference: "But it makes no difference to me, if only you at least give a response, whether then these things seem to you or not: for I at least am most of all scrutinizing the λόγος; however, it stands together perhaps also for me, the one asking, to be scrutinized, and the one giving an answer" (333c, cf. 331c–d). By Socrates' own criterion, his words here do not harmonize with what he said before. We recall that, a little before, Protagoras expressed indifference in asking why it matters how he answers so long as they go through the λόγος together. At that time, Socrates insists that Protagoras must respond for himself so that he can examine both himself and Protagoras. Here, Socrates expresses indifference, claiming now that it doesn't matter whether Protagoras gives his own opinion or that of the many so long as he continues to respond. Socrates further indicates that it will, however, amount to the same thing insofar as through this process both questioner and questioned come to be scrutinized, too. Before, Protagoras

sought, in his evasion, to withdraw from the λόγος altogether. There, he was willing to capitulate to Socrates' sense of the unity of the virtues for the sake of argument, but without any vested interest in the argument's outcome. The conversation would continue but it would lose both purpose and significance.

Here, Socrates recognizes that Protagoras cannot coherently speak in his own voice. This is a somewhat different point than the likewise true observation that Gonzales makes, who argues that Protagoras does not *want* to admit his injustice out of fear of hostility. While this point is clearly true too, the point I am making here indicates a further performative incoherence: that Protagoras' position cannot be stated without performatively undermining itself. Protagoras cannot live according to his own λόγος and articulate it directly. This is yet another way in which Protagoras' sophistry resembles philosophy as depicted in Socrates and practiced by Plato, who both use performative self-contradiction routinely to indicate philosophical truths that cannot be stated plainly without undermining the knowledge of ignorance that underlies philosophical inquiry.²³⁸ However, despite using performative self-contradiction as a tool, Plato depicts a Socrates who can live coherently so long as his speech remains fundamentally interrogative. Moreover, as Griswold argues, in writing dialogues without speaking in his own voice, Plato avoids the risk of begging the question in mounting his defense of philosophy against the charges of sophistry.²³⁹ Protagoras, by contrast, is forced into a performative contradiction only if he is compelled to speak what he thinks. Performative self-contradiction is a philosophical tool but a sophistic trap. Protagoras substitutes the many as a necessity, and Socrates allows

²³⁸ See, for example, Gonzalez 2008, 122. McCoy notes a related similarity that both philosophers and sophists are interested in theoretical paradox and opposition 2007, 17.

²³⁹ 1988, 12 and 143–144. See also Roochnik (1999, 149–150).

the substitution so that their λόγος may continue. Socrates permits Protagoras to continue wearing his cloak, but he signals its presence by suggesting that scrutinizing the λόγος stands also to scrutinize both Socrates as questioner and the responder.²⁴⁰

Socrates' narration suggests that Protagoras perceives that his cloak is beginning to wear thin: "Then, at first, Protagoras was playing coy (or "making himself beautiful" (ἐκαλλωπίζετο) for us—for he was accusing the λόγος of being annoying (δυσχερῆ)—after however, he acquiesced to respond" (333d). Protagoras can tell from Socrates' questions that he is coming to be exposed. Accordingly, he seeks to withdraw once more. The verb ἐκαλλωπίζετο, with its etymological relationship to beauty (κάλον), means in its first sense to beautify oneself, for instance, by applying makeup. As Bartlett indicates, it suggests pretense and falsehood.²⁴¹ Socrates' second remark, that Protagoras was accusing the λόγος of being δυσχερῆ, recalls Socrates' earlier observation that Protagoras bears his questioning with δυσχερῆ. Combining this parallel with Protagoras' desire to withdraw, we might say that Protagoras beautifies himself by projecting his own annoyance and hostility onto the λόγος, when made to confront his own inconsistencies.²⁴² He attempts thereby to conceal himself once more and to retreat from the λόγος on the basis of its—and not his own—character. Socrates does not reveal here what persuades Protagoras to continue. While Socrates has not included the audience in his narration of their exchange to this point, we might nevertheless conclude from their intercession that will soon follow, that public pressure compels him. Protagoras stays in order to avoid appearing weak and

²⁴⁰ Socrates does not name Protagoras as the responder here, further enabling his escape while signaling its limitation.

²⁴¹ Bartlett 2004, n97. It occurs before in the dialogue at 317c.

²⁴² Protagoras' response here is similar to that of the misologist who denounces all λόγοι having been deceived a few too many times (*Phaedo* 90b–c)

cowardly to the assembled listeners. He stays because, as he puts it himself, it is better to expose oneself than to fail in attempting to flee and be noticed by others in the attempt.²⁴³

Socrates' next line of questioning adds prudence (φρονήσις) and good counsel (εὐβουλία) to the identity of σωφροσύνη and σοφία, reinforcing the connection we observed previously in the myth and inching still closer to manifesting the myth's undemocratic implications:

“Come then,” I myself said, “respond to me from the beginning. Do some seem to you to act soundly (σωφρονεῖν) by acting unjustly?”

“Let it be so,” he said.

“And do you say (or “mean;” λέγεις) that acting soundly (σωφρονεῖν) is acting prudently (εὖ φρονεῖν)?” He said so. “And is acting prudently (εὖ φρονεῖν) to counsel well (εὖ βουλεύεσθαι) because they act unjustly?”

“Let it be so,” he said.

“If they fare well (or “act well;” εὖ πράττουσιν) by acting unjustly,” I was saying, “or if [they fare] poorly (κακῶς)?”

“If [they fare] well.” (333d)

By connecting acting soundly (σωφρονεῖν) to acting prudently (εὖ φρονεῖν), Socrates emphasizes the peculiar sense of σωφροσύνη that seems to be taking shape on Protagoras' account. In light of its potential to be wielded unjustly, σωφροσύνη hardly seems to consist in moderation, as it is commonly translated.²⁴⁴ Rather, as we argued while interpreting the myth, Protagorean σωφροσύνη consists in a kind of calculated prudence characterized by forethought.

Socrates' next question links this prudence with the good counsel that Protagoras claims to teach, bringing to the fore the implications we saw in Protagoras' myth. Had

²⁴³ By not disclosing the source of his persuasion, Plato causes readers to reflect on what would compel them to stay. When remembering the present audience, one might well stay out of a similar public pressure, but we might also conclude that it would be to our own benefit to stay and submit ourselves to Socratic inquiry. McCoy 2008 often argues for this interpretation of the role of Platonic dialogues.

²⁴⁴ Moderation is, generally speaking, a fair translation. And translators who pick that common translation likewise bring out the strangeness in Protagoras' answers. I've been leaving the term untranslated or else rendering it as “acting soundly” to preserve the meaning that Protagoras seems to be driving toward and which Socrates' questioning brings out here.

someone only heard Protagoras' myth and assumed that Protagoras meant something like "moderation" by σωφροσύνη, one might well conclude that Protagoras simply teaches the civic virtues required to keep the city together. But prodding a bit deeper, Socrates' questions bring to light the teaching Protagoras offers that might be compelling enough to attract ambitious youths to forego their former associations. Putting this altogether, we can now conclude that Protagoras teaches a good counsel that consists in a kind of prudent sound-mindedness, characterized by the foresight to act unjustly when it is possible to escape other's notice doing so. This skill, in turn, enables his students to fare well. Rather than teaching civic virtue itself, Protagoras teaches others to forego and, when necessary, feign civic virtue. The multiplicity of the virtues reflects the distinction between the self in its appearance to others and the true self who acts in her own self-interest. The sense in which the self is itself a multiplicity for Protagoras will be developed further in the next chapter, but here we see it already implied in his account.

Socrates next turns to examine the sense of "good" that would enable people to fare well. First, Socrates asks if there are good things, which Protagoras affirms. Next, Socrates asks whether what is good is likewise beneficial for human beings. Presumably, if the line of questioning had proceeded linearly, Socrates would have compelled Protagoras to confront a problematic notion of the human good which can be secured through acting badly. But Protagoras does not permit Socrates' line of questioning thus to proceed. Rather than confining their discussion to the human good that enables our faring well, he first exclaims that he calls things good whether they are beneficial for human beings or not. Socrates interrupts the recollected dialogue to narrate to the unnamed companion Protagoras' candor before relating his λόγος: "And to me, Protagoras seemed already to

have become both angry (or exasperated) and contentious and to be standing at the ready to give a response: then, when I was seeing him being in this way, taking caution, gently, I asked...” (333e). Socrates’ narration here colors the interpretation of the exchange that follows. Protagoras is characterized as impassioned, presumably out of embarrassment coupled with a prideful desire to win what he perceives as a contest in λόγοι. Socrates depicts himself, by contrast, as gentle and interested first and foremost in inquiry. Of course, this narration paints a rather flattering picture of Socrates and a rather disparaging one of Protagoras. Setting up the exchange in this way may well further influence our perception of the outcome and turn our favor toward Socrates. Socrates’ effort to narrate the difference between sophist and philosopher sounds indistinguishable from the sophist’s prideful desire to win the contest of λόγοι. It can be difficult to distinguish the philosopher from the sophist for one who does not hear thoroughly. By including this narrative aside, the dialogue emphasizes this difficulty and points once more to the importance of our effort at distinguishing the two.

Just as Protagoras cannot articulate his own activity in λόγος without thereby undermining it, we might perceive here that an attempt to articulate plainly what distinguishes philosophy from sophistry meets a similar difficulty. If what distinguishes sophistry from philosophy consists in part in philosophy’s inner comportment to questioning in contrast to the sophist’s pretense thereof, then an attempt to articulate this difference in speech risks reducing or undermining this difference by bringing it to the level of appearance.²⁴⁵ As readers of the dialogue, we cannot anticipate the difference between

²⁴⁵ For the implications of such a reduction in the political sphere, see Arendt 1990, 431: “As soon as the philosopher submitted his truth, the reflection of the eternal, to the polis, it became immediately an opinion among opinions. It lost its distinguishing quality, for there is no visible hall-mark that marks off truth from opinion. It is as though the moment the eternal is brought into the midst of men it becomes temporal, so that

sophist and philosopher with foresight through λόγος alone but must piece it together retroactively in light of their deeds, too. Plato's dialogues, rather than presenting an account of philosophical activity as perfectly self-evident, chooses to present Socratic philosophy in dialectical opposition to sophistry. His Socrates persistently defends and measures himself in conversation with sophists, poets, and statesmen, as if to depict self-inquiry itself as a philosophical activity that is coincident with the inquiry into virtue. This connection between philosophy's inherently provisional nature and the way in which its λόγος must reflect this in dialogue will be taken up further in the next chapter. For now, we can suggest that if Socratic foresight acknowledges oversight as a condition that renders its wisdom as aporetic and its learning as dialogical, then perhaps philosophy's self-understanding remains so, too. If human wisdom about the good remains aporetic and provisional, in need of dialogical investigation, perhaps, so too, does philosophical self-knowledge.²⁴⁶

When Socrates asks whether things can be good without being advantageous at all, Protagoras responds at some length articulating a relational notion of advantage, which is worth attending to in some detail. But first, it is worth noting that Socrates' question points to the possibility of a notion of the good that is independent of use or advantage.²⁴⁷ While this possibility is not pursued here, we might suspect that Socrates is aware of the possibility his question suggests and such may well constitute his own sense of what is

the very discussion of it with others already threatens the existence of the realm in which the lovers of wisdom move."

²⁴⁶ Another, and perhaps polemical way to put the issue is to wonder whether a sophist would always recognize herself as such, or whether a philosopher who is perfectly satisfied that she is not a sophist might not succumb to the sophistic temptation of claiming more than human wisdom in self-understanding. The Delphic command might not be something to be achieved once, but an on-going activity of faring well that Plato lives out through writing dialogues, and Socrates lives out by interrogating and putting to the test both sophists and himself.

²⁴⁷ See also Bartlett 2016, 50–51.

good. Nevertheless, Protagoras replies maintaining an intrinsic link between good and advantageous, which informs his moderately relativistic sense of the good:

“Not at all,” he said. “But for my part I know (or “I have seen;” οἶδ’) many things that are disadvantageous to human beings—food and drink and drugs and ten thousand other things—but some that are advantageous. Some things are neither the one nor the other for human beings, but are for horses; some are only for cattle, others for dogs. And some things are good for the roots of the tree but harmful to the young shoots. Manure, for example, distributed on the roots of all plants is good, but should you be willing to put it on budding branches and young twigs, it destroys them all. Olive oil too is quite bad for all plants and highly detrimental to the hair of all other animals apart from that of the human: to human hair, and to the rest of the body, it is an aid to health.” (334a–b, Bartlett tr.)

The good is relative to its context: some things are good for some individuals or species, and not for others. Or else, something may be good for some purpose but not for another, or at some time but not at another. As McCoy points out, all of Protagoras’ examples are physical goods.²⁴⁸ He makes no mention of goods related to the soul. The omission is emphasized by his word choice: he knows because he has seen (οἶδα) the diversity of goods across these varied contexts. While what is good has some degree of objectivity in being dependent on the nature and context of what it is said to be good for, on Protagoras’ view—and thus is not simply reducible to its perceptions—he confines his account to goods that can be perceived. Given that this account follows an extended discussion of ἀρετή, which we might assume would be a paradigmatically a matter of the soul’s good, Protagoras’ exclusive discussion of physical goods may well be telling. If what is good can be

²⁴⁸ McCoy 1998, 31. See also Bartlett 2016, 51. For an alternative account of the human good as a potentially conflicted combination of physical and psychical goods, see Gerson’s account of the good in the *Republic* (2019, 15–17). While I would agree with Gerson that psychical goods are crucial for Socrates’ understanding of the good, I part ways with his suggestion that we could comprehensively identify and secure our good through knowledge of the universal form of the good (17). While this might be the aim of philosophical inquiry, on my read and as I argue throughout, Socrates depicts this inquiry as a continuous inquiry rather than something to be completed (see also Hyland 2011). I will take up my concern with Gerson’s arguments that only such knowledge of the universal form of the good can overcome a utilitarian notion of the good and that philosophy occasions identification with the ideal self over the embodied self in more detail in chapter 5 (see Gerson 2019, 26–27).

perceived, then if virtues are to be good, they should either secure physical goods directly or else serve one's perception to others. This explains why Protagoras apparently misses the possibility of a good independent of advantage implied in Socrates' question. Virtue must be advantageous to one's material well-being in order to understand it as a good if Protagoras' sense of the good is itself material.

Protagoras' conclusion alludes to some sense of a distinction between internal and external goods, which remain nevertheless physical: "And in this way the good is something diverse (or "dappled") and manifold, so that even at the same time, on the one hand, for the things outside of the body, it is good for a the human being, on the other hand, for the things inside [of the body] this same thing is most evil" (334c). Protagoras confines the distinction between internal and external goods to bodily goods. Because the good itself is both diverse and manifold, something can be both good and bad at the same time, but in different ways, or for different purposes. He cites the example of olive oil, which he just remarked is good for the body's appearance: "And for this reason all physicians forbid those in a weakened condition from making use of olive oil, except in the smallest amounts on what they are to eat, and then only enough to prevent them from perceiving any annoying odors from their food and relishes" (334c, Bartlett 1994 tr.). While olive oil is good for the hair's appearance—and serves to make food appear more appealing as well—it harms those in a weakened state if ingested. If the key distinction here is between internal and external goods of the body, and given what we have argued above about the virtue of feigning justice, we might suppose that Protagoras also thinks justice is somehow similar: it serves one's appearance but provides no internal benefit. Protagorean σωφροσύνη

renders one sufficiently prudent and wise to act in one's own advantage by securing goods while simultaneously serving one's appearance.²⁴⁹

When Protagoras notes that for healthy individuals, olive oil benefits the appearance of their hair, he simultaneously indicates that it is an aid to health for the rest of the body. Olive oil only harms sick individuals. These too can, however, use a little olive oil to make the unpleasant or irritating (*δυσχειριαν*) odors of their food more appealing (334c). In Bartlett's explication of this passage, he points out that Protagoras hereby implies what is advantageous and therefore good is not necessarily identical to what is attractive or beautiful. What is unattractive may benefit healthy individuals while what is attractive may be bad for sick individuals except insofar as it is used to mask what is unattractive. Once more this notion fits the idea that for Protagoras, injustice may well be the kind of unattractive thing that nevertheless benefits the strong.²⁵⁰ Protagoras uses the same word (*δυσχειριαν*) to describe the odors of the food that repel the sick as Socrates uses to describe the sophists' irritation at his questioning (cf. 332a). Thus, we can add to Bartlett's exegesis of Protagoras' intent the following question: if the unattractive food is nevertheless good for the sick, and therefore the olive oil is used to make what should be palatable seem so, does Protagoras unintentionally imply that Socrates' arguments are beneficial for the truly sound-minded? Put differently, if the comparison to justice holds, then, might we recognize that justice only appears harmful to individuals who, like Protagoras, are sick with an inability to recognize non-physical goods? Naturally,

²⁴⁹ Interestingly, when Protagoras notes that for normal, healthy individuals, olive oil benefits the appearance of their hair, he simultaneously indicates that it is an aid to health for the rest of the body. Olive oil only harms sick individuals. If the comparison to justice holds, then, we might add that justice only appears harmful to individuals who, like Protagoras, are sick with an inability to recognize non-physical goods. Naturally, Protagoras indicates no awareness of this sense of the parallel.

²⁵⁰ Bartlett 2016, 52.

Protagoras indicates no awareness of this further implication of his own account, which intends covertly to valorize his own injustice.

To fare well, on Protagoras' view then, seems to involve procuring necessary and desired material goods. This coheres with the myth, which depicts survival as the primary concern for human beings. Insofar as humans live in social contexts, they to some extent depend on others both for survival and for meeting their desires. Thus, in addition to procuring physical goods directly, faring well would seem to involve maintaining a good reputation so that others do not hinder one's efforts, or even help with those efforts. The good counsel that Protagoras teaches serves this goal by teaching his students the prudent *σωφροσύνη* to pursue their own individual good while feigning civic interest. Socrates leads Protagoras to admit this much, even as he permits him to do so only indirectly, speaking on behalf of the many rather than in his own voice, so as to permit him to avoid outright incoherence in professing openly what he maintains must remain concealed.²⁵¹

If Socrates aims to gather himself together by distinguishing himself from Protagoras, how exactly do the two seem similar? So far, we have observed that neither thinker's views are reducible to their propositional assertions. But we have likewise proposed that the reason for this is different for each thinker. While Protagoras evades questioning simultaneously to avoid incoherence and hostility from others, Socrates maintains a stance of questioning that underlies his speech. We have also observed that both thinkers have a concern for foresight as the faculty by which human beings fare well. But both likewise practice and value different kinds of foresight. If Protagoras speaks with foresight characterized by the aim of avoiding risk altogether, Socrates' questioning

²⁵¹ See also Bartlett 2016, 50.

exercises a mode of forethought that acknowledges the necessary condition of oversight: continuing to put to the test what has been said in an effort to come to a greater understanding of the assumptions underlying one's understanding. Put differently, Socratic philosophy recognizes that its knowledge is provisional and must be continuously put to the test and subjected to further inquiry in order to uncover what has escaped notice. In the next section, I will establish how it is nevertheless that Socratic philosophy can make a claim to being a more fitting mode of thinking than Protagorean sophistry. To the extent that all human beings are non-knowers, continuous self-inquiry is the mode of speech and thought that best reflects human nature. It is with these distinctions in mind that we turn to Socrates' response to Protagoras' lengthy λόγος, and the methodological dispute that follows.

3.3 METHODOLOGICAL DISPUTE

Even though we have uncovered the implications of Protagoras' speech for his account of faring well, Protagoras avoids saying any of this directly. Rather, Protagoras' speech about relational goods avoids accounting directly for what good enables human beings in particular to fare well. Protagoras thereby once more evades Socrates' questions. The crowd applauds, signaling that they admire his skill at speaking even as they miss the implications of his λόγος. After recalling the crowd's applause, Socrates shares his response:

Protagoras, I myself happen to be a certain forgetful human being (τυνγχάνω ἐπιλήσμων τις ὢν ἄνθρωπος), and if someone speaks to me at length, I forget (ἐπιλανθάνομαι) what the λόγος is about. Therefore, just as if I were to chance upon

(ἐτύγχανον) being hard of hearing,²⁵² you would suppose it to be necessary, if indeed you were about to converse with me (εἴπερ ἔμελλές μοι διαλέξεσθαι), to speak with a louder voice than toward others, so also now, since you happen upon forgetful me (ἐπιλήσμονι ἐνέτυχες), cut down your answers to me and make [them] briefer, if I am about to follow (μέλλω... ἔπεσθαι) you” (334c–d).

Socrates prefaces his own remarks with the crowd’s reaction, suggesting that their response somehow informs his own. Socrates entreats Protagoras to cut down his answers and make them briefer on the grounds that he chances upon being forgetful. By including the crowd’s reaction, Socrates anticipates Alcibiades’ claim that Socrates speaks here for the crowd’s benefits, rather than his own (336d). His use of the indefinite article τις distances himself from the claim that he is a “certain” forgetful person, reinforcing the sense in which he speaks about a general tendency for human beings to forget. As others (including Alcibiades within the dialogue itself) point out, Socrates’ response appears to some extent disingenuous.²⁵³ He often gives longer speeches than the one Protagoras makes here (cf. 328d–329d, 342a–347a, and 347b–348a), not to mention the fact that he narrates the entire exchange with Protagoras word-for-word to the unnamed companion in the dialogue’s longest speech by far.

Gargarin suggests that Socrates’ stated preference for brief speeches amounts to his rivaling the sophists in stubbornness. However, I propose that Socrates speaks ironically but in such a way that indirectly reveals certain truths about the deficiencies of Protagoras’ manner of speaking.²⁵⁴ In addition to the fact that his words indicate a general tendency for human beings to forget, his critique of long speeches indicates that the real problem

²⁵² This is Bartlett’s 2004 helpful translation of ὑπόκωφος.

²⁵³ See, for example, Altman 2020, 112 and Gonzalez 2000, 124.

²⁵⁴ See Gargarin 1969, 148. Sommerville likewise argues that Socrates’ preference for brief speeches betrays a desire for victory, thus making the same mistake Protagoras does (2019, 135). For an account of the connection between Socratic irony, wisdom, and humility see Strauss 1964, 51.

with Protagoras' speech is its refusal to disclose the speaker in a way that subjects him to scrutiny and his ideas to further investigation. His speech befits someone who knows perfectly (or who denies the possibility of knowledge altogether), but human knowledge is always imperfect and thus must remain committed to further inquiry. To address this, let us pair Socrates' request here with his opening claim of this section—which he will repeat twice in what follows—namely, that Protagoras is capable both of speaking at length and of giving answers briefly (cf. 329b). There and throughout, we have proposed that what Socrates demands above all is that interlocutors remain open to questioning. Socrates prefers brief responses in part because they allow the questioner to follow up, either continuing the inquiry further or demonstrating the responder's evasion. Long λόγοι, especially when they are as beautiful as those of Protagoras, distract from the original question that gives rise to the λόγος and thereby risk putting an end to the inquiry altogether.²⁵⁵ For example, Protagoras' speech on the relational nature of the good yields applause from the audience, who fail to notice that Protagoras avoids answering Socrates' question about what enables a human being to fare well. It is not the length of the speech as such to which Socrates objects so much as the evasive mode in which it is given, which aims at subverting their inquiry.

Second, Socrates' response here recalls our themes of forgetting, chance, and anticipation. Words related to forgetting (ἐπιλανθάνομαι) and chance (τυνγάνω) each appear three times in this brief response, suggesting the two terms are somehow related. Socrates thereby recalls the association between forgetting and chance that Protagoras establishes in his myth. As a result of Epimetheus' oversight, human beings are unadorned

²⁵⁵ See also Benitez 1992, 242.

and remain in some sense subject to contingency, to which Prometheus' theft helps them to respond. Recalling that point here, along with his two mentions of the anticipatory verb, "to be about to" (μέλλω), allows us to see that Socrates' foresight requires remaining subject to chance if one is really to respond to it. Putting this together with his demand for Protagoras to submit himself to questioning, we can conclude that genuine questioning involves a vulnerability to contingency that Protagoras continuously resists through his repeated evasion.²⁵⁶ Protagoras evades Socrates' questioning in order to avoid the risk of hostility should the implications of his λόγοι come to light and in order to avoid appearing ignorant to prospective students. For Socrates, to be open to inquiry is to be open and responsive to risk, as Hyland argues elegantly, "Socratic self-knowledge, the recognition of what we know and do not know, may be painful and demand courage."²⁵⁷ By rhetorically identifying himself with the human tendency to forget, Socrates contrasts himself with Protagoras by openly acknowledging the role that both forgetting and chance play in inquiry. Afterthought, for Socrates, can and should be openly acknowledged, but never fully overcome.²⁵⁸ If Protagoras wishes to converse with Socrates, Socrates implores him to adopt this model of forethought and accept the attending risks.

Protagoras responds by asking Socrates questions in turn. First, he asks whether Socrates bids him to speak more briefly than the subject requires, to which Socrates responds in the negative. Protagoras implies that subject matters have their internal standard that dictates how one should speak about them.²⁵⁹ In light of apparent appeals to

²⁵⁶ I will explore this idea more during our discussion of courage in chapter 5.

²⁵⁷ Hyland 2019, 51

²⁵⁸ Once more, Hyland's notion of "finite transcendence" informs my thinking here (1995). To acknowledge limitations and transform them into an opportunity for inquiry is a form of transcendence that does not thereby fully and finally overcome such limitations.

²⁵⁹ See Cohen 2002, 3.

objectivity such as this, many remark that Protagoras' *homo mensura* principle does not appear in the dialogue.²⁶⁰ However, Protagoras then asks whose *opinion* will determine the necessary length. He thereby quickly abandons the notion of the subject of λόγος itself determining the account's necessary length. Instead, and in accordance with the *homo mensura* principle, he suggests their dispute is over whose opinion should shape their λόγος. Even if he implies that subject matters have a certain amount of objectivity, he maintains a distance between λόγοι and the matter at hand by confining the former to mere opinion. Socrates of course does not eschew opinion, eliciting Protagoras' opinions (δόξα) repeatedly by asking how things seem (δοκέω) to him. However, Socratic inquiry aims at furnishing a λόγος about the matter at hand, even if such a λόγος remains incomplete, composed of truth and opinion.²⁶¹ But Protagoras reduces λόγος to opinion and thereby severs it from its subject matter.

Socrates responds by appealing to Protagoras' relational—but not relativistic—
notion of what is good:

“I have heard, at any rate,” I was saying, “that you are of a sort yourself and [can] teach another too to speak both at length about the same things, if you wish, so as for the λόγος never to fail (or “run dry”; ἐπιλείπειν), and, in turn, [to speak] in brief so as for no one to speak more briefly than you: if then you are about to converse with me (εἰ οὖν μέλλεις ἔμοι διαλέξεσθαι), use the other way with me, the brief speech (τῇ βραχυλογίᾳ).” (334e–335a)

Above, Socrates compares his forgetfulness to being hard of hearing, suggesting that in that case, Protagoras would suppose it necessary to utter his words more loudly. Here,

²⁶⁰ See for example Moser and Kustas 1966, McCoy 1998, 31.

²⁶¹ Gonzalez helpfully explains Socrates' concern for δόξα by describing δόξα as the implicit beliefs that guide our actions (1998, 181). Similarly, Arendt explains that δόξα are the means by which the world opens itself up to human beings. By eliciting others' opinions, Socrates seeks simultaneously to disclose their own implicitly held beliefs, put those opinions (and their subjects) to the test, and to render the world itself common in conversation (Arendt 1990, 434–437).

Socrates suggests that his forgetfulness similarly warrants that Protagoras shorten his speech. While Protagoras suggests that their dispute over the necessary length is a matter of opinion, Socrates appeals to Protagoras' expressed belief that context and purpose determine what is good to ground his preference for brief speeches (cf. 334c). Socrates' preference for brief speeches is a matter of contingent necessity, but necessity nevertheless, and not mere opinion.

Adding this to our previous observations about the significance of Socrates' preference for brief speeches in relation to questioning, we can conclude that it is human forgetfulness and contingency in general that necessitate speeches sufficiently brief to be submitted to further questioning. Claiming that he has heard it elsewhere, Socrates repeats his claim that Protagoras can speak both at length and briefly, suggesting that this is the clever speaking that Protagoras teaches to others (cf. 329b and 312d). Here, Socrates adds that Protagoras' ability to speak at length results in the λόγος never failing or running dry (ἐπιλείπω). On the one hand, this sounds like Socrates' own practice of λόγος which aims at a completion it may never fully accomplish. Given his own habit of making both lengthy and brief speeches, we might conclude that Socrates here describes his own practice at the same time that he criticizes Protagoras'.

Again, however, Socrates' unending λόγος is characterized by its questioning character, remaining committed to the pursuit of what it seeks. This pursuit is delicate. To capitulate to the recognition that the λόγος cannot be complete would seem to justify Protagoras' evasion. If truth cannot be fully disclosed, then all inquiry is bound to fail.²⁶²

²⁶² It is with awareness of this danger that Socrates furnishes the myth of recollection, encouraging that "By supposing one ought to inquire into things he doesn't know, we would be better and more manly and less lazy than if we should suppose either that it's impossible to discover those things that we don't know or that we ought not to inquire into them..." (*Meno* 86b, Bartlett 2004 tr.)

Anyone's λόγος will reflect their ignorance when put to the test. Socrates avoids this by transforming the limitations into the opportunity for further inquiry, furnishing a speech that probes deeper into the questions, disclosing some things while raising new ἀπορίαι. Socrates puts his λόγος *and himself* to the test by questioning others. Through this pursuit, he deepens his self-understanding through his examination of the λόγος and invites others to the task.²⁶³ Protagoras' lengthy speeches, we have argued, are rather a means of evading questioning and fleeing from the matter at hand to avoid submitting oneself to the risks of inquiry. Sophistry and philosophy both practice an art of δεινός speaking that consists in never-ending λόγοι.²⁶⁴ But Socrates' δεινός speaking promotes the risk of self-knowledge while Protagorean rhetoric evades it.

Socrates apparently fails to impress Protagoras, who assumes that Socrates, like himself, desires victory rather than mutual inquiry: "Socrates, he said, I have already come into contests of λόγοι with many human beings, and if I were to do this thing, which you yourself urge—as my opponent urges me to converse, thus I spoke—I would *appear* better than no one, nor would the *name* 'Protagoras' come into being among the Greeks" (335a, my emphases). Protagoras assumes that his conversation with Socrates is like the other contests of λόγοι in which he has participated. Protagoras reveals himself to be primarily if not exclusively concerned with his reputation. Put together with his care for material goods, Protagorean speech aims at cultivating honor and esteem from those who hear him. From this, he achieves great security and great wealth. He balks at Socrates' suggestion because capitulating to opponents' desires would not allow him to show off. He would not

²⁶³ See also Bell (135–136) and Gonzalez 2000 and 2014.

²⁶⁴ Ewgen identifies the never-ending character of philosophical inquiry in its tendency to end as aporetically as it began, with a clarified awareness of one's original ignorance (2018, 52–53).

appear better than anyone else were he to do so, nor would his name become renowned among the Greeks. What Protagoras ignores or fails to notice, despite Socrates' repeated insistence on the point, is that Socrates desires to scrutinize his person through questioning his λόγοι. The contest, if such a characterization fits at all, is not of λόγοι but of men, Socrates and Protagoras, each of whom Socrates wishes to put to the test through inquiry.

Exactly midway through the dialogue, Socrates' and Protagoras' conversation threatens to break down on the basis of this fundamental disagreement about the nature, purpose, and governing norms of conversation.²⁶⁵ Socrates interprets Protagoras' characterization of their conversation as a contest of λόγοι as an impasse, signaling that Protagoras is unwilling to submit to the kind of questioning that Socrates demands:

And I—for I knew that he himself was not satisfied with his own previous answers and that he would not be willingly ready to converse by responding—leading myself to believe that it was no longer my task to be present among the get-together, said, “But you know, Protagoras, I am not importunately disposed toward our get-together coming to be contrary to what seems best to you, but whenever you yourself wish to converse as I am able to follow, then I will converse with you. For, on the one hand, as is said about you, and *you* say yourself too, you are of a sort conduct get-togethers by means of both long and short speeches—for you are wise—I myself, on the other hand, am incapable with respect to these long [speeches], although I would wish that I were able [to make long speeches]. But it was necessary for you, being capable with respect to both, to yield to us, in order that the get-together would come to be: and now since you are not willing, and I do not have leisure and would not be able stand beside you while you stretch out long λόγοι—for it is necessary for me to go somewhere—I am going: although even these things would I hear from you, perhaps not unpleasantly.” (335b–c)

The disagreement about the manner of speech betrays a more fundamental disagreement about the governing norms and purpose of conversation, which therefore threatens to break

²⁶⁵ Sommerville rather nicely observes that the impasse between Protagoras and Socrates repeats the pre-political situation of human beings in Protagoras' myth, but whereas the latter lack Zeus' gifts, Socrates and Protagoras lack a shared dialectical method (2019, 136).

down their very conversation.²⁶⁶ Protagoras' sense of the norms and purpose of conversation reflect his implicitly immoral and egoistic tendencies. Protagoras views conversation as a contest of λόγοι wherein one person triumphs over another for the sake of glory and reputation, all the while ensuring his personal safety by evading questions that risk exposing unpopular views or implications. His view is inherently competitive: one speaker will conquer another and win reputation and esteem. If there is disagreement about how the conversation will proceed, the stronger must enforce her standards on the other to grant her the advantage. Socrates, by contrast, views conversation as a joint inquiry aiming at completion by means of scrutinizing both questioner and answerer through their λόγοι.²⁶⁷ This completion, presumably, would yield agreement signaling shared wisdom about the matter under discussion.²⁶⁸ But perhaps, at its best, in light of the aporetic nature of human wisdom, it would yield rather a better understanding of the interlocutors' ignorance by reckoning with the inconsistencies or omissions that their account occasions. Socrates' view is inherently cooperative: two non-knowers inquire together into the matter at hand.

²⁶⁶ Roochnik argues that conversation about the very norms that govern conversation can only result in silence, war, or didactic persuasion (1990, 146). In what follows, we will see all three possibilities play out in Protagoras' responses to Socrates' conversational demands. However, we will also see that Socrates indicates a fourth possibility: self-persuasion. Philosophical dialogue can emerge successfully from disagreement about the governing norms of a conversation if only the interlocutor who refuses to submit to λόγος comes to recognize for herself that she is intrinsically subject to these norms as a non-knower.

²⁶⁷ See also Gonzales 2014, 53 and Versenyi 1963, 124 Here again I aim to complicate Ewgen's perceptive account of philosophical dialogue. He distinguishes sophistic eristic from philosophical inquiry on the basis that the former amounts to competitive self-assertion and the latter amounts to self-erasure that aims to occasion the other's self-erasure (2018, 51). The *Protagoras* offers a different picture of philosophical dialogue insofar as it occurs between Socrates and a sophist who persistently evades λόγος. While Ewgen's model of philosophical dialogue would seem to apply to a conversation between Socrates and recognizably dogmatic thinkers, it falls short when applied to an attempt to distinguish Socratic philosophy from Protagoras' evasive sophistry (2018, 51).

²⁶⁸ See also Burnyeat 2013, 422.

That their impasse comes about during a discussion of what constitutes the good by which one fares well signals further that their disagreement about conversation is predicated on a disagreement about the human good itself. For Protagoras, it seems to consist in physical goods which ensure one's survival, satisfy desires, and glorify one's reputation. For Socrates, it would seem to consist in a psychic good that is nourished by inquiry.²⁶⁹ Since their impasse concerns the governing norms that serve as the condition of conversation, any vehicle by which they continue would require submitting to and thus prioritizing one model of conversation over the other.²⁷⁰

Socrates makes two claims that appear to be in tension with each other. First, he says that he is not importunate in demanding that their get-together come to pass in a way contrary to what seems best to Protagoras. That is, he would not insist that Protagoras yield to his model of conversation. Second, Socrates says that, still, since Protagoras both claims and is reputed to be capable of fashioning long and short speeches, he ought to have yielded.²⁷¹ Let us take each claim in turn. Socrates' model of conversation requires that λόγος be aimed at completion. If completion were simply possible, this would yield agreement in shared wisdom about the matter at hand. Agreement is a necessary condition for the λόγος to be brought to completion if their wisdom is to be communal and complete. However, as we saw in chapter one, agreement is not a sufficient condition, since agreement can be reached on the basis of opinions without thereby yielding truths. Second, since *human* wisdom is aporetic and provisional, agreement usually signals a starting point for Socratic conversation: Socrates gets Protagoras to agree with something before

²⁶⁹ Cf. Apology.

²⁷⁰ Cohen 2002, 3.

²⁷¹ Socrates says that Protagoras should have yielded "to us" in the plural, once more implicating the assembled crowd in his appeal.

pursuing the matter further. Completion in λόγος then might, in light of human nature be neither possible nor even desirable for us. Rather, what Socratic conversation aims at is a continuous interrogation into the matter at hand that yields ever deeper self-understanding and reorientation toward the desired truth.

At present, Socrates and Protagoras disagree about the matter and aims of conversation. Socrates emphasizes Protagoras' resistance to Socrates' model of conversation, observing that Protagoras would not be willing to converse of his own accord. Demanding that Protagoras yield to Socrates' model does not resolve the disagreement but rather constrains Protagoras to subordinate his position to Socrates'. But this would be to enforce Socrates' standards of speech onto Protagoras, which is a feature of Protagoras' competitive way of speaking and not Socrates' cooperative way. If their intercourse is to be truly a "getting-together" by Socrates' understanding, then both thinkers must willingly come together of their own accord, agreeing to the terms and aims of the speech. Socrates cannot be importunate in his demand that Protagoras agree to the terms of their get-together without thereby undermining the possibility of their meeting being a get-together in the true, cooperative sense. Since Socrates knows that Protagoras is unwilling to converse of his own accord, Socrates concludes that he no longer belongs there. The agreement is a necessary starting point rather than a criterion for Socratic conversation's completion.²⁷²

However, Socrates' second statement signals the way their conversation could continue, albeit indirectly. If Protagoras' unwillingness to adopt Socrates' model for conversation prevents their get-together from coming to be, Protagoras must become

²⁷² Roochnik 1999, 142.

willing in order for the conversation to proceed. Since Protagoras is capable of making long and short speeches, he should yield and adopt short speeches on the grounds that Socrates is incapable of conversing in long speeches. Most scholars who comment on this exchange dismiss Socrates' humble praise of Protagoras as simply ironic. Some others read it earnestly, but thereby interpret the claim as Plato's genuine signal of Protagoras' superiority over Socrates.²⁷³ Both of these extremes need correcting. The claim is ironic, but it is not therefore simply false or meaningless. Rather, as we have proposed, long and brief speeches signal two kinds of λόγοι. Brief speeches are interrogative and open to questioning, while long speeches are not, whether because they consist in assertion or, as in Protagoras' case, because they evade questioning. Socrates is not incapable of making long speeches as such, but he is incapable of non-interrogative λόγος to the extent that he is not wise. As Ewgen argues, Socrates' alleged inability to speak at length signals rather his ability or power to let the truth appear in λόγος.²⁷⁴

Socrates says that Protagoras is capable of both kinds of λόγοι because he is wise, echoing the early scene where Hippocrates says that Protagoras alone is wise (cf. 310d). Non-interrogative speech, on Socrates' view, presupposes wisdom, whether that wisdom involves knowledge of the good by which human beings fare well, or the recognition that such knowledge is simply impossible.²⁷⁵ Socrates' humility is to this extent earnest in admitting his ignorance, but ironic in praising Protagoras for his wisdom.²⁷⁶ Ewgen points out that ignorance is therefore a precondition of philosophical dialogue in conversation as

²⁷³ Cf. Gargarin 1969, especially 150. Seferoglu likewise reads the praise earnestly but as signaling that Protagoras and Socrates are epistemic peers (2019, 354).

²⁷⁴ 2020, 115.

²⁷⁵ See also Bell 2019, 137.

²⁷⁶ In fact, I posit that reading Socrates' humility as wholly ironic commits the same err that the Athenian jurors do in the *Apology* by taking his profession of ignorance as ingenuine. See also Arendt 1990, 431.

such since if one were wise, conversation would give way to didactic demonstration.²⁷⁷ Thus, we know that Socrates' praise is ironic, in part, because he attempts to persuade Protagoras here to submit to questioning, a mode of conversation that belongs to non-knowers, like Socrates.²⁷⁸ Note that the kind of persuasion Socrates attempts here is indirect. He does not seek to persuade Protagoras to accept his model of λόγος directly. As we have seen, this would amount to a simple submission of Protagoras' position to Socrates. Rather, Socrates aims to persuade Protagoras to willingly submit to questioning, or to question his own model and thereby adopt Socrates' model in coming to recognize that he lacks wisdom. He aims to persuade Protagoras to persuade himself by recognizing his ignorance and adopting the fitting model of conversation. We likewise recognize that Socrates' reason for leaving, that he is busy and has to go elsewhere, is merely an excuse, since immediately after leaving this conversation he undertakes to narrate the entire affair to the unnamed companion, in what is by far the longest λόγος in the dialogue's present dramatic time.²⁷⁹ But since this dialogue as a whole, along with Socrates' narration, gives rise to the question of the purpose and manner of conversation, it too conforms to the Socratic model of interrogative λόγος despite its length.

²⁷⁷ 2018, 46.

²⁷⁸ See also Winn (Barry) 2021. Ahbel-Rappe's characterization of the non-propositional nature of Socratic wisdom likewise emphasizes self-knowledge as the primary content and aims at reorienting the interlocutor toward questioning (2021). She also emphasizes the sense in which Socrates cannot directly bestow self-knowledge and virtue onto others but must depend on them to cultivate it within themselves (2021, 8).

²⁷⁹ See also Bartlett 2016, 53. To Bartlett's proposal that Socrates' lies serve the noble purpose of protecting Hippocrates from a predatorial teacher, we can add that they occasion the true distinction between the sophist and philosopher on the basis of the stance each takes toward questioning.

3.4 DRAMATIC INTERVENTION

Without assurance that his efforts at persuading Protagoras to adopt the questioning mode of conversation suitable to ones who do not know will succeed, Socrates concludes that his part in the conversation is over and rises to leave (335c). By occasioning for its readers the question of the manner and purpose of conversation, the dialogue imitates its action in the remarkable interlude that follows Socrates' attempted departure. The assembled crowd intervenes, each person in turn taking sides in the debate or else proposing his own way to conduct the conversation.²⁸⁰ As Cohen points out, extended dramatic action such as this typically frames Platonic dialogues.²⁸¹ It rarely interrupts the dialogue's main conversation, and never for so long. Moreover, this is the only dialogue in which more than two interlocutors simultaneously collaborate toward a joint end.²⁸² As a result, Cohen persuasively argues that this interlude serves as a parable for both political action and education, with each interlocutor's proposed solution implying a model for political collaboration and education, too.²⁸³ We will emphasize in what follows that each of the proposed solutions—offered by Callias, Hippias, and Socrates in turn—are, as Cohen's account implies, democratic to different degrees and in different senses. In order to draw out the passage's political message, Cohen intentionally underplays the contest between

²⁸⁰ Altman makes a similar point by referring to the dramatic interlude as a “play-within-a-play-within-a-play.” The play itself is the dialogue between Socrates and the unnamed companion. The play within the play is the dramatic action between Socrates and Hippocrates, and then between Socrates and Protagoras. The play within that play is the dramatic interlude in which the auditors intervene on the action in the way we discuss below. Altman proposes that this convention enables Plato to implicate the dialogue's readers (or as he posits, its viewers insofar as he takes it to have been performed for Plato's Academy) who might see themselves in the audience of the play between Socrates and Protagoras. Their intervention, therefore, signals the sense in which the dialogue's readers must enter into the dialogue to bring it to life (Altman 2020, 35 and 45, cf. 49–51).

²⁸¹ Cohen 2002, 4.

²⁸² Cohen 2002, 5.

²⁸³ Cohen 2002. Cf. Bartlett 2016, 53 and Sentese 2020, 290–291.

Socrates and Protagoras, which, on his view, obscures the section's political drama.²⁸⁴ Having attended to the distinction between Protagoras' competitive model of λόγος and Socrates' cooperative model, we can add to Cohen's analysis our observation that while Socrates' model of conversation and proposed solution to their dispute is intrinsically if complicatedly democratic, Protagoras' assumption that one speaker must impose his standards for speaking onto others is despotic. Protagoras' speech aims at competitively held goods like security and glory, while Socrates' speech aims at the cooperative good of wisdom in self-knowledge.²⁸⁵

If Socrates, recognizing the futility of force, aims only to persuade Protagoras—and even that, indirectly—Callias, by contrast, immediately follows up Socrates' remarks by physically restraining him from leaving:

And with me standing, Callias was laying hold of my hand with his right hand and was holding back this cloak with his left hand, and he said: “We will not let you go, Socrates, for if you go away, our conversations will not be the same.²⁸⁶ Therefore, I ask of you to stay with us: as I myself would hear no one with more pleasure (ἡδίων) than both you and Protagoras conversing. But gratify (χάρισαι) us all” (335c).

Callias, guided by pleasure (ἡδίων), begs Socrates to stay while physically restraining him from leaving. In contrast with Socrates, who foregoes any pleasure he might take in Protagoras' extended λόγοι and favors persuasion over force, Callias displays an appetite for conversation that leads him to physical force. If λόγος aims at completion for Socrates and reputation without risk for Protagoras, we find for Callias that it aims at pleasure. Unlike in the dialogue's opening exchange predicated on a shared gratitude between the

²⁸⁴ Cohen 2002, 1–2.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Benitez 1992, 233–236.

²⁸⁶ Or “the conversations will not belong to us in the same way” (οὐχ ὁμοίως ἡμῖν ἔσονται οἱ διάλογοι).

unnamed companion and Socrates, Callias cares nothing for Socrates' desire so long as Socrates gratifies (χάρισαι) his own desire to hear more.²⁸⁷

While Callias thus differs from Socrates, with his pleasure-based love of speeches, he is closer to Socrates than is Protagoras with his irritation (δυσχερῶς) at questioning, leading Socrates to praise Callias and his "philosophy" before rephrasing the reason for his own decision:

It is just as if you were to ask of me to follow Crison of Himera in his prime as a runner, or to both run with (or "against:" διαθεῖν) and follow one of the long-distance runners or daylong runners, I would say to you that I ask of myself much more than you that I go with these runners (θέουσιν τούτοις), but that I am not able. But if it is somehow necessary to behold (θεάσασθαι) both me and Crison running (θέοντα) in the same way, ask this man to make an accommodation: for I am not able to run swiftly, and this man is able to run slowly (335e–336a).

As others have pointed out, on the face of it, Socrates' comparison is as absurd as Protagoras seems to find Socrates' initial request to cut down his responses. To ask an opponent in running a race to slow down undermines the very notion of a race. However, Socrates uses the language of competition ambiguously, in that he could mean to run a race against, or he could mean to run *with* and follow the professional racers.²⁸⁸ Rather than missing the point of racing in making this comparison, Socrates means to transform the paradigm of competition into one of collaboration. Socrates plays on the similarity in words for running (θέουσιν, θέοντα) with words for beholding (θεάσασθαι), to signal that philosophical contemplation is a collaborative activity with a common goal rather than a privately run race for security and glory as on Protagoras' model.

²⁸⁷ Socrates even subtly recalls the unnamed companion at this moment by indicating his shirt dramatically, by which Plato reminds the reader of the unnamed companion and the opening scene.

²⁸⁸ One can easily imagine scenarios in which this would be plausible if not altogether likely. Perhaps an expert runner were showing Socrates a route, or else leading Socrates somewhere, Socrates would need to follow which means the runner would need to slow pace sufficiently for him to keep up.

To complete the racing simile, Socrates turns to Protagoras:

If then you desire to hear me and Protagoras, ask this man to respond in this way now, too, just like before when he was responding to me both in brief and with respect to the things being asked: and if not, what will be the way (ὁ τρόπος) of the conversations? For besides, I myself, at any rate, was supposing that to get together by conversing and to speak rhetorically (τὸ δημηγορεῖν) were separate things (336a–b).

Once more, Socrates tacitly appeals to Protagoras' own sense that what is good depends on context and purpose and is therefore not primarily a matter of opinion. He insinuates that Protagoras' competitive mode of conversation, which evades questioning, is better suited for the kind of public rhetorical speech practiced in lawcourts than in a getting-together in conversation. Protagoras, Socrates implies, despite his flourish for speaking about the relational nature of the good, has a rather poor sense of it. Once more, Socrates associates speaking briefly with attending to questioning, suggesting that questioning is the appropriate mode or "way" (τρόπος) of conversation. While it is true that the two thinkers have an irreconcilably different model of conversation, Socrates implies, using Protagoras' own relational notion of the good, that his is a model that is better suited to conversation as such, irrespective of their differing opinions.

Given that Socrates, like Protagoras employs eristic that seems aimed at refuting his interlocutors, one might reasonably object that Socratic conversation is as agonistic as that of Protagoras. Indeed, there is some element of contest in their discourse here. Recalling that Hippocrates' desire to study with Protagoras lures Socrates to Callias' house in the first place, it would be naïve to think that Socrates has no interest whatsoever in the perceptions of the young men in attendance.²⁸⁹ The guiding question that directs Socrates'

²⁸⁹ Only one commentator suggests that this is the case (Golub 2021). His reason for doing so seems to be that Socrates claims to forget Alcibiades and doesn't refer to Hippocrates throughout his engagement with Protagoras. He therefore concludes that Socrates is indifferent to the young and impressionable audience.

inquiry is whether or not Protagoras is a fit teacher. Naturally, his questions are agonistic to the extent that he might come to light as a fitter teacher than the famed sophist. But in addition to this agonistic element, and in fact prior to it in light of the intrinsically aporetic and provisional nature of Socratic wisdom, is a collaborative motivation. Socrates would rather Protagoras admit that he not know and join Socrates in inquiry than simply demonstrate Protagoras' ignorance to others. If Socrates' only aim were to demonstrate Protagoras' ignorance to others, he would have no reason to continue the conversation after Protagoras admits his self-contradiction. But he doesn't attempt to flee the conversation until Protagoras refuses to continue the inquiry on terms that could plausibly lead to his self-disclosure both to others and to himself.

While Callias' love of λόγοι resembles Socratic philosophy and wins Socrates' love (φιλῶ), admiration (ἄγαμαι), and praise (ἐπαινῶ) (335d–e), that Callias bases his love for λόγοι on pleasure (ἡδίων) leaves him no recourse beyond opinion to measure conversation. Anticipating the conversation of hedonism that follows, we might note that love of pleasure and love of glory lead both Callias and Protagoras to value opinion and seeming over a questioning oriented toward disclosing what is true.²⁹⁰ Callias' response thus misses the point of Socrates' analogy entirely: “‘But—do you know?’—he said, ‘Socrates, Protagoras seems to speak justly, thinking it worthy that it is possible for him to converse however he wishes, and you yourself however you wish in turn’” (336b). His proposal is that each man continue to speak as he desires, so long as the conversation itself continues. As Gonzalez points out, this proposal would yield alternating monologues more than a get-together in

But this seems to me to miss the rhetorical context. The entire course of their conversation aims at testing whether Protagoras is an apt teacher, and therefore puts Socrates implicitly as an alternative.

²⁹⁰ Discussing another dialogue, Bell identifies a valuation of this kind as a mode of self-forgetting wherein the self fails to identify as soul and therefore prioritizes opined goods over true goods (Bell 2019, 133).

conversation.²⁹¹ Cohen observes that the political parallel would be a kind of anarchic model of democracy in which all are unrestricted in acting as they desire, but which therefore provides no common good or ground for the community and lends itself to competition and dispute.²⁹² It would therefore lend itself to the kind of tyrannical impulses that Protagoras' competitive notion of λόγος betrays. The fundamental difference between Socrates' and Protagoras' notion of conversation makes no difference to Callias. Both are pleasing, and thus both men are justified in speaking however they wish. He does not see the problem in the conversation continuing cross purposes, since it would continue nevertheless and therefore continue to please. He misses the cooperative purpose of Socratic conversation and therefore Socrates' motivation for ending their get together.

Confirming Socrates' early claim to the unnamed companion that Alcibiades is well-disposed toward him in this conversation, Alcibiades intervenes and sides with Socrates, perceiving the dispute underlying the two thinkers:

Then, interrupting, Alcibiades said, “You do not speak beautifully (καλῶς), Callias: for, on the one hand, Socrates here agrees that he has no share in long speeches and yields to (or “makes space for”; παραχωρεῖ) Protagoras, on the other hand, that he is able to converse and that he knows both how to give and to receive a λόγος, I would wonder (θαυμάζοιμι) if he yields to (παραχωρεῖ) anyone [among] human beings. If, on the one hand, then, Protagoras, too, agrees that he is baser than Socrates at conversing, it is enough for Socrates: if, on the other hand, he renders himself in opposition [to Socrates], let him converse both asking and responding, not extending a long λόγος after each question asked, evading the λόγοι and not willing to give a λόγος, but drawing [it] out until many of the listeners forget (ἐπιλάθονται) whatever the question was about: since Socrates, at least, I promise, will not forget (ἐπιλήσμων), not that he plays and says that he is forgetful (ἐπιλήσμων). On the one hand, then, Socrates seems to me to speak more suitably: for it is necessary for each man to show forth his own judgment (τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γνώμην ἀποφαίνεσθαι).” (336b–336d)

²⁹¹ Gonzalez 2008, 123. Roochnik characterizes this laissez-fair approach to philosophical disagreement “philosophical silence” (1990, 146).

²⁹² Cohen 2002, 7 and 11.

We suggested before that Socrates cannot directly distinguish himself from Protagoras in words without thereby reducing his λόγος to its appearance. This, reduction, in turn, renders Socratic questioning indistinguishable from the struggle for glory that characterizes Protagoras' speech. If that holds, then perhaps Alcibiades' claims here inch closer to a defense of Socrates, reflective in some ways, of Plato's dialogues themselves, which depict the difference in deed that cannot be stated directly in words.²⁹³ Alcibiades can defend Socrates and, for the most part, succeeds in doing so, without reducing Socrates' ambition to seeking glory. Recalling our earlier discussion of Socrates' δεινός speech consisting in asking beautifully (καλῶς), we see that Alcibiades criticizes Callias for not speaking beautifully on the grounds that he fails to ask the right questions. Callias identifies the opinions (ἐδοκεῖ) of Socrates and Protagoras but fails to ask why each man holds their opinion about conversation.

Alcibiades' own concern for reputation pervades even his perceptive account of the conflict between Socrates and Alcibiades. Alcibiades characterizes the conflict in two ways, both of which illuminate different aspects of the distinction between Socratic philosophy and Protagorean sophistry. First, Alcibiades observes that Socrates yields to Protagoras in his ability to speak at length and suggests that if Protagoras were similarly to yield to Socrates in conversing, then this would suffice to resolve the conflict. At first blush, this remark risks reducing Socrates' concerns to those for reputation or esteem.²⁹⁴

²⁹³ See also McCoy 2007, 3 and 12.

²⁹⁴ Benitez in fact reads this whole dramatic interlude as a comic portrayal of the tendency to conflate philosopher and sophist by interpreting both as primarily driven by competition despite Socrates' efforts to distinguish competition from cooperation (1992, 245). I agree with this interpretation but emphasize that even the interlocutors' mistakes naively help to sharpen the contrast between Socrates and Protagoras even as they themselves often fail to notice the implications of their speeches. Plato persistently preserves the possibility of distinguishing the philosopher from the sophist even as he depicts the repeated failure on the part of the interlocutors to do so.

A concern for honor would seem to motivate yielding in this sense: Protagoras should honor Socrates just as Socrates honors Protagoras so that the two men each maintain their reputation in the get-together. If Protagoras excels at long speeches, Socrates excels at conversing. To this extent, Alcibiades' concern for honor resembles Protagoras' concern for reputation. But the word he uses for yielding (*παραχωρεῖ*) points beyond this concern for honor to the underlying and irreconcilable difference between the two men. The word can also mean that each man should make space for the other. Insofar as the two men differ with respect to the very conditions that make getting-together possible, each one with their own purpose governing λόγος that shapes their manner of speaking, the two occupy different spaces. In this sense "making room for" each other, would consist in acknowledging the impasse and disbanding the get-together in light of its impossibility.

Alcibiades characterizes Socrates' skill at conversing as the ability to give and receive a λόγος. This, in turn, recalls Socrates' ironic praise of Protagoras for being able to give and receive responses (cf. 329b). Both accounts of gifted λόγος require reciprocity and genuine exchange. Alcibiades then proposes that if Protagoras wishes to claim a similar expertise in conversation, then he must adopt this reciprocal style of speaking, both asking questions and giving responses. Reciprocity requires skill at questioning as much as it requires skill at speaking. Protagoras demonstrates the latter in spades. But as Alcibiades now expressly complains, Protagoras' extended speeches in response to each question evades the matter at hand and enables him to avoid giving a λόγος. As we have seen, Protagoras' evasive speech does signal an underlying λόγος but he avoids all questioning that would bring this account to the surface in order to be scrutinized by all in common. Alcibiades accuses Protagoras of engendering forgetfulness in his audience, evading the

λόγος, until the assembled group forgets the original question that gives rise to his λόγος. Alcibiades suggests, too, however, that Protagoras does not entirely succeed in his self-concealment, since Socrates at least forgets nothing, despite his playful pretense to the contrary.

We can add that Socrates never forgets precisely because he recognizes that forgetting underlies human nature, as basis for all inquiry. This fact characterizes the true play of Socratic philosophy. Protagoras, in avoiding questioning, aims to overcome all risk and contingency of oversight; he therefore becomes irritated (δυσχερῶς) when Socratic questioning threatens to expose him. Socrates, in questioning relentlessly, on the other hand, openly embraces the contingency of oversight and urges interlocutors to do the same. As we have seen already, Socrates urges others to adopt his model for conversation since questioning is the mode of conversation that belongs to human beings, whose foresight must remain yoked to oversight and who therefore remain not altogether wise. Alcibiades, with his own concern for honor, suggests that it would suffice for each thinker to maintain their own space so long as they cede the appropriate expertise to the other. Socrates, with his concern for inquiry, demonstrates through his action that nothing suffices until the λόγος has been put thoroughly to the test. It is true that their modes of speech are irreconcilably different, and thus cannot be adjudicated between in λόγος. While Socrates might not be able to refute Protagoras' evasion, Plato can depict the incoherence on which it rests along with its pretense to wisdom and present Socrates as a model for a kind of interrogative speech that can be lived coherently in deed.²⁹⁵ For this reason, Alcibiades

²⁹⁵ Gonzalez argues a similar point with respect to the *Charmides*, where he claims that Socratic knowledge is a non-propositional knowledge of virtue that amounts to knowing how to be virtuous and that is lived out in inquiry (1998, 61). As a result of its non-propositional nature, Socratic philosophy can be easily misunderstood on Gonzalez's read, as we have seen played out in the scene with the eunuch. This difficulty,

conclusion runs true: Socrates speaks more suitably since it is necessary for each to show forth his own judgment, if these judgments are going to be put to the test in light of the limited beings that we are.

The next three speakers each appeal to a sense of community in urging the dialogue forward. First, Critias chastises Callias for siding with Protagoras and Alcibiades for seeking victory: “Prodicus and Hippias, Callias, on the one hand, seems to me to be very much on Protagoras’ side, Alcibiades, on the other hand, is always a lover of victory in reference to whatever he sets in motion. And it is in no way necessary for us to side either with Socrates or Protagoras, but to ask in common for both men not to dissolve the get-together in the middle (μεταξύ)” (336e). In some ways, Alcibiades’ love of victory groups him with Callias’ pursuit of pleasure and Protagoras’ pursuit of glory, even when he defends Socrates.²⁹⁶ That is why even his rather perceptive account of the difference between the two men risks reducing it to a contest of victory. All three men value conversation for its advantages (pleasure, reputation, and victory).²⁹⁷ Each of these objects are privately held: reputation and victory are competitively achieved, and pleasure is privately enjoyed. The next three men, in contrast, aim at sharing something in common, as Critias urges here: the remaining listeners should not side with either thinker, but should ask the two in *common* not to dissolve their get-together in the middle.²⁹⁸

I posit, informs Plato’s decision to write dialogues which depict the difference in deeds accompanying speech. See also Hyland 2019, 61–62 and Strauss 1964, 50–51).

²⁹⁶ Moreover, as Altman emphasizes, Socrates and Alcibiades never speak to each other in the dialogue, despite Alcibiades appearing favorably disposed toward him (Altman 2020, 83–84). It is fair to say, therefore, that Socrates and Alcibiades do not yet get-together in this dialogue, despite Alcibiades’ allegiance.

²⁹⁷ Each resemble Socrates in their love of λόγος, with Alcibiades being a special case since he seems to love both victory and Socrates simultaneously. In Alcibiades, there is a tension between the love of victory and the love of wisdom.

²⁹⁸ See also Cohen 2002, 5.

Prodicus then steps in to refine the sense of “common” as distinguished from equality, in a series of amusing distinctions, which nevertheless illuminate the discussion in interesting ways:

You seem to me to speak beautifully (καλῶς), Critias, for it is necessary for the ones present to these here λόγοι, on the one hand, to be listeners in common (κοινούς) to both of the men conversing, on the other hand, not equally—for it is not the same thing. For, on the one hand, it is necessary to hear in common (κοινῇ) from both men, on the other hand, not to distribute (νεῖμαι) an equal share to each man, but, [it is necessary to distribute] more to the wiser man and less to the less learned man (337a).

Despite Prodicus’ comical penchant for over-wrought distinctions, those he makes here are important for our purposes. As Cohen points out, Prodicus’ remarks turn attention from Socrates and Protagoras as the main speakers to the assembled listeners.²⁹⁹ We can add that Callias indiscriminately takes pleasure in Socrates’ and Protagoras’ speeches while Alcibiades thinks it suffices if the two, in essence, agree to disagree (even if he elsewhere signals Socrates’ superiority). These two positions render the thinkers’ positions more or less equal. Prodicus here suggests that all positions are not inherently equal, even if all merit being heard “in common.” Reintroducing the notion of distribution, Prodicus proposes that listeners should not “distribute” an equal share to both men, but rather more to the wiser man and less to the less learned one. As others have pointed out, this notion coheres with Protagoras’ view that each person may have different capacities for excellence. We can add to this Protagoras’ view that what is good depends on its context and purpose. Using Protagoras’ own notions, we can see that Socrates once more comes to

²⁹⁹ Cohen 2002, 16. He likewise points out that this shift in emphasis parallels the importance of the audience—and not only the speakers—in a political assembly.

light as wiser in proposing a model of speech suitable for conversation, while Protagoras unwisely applies the model for speech suitable for competition.³⁰⁰

Without deciding who is wiser himself, and thus somewhat unwisely leaving his insight behind, Prodicus turns to enjoin Socrates and Protagoras to continue their discussion:

On the one hand, I myself, too, Protagoras and Socrates, think it worthy for you to come together and to dispute with each other about the λόγοι, on the one hand, not to quarrel, on the other hand—for on the one hand, even friends dispute with friends through good will (εὔνοιαν), on the other hand, both those who differ and are enemies quarrel with each other—and in this way our get-together would come into being most beautifully (337a–b).

Prodicus' words echo Socrates' sentiment in the *Meno* where he contrasts eristic quarreling with friendly conversing (75c–d). Because there is disagreement, Prodicus proposes that they should argue (ἀμφισβητεῖν) rather than quarrel. The problem with Prodicus' proposal, as others have pointed out, is that since their dispute is over the nature and purpose of λόγος, undertaking the disagreement would only repeat the conflict, since such an argument must take place in λόγος. Protagoras and Socrates cannot be friends arguing in good will without a shared notion of the good at which λόγος aims.

Prodicus continues by distinguishing empty praise from genuine esteem before finally distinguishing external pleasure from internal delight:

And we, listening, in turn, would be very much delighted in this way, not pleased—for, on the one hand, to be delighted belongs to ones learning something and partaking of prudence (φρονήσεως) by way of thinking itself (αὐτῇ τῇ διανοίᾳ), on the other hand, to be pleased [belongs to] ones eating something or experiencing a different pleasure by way of the body itself (337c).

³⁰⁰ For a related claim about in what sense Socratic wisdom renders Socrates wisest in the *Apology*, see Hyland 2019, 57–58.

Despite his comic portrayal, Socrates' sense that Prodicus possesses genuine—if vague—wisdom is reinforced in these distinctions (cf. 315e–316a). While Prodicus, reinforcing the earlier association with Tantalus, leaves his discussion incomplete by introducing distinctions without applying them, we can supplement his account by making the appropriate distributions (cf. 315c–d). First, distinguishing empty praise from genuine esteem, together with the distinction between pleasure and delight, reinforces our sense that Socrates' praise of Callias is ironic to the extent that he loves speeches for the pleasure they bring so that his love of wisdom remains shallow. Second, he notes that being delighted occurs for those who learn something *and* partake in prudence by way of thinking itself. Pleasure, on the other hand, belongs to someone who eats something or else suffers another pleasure by way of the body. Put simply, delight belongs to the mind while pleasure belongs to the body. This will become crucial in the discussion of hedonism, to be discussed in chapter five, but already, we recall that Protagoras confines his discussion of what constitutes faring well to physical goods. This, in turn, seems to render the virtues subservient to the appetites, so that they either secure goods directly or else promote one's reputation, which, in turn, enables one to secure goods for herself. Prodicus here, by contrast, associates prudence with the activity of the mind. Likewise, he yokes together learning with partaking in prudence by means of thinking. He thereby indirectly, and likely unknowingly, once more supports Socrates' model for conversing, which aims at learning by inquiry in contrast to Protagoras who becomes irritated (δυσχερῶς) with persistent inquiry.

After Prodicus, Hippias suggests that Socrates and Protagoras adopt a middle course, with the audience serving as arbiters:

Then, I both ask and counsel you, Protagoras and Socrates, to meet in the middle (τὸ μέσον) just as under our influence as reconciling arbiters, and you, [Socrates], (singular, σὲ) are not to seek out this exact form of conversations (εἶδος τῶν διαλόγων), corresponding with [being] exceedingly brief, if [it is] not pleasant (ἢδὲ) to Protagoras, but to let go and loosen the reins of the λόγοι, in order that they may show forth (φαίνωνται) as more magnificent and graceful for us, nor in turn, Protagoras, extending all of the lines, setting off by means of a fair wind, are you to flee (φεύγειν) into the sea of λόγοι losing sight (ἀποκρύψαντα) of land, but both of you make your way to some middle (μέσον τι). So then, do this, and be persuaded by me to choose an umpire and overseer and presider who will guard for you the measured length of the λόγοι of each man (337e–338b).

To conclude the intervention, Hippias advises Protagoras and Socrates to submit to the *ad hoc* arbitration that the assembled group offers. But there is disagreement among the group, with Callias urging Socrates to submit to Protagoras, Alcibiades urging Protagoras to yield to Socrates, and Hippias, ostensibly, urging them to continue disputing as before but now as friends with good will. Alcibiades perceptively demands that both men must let their judgments show forth by not evading the λόγος, following from Socrates' claim that scrutinizing the λόγος will allow them to put each man to the test (336d, cf. 333b). Hippias here loses sight of that purpose in entreating Socrates to slacken the reins of the λόγοι so that they, and not necessarily the men behind them, can show forth more magnificently and elegantly. Hippias' own speech is the longest of the group and is fraught with metaphor and adorned language. We might conclude that just as Protagoras desires glory, Callias desires pleasure, and Alcibiades desires victory through λόγοι, so Hippias desires beauty in appearance.³⁰¹ Indeed, Hippias urges Socrates not to pursue an εἶδος of speeches, but to let go so that they may nevertheless show forth more magnificently and gracefully. Hippias

³⁰¹ This anticipates or reinforces the *Hippias Major* on beauty. Davis diagnoses Hippias' love of beauty as an inability to recognize depth beneath surface appearance, a deficiency that is repeated here (2021, 174–176).

desires speeches for their magnificence, but cares little about what underlies both the speeches and beauty.

Still, while Hippias entreats Socrates to slacken the reins of the λόγοι, he entreats Protagoras not to flee into the λόγοι and lose sight of land. Hippias makes a show of equity here, demanding both thinkers meet in the middle, and thus he exhorts Protagoras to concede a little too. Like Prodicus, Hippias, despite himself, says something revealing without applying his words clearly to the matter at hand. If we read this advice with what precedes it, we could argue that Protagoras should not use evasive λόγοι and thereby lose sight of the original question that gives rise to his λόγοι. Or since the verb here translated as “losing sight,” ἀποκρύψαντα, can also mean “to hide,” we might suggest that Protagoras ought not flee giving an account by hiding underneath his λόγοι’s magnificent appearance. This, in turn, recalls the cloaks that early sophists used to conceal their sophistry, reinforcing our earlier suspicions that Protagoras uses evasive λόγοι to hide in plain sight (cf. 316d–e).

So, Hippias proposes that they choose a mediator who will carve out a middle course. Hippias proposes compromise on the grounds of an assumed equality between the two men. The political implication of this proposal, as Cohen points out, is an enforced equality which brings all to the middle but thereby dulls individual excellence, as the double meaning of “compromise” suggests.³⁰² But in his proposal, Hippias seems to miss what preceded. For Alcibiades indicates that the difference between the two concerns more purpose than length, and Prodicus indicates that the two may not be alike by nature as

³⁰² Cohen 2002, 7 and 11. Socrates’ claim that the dialogue can only be measured by its own intrinsic criterion anticipates his later move in which he personifies the dialogue for the purpose of critiquing their preceding conversation (cf. 361a).

Hippias assumes, but one man (Socrates) may be wiser than the other. If the crucial dispute is not merely an absurd disagreement about length, but, as we have proposed, about the manner and purpose of λόγος as such, with Socrates practicing interrogative speech and Protagoras practicing evasive speech, what is the middle course between questioning and evasion?

Still physically constrained to stay by Callias and urged to elect an overseer by the rest, Socrates responds that no judge external to the λόγος can preside over it and that, therefore, to elect one would be shameful (338b). To elect a judge who is inferior to Socrates and Protagoras would be improper and would result in unsuitable judgment. To elect a judge who is similar to Protagoras and Socrates would be superfluous, since the judge would conduct the conversation similarly. Finally, with regard to selecting a superior judge, Socrates says:

But surely you will choose a better man than us. In truth, as I suppose, it is impossible (ἄδύνατον) for you to choose someone wiser than Protagoras here: and if you choose a person in no way better, and declare [him better], this, too, would become shameful for this man here, to choose an overseer just as if he were a base human being, since, for me, there is no difference (338c).

Socrates implies that wisdom is the only relevant criterion on which to choose an arbiter of their λόγοι and that this wisdom will be intrinsic to the conversation rather than an extrinsic measurement of it.³⁰³ Suggesting that no one is wiser than Protagoras, Socrates then implies that anyone chosen would be better in no way than Protagoras but only said to be so, thus appearing to conflate being wiser with being better in general. In light of the

³⁰³ My interpretation of this section is indebted to Gonzalez's account, in which he astutely points out the contrast between Socrates' claim here that no extrinsic criterion can measure their conversation's success with the hedonistic calculus to be proposed soon that provides such a criterion and which, if successful would effectively dispel the need for conversation and dialectical inquiry (2014, 54). See also Gonzalez 2008, 126. Compare this account with Griswold's claim that philosophy cannot defend itself non-dialogically (1988, 11–12).

question about what good enables human beings to fare well that generates this forum on conversation, we might conclude wisdom enables human beings to fare well for Socrates. Socratic speech aims at completion in wisdom, and only wisdom serves as a measure of their λόγοι.

On one level, Socrates' claim that it would be impossible (ἄδύνατον) for someone wiser than Protagoras as their overseer is surely ironic. Protagoras may employ a mode of speech that assumes wisdom, but Socrates implores him to speak interrogatively as Socrates does, as a non-knower. Socrates is therefore wiser than Protagoras to the extent that he knows himself well enough to speak interrogatively as a non-knower.³⁰⁴ However, that they can find no one wiser than Protagoras sufficient to umpire their speeches is true to the extent that, at least on Socrates' view, no one is comprehensively wise, but all human beings remain non-knowers.³⁰⁵ That is why it makes no difference for Socrates who

³⁰⁴ This inches closely to a positive reason to prefer Socrates' philosophical model of speech over Protagoras' sophistic model. Human wisdom provides a criterion for speaking in a manner that acknowledges the limitations of knowing. That is, human wisdom demands that we speak interrogatively. Thinkers like Griswold (1999) and Roochnik (1990) persuasively argue that justifications for philosophical living cannot be made against clever sophists like Protagoras without begging the question. However, human wisdom indirectly comes to light as precisely such a standard that justifies philosophical living intrinsically. All human beings are subject to the limitations of knowing, and the Socratic model of philosophical conversation shows forth as the model that befits this condition. Roochnik's claim that λόγος is fundamentally a matter of desire is true, but rather than preclude a self-defense for philosophical λόγος this recognition affords us the means for this defense (see Roochnik 1990, 108–109). Socrates can defend philosophical λόγος if only he can guide others to recognize for themselves the afterthought that serves as a condition for all human lacking and that occasions philosophical inquiry. Roochnik is quite right that Socrates' recourse here cannot be purely rational in our contemporary, strict sense of the term. But insofar as desire is a root of Socratic λόγος itself, as Roochnik argues that it is, λόγος can defend itself if Socrates can guide others to recognize for themselves the afterthought that serves as the condition for all desire and lacking, and as the occasion for inquiry.

³⁰⁵ Sommerville points out that Hippias' proposal seems to suppose the possibility of technical expertise that could govern their conversation so that the "wiser" arbiter they seek should be an expert in the matter at hand (namely, virtue) (2019, 137–138). Cohen proposes, alternatively, that the claim that no one wiser can become arbiter rings true insofar as were to come to light as wiser, the wiser speaker should replace Protagoras in conversation rather than moderate it (2002, 4). But this interpretation underplays Socrates' implication that technical expertise in matters of virtue and political expertise is not possible, or else that all are wise to the extent that they admit their ignorance. Sommerville recognizes the dialogue's implication that expertise in matters of politics and virtue is not possible, but he sees Protagoras as the source of this view while I take it to be Socrates' view against Protagoras' aim of perfect foresight (Sommerville 2019, 143–144). Despite Protagoras' disdain for τέχνη, his desire for fame and safety pushes him to seek refuge in a quasi-technical calculation of risk that Socrates here begins to undermine.

arbiters the debate since no one will come to light as wiser. Moreover, as we saw both in the conversation with Hippocrates and in the interlocutors' failure to apply their insights to the present contest: non-knowers are unable to recognize and select the knower as wiser. No one is wiser in the sense that no one knows comprehensively in a way that would enable them to arbitrate the dispute externally against a perfect standard of wisdom. The wisdom that would constitute an arbiter of their speech is Socratic human wisdom. But, as we saw above, Protagoras must accept this standard himself of his own accord rather than submit to it as an external command for Socrates' sense of conversation or collaboration to prevail.³⁰⁶ The only way out of their impasse, then, is through it.³⁰⁷ The arbitration can only occur from within. Socrates and Protagoras must act, holding themselves in *ἀπορία*. Protagoras must come to remember that forgetting is in his nature and thus submit himself to inquiry, or else they must ultimately agree to part ways in the middle, as they do.³⁰⁸

Instead of electing an external arbiter of the conversation, Socrates proposes that he and Protagoras switch roles so that he might model for Protagoras the kind of response-giving he seeks:

But I am willing to do [it] in this way, in order that what you are eager for, both our getting-together and conversations, may come to be: if Protagoras does not wish to respond, let him ask, and I will respond, and at the same time I will try for my part to show to him how I say it to be necessary for the one responding to respond: and when I have responded as much as this man wishes to ask, again, let this man furnish (or “submit”; *ὑποσχέτω*) a *λόγος* for me similarly. Then, if he does not seem to be eager to respond according to the thing being asked itself (*αὐτὸ τὸ ἐρωτώμενον*), both I and you all in common (*κοινῇ*) will ask him the very thing

³⁰⁶ See also Griswold 1999, 305. In a way, Socrates' remarks here echo the *Meno*'s *ἀπορία* about questioning: those who know wouldn't seek and those who do not know, would not know what to seek (80e). So, too, a similar judge would be superfluous and a truly wise judge would be unrecognizable. Arendt, too, indicates that persuasion in this sense can become indistinguishable from force when she says “persuasion is not the opposite of rule by violence, it is only another form of it” (1990, 432).

³⁰⁷ Recall, too, that Socrates and Hippocrates are likewise acting in *ἀπορία*, questioning Protagoras without a measure by which to evaluate his teachings (313e–314e).

³⁰⁸ For a general reflection on the sense in which Socratic dialogue requires epistemic openness and submission to inquiry in common, see Ewegen 2018.

which you [ask] me, not to destroy (διαφθείρειν) the get-together: and it is in no way necessary for one overseer to come into being for the sake of this, but everyone, in common (κοινῇ), will oversee (338c–e).

Cohen observes that in his proposal to switch places with Protagoras, Socrates likewise indicates a democratic model, but one which pursues a common good, unlike Callias' and which promotes excellent individuals, unlike Hippias'.³⁰⁹ On Socrates' proposed solution, the excellent individual, Socrates himself, models action for those less capable.³¹⁰ Cohen argues that Socrates alone in the dialogue is capable of this kind of solution since Socratic inquiry unifies the reflective moment of action in which one identifies the action's goal coincides with the transitive moment of action, in which one persuades others to pursue that goal too.³¹¹ We can add two things to Cohen's superb analysis. First, Socrates' model is intrinsically democratic precisely because, insofar as he recognizes his own ignorance and recognizes the Epimethean character of human nature, he recognizes that all are similarly unwise and thus can undertake to seek together. Second, the common goal that unites philosophical inquiry and collaborative political action, for Socrates is wisdom. If Hippocrates will learn from Protagoras how to acquire private goods without angering the many, he will learn from Socrates how to pursue the good in common together with others.

Socrates indicates that he will do more than model how one ought to respond, indeed, he will respond at the same time. That is, Socrates will furnish an account and submit it to Protagoras' scrutiny. In showing his way of conversing to Protagoras, Socrates will simultaneously show himself to Protagoras. Once Protagoras has asked as much as he

³⁰⁹ See also Versenyi, who emphasizes that true community for Socrates requires individuality in addition to community, contra Hippias' proposal to meet in the middle as equals, which would effectively reduce all to the same (1963, 126–127).

³¹⁰ Cohen 2002, 7.

³¹¹ Cohen 2002, 11–12.

wishes, Socrates proposes, the two will switch places again. But after this, Socrates proposes that he and the others in common will ask Protagoras to submit to the Socratic model of responding in accordance with questioning. Socrates says in this way all together will moderate the conversation in which they all take part. Socrates hereby reforms their conversation from a contest between himself and Protagoras into a joint, democratic inquiry.

Arendt, in her interpretation of the *Republic* offers a similarly democratic sense of Socrates' human wisdom, arguing that Socrates' goal is to improve others' δόξα in and through conversation in λόγος.³¹² In contrast, Bartlett suggests that Socrates rather rules and demonstrates his fitness to rule by proposing the terms of the conversation that will be adopted jointly.³¹³ Socrates' proposal and its success could therefore be a kind of aristocratic model reminiscent of the philosopher-ruler of the *Republic*. While on my reading, the text affords both interpretations, I favor the democratic interpretation for three reasons. First, as discussed above, Socrates indicates the limitations of persuasion even as he undertakes to persuade Protagoras and the rest to follow his lead. By undermining his act of persuasion, Socrates signals that self-persuasion and not a ruling-persuasion over others is the preferred route by which they should proceed.³¹⁴ In that case, his own act of ruling by persuasion would be a necessary evil for the sake of the dialogue's continuation rather than his preferred model of political community. Second, the reason that Socrates prefers self-persuasion results from his recognition of ignorance as a common condition of human nature as such, an awareness of which would occasion his interlocutors to join him

³¹² Arendt 1990, 434.

³¹³ Bartlett 2016, 54.

³¹⁴ See also Winn (Barry) 2021.

as non-knowers in inquiry. What separates Socrates from the multitudes is not ignorance as such, since all suffer ignorance, but Socrates' ability to endure the *ἀπορία* that ignorance occasions.³¹⁵ Third, Socrates' claim that any criterion for conversation must be intrinsic to it suggests that the object of philosophical inquiry is intrinsically communal, achievable only through conversation with others.³¹⁶ His practice of conversing and Plato's choice to depict philosophy as ever-dialogically engaged suggests a dialogical understanding of philosophical activity that would be best realized in a community of individuals who have achieved the self-knowledge sufficient to inquire further together.

But Socrates signals from the outset that the get-together is likely to fail since Protagoras never willingly agrees to Socrates' terms: "It seemed to everyone that it must be done in this way: and Protagoras was not altogether (*πάνυ*) willing, nevertheless, he was compelled (or "necessitated"; *ἠναγκάσθη*) to agree to go on to ask, and when he asked sufficiently, again, to go on to give a *λόγος*, answering in short" (338e). The placement of *πάνυ* suggests that Protagoras was either entirely unwilling or not entirely willing. That is, Protagoras is either fully forced to comply, in which case he takes no agency in what follows, or else, he is compelled, in which case he proceeds albeit reluctantly. If Protagoras is entirely unwilling, then as we have seen already, the conversation as a get-together is doomed to failure, since Protagoras only submits to an external pressure and does not of his own accord submit himself to Socratic questioning, which is what Socrates' model of questioning requires. Because Protagoras only complies under force, he is unlikely to accept the consequences of the questioning, since he does not recognize the questioning's

³¹⁵ See also Arendt 1990, 450 and McCoy 2017, 159 and 162.

³¹⁶ See also McCoy 2007, 19. McCoy likewise links the necessarily social character of philosophical inquiry to the limitations of human knowledge (2007, 71–73).

internal necessity, still holding his own model of conversation as his standard. There can be no getting-together under these circumstances but only passive submission to an external necessity. If this is the case, still, however, Socrates proceeds because now, at least, the audience will have a better sense of what is at stake. By modeling what it is to give an account in response to questioning, Socrates will enact the alternative model to Protagorean conversation that cannot be directly stated without thereby undermining its questioning nature. Roochnik argues that moments like Protagoras' refusal to recognize his ignorance makes reason "tragic" insofar as it cannot defend itself against an interlocutor who refuses to recognize its claims on her.³¹⁷ At the same time, the dialogue's dramatic action calls readers' attention to the way in which Protagoras and Socrates each inhabit their λόγος as yet another way to measure each through an internal standard of self-knowledge. Protagoras cannot submit himself to inquiry without rendering his account incoherent, which means he can never pursue self-knowledge. On the other hand, Socrates' interrogative mode of speaking can be lived coherently in deed.

Our exploration of the methodological dispute indicates that Socrates' model for conversation is intrinsically democratic and collaborative. Insofar as no one is comprehensively wise, all must seek the good together in common through an act of joint inquiry. By contrast, Protagoras' assumption that conversation is a competition over privately held goods informs his despotic assumption that a successful speaker imposes her standards onto others. For Socrates' model to be efficacious and to avoid a similar despotism, Protagoras must recognize and persuade himself of the legitimacy of Socrates' model for conversation by coming to recognize his own ignorance. Each intervention

³¹⁷ Roochnik 1999.

implicitly provides contextual evidence for the superiority of Socrates' model over that of Protagoras as a model that befits human beings as non-knowers. Because Protagoras fails to persuade himself to recognize his own ignorance, Socrates offers to model the kind of response-giving he seeks in order to further indicate for the assembled listeners the superiority of his own conversational model in practice.

4.0 CHAPTER 4: THE POETRY OF FARING WELL

This chapter argues that despite Socrates' concluding dismissal of poetic interpretation, his interpretation of Simonides' poem reveals that λόγος ought to be treated as poetic in nature in light of the provisional and aporetic character of human wisdom, that is, our Epimethean limits. By poetic in nature, I mean that, for Socrates, λόγος should point beyond itself in order to signal that it is incomplete. In section one, I argue that two parallel oppositions govern the thematic importance of the section: self-contradiction vs. selfsameness and becoming vs. being. In section two, I argue that Socrates' joint efforts with Prodicus establish Prodicus as a second extreme to Protagoras in their use of λόγος. While Protagorean speech reduces being to becoming, the Prodician distinction, by abstracting altogether from becoming, renders being pure but also empty. I then argue in section three for a particularly poetic form of Socratic λόγος. Socrates' extended and playfully violent misinterpretation of Simonides' poem reveals the dialectical nature of speech, which is as if not more important than the positive, Socratic "account" that his misinterpretation yields.³¹⁸ In particular, Socrates calls attention to the poem as offering a plausible alternative to his own depiction of human nature and striving that serves as a limiting condition to his claims in order to emphasize the provisional and aporetic nature of his understanding. Finally, I conclude in section four by arguing that, in light of the necessarily

³¹⁸ Numerous and fruitful commentaries seek to understand the poem's original meaning and purpose. Some argue that it is a "consolation" poem for some failure on Scopas' part (Parry 1965). Others argue that it is a clear example of a Simonidean praise poem (Carson 1992 and Dickie 1978). Still others attend to the poem as providing a kind of account of human nature and virtue (Woodbury 1953). Finally, others question its original order and composition (Beresford 2008). I leave a full reconstruction of the poem and its meaning to those efforts since my own ambition here is to read the dialogue between Socrates and the poem within the context of the contest between Socrates and Protagoras.

poetic nature of speech, Socrates' dismissal of poetic interpretation only dismisses a sophistic mode of poetry interpretation, one that aims only at the appearance of wisdom rather than earnest self-disclosure. However, it makes room for a philosophical mode of speech that is nonetheless poetic.

Frede likewise argues that the section emphasizes the aporetic ending, but her frame assumes a developmentalist reading that mine does not (1986, 751–752). McCoy draws a similar conclusion without the developmentalist assumption (1999, 359). My interpretation on the whole is aligned with thinkers including Ford 2014, Frede 1986, Gonzalez 2000, Griswold 1999, Irrera 1981, McCoy 1999, Moore 2016, Trivigno 2013, who read the interlude as philosophically significant, against interpretations that dismiss the whole affair as either a simple demonstration of the pointlessness of poetic interpretation or a refutation of sophistry (see Gagarin 1969, 151–152, Vlastos), or the much larger body of scholarship (too numerous to name) who find it so unimportant as not to mention it at all. Moreover, my reading directly combats Nussbaum's 1986 notion of Plato's anti-tragic ambitions by arguing that the dialectical opposition between the poem and Socrates' account means to bring the poem's own tragic truths even more to the fore than the poem's dismissive conclusion suggests. It is along these lines that my interpretation similarly departs from that of Beresford 2008.

4.1 THE UNITY AND MULTIPLICITY OF THE SELF

As others observe, Protagoras intends to demonstrate his own δεινός ability in verses by pointing to a contradiction in Simonides' *Ode to Scopas*.³¹⁹ By doing so, he will come to light as wiser than both Simonides who, presumably unwillingly, contradicts himself, and Socrates who, presumably unaware of the contradiction, judges the poem to be beautifully and correctly made.³²⁰ While these observations are undoubtedly true and speak to the sophist's care for his reputation, this section argues that Protagoras aims further at self-vindication in a way that is inextricably bound up with the poem's meaning, and which comes to light through the dialectic play between the poem's meaning and Socrates' heavy-handed interpretation of it. Specifically, Protagoras charges Simonides with self-contradiction as a manifestation of self-forgetting, the very Epimethean failure with which Socrates charges Protagoras in the previous section.³²¹

Two themes in Protagoras' challenge to the poem, self-contradiction and self-unity, are then repeated by the poem's twin concerns with becoming and being. Simonides' poem suggests that human beings cannot battle against necessity and must be accepted and even praised if they abstain from doing ill. The self in a state of "becoming" moves from one state to another, and in within that movement, it might even contain contraries within itself. For example, an incontinent person who becomes continent, is in a sense a multiplicity of "beings" across time. All human beings present a multiplicity in this sense, being at one time, for example, a child and at another time an adult, and therefore not a child. If self-

³¹⁹ See, for example Gargarin 1969, 151 and Trivigno 2013, 513–514.

³²⁰ See also Bartlett 2018, 56.

³²¹ Gonzalez suggests a further parallel contradiction: Protagoras claims that virtue is easy when he suggests that everyone has it, but also that it's difficult in when he suggests that they need him to teach it (2000, 128).

contradiction manifests the multiplicity that defines the self in its becoming, then Protagoras has committed no blameworthy fault in his own self-contradiction, but manifests the self in its multiplicity that is necessitated by its condition in the state of becoming.³²²

Having agreed to switch roles so that Socrates models for Protagoras the kind of response-giving that befits non-knowers, Protagoras chooses the questions. Claiming that being δεινός about poetry is the highest distinction of an educated man, Protagoras moves their conversation about ἀρετή into the poetic sphere. If Protagoras still perceives their conversation as a contest of speaking, where each man makes a claim to being δεινός λέγειν, Protagoras now hopes to best Socrates in a particular kind of speech concerning poetry. Given his concern for reputation, part of Protagorean excellence concerns the ability to speak in a way that charms others without incurring risk. Fleeing into poetry enables Protagoras precisely this kind of opportunity, even if he flees in this way reluctantly given his critique of other sophists who take such recourses (cf. 316d). If Socrates' δεινός ability at speaking consists in large part in his asking beautifully (καλῶς), as we have argued, Protagoras reveals that his own understanding of clever (δεινός) speaking consists in very large part in a certain poetic ability:

“I myself, Socrates,” he said, “hold that a very great (or “the greatest”; μέγιστον) part of education for a man (ἀνδρὶ) is to be δεινός about verses (ἐπῶν): and this is to be able to put together (συνιέναι) both which of the things being said by the poets (τῶν ποιητῶν) have been made (πεποιήται) correctly (ὀρθῶς) and which things not, and to know both how to take [them] apart (διελεῖν) and, when being questioned, to give a λόγος. And moreover, now in particular the question will be about the same thing, the very thing about which, on the one hand, both you and I were conversing just now: about virtue, having been carried over (μετενηνεγμένον), on the other hand, into poetry (ποιήσιν): it will differ (διοίσει) only in such a sort of way” (338e–339a).

³²² Moore approaches this observation in contending that Protagoras' failure to think through the unity of the virtue amounts to a failure to think through the unity of the self (2016, 296).

Protagoras singles out poetic interpretation as perhaps the highest point of distinction for an educated man.³²³ He then identifies two sets of abilities that distinguish someone as δεινός about verses. First, the δεινός interpreter can put together (συνιέναι) both what has been said correctly by the poets and what has not. Second, he knows (ἐπίστασθαι) how to take apart (διελεῖν) what has been said by poets and how to give a λόγος when being questioned.

The words Protagoras uses to describe the skills of poetic interpretation, to put together (συνιέναι) and to take apart (διελεῖν), are themselves poetic. Poetry as an act of composition involves putting together words in an unexpected way. The English word “text” has a similar sense, originally connoting weaving textiles.³²⁴ “Text” understood as “textile” suggests that reading requires the reader put strands of text together to form a whole composition. Interestingly, Protagoras mentions knowledge (ἐπίστασθαι) only when describing the second set of abilities. One must know how to divide or take apart a poem or else how to give a λόγος when being asked. Instead of knowledge, something like poetic ability itself would seem to be the prerequisite involved in “putting together” (συνιέναι) which things said by poets have been composed (πεποιήται) correctly or not. This would suggest that there is not an external standard against which one could measure or two which one could appeal in determining the composition’s “correctness.” Rather, any standard for poetic composition is internal to the poem itself or else it demands creativity on the part of

³²³ By using the explicitly masculine noun closely related to the notion of courage (ἀνδρεία), Protagoras heightens the stakes in his test of Socrates. This is a skill not merely important for human beings as such but for human beings as “manly men,” capable of excellence.

³²⁴ I am indebted to Marina Vitkin for introducing me to this original sense of our common English word. Her insights about the etymological implications of “text” in informing our access to the world through λόγος as an act of interpretation has been formative to my approach.

the reader to put the pieces together to form a coherent whole. In light of this, is poetic interpretation a mode of knowing, or itself a repetition of the poetic act? Protagoras unknowingly anticipates how Socrates will soon analyze (διελεῖν) and put together (συνιέναι) things said by Simonides in order to give an account of the poem's correctness in spite of its apparent contradiction. While Socrates' interpretation itself does little to demonstrate his knowledge of the poem's meaning, it does satisfy the requirements of δεινός interpretation that Protagoras outlines here and enables Socrates to give an account that reveals something of his own poetic ability and knowledge of ἀρετή.

Moreover, Protagoras claims that ἀρετή will remain the subject matter of their conversation, albeit carried over (μετενηνεγμένον) into poetry (ποιήσιν). The word for "carried over," μετενηνεγμένον, from μεταφέρω, is the source of the English word "metaphor." It means to carry over, to change, or, like its sense in English, to use a word in a new sense and thus to speak metaphorically. Protagoras, by insisting that their subject matter, ἀρετή will be the same (τοῦ αὐτοῦ) as the very thing which (οὗπερ) they spoke about before, drastically underplays the transformation (μεταφέρω) that this only difference (μόνον διαφέρω) occasions.³²⁵ We recall that in the previous chapter, we argued that Socrates demands that Protagoras speak about ἀρετή in his own voice so that the two could test both the λόγος and through it, Protagoras and Socrates themselves as responder and questioner. Protagoras' evasive speech and attempts to consider the view disinterestedly do not suffice for Socrates. Both allow Protagoras as the speaker to maintain distance between himself and his words. Introducing poetry is one more means to this

³²⁵ See also Trivigno 2013, 513.

end.³²⁶ Carrying the question of ἀρετή into the sphere of poetry enables Protagoras once more to withdraw from disclosing his own views, transforming the very heart of their inquiry on Socrates' understanding.³²⁷ Poetry need not reveal the poet's true views, much less the views of the poem's interpreter. On the other hand, Socrates' desire to test Protagoras through his λόγοι implies that he sees words as more than their propositional content. Rather, λόγος is the way in which we understand the world, ourselves, and our actions in it.³²⁸ To this extent, Socrates' understanding of speech, we will see, is also poetic—despite his apparent disdain for poetic interpretation (cf. 347c)—but in an importantly different sense from Protagoras. Poetic speech enables Protagoras to give an account without accounting for himself. For Socrates, speech is poetic both because it reflects our own poetic attempts to put together an account of the world and our place in it, and because, as such, it will—or it should—always reflect the distance between that account and the world itself, which in turn prompts further inquiry beyond our current understanding.³²⁹

Having thus extolled and described the virtues of poetic interpretation, Protagoras turns to Simonides. He first recites a couple of lines from Simonides and asks whether Socrates knows the ode or if he shall go through the whole thing for him. Socrates narrates his response: “And I myself said that there was no need: ‘For I know it, and by all means it chances upon me to have had a care for the lyric’” (339b).³³⁰ First, as Altman points out,

³²⁶ Bartlett, too, characterizes Protagoras' recourse to poetry here as a “retreat” and suggests that this retreat indicates a serious flaw in Protagoras' self-professed “openness” 2018, 55.

³²⁷ See Griswold 1999, 290.

³²⁸ Roochnik

³²⁹ Davis Music of Reason citation.

³³⁰ ἐπίσταμαί τε γάρ, καὶ πάνυ μοι τυγχάνει μεμεληκὸς τοῦ ᾠσματος.

Socrates' response here further undermines his pretense to forgetfulness.³³¹ Socrates implies that he knows the poem so well that he has no need to hear it recited but can recall it by heart. Socrates describes his care for the poem in a rather indirect way.³³² He does not exactly *have* a care for the lyric. Instead, the care “chances upon” him. Considering Protagoras' observation that poetry interpretation is the greatest part of a man's education, we might suppose that Socrates encountered this exact poem as part of his own education. His care for the poem might be somewhat similar to the care for *Hamlet* that chances upon attentive high schoolers today who could, if prompted, continue to recite Hamlet's soliloquys years after graduation.³³³ If poetry, as Protagoras implies in his great speech, educates students in ἀρετή, then the dissociation Socrates expresses toward his care for Simonides' signals once more the sense in which human beings do not become virtuous by their *own* care alone, a notion that will be central to the poem itself. Rather, it would imply that Socrates has learned Simonides' works and perhaps ἀρετή, too, from someone else—calling into question his own claim that ἀρετή is not teachable. With the movement of their discussion of ἀρετή into the sphere of poetry, Socrates here begins to “change places” with Protagoras—as he will later describe the two of them at the dialogue's conclusion. He tacitly implies that ἀρετή may be teachable after all and, as Simonides suggests, not simply a matter of one's own control.

Having established Socrates' familiarity with the poem, Protagoras then asks him to evaluate it:

³³¹ 2020, 106.

³³² The participle “having had a care” is neuter, suggesting Socrates is not the subject of the care that happens upon him.

³³³ The idealized view of education today that my example of Hamlet betrays notwithstanding, perhaps a more universally memorized lyric would be Frost's “The Road Not Taken,” which surely many could continue if prompted, “Two roads diverged in a yellow wood...”

“Then, does it seem to you to have been made beautifully (καλῶς) and correctly (ὀρθῶς), or not?”

“Entirely,” I myself said, “both beautifully and (correctly).”

“And does it seem to you to have been made beautifully, if the poet himself speaks opposed to himself (ἐναντία λέγει αὐτὸς αὐτῷ)?”

“Not beautifully,” I was saying (339b).

Socrates and Protagoras surprisingly agree that something said cannot be beautifully made if the poet speaks in opposition to himself. That Socrates agrees to this is not entirely surprising. He earlier critiques Protagoras’ speech for this kind of inconsistency, remarking that his λόγοι do not sing together in claiming both that each thing has one contrary and that ἀφροσύνη is opposed to both σοφία and σωφροσύνη (332e). Protagoras might prefer to avoid overt self-contradiction, but he has shown himself to be willing to employ it to avoid the greater evil of coming to light as unjust. Moreover, the notion that a poem cannot be beautiful if the poet speaks in opposition to himself is far from self-evident. To take a well-known example from modernity, does Whitman not seem to describe the very poetic impulse itself when he says “Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes)?” (1892, 51). Or more to the point here, is the *Protagoras* any less beautifully made for its apparent contradictions that culminate in its main speakers trading positions at the dialogue’s end? In fact, Protagoras gives Socrates a way out of this bold claim straight after asking this, urging him: “Indeed, see better,” he said” (339b–c), suggesting that perhaps something that opposes itself can nevertheless be beautifully made. Uncharacteristically, Socrates responds “But, good one, I have looked into [it] sufficiently” (339c), refusing Protagoras’ invitation to inquire further.

Protagoras first asks if Simonides’ ode seems to Socrates to have been beautifully and correctly made. Protagoras then drops the issue of correctness, asking whether it can be beautifully made if the poet contradicts himself. It would seem clear enough that a poem

cannot be correctly made if the poet contradicts himself, but it is not nearly as clear that it could not be beautifully made.³³⁴ It cannot be correctly made since “correctness” seems to imply a connection to consistency. On the other hand, beauty relates to how something appears, and it would seem to be the case that a contradiction could appear within a poem and present itself beautifully.³³⁵ Since poetry does not speak in propositions, self-contradiction is by no mean a self-evident criterion for judging a poem’s beauty. However, there is some ambiguity about this in the Greek. “Beautifully” was added to the manuscript and does not appear in Socrates’ response to Protagoras’ first question in our earliest record of the Greek.³³⁶ The addition of “correctly” accounts for the “both... and” of Socrates’ reply. If the manuscript’s addition is incorrect, then it is Socrates and not Protagoras who first effects the omission of correctness. But perhaps the omission relates to the above considerations of a poem’s correctness being a matter of the interpreter’s composition. If poetry’s standard for correctness is internal to it, would that not amount to a kind of identity between beauty and correctness in the sphere of poetry? Despite first appearances, perhaps Socrates, too, recognizes the issue of self-contradiction is not as cleanly related to beauty and correctness as his responses seem to imply.

Protagoras attempts to exploit Socrates’ demand for self-consistency in order to trap him into appearing less δεινός at verses than Protagoras. Socrates refuses Protagoras’ invitation to reconsider his opinion that something that opposes itself cannot be beautifully made, but this refusal seems to oppose Socrates’ own habitual inquiry and willingness to explore inconsistencies in ideas. Altman argues that this question from Protagoras renders

³³⁴ For a complication to this sensibility, see Bartlett 2018, 56.

³³⁵ Consider, for example, Wordsworth’s 1802 line “the child is the father of the man” or the plethora of apparent yet masterful contradictions within Shakespeare’s monologue for Romeo at 176–189.

³³⁶ See Bartlett 2004, 38n114.

self-contradiction a thematic concern of Socrates' Simonides exegesis; the centrality of the theme has important implications for how we should interpret his meaning, as I will discuss below.³³⁷ For now, we must observe preliminarily that Socrates and Protagoras both seem to contradict themselves throughout the dialogue while also disavowing contradiction—and thereby doubling their own self-contradiction! Of course, this raises the issue of intentional and unintentional self-contradiction. The latter would perhaps be blameworthy, but the former could exemplify poetic skill (for Simonides), rhetorical skill (for Protagoras), or else a kind of dialectical skill (for Socrates). Unintentional self-contradiction betrays an Epimethean failure in self-knowledge, but intentional self-contradiction could indicate an awareness of the self as multiple.

To address these problems, we must follow Protagoras and Socrates in putting together the sayings of Simonides. To illustrate that Simonides speaks in opposition to himself, Protagoras pairs the first two lines he quotes, “*On the one hand to become (γενέσθαι) truly a good man (ἀγαθὸν) [is] difficult (χαλεπὸν), / In hand and foot and mind wrought foursquare without flaw*” (339b) with the later phrase in the same lyric, “*Nor harmoniously (or “suitably,” ἐμμελέως) is the thing of Pittacus held (νέμεται) by me / although having been said by a wise mortal: [it is] a difficult thing, he declared, to be good (ἐσθλὸν)*” (339c). As others have pointed out, Simonides sets an exceptionally high bar for what it means to become “good” (ἀγαθός): to be wrought perfect and without flaw in body and in mind.³³⁸ Such an accomplishment, he calls “difficult” (χαλεπός), to say the least. The apparent contradiction with the second quoted passage, then, is that Simonides critiques the saying of Pittacus, which seems to repeat his own notion that it is difficult to

³³⁷ 2020, 100.

³³⁸ See McCoy 1999, 3.

be good (ἐσθλόν). This saying of Pittacus, Simonides complains, is not harmonious. Why, Protagoras charges, does Simonides critique Pittacus for saying what appears to be the same thing he himself says? And how can someone who apparently thus contradicts himself be said to have composed something beautiful, if as Socrates agrees, that what is said beautifully cannot oppose itself? Trivigno helpfully characterizes Protagoras' method for interpretation here as "eristic" insofar as it aims at demonstrating one's superiority to a poet and to other interpreters by treating the text violently and with disinterest toward its content.³³⁹

Two terms relevant to our earlier discussions so far appear in the poem's second quoted passage, harmony (ἔμμελέως) and distribution (νέμεται), here meaning what is "held" or "considered" as such. Taken together, the words recall Prometheus judging Epimetheus' distribution (τὴν νομήν) of powers to find that human beings, in contrast to the non-rational animals who bear harmoniously (ἔμμελῶς, 321c), have been left out of the distribution. The myth's structure redoubles itself in this exchange.³⁴⁰ First, Simonides takes on the role of Prometheus in judging the distribution of Pittacus/Epimetheus. Simonides judges that Pittacus has not judged rightly, just as Prometheus had judged Epimetheus. But second, Protagoras also takes on the role of Prometheus as Simonides becomes Epimetheus in this parallel. Protagoras judges Simonides for his own lack of judgment in composing the poem.

³³⁹ Trivigno 2013, 514. See also Gonzalez 2000, 127.

³⁴⁰ Others note that the contest between Simonides and Pittacus is a repetition of that between Socrates and Protagoras, but to my knowledge, the sense in which this likewise repeats the myth's opposition between Prometheus and Epimetheus has not been extensively treated. See, for example, Coby 1982, 152; McCoy 1999, 354; Moore 2016, 384; Scodel 1986, 31.

Indeed, the parallel continues in what follows. For just as Epimetheus forgets *that* forgetting is his nature, so Protagoras charges that Simonides forgets himself when he critiques Pittacus for saying the same thing that he himself says a little before in the same ode (339d). While Protagoras scrutinizes Simonides, he likewise critiques Socrates' distributions in praising the beauty of Simonides' ode, which appears to contradict itself, in spite of his admission that what contradicts itself cannot be beautiful. While Socrates before, like Simonides, appeared in the role of Prometheus judging Protagoras/Epimetheus, Protagoras chooses a poem that invokes the same language of judgment he offered in the myth to signal that he and Socrates have switched roles.

Before reintroducing self-forgetting as Simonides' cardinal error, Protagoras asks Socrates, "Do you have in mind that this same man says both the things here and those things before?" (339c). When Socrates assents, Protagoras continues, asking whether the things said seem to Socrates to agree with each other, to which Socrates replies "'They appear to me [to agree] at least (however at the same time, too, I was fearing lest he was saying something), nevertheless,' I myself said, 'Do they not appear [to agree] to you?'" Protagoras emphasizes the self-identity of Simonides before asking whether the poem contradicts itself. Self-contradiction threatens the self's unity. It is not just a problem of contradictory propositions, but rather that one should hold incompatible ideas within oneself as somehow reflective of incompatibility within the self itself. As Arendt puts it, "The fear of contradiction comes from the fact that each of us, 'being one' can at the same time talk with himself (*eme emautō*) as though he were two."³⁴¹ We all experience ourselves as a multiplicity when we think and reflect on our own experiences: there is the

³⁴¹ Arendt 2004, 437–438.

self who experiences and the self who thinks and reflects on that experience. To avoid contradiction is to maintain a unity of the self in spite of the experienced multiplicity. To speak in contradictions is to admit that in “being one,” we might nevertheless be many and that there may not be a clear way forward to resolve that multiplicity into unity. Protagoras exploits Socrates’ demand for harmony and thereby exposes the self’s multiplicity.

If Socrates were to permit Simonides’ self-contradiction, he would need to admit that Protagoras did not err in contradicting himself before. For example, Protagoras as a teacher and sophist seeks glory and fame, which requires speech of a different kind from that of Protagoras, who seeks safety and remains subject to laws of the *πολεῖς*. But Protagoras is not the only figure who is complex in his self-presentation. Socrates, too, presents himself differently when speaking with Protagoras than he does when speaking with the unnamed companion. In his narration in this section, Socrates tells the companion something that Protagoras does not hear from Socrates: that Socrates fears for himself lest Protagoras be saying something meaningful in critiquing Simonides. Acts of self-perception and self-regard double the self. Here, the fearing Socrates is a double of the self for whom he fears.

Protagoras then charges Simonides with self-forgetting, echoing both the fault of Prometheus in his myth and Socrates’ own charge against Protagoras at 332e–333a:

For how could the one saying both of these things appear himself to agree with himself (ὁμολογεῖν αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ), who, at least, first himself (αὐτὸς), suggested for himself that it is difficult to become truly a good man, and, going a little later on within the poem, forgot (ἐπελάθετο). And this man, Pittacus, the man saying the same things as himself (τὸν ταῦτα λέγοντα ἑαυτῷ), that “[It is] difficult to be noble,” he both censures and refuses to accept (ἀποδέχεσθαι)³⁴² him, saying the same things as himself (αὐτοῦ τὰ αὐτὰ ἑαυτῷ λέγοντος)? Moreover, whenever he censures the man saying the same things as himself (τὸν ταῦτα λέγοντα αὐτῷ), it is

³⁴² I maintain Protagoras’ use of the historical present, though awkward in the English translation.

clear that he also censures himself (ἐαυτὸν), so that, indeed, before or later on, he does not speak correctly (339c–d).

Just as Epimetheus forgets himself by forgetting that it is his nature to forget, so Protagoras charges that Simonides forgets himself by criticizing Pittacus for saying the same thing he himself does. Words related to self or self-same appear eleven times in this speech, so that we can add to Altman's observed theme of self-contradiction a thematic concern of self-identity as the guiding twin themes of this section.³⁴³ Putting this passage together with Socrates' censure of Protagoras' contradictory speech reveals something more. Simonides, on Protagoras' view, censures himself in censuring Pittacus who says the same things as Simonides himself. In light of Protagoras' own self-contradiction (332e–333b), we could likewise charge Protagoras with self-censure in censuring Simonides. Both men sing unharmoniously by appearing to maintain incoherent positions.

What is more, Protagoras censures Simonides for refusing to accept (ἀποδέχεσθαι) Pittacus for saying the same things as he does. Recall that Socrates had earlier implored Protagoras to accept (ἀποδέξασθαι) responses as a merit of someone skilled at questioning (329b).³⁴⁴ If Protagoras himself notes these parallels, we might conclude that, in choosing this poem as a means to question and best Socrates, Protagoras implicitly defends his own self-contradiction.³⁴⁵ If Socrates admits that Simonides speaks beautifully in spite of self-contradiction, then Protagoras might likewise come to light as beautifully wise. We can ground this supposition by observing a dissimilarity between Epimetheus, whom

³⁴³ We might note, too, that these twin themes provide a parallel, however imperfectly, to the twin Promethean and Epimethean natures of human beings from Chapter 2.

³⁴⁴ In the context of the great speech, recall that the Athenians justly *receive* (ἀποδέχονται) counsel from all in assembly on the basis that all know something of virtue, while Socrates advocates receptivity as acknowledging one's limitations as a non-knower.

³⁴⁵ While Protagoras distinguished himself from other sophists, he nevertheless grouped Simonides together with himself as a sophist, permitting the present comparison (cf. 316d).

Protagoras unequivocally blames, and Simonides. While Epimetheus' self-forgetting reflects and thereby reinforces his nature, a nature which Protagoras desires to transcend, Simonides' self-forgetting disrupts the self's unity and reveals its multiplicity. Socrates' desire for self-consistency, on Protagoras' view betrays a kind of Epimethean simple-mindedness that an ability to speak in multitudes overcomes. Rhetoric, after all, might include the ability to speak differently to different people, out of the view that both the speaker and audience are not, in fact, consistent unities, but rather complex beings who may hold varied beliefs and characteristics that emerge at different times and places.

4.2 WHAT IS IT TO BE ΔΕΙΝΟΣ AT VERSES?

Socrates will undertake three attempts to rescue Simonides from Protagoras' charge of self-contradiction.³⁴⁶ For the first two attempts, he joins forces with Prodicus in attempting to use linguistic distinctions in order to avoid contradiction.³⁴⁷ I argue that his first two efforts with Prodicus actually serve a further purpose in clarifying Socrates' own approach to λόγος and his understanding of the self's nature. Protagoras and Prodicus represent two extremes in their approach to λόγος, against which Socrates' middling approach can come to light.³⁴⁸ Protagoras demonstrates a kind of detachment from the

³⁴⁶ For an account of how each of Socrates' attempts parody standard conventions of interpretation see Brittain 2017, 42. For a general background on the nature of sophistic interpretation see Ford 2014, 27.

³⁴⁷ Trivigno points out that both of these attempts with Prodicus parody Protagoras' own "eristic" model of interpretation (2013, 515).

³⁴⁸ Here, my analysis is similar to that of Ford, insofar as he understands Socrates to be exposing the limits of semantic analysis. However, I add that he establishes Prodicus as another extreme against which to demonstrate his own unique approach to λόγος. He resists this move on the assumption that Socrates is not wholly uncritical of Prodicus and never says anything disparaging against the sophist. This is not quite true since Socrates ridicules Prodicus for resembling Tantalus in a way similar to his observation that Protagoras resembles Orpheus (2014, 29).

content of λόγος so long as it enables him to come to light as wiser than others. His λόγος is evasive, multivalent, and shifting, caring not whether he speaks in myth or λόγος, about poetry or ἀρετή as such. His λόγος refers to appearances, to the world of becoming, which in turn enables him to come to light as wiser so long as he can adapt his λόγος to the appearances that suit him (and his interlocutors) at the moment. By contrast, Prodicus cares for an absolutizing λόγος independent of any particular referent. His distinctions about the “correct” use of words are independent of the context that might condition their meaning. If Protagorean λόγος reduces being to becoming, then Prodician λόγος refers to pure, but therefore empty, being. If Socrates poses an alternative to this, it will be one that understands λόγος to mediate between these two extremes: taking the λόγος to refer to particular beings but demanding that even within their contexts they mean *something*. Recalling the notion of poetic interpretation that opens this exchange along with his insistence that λόγος reveal and put to the test its speaker, we might with cause infer that λόγος reflects our own effort of holding together appearances.

For the second time, Socrates recalls the uproar resulting from Protagoras’ speech:

Then, saying these things, he caused applause for many of the ones listening, and they were praising [him]: and, at first, just as if having received a blow from a good boxer, I was both in the dark (ἔσκοτώθην) and dizzy, with him saying these things and the others applauding: next—as to you, at least, I will tell the truth, in order that time may come to pass for my consideration (τῇ σκέψει) with regarding what the poet was meaning (λέγοι)—I turn myself (τρέπομαι) to Prodicus, and calling him (αὐτόν), “Prodicus,” I said, “To be sure, Simonides is a citizen of yours: you would be just to give assistance to the man...” (339d–340a)

Once more, the crowd applauds Protagoras’ speech, apparently impressed that he finds a contradiction in a poet as great as Simonides and moreover that he seems to get the better of Socrates, who in turn seems to them blind to the contradiction until Protagoras indicates

it.³⁴⁹ In describing his internal response to Protagoras' speech, Socrates indicates that he takes Protagoras' words as an attack. Describing Protagoras' blow, he uses two words that figure prominently in the *Republic's* cave allegory. First, he says that Protagoras' words and the attending applause strike him like a good boxer leaving him in the dark (ἐσκοτώθην). This word describes both the darkness of the cave and of the prisoner's eyes who moves into and out of the cave (cf. *Republic* 516e and 518a). Pavlou indicates moreover that the word is elsewhere associated with ἀπορία explicitly, and that Socrates responds to the ἀπορία with a creative generation of his own account, rather than with inertia or resistance.³⁵⁰ Second, he describes himself as turning (τρέπομαι) to Prodicus, using the same word used to describe the reorientation of the prisoners away from the shadows to the artifacts casting the shadows they previously took to be real (*Republic* 515d, cf. *Republic* 518d, 519a, and 519b).

Let us remember, too, that Socrates at present dwells in the Hades-House of Callias in the Piraeus, where Protagoras and the gathered applauding sophists are depicted as shades, or shadow-selves. If Protagoras appeals to the appearance of self-contradiction as an implicit defense for the self's multiplicity, then Socrates' turn to Prodicus may signal a turn away from these appearances to the λόγοι behind such appearances. This much he indicates "in truth" (τάληθῃ), if indirectly, to the unnamed companion, in confiding that he calls on Protagoras because he needs time to consider (σκέψει) what the poet means (λέγοι). At the same time, this confession undermines Socrates' pretense to Protagoras that he need

³⁴⁹ Woodbury points out that the crowd's reaction implies the contradiction was not readily apparent (1953, 141).

³⁵⁰ 2021, 308–310. I part ways here with Seferoglu who takes Socrates' dizziness to signal his previous dogmatism (2019, 356–357). While perhaps we can say that Socrates was previously ignorant of the particular challenge that Protagoras poses to the Simonides' poem, his response indicates that his open-ended comportment toward what is unknown.

consider the poem no further (cf. 339b). The observations by other scholars that Socrates seems to treat Prodicus rather instrumentally need not discourage our own observation.³⁵¹ Prodicus is also a shade in Hades, after all. But this sophist's concern for λόγοι puts him in an intermediary position between Protagoras who uses λόγος as a mere means to conceal himself and Socrates whose λόγος points beyond itself to what it seeks to disclose. If Protagoras' self-concealment issues a multiplicity of shadow-selves, Socrates' turning to Prodicus signals his calling forth the self who issues from and manifests the λόγοι.³⁵²

Socrates tells Prodicus that he seeks his counsel since the correction (ἐπανόρθωμα) of Simonides depends upon his musical skill (τῆς σῆς μουσικῆς) of distinguishing (διαίρεις) (340a–b). The characterization of διαίρεις as μουσικῆς reinforces our earlier claim that the skills and knowledge involved in poetry interpretation are themselves poetic in nature. This would suggest that a poem is not made “correctly” in itself but becomes such through a poetic act of interpretation. Poetry *requires* a reading or an interpretation in order for its meaning—or perhaps meanings—to come to light. Good interpretations let more of the poem's meaning shine forth.³⁵³ This puts poetry alongside Socratic conversation, the success of which Socrates indicates cannot be measured by an external criterion but only in and through the conversation itself, as we observed in the previous chapter. Both poetry and Socratic conversation compose a λόγος that is intrinsically related to its context.³⁵⁴ To sever the λόγος from its poetic or dialogical context would be to

³⁵¹ See, for example, Woodbury 1953, 142.

³⁵² For an extended and compelling account of the Homeric reference by which Socrates enlists Prodicus' assistance, see Pavlou 2021 (297–320).

³⁵³ For an account of the importance of context and completeness in hermeneutic interpretations, see Strauss (1952, 30), and Roochnik's defense of the principle of “logographic necessity” (1988, 188). See also Gadamer on the dialogical nature of textual interpretation (2006, 387–388).

³⁵⁴ Woodbury makes this point about poetry as a defense against the charge of self-contradiction (Woodbury 1953, 138).

misunderstand its nature. At the same time, both kinds of λόγοι require interpretation precisely because of its varied contextual sources which must be put together and taken apart to render the composition whole. The poetic and philosophical λόγος are in some ways fundamentally incomplete and continuously come to be through interpretation. There is something intrinsically hermeneutical in reading a Platonic dialogue that repeats the sense in which philosophy, too, as Socrates practices it, is dialogical and interpretive.

Socrates turns to the distinction between being and coming-to-be in his first attempt to rescue Simonides' poem. As others have pointed out, all three of Socrates' attempts are rather feeble as poetic interpretations go, being quite clearly unfaithful to Simonides' meaning.³⁵⁵ However, all three nevertheless serve as poetic creations in their own right, which illuminate Socratic λόγος in opposition to that of Protagoras. Socrates first asks Prodicus, "Does becoming seem to you to be the same (ταὐτόν) as being, or other (ἄλλο)?" Prodicus swears by Zeus that they are other: to be is not the same as to become.³⁵⁶ Socrates then emphatically asks, "Therefore, I myself was saying, on the one hand, in the things first [said], Simonides himself (αὐτὸς) showed forth his own opinion (τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γνώμην ἀπεφώνηατο), that it is difficult to become truly a good man?" (340b–c). Socrates, following Protagoras, emphasizes that Simonides voices his own view in claiming that it is difficult to become truly good. Prodicus agrees that Socrates speaks truly. But Socrates opposes Protagoras by denying that Simonides contradicts himself in censuring Pittacus, since the two men do not say the same thing:

"And he blames Pittacus, indeed," I myself was saying, "not, as Protagoras supposes, for saying the same things as himself (ταὐτὸν ἑαυτῷ λέγοντα) but other

³⁵⁵ See, for example, Altman 2020, Griswold 1999, and McCoy 1999.

³⁵⁶ This distinction reintroduces Socrates' early conversation with Hippocrates. There, Socrates implies a distinction between being and becoming in asking why Hippocrates seeks to study with Protagoras. Protagoras *is* what and Hippocrates seeks to study with him so that he will *become* what? (311e–312a).

things. For this Pittacus was not saying, that it is difficult to become good, just as Simonides, but to be so: and being and becoming (τὸ εἶναι καὶ τὸ γενέσθαι) are not the same (ἔστιν δὲ οὐ ταυτόν), Protagoras, so declares Prodicus here. And unless being is the same as becoming (τὸ αὐτὸ ἐστὶν τὸ εἶναι τῷ γενέσθαι), Simonides does not himself speak in opposition to himself (οὐκ ἐναντία λέγει ὁ Σιμωνίδης αὐτὸς αὐτῷ).” (340c)

Socrates distinguishes being from becoming to show that Simonides and Pittacus are not saying the same thing and thus that Simonides does not oppose himself in censuring Pittacus.³⁵⁷ Simonides says that it is difficult *to become* good, but Pittacus says it is difficult *to be* good. A self-contradiction only follows if being and becoming are reduced to the same thing. Exactly this reduction would seem to follow from Protagoras’ reduction of being to seeming, observed in previous chapters. The distinction allows Socrates to rescue Simonides from self-contradiction and serves to disclose Protagoras’ underlying assumptions that operate throughout his conversation with Socrates.

Of course, by emphasizing the distinction between being and becoming, Socrates in fact tacitly reinforces the multiplicity of the self. This distinction reintroduces Socrates’ early conversation with Hippocrates.³⁵⁸ There, Socrates implies a distinction between being and becoming in asking why Hippocrates seeks to study with Protagoras. Protagoras *is* what and Hippocrates seeks to study with him so that he will *become* what? (312a). But this implies that Hippocrates is not yet who he wishes to become. Hippocrates, in effect, will become someone else through studying with Protagoras. Education itself is premised on the idea that who one can become is in some way different than who one already is. Moreover, Hippocrates could become any number of different selves through studying with

³⁵⁷ While the more apparent distinction might be between *esthlos* and *agathos*, Parry notes that not even Prodicus with his love of distinctions suggests this as evidence for the view that the words were more or less universally synonymous (1965, 305). See also Irrera 1981, 13.

³⁵⁸ See also Gonzalez 2000, 132 and 2014, 36.

and taking in teachings from any number of teachers. Rather than capitulating to this multiplicity, however, or maintaining an equality among the potential selves that could be affected through his studies, Socrates encourages Hippocrates to reflect on the desire already present to him. Doing so, Socrates implies, may inform Hippocrates' decisions and the direction of his self-becoming. Self-sameness, for Socrates, seems to come not from denying either multiplicity or potentiality but by attending to the desires always already present within us as guiding threads that inform our actions and keep the self unified by relating always back to that original yearning.³⁵⁹ If Protagoras' two-fold desire for fame and safety yields a multiplicity of shadow selves, Socrates' self-reflection on desire's ultimate object unifies the self throughout its pursuits and self-manifestations.

After pointing out the distinction between being and becoming, Socrates attributes to Prodicus the view expressed by Hesiod that while becoming good is difficult, once accomplished, being so is easy (340c–d). On this view, virtue would be like any number of other things acquired through practice and habituation: difficult to achieve, but relatively easy once achieved.³⁶⁰ For example, it is difficult to become a professional athlete, but easy to be one. Even if any particular situation or game requires effort, the fact of *being* a professional athlete remains easy once one becomes a professional athlete. But this introduces an ambiguity that Protagoras will soon exploit; while being a professional athlete in the sense of maintaining one's self-understanding as a professional athlete may be easy upon becoming one, being a professional athlete often requires doing many

³⁵⁹ Moore similarly distinguishes Protagorean education from Socratic education by saying the former aims to teach practical skills that ensure personal material success while the latter encourages the student to come to self-knowledge. The former relies on his reputation for wisdom, and the latter demonstrates his curiosity as worthy of emulation (2016 283–284). McCoy distinguishes Protagorean knowledge as knowing how to benefit oneself from Socratic knowledge of what the good is as such (1990, 349).

³⁶⁰ Cf. *NE* II.

difficult things, such as making a particularly difficult goal or facing a particularly viable opponent, and to that extent being a professional athlete remains difficult. So, too, the case may be with virtue, being a good person might be a basically stable thing once achieved, but one which requires doing difficult things, as in courageous acts, which will become central in the next chapter.

While Prodicus praises Socrates, Protagoras rebukes him: “Your correction, Socrates, has a greater error (ἀμάρτημα) than that which you are correcting” (340d). While Aristotle will come to associate ἀμάρτημα with tragedy, Socrates interprets Protagoras comically: “And I was saying, ‘Then, a bad thing has been worked out by me (κακὸν ἄρα μοι εἰργασται), as is likely, Protagoras, and I am some laughable (γελοῖος) physician: while treating, I make (ποιῶ) the illness (νόσημα) greater” (340d–e). First, by noting the comedy of his situation, Socrates distinguishes himself from Protagoras who responds irritably to similar criticism (cf. 332a). As Carson elegantly observes, “You can always tell the sophist from the philosopher in a Platonic dialogue. The sophist is the one who loses his sense of humor.”³⁶¹ Second, Socrates’ self-description applies more generally to his practice of questioning others and leading them into ἀπορία. Similarly, in bringing others to recognize their ignorance, he often seems to them to exacerbate their condition, as when he causes Hippocrates to blush at the thought of becoming a sophist.³⁶² Third, by characterizing his practice as γελοῖος rather than a ἀμάρτημα, Socrates carries his practice over from tragedy into comedy. Rather than understanding Socrates’ enterprises as pointless or the ἀπορία as

³⁶¹ 1992, 128.

³⁶² It is this very trait of Socratic questioning which leads Meno to accuse Socrates of being a “torpedo fish.” See *Meno* (80a–b).

hopeless, Socrates encourages laughter as the appropriate response to recognizing our limitations and indicates that he is “in on” the joke.³⁶³

Acknowledging the comedy of Socratic philosophy prepares the way for our final observation of this brief response. Socrates indicates that he does bad work (κακὸν... εἴργασται) in making (ποιῶ) the illness greater. Socrates will soon suggest that no one does bad work willingly (345e). He anticipates that argument here when he acknowledges his own bad work, to two effects. First, if we interpret Socrates’ efforts earnestly, we might conclude that there is a gap between intention and performance, or between thought and deed. Any number of things can interrupt our efforts and lead to bad work against our will. Protagoras’ criticism of Simonides indicates that forgetting, and particularly self-forgetting, is one such source of disruption, which is closely related to ignorance. If forgetting is endemic to human knowing, then rather than a celebration of human achievement, Socrates’ argument comes to light as an acknowledgement of the limitation to human achievement. Bad works will nevertheless be done because human enterprise is subject to intrinsic limitations, as our poem will soon attest. Socrates’ own understanding of this issue will become all the more relevant in relation to his introduction of the “hedonistic calculus” in the next chapter. But second, if we interpret Socrates’ efforts here with a mind to his comic sensibilities, we might conclude that his making the ἀμάρτημα is intentional. In erring intentionally, Socrates plays a joke on the sophists, eliciting their engagement with his ideas and luring Protagoras to object to his account and thereby reveal his own views about ἀρετή.

³⁶³ McCoy makes a similar argument in her article on the relationship between comedy and ἀπορία in the dialogue (2017, 160).

Protagoras mocks Socrates' interpretation for making the poet say something totally contrary to common sense: “‘Great,’ he said, ‘would be the ignorance (ἄμαθία) of the poet, if in this way, he declares that it is an easy (φᾶλός) thing to have procured ἀρετή for oneself, which is the most difficult thing of all, as it seems to all human beings” (340e).³⁶⁴ Most everyone, Protagoras complains, takes possessing virtue to be a difficult thing. By having Simonides claim that it is easy to possess, Socrates' interpretation offends common sense. Protagoras says that the poet would be “ignorant” to disagree with everyone. However, he presupposes that it would be impossible for something to be true if nobody knew or held it to be such, closely associating truth with opinion, albeit universal rather than privately held opinions. But perhaps Protagoras' objection still has some weight. If continuing to possess virtue once achieved were truly something easy (φᾶλός), then virtue itself in the end would seem to be something base (φᾶλός). It is unclear that virtue really is something that can be simply procured and unproblematically possessed. Virtue may well require continuing to do difficult things to maintain virtue. In other words, at this point, one might ask Socrates' Simonides whether it really is possible ever to be virtuous, or if it something we must *constantly* become.

Even if Socrates intentionally stretches meaning in interpreting Simonides, he still thereby guides Protagoras to object to his interpretation in a way that will further Socrates' own argument. Socrates does not argue the point about being and becoming but turns instead to reconsider the meaning of the word χαλεπός. Before turning to consider the meaning of that word, Socrates, swearing by Zeus, implicitly invokes language of timing, chance, and risk, and appeals to contingent experience, all of which further signal the

³⁶⁴ As others note, Protagoras does not point to the very next lines of the poem which would likewise subvert Socrates' reading. Cf. Scodel 1986, 29 and McCoy 1999, 353.

contingency involved in remaining virtuous which would subvert his argument if taken at face value:

And I said, “Yes by Zeus, at the critical moment (καιρόν), indeed, Prodicus here has happened to be present (παρατετύχηκεν) among our λόγοι. For the ancient wisdom of Prodicus runs the risk (or “is likely”: κινδυνεύει) you know, Protagoras, of being something divine, either having begun from Simonides’ time, or even still more ancient. And you appear to be experienced (ἐμπειρος) in many other things but inexperienced (ἄπειρος) in this [wisdom], unlike me; I am experienced on account of being the student of Prodicus here.” (340e–341a).

Before turning momentarily to the irony in Socrates’ words, let us first attend to their truth. Prodicus’ special wisdom, as we have already begun to see, concerns λόγος. Prodicus specializes in distinguishing words that otherwise appear synonymous. Socrates calls his wisdom ancient and divine. By appealing to the notions of critical timing, chance, and risk, in his praise of Prodicus, Socrates simultaneously signals the truth of Protagoras’ objection. Human virtue is and remains subject to certain contingencies. Moreover, his concluding point that Protagoras is “inexperienced” in Prodicus’ wisdom while Socrates himself is “experienced,” being a student of Prodicus recalls his opening conversation with Hippocrates and the sense in which education too is subject to these contingencies. A student must encounter a teacher at the right time, which encounter in turn is subject to chance. To the extent that he has procured Prodicus’ wisdom, he has submitted as a student to Prodicus’ teaching. Recalling that a care for Simonides’ poem chanced upon Socrates, from which we inferred that Socrates studied this poem as a student, and Socrates here associates Prodicus’ wisdom with that of Simonides, we might even speculate further that Socrates studied this poem with Prodicus himself.

As is often the case with Socratic praise, his words here are surely to some extent ironic. After all, Socrates earlier unflatteringly compares Prodicus to Tantalus in his

narration to the unnamed companion (315c), Plato depicts his special skill at distinguishing as a kind of parody in the dispute on method (337a–c), and, as we will see, Socrates will unsympathetically make a mockery of Prodicus in the present account by having him make implausible distinctions before quickly abandoning the point. As we observed in the previous chapter, Prodicus' distinctions indicate something true, but he falls short of wisdom by failing to apply them adequately to the particulars involved discussion at hand. While Prodicus has some understanding of the distinction between listening “in common” and “equally,” “esteem” vs. “praise,” and “being delight” vs. “being pleased” in general, he fails to apply these distinctions to the specific issue at hand. Socrates' praise is ironic to the extent that he has surpassed his teacher in recognizing that an interest in λόγοι requires further interest in how to apply λόγοι to the particular beings under discussion. Prodicus is like Tantalus because his “wisdom,” so long as it remains detached from the particulars, remains incomplete. Moreover, like Tantalus who steals the god's nectar, Prodicus' wisdom runs the risk of surpassing human limits.³⁶⁵ Prodicus' wisdom is ironically divine in that he knows the ideas themselves but has lost sight of their meaning in their practical context.³⁶⁶ Such wisdom, if possible, would be “divine” but it would cease being human. If Protagoras reduces being to seeming, Prodicus, in abstracting ideas from their particular context, is all being, so to speak, with no reference to becoming. Socrates, on the other hand, aims at a kind of wisdom that mediates between being and becoming and avoids reducing either to the other.

³⁶⁵ Cf. Euripides' *Orestes* 10.

³⁶⁶ This, in turn, indicates a more general risk of philosophical inquiry to lose sight of human affairs and particular contingency. I leave full discussion of this to another project.

Socrates continues by calling into question the notion of “difficult” at question in the poem:

And now you seem to me not to know, too, that Simonides perhaps understands this “difficult” not just as you understand [it], but just as Prodicus here admonishes me on each occasion about what is “terrible” (δεινός), whenever I, praising either you or someone else, say that Protagoras is a wise and terrible man, he asks if I am not ashamed calling good things “terrible.” For, what is terrible, he says, is bad: for no one says on each occasion: “terrible wealth,” “terrible peace,” or “terrible health,” but “terrible illness,” “terrible war,” and “terrible poverty,” as what is terrible is bad. Perhaps then also in turn the Ceans and Simonides understand what is “difficult” as either bad or something else which you do not know.” (341a–b).

Socrates postulates that perhaps Simonides understands χαλεπός to mean “bad” as opposed to “difficult,” as one might describe a “difficult” child who is disobedient. Simonides thus chastises Pittacus for saying that being virtuous is something bad. He compares the potential misunderstanding to a recurrent dispute he has with Prodicus over the meaning of δεινός, when Socrates uses it in praise, and Prodicus complains that it has bad connotations. Three things come readily to mind here. First, by pointing to the ambivalence of δεινός, Socrates emphasizes that in practice it often carries with it both meanings.³⁶⁷ Socrates regularly uses δεινός to praise people and things that can be either good or bad. Second, this dispute reinforces the limitations of Prodicus’ wisdom. By refusing to acknowledge context, Prodicus reduces the complexity of the notion of δεινός, which not only means “terrible” or “awful” in the sense of “bad” (κακός) but can also have a positive sense of “clever.” That Prodicus will accede to the notion that Simonides understands χαλεπός as κακός only to be promptly and unceremoniously dismissed by both Socrates and Protagoras reinforces the deficiency of his too general “wisdom.” Recalling the tacit dispute over the nature of the self as either singular or multiple, Socrates demonstrates his

³⁶⁷ See also Trivigno 2013, 517–518.

sensitivity to multiplicity in distinguishing himself from Prodicus here. Third, as Most points out, Socrates points to a third possible meaning of χαλεπός when he suggests it could mean “difficult,” “bad,” or “something else” that Protagoras doesn’t know.³⁶⁸ Most argues that this third meaning is “impossible,” and that this is the meaning implied by Simonides’ poem. The possibility of being and becoming virtuous will be of key importance to what follows, and Socrates’ demonstrated sensitivity to the multivalence of his words suggests that he would be well aware of this third meaning.

Protagoras unceremoniously dismisses the idea that Simonides could take Pittacus to mean κακός by χαλεπός. He once again cites unanimous agreement on the meaning as his evidence against the suggestion, thereby relying on the common opinion of the many for his views much more than he might care to admit. Again, rather than challenge Protagoras on this point, Socrates immediately cedes the point. He agrees that this couldn’t be what Simonides understand by χαλεπός and suggests that Prodicus—and, therefore, by extension Socrates himself too—plays around by suggesting such an unlikely meaning. Socrates even provides further textual support to doubt interpreting χαλεπός as κακός, while tacitly implying that it could mean instead impossible, per Most’s suggestion. Socrates quotes the next line in Simonides’ verse: “God alone could have this privilege” (341e). The context suggests that χαλεπός can’t mean bad if Simonides’ grounds for disagreeing with Pittacus is to say that only a god could possess nobility. At the same time, suggesting that *only* a god could possess it does imply that χαλεπός could mean that it is “impossible” to be noble, at least for human beings. If each poet means a different thing by χαλεπός, then the disagreement could stand without contradiction on Simonides’ part.

³⁶⁸ Most 1994.

Simonides thinks it is *χαλεπός* (impossible) to be good, while Pittacus thinks it is difficult (but possible) to be so. This, of course, is quite contrary to Socrates' initial proposal regarding Simonides' poem—that it is difficult to become, but easy to be good. Socrates plays with the poem's meaning in order to foreground its philosophical themes.

By aligning himself with Prodicus, on the question of the relationship between being and becoming, Socrates indicates yet a third kind of Promethean thinking. If Protagoras reduces being to becoming by caring only for his appearance to others and physical safety, Prodicus reduces becoming to being by caring only for *λόγοι* as such, independently of the particular, real, things that *λόγοι* refer to and in which the ideas he distinguishes between appear. Socrates, by poetically over-emphasizing the importance of the distinction between being and becoming in Simonides' poem, brings this issue to light. At the same time, by calling attention to the third unmentioned meaning of *χαλεπός* as “impossible,” Socrates indicates Simonides' true meaning, from which he abstracts in his own playful interpretation. The poem suggests, so it seems, as many interpreters argue, that it is difficult to become virtuous and impossible to remain so persistently. Every Greek reading the dialogue would laugh along with Socrates as he plays by stretching its meaning. But the poem's real meaning serves as a limitation to the approaches of both Prodicus and Protagoras. It likewise provides insightful complications to the account of the poem that Socrates will soon give that will help us to glean the philosophical stakes of his poetic misinterpretation.

4.3 THE ANCIENT RIVALRY RECONSIDERED

Socrates' extended misinterpretation of the poem puts Simonides' notion of the extrinsic limitations to human flourishing in a dialectical opposition to Socrates' insistence that knowledge alone determines moral virtue.³⁶⁹ In particular, the poem provides a limiting condition to the truth of the claims that Socrates' misinterpretation yields.³⁷⁰ More than using the poem to convey his own philosophical position, Socrates calls attention to the poem as offering a plausible alternative to his own account of human excellence and striving. Socrates includes this limiting condition to his own account in order to emphasize the aporetic and provisional character of his account which follows from the necessary limitations to human aspiration and knowing that both the poem and Socrates' account acknowledge. Socrates' account, to be true to itself, must present itself from within this opposition.³⁷¹ The account that Socrates' misinterpretation yields could no more justly be evaluated as universal truths independently of this context than could the lines of Simonides' verse. To this extent, I align with interpreters like McCoy who read Socrates' efforts here as dialectical in nature.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ However, contra Brittain, my understanding of the priority of the dialectical parallels does not deny the importance of the content of Socrates' interpretation. That his misinterpretation yields recognizably Socratic ideas has bearing on how we are meant to understand the dialectic on display in his interpretation (cf. Brittain 2017, 56–57). To the extent that Socrates does use Simonides' poem to voice his own position, Trivigno argues that he performs a parody of "parasitic" interpretation (2013, 515).

³⁷⁰ I here depart from the view of Ford who argues that Socrates employs a hermeneutic of charity in bestowing truth upon Simonides' poem in order to maintain the poet's authority (2014, 33).. This seems to undermine the provisional and aporetic nature of Socratic wisdom and make poetry interpretation truly superfluous despite his aim to defend it.

³⁷¹ In this sense, my interpretation is compatible with that of Trivigno, who argues that Socrates' interpretation's philosophical significance comes from its parodic nature, so that he likewise sees the manner in which Socrates puts forward his claims as inseparable from the claims themselves (2013, 511). However, I argue that although his interpretation has clear parodic elements, which Trivigno's analysis nicely emphasize, the upshot isn't a standard "philosophical idea" for interpretation, but rather a performance of the dialectical nature of truth that occurs within the "parody" itself.

³⁷² 1999, 364.

In contrast to McCoy's claim that "if perfect knowledge could be achieved, then, indeed, being virtuous would be easy,"³⁷³ however, I argue that rather than establishing Simonidean "divine nature" as an aspiration of human yearning, instead Socrates establishes two different senses of human striving and excellence belonging to different spheres of human life. In human action, Socrates acknowledges the limitations to achievement that the poem brings to light. We might ask, why does Socrates apply the idea that virtue is knowledge to this poem, when the poem itself seems not to take this point of view? I suggest that Socrates deliberately applies a faulty hermeneutic to the poem in order to signal that even Socrates' understanding of wisdom as knowledge does not ensure that human beings fare well in all spheres of life. The life and especially death of Socrates testifies to this fact. It is possible to be persistently good for Socrates only in the mode of inquiry into truth which is itself a continuous achievement rather than a passive state finally completed. However, even in light of the incompleteness of human knowledge, the self remains unified within that striving by keeping the singular object of its striving in mind. Socrates' interpretation provides the self its unity by orienting its desire toward.

It is perhaps surprising to suggest that the self remains unified in its striving toward wisdom. Indeed, the *ἀπορία* suffered in such striving seems to disrupt the self by making it aware of what it does not know. However, Socrates unifies this rupture by recognizing *ἀπορία* as a condition for further seeking. Hyland characterizes *ἀπορία* as consisting of three moments, one is ignorant, then one comes to be aware of one's ignorance, and finally one strives to overcome it.³⁷⁴ Of course, these movements are often experienced in a linear and contingent way. An interlocutor may deny inquiry altogether and refuse to seek

³⁷³ McCoy 1999, 353.

³⁷⁴ Hyland 2008, 39.

further.³⁷⁵ Or an interlocutor may capitulate to the ἀπορία as an impasse.³⁷⁶ Socrates, however, depicts a way of embodying ἀπορία in a unifying way, where simply to recognize his ignorance motivates his striving to overcome it. It is in this sense that Socrates can unify the self within its striving by consistently orienting himself toward wisdom, by being consistently aware of himself as its loving seeker.

Abandoning Prodicus' aid, Socrates offers to give his rather extended account of the poem, thereby ostensibly abandoning the purpose of the exercise, in which Socrates was supposed to demonstrate to Protagoras how to answer questions briefly: "But what Simonides seems to me to have in mind in the lyric, I am willing to say to you, if you wish to make a trial of me (λαβεῖν μου πείραν) as to where I stand, with respect this thing which you say, concerning verses: and if you wish, I will hear from you (ἐὰν δὲ βούλῃ, σοῦ ἀκούσομαι)" (341e–342a). Even as Socrates abandons the brevity of speech he associates with philosophical questioning, he emphasizes both the receptivity and self-display required in Socratic inquiry. He offers to give his own interpretation of Simonides' meaning so that Protagoras can make a trial of Socrates, should he wish to do so. This recalls Socrates' own repeated insistence that the purpose of his questioning is ultimately oriented to putting both Protagoras and himself to the test (cf. 331c and 333c). Socrates changes the phrasing here to be more ambiguous, reflective of Protagoras' less clear intentions in their exchange. Λαμβάνω together with πείραν in this context means something like to "make a trial" but alone it can mean "to grasp" in the sense of to "apprehend" or even to "receive" another hospitably. These are all the positive senses of

³⁷⁵ Cephalus in *Republic* I, despite his avowed love of speaking in his old age, chooses to leave the moment his sense of justice comes under scrutiny.

³⁷⁶ Meno succumbs to this when he accuses Socrates of being a torpedo fish.

receptivity in inquiry that Socrates celebrates throughout the dialogue. However, λαμβάνω can also have violent connotations, suggesting that Protagoras, unlike Socrates, may not be so willing to receive. In putting Socrates on trial, Protagoras does not aim also at testing himself. Finally, Socrates once again makes clear, by contrast, his own openness to receiving Protagoras, stating that if ever he should wish to put himself on display similarly, Socrates would hear from him.³⁷⁷

Indeed, Protagoras expresses no such receptivity to or even interest in what Socrates has to say, noncommittally allowing Socrates to continue if he so wishes, while Prodicus, Hippias, and the rest urge Socrates on, so that Socrates continues (342a). Since Protagoras expresses no interest in receiving Socrates' account, Socrates turns to address the group altogether: "Therefore," I was saying, "I will try for myself to go through for you what seems so to me concerning this lyric" (342a). Here, Socrates uses the plural form of "you," making clear that he is addressing the group and not only Protagoras. If Protagoras refuses to take on Socrates' role as questioner by putting Socrates on trial, just as he sought to do with Protagoras, then Socrates will take on both roles and put himself to the test, exhibiting for Protagoras a picture of philosophical inquiry. This explains the peculiar fact that, as many commentators observe,³⁷⁸ having criticized Protagoras' lengthy speech, Socrates goes on to present an account that rivals the length of Protagoras' Promethean myth and λόγος in what Moore calls "one of Socrates' longest, uninterrupted speeches in all Socratic literature."³⁷⁹ Socrates does not abandon his preference for brief speech, but since Protagoras refuses to play the game in earnest, Socrates must once again become both

³⁷⁷ Socrates makes it grammatically clear that this is an open invitation, by stating it in a future more vivid conditional statement.

³⁷⁸ See for example Altman 2020, xi–xii and Griswold 1999, 186.

³⁷⁹ Moore 2016, 282.

questioner and questioned, in order to illustrate for Protagoras the purpose of dialogical inquiry that informs his preference for brief speech in the first place.

Socrates prefaces his account of Simonides' poem with an ironic—or even satirical—praise of Spartan philosophical brevity.³⁸⁰ Recalling that Socrates puts himself on trial here, it is telling that he opens his interpretation with a playful account of philosophical speech. Spartans, he says, are abundantly wise, but they conceal their wisdom—as sophists do according to Protagoras—so that they are taken to be superior to other Greeks on account of their courage, rather than wisdom (342b). While the sophists, according to Protagoras, conceal their “wisdom” or cleverness on account of the personal risk involved in coming to light as superior in wisdom, Spartan courage is not cowardly in its motive to conceal. Instead, they conceal their wisdom because “Believing that if they knew that they [Spartans] were superior by means of it, namely wisdom, then all would practice in this way” (342b). Sophists, according to Protagoras, conceal their wisdom on the assumption that it is rare, to be possessed only by a few, and therefore something that will incur hatred from the many. But Spartans, according to Socrates, conceal their wisdom because it is so simple that if others knew how valuable it was, everyone would achieve it, and Spartans would come to light as nothing special at all. By grouping Spartans together

³⁸⁰ Moore points out that all but one mention of “philosophy” occur in the section on Spartan wisdom (2016, 283). Many see this entire comic affair as a parody of Protagoras specifically or sophistry in general (see, for example, Scodel 1986, 30–31). It is my contention that it parodies sophistry and philosophy alike but for different reasons, or as Bartlett puts it, “Being a good joke, it is a joke worth making” (2018, 63). The parody of philosophy establishes the provisional nature of its truths while the parody of sophistry indicates nevertheless its inferiority to philosophy for not even attempting to find truth. Muller argues that the section amounts to a full-scale attack against free society in a way that anticipates or repeats the *Republic*'s argument for a *Kallipolis* (2018, 569–590). By focusing on the aporetic character of Socratic philosophy, my interpretation indirectly challenges this view. Muller argues that perfect wisdom is unnecessary since any well-intentioned philosophical rule would be better than the dangers free society is subject to—be it from poets or sophists who avariciously endorse ignoble ideas for their personal fame and wealth. However, it is not clear to me how this claim would be in practice different in kind from any other pretender to wisdom that Socrates routinely charges with ignorance.

with sophists here, Socrates suggests that perhaps sophistic wisdom, too, is really nothing all that special or difficult. The sophists meeting as the assembled men are at present, in private, enclosed houses, shielded from the hatred of many, is, as Socrates implies, much ado about nothing (cf. 342c). Sophists conceal their wisdom to conceal how simple-minded it really is.³⁸¹

Socrates then turns to brevity as a signal of Spartan wisdom:

For if someone is willing to get together with the basest of the Spartans, he will find that he appears to be a simple man with respect to many of his speeches, then, when in some places he happens upon the things being said, he will toss in a brief and pithy phrase worthy of account just as a δεινός javelin-thrower, so as for the one answering in the conversation to appear in no way better than a child (342d–e).

Socrates here praises Spartan brevity in a way that recalls his own preference for brief speech.³⁸² If before, Socrates seems to describe sophistic wisdom when he satirizes Spartan wisdom, here he could well be describing his own skill at conversing. Socrates often appears at first to his interlocutors to be naïve or simple-minded in his questioning (cf. 329d). But then, he quickly poses a question or observation that forces them to confront their own childish ignorance (cf. 331b–332e). Socrates claims here that this skill belongs only to the perfectly educated human being (343a). At the same time, Socrates acknowledges that this skill of his involves some chance and timing, since it is subject to what the other person says. Socratic speech remains fundamentally responsive and therefore subject to failure, since his interlocutor may or may not be receptive to the exhortation to recognize his ignorance in the first place, or to seek further in the second.

³⁸¹ Bartlett argues, moreover, that the prelude on Sparta satirizes philosophy for the purpose of indicating that knowledge as virtue alone does not suffice for faring well (2018, 64). We will return to this point in our analysis of the poem.

³⁸² See also Scodel 1986, 31.

Being thus subject to chance and vulnerable to his interlocutor thus distinguishes Socratic skilled speaking from sophistic skilled speech.

Socrates also draws a connection between Spartan brevity and the inscriptions at the Temple of Apollo. Socrates claims that Pittacus, along with six other wise men were beneficiaries of Spartan wisdom:

All these men were emulators, lovers, and students of the Spartan education, and someone could learn that their wisdom was of such a sort, by the brief phrases worthy of mention that have been said by each one: and these men having come together in common dedicated the fruit of their wisdom to Apollo at the Temple in Delphi, writing these things which surely everyone chants, “Know thyself” and “Nothing in excess.” (343a–b)

Socrates thus concludes the preface to his Simonides interpretation with an invocation of the Delphic Temple of Apollo. He puts self-knowledge and moderation front and center to his account that will follow. Interestingly, Socrates leaves out the third brief and pithy phrase bestowed upon the temple: “Certainty brings ruin.” His omission invokes the idea behind the phrase all the more, since certainty is the very goal at which Protagorean foresight aims, and which Socratic foresight acknowledges is not possible. An immoderate quest for certainty amounts to a failure of self-knowledge. Recalling that Socrates is declared wisest of all Athenians based precisely because of moderate claim that he is not certain of anything brings this contrast between the two men to the fore.

Socrates finally explains the purpose of this preface as demonstrating the nature of Pittacus’ Spartan wisdom, by way of contrast with that of Simonides. Pittacus represents the “way” of the ancient wisdom, a kind of laconic brevity, as Socrates calls it (343b). Simonides, on the other hand, “being an honor-lover (φιλότιμος) as regards wisdom” composed his entire lyric for the purpose of besting Pittacus by overcoming this phrase (343c). Again, Socrates signals the difficulty distinguishing philosopher from sophist by

describing Simonides' honor-loving behavior in a way that is remarkably difficult to distinguish from either Socrates' or Protagoras' own behavior in the dialogue.³⁸³ Simonides, according to Socrates, composes his entire poem in order to come to light as apparently wiser than Pittacus, just as Protagoras challenges Simonides' poem to come to light as wiser than the poet and Socrates.³⁸⁴ Socrates, too, appears to put together this entire interpretation to best Protagoras in a verbal contest. Once again, the love of honor as regards wisdom is remarkably difficult to distinguish from the love of wisdom, just as the beauty of someone who is apparently wise is difficult to distinguish from the beauty of true wisdom.³⁸⁵

Just as Socrates problematizes the distinction between himself and Protagoras, he reminds the assembled audience that the philosopher's collaborative inquiry into truth is the key point of differentiation: "Let us all consider it precisely in common, if then I say true things (or "speak truly"; ἀληθῆ λέγω)" (343c). Here, Socrates asks them to inquire together, and he does not merely seek to persuade in order to be honored for his persuasive abilities. Socrates presents a wildly implausible interpretation of Simonides' poem, but Socrates nevertheless says true things.

Every piece of evidence Socrates provides for his interpretation is either manifestly absurd or simply implausible. First, Socrates claims that including μὲν in the first line only makes sense if Simonides anticipates a quarrel with somebody else, presumably Pittacus (343d). While it is true that μὲν sets up a contrary, it often appears without the

³⁸³ Indeed, so difficult that it leads Gagarin to conclude that both Socrates and Protagoras care more about avoiding refutation than their arguments (1969, 151).

³⁸⁴ See also Coby 1982, 153 and Moore 2016, 284.

³⁸⁵ The difference lies in the motivation. For Socrates, the motivation to win their argument is out of care for Hippocrates' soul, while for Protagoras, it is the self-serving interest in his own reputation.

corresponding δὲ even within Socrates' own speech and often with no adversarial force. With only the fragment we have, it is not easy to imagine what alternative the μὲν means to signify, but there are plenty of other possibilities than the single interpretation that Socrates offers here.³⁸⁶ Second, Socrates claims that “truly” functions as a “hyperbaton,” belonging not with *good*—as regular Greek grammar would have it—but with *difficult*. This means that the line would read not that “It is difficult to become a truly good man” but “It is truly difficult to become a good man.” While not grammatically impossible, it is not the line's most obvious reading since adverbs typically couple with the verb or adjective directly beside them and “truly” occurs directly beside “good” but is separated from “difficult” by “to become.” Moreover, Socrates' reasoning for why “truly” can't belong to “good” offends both common sense and his own distinction between being and seeming: “Not truly *good*—he doesn't mean the ‘truly’ to apply to this—as though there are some who are truly good and others who are good but not truly so.” (343d–e, Bartlett 2004 tr.). Socrates alludes to the distinction between what appears wise and what is not wise both here and throughout the dialogue (cf 309c and 310d).³⁸⁷ Yet here, he claims that there is no similar distinction in the case of goodness, treating the word “truly” as superfluous in Simonides' poem. But this interpretation likewise subverts his warnings to Hippocrates about pursuing “a learning” (which would ostensibly appear good to one who wishes to pursue it) without first confirming whether it harms or benefits the soul. Surely, it is possible, and Socrates knows well, that someone can appear good without being so. That is precisely what would seem to separate the honor-lover from one who is truly

³⁸⁶ See also Frede 1986 (741); Trivigno 2013, 521.

³⁸⁷ See also Trivigno 2013, 521.

honorable as Socrates has only just implied. By denying the possible distinction, Socrates brings it more readily to our attention.

Socrates next introduces the issue of whether or not it is possible to remain or become good, bringing into consideration the third, unstated meaning of χαλεπός from the discussion with Prodicus:

For after this he says going on a little, as if he should speak a λόγος, that to become on the one hand a good man truly is difficult, however it is possible for some time at least: on the other hand, having become, thoroughly to remain in this condition (διαμένειν ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ἔξει) and to be a good man, as you say, Pittacus, is impossible and not humanly (ἀδύνατον καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώπειον), but God alone could have this gift. “And it is not possible not to be bad (κακὸν) for a man / whom misfortune beyond (ἀμήχανος συμφορὰ) means takes down.” (344b–c)

First, Socrates notes the violence that he does to the text already by forcing the poet to speak as if he gives a λόγος. Socrates distorts the meaning of Simonides’ poem in order to turn it into an account. Earlier, he and Protagoras agreed that something could not be correctly and beautifully put together if it contradicted itself. But here, by indicating his awareness that poetry is not in the account-giving business, Socrates signals his awareness that their agreement might not have culminated in something true. Second, depicting all of this suggests that Plato, too, was aware of the difficulty that interpreting a text poses and would be aware of the difficulty that will attend those interpreting his texts. The dialogue’s drama suggests that Plato’s own philosophy wrought with self-contradiction, though they may be, can nevertheless be beautifully composed. Likewise, observing Socrates violently distort the poem by extracting an account from its context, we might reflect on and come to question our own tendency to isolate Platonic “ideas” from the text. Plato’s dialogues are themselves composed of poetry and philosophy, which mixes λόγος with other literary devices to disclose truths that, like those of poetry, cannot always be directly accounted

for. Here, by abstracting from the poem's context, the context is all the more forcefully called to mind.

Socrates, translating Simonides poem into a λόγος, uses a later line in the poem to inform the disagreement between Simonides and Pittacus. Simonides says later in the verse that it is not only difficult but not possible (οὐκ ἔστι) for a man not to be bad (κακόν) in the face of misfortune beyond his means. From this, Socrates infers that for Simonides, persistent goodness is impossible (ἀδύνατον) because it is not a humanly thing (οὐκ ἀνθρώπειον).³⁸⁸ Only the gods can remain persistently good because only the gods have means to confront all misfortunes. Merely human wisdom does not suffice for faring well, contra Socrates' depiction of the Spartans, since human life will always be subject to misfortunes.

Socrates continues, presumably explicating Simonides' view, by emphasizing that it is human achievement, and not just human beings as such, that remains vulnerable to misfortune:

Who then does misfortune beyond means (ἀμήχανος συμφορὰ) take down in rule of a ship? It is clear that it is not the layman: for the layman is always taken down. Just as, then, someone would not take down the one lying down, but, on the one hand, someone would at some time (ποτέ) take down the one standing so as to make him lie down, on the other hand, not the one lying down, and in this way, too, misfortune beyond contrivance (ἀμήχανος... συμφορὰ) would at some time (ποτέ) take down the one the one being full of contrivances (τὸν εὐμήχανον), on the other hand, not the one being always without contrivance (τὸν δὲ ἀεὶ ἀμήχανον), and a great winter falling upon the pilot would make him without contrivance (ἀμήχανον ἂν ποιήσειεν), and a difficult period coming upon the farmer would establish him as without contrivance (ἀμήχανον ἂν θείη), and these same things for the physician (344c–d).

³⁸⁸ Woodbury argues plausibly that the poem's real distinction is not the Socratic one between an unchanging "being" and changing "becoming" but between "being" understood as what is necessarily conferred by the gods and "becoming" which is subject to human efforts and achievements (1953, 150–151). Even if the exact nature of interpretation varies, there is near unanimous agreement that Socrates' purpose in drawing the distinction is different from the poem's original intent (see Parry 1965, 315).

Socrates emphasizes here the frailty and vulnerability of human achievement. It is not the unskilled layperson whose fate misfortune threatens. They are always without contrivance, just as someone lying down already cannot be knocked down. Rather, it is precisely those among human beings who have procured great contrivance (τὸν εὐμήχανον) who are most subject to a change in fortune. Others point out that Socrates' familiar inclusion of technical experts here interjects his own sense that virtue is knowledge and renders the "misfortune beyond contrivance" as a deprivation of knowledge.³⁸⁹ But read against the poem's context, Socrates' examples render his own notion clearly incomplete, since in each case it is not simply a lack or deprivation of wisdom that threatens their achievements.³⁹⁰ A pilot, for all his technical wisdom, cannot overcome the threats posed by a great winter even if he does not thereby lose sight; a farmer likewise cannot overcome a dry spell. Socrates leaves unstated what the physician cannot overcome, but plausibly the physician's limit signals the ultimate limit on all human achievement: the physician cannot finally overcome death, any more than any other human being can.

In each case, it is not losing sight of the good that threatens their achievements, despite Socrates' manifestly absurd suggestion to the contrary. Socrates does not hereby "double-down" on his insistence that virtue is knowledge, but rather raises it within the poem's context to indicate the limitations to such a view taken out of context. Human life, no matter its achievements, remains subject to misfortune beyond contrivance. Despite the

³⁸⁹ Cf. Frede 1986, 741–742; McCoy 1999, 355; Scodel 1986, 33; Trivigno 2013, 522–523.

³⁹⁰ Irrera 1981 suggests the section manifests two compatible notions of virtue: a highest ideal toward which we should strive and the humanly capable achievement of civic virtue. She attributes both to Socrates. I agree to the extent that Socrates recognizes that the truth of Simonides' poem complicates his own ideal of virtue as knowledge, but on my view the relationship is not quite so simple as a basic civic virtue as opposed to an ideal of virtue. It seems rather that the poem allows Socrates to put forward a notion of virtue and human aspiration without thereby presenting itself as the exhaustive truth of the human condition, since the poem presents a plausible alternative to Socrates' proposed account.

Promethean achievements of humankind, human beings must live within their Epimethean limits. Although they can attempt to respond and adapt to greater and greater misfortunes, misfortune beyond contrivance will always threaten human efforts. Note, too, that in Platonic dialogues, it is interlocutors who assume that they are wise that are “taken down” by Socratic inquiry. Socrates, by contrast, in his aporetic way, is like those always without contrivance who cannot be taken down, but reinterpreted in a positive light. It is not the one who knows who fares well in philosophical inquiry, but one who knows that they do not know.

The limitations to human achievements also have a moral significance, as Socrates’ interpretation of Simonides insists, since in the face of misfortune it is impossible not to be bad:

For there is room for the noble person to become bad, just as is also attested by a different poet from the one speaking—‘However, a good man is, at one time, bad, at another time, noble.’ But there is no room for the bad person to become so, but it is necessary that he always be so. So that whenever misfortune beyond contrivance (ἀμήχανος συμφορὰ) takes down the person with contrivances (τὸν... εὐμήχανον), both wise and good (καὶ σοφὸν καὶ ἀγαθόν), “It is not possible not to be bad.” But you declare, Pittacus, “It is difficult to be noble:” however, it is difficult to become noble, but possible (δυνατὸν), and it is impossible (ἀδύνατον) to be so: “For, on the one hand, every man having acted well is good, on the other hand, bad if badly” (344d–e).

Here, Socrates puts the point of contention between Simonides and Pittacus, as he now sees it, most clearly: Simonides thinks it is difficult—but possible—to become noble, but it is impossible to remain so persistently. On the other hand, Pittacus says it is difficult, and not simply impossible to *be* (persistently) good. Thus, the difference still hinges on the difference between being and becoming, but now in a new and more plausible sense. Whereas before, Socrates implied that being good is something easy for Simonides, now

he indicates that due to the vulnerability of human achievement, being *persistently* good is impossible.

However, Socrates points to a difficulty with “Simonides’ account.” If being good is impossible, it is unclear how one who is not good, or especially someone who is bad, could become good. He says that there is no room for somebody bad (κακὸν) to *become*, since it is necessary (ἀνάγκη) for them always to *be* so, so that “It is not possible not to be bad.” This could simply mean that one who is bad cannot become bad, already being so. But the grammar also suggests that the one who is bad cannot become at all, which would suggest that the bad person likewise cannot become good. Socrates thereby tacitly reintroduces the question of how one becomes virtuous. Becoming is oriented toward being. If it is simply impossible to be good, then it would also be impossible to become good, insofar as becoming aims at being.

Socrates uses Simonides’ poem to introduce a two-fold problem in human efforts to become good. First, human achievement is insufficient to overcome misfortunes beyond means. This undermines Protagoras’ ambition of total foresight by pointing out the extent to which his contrivances remain still subject to limiting conditions. However, it likewise complicates Socrates’ own identification of wisdom with faring well. Wisdom—and particularly understood as an ἐπιστήμη resembling technical wisdom—cannot lead to faring well in the sense of becoming invulnerable to life’s misfortunes for Socrates. The achievement of this kind of wisdom is Protagoras’ goal, which Socrates’ poetic account here reveals to be a fool’s errand. Second, because of the vulnerabilities that human achievements remain subject to, which threaten our efforts at being noble and good, we cannot take being noble and good as achievements that can be fully completed. Rather,

human beings must continue to become good and noble in the face of misfortunes. But then *being* good, contra “Simonides,” cannot simply be impossible. If being good were simply impossible, it would be necessary always to be bad. “Simonides” in effect by denying the possibility of being good altogether makes a similar reduction of being to becoming as Protagoras reduces being to seeming. Rather, the goal of being good must be reinterpreted as a kind of continuous activity rather than a state achieved once and maintained without further effort. Human life is neither simply being, which belongs only to the gods, nor simply becoming, which renders human achievements totally futile, but a delicate balance between the two.

Socrates next indicates that losing the standard of being good renders becoming good absurd. He provides an elaborate account of how one becomes good and bad at particular τέχναι, which nevertheless raises serious questions for how one could become either good or bad. He provides a kind of proto-Aristotelian account of how acting well makes one good and acting badly makes the same person bad with respect to the same thing. Someone becomes a good physician by learning to attend to the sick. This is similar to Aristotle’s account of how human beings become virtuous by habituation and by doing virtuous acts. However, Socrates confines the prospect of becoming bad at something only to those who were already good:

Who then could become a bad physician? It’s clear that it would be one who is in the first place a physician, then a good physician—for he is the one who could also become bad. But we who are unskilled laymen in medicine could never become physicians or builders or any other such things by acting badly. And whoever could not become a bad physician by acting badly is clearly not a bad physician either (345a–b).

While there is a logic to Socrates’ comments regarding technical experts, it is difficult to apply this understanding of becoming good and bad to virtue in general, which is what

appears to be at stake. A layperson who attempts and fails to heal a sick person is not therefore a “bad physician.” Such a person is not a physician at all. But would we want to confine being a wicked person only to those who have first worked to become virtuous? It isn’t the case analogously that one who fails to become a good person is simply not a person, or at least the suggestion is far from intuitive.

Socrates’ continuation, nevertheless, attempts absurdly to apply the same principle to virtuous action in general:

In this way, too, on the one hand, the good man would become at some time bad either under the influence of time, toil, illness, or some other calamity—for this alone is a bad action, to be deprived of knowledge—on the other hand, the bad man would not at any time become bad—for he always is—but if he is going to become bad, it is necessary for him first to have become good (345b).

Socrates reduces all these vulnerabilities—time, toil, illness, and more—to the single evil of being deprived of knowledge. McCoy helpfully summarizes Socrates’ intent here: “[Socrates’] point is that the self cannot be harmed except through a loss of knowledge of what is good; that is, the loss of knowledge that is decisive for harming the good life in a way that other loss, bad as they may be, are not.”³⁹¹ Reducing wisdom to this kind of knowledge and reducing faring well to the simple possession of a technical kind of wisdom leads to the absurd consequence that only a virtuous person can become bad. It would seem, at least, that people who are neither ἀγαθός nor κακός could still “become” bad. Moreover, as we have seen above, the misfortunes beyond contrivance that threaten even the technical experts’ faring well, have little if anything to do with a deprivation of knowledge.

Moreover, the bad person cannot become bad, but it seems likewise that she cannot become good, since as is said “It is impossible not to be bad.” Simonides therefore praises

³⁹¹ 1999, 356.

a moderate goal of doing nothing bad. Human life is either a static neutrality or a miserable thing on this interpretation, and all achievements ultimately fruitless and doomed to failure.³⁹² Even the best among human beings is condemned to become bad or suffer a loss of knowledge, and once that happens, there is no indication that she can become otherwise. This is a distortion of the poem's straightforward meaning, but one that indicates the flaws in both his (forced) and Protagoras' (implied) account. On the one hand, if we reduce all being to becoming, then we seem to render human achievement at best pointless and at worst doomed to failure. On the other hand, it remains true that misfortune beyond contrivance threatens human achievements and virtue. Attempting to overcome such threats so as to be persistently good is a superhuman feat that *is* doomed to failure. Would it not be the otherwise excellent individual who has convinced herself that her excellence will persist in the face of life's difficulties, who is most likely of all to be taken down by misfortune beyond contrivance? But capitulating to such threats is no better. In fact, it would seem that the best contrivance human beings can take, in light of all that Socrates says, is to recognize the presence of misfortune beyond contrivance and thus to continue to remain responsive to such difficulties.

Socrates summarizes this portion of the lyric to say that it is difficult to become a good person, impossible to be so persistently, but possible for someone who has become good to likewise become bad: "So that also this part of the lyric extends toward this, that, on the one hand, it is not possible to be a good man, continuing to be good to the end

³⁹² Socrates' insistence in the *Meno* that we would become better bolder and less idle supposing we could come to knowledge encourages a kind of optimistic effort that his interpretation of Simonides would not allow (*Meno* 86b–c). Similarly, his persistent inquiry into the nature and teachability of virtue might indicate a further optimism about human efforts toward becoming good, albeit one that is tempered by limitations to our efforts.

(διατελοῦντα ἀγαθόν), on the other hand it is possible to become good, and for the same man [to become] bad indeed” (345b–c). Once again, Socrates appears to anticipate Aristotle here. Aristotle, when considering whether anybody can be said to have achieved happiness (εὐδαιμονία) before their life is complete, reflects on the vulnerability that human achievement suffers. Human happiness is not totally a matter of their own control. Nevertheless, Aristotle wants to conclude that it would be absurd only to call someone happy once they have died, and thus when they are no longer happy or wretched. Thus, the conclusion that Aristotle arrives at is that happiness is an activity that must be continuously pursued rather than a state simply to be achieved. Socrates seems to harbor these same concerns in emphasizing the vulnerability that human goodness faces. Socrates acknowledges that human vulnerability and limitation renders the self a multiplicity. The same person can be good and bad, since the self is subject to time, toil, and illness that changes the course of actions available to us. At the same time, like Aristotle, he seems unwilling to conclude that therefore human goodness is simply not possible—whereby becoming good would likewise be problematic, too. Wisdom understood as ἐπιστήμη does not and cannot ensure that human beings fare well since, in fact and despite what Socrates says, being deprived of knowledge isn’t the only evil that can befall human beings. Rather, the wisdom that would enable human beings to fare well is one that would be continuously responsive to life’s misfortunes in a persistent pursuit of being good.

The next part of Simonides’ lyric, as explicated by Socrates, draws a further conclusion on the basis of human weakness:

For this reason I shall never set on a vain hope the meager span of life
Allotted (μοῖραν αἰῶνος), seeking that which cannot (μὴ ... δυνατόν) come to be:
A human being wholly without blemish, among us who reap the fruit
Of the broad land

When I find him I shall tell you

...

And I praise and love all

Willingly whoever does

Nothing shameful; but with necessity (ἀνάγκη) not even the gods do battle (345c–d).³⁹³

The meaning of Simonides' verse here seems to be that in light of human frailty, the best we can expect of human beings is that they not willingly act shamefully. The speaker will not spend his days in search of a truly good person, since human goodness is subject to so many vulnerabilities that a perfectly good person is impossible to find. The next best thing is to accept and praise those who do not unwillingly act in shameful ways. Again, the conclusion reinforces the notion that with the impossibility of being good, becoming good is likewise called into question. Now, Simonides does not even demand that human beings strive to become good so long as they only do not willingly do wrong. It suggests that it is not good to spend one's life pursuing impossibilities, and thus that one should capitulate to human limitations rather than strive to meet them.

Socrates seems sensitive to the limitations that Simonides' verse uncovers. He uses those verses both to undermine Protagoras' ambitious goal of total foresight and to complicate his own suggestion that wisdom results in human beings faring well. Knowledge may be central to wisdom, but neither completely alleviates the possibility of all kinds of misfortune, on Socrates' view. However, acknowledging limitation does not require simply capitulating to it for Socrates.

Socrates' explication of this section signals his own divergence from the poet on this point by willfully distorting the poem's original meaning:

For Simonides was not uneducated in this way, so as for him to say that he praises these men, he who willingly does nothing bad, as though there were some who

³⁹³ Bartlett 2004 tr.

willingly do bad things. For I dare say (σχεδόν τι) that I suppose this, that no one of the wise men considers anyone of the human beings willingly to miss the mark (ἐξαμαρτάνειν) nor willingly to do (ἐργάζεσθαι) both shameful and bad things, but they know well that all those who do both shameful and bad things do so unwillingly (345d–e).

Bartlett points out that this is the only place in the exegesis that Socrates apparently speaks in his own voice (“I dare say that I suppose this”).³⁹⁴ Altmann points out further that Socrates’ words here are a performative contradiction.³⁹⁵ He errs or does a bad work interpreting Simonides’ poem exactly when he says that no one would willingly do bad work to the extent that the interpretation is bad, even if it serves a his good purpose. We can add to Altmann’s analysis that Socrates must be aware of this fact in light of the idiomatic phrase σχεδόν τι, which suggests an ironic expression of one’s own opinion or judgment. Socrates knows that he is at present doing a bad work at the exact moment that he ironically supposes that no one would willingly do bad work. Socrates here undermines the very point that he apparently wishes to make. Knowledge does not suffice for avoiding bad work. Those who know can still choose to err or can be forced to err in light of misfortunes beyond contrivance. By using a performative contradiction to make this point, Socrates signals the problem with his own reduction of virtue to wisdom, if we understand wisdom to be something like epistemic knowledge. If virtue simply were knowledge, then it would follow that no one could willingly err. But it would also follow that being—and therefore becoming—virtuous would be an impossible goal and therefore foolish to pursue in the face of misfortunes beyond human contrivance. Since Socrates nevertheless remains committed to the question of becoming virtuous, we must suppose another notion of the human good informs his continued efforts.

³⁹⁴ 2018, 66.

³⁹⁵ 2020, 100.

Socrates ironically attributes the idea that no one errs willingly to Simonides. Simonides wills himself to praise those who do nothing wrong. Socrates then introduces the question of self-control into the account of what it is to be a good person, albeit in a strangely convoluted way: “Moreover, Simonides does not declare himself to be a praiser of these men, he who does not willingly do bad things, but he says this “willingly” about himself. For he considers that a noble and good man often compels himself (αὐτὸν ἐπαναγκάζειν) to become a friend and praiser to someone, to love and to praise [him]” (345e–a). In a rather bizarre, and often disregarded explanation, Socrates says that this kind of thing often happens for someone who is estranged from his father, mother, country, or something else otherwise dear to him. Socrates appears to describe instances where some offense has occurred between people who should naturally love each other. A bad person, he says, allows himself not to love the offender and makes a show to others of that individual’s wickedness. The result, Socrates claims, is that willing (ἐκουσίους) resentment builds upon the resentment that arises out of necessity (ἀνακαίαις) from the situation. By contrast, a good person conceals his hatred and compels himself (ἀνακάζεσθαι) to praise and even to love the offender despite the offense. While such a self-compelled praise might be praiseworthy in some instances, such as when someone gracefully speaks well of a family member with whom they have private misgivings, it does not seem self-evident that all instances of self-compelled praise are likewise praiseworthy. Indeed, Socrates concludes that Simonides often acted similarly, praising and writing encomia for tyrants “not willingly, but out of self-compulsion” (οὐχ ἐκὼν, ἀνακαζόμενος).³⁹⁶

³⁹⁶ As others note, this practice of selling praise and his notable avarice establishes a parallel between Simonides and Protagoras. Cf. Carson 1992, 113–114 and 122, Moore 2016, 284; and Woodbury 1953, 147. Bowra is a notable exception, who claims that Simonides was no sycophant, willing to oppose his wealthy patrons for the sake of speaking his own mind (1934, 231).

While this passage is often overlooked by scholars, one notable exception is Austin, who reads Socrates wholly unironically here.³⁹⁷ She argues that for Socrates it is sometimes in one's patriotic or pious duty to praise one's own even upon suffering or witnessing injustice. Her account is thorough, compelling, and uncomfortable in suggesting that Socrates should endorse praise or even love of unjust or otherwise vicious actors. On this point, I contend that while not wholly implausible, Austin reads Socrates too unironically. He concludes his description of "unwilling praise" to include Simonides' own act of praising Scopas in what is clearly a dig at the poet's avaricious motivations in praising potentially unjust actors. While Austin's account is plausible, more work would need to be done to establish when it is appropriate to praise and love unjust actors and when not, since Socrates seems ambivalent about this point both here and in his own autobiography. However, Austin and I agree on a second controversial point, namely, that Socrates' comments here seem to endorse what she calls a "psychic conflict" in certain moral actions, which undermines a simplistic account of the soul's unity in moral actions which occur within an imperfect city. It is to this point that I now turn in order to demonstrate Socrates' sensitivity to the multiplicity of the self.

Words related to "necessity" or "compulsion" (ἀνάγκη) recur five times in this context compared to "willing" (ἐκόν), appearing four times (345e–346b). The contrast between willing and compulsory action reflects the tension between the singularity and multiplicity of the self. The self who acts willingly is a singular, unified self, while the self who acts under self-compulsion is a multiplicity composed of the part that compels and the part that is compelled. While elsewhere in Platonic dialogues, a unified willing self is

³⁹⁷ Austin 2017, 21–44.

depicted as desirable being unified by knowledge of the good,³⁹⁸ the picture of a willing self is a totally unflattering one:

With respect to the wicked men, whenever such a sort of thing happens (συμβῆ) to them, just as if they were glad to see [this], they both display their blame and accuse the wickedness of their parent or fatherland, in order that human beings do not accuse them of having no care for them, nor reproach them for having no care, so as for them to blame them still more and for willing (ἐκουσίους) hatred to be added to those out of necessity (ταῖς ἀνακαίαις) (346a–b).

The wicked men are the ones who willingly stew in anger. Socrates notes that both chance (συμβῆ) and necessity (ἀνακαίαις) contribute to their circumstance. However, they willingly capitulate to this condition with the result that they add more willing enmity on top of the ones arising out of necessity. It is worth reading this account against the previous Simonides line, which says “but with necessity (ἀνάγκη), not even the gods do battle.” The totally willing men, here the wicked ones, likewise do not battle against necessity but they also fully capitulate to it and even hasten its resolve.

In contrast, by introducing the notion of self-compulsion here, Socrates tacitly—and surprisingly—implies that human beings are in fact even more powerful than the gods according to this depiction.³⁹⁹ The totally willing self on this depiction wills its own necessity. But Socrates depicts this in an unflattering light, implying that a totally unified human self is in fact enslaved to its own necessity. By contrast, the self that compels itself can, unlike the totally singular gods, do battle with necessity: “On the other hand, the good men both conceal themselves and compel themselves (ἀναγκάζεσθαι) to praise, and if they are angered in some way, being wronged by their parents or fatherland, they both encourage and reconcile (διαλλάττεσθαι) themselves, compelling themselves (προσαναγκάζοντας

³⁹⁸ I have in mind, in particular, *Republic* IV.

³⁹⁹ As Woodbury notes even the gods are subject to necessity (1953, 151).

ἑαυτοῦς) to love (φιλεῖν) and to praise their own (ἑαυτῶν)” (346b). Good men, Socrates suggests here, do not capitulate to external necessity. Instead, they compel themselves to transform their enmity into friendship (διαλλάττεσθαι). If human beings were totally unified, on the one hand, they would be similar to gods, totally reconciled to necessity. But this is no different in the end from rendering oneself totally passive. On the other hand, human multiplicity introduces the possibility of self-control and a uniquely human capacity to oppose necessity. Human beings can transform what appears to be mere necessity into a possibility since they are not only passive but active agents who can respond to what befalls them.

It is worth noting, too, however, that Socrates’ praise of the self-compelling “good men” is not without its own irony. The self’s multiplicity introduces the possibility of self-transcendence through self-compulsion. But at the same time, it introduces the possibility of self-concealment (ἐπικρύπτεσθαι), deception, and flattery. The picture he paints of these “good men” is far from unambiguous. While the fate of the totally willing men is plainly unflattering and undesirable, the choices of the men acting under self-compulsion are questionable. He points to Simonides’ praising and writing encomia to tyrants as an example of an act done unwillingly, under self-compulsion (οὐχ ἑκόν, ἀλλ’ ἀναγκαζόμενος) (346b). This is hardly an unambiguously “good” act of self-compulsion. Moreover, the idea of self-concealment recalls Protagoras’ own tactics during the dialogue, along with his tendency to pander to the democrats among the group, despite perhaps privately harboring undemocratic values and intentions. Socrates implies here that the multiplicity of the self along with self-control can lead on the one hand to self-transcendence and responding to limits rather than capitulating to necessity, when

positively construed. On the other hand, it also enables people like Protagoras to conceal himself by splitting himself into two, his own true self and his apparent self, which panders to the many, when negatively construed. While the uniquely human capacity for self-compulsion can elevate human beings even above the gods, it can also lead them to sink lower than beasts.

Having established that Simonides willingly praises those who refrain from shameful deeds, Socrates interprets the following lines of Simonides' verse to address and justify his blame of Pittacus directly. Simonides, on Socrates' interpretation, reserves blame for those who are overtly bad, refraining from blaming those who simply avoid being bad (even, presumably, if they don't pursue being good, which has been established as impossible). The concluding line of this section explains Simonides' reasoning: "All things, you see, are καλός, with which shameful (or "ugly things"; αἰσχρὰ) have not been mixed" (346c).⁴⁰⁰ Simonides' meaning here seems clear enough in light of the context: what is beautiful is simply that which is not composed of anything shameful or ugly. In yet another interpretive stretch, Socrates distinguishes the case of beauty from that of whiteness: "He does not mean this, just as if he were to say all things are white, with which black things have not been mixed—for this would be laughable (γελοῖον) in many ways—but that he himself (αὐτὸς) also accepts (ἀποδέχεται) the middle things (τὰ μέσα) so as not to blame" (346d). In context, the case seems very much like that of the relationship between white and black. In both cases, something cannot be mixed with its contrary. But rather than emphasizing the purity of beauty and goodness as such, Socrates emphasizes instead that human goodness and beauty is a middling state between pure beauty and pure ugliness.

⁴⁰⁰ Bartlett 2004 tr.

As McCoy points out, the notion of human beings as being “in the middle” resonates with the *Symposium*, where human being as erotic creatures are said to be between beauty and ugliness on the one hand, and wisdom and ignorance on the other.⁴⁰¹ Alternatively, Trivigno argues that the “middle state” could refer to human wisdom as a middle between divine wisdom and mere ignorance as in the *Apology*.⁴⁰² In both cases, Socrates once again emphasizes the notion of acceptance and receptivity in suggesting that Simonides receives those in a middling state. Receptivity befits the kind of middling creatures that human beings are as neither totally active nor totally passive. Accepting (ἀποδέχεται) the middling things (τὰ μέσα) amounts to accepting oneself (αὐτὸς) as a middling being.

Socrates uses the poem’s final lines to reinforce this message: “‘And I do not seek,’ he said, ‘*An all-blameless human being, as many of us who enjoy the fruit of the spacious earth, finding him, I will give tell to you all...*: so that I will not praise anyone for the sake of this at least, but to me it is enough if he is middling (μέσος) and does nothing bad, as I ‘love and praise’ all...” (346d). Socrates adds the notion of “middling” to the account, which appears nowhere within the poem. This suggests that this notion in particular is, on Socrates’ view, missing from the poem once it becomes an account of human nature and goodness. Socrates accepts (ἀποδέχεται) the limitations to human goodness that Simonides’ poem draws out, but he differs from Simonides in that he does not simply capitulate to these limitations. If the poem is read as an account of human nature and goodness, it seems to suggest that in light of human limitations, human beings should be satisfied by simply avoiding overtly bad actions without further aspiration for perfect

⁴⁰¹ 1999, 357. See also Coby 1982, 140.

⁴⁰² 2013, 525. In my view, there is no real distinction between the two proposals: the middling nature of human beings in the *Symposium* is not different in kind to human wisdom as articulated in the *Apology*, but this argument is beyond the present scope.

goodness, which is beyond human scope. But Socrates distorts the poem in order to put forward his own λόγος of human goodness and aspiration, and yet in a way that still honors the truths about human limitation that the poem reveals. Socrates' account points to the fact that human beings, despite their limitations, are not satisfied to capitulate to them. By introducing the notion of human beings as “middling” creatures, Socrates indicates that the middle that characterizes human beings is not a state of passive yielding to limitation, but a constant struggle against the limiting conditions of badness toward the aspirational beauty and goodness beyond human scope. In this sense, Socrates' hermeneutic moves between care for the poet's views and his own views; it is dialogical.

Socrates concludes his interpretation of Simonides by returning to the dispute between Simonides and Pittacus: “Therefore, if you were saying suitable and true things in a middling way (μέσῳς), Pittacus, I would never blame you: but now lying very much even about the greatest things you seem (δοκεῖς) to speak truly, on account of these things *I* blame *you*” (346e–347a). Socrates here seems to point out that the middling nature of human beings results in their λόγος being of a middling sort, too. Because human beings lack perfect wisdom of what is simply beautiful and good, human λόγος will always be mixed with falsehoods. Therefore, it's not simply for saying falsehoods that “Simonides” blames Pittacus. Rather, “Simonides” blames Pittacus for speaking falsehoods which nevertheless seem to be true. Recall that Socrates introduces Protagoras as the person who is *apparently* the wisest of all, reinforced by Hippocrates' enthusiastic claim that Protagoras alone is wise, and the repeated praise from the crowd. Socrates alludes to the distinction between his own speech and that of Protagoras, recalling the earlier contention

that Protagoras introduces *this poem* in particular as a self-vindication.⁴⁰³ If all speech contains falsity, then the truest speech would be the one that reflects its middling nature. True speech would signal the presence of falsehoods in it. True speech must always be poetic.⁴⁰⁴ It must point beyond itself to the truth at which it aims, but which by its own middling nature, it cannot hope to simply reflect. Socrates' λόγος of Simonides' poem exemplifies this kind of speech. For in it, Socrates quite plainly misinterprets the poem. He knowingly errs. But in so doing, he gives his own λόγος of human nature that nevertheless resists presenting itself as the plain truth. By causing the reader to put together and take apart his sayings, Socrates repeats the poetic act that provides the occasion for truth's appearance without thereby reducing the truth to its appearance. Plato, too, immediately reinforces the same limitations to his own speech by having Hippias offer to give his own account of the poem, while Alcibiades dismisses the offer for another time. Plato concludes Socrates' reflections on the necessarily middling and provisional nature of speech with an indication of the limitations to his own speech, signaling its provisional nature.

4.4 Much ado about Something

If the foregoing interpretation has any merit, then philosophical λόγος is and should be poetic, but in an importantly different sense from Protagoras' merely linguistic play which renders speech more or less meaningless. Poetry must be poetic for Socrates to the extent that it ought to reflect its own provisional nature, as is necessitated by the intrinsic ignorance of its speaker. Speech should reflect the speaker's earnest attempt to put together

⁴⁰³ Scodel notes the parallel here between Pittacus and Protagoras from Socrates' perspective, but I argue it would be readily apparent to Protagoras too and in fact is the reason that Protagoras chooses *this* poem (Scodel 1986, 34).

⁴⁰⁴ See Davis 2021, 32.

the world while at the same time indicating its nature as an attempt by pointing to the distance between the account it gives and what is to be disclosed. The foregoing dialectic between Simonides' poetic reflections and Socrates' misinterpretation reveals one way of accomplishing this. In light of this, we can understand Socrates' ensuing dismissal of poetic interpretation as a dismissal of the particularly sophistic character of Protagoras' ambitions.

Having completed his long λόγος of Simonides' poem, which concludes by subtly acknowledges the poetic nature of all true speech, Socrates proposes that they abandon what pertains to lyrics and poems. Interpreters who read Socrates here to abandon poetic interpretation tend also to read the Simonides interpretation as a mere digression, thereby missing its own insights, with their necessary recourse to poetry. Instead, just as Socrates' preference for brief speech signals his demand for speech to be interrogative and responsive, so also his dismissal of poetry demands that Protagoras speak in his own voice rather than hide behind that of Simonides.⁴⁰⁵ At the start of this section, Protagoras claims that the concern of their conversation remains the same, albeit "carried over" into poetry. Socrates indicates here that this is just one more contrivance Protagoras takes to conceal his own views about the matter at hand. While truth requires poetic expression and poetry in turn can reveal truth, it can likewise allow its readers to distance themselves from the matter at hand by focusing on the poem as such rather than the truths it contains. Protagoras, by asking whether Socrates believes Simonides speaks beautifully, attempts to lure Socrates away from the consideration of what truths the poem reveals. Socrates now insists that they *both* return to this consideration and quit relying on the poetic nature of truth's expression to distract them from the importance of inquiry.

⁴⁰⁵ See Griswold 1999, 290.

Socrates first compares their current conversation to the kind of discussion that would take place during drinking parties in ancient Greece.⁴⁰⁶ Socrates suggests that base (φαύλων) and common (ἀγοραίων) partake in such conversations. Being uneducated themselves, base human beings are incapable of getting together with each other over drinks by their own voice and λόγοι. They hire flute-girls and aulos players and rely on the voices of these to carry the conversation (347c–d). Socrates suggests here that Protagoras, too, uses Simonides’ poem as a diversion to avoid speaking in his own voice and giving his own account. Rather than trying to learn from Socrates how to answer questions as a means of speaking his account in his own voice, Protagoras distracts the rest by introducing a new voice to the conversation.⁴⁰⁷ Unwilling or unable to give his own account in his own voice, Protagoras hides behind Simonides’ words to let his own thoughts disappear.⁴⁰⁸ More than that, he uses Simonides’ words to justify this self-concealment: insofar as the self is a multiplicity, he can’t be blamed for not revealing himself in his λόγος in some straightforward way.

By contrast, according to Socrates, καλοὶ καὶ ἀγαθοὶ “are themselves sufficient to get together with themselves... by their own voice, both speaking and hearing from each other, in turn, in an orderly way” (347d).⁴⁰⁹ Note that Socrates here depicts the noble and good men as those who are sufficient to converse by themselves and in their own voice. At the same time, this is not a total self-sufficiency that implies perfect knowledge or wisdom

⁴⁰⁶ As others have pointed out, this passage heavily alludes to the *Symposium*. For a discussion of this allusion, see Frede 1986.

⁴⁰⁷ Golub’s proposal that Socrates is disinterested in the conversation and speaks in Simonides’ voice rather than his own would have Socrates commit the very error he accuses Protagoras of committing. Moreover, that interpretation does not account for the clear misinterpretation of Simonides’ poem that Socrates voices.

⁴⁰⁸ See also Trivigno 2013, 531–533.

⁴⁰⁹ Αὐτοὺς αὐτοῖς ἱκανοὺς ὄντας συνεῖναι... διὰ τῆς αὐτῶν φωνῆς, λέγοντάς τε καὶ ἀκούοντας ἐν μέρει ἑαυτῶν κοσμίως.

about the matters at hand, since these men too, follow Socrates' model for inquiring non-knowers: speaking and hearing from each other in turn, in an orderly way.⁴¹⁰ Socrates subtly indicates here a model for the humanly good and beautiful, which nevertheless refuses to capitulate to human limitations. Rather, because human aspiration is always subject to misfortune beyond contrivance, and because human beings are in a middling state between wisdom and ignorance, the properly human goodness and nobility consists in continuous and responsive inquiry rather than a state to be finally achieved without further effort. Such an inquiry would unite the self in its orientation toward its object in much the same way that Socrates collects himself to respond to Protagoras (328d) or that Hippocrates recalls his desire for truth that should guide his inquiry with Protagoras (311e–312a).

Crucially, the efforts of the *καλοὶ καγαθοὶ* are oriented toward what is true. This requires that they take earnestly the object of their inquiries. It is precisely this sincerity that distinguishes the base men's efforts from those of the *καλοὶ καγαθοὶ*. The reason that Socrates expresses disdain for poetic interpretation is not because it cannot yield truths, but because sophists use poetry to avoid this kind of inquiry altogether. By focusing on what the poet *meant* rather than on what the poem itself conveys, poetic interpreters excuse themselves from the difficult task of thinking for themselves about what truths poetry can convey. The poet, Socrates explains, cannot himself respond, so that the inquiry is doomed from the outset: “conversing about an affair, which they are unable to put to the test.”⁴¹¹

⁴¹⁰ As Trivigno points out, having a voice entails the ability to respond to philosophical questions, which would suggest being open to them (2013, 530). Griswold makes a similar point in arguing that Socrates' critique that the poets cannot account for their own poems amounts to a complain that they are not subject to a dialogical exchange (1999, 291). f

⁴¹¹ This has resonances with Plato's critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*, in particular at 274d. See also McCoy 1999, 358–359 and Scodel 1986, 25.

The distinction here is a complicated one. Both genuinely philosophical inquiry and this kind of disingenuous poetic interpretation are in some sense endless endeavors.⁴¹² But poetic interpretation, when directed toward the poet's meaning rather than what truths the poem conveys, sets itself a task that is in principle impossible. There is no singular meaning of a poem that can guide poetic interpretation to its conclusion. Similarly, inquiry into truth is an endless task because no singular account of truth will be exhaustive. The difference hinges on the speakers' orientation. By being oriented to what is true, the interlocutors have a guided purpose to their conversation, enabling them to speak and hear in turn, in an orderly way.⁴¹³

As a point of final contrast with these men, Socrates indicates that in addition to speaking in their own voice, *καλοὶ καὶ ἀγαθοὶ* use their own *λόγοι* to converse: "On the other hand, they themselves get together with themselves by themselves, taking and giving a trial of each other in their own *logoi*" (348a). Just as Socrates has insisted repeatedly that Protagoras give his own *λόγος* and speak in his own voice so that both he and Socrates may be put to the test, so here Socrates insists that *καλοὶ καὶ ἀγαθοὶ* should converse in the same way and for the same purpose. It is impossible to put the meaning of poets to the test, who cannot speak for themselves. But seeking truth as a personal effort can be tested by putting one's *λόγος* to the test in order to find out through conversation what still needs to be disclosed. Socrates indicates here that the pursuit of truth is simultaneously a personal

⁴¹² As Scodel points out, reading Socrates' critique straightforwardly would suggest that we should dismiss aporetic dialogues as well given their inability to come to certain truth about their subject matter (1986, 26).

⁴¹³ Plato once more includes in his account a way to understand his own dialogues. The proper reading is one that allows them to be occasions for truth to appear, rather than one that disputes endlessly over what Plato himself meant.

effort of self-inquiry. It is one's own relationship to truth that conversation puts to the test, if only one is open and responsive to inquiry.

Having thus defined the terms for philosophical inquiry, Socrates invites Protagoras once more to inquire together with him:

It seems to me to be necessary for both me and you to imitate rather such men, putting aside the poets themselves to make λόγοι to each other by ourselves, making trial of the truth and of ourselves: and if you still wish to ask, I am ready to submit to you in responding, but if you wish, submit to me concerning the things which we ceased from going through in the middle, in order to put an end (τέλος) to these things (348a).

Socrates reinforces the earlier sense that to engage in λόγος should involve a desire to seek its end. He urges Protagoras to leave aside poetic interpretation, again, not because it cannot disclose truths. Socrates' display shows that it can and in a way that is sensitive to the limitations of any particular truths it discloses. But rather, so that now they can put both Socrates and Protagoras to the test by testing their λόγοι. This amounts to a test of what truths the λόγοι disclose and to how the men stand in relation to truth through their λόγοι. At the same time, it is precisely this kind of responsive and inquiring conversation that characterizes the good and the beautiful, for Socrates. This is the persistent and continuous activity by which men become good by remaining committed to bringing truth to its end despite the necessity that our own accounts will always necessarily be incomplete. We need not capitulate to this and conclude that truth itself is impossible, because as its seekers, we already always have it in our sights.

Finally, and by way of conclusion, I distance myself from interpreters like Scodel who take Socrates to be distinguishing poetic writing from philosophical writing here and establishing only the latter as impervious to the dangers of criticism. Rather, the remarks

here are self-reflective.⁴¹⁴ Plato's text advises us, by way of Socrates' example, to borrow a phrase from Carson 1992, "how not to read," not only a poem, but any meaningful text at all. However, Plato demonstrates here an awareness that there will be every tendency to read him exactly as the two thinkers read Simonides: either, like Protagoras, by assuming one's own standard of truth and measuring "what Plato says" against it or else, like Socrates, by assimilating "what Plato says" to one's own standard of truth.⁴¹⁵ In either case, there are two fundamental assumptions, equally flawed in reading Plato as they are in reading Simonides. The first is to assume that one's standard of truth without adequate humility, in which case the reason for reading anything becomes unclear. If the standard for truth is already present and self-evident to us, then why should we enter into conversation with others, living or "dead" writers? If our access to truth is not inherently aporetic and provisional, then philosophy is not intrinsically dialectical. This is not the picture we get from Plato's Socrates, who persistently tests himself and his interlocutors, who performs, loves, and praises, dialectical inquiry into truth as the ongoing activity constituting a life well-lived, in which we can earnestly say that "virtue is knowledge" in the sense of continuous self-inquiry and testing.⁴¹⁶ But this leads to the second flawed assumption: that Plato or a poet "says" in a way that can be straightforwardly measured against our own expectations about what is true. Rather, the very poetic-philosophical way

⁴¹⁴ See also Griswold 1999, 291.

⁴¹⁵ Altman argues a similar point in claiming that Plato presents his readers with a choice ignore and explain away the contradictions, jokes, and deceptions or embrace them and enter into a dialogue with the dialogue itself (2020, 104).

⁴¹⁶ See also Trivigno 2013, 539–540 on why poetic interpretation, let alone philosophical interpretation is still worthwhile despite Socrates' apparent dismissal. I would add to this account that insofar as philosophy depicts one sense of human goodness in inquiry, it must be "read" alongside poetry and other models of human goodness to indicate its own provisionality. Human goodness in inquiry does not prevent Socrates from suffering misfortune beyond contrivance, even if it prepares him to respond with lightness, comedy, and nobility to it when it befalls him. For a possible understanding of the dialectical relationship between philosophy and poetry but in a combative lens, see Roochnik 1990, 135–136.

of speaking, as I have argued, resists this kind of straightforward interpretation. It means rather to carve out a space for inquiring together in dialectic and thus to exhort us to undertake the difficult task of becoming good in spite of and within the limitations of misfortune beyond contrivance.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁷ For one possible notion of what such dialectical practice and interpretation of a dialectical text would consist in, see Trivigno 2013, 527–528.

5.0 CHAPTER 5: ON COURAGE & INQUIRY

The concluding section of the *Protagoras* is puzzling. Protagoras, backed into a corner, clings desperately to courage as the final virtue which might allow him to maintain the disunity of the virtues, but in doing so winds up falling prey to a winding Socratic argument that reduces courage to a kind of prudent calculation of risk avoidance. Socrates, for his part, seems to advance a wildly un-Socratic argument in favor of hedonism, suggesting that only an art of measuring pleasure can “save human life” by ensuring that we fare well. While no argument comes to light that denies either conclusion despite the sophist’s increasing frustration and embarrassment, Socrates nevertheless dismisses their attempt as confused and misguided from the start. He observes that they have by now switched positions, with Socrates arguing that virtue is a wisdom and therefore teachable, despite his earlier denial that virtue can be taught, and Protagoras arguing that virtue is not knowledge, despite his insistence that he teaches it. Their λόγος he says, should it have a voice, would ridicule them for such a display.

There is no shortage of puzzles in this conclusion, but perhaps the largest one which has captivated scholarship the most is Socrates’ hedonistic argument. It interrupts their discussion of courage and appears to provide the sole grounds for what is widely taken to be the evidently Socratic “thesis” that virtue is wisdom, despite the fact that elsewhere in the dialogues, Socrates seems to reject hedonism unambiguously.⁴¹⁸ I argue that the

⁴¹⁸ Cf. *Gorgias* 495e–499a. As will be evident in what follows, I would object both to the characterization of this view as a thesis and to many articulations of the view that would have it resemble anything like what Socrates appears to argue in the course of his discussion with the sophist.

mentions of τὸ καλόν that pervade this section illuminates what is at work in this section.⁴¹⁹ Rather than himself endorsing the hedonistic view *or* the straightforward understanding of virtue as knowledge by which we would unfailingly fare well, I propose that both of these arguments reveal and follow from Protagoras' desire to gain glory while securing personal safety.⁴²⁰ Protagoras, Socrates reveals, fails to articulate a τέλος for human action by which to distinguish good from bad pleasures in such a way that would preserve the nobility of courage. Nevertheless, throughout, τὸ καλόν comes to light as the largely unarticulated good that could serve as such a τέλος, and which would disrupt Socrates' hedonistic argument. Rather than advancing this view directly, Socrates allows it to emerge from their λόγος in order to signal the dialogical relationship that human beings as non-knowers have with that τέλος.

In the first section, I trace Socrates' attempts to guide Protagoras to acknowledge the identity between courage and technical wisdom, which the sophist's own account implies. I argue that τὸ καλόν first emerges here as a possible way by which to unify the virtues as a form of wisdom, which might nevertheless not be reducible to τέχνη. In section two, I argue that the hedonistic calculus exposes Protagoras' ambition of total foresight as ultimately its own form of ignorance in opposition to a Socratic wisdom which culminates

⁴¹⁹ A full account of this feature would require pairing the dialogue with the *Symposium* as its counterpart, which I leave to a continuation of this project. I find myself sympathetic to Ahbel-Rappe's proposal that Socrates means by "virtue is knowledge" that virtue is self-knowledge, for reasons that will become clearer still in what follows (2019, 2).

⁴²⁰ In this sense, my argument follows that of Bartlett 2016, Coby 1982, German 2022, Grube 1933, Hemenway 1996, and McCoy 1998 and 2008. It also coheres with Gonzalez's account, which proposes that Socrates undermines Protagoras' claim to teach an art that saves human lives by "playing up to it" (2014, 49). It departs from scholars who attribute hedonism and its calculus to Socrates or Plato (see, for example, Hackforth 1928 and most especially Nussbaum 1986). I also depart from Davies who wishes to deny that the hedonistic calculus should be ascribed to anyone in the dialogue, since this seems to me to undermine its dramatic effect on Protagoras (2017).

in dynamic inquiry rather than fixed knowing.⁴²¹ In section three, I demonstrate that applying Socrates' arguments from the hedonistic calculus reveals that Protagoras is ignoble, cowardly, and ignorant. I conclude by proposing that the dialogue's aporetic ending reveals the intrinsically dialogical and aporetic character of philosophical inquiry on Socrates' view, which scrutinizes both the philosopher and the interlocutor together for the purpose of their becoming wiser in deepening their awareness of what remains to be known.

5.1 THE UNITY OF THE VIRTUES RECONSIDERED: COURAGE

Echoing his insistence on the dialogical nature of their conversation, Socrates reopens the conversation by saying that he desires (ἐπιθυμῶ) Protagoras to remind (ἀναμνησθῆναι) Socrates of the things that their previous investigation concerned, and to look into them thoroughly together (συνδιασκέψασθαι) with him (349a). Once again, Socrates proves his memory to be perfectly adequate, since, despite his yearning for Protagoras to remind him, he proceeds briefly to summarize their proceeding conversation and Protagoras' stated position regarding the multiplicity of the virtues. Turning to look into the matter thoroughly with the sophist, he asks: "If, on the one hand, these things still seem to you just as [they did] then, say so: if, on the other hand, [they seem] somehow otherwise, define this, as I at least set up no reckoning against (ὑπόλογον) you, if you speak now in some other way. For I would not wonder if you were saying these things making a

⁴²¹ This is analogous to Hyland's argument that Socratic wisdom is a lifelong quest for wisdom rather than itself a cognitive state (2019, 57).

trial (ἀποπειρώμενος) of me then” (349c–d). Socrates tactfully invites Protagoras to alter his account now, supposing that perhaps before, the sophist advocated an extreme view of the virtues’ disunity to test Socrates. This suggestion recalls Socrates’ claim that Prodicus puts forward a false meaning of χαλεπός to test them both (341d). In truth, it is Socrates who repeatedly puts himself and others to the test by occasioning difficult and conflicting accounts. Socrates’ choice of the self-reflexive ἀποπειρώμενος implies that despite his assurances to the contrary, Protagoras remains likewise subject to the test, just as Socrates’ questioning tests both himself and the responder.

Protagoras accepts Socrates’ invitation to alter his account, now agreeing that four of the virtues—wisdom, piety, justice, and moderation—are similar to each other, but claiming that courage differs very much from all the others: “And, in this way, you will know that I speak truly: for you will find many of the human beings, on the one hand, being very unjust, impious, licentious, and unlearned, on the other hand, especially courageous” (349d). If it is possible to be courageous without thereby being just, pious, wise, and moderate, then Protagoras can maintain the multiplicity of the virtues and some semblance of his tacit promise to teach civic virtue *and* the virtues by which the few become pre-eminent in the city. If he capitulates entirely to the unity of the virtues, then in claiming to teach virtues he can only teach what every good citizen must know. But this makes him nothing so special to ambitious young students who boldly wish to surpass other citizens in excellence. Protagoras clings to courage as the virtue by which to distinguish this skill, since the attempt to distinguish σωφροσύνη risked imprudently disclosing his true intentions as we saw in chapter 3.

Socrates tells Protagoras to wait, perhaps cutting the sophist off from providing another long and extended account by which he could conceal the implications of his efforts to distinguish courage from the other virtues. Instead, Socrates insists that what he says so far is itself worthy (ἄξιον) of inspection (ἐπισκέψασθαι), leading Socrates to ask whether courageous men (ἀνδρείους) are also bold (θαρραλέους) (349e). The question does not seem to follow immediately from Protagoras' claim. Instead, Socrates clearly wants to define what exactly Protagoras means by "courageous." Doing so will enable Socrates simultaneously to evaluate Protagoras' claim that courage is unique among the virtues *and* to expose the ignoble implications of Protagoras' desire to keep the virtues distinct. Without specifying what courage is, Protagoras can continue to make his sales pitch without putting himself on display.

Protagoras responds emphatically that not only are courageous men bold, but Protagoras adds, "‘And eager, indeed,’ he said, ‘to go toward the things which the many fear’" (349e). By contrasting the courageous person's eagerness with the fear of the many, Protagoras highlights that courage distinguishes the few from the many. Courage of all the virtues can be said to belong to only the best, who are willing to face what most people will strive to avoid. While most recognize the personal advantage of cultivating piety, justice, and moderation—and even a craftsman can be wise in their expertise—only a few prove themselves to be courageous in this way. It is a particularly distinctive virtue since it involves extraordinary behavior, while the other virtues all to some extent reinforce habits that are practiced in everyday civilian life.

Socrates' next question is pointed: "Come then, do you say that virtue is something καλόν, and do you offer yourself (σάυτὸν) as a teacher because of its being (ὄντος αὐτοῦ)

καλόν?” (349e). Socrates explicitly asks Protagoras to confirm that the ἀρετή he teaches is καλόν. He emphatically puts pressure on Protagoras to commit himself to the connection between excellence and nobility. In a slight grammatical stretch, we can add that Socrates asks Protagoras to confirm that he himself is qualified to teach an ἀρετή that is καλόν on the grounds that he himself is καλός. If Protagoras commits himself to the idea that ἀρετή is καλόν, then even if he maintains the disunity of ἀρετή, the various excellences would still have nobility in common. Moreover, a sense of ἀρετή as καλόν would undermine the impression that the courageous person could act ignobly by courageously pursuing injustice.

If Socrates’ question is pointed, Protagoras’ response is telling: “‘Very καλόν, certainly’ he said, ‘unless I am mad (μαίνομαι), indeed’” (349e). Predictably, Protagoras confirms that ἀρετή is καλόν, and claims further that it is, in fact, most καλόν. But in what would seem to be a rhetorical throwaway, Protagoras reveals his hand to any attentive listeners in the audience, whose memory for the previous conversation may compare with that of Socrates. In effect, Protagoras could not answer Socrates otherwise. He must declare that ἀρετή is καλόν lest he be mad. For, as Protagoras himself explains, “to speak the truth is madness” when the truth involves admitting one’s injustice (323b).⁴²² To admit that Protagoras teaches an ignoble ἀρετή, which divorces itself from justice, would be tantamount to madness in admitting that he himself does injustice. In a calculated rhetorical move, Protagoras signals here to the ambitious audience who might remember the earlier exchange that even though he cannot admit it openly, such an ignoble excellence is precisely what he teaches.

⁴²² See also Bartlett 2016, 75.

Still determined to draw Protagoras further into the open, Socrates continues: “I was saying, ‘Is a certain part of it shameful and another part of it καλόν, or [is it] καλόν as a whole?’” (349e). Socrates presses Protagoras to claim the *whole* of ἀρετή is καλόν, and thus to undermine his implication that courageous could be totally distinguished from the other virtues. If Protagoras is constrained to say that ἀρετή as a whole is καλόν, then Socrates has a new recourse to reinstate the unity of the virtues. But thereby Protagoras would once more lose his promise to teach an elite ἀρετή by which one can distinguish himself as excellent in the city. Indeed, Protagoras cannot but agree that the whole of virtue is as καλόν as possible. His task will now be to maintain how courage can still be separable from the rest, if all are καλόν, while Socrates’ task will now be to demonstrate how understanding the virtues as a whole as καλόν reinstates their unity.

Suspending the question of the nobility of courage or ἀρετή, Socrates turns once more to his τέχνη-analogy in order to establish a connection between courage and knowledge. Because the dialogue has not distinguished cleanly between knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and wisdom (σοφία), suggesting that courage is a kind of knowledge paves the way for Socrates to reunify at least those two virtues. He first asks who dives boldly into wells or wages war on horseback, to which Protagoras responds, predictably, that divers and cavalymen do (350a). He then asks if such men are bold “because they are knowing (ἐπίστανται) or on account of something else?” to which Protagoras replies that it is because they are knowing (350a). When Socrates continues the analogy further by including other experts, Protagoras anticipates the conclusion: “And with respect to all the others, indeed, if you are seeking this,” he said, ‘the knowers are bolder than the non-knowers, and they, whenever they learn [are bolder] than they were themselves (ἐαυτῶν)

before they learned”” (350a–b). Protagoras hints at impatience here, eager to generalize according to the analogy, and to hand Socrates the conclusion, so far associating boldness with knowledge. He tosses in, however, the further comparison between a present self and a past self: it is possible for a present self who has learned to become bolder than the past self before they learned. Someone who has not yet learned to ski would be afraid to descend the mountain, but once they learn, they boldly race down the slope. Despite his impatience, he welcomes the opportunity here to advocate the importance of learning, and thus of his skill as a teacher. If listeners are afraid to act unjustly now for fear of getting caught, Protagoras can help them learn the courageous *σωφροσύνη* by which they can conceal their injustice like he does and thus become bolder than themselves. At the same time, this suggestion subtly reintroduces the self as a multiplicity who changes over time.

Rather than conclude immediately by identifying courage with knowledge, however, Socrates next asks Protagoras if there are some without knowledge who are nevertheless bold in these efforts, to which Protagoras responds that there are and that such men are “exceedingly bold, indeed” (350b). Socrates’ questioning seems on the one hand to guide Protagoras to outline a proto-Aristotelian notion of courage as a mean between excessive boldness and cowardice (*NE* 116a10). On the other hand, Socrates seems to be pushing toward the identification of courage with knowledge, for which Aristotle criticizes Socrates, taking knowledge as a mere semblance of courage, since courage must involve risk that expertise avoids (*NE* 116b4–24). To push toward the identification of knowledge with courage, Socrates asks whether these non-knowers who are bold in expert endeavors are likewise courageous (350b). Since the two never explicitly agree that bold knowers are courageous, Socrates effectively assumes it as given. But tellingly, Protagoras does not

object, suggesting that he agrees so far and to this extent with the picture of courage outlined. Courage consists in a knowing boldness. While Socrates is leading the account through his questioning, his questions are putting Protagoras to the test.

Protagoras does strongly object, however, to the suggestion that the bold non-knowers should be courageous, too: “But courage would be a shameful thing (αἰσχρὸν): since these men, indeed, are mad (μαϊνόμενοι)” (350b). Before, we witnessed Protagoras covertly allude his earlier description of madness as telling the truth of one’s injustice. Now, Socrates leads Protagoras to allude to his other description of madness mentioned in that earlier scene. There, Protagoras also claimed that it is also madness to claim technical expertise that one does not possess (323b). By leading Protagoras to refer to the twin kind of madness from their earlier conversation, Socrates helps the audience remember what Protagoras implies above, namely that he agrees that the ἀρετή he teaches is καλόν since it would be mad to do otherwise. Moreover, he starts to establish a link between the two kinds of madness in order to undermine the notion that telling the truth about one’s injustice should be madness. If Socrates can successfully unify the virtues in terms of a kind of technical expertise in knowing the καλόν, then he can lead Protagoras to realize that if assuming technical knowledge that one does not have is madness, so too is assuming ἀρετή where one has none, on Protagoras’ own terms. We need not conclude from this that Socrates himself holds ἀρετή as subject to a technical kind of wisdom, or the exact model of the unity of ἀρετή that he guides Protagoras toward here. Rather, he is putting Protagoras’ own account to the test. It is Protagoras who does not oppose Socrates’ characterization of the bold knowers as courageous, and Protagoras who claims to teach a certain knowledge about ἀρετή. Socrates’ questions aim at guiding Protagoras to admit the

conclusions of these claims so as to either admit his own injustice or give them up as inconsistent and misleading.

Socrates once more assumes an identity between wisdom and knowledge. He observes that the only difference between the courageously bold knowers and the manifestly mad non-knowers is the presence or lack of wisdom, asking Protagoras whether wisdom and courage are the same (350c). This would imply that wisdom serves as a specific difference which enables one to distinguish who is truly courageous from those who are merely bold. Protagoras, reasoning in good faith, could respond in at least one of two ways: he could propose an alternative way to distinguish between those who are courageously bold and those who are not courageously bold, or he could question the assumed identity of wisdom with knowledge. He does neither of these things directly. Instead, frustrated once more by Socrates' line of questioning, he objects to the procedure altogether in an extended rebuke that weaves together warranted objections with evasive tactics: "'You do not remember nobly, Socrates,' he said, 'what I was saying and responding to you'" (350c). While it is true that Socrates makes a hasty generalization from the notion that some courageous people are bold knowers to the notion that courage itself is wisdom, Protagoras' following objection weaves together valid and invalid objections. Moreover, his claim that Socrates does not remember the exchange nobly challenges Socrates' promise as a teacher, if it is remembered that Socrates establishes nobility as a ground for Protagoras' claims to be a teacher. Protagoras positions himself squarely in defense.

First, Protagoras points out that Socrates only asked whether the courageous are also bold, but not whether the bold are courageous: "I, indeed, being asked by you if the

courageous are bold, agreed: and I was not asked if the bold are courageous—for if you asked me, in that case, I would have said that not all are—and with respect to the courageous, as not all bold men are, you did not demonstrate that I agreed to my agreement incorrectly” (350c–d). Protagoras’ speech here is largely passive, echoing the sense in which the things he said are at the same time responses to Socrates’ questioning, so that he reminds the audience to implicate Socrates in their conclusions at least as much as Socrates aims to implicate him. However, this first objection distracts from Socrates’ current point about courage and wisdom. Socrates does not insist upon the identity of boldness and courage, but rather accepts the distinction that Protagoras makes, when he says some bold men are manifestly mad (350b). Socrates now seeks to distinguish what separates the courageously bold from the non-courageously bold. Protagoras will not respond to this implicit question until the very end of his objection, and then only vaguely. Instead, he registers his discontent with Socrates’ method of guiding the conversation and indicates that his “account” is thereby warped in being limited to responding to Socrates’ questions.

If Protagoras accuses Socrates of putting words into his mouth, he next puts his own words into the mouth of Socrates: “Next you show that the knowers themselves are bolder than themselves and the other non-knowers, and in this you suppose that courage and wisdom are the same” (350d). But Protagoras is the one who states that the knowers are bolder than themselves and the non-knowers, in a largely unsolicited comment in which he generalizes from the particular question being asked (350a–b). Protagoras overplays his hand by attributing these views and their conclusions to Socrates. Moreover, he distracts from the particular inference Socrates is raising, namely, that the only way that Protagoras has distinguished the courageously bold from the uncourageously bold so far has been on

the basis of the presence or absence of knowledge. It is Protagoras who identifies increased boldness with an increase of knowledge, and Protagoras who only objects when Socrates suggests that bold non-knowers could be courageous. While it is true that Socrates' conclusions are hastily drawn, it is not true that his conclusions are totally alien to Protagoras' account.

To illustrate the flaw in Socrates' hasty generalization, Protagoras apparently superfluously compares it to a similarly flawed argument:

And going along in this way too you would suppose that strength is wisdom. For, first, if going along in this way you were to ask me if the strong are powerful, I would say so: afterwards, if [you were to ask if] the ones knowing how to wrestle are more powerful than the ones not knowing how to wrestle and if these [are more powerful] than themselves when they learn than before they learn, I would say so: on the other hand, with me agreeing to these things, it would be possible for you, using this same proof, to say that, according to my agreement, wisdom is strength. And I do not in any way in this case agree that the powerful are strong, however the strong are powerful: for power and strength are not the same thing, but the one thing comes to be from knowledge, namely power, and from madness and *θῦμος* indeed. Strength, on the other hand, comes to be from nature (*φύσεως*) and nourishment (*ἐντροφίας*) of the body (350d–351a).

The analogy seems to be as follows. According to the previous questions: (1) (all) the courageous are bold, (2) bold knowers are courageous, (3) bold non-knowers are not courageous, (4) the bold are not all courageous, (5) therefore, courage is [defined by the presence or absence of] wisdom (or knowledge). Protagoras' parallel imagined questioning proceeds as follows: (1) (all) the strong are powerful, (2) powerful knowers are strong, (3) powerful non-knowers are not strong, (4) the powerful are not all strong], (4) strength [is defined by the presence or absence of wisdom (or knowledge). Point 4 is assumed in the first line of questioning based on Protagoras' assertion of point 3. But Protagoras responds to both arguments as if Socrates strongly assumes the contrary of point 4, namely, that the bold are courageous and that the powerful are all strong. But Socrates never insists upon

this point. The point of overgeneralization still stands here and in the next move from some knowers are bold and courageous to therefore wisdom is courage. However, Protagoras' objection to the first instance of hasty generalization distracts from the extent to which his own comments really do lead to the implication that Socrates imperfectly infers.

At the end of his imagined exchange, Protagoras indicates the kind of thing that distinguishes knowledge from the virtues under discussion. He says that power isn't identical to strength. Power comes to be from knowledge, madness, or θυμός while strength comes to be from the nature and nourishment of the body. The reason for the parallel becomes clearer in these terms. Knowing how to wrestle makes one capable of wrestling by teaching one the skills and moves necessary to win in a competition. But it would be absurd to say that knowledge alone makes one physically strong. By separating power as a skill from strength as a physical excellence, Protagoras renders the identification of knowledge (or wisdom) and power absurd. He concludes his point along these lines:

And, in this way, in this case, too, boldness and courage are not the same thing so as for it to happen that the courageous are bold. Indeed, the bold, at least, are not all courageous: for, on the one hand, boldness comes to be for human beings from τέχνη, θυμός, indeed, or madness—just like power—courage, on the other hand, comes to be from nature and nourishment of the soul (φύσεως καὶ εὐτροφίας τῶν ψυχῶν) (351a–b).

Protagoras perceives that what distinguishes wisdom from courage is at stake, but rather than responding directly, he draws a sharp distinction between courage from boldness, which distinction was uncontested. This distinction allows him to claim that boldness comes from wisdom—now specifically τέχνη—along with a host of other possible sources, while courage comes from the nature and nourishment of the soul just like strength comes from the nature and nourishment of the body.

However, of course, while the distinction between wisdom and physical strength is thereby perfectly clear, the distinction between wisdom and courage remains subject to question. Presumably, as a teacher of ἀρετή, Protagoras would be concerned with nourishing the soul well, rather than relying on its becoming good by nature. However, he does not specify here in what such nourishing should consist. In fact, Protagoras' claim here echoes the opening conversation between Socrates and Hippocrates in such a way that reassociates learning, and therefore knowledge and wisdom, with nourishing the soul. There, Hippocrates asks, "By what is a soul nourished?" to which Socrates replies "By learning (μαθήμασιν), doubtless" (313c). Thus, we have already seen in the dialogue the suggestion that learning nourishes the soul, and such learning would yield a kind of knowledge or else wisdom by which the soul would become excellent. However, what exactly this learning consists in was likewise left undetermined there, too. If Protagoras explicitly associates τέχνη with the cultivation of boldness and not courage, then he leaves open the possibility that some other kind of wisdom must be learned by which a soul could be reared, despite his apparent denial of the identification between σοφία and ἀρετή.

So far, Protagoras succeeds in keeping the virtues distinct, but he falls short of articulating clearly and distinctly what it is that distinguishes courage as an ἀρετή from wisdom. In fact, his concluding comments would suggest that nothing other than wisdom could define courage if courage must come to be through a nourishment of the soul, which would be a learning that cultivates some kind of wisdom. While he denies, albeit insufficiently, the identification of τέχνη and courage implied by Socrates' τέχνη analogy, he leaves open the possibility that some other kind of wisdom could characterize courage and thereby unify courage and the other virtues. Recalling their uncontested agreement that

ἀρετή as such is something καλόν, we might suppose that wisdom pertaining to what is καλόν should characterize courage and ἀρετή as a whole. Since Protagoras, it was seen, agrees to the nobility of ἀρετή at risk of seeming mad for denying it, we might more soundly infer that wisdom's connection to τὸ καλόν describes Socrates' own view.⁴²³ What follows then, should help us delimit the Socratic sense of wisdom regarding the καλόν from Protagoras' attempt to nourish a courageous, but not necessarily just or καλόν soul.

5.2 ON BEING AND KNOWING ONESELF

Rather than responding directly to Protagoras' objection by asking him to specify what nourishes the soul, Socrates redirects the conversation in such a way that brings both his own and Protagoras' response to this question to light. Socrates first asks whether some human beings live well (εὖ ζῆν) and others badly (κακῶς), which Protagoras affirms (351b). He then asks Protagoras whether someone would seem to live well who was suffering distress and pain, which Protagoras denies (351b). Socrates then asks, "And what if he were to meet his end having lived his life pleasantly (ἡδέως βιοῦς τὸν βίον τελευτήσειεν)? Would he not seem to you in this way to have passed his life well (εὖ... βεβιωκέναι)?" (351b). Socrates switches terms here from εὖ ζῆν to εὖ βιώω. The former verb connotes a more passive sense of living as merely existing, while the latter implies the more active sense of living one's life in pursuit of various activities. The force of this last question suggests that someone who spends her life in pleasant endeavors, and dies

⁴²³ Hemenway supposes this too, although without attending to its implications throughout this section as we will attempt to here (1996, 22).

having done so, has thus spent her life well. Protagoras agrees with this. Socrates speaks in a way that indicates that the activity of living well is identical to the goal of having lived a good life.

At the very moment that Socrates questions seek to identify pleasantly living well with living a good life, Protagoras reintroduces the notion of nobility. Earlier, Socrates introduces nobility to identify courage as a virtue, despite its being distinct from the other virtues on Protagoras' account. Similarly, Protagoras introduces the notion of noble pleasures to ensure that the life Socrates characterizes as living well is indeed a *good* life: “‘If indeed,’ he said, ‘he should live being pleased by noble things (τοῖς καλοῖς), at least (γ’⁴²⁴)’” (351c). Protagoras draws on Socrates' sense of nobility to introduce a potential distinction between pleasure (ἡδονή) and what is good (ἀγαθός). While Socrates introduced nobility to unify the virtues, Protagoras uses it to distinguish the good from the pleasant. But once more he does so without thereby defining the distinction in terms of in what such nobility should consist.

While Socrates argues for the distinction between pleasure and the good on the in the *Gorgias*, here Socrates ridicules Protagoras for making a common argument. The many, Socrates says disdainfully, call pleasant things ‘bad’ and grievous things ‘good.’ Many scholars take Socrates himself to be advocating a simple identity between pleasure and the good here, interpreting Socrates as adopting an uncharacteristic hedonism in the dialogue.⁴²⁵ However, others have compellingly argued to the contrary, that Socrates’

⁴²⁴ When used to introduce a new term in response to a question the particle, γε, can be either emphatic or ironic, and here it has both senses.

⁴²⁵ See, for instance, Hackforth 1928. Nussbaum claims similarly that pleasure provides a useful provisional sense of the good that can be quantified and thereby subject to knowledge (1986, 110). I thereby depart quite severely from her both in thinking that Socrates espouses hedonism even provisionally, but especially in her interpretation that it is Socrates who desires to quantify the human good through the art of measuring in this way.

argument discloses a latent hedonism in Protagoras' position.⁴²⁶ As Bartlett puts the point, "To suppose that Socrates is seriously proposing such an 'art of measurement' is to fail to enter into the action of the dialogue and, in particular, to attribute to him a kind of naivety that the dialogue as a whole refutes; it is Protagoras the sophist whose hopes for and from knowledge may prove to be excessive."⁴²⁷ In fact, the context provides further evidence for the second possibility. Protagoras ironically appeals to nobility to distinguish pleasure from the good. But once again, he fails to specify what this nobility is by which we can make the distinction.

Socrates' ridiculing question to Protagoras brings this out: "What indeed, Protagoras? *You* don't also, just like the many, call pleasant things 'bad' and grievous things 'good'? For I mean, according to that which things are pleasant, are they not thereby good, unless something else result from them? And again, in turn, are not the grievous things similarly bad to the extent that they are grievous?" (351c). The failure of the many, Socrates implies, isn't simply that they call some pleasant things 'bad' and grievous things 'good' but rather that they fail to explain in what goodness and badness consists, without ultimate recourse to pleasure and pain. Protagoras likewise invokes nobility in his attempt to distinguish the pleasant from the good, but he neither explains the notion of nobility nor separates it altogether from pleasure. If goodness consists of noble pleasures, then goodness is still a kind of pleasure, just as above Socrates tried to show Protagoras that if courage is a bold wisdom, then courage is a kind of wisdom. These identifications come from Protagoras' confusion and evasion rather than from Socrates' reasoning.

Protagoras once more evades the question and explains his motivation in doing so:

⁴²⁶ See Coby 1982, German 2022, Gonzalez 2014, Grube 1933, Hemenway 1996, and McCoy 1998 and 2008.

⁴²⁷ Bartlett 2016, 86.

“I don’t know, Socrates,” he said, “if it is necessary for me to answer so simply, as you ask, that the pleasant things are all good and the grievous, bad: but it seems to me to be safer to give a response not only in respect of the answer now, but also in respect of the rest of my life as a whole (πάντα τὸν ἄλλον βίον τὸν ἐμόν), that there are some of the pleasant things that are not good. In turn, there are also some of the painful things that are not bad, and there are some that are, and thirdly, some that are neither of the two, neither good nor bad.” (351c–d).

Protagoras’ response is reasonable on the face of it. Like his account of the multifaceted nature of what is advantageous, he denies the simplicity that Socrates’ question implies. He suggests that pleasure and pain as such are value neutral: they can be good, bad, or neither. But critically, he does not explain or justify what makes some pleasures good and others bad. His claim that he answers with a view to his whole life rather than only for the present moment indicates why he might answer thus evasively and recalls the totalizing foresight he seeks. First, he says that it is “safer” for him to answer in the way that he does. Once again, it could be that his notion of goodness is not so noble as he would pretend, suggesting that it is safer for him to answer in these vague and general terms. But, perhaps, too, his resistance to pin himself down is more thoroughgoing than this. Recalling his notion of what is good and useful as something that is subject to context and change, it could be that he *cannot* answer with more specificity. His notion of what is good is not sufficiently fixed to give an account that will withstand both Socratic questioning and the test of time. Recall that the same thing can be good or advantageous for someone when sick and bad for them when healthy, and that cures can sometimes be unpleasant. Protagoras’ notion of the good as identified with these changes of appearance and conditions of the self makes it impossible for him to articulate the relationship between pleasure and the good. But this coupled with his identification of the good with bodily

safety and reputation problematizes the distinction he desires between good and bad pleasures, too, as we will see in what follows.

When Socrates asks explicitly whether pleasure itself is good, Protagoras once more avoids the question now under the guise of Socratic inquiry: “‘Just as *you* say,’ he said, ‘let us consider it, and if, one the one hand, the consideration seems (δοκῇ) to be proceeding from *logos* and the same thing (τὸ αὐτὸ) comes to light (φαίνεται) as both pleasant and good, we will come together (συγχωρησόμεθα): if not, on the other hand, then straightaway we will stand apart (ἀμφισβητήσομεν)’” (351e). Most plainly, Protagoras claims here to let their λόγος determine whether the pleasant and the good are the same. If they are, they will agree, and if not, they will dispute it. However, the words chosen for “agreement” and “disputation” are metaphorical, suggesting simultaneously coming together or standing apart. Taken this way, the passage suggests more than what Protagoras says. Namely, *if* what is pleasant and good were the same, then Socrates and Protagoras, too would be the same. Socratic philosophy would be interchangeable with Protagorean sophistry. Protagoras’ words effect this identity indirectly. While Socrates asks whether pleasure *is* goodness (ἐστίν), Protagoras translates their consideration into a matter of opinion (δοκῇ) and the appearance of pleasure and the good (φαίνεται). Considering the good from the standpoint of its appearances, as Protagoras does, permits no distinction between pleasure and the good, despite his best efforts. And from the standpoint of appearances, the sophist looks no different from the philosopher. The difference, if there is to be one, hinges on what each desires: the philosopher, in pursuit of truth and wisdom, desires what is, while the sophist, in pursuit of reputation and persuasion, desires what seems and appears so.

Since Protagoras proposes they consider the matter, rather than answering Socrates' questions in such a way that would let the consideration proceed, Socrates ask whether Protagoras would prefer to lead the consideration himself. Protagoras feigns sportsmanship: "You [are] just, he said, to lead for yourself: for you, too, are making a beginning of the λόγος" (351e). Once more Protagoras, withdraws from their λόγος, suggesting that Socrates singlehandedly begins the account and thus should lead it himself. Protagoras' pretense to justice is an ironic expression of the perceived injustice his account suffers at Socrates' questioning. Socrates, he suggests, has been guiding the λόγος all along. Of course, as we have seen, Socrates' questions follow from Protagoras' own words and his responses, in turn, inform Socrates' questions. The brief exchange here changes nothing, but only re-establishes Socrates' sense of the conversation as an exchange, wherein one should guide and one should respond, and Protagoras' desire to withdraw altogether rather than permit his own views to come to light.

Despite Protagoras' pretense to the contrary, Socrates' response reinforces once again that it is Protagoras himself who is, however unwillingly, on display:

"Then," I was saying, "would it come to be thoroughly apparent (καταφανές) to us in this way? Just as if considering some human being from his look (εἶδους) either in reference to health or in reference to something other working of the body, seeing the face (πρόσωπον) and the hands as extremities [someone] would say: 'Come indeed, uncovering for me, exhibit both your breast (τὰ στήθη) and your back, in order that I may review more clearly,' I, too, am yearning (ποθῶ) for such a thing in reference to the consideration: being in wonder for myself (θεασάμενος) that you hold, in this way, regarding the good and the pleasant, as you say, I stand in need (δέομαι) of saying such a thing: 'Come indeed, Protagoras, and uncover this thing here of your thinking (διανοίας) here for me...' " (352a–b).

Socrates suggests that the consideration about the relationship between what is good and pleasant would come to be thoroughly apparent if Protagoras would disclose his own thinking. He uses the metaphor of a physician examining the health or working of a

patient's body from his look (εἶδους). Having reviewed the patient's extremities, the physician would bid the patient to uncover his chest and back. So also, Socrates says, he now wishes to ask Protagoras to uncover his thinking (διανοίας) so as to continue their examination. Socrates here takes on the role of Protagoras' physician. Socrates asks Protagoras to uncover his thinking (διανοίας) just as a physician asks a patient to uncover his chest (τὰ στήθη) and back for a more thorough examination. If the physician examines the patient's body, Socrates examines Protagoras' soul.

First, the plural τὰ στήθη in Homer, for example, regularly serves as a metaphor for the seat of one's feelings or thoughts, reinforcing that Socrates implores Protagoras to expose himself by uncovering his thinking (διανοίας). Second, Socrates says that the physician first examines the body's extremities including the πρόσωπον, which means interchangeably "face" or "mask." Socrates implies that so far all they have heard from Protagoras is but a verbal mask. He charms without thereby disclosing himself. Third, if the "look" of the patient's body is his physical appearance, the "look" of the soul should be the λόγοι that compose their consideration. If his words so far have served as his mask, we might recall his likeness to Orpheus wherein his voice charms those who hear it (cf. 315b). Socrates insists here once again that Protagoras speak in his own voice so that his thinking about the relationship between the good and the pleasant can come thoroughly to light for their consideration.⁴²⁸

Finally, Socrates, unlike Protagoras, includes himself as the physician in his account here. He says that he yearns (ποθῶ) and stands in need (δέομαι) of Protagoras' self-disclosure in reference to the consideration. Both words signal a sense of

⁴²⁸ Griswold 1999, 305.

incompleteness.⁴²⁹ Commentators who mine the dialogue for Plato's own position as if it could then be evaluated independently of the context and who interpret the hedonistic calculus as his own view underemphasize this aspect of Platonic writing. Socrates' own account in this consideration is incomplete without that of Protagoras becoming thoroughly apparent. Just like in the previous section, Socrates' notion of virtue as knowledge is inseparable from the Simonides poem which provides its limiting context, so also Socrates' notion of the good as developed here is inseparable from the appearance-based account of Protagoras. Socrates' incompleteness comes from his wonder (θεασάμενος) at what Protagoras says about the relationship between the good and pleasure. He yearns to know how it is that pleasure can be distinct from the good on Protagoras' account in light of all else he has said. We saw in chapter two that wonder serves as a criterion for what is learned in absence of sure knowledge, and here we see that notion in action. This is the positive sense in which Socrates acts from within ἀπορία. Rather than being wholly taken in by Protagoras' display or altogether disinterested, Socrates remains in a state of wonder wherein he questions further.

To understand Protagoras' position about the relationship between pleasure and pain, Socrates first turns to the sophist's understanding of knowledge:

How do you hold regarding knowledge? Does it seem to you too just like [it does] to the many human beings, or otherwise? Concerning knowledge it seems to the many in such a way: that it is neither strong nor capable of leading (ἡγεμονικόν), nor fit for rule (ἀρχικόν): they do not even think about it as such a being, but with knowledge being in a human being often the knowledge of him does not rule but something else, at one time, θῆμος, at another time, pleasure, at another time, pain, at times, desire, and often fear, artlessly thinking about knowledge just as about a slave, being dragged around by all the rest. Then, concerning it, does it seem to you in such a way, or is knowledge both a καλόν thing and of a sort to rule over the human being, and if indeed someone recognizes the good and the bad, is he not

⁴²⁹ The former (ποθῶ) is the same term Aristophanes uses in the symposium to describe human beings yearning for their other half (191a).

conquered by anything so as to act in another way than knowledge urges, but is prudence (τὴν φρόνησιν) sufficient to help the human being? (352b–c).

Socrates claims that the many suppose that knowledge is insufficient to rule over a human being. The evidence for this is that knowers are sometimes led by their knowledge but are also sometimes led by any number of other things. As a result, they think of knowledge as weak and slave-like, often overpowered by other stronger things. Socrates first speaks of human beings as being ruled either by knowledge or some other force, be it ἥμιος, pleasure, pain, desire, or fear. He then speaks of knowledge itself being pulled just as a slave by these various forces. Socrates thereby tacitly identifies the human being with knowledge: the human being who is pulled is the *knowing* human being. Socrates thereby implies that human beings are most properly the activity of knowing, rather than any of the various other forces that might compel them, or even some combination of such powers. Protagoras has just urged Socrates to lead (ἡγεῖσθαι) their conversation on the basis that he has begun the account (κατάρχεις). In his subsequent question to Protagoras, Socrates characterizes knowledge as both capable of leading (ἡγεμονικὸν) and ruling (ἀρχικὸν), invoking both terms Protagoras associates with Socrates in their conversation. Socrates covertly implies that he knows more than Protagoras, by Protagoras' own admission, should Protagoras agree to the characterization of knowledge. Socrates covertly identifies himself with knowledge, capable of leading and ruling, and Protagoras as lacking knowledge and thus incapable.

The word that Socrates uses for “knowledge” throughout this description is ἐπιστήμη. However, in the one instance that he speaks of an act of knowing, rather than using the verbal form ἐπιστάμαι, he uses a different verb for knowing, γινώσκω. Socrates often uses different words for knowledge interchangeably. By subtly introducing another

notion of knowing and mentioning prudence (φρόνησιν), too, however, Socrates introduces the possibility that the kind of knowledge that pertains to virtue, and which would render one capable of leading and ruling the conversation, might be different from τέχνη or ἐπιστήμη. Socrates calls this kind of knowledge “prudence,” suggesting that it is sufficient to help human beings. The dialogue’s only other mention of prudence occurs when Prodicus distinguishes those who are “delighted” (εὐφραίνεσθαι) by learning (μανθάνοντα) and sharing in prudence (φρόνησις) by means of thinking itself (διανοία) from those who are “pleased” (ἡδοίμεσθα) by bodily sensations (337d). Socrates thereby likewise plants the seeds for a real distinction between pleasures of the body and goods of the mind. Far from endorsing the hedonistic position he leads Protagoras to recognize for himself, Socrates subtly introduces an alternative picture of knowing that would make possible the distinction that Protagoras seeks, the implications of which Protagoras fails to recognize.

Protagoras, naturally, agrees with Socrates against the many: “‘It both seems as you say, Socrates,’ he said, ‘and at the same time, if indeed [it seemed] in another way, it would be a shameful thing for me not to say that both wisdom and knowledge are the mightiest of all the humanly affairs’” (352d). Once again, Protagoras outwardly agrees with Socrates while simultaneously indicating he might think otherwise. As a teacher of wisdom, Protagoras cannot very well openly admit that his teachings are so weak as the account here. If Protagoras’ teachings leave his students still vulnerable to acting or faring poorly due to their being led by other considerations, they will be much less likely to pursue him than if they supposed that his teachings would ensure they fare well infallibly. Protagoras merely admits that things seem in this way but does not commit to these beliefs.

After praising Protagoras for speaking nobly and truly, Socrates proceeds to join with Protagoras against the many, who are unpersuaded by their sense of knowledge's might. They say, as Socrates explains, that many people, despite recognizing what the best things are, act otherwise: "And as many as I asked whatever the cause of this is, say that the ones doing these things act do so under the influence of their being weaker (ἥττωμένους) than pleasure or pain, or under the influence of being overpowered (κραττουμένους) by some one of the these things, which I was just now saying" (352d–e). Once more, Socrates tacitly identifies a self who is weaker than pleasure or pain, or overpowered by θῦμος or fear, with a *knowing* self, whose actions must be explained. Implicitly, Socrates assumes the unity of the self against the appearance of its being pulled in multiple directions. Rather than identify these various forces as competing parts of the self,⁴³⁰ Socrates, speaking on behalf of the many, distinguishes the rest as pressures that appear to compel the knowing self in different directions. This unification of the self as a "knowing self" will be instrumental to the account of the art of measuring that follows.

Socrates wins Protagoras over with his ridicule of the many, as the sophist agrees that people say many other things incorrectly, too. With this apparent victory, Socrates appeals to Protagoras to try their hands at persuading and teaching the many what their suffering really is, such that they falsely call being weaker than pleasure, which in turn leads many not to do the best things despite knowing (γινώσκειν) them (353a). But Protagoras balks at this suggestion: "And what, Socrates, is it necessary for us consider the opinion of the many human beings, who, whatever they chance upon (τύχῳσι), say this thing?" (353a) Put plainly, Protagoras expresses doubt about the relevance of Socrates'

⁴³⁰ And notably contrary to his own account in the *Republic*.

proposed investigation into the opinion of the many. He says dismissively that such people just say whatever comes to them, and thus suggests that their opinions aren't worth being seriously considered. But perhaps, too, Protagoras does not wish to subject himself and his account to the element of chance he disdains in the opinions of the many. Protagoras, who seeks to give an account that avoids risks involved in exposing himself, protests, perhaps being unable to foresee where the account will lead.

Socrates responds by reminding Protagoras of their agreement that Socrates should lead the conversation, but offers once more to cede to the sophist:

“I suppose,” I was saying, “that it is [necessary] in reference to our finding this certain thing about courage, [namely], however it holds in reference to the other parts of virtue. If, then, it seems best to you to abide by the things which just now seemed best to us, for me to lead (ἡγήσασθαι) in the way which I indeed suppose that it will become apparent most beautifully (κάλλιστα φανερόν γενέσθαι), follow. And if you do not wish, if it is dear (φίλον) to you, I will allow [you] to dismiss [it] (χαίρειν).” (353b)

First, Protagoras has consented for Socrates to guide their consideration of the relationship between pleasure and the good. Here, Socrates indicates that this consideration, in turn, will lead them to discover how courage relates to the other parts of virtue, too. That Protagoras fails to see its relevance reinforces once more Socrates' fitness to lead (ἡγήσασθαι) and Protagoras' incapacity. Second, all the same, Socrates suggests that if this method of proceeding no longer seems best to Protagoras, Socrates is willing to dismiss the inquiry (χαίρειν), using a word that simultaneously invokes the notion of gratifying the sophist. The gratification seems connected to Socrates' suggestion that avoiding this way of proceeding might be dear (φίλον) to the sophist, whereby Socrates signals that his mode of questioning touches on something quite personal to Protagoras. Finally, Socrates originally asks whether pleasure *is* good (351e), and Protagoras transforms this into a

consideration of whether the same thing appears both pleasant and good (351e). Socrates here, following Protagoras, characterizes their consideration as “becoming apparent” (φανερὸν γενέσθαι). Here, Socrates presents his interpretation of Protagoras’ implicit sense of the relationship between pleasure and the good, rather than presenting a straightforward account of his own view.

Protagoras agrees that Socrates should complete the investigation as he began it, once more downplaying his own role in contributing to the conversation’s findings (353c). Perceiving Protagoras’ reluctance, once more, Socrates joins forces with Protagoras and interrogates “the many,” with Protagoras voicing their reply rather than speaking in his own voice.⁴³¹ First, Socrates asks “the many” whether they are weaker than pleasures when they do wicked things (πονηρά) recognizing them to be wicked, which Protagoras confirms on their behalf (353c). Socrates next asks what exactly makes some pleasant things “wicked” according to the many:

Is it because they provide this pleasure in the immediate [moment] and each of them is pleasant, or because at a later time they produce both illness and poverty and procure many other such things? Or even if they procure nothing of these at a later time, and only produce delight (χαίρειν), would they nevertheless be bad, simply because (μαθόντα) that they produce delight (χαίρειν) in any way? Do we suppose, Protagoras, that they will respond in another way than that they are not bad according to the production of the immediate pleasure itself, but on account of the things coming to be later, both illnesses and the rest?” (353d–e)

Before, Protagoras refuses to identify pleasure and the good taking foresight: “Rather, in my opinion, it’s safer for me to reply not only with a view to the present answer but also with a view to my life as a whole” (351d, Bartlett 2004 tr.). Socrates here appeals to Protagoras’ notion of foresight to undermine the distinction that the many make between

⁴³¹ Recall that Socrates uses this tactic earlier before turning to examine Protagoras directly (cf. 330c). See also Griswold 1999, 289.

what is pleasant and good, in which Protagoras sought refuge. He asks whether it is actually with a mind to *later* pains like illness, poverty, and other such things, that the many call some pleasant things bad, and not because of the pleasure they produce as such at the present moment, which Protagoras affirms on their behalf (353e).

Without pursuing it further, Socrates introduces the possibility of pleasures that only produce delight (χαίρειν) without later pains, implying that the many would not call such delightful things “bad” or “wicked,” but only pleasant things that cause later pains. He then asks whether they would call such purely delightful things “bad” just because they produce delight at all. Socrates here drops mention of pleasure here (ἡδονή) and includes a mention of learning (μαθόντα). Idiomatically, the inclusion of learning implies that his suggestion that pure delights should be bad is absurd. But the reference to a kind of pure delight distinct from pleasure as such recalls Prodicus’ distinction between the delight (εὐφραϊνοίμεθα) produced by thinking (διανοία) and the pleasure (ἡδοίμεσθα) produced by bodily experiences (337b). Socrates introduces χαίρειν as a form of delight free from later pains. Moreover, Socrates has just offered to delight (χαίρειν) Protagoras by dropping the present line of conversation. By doing so, Socrates indicates that he foresees that the conversation will soon pain the sophist and render him speechless (cf. 360d). Socrates could have let Protagoras avoid this future pain by dropping the present inquiry, but Protagoras fails to foresee that their conversation will have bearing on his own argument despite his attempted evasion. The sophist reveals himself once more to be like Epimetheus in failing to notice his own role in their argument.

Socrates then reasons that the many call such pleasant things “bad” precisely because they subsequently end in distress and pain. It is not *qua* pleasure that they are bad,

but only to the extent that they issue greater pain and distress than the present pleasures (353e). Socrates makes a similar argument about what the many call distressing goods, such as exercise, military campaigns, and medical treatments (354a). They are called “distressing” because they are painful at present but good to the extent that they produce the good condition of the body and the preservation, domination, and material flourishing of cities. Socrates emphatically indicates three times in short order that the many cannot think of another τέλος in view of which they could distinguish between good and bad pleasures (354b–e), with Protagoras agreeing on each occasion. Safety, influence, and material well-being are precisely the ends that came to light as Protagoras’ own ambitions in the Great Myth and throughout the dialogue. Despite Protagoras’ expressed disdain for the many, Socrates has indicated here that their conception of the good is remarkably similar to that of the sophists. He reinforces this connection by asking on their behalf what the purpose of this extended inquiry into their views is, the precise question that Protagoras has only just asked (354e, cf. 353a).

If one can think of no higher ends than self-preservation, material well-being, and reputation, then pleasure suffices as the highest end, since all those proximate ends directly or indirectly contribute to one’s material comfort or relief from pain.⁴³²

But still even now it is possible to move back a step, if somehow you have it in you to say that something is good other than pleasure, or that something is bad other than distress: or does passing your life pleasantly without pain suffice for you? And if it suffices, and you do not have it in you to say that another thing is good or evil, which does not end (τελευτᾷ) in these things, hear this following thing (354e–355a).

⁴³² See McCoy who argues this point in detail (2004, especially 67–69 and 1998, 34–36). German makes a similar point in arguing that the hedonistic calculus demonstrates to Protagoras that even his sophistic practice does not transcend nature insofar as it remains rooted in the natural desire for self-preservation (2022, 61).

Even though it is not taken up here, Socrates indicates that it would be possible to “move back a step” and perhaps reach a different conclusion if only one could name a different τέλος which would justify calling something painful “good” for another reason than that it ultimately ends in pleasure. Since Protagoras’ views seem parallel to the many, which prompts Socrates’ inquiry in the first place and since Socrates expresses consistent skepticism of the view along with indicating an alternative possibility, we could reasonably suspect that Socrates himself has in view a different τέλος by which to understand what is good as distinct from what is pleasant. Since the following argument results from the identity of pleasure and the good *which, in turn, follows from the implicit views of the many in contrast to Socrates’ own*, we can infer from this that the following argument regarding the hedonistic calculus is likewise an implied view of the many and Protagoras, rather than being Socrates’ own opinion. Socrates implies rather that there may be another τέλος such as τὸ καλόν informing his own distinction between the good and pleasure.

Following from the identification of the good with pleasure, Socrates next concludes that the conviction that one does bad things due to being overpowered by pleasant things becomes laughable (355a). This is because to say that one is overcome by pleasant things amounts to saying that one is overcome by good things; or to say that one does bad things amounts to saying that one does painful things. But now there is no qualitative distinction in the kind of thing being pursued or avoided. All pursue pleasure as it is good and avoid pain as it is bad (cf. 354c). That leaves only a possible quantitative difference in one’s efforts. To say that one does painful things being overcome by pleasant things indicates rather that one has chosen a course that ends in more pain than pleasure (355d–e). Socrates indicates that this is possible because our perceptions of what is good

and bad or pleasant and painful are influenced by proximity (356a–c). While one might know that smoking will cause pain and illness in the long term, one might choose to smoke because of the immediate pleasure one takes in doing so. Similarly, one might put off a medical procedure that will be painful in the short term, even though undergoing it would provide long-term relief. Still, the difference is primarily quantitative: smoking produces some pleasure at the present, but much greater pain later. Similarly, the medical procedure may cause intense pain in the short term but much longer relief, and therefore more pleasure, in the long term. In either case, one chooses a course that is less good or pleasant overall, choosing a course that is good for the present moment but bad with a view to their life as a whole.⁴³³ Recall Protagoras' care to answer questions not only for the present, but with a view to his life as a whole (351d).⁴³⁴ Socrates, by contrast routinely indicates the necessity of submitting to risk in pursuing what is yet unknown, most notably in the opening exchange with Hippocrates (cf. 313a). The mode of valuation and long-term thinking Socrates describes here is reflective of Protagoras' intuitive practice more so than it is of Socrates. Moreover, as Gonzalez observes, the hedonistic calculus defends the power of knowledge at the expense of making it subservient to people's natural desire for pleasure.⁴³⁵ Socrates, who, as we know from the *Apology*, would rather die than give up the pursuit of wisdom could hardly endorse such a view. In stark contrast to Protagoras who uses his wisdom to ensure his personal safety (cf. 317b–c), Socrates risks everything to pursue it.

⁴³³ Recall Protagoras' care to answer questions not only for the present, but with a view to his life as a whole. The mode of valuation and long-term thinking Socrates describes here is reflective of Protagoras' intuitive practice more so than it is of Socrates.

⁴³⁴ See also Gonzalez 2014, 62 and McCoy 2008, 68.

⁴³⁵ Gonzalez 2014, 58 and 2000, 136–137.

Having thus reasoned that proximity to present pleasures and distance from future pains often causes one pursues a less pleasant course, Socrates concludes by describing the “art” that would enable human beings to overcome this tendency and thus live well by consistently pursuing the most pleasant course with a view to their whole lives:

If, therefore, acting well for us were in this: in both acting and seizing the great lengths, and fleeing and not doing the small lengths, what salvation for our lives would come to light? The measuring art or the power of appearing? Or does this latter [power] cause us to wander and make us often take in exchange the same things back and forth and cause regret, too, in our actions and choices of both the greater and smaller, and would the measuring art make this phantasm (φάντασμα) invalid? Having made visible the truth, would it make our soul have rest (ἡσυχίαν) remaining in the truth, and would it save our life? Would the human beings agree with us regarding these things that the measuring art would save our lives or another art? (356c–e)

We have already indicated some problems with the view that Socrates presents the hedonistic calculus as his own view. In addition to our observation that it is Protagoras and not Socrates who expresses a desire to ensure one’s safety over the entire course of life, we can add the further grammatical evidence that Socrates presents the hedonistic art in the future less vivid condition, indicative of a counterfactual view. If acting well *were to* consist in acting and seizing greater lengths of pleasure and avoiding smaller ones, then the measuring art *would come to light* as the salvation for human life. But this construction strongly indicates that this is not actually Socrates’ view. Faring well for Socrates is not simply a matter of choosing greater pleasures, rather there is a different, albeit unspecified τέλος, τὸ καλόν, that qualitatively distinguishes a pleasant life from a good life.

Socrates distinguishes the measuring art from the power of appearance, suggesting that only the former would enable one to act as Protagoras desires, with a view to the preservation of his whole life. The power of appearances, Socrates suggests, would cause us to wander about and change our minds, regret our actions and choices. The measuring

art, by contrast, making the truth manifest and causing our soul to remain in the truth, holds the soul fast. Moreover, the measuring art overcomes appearances by reducing them to mere phantasms. While Socrates' ideas are supported by examples such as the medical procedure example offered earlier, there are also some serious problems with this idea. First, it is not clear that present and future pleasures are as qualitatively similar as the measuring art would suggest. As temporal beings, an anticipated pleasure in the future is not experienced in the same way as a pleasure that one currently enjoys. In an everyday sense, it often happens that one imagines how something feels and yet the reality of the thing does not quite match up to the anticipation, or perhaps even exceeds it. I might know *that* I will feel better if I exercise regularly, and I might even imagine being able to do all kinds of things as a result of that effort. However, those anticipations are different experiences from the present reality of the physical comfort that fitness brings or running a trail without being winded.

Moreover, what exactly is the nature of the self who measures and chooses according to this calculation? In identifying the self with the knowing self, Socrates prescind from the embodied self who does or will undergo the effects of her choices.⁴³⁶ We recall that learning effects a change in the self, suggesting that the self changes over time and becomes someone new in a significant sense. It is not at all clear that the choices somebody makes in the present can be measured disinterestedly according to their impact on her future self, with whom the present self can hardly fully identify. Or put differently, since the future self is not yet present, one cannot be sure that the choices made in the

⁴³⁶ Dyson makes a similar point in observing that the agent who chooses is never in a position to make the kind of informed decision Socrates implies here, since it would require knowing perfectly the outcome of future actions (1976, 40).

present really will benefit a future self. In the wake of “misfortune beyond contrivance” (344c) can anyone be sure that she will live long enough to suffer the future harm caused a current action, feel fully justified in sacrificing present pleasure in all cases? Or, perhaps what a present self anticipates as pleasant might not be so to a future self whose desires change.⁴³⁷ Finally, let us to return to the example of Prometheus. On Aeschylus’ telling, Prometheus foresees what unending pain he will suffer, and yet he adopts that course anyway. Prometheus knew that he would suffer, but he did not and could not know beforehand how that suffering would feel.⁴³⁸ The only way that one could render this a tragedy is by acknowledging that knowing is different from suffering. To identify the self with the knowing self might be a necessary condition for purified foresight that Protagoras would seek, but it is hardly self-evident that such an identification is accurate, or Socrates’ own, given that he voices it only on behalf of the many.⁴³⁹

Gonzalez argues that three things indicate that the hedonistic calculus would be beyond human capacity on Socrates’ read: it requires omniscience, it requires guarantee of enough life to avoid rendering the measuring superfluous, and it requires that we could quantify the good and the bad.⁴⁴⁰ To his observation that the philosophical soul is inherently dialogical, I add that the image of the soul being fixed or silent (ἡσυχίαν) by the hedonistic calculus is quite far from the constantly wondering, aporetic, and discursive movement of the philosophical and inquiring soul depicted within Socratic dialogues.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁷ One thinks here of Cephalus who celebrates his loss of his appetite for “wine, women, and feasts” and his newfound love of speeches. Would the young Cephalus have made the same calculations that the present Cephalus would? (*Republic* 329a). I am grateful to McCoy for raising this consideration.

⁴³⁸ I am indebted in this line of thinking to Michael Davis, who articulated this insight in a seminar on the *Protagoras* in 2021.

⁴³⁹ Coby too, understands the hedonistic calculus as a culmination of Protagoras’ Promethean ambitions (1982, 139).

⁴⁴⁰ 2014, 56.

⁴⁴¹ Bell 2019 similarly contrasts rest from Socratic wakefulness in general, with a similar conclusion.

While it seems true that Socrates seeks to inquire beyond mere appearances into truth, in practice, Socrates can hardly be said to dismiss appearances as mere phantasms. Far from describing the dynamic movement of Socratic inquiry, Socrates here seems to describe a dogmatic move toward certainty that he himself never exhibits. If Prodicus embodies a dogmatic drive toward pure but therefore empty being, Socrates here indicates that the impulse toward mere appearances in pursuing bodily pleasures and pains bottoms out in a similarly dogmatic yearning for certainty.

With Protagoras agreeing that the art of measuring would thus save human life, Socrates continues that it is “by necessity doubtless indeed a τέχνη and ἐπιστήμη” (357b). He introduces the notion that the τέχνη that would save our lives is a kind of ἐπιστήμη still within a future less vivid condition, once again signaling that his description is a counterfactual rather than something Socrates himself believes to be true. As we saw before, Socrates could think that another kind of knowing (γινώσκω) better describes the kind of acquaintance with the true τέλος of human life that might not itself issue in a technical expertise like the kind he describes here. Socrates next develops the sense that the measuring art is a kind of knowledge into what amounts to a convincing advertisement for sophistry, further reinforcing our sense that the present account serves the sophist’s—and not Socrates’—purposes.

Since the measuring art is a kind of ἐπιστήμη, it is not “being overwhelmed by pleasure” that causes many to pursue what they know are lesser goods, but rather, however implausibly, it is ignorance that causes them to err:

If therefore, on the one hand, we would have said to you straightaway then that it is ignorance, you would have laughed at us, now, on the other hand, you all would laugh at us, and you will be laughing at yourselves. For you have agreed that it is by a want of ἐπιστήμη that the ones missing the mark concerning the choice of

pleasures and pains miss the mark—on the other hand these are both good and bad—and not only of ἐπιστήμη, but also of that ἐπιστήμη which yet before you have agreed is the measuring art. On the other hand, the action—missing that mark without ἐπιστήμη—you all know, doubtless, too, is done by means of ignorance. So that this is being weaker than pleasure, the greatest ignorance, of which Protagoras here declares himself to be a physician, Prodicus and Hippias, too. On the other hand, you, on account of supposing that it is something other than ignorance neither yourselves [go] nor send your children to these teachers of these things here, the sophists, on the grounds that it is not teachable, but troubling over money and not giving it to these men, you act badly both in private and in public (357d–e).

The measuring art would secure knowledge and truth by fixing the soul against the variety of shifting appearances. It teaches the soul to recognize these appearances as mere phantasms in order to see clearly the true quantity of pleasure that any course of action will issue. In being led by appearances, the soul that errs and chooses a short-lived pleasure over the long-term is ignorant of the true nature of these appearances, choosing the phantasm of greater pleasurer over the true long-term pleasure. Thus, the one who errs, errs due to her ignorance.

Socrates expresses doubt that a political τέχνη allowing one to fare well is teachable (319a), strongly suggesting that this endorsement of sophistic teaching is highly ironic. His taunt that people who distrust the sophists act badly in private and public life recalls Protagoras' promise that he will teach good counsel in domestic and city affairs (318e–319a). Moreover, while Socrates indicates that Protagoras declares that he himself is a physician, we have seen Socrates embody the physician's role, first in warning Hippocrates to tend to his soul's desire prior to encountering the sophist, and more recently, in seeking to examine the look of Protagoras' soul (cf. 352a–b). While Socrates gives an account of an ἐπιστήμη that ensures one would fare well consists in, his own actions as physician to

Hippocrates and Protagoras operate according to inquiry rather than certain knowledge.⁴⁴²

In his narration of the sophists' response to the unnamed companion, Socrates presents his account at a distance: "Supernaturally (ὑπερφυσῶς) the things being said were seeming to all to be true things" (358a). Socrates emphasizes the sophist' endorsement over his own presentation, suggesting that the account is more theirs than his own. Moreover, that the account should appear *supernaturally* true indicates that the picture of ἐπιστήμη here exceeds human limitation. It is a kind of ἐπιστήμη that Socrates often disrupts, but routinely denies possessing.

Socrates then reintroduces the notion of nobility: "'And what indeed, men,' I said, 'is this thing? Are all actions with a view to this, living without pain and pleasantly, therefore not also noble (καλαί) and beneficial? And is the noble deed (τὸ καλὸν ἔργον) both good and beneficial?'" As we saw a little before, Socrates asks Protagoras whether the virtues are noble in order to establish their unity (349e). Protagoras, by contrast, reintroduces the notion of nobility to distinguish good pleasures from bad ones (351c). Socrates now, following from their account, unifies the noble with the good, which Protagoras has previously identified with the beneficial (334a–c). If the good is simply what is beneficial, and what is beneficial is understood as that which confers material well-being and comfort, then there is no room for a distinct notion of τὸ καλόν that separates noble pleasures from ignoble ones. All goods aim at one's own material well-being and pleasure is simply a reflection of the extent to which that good has been secured. "Noble" pleasures, would simply be those pleasures that *really* benefit the actor rather than those that do so for the present moment, but incur much greater pain later. But τὸ καλόν would

⁴⁴² Or, as Gonzalez articulates it, Socrates' skill as physician consists of an erotic pursuit of what is good (2014, 60).

not concern a different *kind* of τέλος from pleasure altogether. Despite Protagoras' desire to distinguish noble and ignoble pleasures, his notion of the τέλος of actions cannot account for what would ground such a distinction. Nevertheless, reintroducing τὸ καλὸν now recalls the earlier efforts to make such a distinction and anticipates the problem that such an understanding of τὸ καλὸν will soon pose for our notion of courage.

Socrates continues by connecting the notion of being weaker than pleasure explicitly to ignorance and wisdom:

“If then,” I was saying, “The pleasant is good, no one either knowing or supposing that other things are better than those which he does—and possible—thereupon does these things, with the better things being possible: nor is this ‘being weaker than oneself’ (τὸ ἥττω εἶναι αὐτοῦ) anything other than ignorance (ἀμαθία), nor is ‘being stronger than oneself’ (κρείττω ἑαυτοῦ) anything other than wisdom (σοφία).” (358b–c)

Earlier, speaking in terms of pleasure, Socrates identifies the self with the knowing self, and suggests that the knowing self can be overpowered by and become weaker than either pleasure or one of the other forces that compels the self to act. But here, Socrates complicates the picture: one can be weaker or strong than oneself, either through ignorance or wisdom. The self in this picture is implicitly identified with its own pleasure or suffering. One can be weaker or stronger than oneself just as one can be weaker or stronger than pleasure. The self who feels pleasure undermines itself when it acts ignorantly and pursues lesser over greater pleasures. The self who is stronger than oneself overcomes the temptations of pleasure and acts solely in accord with knowledge. If, as Socrates argues here, knowledge is to be stronger than oneself and ignorance is to be weaker than oneself, what is it to be oneself? Implicitly, on the basis of what has been said here, simply to *be* oneself would seem to involve somehow being between ignorance and wisdom. Such a self would identify neither solely with knowing itself nor with the suffering of pleasure itself,

but somehow with both. This is the precise position I have argued all along is reflective of Socrates' form of ἀπορία, characterized by his peculiar combination of foresight and oversight.⁴⁴³ This analysis provides the benefit of informing what it means to claim that wisdom is to be *stronger* than oneself. One is stronger than oneself by overcoming the natural limitations to acting in one's own interests. This is Protagoras' ambition in cultivating a sense of foresight that enables him to benefit himself over the course of his whole life and teach this skill to others.

But if this isn't actually possible, or if the pleasant is simply identical to the good life so that acting well does not *always* mean acting in one's own interests in this way, then this pretense to wisdom turns out itself to be another form of ignorance: "And what, indeed? Do you say that ignorance is this thing here, to have a false opinion (ψεῦδοῦ... δόξαν) and to speak falsely (ἐψεῦσθαι) about the affairs worthy of much?" (358c).

Ignorance is not merely the absence of knowledge but the presence of false opinion which lead ones to speak falsely about the most important things. Attempting to overpower oneself where it is not possible to do so amounts to ignorance and renders one weaker than oneself. Ignorance is not merely the absence of knowing, but rather it is nothing other than supposing oneself to be wise when one is not. The notion of speaking falsely about important affairs recalls the conflict between Simonides and Pittacus. Socrates claims that Simonides chastises Pittacus not because he errs, since all err, but rather in erring he speaks falsely about the greatest things while *appearing* (δοκεῖς) to speak true things. Implicitly,

⁴⁴³ I share here Hyland's sense that Socratic ἀπορία is itself a mode of knowing (59). Arendt, too similarly identifies the philosophical position with that of a self who suffers in her discussion of wonder (1990, 449–450). Even more directly, Coby argues that Socrates' foresight, in contrast to that of Protagoras, is to be in erotic pursuit of wisdom (1982, 140–141). My analysis adds to his by bringing out Socrates' connections to Epimetheus, too. My argument here departs from all scholars who read Socrates' arguments as straightforwardly "intellectualist" including Butler 2019, Carey 2019, Dyson 1976, and Gargarin 1969, despite the particular nuances that differentiate such interpretations, which cannot be addressed here.

Socrates' culminating account of the kind of wisdom that would save human life on Protagoras' view undermines the possibility of such a perfect wisdom. An art of measuring which ensures its users fare well would certainly put an end to further seeking, and promising such a τέχνη, would surely be to lie about the most important things.⁴⁴⁴ This is because, as Bell helpfully puts it, the belief that one knows what one doesn't "...anesthetizes the vital noetic functions of the soul, thereby disempowering those psychical activities that are most valuable to human existence—thinking and inquiring."⁴⁴⁵ By contrast, Socrates implicitly develops an image of what it is to be oneself by maintaining a notion of foresight that is neither mere ignorance nor simple wisdom, but a continuous activity of striving toward wisdom that constitutes a life well-lived.⁴⁴⁶ Rather than a fixed soul that simply grasps the truth, Socrates exemplifies the soul of philosophy in motion, courageously inquiring into a truth beyond human reach.⁴⁴⁷

5.3 PURE FORESIGHT AS COWARDICE

Returning to the issue of courage, Socrates reasons that no one knowingly or willingly advances toward things that one either supposes or knows to be bad (358c–d). Anyone who appears to do so is acting out of ignorance. Of course, this recalls Socrates' supposition that no one willingly does bad things (cf. 345d). We observed there that

⁴⁴⁴ See also Gonzalez 2000, 136.

⁴⁴⁵ Bell 2019, 137. He further argues that those who fail to know also fail to know themselves insofar as they fail to recognize their soul as active in nature (137–138).

⁴⁴⁶ See Bell 2019, 138.

⁴⁴⁷ See also Coby 1982, 140 and Hyland 2019, 58–59.

Socrates himself does a bad work of interpreting the poem at the exact moment that he claims no one willingly does bad work. Socrates' performative self-contradiction anticipates a possible counter to this present argument. The idea that no one willingly advances toward bad things makes a mockery of courageous actions, as Socrates will soon show. Courageous actions, under the art of measurement, will turn out to be simply a calculated pursuit of the best possible course of action that will promote one's own pleasure to the highest degree. This, of course, turns courage into a rather base and unimpressive thing. Yet, we see Socrates admire Hippocrates' courage, however impetuous it is, for boldly pursuing the sophist without questioning whether or not the sophist is bad (cf. 310d). Rather than discourage the youth, Socrates encourages Hippocrates to *inquire* and thereby to recognize that he is pursuing something unknown with risks (cf. 314b). By causing Hippocrates to reflect and recognize the risks involved in pursuing the sophist without knowing whether doing so will benefit or harm him, Socrates seeks to transform Hippocrates' impetuous boldness into courageous inquiry.

Socrates next asks about fear and dread: “‘What then,’ I said, ‘Do you call something fear and dread? And is it the very thing which I myself [say it is]? (I say this to you, Prodicus). I mean this, some expectation of a bad thing, whether you call [it] dread or fear’” (358d). Protagoras and Hippias agree that fear and dread are both an expectation of something bad, while Prodicus says that dread is such, but not fear. Socrates playfully dismisses Prodicus saying it makes no difference (οὐδέν... διαφέρει) (358e). Just as we observed when Protagoras asks what difference the relationship between piety and justice makes (cf. 331c), this dismissal too has bearing on the present argument. For dread involves anticipating something one knows or supposes to be bad, while fear might rather involve

what is unknown. Socrates expressly asks Prodicus his opinion and then dismisses his dissent, calling it to our attention that the fear involved in Socratic courage may be something different than the simple anticipation of evil that Socrates describes here.⁴⁴⁸ The calculated anticipation of possible evils describes Protagoras' foresight, which aims to avoid risk and ensure present and future safety and material well-being. Socrates dismisses the difference. On the basis of the argument so far, no one will advance toward what they fear when it is possible for them to pursue what is known to bring pleasure instead. There is no reason to pursue anything painful or unknown if pleasure is the highest good. It suffices to pursue only what one knows to bring pleasure.

Socrates then applies their findings to the question of courage, asking whether courageous and cowardly people advance toward the same things (359c). When Protagoras says they do not, Socrates next asks whether the cowardly advance toward things they feel bold about while courageous people advance toward "terrible things" (τὰ δεινά). When Protagoras responds that human beings speak precisely in this way, Socrates replies, "'Truly,' I said, 'you speak: but I was not asking this, but for what do *you* say that the courageous are eager? For the terrible things, considering them to be terrible? Or not for them?'" (359c–d). Socrates prefaces the present inquiry by recalling Protagoras' claim that courage is different from the other virtues in order to test that claim against their recent findings. Protagoras once more attempts to evade this line of inquiry by voicing the view of the many rather than his own, but Socrates again entreats him to submit to the inquiry by voicing what he himself says and thus to follow the inquiry to its conclusion. Thus compelled to speak, Protagoras begrudgingly admits, "'But this at least,' he said, 'was

⁴⁴⁸ See also McCoy 2017, 161.

demonstrated just now to be impossible in the λόγοι, which you were speaking” (359d). Again, Protagoras withdraws from the λόγος, presenting it as that of Socrates rather than his own.

Still, Socrates indicates that Protagoras plays a role in their λόγος: “‘This too,’ I said, ‘you speak truly, so that if this was correctly demonstrated, on the one hand, no one goes for things which they consider to be terrible, since being weaker than oneself was found to be ignorance’” (359d). Appealing to the correctness of the demonstration recalls that Protagoras and the other sophists agreed to the argument’s various premises. The argument proceeds as Protagoras and the rest allowed it. Prodicus is the only one who hesitates at the identity of the fearful and the dreadful. Otherwise, Protagoras has every opportunity to dissent to the line of argumentation and does not, presumably, because he cannot. Just as the many can find no other τέλος by which to distinguish noble from base pleasures, neither can Protagoras.⁴⁴⁹ People don’t willingly pursue what they consider to be terrible. Instead, when they pursue terrible things, they do so because they are ignorant. But Socrates admits to calling Protagoras δεινός (cf. 341a–b), and yet pursues him here on Hippocrates’ behalf. The dual nature of δεινός as either clever and wise or sinister and wicked admits to an ambiguity that would befit pursuing what is unknown. While it may be the case that no one willingly and knowingly pursues what is simply bad, we witness Socrates at present pursuing what is δεινός—and therefore what might be either terrible or good—by inquiring into the unknown and urging others to do the same.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁹ See also Gonzalez 2000, 135, and McCoy 1998, 34 and 2008, 69. Bartlett proposes further that Protagoras might be even less capable of doing so than the many, who could likely point to immoral sources of pleasure in objection to Socrates’ railroading identification of pleasure with the good (predicated on Protagoras’ agreement) (2016, 89–90).

⁴⁵⁰ See also Gonzalez 2014, 138–139.

Since no one would willingly pursue what is bad, according to their argument, the courageous and the cowardly both pursue what they feel bold about and to this extent pursue the same things (359d–e). Protagoras objects that this being so, still courageous people, for instance, advance into war whereas cowards do not (359e). Socrates then asks whether doing so is καλόν, and therefore good and pleasant, which Protagoras affirms (359e–360a). Put into the terms of the hedonistic calculus, a hedonist can consistently choose to go to war for the sake of the future pleasure of safety, in a way similar to a patient submitting herself to painful treatment for the sake of future comfort. While Protagoras wants to distinguish the coward from the courageous person on the basis of what they pursue, he has not introduced another τέλος for acting that meaningfully differentiates the two.

Socrates and Protagoras then agree that courageous people have no shameful fears or boldness, while cowards do (360b). Socrates then asks, “And are they bold with respect to the shameful and bad things on account of anything other than on account of a lack of knowledge (ἄγνοια) and ignorance (ἀμαθία)?” (360b). He concludes from this that cowards are such on account of their ignorance of what is and is not terrible (360c). Protagoras here nods. When asked whether courage is the contrary of cowardice, he vocally agrees for the last time (360d). Next asked whether wisdom is pertaining to what is terrible and not is the contrary of ignorance of these things, he nods (360d). Finally, when Socrates puts their account together to conclude that courage is thereby wisdom about what is and isn’t terrible, Protagoras refuses even to nod, commanding Socrates, “Finish [it] yourself” (360d). Socrates responds, “Only one thing still, at least, I said, ‘I ask you, if just as at first

some human beings seem to you to be, on the one hand, most unlearned (ἀμαθέστατοι), on the other hand, most courageous” (360d–e).

Bringing the argument to bear on Protagoras’ expressed views grates on the sophist, leading him to retort, “‘You seem to me,’ he said, ‘to love victory, Socrates, with respect to my being the responder: I will gratify you then, and I say that from the things having been agreed, it seems to me to be impossible’” (360e). Once more, Protagoras balks precisely when Socrates demonstrates something that Protagoras previously denied regarding wisdom (cf. 335d). Protagoras affirms the premises but cannot bring himself to accept Socrates’ conclusions. Doing so would require him to admit too much. First, Protagoras would need to admit that his notion of virtue is in fact an ignoble pursuit of pleasure. This is particularly jarring in the case of courage since it requires him to confront and admit that his own courage is nothing more than a calculated prudence seeking to ensure his safety while promoting his own material well-being.

But moreover, it forfeits his charade that the good counsel he teaches is something incomparably exalted. Like the wisdom of the parodied philosophical Spartans, Protagorean wisdom comes to light as much ado about nothing. It’s a matter of simple calculation that anyone could learn. He has won his advertisement for sophistry but at the expense of rendering what he has to offer as something totally base that would repel the ambitious young men who would pursue him. Socrates has effectively demonstrated that Protagoras does not have a sufficient sense of τὸ καλόν as a τέλος by which he could distinguish noble from ignoble pleasures or maintain the distinction of the virtues that he seeks. While he seeks a foresight that overcomes risk and pursues his own material well-being, though Socrates’ questioning, Protagoras comes to light as cowardly, ignoble, and

ignorant.⁴⁵¹ Or, as Gonzalez puts it, “[Socrates] thus exposes not only the arrogance of Protagoras’ claim to teach goodness, but also the moral mendaciousness of his claim to be good.”⁴⁵² It is perhaps perceiving the implications of their λόγος that leads Protagoras to insist that he is not a bad human being and to praise Socrates as evidence that he lacks jealousy (361d–e).

5.4 Concluding Ἀπορία

Socrates insists once more that Protagoras misinterprets him. He does not desire victory, but rather desires an investigation into the nature of virtue. As if to reinforce the difference between himself and the sophist, Socrates willingly applies the argument to his own account, to show that he has undermined himself as well as Protagoras through the course of their conversation:

And to me the road out (ἐξοδός) of our speeches seems now, just as a human being, both to accuse and to ridicule us, and if it should have a voice, it would say: ‘Indeed, you are absurd, Socrates and Protagoras: you [Socrates] saying that virtue is not teachable before, now you urge opposing things, trying to show that all things are knowledge—justice, σωφροσύνη, and courage—in which case virtue would most of all come to light as teachable. For if, virtue were something other than knowledge, just like Protagoras tried to say, clearly, it would not be teachable... Protagoras, in turn, having suggested at one time that [virtue] is teachable, now he is like someone urging that it is nearly anything rather than [let] it come to light as knowledge: and in this case, it would be least of all teachable.’ (361b–c)

Socrates, unlike Protagoras, desires inquiry and not victory. He emphasizes the difference by submitting his own account to their λόγος and giving the λόγος a voice so that it can accuse and ridicule both thinkers together. While before he ridiculed the many, now Socrates, adopting the language of the courtroom, allows the λόγος to accuse and ridicule

⁴⁵¹ See also Hemenway 1996, 20.

⁴⁵² 2000, 137.

him. While Protagoras seeks categorically to avoid both ridicule and accusation that would endanger his reputation or safety, Socrates willingly submits himself to the ridicule of λόγος. This is because, as Hyland elegantly puts it “Socratic self-knowledge, the recognition of what we know and do not know, may be painful and demand courage.”⁴⁵³ The courage involved in Socratic inquiry, presumably, that of enduring the painful recognition that one does not know. Socrates willingly submits himself and Protagoras together to the judgment that their λόγος yields and finds them both lacking and “absurd.” They have displaced themselves by arguing contrary things. At the same time, the courage of inquiry might involve facing the unknown of *what* one might learn. Bartlett, connecting Socratic courage to the Simonides interpretation, points out that inquiry into truth might require acknowledging that the world is not in fact suited perfectly to our good, to acknowledge the persistent presence of misfortunes beyond contrivance.⁴⁵⁴ Nevertheless, we find a Socrates who does not despair or flee from the unknown, but who faces his limitations with laughter and a persistent confidence in his conviction to inquire further. We witness a Socrates who marries the tragedy of inquiry with its comedy.⁴⁵⁵

Socrates says that the end or “road out” of their speeches accuses and ridicules them. If the conversation does not culminate in true knowledge about the nature of virtue, the way out is rather through good-humored self-reflection. This self-reflection involves acknowledging the extent to which they themselves have fallen short of the λόγος and acknowledging their ignorance, which their λόγος has revealed. Neither knows the full nature of virtue nor decisively whether or not it is teachable, but Socrates indicates that he

⁴⁵³ Hyland 2019, 51.

⁴⁵⁴ 2014, 90–91.

⁴⁵⁵ Cf. *Symposium* 223d.

has learned about himself through the inquiry. If wisdom is a kind of virtue (or *vice versa*), then this self-reflection surely marks an advance in their inquiry. Socrates better understands the extent to which he does not know what virtue is, and he invites Protagoras to undertake a similar reflection.

His very way of describing the inquiry evokes self-knowledge, saying that he wishes “to inquire however things concerning virtue are and whatever it (αὐτό) is” (360e). He uses the neuter demonstrative pronoun αὐτό for the feminine noun ἀρετή. The demonstrative pronoun, in other contexts, is the same word for “self.” Their inquiry into virtue turns out to be an inquiry into the self. The practice of virtue in this dialogue turns out to be a kind of wisdom that consists in self-knowledge continuously achieved through dialogical inquiry.⁴⁵⁶ This kind of wisdom would hold together Socrates’ claim that virtue is wisdom with his denial that it is teachable in some straightforward sense. Insofar as it is *self*-knowledge, it cannot be taught but must be undergone. At the same time, Socrates can demonstrate for Hippocrates and Protagoras in what such self-knowledge consists by modeling its activity. As we have seen, he has done so throughout this dialogue. For instance, at the start, he helps Hippocrates recognize his ignorance about who the sophist is and what he teaches while encouraging him to seek anyway. Later, in the Simonides section, he presents his own understanding of virtue as knowledge in dialectical tension with Simonides’ poem, which provides a context that limits the scope of his claims in light of misfortune beyond contrivance. Finally, here he lets the λόγος critique his claims and admits his ignorance and need to seek further. But even so, Protagoras must recognize for himself the necessity to submit himself to his λόγος.

⁴⁵⁶ See Gonzalez 2014.

Socrates continues to exhibit his dedication to inquiry, this time invoking Prometheus and Epimetheus:

I then, Protagoras, looking down upon all these things being terribly stirred up and down, I have every eagerness (προθυμίαν) for them (αὐτὰ) to become thoroughly apparent (καταφανῇ), and I would wish for us, having gone through these things, to come upon what virtue is, and again to review (ἐπισκέψασθαι) about it whether it teachable or not teachable, lest perhaps that Epimetheus, deceiving, trips us up in our consideration too, just as, also, in our distribution he neglected us, as you say. Prometheus satisfied me more than Epimetheus in the myth: I, consulting him and using forethought (προμηθεύμενος) on behalf of my whole life undertake (πραγματεύομαι) all these things, and if you wish, with respect to the very thing which I was even saying from the beginning, I would very pleasantly look through these things with you (361c–d).

Put simply, Socrates here compares himself to Prometheus—in contrast to Protagoras as Epimetheus—in that he is eager to make the subject of their inquiry clear: the nature of virtue and whether it is teachable.⁴⁵⁷ His word for eagerness (προθυμίαν) resonates with the notion of foresight (προμηθή) that closely follows, linking the two ideas. Literally, the word signifies being “spirited in advance.” It describes something like an inner drive that is yet under-determined. The only other appearance of the noun in the dialogue comes when Protagoras describes the eagerness that all have to teach and discuss virtue in light of its universal necessity for a city’s survival (327b). Protagoras there describes the minimum virtue needed for a citizens to stay united. As we saw in chapters 2 and 3, he implicitly contrasts that civic virtue with the virtue by which individuals might not only survive but flourish in material well-being. By contrast, Socrates is eager that they all come to an understanding of virtue with a view to life as a whole, or rather, so that they live well. Inquiry is a cooperative and on-going activity that constitutes living well.

⁴⁵⁷ See also Gonzalez 2000, 142.

But Socrates does not leave his desire at this simple appearance of virtue and whether it is teachable. Rather, he suggests that in order to avoid Epimetheus' deceit tripping them up, they must go through it again, find and articulate what virtue is, and then review again (ἐπισκέψασθαι) whether it is teachable. Socrates describes the appearance of virtue as continuously coming to be, taking place in continuous dialogue inquiring into its nature.⁴⁵⁸ Socrates claims here to use foresight on behalf of his life as a whole in carrying out these inquiries. But the foresight he carries out isn't characterized by having made perfectly manifest what virtue is. Rather, his foresight responds to the persistent threat of oversight, by renewing the inquiry and busying himself with all these things. Indeed, Socrates echoes Epimetheus' own words, who persuades his brother by entreating him to review (ἐπίσκεψαι) his distributions. Socrates' Promethean foresight is shot through with his awareness of our Epimethean limitations.

After praising Prometheus for satisfying him more than Epimetheus, Socrates indicates that he acts, "consulting him (ῥ) and using foresight (προμηθοῦμενος) on behalf of my whole life undertake all these things." He "consults" the god in taking forethought on behalf of his whole life. One would naturally suppose that Socrates consults Prometheus in his own foresight. However, the pronoun is indeterminate, and could describe consulting either Prometheus or Epimetheus, with the placement slightly reinforcing the latter. To consult Epimetheus in taking foresight would mean to respond to the risks inherent in inquiring by continued pursuit, as we witness Socrates do. Finally, Socrates says that he would "very pleasantly" look through these issues together with Protagoras. The dialogue's only other instance of the superlative form of "pleasant" occurs when Protagoras declares

⁴⁵⁸ As Gonzalez puts it, "giving thought to the good together *is* virtue in Plato's *Protagoras*" (2014, 143).

that he would “very pleasantly” fashion a λόγος before all in the house, presumably so that he may come to light as the greatest of all the sophists by his unique wisdom and teachings (317c). While Socrates takes most pleasure in learning cooperatively by inquiry, Protagoras takes most pleasure in competitively outshining others in speech.

Protagoras’ response signals that he still does not yield to Socrates’ model of λόγος, either as cooperative inquiry or as an opportunity for critical self-reflection:⁴⁵⁹

And Protagoras said, “I, Socrates, praise your eagerness and the through-road of the λόγοι. For in other ways, too, I do not suppose that I am a bad human being, and least of all human beings am I jealous, since, indeed, I have said about you to many that I admire you the most by far of those whom I happen upon, and by especially of those your age: and I say, at least, that I would not wonder if you should become among the men held in high regard (ἐλλογίμων) for wisdom.” (361d–e).

Protagoras praises Socrates for his eagerness and the course of his speeches. But he explains that he does so because he admires Socrates and would not wonder if Socrates should become well-reputed (ἐλλογίμος) for wisdom. Rather than observing the differences between himself and Socrates, as Socrates repeatedly does, Protagoras lets Socrates into his club by praising the young thinker. That he admits the possibility that he should be jealous reveals that he still thinks of their conversation primarily as a mode of competition, as does his claim that Socrates might become held in high regard for wisdom, presumably an elite achievement that Protagoras himself enjoys.

The term ἐλλογίμος also recalls Socrates’ diagnosis that Hippocrates wishes to become held in high regard in the city (cf. 316b–c). Socrates perceives in Hippocrates the desire for political reputation, while Protagoras perceives in Socrates the desire for his own sophistic reputation. That Protagoras would not wonder about Socrates reputed wisdom

⁴⁵⁹ See also McCoy 2008, 71–72.

renders him opposed to Socrates' persistent wonder that pushes him to seek wisdom in response to Protagoras' speeches. Socrates, for his part, certainly rises to the occasion to outperform the sophist in this public exchange, suggesting that he does not shy away from public esteem himself, especially when vulnerable young Athenians are watching and deciding whether to study with the sophist, or perhaps, with Socrates instead. At the same time, in his words and deeds, Socrates consistently shows himself to be concerned first and foremost with their inquiry in pursuit of wisdom on his own behalf and for the sake of his interlocutors, too. Protagoras satisfies himself with the appearance of wisdom and does not acknowledge the occasion to inquire further. Socrates' pursuit of wisdom, on the other hand, is pierced through with wonder and desiring to seek beyond. Moreover, Protagoras refuses to consider the implications of his own speech and admit that there might be undesirable consequences that would follow from it. He simply denies that he is a bad human being by pointing to his lack of jealousy and his willingness to praise Socrates. By this, Protagoras distinguishes himself from the many who are jealous of sophists and ridicule them. But he does not thereby come to light as himself good. He embodies here the Simonidean hero who does nothing wrong willingly, but not the Socratic ideal of striving for the wisdom of self-knowledge.⁴⁶⁰

The dialogue ends, suitably, in ἀπορία. Protagoras declines Socrates' request to go through the inquiry together, saying that it is time for him to turn something else, while Socrates agrees to let it go if this seems best to Protagoras (361e–362a). Socrates, for his part, has stayed in spite of a prior engagement elsewhere, only to gratify the beautiful

⁴⁶⁰ It is also worth noting that, in turning now to other things, Protagoras completes his semblance to Orpheus, who turns back too soon and loses the object of his desire, Eurydice, forever. So, too, Protagoras turns to other things and presumably never returns to the question of virtue.

Callias (Καλλία τῷ καλῷ χαριζόμενος) (362a). The play on words between Callias' name and καλός recalls Callias' love of "philosophy" as a love of the *appearance* of wisdom in speeches. That is, Callias loves the beauty of speeches, even if he fails to see that beauty through to its proper end in wisdom.

Why should Socrates not only stay but also immediately afterward recount this entire meeting for the unnamed companion, and thereby undermine his claim that he has more important matters to attend? Socrates reintroduces the connection between τὸ καλόν and philosophy, just after he has relied on the notion of τὸ καλόν as a potential end by which to distinguish base from noble pleasures. Socrates stays in order to be in a state of gratifying the beauty of philosophy. He stays to enact a philosophical dialogue.

That the dialogue ends aporetically is fitting insofar as the dialogue has depicted ἀπορία as the fitting end to philosophical dialogue. The inquiry into virtue cannot be wholly completed. At the same time, ἀπορία also characterizes the beginning and through-road of philosophical dialogue. It begins with the recognition that we do not know, it proceeds by inquiring into the unknown, and it ends, one hopes, with a greater awareness of how one stands in relation to what is unknown.⁴⁶¹ To this extent, philosophical inquiry that begins, progresses, and culminates in ἀπορία still advances the inquiry by causing the inquirer to come to a greater understanding about herself through the inquiry. Protagoras continuously refuses to take this step, by continuously refusing to proceed in and through ἀπορία. He takes himself to prefer foresight over oversight by avoiding the risks of inquiry altogether. But Socrates shows that this tendency is itself a form of ignorance insofar as it conceals from the sophist his own ignorance and therefore, too, the true nature of virtue that should

⁴⁶¹ See Hyland 1984, 39.

be the object of inquiry. Protagoras, despite his best efforts, comes to be tripped up by Epimetheus, and reveals himself to be a coward in cunningly avoiding inquiry rather than boldly facing the unknown. Socrates, by contrast, characterizes inquiry into the unknown as the greatest pleasure. His semblance to Prometheus comes from his recognition that he likewise resembles Epimetheus and his willingness to act from within ἀπορία rather than attempting either to avoid it, or to finally overcome it, and repeat Epimetheus' failure of self-knowledge.⁴⁶²

Finally, Socrates' ambiguous closing lines, along with the previous mention of gratification (χαριζόμενος) echo the dialogue's frames and cause us to wonder about the effect of philosophical dialogues on its dramatic audience and its readers. Socrates says, "Having said and heard these things, we went away" (362a). Much debate has occurred over who Socrates means to include in the "we" who departs. Some argue that this signals Socrates' success at persuading Hippocrates to abandon sophistic education.⁴⁶³ Others think the ambiguity signals the possibility that Socrates has wider-reaching success, leading a number of would-be students away from the sophists.⁴⁶⁴ However, by not mentioning Hippocrates explicitly, Plato leaves open the possibility of Socrates' failure to persuade Hippocrates. There is a third, albeit unconventional possibility. Socrates' word choice echoes the dialogues frame wherein Socrates and the unnamed companion express a two-fold gratitude for Socrates to speak and the companion to hear (310a).

⁴⁶² Ewgen characterizes this characteristic of Socrates as "an openness to concealment" in which he regularly brings his ignorance, or what is concealed from him, into the open (2018, 120–121).

⁴⁶³ See, for example, Segvic 2006, 255.

⁴⁶⁴ Gonzalez proposes something like this, in suggesting that the ambiguity opens an invitation to measure Socrates' success, with which I agree below (2014, 64).

Or perhaps Plato here, through his character, Socrates, “breaks the fourth wall” and speaks to us readers, indicating that he gives this narration with no response at all from the unnamed companion, who simply departs directly afterward. This is a strange possibility, but it has the advantage of tying the frame back into the conclusion in such a way that concludes not only the dialogue’s internal narration but the whole dramatic action. Regardless, we never hear exactly how Socrates’ companion reacts to the story that Socrates tells, just as we never get definitive proof that Hippocrates follows Socrates out of Callias’ home. This silence invites the readers to evaluate its findings. By presenting the narrator’s silence, the dialogue opens itself to our response. In this way, the ἀπορία of the dialogue repeats itself in the ἀπορία of the dialogue’s conclusion. Rather than present the dialogue as a whole unto itself, Socrates presents it as a dynamic text, much like an old poem by Simonides responding to an even older saying by Pittacus. A Socratic dialogue requires interpretation and response on the reader’s part, “so as not to leave it incomplete” (cf. 314c). By opening itself up to multiple interpretations, by including within it numerous voices and approaches to philosophical conversations, and by concluding in an open-ended ἀπορία, the dialogue challenges its readers to inquire for themselves and thereby to become active participants in the dialogue’s dramatic action. In this way, the dialogue’s concluding ἀπορία, “the road out” of the speeches, is not an ending, but our road into a philosophical conversation.

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