THE LIMIT OF LIFE:

THE ETHICS OF DISCOURSE IN PLATO’S PROTAGORAS

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by

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Plato’s *Protagoras* composes an extended study of political education, understood broadly as the project of cultivating judgment that aims at the good life for individuals and at the advantage of one’s community as a whole. Within this investigation, Plato develops two primary themes that appear to intersect and diverge at various points in the dialogue. The first of these themes has to do with how the multiplicity of human virtues essential to a life well-lived can be collected together into a unified account, where participation in each aspect of virtue necessarily entails participation in all of the others. The second theme consists in sifting through the variety of discursive practices – among them extended monologue, literary interpretation, mythic speech, and agonistic contests of rhetoric – on display throughout the dialogue in order to determine how and why Socratic dialectic is best-suited to the aims of political education.

In my dissertation, I argue that Socrates’ attempts at successful dialectical exchange with each of his interlocutors, particularly Protagoras, are directed to marking out the limits of human knowledge within which the question of virtue, in its unity and multiplicity, can be pursued and incorporated into one’s life. Specifically, I investigate the ways in which Socrates’ crucial distinction between becoming and being informs both the underlying motivations of his interlocutors and the implications that their speeches and deeds have for ethical, political and epistemological practice in general. Lastly, I show that in light of this distinction Socratic dialectic, in its dedication to uncovering an objective measure for human virtue, as well as in its function of transforming the motivations of those who engage in it in the process, is a necessary part of realizing
virtue, and hence, is an indispensable component of what it means to live well in public and in private life.
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Introduction

Standing before the Athenian jury, which has just levied the penalty of death upon him, Socrates continues to speak. Facing the limit imposed upon his life, he gives pause to consider the alternative to his own activity of speaking, the option of refraining from dialogue that would have almost certainly saved his life:

Perhaps someone might say, ‘Socrates, can you not go away from us and live quietly, without speaking?’ Now this is the hardest thing to make some of you believe. For if I say that such conduct would be disobedience to the god and therefore I cannot keep quiet, you will think I am being ironic and will not believe me. And again if I say that to talk every day about virtue and the other things about which you hear me speaking and examining myself and others is the greatest good for humans, and that the unexamined life is no life for a human, you will believe me still less. This is as I tell you, gentlemen, but it is not easy to persuade you. (Apol. 37e-38a)

It is in this testament to his own life, almost, as it were, in passing, that Socrates states what he takes the greatest good for humans to be: not possessing virtue, as if this were something possible for humans, but speaking about it as a matter of continuous practice for our lives. Not even the threat of death could keep Socrates from engaging in this activity, where the pursuit of goodness in speech somehow belongs to human goodness itself.

Yet we must note that there is something missing in what Socrates says here. His statement stands in need of qualification. For it should be added that it is not simply speaking about virtue with others, but as well the manner in which one speaks about it that appears to make all the difference. Certainly, as traditional authorities on virtue in Athens suffered erosion in a time of extended war and under the pressures of empire, wherein new forms of justification were called for, speaking about virtue had become less
than a straightforward affair. Furthermore, the educational influence of the sophists, who characteristically claimed expertise in matters of virtue, deepened public uncertainty with respect to what it means to live virtuously. Where sophist pedagogy sought to replace poetic authority with arts of persuasion in late Fifth Century Athens, speaking cleverly became increasingly crucial for individuals looking to advance themselves in public life. If discourses on virtue, then, as Socrates encountered them were the means for participation in the greatest human good, they also carried with them the danger of grievous manipulation.

It is, of course, a falsehood to say that what is missing in Socrates’ statement betrays an oversight on Plato’s part. For in each of his dialogues, the manner in which each interlocutor speaks determines the scope of what can be revealed about the subject at issue. In this respect, the Protagoras occupies a preeminent position among the Platonic dialogues, indeed among the whole of ancient literature. Not only does this work provide one of the most detailed extant portraits of sophistic education, but it as well brings together a wide variety of discursive modes – among them myth, extended set speeches, rhetorical evasions, hair-splitting distinctions, literary interpretation, hypothetical interlocutors, and even the architectonic of a new science – with which to contend in the consideration of virtue. The present study undertakes an interpretation of the Protagoras as a whole, placing specific emphasis on these manifold forms of discourse. In particular, it is my task to investigate the ethical implications of speaking, reciting, and reading as they are portrayed in the course of the dialogue. What I hope to demonstrate is that within the interplay of these various modes, the Protagoras offers us
resources for understanding how it is that, as Socrates puts it above, speaking about human goodness can comprise in itself the greatest of human goods.

In interpreting this curious unity between speech and practice, certain themes within the dialogue hold a privileged status. Of these themes, that which I take to be the most primary, and that which functions as a unifying thread for the *Protagoras* as a whole, is the theme of measure. Indeed, given that Protagoras was noted, even in Socrates’ day, for the dictum that “man is the measure of all things,” it is perhaps most fitting that at the heart of the exchange between Socrates and Protagoras their differing conceptions of measure are of fundamental significance. In their dialogue, the problem of measure is enacted in two ways. The first has to do with the question of how it is that *logos*, discourse, can serve to bring varying and even contradictory appearances of goodness into a single measure, where goodness itself might be grasped. The second concerns the search after a measure for *logos* itself, wherein this function of gathering appearances can be carried out.

In view of this dual investigation that doubles back upon itself, it is necessary to consider the way in which what is said in the dialogue and how it is said doubles back upon the character and motives of the interlocutors themselves. For as will become clear, the project of examining human goodness entails an examination of those very humans engaged in such a project. Moreover, such self-reflective comportment to discourse will extend itself beyond the characters of the dialogue to the reader herself, such that she, too, will become a party to the drama of the work and will be compelled to reflect upon the practice of reading.
In this connection, the *Protagoras* is an exemplary dialogue; Plato invests considerable care in constructing a vivid portrait of the character Protagoras, and in fact, the dramatic dimensions of this dialogue are arguably as developed as anywhere else in his corpus. Accordingly, my investigation seeks to hold together what a number of influential scholars, regrettably, have set apart in Plato’s compositions, namely their “philosophical” and “literary” aspects. In fact, the thesis of this essay already implies that the traditional attempt to extract Platonic “doctrine” while leaving aside dramatic window-dressing is a misguided project from the beginning. Rather than assuming that there are cleverly-hidden doctrines to be gleaned from the text at all, by giving equal consideration to each of these aspects in light of the other we are, I believe, better able to view Plato’s dialogues in the way that is most faithful to their structure. As Drew Hyland has aptly put it, “every Platonic dialogue is an imitation of philosophy, an imitation of a given philosophic situation, of how philosophy might arise out of that situation.”\(^2\) Thus, this interpretation will proceed in line with that alternative mode of Plato scholarship that gives a central place to the relation between speech and deed as these are presented within the dialogues.

This guiding hermeneutic principle for the present work is accompanied by a second, equally consequential means of reading the *Protagoras*. As a number of Plato’s dialogues, including the one at hand, end in *aporia*, we find that certain problems are raised, yet not solved, within the enactments of philosophy between interlocutors. Many of the dialogues are therefore composed in such a way that these problems remain open for the critical pursuit of the reader. Mitchell Miller has emphasized this aspect of Plato’s writings, offering the view that such problems are to be taken as “provocations” where
the reader is invited to take such open problems as incitements to engage in the search
after their solutions. This principle of reading the *Protagoras* as offering provocations
for inquiry is illustrated in what I take to be two pivotal junctures of the dialogue –
Socrates’ disavowal of his poetic interpretation and the true function of his art of
measurement – and will therefore be decisive for my project as a whole.

In the attempt to hold to the contexts in which the manifold modes of discourse in
the *Protagoras* arise, this study will follow the course of the dialogue itself, referring to
earlier or later portions only for the sake of orienting the discussion and clarifying the
issues of the dialogue as they develop. Since my aim is to interpret the dialogue
primarily as an independent whole, I shall incorporate other dialogues into the
conversation where I believe they can aid in illuminating the text at hand. The single, if
considerable, exception to this principle is the brief interlude on measure and technical
knowledge following Chapter One, where I find it necessary to trace these notions across
more significant portions of Plato’s work.

Furthermore, it is of course hardly advisable – in fact, irresponsible – to offer a
reading of any philosophic text without reference to available current and previous
scholarship bearing upon that text. This is especially the case with Plato, whose progeny
of secondary literature is so extensive that any attempt to exhaust it in one’s studies is
bound to fail. However, whereas a number of studies on Plato, including those limited to
the *Protagoras*, engage other commentators directly within the body of their work, I seek
as far as possible to limit such engagement to the notes appending each chapter. This
measure is implemented for the sake of minimizing interruptions to following the course
of a dialogue that in its composition resists the readers’ efforts at any easy and sustained
thematic unity. For I take it as obvious that the richness and wealth of questions that the
Protagoras raises exceed any single interpreter’s capacity to meet even the better part of
them. In this sense, the present interpretation, like all of the rest composed by mere
mortals, must necessarily remain incomplete.
The various pressures upon Athenian society in the late 400’s and the effects that these had upon public forms of speaking and upon conceptions of virtue are admirably detailed by Mark Munn in *The School of History: Athens in the Time of Socrates* (2000, 64-91).

In O’Meara (1985, 163-194).
Chapter One

I. Prologue: The Need for a Measure

Friend: Would you tell us about this meeting in detail, if nothing hinders you? My boy will rise for you to sit here.
Socrates: By all means. Indeed, I will take it as a favor (χάριν), if you all listen.
Friend: As it will be on our part, if you speak.
Socrates: A double-favor (Δίπλα ἦ ἡ χάρις), then. But listen. (310a)

A double-favor, Socrates calls it. A mutual service of telling and listening, of being told and being heard, is the gesture within which the Protagoras unfolds. More precisely, the meeting between Socrates and Protagoras, as well as the events leading up to this meeting, are recounted as a favor, as a gesture of friendship marked out at the beginning by an agreement between Socrates and a group of his companions. “But listen,” he says. According to their agreement, whereby Socrates is to speak and his audience is to receive what is spoken, this double-favor, as a service accepted and returned, has its fulfillment in one and the same act of listening. For the remainder of the dialogue, Socrates’ audience remains silent, neither posing questions nor interrupting, but rather listening to his voice.

That this group of listeners is left unnamed, and furthermore without number, might lead us to believe that those to whom Socrates delivers his logos are of little significance and that they have been included simply in order to give him an occasion to speak. Yet this conspicuous indeterminacy and anonymity on the part of his audience serves to throw into relief the position that we, as readers, occupy with respect to Plato’s
text. Like those present, indeterminate in name and number for the author, we silently
attend to the dialogue without interrupting and without asking Plato to elaborate on what
is related in the *Protagoras*. In fact, the status of the dialogue as a text makes such
interjections on our part impossible, and necessitates a shared silence between Socrates’
listeners and Plato’s readers. If we take note of this analogous relation between
audiences, we find ourselves addressed by its author with a request parallel to that which
Socrates puts to his hearers. Echoed in this address, we hear Plato himself saying, along
with Socrates, not “But listen,” rather, “But read.” It is by reading that we who inherit
this text carry out Plato’s veiled request; in one and the same act of reading, we return
and accept that service, thereby preserving the original character of the *Protagoras* as a
favor.¹

This seems at first glance to be an odd request on Plato’s part, at the very least
superfluous. Given such limitations faced by the reader, there seems hardly anything
other for us to do than simply read the dialogue, and we must have already begun to do so
in order to discern this unspoken request in the first place. Thus it appears that we are
asked to do what we are already doing, what is most obvious for one to do when faced
with a text: we simply read it. Yet the extent to which one can ‘simply read’ a text – and
more specifically a Platonic text – is called into question the moment that what at first
appeared obvious becomes questionable, the moment that we become uncertain what it is
that the author means to say in what has been composed. One ‘simply reads’ either in the
expectation that a text is transparent, unambiguous, and meaningfully obvious, or, on the
other hand, without any expectation that a given meaning is to be found therein, and
therefore without a commitment to understanding the text itself. The *Protagoras* is
exemplary among the Platonic dialogues not only for its sustained and considerable resistance to such simple reading, but also in that it explicitly treats this kind of reading at the very center of the dialogue, where the inadequacy of simple reading will constitute a crisis, indeed a failure, on the part of all written works as such. If we bear these considerations in mind, then Plato’s request for us to read becomes far from obvious. There is, rather, the question to be posed throughout of what it means to read this dialogue, and moreover what it means to read it in such a way as to fulfill the favor that the Protagoras is to be. At the very least, we are given subtle indications, here at the beginning, that reading the dialogue will be anything but a simple matter.

We are likewise not without indications from Plato as to how one might read this text so as to let what is written therein become manifest. For, if we note the original indeterminacy of what is intended in the request to read, if we see that there is an ineluctable gap between what is intended by the author and what is expected by the reader, then we can also derive preliminary instruction from the parallel between ourselves and Socrates’ listeners. In this brief prologue a striking discordance in thinking between Socrates and his anonymous friend comes to light, despite the fact that their interchange maintains a tone of playful, everyday banter. Moreover, in what is said between these two an excess of meaning beyond the obviousness of everyday speech is to be closely followed. Socrates has more in mind than what his companion simply hears from him, and in turn, this companion says more with his casual remarks to Socrates than he most probably intends. This discordance is to be recognized in reading carefully what is asked and answered, or even not answered, in the interchange. That is, Socrates’ anonymous companion is to be taken as a model for listening, and analogously for
reading, albeit a negative model; his questions and statements betray a certain priority, a
directedness, in listening and speaking that threatens to pass over blindly those crucial
elements of Socrates’ *logos* that are not presented in self-evident fashion. This
comportment toward what is spoken must be overturned and reoriented by what Socrates
goes on to say in his account of the meeting with Protagoras. Such a reorientation will be
premised upon his companion’s ability to listen as Socrates requests.

Without knowing it, in his first utterance, Socrates’ friend gestures to the scope of
the problem that Socrates has just been discussing with Protagoras.

> Whence do you appear (φαίνη), Socrates? But it is obvious (δῆλα) that
> you have come from the chase after the youth of Alcibiades. Looking at
> him earlier, he appeared (ἐφαίνετο) to me still beautiful as a man – for a
> man he is indeed, Socrates, between you and me, with his beard already
> coming in. (309a)

The initial words of the *Protagoras* arise upon the basis of appearing (φαίνεσθαι). But what is more, these appearances are set into relation with desire, with
what presents itself in appearing as an end, as what is determined to be valuable and
worthy of pursuit. Socrates’ companion begins his greeting immediately by poking fun at Socrates under the assumption, on the basis perhaps of Socrates’ facial expression, which
is hidden from the reader, that Socrates has been spending his time in an erotic chase.
Socrates is introduced at the outset as someone who appears noticeably to others as an
eroticist, perhaps even a hedonist, pursuing beautiful appearances. That this friend
knows about the relationship between Alcibiades and Socrates, at least in rough outline,
tells us as well that Socrates has gained a reputation as a lover of youthful bodies, a
reputation that does not address the philosopher’s more proper preoccupation with the
souls of the young.\(^2\)
Yet Socrates is not teased here for being the aspiring lover of a beautiful adolescent – a practice openly engaged in on the part of the Athenian nobility – but rather for overlooking the fact that the youth’s admitted beauty has passed into the stage of adulthood, which makes him no longer a fit object of pursuit in the eyes of customary opinion. Caught up in his chase after Alcibiades, as it seems to his companion, Socrates appears to be a ridiculous figure because he has not looked clearly enough at his fleeting object of desire to notice that it has passed out of its youthful prime and become something other than what should be desired, namely a man. If, it is implied, Socrates would only attend as closely to his perceptions as his friend does, to the way in which sensible appearances are subject to becoming, then he would take heed of the obvious fact of his impropriety and revise his actions and his desired end accordingly.

In his companion’s casual use of language, twice invoking a direct relation between what appears and what is obviously the case (Socrates appears from somewhere, clearly from the chase after Alcibiades, who appears clearly no longer a proper beloved to any but Socrates), a particular comportment toward appearances reveals itself. As Socrates hints in his riposte, his friend’s comportment does not rise beyond simple naïveté, but instead rests content with the appearance of obviousness and self-evidence.

And what of it? Do you not mean to approve of Homer, who said the highest favor of youth is in him whose beard is coming in, as is now the case with Alcibiades? (309a-b)

This provocation serves to transform Socrates’ position from that of a blind, or at the very least eccentric, lover to a lover more proper in his tastes than the contemporary citizenry. That is, if what is to be most highly favored has its sanction in the greatest of the poets and in the cornerstone of Greek education, then Socrates in fact follows a higher
authority on matters of *eros* than those who base their judgments of what is desirable upon current majority opinion. The disagreement between Socrates and his friend is not, as the latter assumes, a matter of differences in simple perception, in *aiσθησις*, but rather has its basis in *logos*. Not only has Socrates seen Alcibiades clearly enough, but by summoning to his aid the most authoritative of *logoi* in the Greek tradition, he gestures to the power of *logos* to mediate what is perceived, that capacity of speaking (or here, writing) which determines particular appearances in their good or ill character. Taken literally, the first line of the dialogue – “Whence do you appear, Socrates?” – already gestures to the ‘whence’ from which appearances spring, to the source of particular modes of appearance. Socrates’ initial response functions as a provisional answer to this question by pointing to *logos* as a contributing element alongside *aiσθησις* in the manifestation of appearance.

At the same time, Socrates’ indication of the role of *logos* in their disagreement serves as a cautionary note to his friend about the power that appearances have of concealing that role, about those unacknowledged assumptions that give appearances a self-evident character – as if it were simply a matter of using one’s eyes to determine what is to be pursued and what not. We see as well in the present case that Socrates’ reputation in the city has preceded him, has preceded even his appearance, giving rise to its particular character of appearing and leading those amongst whom he lives to misidentify him as a lover in the common sense. If anyone is guilty of an oversight, therefore, it is Socrates’ friend; for he mistakes the mediation of public opinion, of *δόξα*, for what appears to him to be immediately evident.
It is not necessary that Socrates be taken seriously in his playful agreement with Homer. We should not, however, overlook the significance of that appearance to which Socrates alludes in his quotation. Twice in the texts of Homer reference is made to the favor of the man in whom a beard is just coming in, and in both contexts Homer depicts the appearance of Hermes in the guise of a human, once coming to the aid of King Priam in the *Iliad*, and again aiding Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. Hermes’ distinction among the gods lies primarily in his association with speech and communication, not only between humans and gods, but between potential enemies as well as between strangers and hosts. He is the god who both marks out and transcends boundaries, who carries messages across from the divine to the mortal realm, interpreting and translating them from one form into another. In this prologue to the *Protagoras*, designed as it is to emphasize a comic discordance in communication, the figure of Hermes is particularly suggestive. As well, in what is to come the special talents represented by Hermes will be required to aid those in need of reaching agreements with one another, as they are required by each of the heroes above in their respective aims. As Odysseus has need of Hermes, who provides the wanderer with a *pharmakon* to combat the enchantments of the sorceress Circe and to set his kinsmen free from her influence, so will Socrates need a special ability to overcome the enchanting effect that Protagoras’ voice has upon his listeners. Moreover, this special capacity represented by the god of communication will be indispensable at a decisive point in the dialogue, where the very possibility of communication, of giving and accepting *logoi* in speech, is endangered.

We should also not overlook the irony in Socrates’ reference to the highest favor of young men. In Homer, the one with this beautiful countenance is neither a youth nor a
man at all but rather a god. When Hermes appears before Priam, his identity as a god is withheld until the favor of escorting Priam to Achilles is fulfilled, perceived by the old king up to that point simply as a noble youth carrying out an uncommon act of friendship. Likewise, while Socrates’ friend may be able to distinguish clearly by sight the youth from the man, this reference to Homer carries with it the implication that distinguishing between the spheres of the human and the divine, demarcating the very limit that Hermes is noted for transcending, is a less obvious matter. Yet this distinction, as we will see, is the most consequential in its effects upon the tradition of education in which Homer’s texts are situated.

In addition, this early reference to Hermes functions as a preliminary indication for us, the readers. Reading the Protagoras will require our own hermeneutical efforts to mediate what appears to be said straightforwardly therein. This demands that from the beginning we preserve the notion of communication as such, of speaking and listening as with writing and reading, as an ever-present problem while we attempt, through reading, to cross the distance that separates us from Plato’s thought. It is this distance that marks the gap between what is intended and expected in the very act of communication.

We see the extent of this gap in the present exchange between Socrates and his anonymous friend. For the latter, were he attentive to the suggestive character of Socrates’ response, would understand that the apparent conflict in perceptions gives way instead to a conflict in logos, thus obliging each to give an account of his respective standard of what appears desirable if a resolution of this point is to be reached. Yet his friend sticks to what is most immediately clear in Socrates’ elusive, circumspect reply: that he plainly has not given up his designs on Alcibiades. Accordingly, it is to this point
that he responds, ignoring the questionableness within Socrates’ question and instead posing a series of questions of his own.

Then how are things now? Are you appearing (φαίνη) then from his side? And how is the young man disposed toward you? (309b)

Whatever sort of gathering Socrates has wandered into, it has not been as important, it seems, as the latest erotic gossip between two of Athens’ most colorful personalities. Against this expectation of hearing details on the pursuits of his own pleasure, Socrates attempts a redirection of his friend’s curiosity to another subject. He replies that Alcibiades does seem to be well-disposed to him, since he spoke frequently on Socrates’ behalf just earlier that day. “However,” Socrates goes on, “I wish to tell you something strange (ἀτοπον). Although he was present, I did not pay him any mind, and at times I completely forgot (ἔπελαυθανόμην) him” (309b). Despite Socrates’ ironic admissions of characteristic forgetfulness later in the dialogue, the very idea that Socrates has forgotten anything, not to mention Athens’ greatest beauty, is itself truly strange. Yet for his companion, this strangeness has to do with the question of what could possibly be more worthy of pursuit than those pleasures found in physical beauty. And it is in the ensuing exclamation of surprise that his companion reveals his own character most starkly:

Why, what trouble could have transpired there between you and him? Doubtless (δῆπον) you did not happen upon someone more beautiful there, not in this city. (309c)

An explanation must be given to account for Socrates’ strange comportment towards, or rather, away from Alcibiades. The only thing that his friend surmises to be more important, more worthy of attention, than someone’s beautiful appearance would be someone who appears even more beautiful than the first. Thus, the most plausible
explanation for such action would be that Socrates had compared the amount of beauty exhibited by Alcibiades against that of another, measured each against the other, and found the beauty of the latter to be greater than that of the famous young man. If this is indeed the case, then the one more beautiful must truly be strange, since Alcibiades is, as is clear to all, the measure of physical beauty in Athens. Any beauty exceeding his must be, in this light, ἄτοπον in the literal sense, as that which lacks a proper place. Within the measure of beauty set by Alcibiades, this strange figure finds no identifiable place, but rather exceeds in some way that measure. In his response therefore, Socrates’ friend betrays the priority of his own desire; the choiceworthy end of one’s attentions lies for him in the appearance of greatest beauty, gauged, as he assumes, by simply using one’s own eyes, as he had looked earlier at Alcibiades and found him beautiful despite his obvious maturity. His remark of surprise is a further confirmation that for him the notion of goodness – in the sense of that towards which one aims in one’s actions – has its end in measures of outward beauty. Such erotic disposition not only naively takes its direction from αἰσθησις by operating on the level of assumed obviousness and self-evidence, but furthermore grounds its standard of what is choiceworthy and good in αἰσθησις so understood.

Socrates teasingly admits that there was indeed someone present of greater beauty, much greater in fact. He divulges that this person is a foreigner from the city of Abdera, an admission that seems to surprise his friend anew:

And this foreigner seemed to you (ἐδοξέσαι σοι) so beautiful that he appeared (φανησαι) to you of greater beauty than the son of Cleinias? (309c)

Thus, there is an implicit question about Socrates’ estimation of this stranger’s beauty, as if Socrates might have committed a kind of oversight in his judgment of appearances
similar to the way he was assumed to be mistaken about his perception of Alcibiades. Once again, if there is anything in question for Socrates’ friend, it is the astuteness of Socrates’ powers of \( \alpha i\sigma \theta \eta \iota \iota \iota \iota \iota \).

It is here, with a single question, that Socrates divulges the actual end of his own desire, and in so doing reorients the exchange to a higher, yet more obscure, erotic subject: “Why, o blessed one, must not the wisest appear \( \varphi \alpha \iota \nu \varepsilon \sigma \theta \alpha i \) more beautiful?” (309c). The strangeness of this reply must certainly be surprising for one who trusts straightforwardly in what appears to him or her through the senses. As it is put forward by Socrates, however, wisdom \( \sigma o\rho \iota \alpha \) that which is perhaps the least obvious of matters, overtakes what appears most “obvious” in the realm of beautiful phenomena. Yet what is it that allows Socrates a vision of the appearance of wisdom, a thing of greater beauty than that which we take in with our eyes? Socrates does not say. He does, however, provide a hint for this question after admitting having been in the company of Protagoras, by saying, “there were many things said and heard \( \varepsilon i\pi \dot{\omega} \nu \kappa a\iota \dot{\alpha} \kappa o\upsilon \varepsilon \sigma \varsigma \)’’ (309d). It is, we are to understand, through this practice of speaking and listening, of giving and taking \( \logoi \), that Socrates is afforded that vision thanks to which he now appears to his companions as erotically inspired.

In this orientation toward wisdom, Socrates at the same time shows himself to have been pursuing something quite different from, yet strangely akin to, what his friend has assumed. It is in the \textit{Phaedo} that Socrates, in an autobiographical ellipsis, most explicitly captures this difference in vision. He speaks of that second sailing according to which he was moved to seek out the manifold causes of transformation within becoming, within the realm of \( \gamma e\nu e\sigma \iota \iota \iota \iota \iota \iota \) by means other than simple \( \alpha i\sigma \theta \eta \iota \iota \iota \iota \iota \).
Since I had given up looking into beings in this way, it seemed to me that I had to be on my guard so as not to suffer that very thing those people do who behold and look at the sun during an eclipse. For surely some of them have their eyes destroyed if they don’t look at the sun’s image in water or in some other such thing. I thought about this and feared my soul would be blinded if I looked at things with my eyes and attempted to grasp them through *aisthētikē*. So it seemed to me that I should have recourse to *logoi* and look (σκοπεῖν) in them for the truth of beings (τῶν ὄντων τὴν ἀλήθειαν). (99d-e)

That vision (σκέψις), as his admission from the *Phaedo* indicates, which characterizes Socratic *eros* in its striving after beings is a form of seeing that aims at letting beings appear truly in *logos*. Instead of looking for the beautiful within the sphere of becoming, Socrates’ attention to wisdom signifies a kind of sight that aims at the *being* of the beautiful. We should be careful to observe, however, that even though Socrates’ companion is deceived by what he perceives, by what appears to him to be obvious, the rudimentary conception of appearance here is not to be understood outright as an oppositional counterpart to being. The distinction between Socratic vision and vision attuned merely to the obvious does not, as we see in the quote above, turn upon a distinction between appearance and being, but rather upon a distinction within appearances themselves. For viewing beings in *logos* is as well an investigation in and through appearances. If a strict being-appearing dichotomy were to be adopted, appearances would thereby assume the role of merely concealing rather than revealing the nature of that to which appearances belong, as if appearances are to be overcome altogether in the gathering of knowledge. Such an assumption would prove no less naïve than its opposite – that of accepting appearances as self-evident. In fact, the possibility of there being a mode of truth apportioned to the realm of appearances will play a crucial
part in the investigation of a sophistic science that brings all of the sophists with whom Socrates will speak into agreement with one another.

That particular σκέψις by means of logos is, then, to afford a vision of beauty “far greater,” as Socrates emphasizes, than whatever appears through αἴσθησις. Socrates has not, therefore, compared one countenance with another in order to determine greater and less, but has rather set the physical appearance of Alcibiades into a common measure with the appearance of wisdom of Protagoras, thus bringing together aesthetic and noetic appearances under a single look of beauty whereby each receives its proper place within that measure. Yet what is that process by which logos is able to yield a measure for those ends after which we strive? What is the relation between logos and measure that is to provide a vision of beings beyond becoming, as they appear in their truth? These fundamental questions arising from the prima facie innocuous banter between Socrates and his companion function as early points of orientation for what is to come, and our reading of the Protagoras will proceed with these questions in mind. In the attempt to gain a σκέψις of our own by which to bring together, amidst many tortuous and seemingly fractured logoi, the main strands of the dialogue, we shall find these questions recurring in an array of subtly different forms.

If we pause to turn for a moment to Plato’s Symposium, we find laid out in Diotima’s speech on erotic education a general blueprint according to which individuals come to that vision – a “wondrous vision,” in fact, brought forth through the fruits of philosophical logos and thought (διανοήματα) – through which the being of the beautiful appears. Socrates recounts her description of that ascent in learning that moves not only from the vision of beautiful bodies to beautiful souls, but as well from the beauty
of instances of knowledge to beauty “existing ever in singularity of a look (μονοειδές) by itself, while all the many beautiful things partake of it in such a way that, though all of them are coming to be and perishing, it grows neither greater nor less, and is affected by nothing” (211b). It is clear that the end of such strivings demands a kind of synthesis, a bringing-together of appearances in a single look that transcends the movement of becoming and leads us to a vision of the being of beauty. Given the appropriate theme of his present discussion with the anonymous companion, Socrates, it seems, would do well to settle the difference in determinations of beauty by recounting Diotima’s ladder of love, and thus make clear the very end of the conversation toward which they should turn. However, that erotic ascent in learning related at Agathon’s party provides a smoothly progressive, successful account of the path of learning that does not address the potential pitfalls inherent in the turn to logos, the ways in which logos can also function to conceal that which provides a true measure and ordering of beings in their truth. The Protagoras gives us instead a portrait of such modes of concealment, where the various attempts at obscurcation – and the corresponding attempts to overcome it – in Socrates’ conversation with Protagoras are to provide a sort of prism through which the relation between logos and measure is to be investigated.

Socrates gestures to the concealing power of logos in this early exchange with his companion, where he states that Protagoras is “surely the wisest of all at present,” adding, “if Protagoras seems (δοκεῖ) to be wisest to you” (309d). This is, as a whole, another strange statement, especially considering that Protagoras certainly appears, by the close of the dialogue, to be unwise in a myriad of ways. The connection of which we should take careful notice, however, is the emphasis that Socrates places here upon seeming,
upon \( \delta \omicron \zeta \alpha \). \( \Delta \omicron \zeta \alpha \) refers not simply to seeming, but is also the word for opinion, a connection that reflects the fact that one’s opinions are formed as a result of the way in which things seem to him or her.\(^{11}\) Along with the danger of naïvely taking what appears in \( \alpha \iota \omicron \theta 
eta \iota \sigma \iota \) as self-evident, as Socrates’ friend shows us, there is also the ineluctable danger of accepting common opinion in like manner, making the problem of \( \delta \omicron \zeta \alpha \) not merely an individual, but a political problem. The question, therefore, of how a measure for those ends taken to be good is to be gained in \( \logos \) will be set within the context of political life, as perhaps the most pressing of political questions. Indeed, insofar as that vision to which Socrates has recourse takes place not simply in \( \logos \), but in the giving and taking of \( \logoi \) between interlocutors, in short, in the process of dialogue, the question of measure is always already a political question. We shall find that in the \textit{Protagoras} the political nature of dialogue has its counterpart in an overall discourse about the \textit{polis} and about common opinion dealing with the goodness of its citizenry. It is precisely herein that the greatest of dangers, both for the individual interlocutors and for the \textit{polis} as a whole, is to be found; where common opinion conceals its lack of proper measure behind the guise of self-evidence, yet nonetheless with an authority that exploits the power of seeming in \( \delta \omicron \zeta \alpha \), the problem of human goodness as such no longer arises as a question-worthy matter, in fact, hardly arises as a problem at all.

The connection between dialogue and political life that we have begun to indicate takes on a particular significance if we consider the political status of those whom Socrates addresses in the prologue. The name of Protagoras is certainly not new to Socrates’ listeners, yet the friend reveals his surprise at hearing that the famous Protagoras has come to Athens, unaware that the sophist has in fact arrived two days
earlier. This ignorance proves to be significant: his unnamed friend and those with him do not belong to that circle of Athenian society privy to such distinguished events. As well, the absence of a name for Socrates’ companion suggests that he has not been able to make a name for himself in the city, has not been able to distinguish himself from the many in any particular way. These considerations strongly indicate that Socrates is speaking here with the many,  

\[\text{oí póllloi,}^{12}\]

who make up the average mass of the city’s population, and who enjoy no distinction of noble family or of high office in the city. Socrates gives his account of the meeting with Protagoras to those against whom the excellent class of Athenians, the self-proclaimed noble and good (\(káloí kágáthoi\)) gentlemen of civic affairs, measure themselves. Socrates will go on to recount for this small representative of the many a series of \(logoi\) from the famous wise man, for whose lessons they assuredly can neither afford nor to which they can be admitted without the requisite credentials. For, even the young Hippocrates, of noble lineage and considerable potential, requires the sponsorship of one distinguished Socrates in order to be accepted as Protagoras’ student. Socrates, then, already resembles a kind of political Hermes, bringing news across the divide that separates those few who govern, who identify themselves with excellence, on one side, and those who are governed and who remain undistinguished in the \(polis\), on the other.

It is worthwhile to note here the exceptional character of this intercourse between Socrates and the many; for hardly anywhere else in the dialogues is Socrates portrayed as speaking primarily to anyone other than individuals belonging to the \(káloí kágáthoi\) or those who are recognized for some other form of distinction.\(^{13}\) In the \textit{Protagoras}, however, the order of the city based in such distinction provides a limit for sophistic
discourse. The exclusive gathering of sophists in Callias’ estate, as well as the particular opinions that Protagoras, and Hippias too, voice with respect to the division between the excellent and the average are overt signs that the wisdom of the great sophists is self-consciously kept from crossing that division. In fact, it is Socrates who will insert the voice of the many into his conversation with the sophists at Callias’ home, taking up the position of the many, and acting as their representative in *logos*. In the processes of bringing the voice of the many into his dialogue with Protagoras and the other sophists, and of bringing to the many a report of what was said and done in Callias’ home, the crossing of this political divide will, in the end, serve to put into question that very separation according to which the *polis* is presently ordered.

We should bear in mind that it is of these many unnamed, undistinguished listeners that Socrates asks the original favor in which the *Protagoras* unfolds. It is appropriate therefore to ask: why is it that Socrates chooses the many as his audience for recounting the meeting with Protagoras? Why does Socrates cross this obvious division in the city in order to give a *logos* the events of which were originally to be restricted to one side of this division? Given that his unnamed friend proves at the outset to be an unsophisticated and careless listener, it is indeed questionable that Socrates shares such an elusive and complex account with an audience of this sort. We are not given a sufficient sense for answering these concerns; we are, however, given the notion that the task of communicating what lies beyond the obvious in Socrates’ *logos* is subject to considerable risk. In particular, it is the risk of failing to move his listeners beyond an attunement to the obvious, to that which remains concealed and which can only be made
manifest through careful and focused listening. To all appearances, this failure seems quite likely.

On the other hand, that other audience, that which occupies a parallel position with those to whom Socrates speaks at the beginning, enjoys a certain advantage. This other audience, as we have already noted, is the one that will attend to Socrates’ account by reading it. The advantage that the reader enjoys has to do with the permanence of the text itself; we can return, ever again, to Plato’s words, searching therein after the common threads of an overall discourse that appears to suffer interruption and abrupt shifts throughout its course. This permanence of written logos serves therefore as an aid to our memory, preserving what was said and done for the return of our exertions in thought, seeking not merely to remember, but to understand anew. It is in this repetition and silent questioning that the straightforward apprehension of speeches and deeds can give way to that level of understanding at which the close interweaving of these threads can be charted, and their unity can be brought into view.

This advantage is won, however, at the cost of a corresponding limitation particular to those readers who cannot hear Socrates’ – or Plato’s – voice. Whether Socrates’ audience had gone on to put questions to him after the termination of his logos is unanswerable; Plato prevents us from knowing this precisely by not returning to the opening frame of discourse, and prevents us therefore from discovering whether Socrates’ favor had been carried out by his listeners. The indeterminate fate of Socrates’ logos has its counterpart in the irreducible indeterminacy of Plato’s logos for the audience of the text entitled Protagoras. We cannot expect anything more from Plato to aid our reading than what he has written; he cannot indicate to us whether, ultimately,
we’ve properly understood his text. Yet the expectation of such confirmation carries with it an assumption parallel to that kind of reading that we have called ‘simple reading’, namely that the permanence of a text entails the permanence of a single meaning, abiding and clear, to be found therein. In attempting to cross the divide that separates Plato’s thinking from ours, the belief that his intended meaning could be transferred to us perfectly intact and transparent, is as hardly tenable as the belief that the indeterminacy inherent within his text gives us license to make of it simply what we wish.

Understanding his text, and therefore understanding in what the favor of the *Protagoras* consists, is a task to be carried out between those two extremes, in the acknowledgement that while the structure and grammar of the text places particular limitations and demands on the invested reader, it is, precisely as a text, unable to provide us with a full directive of its proper and perfect interpretation. Plato’s audience is therefore, like that of Socrates, the many, if in a different sense. We are the many foremost in the sense of a plurality of interpreters who are set with the project of justifying our respective accounts of its wholeness in the absence of any final word on how it is to be understood. To this extent, the end of the dialogue remains open in that the fate of Socrates’ original favor is left undetermined for us. If there is to be a determination of it, this task lies solely in the hands of the reader.

By closely reading the opening passages of the *Protagoras*, we have already begun to trace the emergence of measure as a central question. Moreover, the problem of measure has been seen to arise in the contexts of *logos* and that interplay between *logos* and *aĩsθησις*, contexts in which various modes of appearance function to determine the practices and ends that we take to be desirable and choiceworthy. Our task in what
follows is to chart the development of these themes in the dialogue through the speeches and deeds of Socrates and his interlocutors. In doing so, we shall pay particular attention to this relation between measure and _logos_ as a practical problem, one that, in circulating around questions of education, knowledge, friendship, and human goodness, spans both individual and political concerns.

It is also to be observed that the opening of the dialogue, with its subtle gaps in communication and measures that remain in concealment, constitutes a failure in the giving and taking of _logoi_ between Socrates and his companion. Yet we also see how this failure serves to illuminate the intersection of those factors that influence the appearances toward which _eros_ is directed. This failure to communicate without complete transmission of meaning and without perfect transparency does not prevent Socrates from undertaking the extended and complex account that follows; in fact, it leaves open the possibility of subsequent failures, reflected in the exchanges between Socrates and Protagoras that make up this account. If we return once more to the parallel between Plato’s audience and that of Socrates, we can see how possible, even inevitable, discords in transmission of meaning undergo a mirror-effect that extends from the giving and taking of _logoi_ within the account that Socrates gives, through his exchanges with the audience who listens to this account, and finally to the account that Plato gives to the reader. It is from this imperfect position that we begin the task of reading; yet to the extent that we carry out this reading with care, we involve ourselves as participants in that very favor that Socrates requests.
II. Hippocrates and the Significance of the Question

The initial favor of the dialogue begins with a second favor, asked of Socrates by his young friend Hippocrates. It is, we must note, only on account of carrying out this second favor that Socrates has the privilege of recounting the meeting with Protagoras to his listeners. The young man approaches Socrates principally in order to ask him to converse (διαλέγεσθαι) with Protagoras on Hippocrates’ behalf. However, the fulfillment of this favor will, as we shall see, turn out to take a form quite other than Hippocrates initially intends. As a second prologue to the encounter with Protagoras, we find in Socrates’ exchange with the young man discords in understanding and a preoccupation with apparent obviousness similar to those we have observed in the opening conversation. While the opening exchange has been instructive for us in letting the relation between logos and measure first be posed as a question, this instruction was lost to Socrates’ companion. The conversation to come, in contrast, will serve to bring Hippocrates to an awareness of this relation through seeing how his logoi fall short of the measure he has unreflectively set for himself. In this initial portrait of tutelage, the need for a measure and the possibility of posing philosophical questions are bound together.

As the Protagoras begins with the appearance of Socrates, and in fact puts his appearance at issue in the opening lines, we find this form of aesthetic appearance suspended by darkness in the early hours at which Socrates begins his retelling. In this suspension of aesthetic vision, the way is cleared for concentrating upon those appearances that come forth in logos. At the same time, the darkness functions as a
counterpart to that concealment accompanying the δόξα at work in Hippocrates’ self-understanding.

Socrates is awakened by the sound of violent knocking at his door, followed by the loud voice (τῆς φωνῆς μέγα) of Hippocrates, who asks, “Socrates, are you awake or asleep?” (310b). If Socrates had in fact been sleeping prior to this question, now, in the face of the young man’s blaring voice, sleeping is no longer a possibility. In his first utterance, Hippocrates manages oddly to efface the very sense of his question. That is, the position of questioning, that openness to logos that arises out of an awareness of one’s ignorance and the corresponding desire to overcome it, is here undercut by the way in which Hippocrates speaks; the volume of his voice neutralizes the indeterminacy inherent in questioning by calling for a predetermined response in the act of putting the question.

It is, in turn, the sound of Socrates’ own voice that provides an answer Hippocrates’ question, not by needlessly answering in the affirmative, but by greeting him and asking if there is not some news that his friend has come to report. “Nothing, if not something good (ἄγαθόν),” Hippocrates replies, referring to the event of Protagoras’ arrival in Athens (310b). Before Protagoras has even made his appearance in the dialogue, he has thus already been associated with not only beauty and wisdom, as Socrates has characterized him to the small gathering, but here also with goodness. Or, more properly, Protagoras is linked with opinion, with δόξα, in reference to these qualities, concluding with the opinion of him that Hippocrates has accepted, when he later adds: “I have never yet seen Protagoras nor ever heard him speak at all …[b]ut, Socrates, all men praise him and say that he is the wisest in speaking” (310e). Hippocrates, young and impressionable, reveals himself as receptive to the influence of
common opinion. Innocently trusting in and adopting the δόξα of the many as his measure of goodness, his desire is directed single-mindedly toward achieving that apparent goodness as so determined.

Indeed, it is hard to miss the urgency with which Hippocrates chases this end. For in addition to Socrates’ saying that his friend hurried in “at once” (εὐθὺς) (310b), Hippocrates himself describes with the same word his efforts to reach Socrates the night before and that morning “at once” (310c-d). In essence, Hippocrates embodies the condition of immediacy. This is not only in the sense that he pursues with exigency the fruits of Protagoras’ wisdom, seeking to overstep any passage of time that keeps his end distant. His comportment to δόξα marks as well a kind of immediacy akin to the immediate trust in αἰσθησίας that we have seen in Socrates’ anonymous friend, namely the immediacy of accepting appearances as if they were, in the manifestation of their appearing, sufficiently disclosive of the being of that to which they refer. In this comportment to δόξα, an inclination to examine further what is said goes unprovoked, precisely because of the unmediated, self-evident character attendant to such appearances.

As Protagoras’ wisdom is first mentioned by Hippocrates, we note a number of conspicuous questions, particularly having to do with wisdom, that remain unaddressed in this immediate erotic relation. In response to Socrates’ question why Protagoras’ arrival might be of importance to him, and to the further playful question of whether Protagoras has done him an injustice, Hippocrates answers, laughing, “Yes, by the gods! By being the only wise man, and not making me one” (310d). The first question that goes unposed would be whether or not the wisdom that Protagoras is said to possess is
teachable at all, whether one person can make another wise. As we shall see, this question is only taken up by Socrates after Protagoras proclaims the subject of his purported wisdom to be virtue. That Protagoras can transmit his wisdom to others is, for the eager young man, taken for granted.

Secondly, Hippocrates, at least a fairly close associate of Socrates from what we can tell, calls Protagoras the only wise man, which would lead us to believe that if he has spent a good deal of time with Socrates, he has not been able to ask the question with any seriousness of the wisdom that Socrates might exhibit. Like the unnamed friend, Hippocrates appears to regard Socrates not as a philosopher first and foremost, but rather as one who perhaps wields a certain influence in the city.

Thirdly, the assumption that Protagoras is a teacher of his wisdom would make us want to ask why he would then be the only wise man. To uphold the belief that Protagoras is the only possessor of wisdom would entail at the same time that he has been unable to make others wise, that he is in fact not a teacher of wisdom at all, and therefore would as well be unable to make Hippocrates wise. In his eagerness to possess that which he desires the young lover of wisdom is led to overlook these most questionable aspects of his logos.

In speaking and in listening, then, those in Socrates’ company exhibit thus far in the dialogue a pronounced lack of concern for what is questionable in these respective events of questioning, and furthermore point to a distinction between proper and improper comportment to the sense of a question, to questionability as such. This implicit distinction, and the examples of inferior attunement to questioning, indicates that
questioning, as with reading and listening, will also prove to be more than a simple, straightforward matter.

It becomes clear as well in this introductory image of Hippocrates that the exorbitance of his desire, in contrast to that *eros* of Socrates that engenders a wider, more comprehensive measure and ordering of its objects, serves to narrow, rather than expand, the young man’s own ability to measure the appropriateness with which he pursues his object. Prior to his knowledge of Protagoras’ visit, Hippocrates already displays a certain capriciousness of character. That he was forced to chase after a runaway slave implies a lack of order in the management of his own private affairs, and the fact that he had meant to tell Socrates beforehand that he was going, but that he had forgotten due to “some other matter” furthermore signifies an already erratic disposition (310c). The new possibility of associating with Protagoras seems to enflame a rather scattered figure into a state of blindness with respect to any considerations outside of reaching his newfound end. Hippocrates, as a result, does not take proper note of the earliness of the hour at which he rouses Socrates, nor is he aware that it is still too early to approach the famous sophist at Callias’ home. In short, the immediacy of his desire results not only in an obliviousness to questioning, but also in a lack of measure with respect to the passage of time, marked as it is by the passage of phenomena into their opposites, as the darkness of night passes into the light of day. In contrast to the former implication that Socrates is unskilled at attending to the manifold appearances of becoming, it is Hippocrates who appears to be most guilty of this charge.

Where Hippocrates’ desire reduces his attention to immediate concerns, these concerns are narrowed, in turn, to his own perceived good. For he admits that if it were
merely a question of paying the fee that Protagoras charges for his teachings, he would hesitate neither to give up his own money nor that of his friends (310e). This telling admission marks a decidedly political, or rather anti-political, dimension of Hippocrates’ erotic excess: in seeking his apparent good, he is willing to deprive his friends of their advantages. He seems to regard his own good as something liable to conflict with the goods of others, with the implication that goodness is a purely individual matter, one that need not coalesce with friendship or other relationships of care. In this offhand remark, we can already discern seeds of a dangerous tendency to withdraw from, or abuse, his political attachments. As he is still young, however, this tendency may be overcome by a redirection of his desire15 to that which would serve to bring this desire into its proper measure, namely to a consideration of human goodness as such, beyond any simple opinion that one might adopt from others. The gradual redirection of Hippocrates’ desire will be Socrates’ aim, carried out by painstakingly opening up, separating out, interrupting, the immediacy between Hippocrates’ desire and that appearance of goodness to which it is so strongly committed, in order to make apparent those mediating factors to which the youth, in his immediacy, is blind.

Without awaiting Socrates’ assent to performing this favor for him, Hippocrates calls for them to depart immediately, lest they miss Protagoras at Callias’ home. Socrates, certainly concerned to avoid another scene of early awakening such as he had received, suggests that they first wait until it becomes light, and that they walk a bit in the courtyard in the meantime. The absence of light, of the sun, provides Socrates with the time to “test (ἀποπειρώμενος) Hippocrates’ strength by examining (διεκόπουν) him with questions” (311b). Testing consists essentially in the process of measuring
appearances, of seeing how things stand in relation to the way in which they appear, as when one tests, for example, the strength of a step by measuring its integrity in placing weight upon it. Hence, the testing that Socrates begins is a kind of seeing guided with reference to a standard by which something is measured. That particular mode of vision (σκέψις) that takes place in and through logos, the extra-aesthetic vision to which Socrates has recourse in seeking the appearance of the truth of beings, is here inaugurated through the process of questioning.

Socrates’ σκέψις through questioning is not undertaken here simply as a means for overcoming his own ignorance with respect to Hippocrates’ designs, but also to determine whether Hippocrates is ignorant of the very end he has set for himself, whether he knows or only contents himself with the appearance of knowledge. For, as Socrates states in *Alcibiades I*, one “will inquire only if he thinks he does not already know” (109e). Hippocrates’ unquestioning position can only be the result either of knowing sufficiently what it is that he is after, or the result of being ignorant of his own ignorance in this matter. By answering, Hippocrates allows his thinking to be revealed to Socrates, to appear in such a way that it can be submitted to testing. In letting Hippocrates’ thinking be manifest in this way to them both, Socrates’ vision afforded by the giving and taking of *logoi* focuses not only upon what is said, but also focuses upon the cause of Hippocrates’ speech, namely, the condition of his soul. Their strolling in the court in anticipation of daylight, in opposition to sitting unmoved in the darkness of Socrates’ quarters, suggests the movement carried out through questioning and answering, a movement of the soul’s coming to self-awareness whereby what remains concealed to the δόξα and αἰσθησις of others is shown most clearly in the mutual investigation of *logoi*. 
Socrates begins this test by posing two questions together, as of a single piece. “Tell me, Hippocrates, in now attempting to reach Protagoras, paying him money as a fee for his services to you, to whom are you going, and what is it that you are to become (γενησόμενος)?” (311b). Most appropriately, Socrates sets his initial questions within the context of becoming, in the issue of becoming as a form of desired self-transformation. Yet we should first notice that the kind of becoming at issue here is not becoming with respect to those appearances in αἰσθησις about which Socrates and his unnamed friend first spoke, but rather becoming in the sphere of one’s own knowledge, of what is manifest in its truth to one’s soul. It is through these first two questions that Hippocrates will come to a particular knowledge bearing not upon some external subject, but upon himself, upon his own soul.

By way of examples, Socrates leads Hippocrates to the sense of the questions put to him. Through the association of a famous name, such as the preeminent physician Hippocrates, or the sculptors Polycleitus or Pheidias, one knows not just their names, but those arts (τέχναι) thanks to which their names are known to the many; the fame accruing to each of them is a result of excellence in his respective craft. To answer the question of what these individuals are, in the sense implied by Socrates, is to identify the kind of knowledge according to which the excellence of each shows itself in what is brought into being through such knowledge. The kind of knowledge that marks each man as what he is, is also that knowledge that one expects to receive when one approaches that person as a learner, in the way that Hippocrates intends to approach Protagoras.
By identifying the technician as one who can communicate his knowledge to others, Socrates refers to τέχνη as a matter of logos, of giving an account of those principles and directives that guide human activity in the process of bringing an intended object or state of affairs into being. Thus, if a technician is excellent in his craft, if he holds to his particular knowledge and lets it guide him in carrying out the particular function at which his craft aims, he is thereby also able to transmit the knowledge of his craft to another by teaching. Accordingly, the student of the technician becomes, through the process of teaching and learning, what the technician already is. In Socrates’ posing of the question of Hippocrates’ end in this way, the terms “becoming” and “being” accord with the learning of a specific kind of knowledge and the possession of that knowledge, respectively, both made possible through logos. To say that one “is” a doctor or a carpenter means essentially that one is identified with the knowledge that he or she possesses; one “becomes” a technician of this or that craft to the extent that one is underway in the reception and securing of those accounts out of which such knowledge is composed. Thus there is, at least in the everyday parlance that Socrates uses in posing his question, a determination of the being of an individual that accords with the safekeeping and execution of a delimited region of wisdom, a stable, reliable body of accounts that can be taught as well as applied to the world.

It is furthermore noteworthy that one’s identity in these cases, as a particular kind of person practicing a specific form of knowledge, represents a function within the polis as a whole. The significance of technical knowledge is twofold in the sense that it is that by which one earns one’s living, that which makes possible the preservation of one’s life in the city. Secondly, the craft that one practices contributes to the functioning and
preservation of the city insofar as each craft responds to a particular need on the part of human life as such in the city. One is, in common speech, what one practices as a service to one’s community, and one’s community receives its everyday order on the basis of the dissemination of technical *logoi*. For a youth of Hippocrates’ age, the question of what one will become in respect to knowledge is intimately tied to the role he will play through such knowledge as part of the functioning of the city. Socrates’ initial questions here with respect to being and becoming serve indirectly to bring Hippocrates into the scope of his citizenship and his place in the *polis* by looking at human being in the dimension of its appearance through specific activities that allow the city to function. Each ἔχνη, insofar as it is developed as a means of benefit to humans, represents a specific region of human goodness, both insofar as it contributes to the preservation of the individual and to the city as a whole.

Since ἔχνη is that knowledge based ultimately in accounts, in *logoi*, according to which the *polis* receives its basic form of order, and whereby the city takes part in the measuring out of which order is created, the question in reference to that form of measure inherent in such accounts returns to the fore. As teaching refers to the knowledge whereby humans become this or that sort of technician, we must also look into that kind of measuring of which transmitted *logoi* partake, that more originary measure that forms the basis for the order by which the city preserves itself. Hippocrates, however, as we have noted above, is still far from being able to consider the teaching that he seeks in relation to the good of the city. Nor does he yet suspect that what he is to become through teaching can only receive its goodness insofar as it proceeds ultimately from that measure by which ἔχνη and the polis are linked.
In these examples of technical knowledge, Hippocrates easily satisfies the questions of what a particular person is and what one becomes through the transmission of their services by providing one and the same answer: when one goes to a doctor in order to learn from him, one becomes a doctor, and likewise in the case of a sculptor. In the case of τέχνη, being and becoming possess a kind of sameness through the knowledge provided and accepted, where a straightforward answer requires little thought in association with a particular name; one knows, at least on the level of the sameness of titles, what one’s fate will be under the instructive care of the technician.

Socrates marks the confidence that Hippocrates sets in his knowledge of these correct names for each art by reminding them both that Hippocrates is willing to set his own money and that of his friends upon acquiring that sort of knowledge corresponding to Protagoras’ purported art. Along with emphasizing the young man’s seriousness, however, Socrates also stresses that orientation to mere names (ὁνόματα) emblematic of the level of Hippocrates’ thinking. He goes on:

Now if anyone, observing our extreme earnestness, were to ask us, ‘Tell me, Socrates and Hippocrates, having it in mind to pay money to Protagoras, what is he (τίνι δυντι)?’ What do we answer him? What is the other name (ὁνόμα) we hear spoken concerning Protagoras? Just as with respect to Pheidias we hear ‘sculptor’ and Homer ‘poet’, what do we hear with respect to Protagoras? (311d-e)

Socrates’ way of framing the question implies that one can answer the question of what a person is by having heard the title that commonly accompanies that person’s name, as if knowledge were a matter of mere correct association, the joining together of names in the right way.

Hippocrates, following the pattern of answers already given with respect to other technicians, answers that Protagoras is called a sophist, and it is in this dimension of
Protagoras’ being that Hippocrates approaches him, intending to give him money for his services. But in the second part of the question, what he will become as a result of this plan, Hippocrates experiences a reaction that he had not anticipated in his excessive desire to procure what he wishes. “To this he replied blushing; at that point, the day was coming to light (ὑπέφαινε) so that he had become clearly visible – ‘If it is akin to those cases before, then clearly, to become a sophist’” (312a). The coincidence of dawn breaking with the visible blush of Hippocrates gestures to the light cast upon Hippocrates himself, to the dawning of his own self-awareness as the first point of mediation between his desire and the nature of that which he desires. And in response to Socrates’ emphatic question whether he would not be ashamed (αἰσχύνοι) to offer (παρέχων) himself to the Greeks as a sophist, Hippocrates says, “By the god, Socrates, yes, if I must speak that which I think” (312a). Thus, the good that Hippocrates had assumed in his desire to approach Protagoras reveals itself in its implications to be other than unconditionally good, both in his own opinion and in the common opinion of his fellow citizens.

Hippocrates’ response of shame reveals – if not yet to him – that the good which he takes to be an individual concern is not purely individual, but, based as it is upon common opinion, must revert back to the opinions of others for its determination.

It is here, in his experience of shame, that Hippocrates confronts the ambivalence, the contradictory character of the common opinion according to which he determines his own goodness. The δόξα of the many, with its attendant praise, shows itself subject to the sphere of becoming, of moving between opposing states with respect to the same object. In this movement of opposition, the disclosure of goodness made by common δόξα proves to be only partial insofar as it does not reach goodness as such and as a
whole, goodness in its being, and therefore cannot serve as an adequate measure for the
goodness of action.\textsuperscript{17}

Through these initial questions, Socrates allows Hippocrates, who speaks, as he
says, his thoughts, to become cognizant of the contradiction inherent within that good
that he had formerly taken to be self-evident. Socrates’ διάσκεψις in logos
communicates to Hippocrates a broader vision of his end; he is brought from an
immediate appearance of the goodness of his end to a vision that gathers together
multiple appearances of this end into a single view. In gathering together appearances of
an end in this way, the σκέψις which consists in giving and taking of logoi aims at a view
of the whole of the end in question, of what it is in its essence beyond what it appears in
any immediate point of becoming. As a gathering-together of many appearances, the
practice of aiming at the whole of a particular end is subject to mediation, to a view that
considers each appearance in light of the others. The vision that Hippocrates now sees in
his understanding of sophistic wisdom contains now a second appearance, and the
combination of the two results in an appearance of good and bad mixed together, a vision
rent in two, and hence, a vision at odds with itself. Insofar as this vision is taken up as a
prospective object of desire, pursuing it means that one seeks both what one desires and
what one is repelled by, that one acts in opposition oneself in the very pursuit of it.

In order not to dismiss Hippocrates’ plans altogether, Socrates leaves off this
point with the consolation that his friend may not be approaching Protagoras in order to
become a professional at sophistry, but rather approaching him in the form of his own
education – which he has already done in the cases of his grammar teacher and his
musical and athletic instructors\textsuperscript{18} – as a means of developing oneself through education.
(παιδεία) as is “proper to a private and free man (ὡς τὸν ἰδιώτην καὶ τὸν ἐλεύθερον πρέπει),” as Socrates puts it (312b). By turning to the notion of self-cultivation in παιδεία, Socrates thereby changes the terms of Hippocrates’ apparent end. If Hippocrates is to learn a τέχνη, to garner a share of technical wisdom, the goodness inherent in such wisdom would now reside in a kind of freedom. Socrates does not elaborate on what this means. However, in regarding the learning in which Hippocrates is presently engaged through Socrates’ σκέψις, we can view the freedom that comes of wisdom to be tied to a freedom from a particular concealment, a concealment that resides within one’s immediate orientation to appearances in αἰσθήσεως and δόξα alike.

However, we must not take this freedom from such concealment to mean a freedom from ignorance, but instead an unconcealment of one’s ignorance, that wisdom which resides in knowing what one does not know, in knowing the limits of one’s knowledge. It is precisely in relation to such limits that one can begin to hunt for a measure of the goodness of one’s ends. It is this freedom that Hippocrates unknowingly begins to take up as his answers approach their limit.

Hippocrates’ ready acceptance of this new qualification overlooks, again, what is questionable in making this shift. For musicians, athletes and grammar teachers do not garner shame for themselves through their arts – the results of these arts are visible and sanctioned by the many, whether one learns them for technical proficiency or for self-development. Sophistry, on the other hand, as we have seen, is regarded as a shameful kind of τέχνη by the many, yet not shameful, it appears to him, when undertaken as a means of helping to shape one as an individual. How might learning one and the same τέχνη allow one to profit from a kind of wisdom that becomes shameful the moment one
begins to practice it professionally? One would have to accept sophistry as a worthy pursuit only by relegateing the goodness of the private individual and the goodness of the political to separate, unconnected spheres, by fracturing goodness as such, a notion by which Hippocrates is still untroubled. And insofar as sophistry is taken as its own subject, distinct from any of the other τεχναι, it bears the burden of offering something distinct to one’s free development as a person from what these other arts can offer.

Socrates presses on by showing the young man that the apparently safer learning of sophistry, that which avoids shame at taking this craft up as a profession, actually poses a greater danger to Hippocrates than that of facing his fellow Athenians in shame, precisely because the kind of παιδεία that Hippocrates has located as the purpose of his visit bears directly upon his own soul. “Then are you aware of what you are now intending to do, or does it escape you?” (312b). He continues:

I mean your intention of offering your soul to the treatment of a man who is, as you say, a sophist; but that which a sophist is, I would be in wonder if you knew. And if you are ignorant (ἀγνωστος) of this, you know neither to whom you are handing over your soul, nor whether this is to something good or something bad. (312b-c)

Socrates’ statement is telling. For it not only implies that the object of one’s desire reflects the condition of one’s soul, the soul’s grasp of appearances gathered together to measure its goodness, but also that pursuing a given object has, in turn, an effect on the soul’s ability to gather appearances and to judge adequately what is good or ill. As Hippocrates has been withdrawn from the judgment of the many, whose estimates of the desirability of sophistry, as we have seen, are in conflict with each other, the burden of responsibility is now more clearly placed upon Hippocrates himself, upon what he knows in distinction to those conceptions that he has adopted from others. For he
cannot borrow the *logoi* of others in order to determine the goodness of this end. Rather, he must instead search within himself to produce a *logos* that unconditionally captures the goodness of sophistry for his own benefit.

“I believe, he said, that I know. I say, as the name says, that he is the one knowing of wise things (*tōn sophōn epistēmōn*)” (312c). Continuing to concentrate upon names, attempting to compel the name to shed light upon itself, Hippocrates does not succeed in making clearer the meaning of sophistry. In effect, given the indeterminacy of the name “sophist,” Hippocrates’ answer is nothing more than a tautology, a repetition: the wise man is wise in wisdom.

Socrates addresses the insufficiency of Hippocrates’ answer through a further set of examples wherein each specific art can be identified as a specific region of wisdom. Each art, in its distinct function, operates within a given set of limits, limits derived from the object of knowledge characteristic of this craft or that. Thus, from what Hippocrates has answered, the sophist is as yet undistinguished from any of the other artisans; to define the sophist as one who is knowing of wise matters is to leave the particular object of knowledge appropriate to sophistry indeterminate, without limits, and on this basis, the sculptor, doctor, painter or carpenter could as well be deserving of the title “sophist.” Conversely, the sophist could, by exploiting this indeterminacy, take on the appearance of wisdom in any of the arts, if his wisdom is left unqualified and seen simply as wisdom as such.¹⁹

Socrates is compelled to ask Hippocrates about the specific kind of knowledge that composes the bounds of sophistry. “What kind of production (*ēργασία*) is [the sophist] knowing in?” (312d). Socrates’ clarifying question here makes reference not
only to the productive capacity involved in \( \tau \epsilon \chi \nu \eta \), but also to the fact that there is a necessary link between the being of the technician, marked by his or her particular knowledge, and what is brought into being on the basis of such knowledge. If sophistry is a \( \tau \epsilon \chi \nu \eta \), one should be able to see what sophistry brings into being, and what this bringing-into-being of a specific thing accomplishes both for the soul and for the city.

Hippocrates, mindful of what had first distinguished Protagoras for him through the opinion of the many, namely as the wisest in speaking, attempts to revise his answer in accordance with this opinion. “What are we to say he is, Socrates – one knowing how to make one a formidable (\( \delta \epsilon \iota \nu \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \)) speaker?” (312d). Hippocrates’ oversight with respect to the matter of that proper object of a given art, that which puts one’s specific knowledge into a set of limits and directs one’s activity to a specific region of human life, is here recapitulated, yet in such a way that the link between \( \tau \epsilon \chi \nu \eta \) and \( \logos \) is made explicit. That is, the distinction of making one a “formidable speaker” is in fact no distinction at all among the arts; he or she who practices a craft, who puts his or her knowledge into practice, is also one who must thereby be able to give an account of the principles according to which a given craft is implemented, and thereby speak authoritatively on that particular subject. Where knowing wise matters fails to separate the sophist from the other technicians, making one a formidable speaker merely restates the indeterminacy of Hippocrates’ idea of sophistry, since any technician can make another an authority on his craft through the transmission of knowledge in \( \logos \).

Thus, Socrates answers, Hippocrates’ guess is not untrue, but it rather calls for further delimitation if such truth is not to remain obscure; it calls for the question of that object of knowledge over which the sophist claims mastery. Exhausted, Hippocrates
states: “By the god, I do not have anything to say to you” (312e). Upon reaching the
limit of his ability to answer, the limit-point of his own logos where no identifiable
meaning for sophistry can be given, Hippocrates has reached the limit of his
understanding. Socrates has successfully reduced his young friend to the state of aporia,
to the point at which the semblance of knowing has receded in the face of the certainty of
not knowing, where the need to question finally brings itself to light.

It is not, however, merely that Socrates has at this point brought Hippocrates to an
awareness of his own ignorance. He has also unmasked the seemingly noble desire for
knowledge in general – being ‘made wise’, as Hippocrates has put it – as merely an
apparent motive, a motive connected with the obscurity of sophistry’s proper object. For
in order to desire knowledge, one must operate with the knowledge that one does not
know, and that one does not know something in particular. It is in the emergence of the
question about this or that matter that a desire to know manifests itself and at the same
time gives a sense of orientation to questioning, a delimitation of possibilities for a
particular answer, and therefore, a particular region of knowledge. As Hippocrates
pursues knowledge without any questions of his own, and in fact in ignorance of the very
region of knowledge corresponding to Protagoras’ teachings, his desire reveals itself
thereby to be directed not at wisdom, but rather elsewhere. Hippocrates has already
hinted at this other end by reminding Socrates of how everyone praises Protagoras for his
wisdom in speaking; that Hippocrates is not even curious about the subject of the
sophist’s speech testifies to his lack of care for any particular kind of knowledge, and
rather to his truer desire to win the name “wise” for himself. Thus, Hippocrates’
shortsighted adherence to names, or more specifically, titles, reveals more fully his tacit
aim. By the fact that Hippocrates is genuinely surprised when he finds that he does not
know what he thought he knew in virtue to his adherence to names, we may be justified
in thinking that his unexpressed aim of being called wise over gaining wisdom is an end
of which not even he is reflectively cognizant.

Hippocrates therefore exhibits a particular mode of comportment to speech and
action that is lacking in foresight – not insofar as Hippocrates does not anticipate the
fruits of his striving, but rather insofar as he is confused about the real end, the \(\tau\varepsilon\lambda\omicron\sigma\),
upon which he shall base his actions: he represents this desire in terms of the acquisition
of knowledge as his highest end, yet he in fact appears much more seduced by the
pleasure of being highly regarded in the city for wisdom, by appearing wise to his fellow
citizenry. Being led by the \(\delta\omicron\zeta\alpha\) of the many, Hippocrates seeks ultimately a share of
this \(\delta\omicron\zeta\alpha\) in the form of reputation. Even though he may appear to be motivated by ends
much more noble than that of Socrates’ friend in the prologue, we find in Hippocrates’
answers more reason to believe that the ends of these two characters – insofar as they
have to do with experiences of pleasure, whether through erotic and beautiful sights or
through the enjoyment of praise – are shared. The difference here is that while the
unnamed friend is aware of what he desires, Hippocrates is not; he remains unaware,
even in the face of his inability to answer. In addition to making Hippocrates aware of
his ignorance about sophistry, Socrates also implies that his young friend is likewise
ignorant of those aims already taking hold of him; that is, he is ignorant of the real source
of those appearances that direct his desire, and in this respect ignorant of himself.
III. Sophistry and Care for the Soul

The implications for Hippocrates’ fate in his design of seeking out Protagoras remain to be determined. Socrates undertakes this determination by rescripting the very distinction that remains confused to Hippocrates’ thinking in light of his passion. Since Hippocrates is unable to discern the difference between his ultimate intentions (gaining pleasure through high repute) and the intentions that he believes to be of highest priority for himself (procuring some esoteric art of wisdom), Socrates must present him with an analogy that makes those terms about which Hippocrates is confused more evident in their difference. This analogy refers to the difference in priority of those components that make us what we are, the relative values of the human body and soul. “What, then? Do you know into what sort of danger (κίνδυνον) you are setting your soul?” (313a).

This first question demands to be asked of one who is in fact as youthful and capricious as Hippocrates is, precisely because it is characteristic of youth and naïve thinking to attend more closely to that which appears to us most obviously and immediately rather than what does not show itself in this way. The entire character of immediacy exhibited by Hippocrates from the first is a testament to this fact. As we have seen, even Hippocrates’ primary relation to logos as he is presented here has to do with the naïve and immediate trust in names. It is as well the notion of trust, or a turning-oneself-towards (ἐπιτρέπειν) a thing or person that Socrates invokes in stressing the implications of Hippocrates’ immediate plan, a turning that at the same time necessitates a certain risk (διακίνδυνον), in the act, of becoming better or worse. The analogy proceeds thus: if Hippocrates were to entrust his body to a person, with this risk, he
would likely look on all sides (περισκοπέω) whether to carry out this turn, not only by himself, but with the counsel (συμβουλία) of his friends and relations, viewing (σκόπουμενος) this matter over a number of days. On the other hand, as Socrates emphasizes,

> concerning your soul, which you value much more than your body, and upon which all of your ill or good faring depends – accordingly as it becomes better or worse – you consult (ἐπεκοινώσω) neither with your father, nor your brother, nor us, your friends concerning whether you should turn (ἐπιτρεπτέω) your soul towards this newly-arrived stranger. (313a-b)

Part instruction, part admonishment, Socrates’ words here stress that the turning of Hippocrates’ soul is at issue, a turning that necessarily affects the very goodness or ill of the soul itself. As well, Socrates is unequivocal about the priority that his soul is to take over his body in the fate of Hippocrates as a person; where the benefit or harm in regard to his body, effects that can be plainly ascertained through αἴσθησις – pleasure, health, pain, or illness – would demand that he consult with others prior to action on behalf of his body, the less clear effects on his soul in a parallel case do not even receive from him similar consideration. The implication here is not simply that Hippocrates is foolish, but also that the problem of the care for one’s soul is more difficult insofar as the soul’s condition cannot be gauged with the same apparent obviousness as that of the body. Such care proper to the human being demands a kind of access to the soul that must go beyond what is obvious and plainly manifest; it demands another kind of σκέψις, which, as Socrates suggests, must begin with the aid of those who care for us most: our friends and relations. This holds, we should note, not only for the young and inexperienced; our need of others in the task of determining goodness is precisely what
gives rise to and sustains philosophical dialogue. As Socrates presents this notion to Hippocrates in his analogy, taking counsel with others and the power of a communal form of vision based in a care for the matter at hand are indispensable elements of determining goodness and its opposite, both with respect to the body (where one does not have the knowledge possessed by a doctor or trainer) and the soul.

The turning of one’s soul where no unquestionable expert is available, as Socrates suggests, must begin, then, with a trusting, a turn toward those sources of care – those relations of φιλία – who have a stake in one’s own goodness. The individual’s initiative in seeking out his own course of self-betterment is always already characterized by a certain risk necessary to the very concept of trust. Trusting implies a lack of complete and perfect knowledge, and therefore the danger of mistaking false appearances for true ones. However, one can begin, as Socrates’ reference to friends and family makes clear, more or less carefully.

The role that intimate associations possess here with respect to the soul is that they have to do, insofar as they are relations of φιλία, not with whatever specialized knowledge or station to which Hippocrates aspires, with whatever specific region of human being over which he is to claim authority through τέχνη, but with Hippocrates as a whole person. Socrates indicates this character of wholeness regarding the human above by locating the soul as that upon which all of one’s good or ill faring depends. The soul functions, therefore, as the unifying center for the totality of one’s actions, and accordingly, is that point with reference to which all of one’s pursuits are to be determined.²¹ Caring for the soul entails measuring one’s activities with respect to the goodness of the soul, deriving meaning for what is said and done from a conception of
the soul’s benefit. In this sense, the initial turn of his soul that is a movement carried out
in trust is first a turn towards the care for goodness in others, and as such, takes initial
priority over competing claims to technical expertise. Proper counsel, then, to the extent
that it belongs to self-care, is presented here as first guided by another’s care for the good
of the whole of oneself, and thus guided by a spirit of friendship. As we will go on to
observe, it is also the notion of the communal investigation, περίσκεψις, which
accompanies proper counsel, that is at issue in the heart of the exchange between the
sophist and the philosopher.

Socrates, as a member of the community of care in which Hippocrates is
enmeshed, takes a first step toward providing that communal vision with reference to
which Hippocrates is to decide his course of action. Accordingly, Socrates begins his
counsel for the young man by way of an alternative appearance of the sophist. “Then can
it be, Hippocrates, that the sophist is some merchant or dealer of provisions on which a
soul is nourished (τρέφεται)? Such is what he appears (φαίνεται) to me” (313c). The
image cast through this vision brought forth out of Socrates’ care for Hippocrates has to
do not only with the nature of the sophist, but also serves to mark a clearer parallel
between the soul and the body by painting the soul in bodily terms: the soul is conceived
as a kind of organism that, like the body, has need of nourishment, and by implication,
moves between the conditions of health and illness at any given time, becoming better or
worse in its integrity and function. In particular, the soul is to be seen as being in motion,
in a state of transformation that depends upon the nature of that to which it is exposed.

In answer to Hippocrates’ question, Socrates states that the nourishment of the
soul comes in the form of things learned (μαθήματα). Thus, the learning by which a
soul is moved to become better or worse is foremost a movement in *logos*, by which what is said or perceived sheds light upon the nature of things. The Greek word for nourishment, *trέφειν*, carries with it not only the significance of growth and fostering, but as well the sense of congealing, of integrating the parts or aspects of a thing into a firm, proportionate whole. If we bear this dimension of *trέφειν* in mind, we can understand the nourishment of the soul in optimal terms as that which allows integration on the part of the soul, protection against the soul’s dissolution and self-opposition. On the other hand, the growth or increase implied by the term as well suggests gaining breadth or depth with respect to one’s understanding in the practice of learning, an expansiveness that is linked with the expansiveness of Socrates’ own vision, whereby differing appearances may be gathered together into their proper unity.

Socrates continues:

> And we must not, my friend, be deceived by the sophist who praises his wares, as the merchant and the dealer do in the case of our bodily food. For among these provisions you know in which such men deal, not only are they themselves ignorant of what is good or bad for the body, since in selling they praise them all, but those who purchase are so too, unless one happens to be a trainer or a doctor. And similarly, those who take their *μυθήματα* through our cities, selling them to anyone who desires them, praise all that they sell, and there may be some of those, o best of men, who are ignorant of which of their wares is good or bad for the soul; and in such cases, the people who purchase from them are so too unless one happens to have a doctor’s knowledge with regard to the soul. (313d-e)

In this first determination of sophistry as it appears to Socrates, the sophist possesses no *téχνη* whatsoever, but is only a merchant who finds buyers for those *μυθήματα* that fall into his hands. As a merchant, then, the sophist – constrained by the need to make his own living – neither creates his own *logoi* nor is he likely to possess the knowledge of their effects on a given patron. He recommends all of his items to those...
desiring (ἐπιθυμοῦντι) them, without regard for the condition of the soul of his buyers, whether a given *logoi* is appropriate to a particular individual, or whether any of them are good in general. In praising his wares, the sophist carries out the task of making each appear to be beneficial and worthy of desire, and the implication here is that casting deceptive appearances is the very crux of his activity.\(^\text{25}\) Such appearance of goodness comes forth in large part from and within his *logoi* themselves, and maintains the appearance of wisdom crafted by the sophist in order to conceal the ignorance of the one proclaiming them in debate and discussion. This talent on the sophist’s part to conceal his own ignorance from the buyer must, if it is to be successful, be parasitic upon the ignorance of the buyer himself. It is this double-ignorance that makes possible the appearance of the sophist’s wisdom, a double-ignorance premised upon the concealment of the truth of those things to which his *logoi* refer.

Furthermore, the creation of this appearance through presentation and praise of his wares betrays a lack of care on the sophist’s part, not only for the souls of his pupils, but also for an understanding of the *logoi* themselves. It is not, of course, that neither the sophist nor the patron/pupil can understand in a rudimentary fashion what is said in these μαθήματα, but rather that what is passed over in delivering them is an understanding of the significance that each has for living well or badly. In short, this lack of care is either an incapacity or a refusal to recognize the good of the soul as the measure for the goodness and appropriateness, in his own case as well as on the part of others, of the μαθήματα at issue. Thus, the ignorance that the sophist embodies, in Socrates’ account, is precisely a turning away from the soul in its function as a measure for the content of *logos*, a blindness with respect to what sustains and nurtures a good condition of the soul.
For only one who has attempted to test the soundness of a given *logos* within the context of his soul’s benefit as the unifying center of all of his practices can claim a kind of knowledge with respect to the *μαθήματα* in question.

Socrates notes that the potential buyer of learnings from the sophist can only be spared the danger of being worsened by them if he already possesses – as a trainer or doctor would when choosing among different victuals – a knowledge of health that pertains to the soul. The danger of buying from the sophist is greater than that of the analogous case of the merchant-grocer, not only because the former puts at risk one’s highest valued soul, but also because of the more immediate relation between buyer and desired commodity in the peddling of *logoi*. Whereas one can store a purchased fruit or potion in a separate vessel while seeking out the counsel of those more knowledgeable in respect of such items prior to consuming them, Socrates insists, “you can not carry off *μαθήματα* in a separate vessel; when you have given your money you must necessarily take the *μάθημα* into your soul itself in the act of learning it, and go away as one either harmed or benefited” (314b).

Socrates’ famous statement calls for closer inspection. For the implication here is that the act of understanding a lesson, the act of learning, is accompanied by a belief in the truth of what is said. But further, understanding and belief of a particular *logos* entails as well that one lets oneself be guided by it in the course of one’s life, especially when, as Protagoras himself will testify, what is said in the sophist’s teaching bears upon making one a better citizen. For one would be hard-pressed to maintain that the mere understanding of false *logoi*, with a corresponding understanding that they are false, constitutes a particular danger to one’s soul, since one could justifiably argue that
knowledge of false doctrines and teachings can be useful for understanding the integrity of true ones. Yet it is also important to observe that Socrates is here speaking with a young man who is already convinced of Protagoras’ wisdom, and who furthermore is not predisposed to question the appearance of wisdom, either through the reports of others about Protagoras or, as is likely, what Protagoras will have to teach him directly. Fueled as he is by his own aspirations, which, as we have observed, have little to do with an informed relation to wisdom itself, Hippocrates has already primed himself to follow Protagoras dogmatically, without question.

The double-ignorance in the commerce of sophistic *logoi* that constitutes the appearance of wisdom translates, in Hippocrates’ case, into a double-risk where his soul is the only vessel for such teachings. It is a risk that threatens the taking as well as the giving of *logoi*, especially where one is used to operating on the level of the appearance of sense through contenting oneself with impressive words and names. There is, first, the risk of putting into practice received *μάθήματα* whose falsity and harm for the soul may at first remain concealed from the individual operating with them. Here the student understands only superficially what is said, without questioning and without going further than the immediate appearance of meaning in the sophist’s *logos* and attempting to live in accordance with this superficial comprehension.

The other side of this risk is that of learning to comport oneself to *logoi* as the sophist, as Socrates sees him, does, a risk of learning to utilize speech without a full knowledge of what is said as if one possessed such knowledge, of speaking without undertaking a *σκέψις* of the meaning of that speech within the context of the unity of one’s life. In short, it is the tendency to repeat and transmit learned *logoi* as authoritative
in themselves without undertaking the soul’s movement of understanding along with them. This second risk amounts to a withdrawal of all but one’s most immediate understanding by keeping questions, most importantly questions of goodness and truth pertaining to what is said, at bay and allowing the appearance of sense and understanding to hold sway in their stead. Here, the function of *logos* in its political dimension is reduced to concealment and the manipulation of others, to the furthering of ignorance in others, for the sake of one’s own perceived good. We should recall that Hippocrates’ ignorance about his desire to see Protagoras revolves around a confusion between pleasure and wisdom, and it is also the case that *logoi* given by the sophist will also appear wise to many where this confusion is maintained on the part of his listeners. What results is the opinion – shared, it seems, not only by Hippocrates, but by other aspiring sophists such as Meno, Euthydemus, Dionysodorus, and others – that human wisdom corresponds to the possession of clever or impressive *logoi*, the accumulation of a stock of speeches with which to answer forthwith any question or refute any challenge posed by a dialogical adversary.  

On this conception, learning is limited to mere memorization of *logoi*, to imitation and empty repetition.

But what of that physician’s art of the soul of which Socrates speaks, the art that would resist these dangers? What might such an art entail, and would it be a *τέχνη* in the sense of the arts thus far considered? Socrates does not explicitly elaborate on this question. His offhand comment comes in the context of an analogy of health and nurturing between soul and body without, however, saying that such an art of the soul does in fact exist. Thus, we should be cautious not to assign a strict identity of structure between *τέχνη* as such and whatever is implied by the invocation of a physician of the
soul. If we consider, however, that the point of Socrates’ analogy is that, like the consultation of the doctor in view of a strange food’s effects on the body, the physician of the soul would provide a resistance to immediate consumption and an investigation of the lessons in question for the sake of the soul’s well-being and continued operation, we can see that such a physician would be one who can submit the sophist’s *logoi* to scrutiny and critique, who interrupts the immediate passage and translation of *μαθήματα* into belief in the soul of the pupil.

An activity fitting the preliminary demands of this art is, in fact, already at play in the discussion between Socrates and Hippocrates. It is, as we have seen, Socrates’ questions that serve to interrupt the immediate pursuit of Hippocrates’ desired end, questions that arise from the *διάσκεψις*, the looking and searching through *logos*, that Socrates enacts. In the very act of informing Hippocrates about the immediate consumption and effects of the sophist’s *logoi*, Socrates allows Hippocrates the distance from his own impulse to accept what the sophist has to sell. Bearing in mind his own ignorance with respect to what it is upon which the sophist claims wisdom, and as well with an awareness of the risks inherent in such a relationship, Hippocrates has open to him the possibilities of resistance and questioning in the face of what he had hitherto desired without question.

It is not merely that this kind of doctor provides a resistance to sickness in the soul through inspection of what may be consumed, as one would the body, but Socrates mentions in this analogy a more positive role taken by the doctor in giving counsel. The doctor, according to his knowledge of the relation between the health of the body and what it digests, can say not only what nourishment is beneficial for the body in this
respect, but also determines the conditions in which this nourishment is to be properly taken – how much of it should be taken in and how often. Thus, proper consumption of what the doctor deems good is determined by a notion of proportion and measure. If there is to be a physician of the soul, it seems that an analogous sense of proper measure must accompany this knowledge. That is, insofar as nourishment for the soul takes place in *logos*, the physician of the soul would need not only to measure the goodness of what is said, but also measure those conditions under which speaking takes place – measuring the timeliness of speaking, whom is addressed, the mode of speaking, and as well the proper length of nourishing *logoi*. We shall revisit these themes in the course of Socrates’ dialogue with Protagoras.

The attempts that Socrates makes to inspire a soul – that of Protagoras soon to come – to put itself in question, and therefore the attempts that most closely approximate a physician’s therapy of the soul, are carried out under the name of *dialectic*. In its application to Hippocrates, we can see that dialectic is a particular mode of giving and taking of *logoi* that seeks through these *logoi* a particular *sképsi* which, in its activity of bringing appearances together, serves to cast light not only upon the matter discussed, but as well upon the souls of those who submit their *logoi* to questioning therein. As much a favor for Hippocrates, Socratic dialectic will also turn out to be a favor offered to the sophist, one that is ultimately denied. If it is the soul of Hippocrates that is ultimately at stake in the encounter between Socrates and Protagoras, both this early dialectical interchange with Hippocrates as well as the lengthy one with the sophist that follows are to be seen, in the end, as means toward the benefit of the young man’s soul.
Given all that Socrates has thus far said about the dangers of sophistry, he surprisingly suggests that as a way of mitigating the risk of harming Hippocrates’ soul, they consult with the other famous sophists present at Callias’ home, in particular Prodicus and Hippias. For if Protagoras, as a sophist, may himself be ignorant or uncaring about the goodness of his *logoi* for his pupils, it appears hardly safer to consult other sophists – strangers to the city and as distant from the care of Hippocrates’ friends and family as Protagoras – upon what has been said when the latter constitute no less a potential danger than the first. Each of the three sophists named above presents himself as a sophist, and therefore each claims the authority of a kind of wisdom. Yet Socrates assigns to none of these a *prima facie* authority on the matter of the soul’s goodness, and he admits, furthermore, that he is too young to answer such a matter. Thus, the question of where to seek a standard against which any of the three sophists can be measured, what ground can be revealed upon which to make such a determination, remains an open question. Socrates’ only suggestion for dealing with this absence of authority in sophistry is, for the present, simply to speak to them. For, one might suggest, along with Socrates, what more can one do than this?

A hint for what strategy is to be devised for this problem follows immediately from Socrates’ remarks, when, once he and Hippocrates have made their way to Callias’ door, the two of them put off their entrance in order to continue the dialogue that they began along the way. We are not privy to the content of their discussion; Socrates does not mention it. What he does relate is that they deferred their entrance in order not to leave their discussion unfinished (ἐτέλεσαν) (314c). However, given that they take part in a dialogue, a give and take of question and answer that in all likelihood bears upon what
they are about to undertake, we must ask how it is that such a dialogue might actually be brought to a finish without interruption so that it may reach its end, its τέλος. Moreover, what is the proper τέλος of a dialogue? Socrates states that their deferral, and therefore their discussion, ended once he and Hippocrates had reached an agreement with each other (συνωμολογήσαμεν ἀλλήλοις). The “saying the same together,” as the Greek word συνωμόλεγειν denotes, reflects a shared understanding, and hence, a shared σκέψις on the part of the participants. Agreement, then, refers to a seeing together in logos, that point at which testing and measuring gathers together the appearances of truth to each participant to produce a common appearance in what is said. Hence, the favor that dialectic comprises consists in forging a common vision whereby what appears receives a free and mutual granting of validity by both participants. Such mutual granting, in turn, arises out of submission to what, and the way in which, logos gathers different appearances together into a whole such that they can be seen together in a common vision.

To leave the notion of agreement determined as the end of dialogue is, however, only to speak partially of its role in philosophical discussion. Agreement serves, in addition, as the beginning of dialogue. A discussion can only properly begin once two interlocutors have agreed to exchange logos for the sake of the truth of a particular matter. There must be a mutual agreement to listen and to speak in turn about a common issue in such a way that the end agreed upon is the attainment of a shared vision in logos capable of revealing what has been concealed in that issue from both participants. This prior agreement entails, on the part of each, setting the truth of the matter as the highest priority of their dialogue, with a corresponding revelation of the way in which the matter
at issue appears to each. Hippocrates, though lacking in knowledge of what sophistry entails and thereby unable to speak the truth about it, nonetheless answers truly to the extent that he does not conceal what he thinks, that he speaks in accordance with what appears to him to be true.31 Such truthfulness in speech is a necessary prerequisite to uncovering the truth of the matter at issue in dialogue, a truthfulness that Socrates will take great pains to secure in his discussion with the sophist. Seen thus, the initial agreement whereby dialogue is begun is, as far as each interlocutor stands to gain a greater understanding of the subject of discussion, a mutual granting of favors, a mutual commitment to the betterment of each through a commitment to the truth of their shared logos. It is perhaps, we might say, the paramount expression of friendship.

Even though we do not know what, exactly, Hippocrates and Socrates agree upon, this aspect of their exchange of logoi implies that the young man is receptive to this dialectical way of investigating, and that despite his initial misguided tendencies, he exemplifies a potential for philosophical comportment should his path of education permit it.32 There is hope, therefore, that he may succeed with Socrates’ aid in caring properly for his soul.

By focusing closely upon Socrates’ exchange with Hippocrates, we have been able to isolate several aspects of logos in its capacity for revealing as well as concealing. We have seen, first, how logos in the form of δόξα presents itself with the character of obviousness and completeness, and, in doing so, engenders a corresponding appearance of understanding and meaning for those, like Hippocrates, who adopt it immediately without question. Socrates unmasks Hippocrates’ doxastic comportment to logos as an
ignorance that conceals itself from itself, conceals not only his ignorance of the nature of his end behind empty names, but as well conceals from him his own true motives. As well, we have seen that it is this seductive effect of common opinion that puts Hippocrates in danger with regard to his plan to learn from Protagoras. For if Socrates’ notion of sophistry as mercantilism of *logoi* is accurate, then the naïve attunement to obviousness by which δόξα propagates itself has its culmination in the model of the sophistic scholar whose fruits of learning are little more than memorized *logoi*; the double-ignorance by which the mere appearance of understanding and sense is made possible remains intact – memorization threatens to become the criterion of learning, and repetition of what carries for the speaker only the appearance of sense becomes the mark of wisdom.

On the other hand, we find in Socrates’ *logoi* resources that resist the influence and seductiveness of common opinion by mediating the immediately compelling character of obviousness conveyed by δόξα. Opening up Hippocrates’ δόξα through the process of questioning, putting Hippocrates’ own knowing into relation with the common opinion that he has adopted, Socrates undertakes that vision whereby appearances in *logos* can begin to be mediated. In the case of Hippocrates’ opinion of the desirability, the goodness of sophistry, such mediation comes in the form of measurement, of measuring the appearance of wholeness and self-evidence in regard to the goodness of sophistry against the way in which sophistry appears in the light of further questioning. By bringing together sophistry’s conflicting appearances for Hippocrates in *logos*, Socrates allows him a *σκέψις* by which to measure the incompleteness and instability of his end. At the same time, the *σκέψις* with reference to what the sophist knows reveals
that making the truth of things manifest in *logos* is not simply a matter of bringing appearances together, but of distinguishing and delimiting appearances whereby the matter in question can be properly identified. It is as much in the bringing together of appearances of one and the same thing as it is in the delimitation of one thing from another that the measure of each is to be gained. Such observations from the dialogue with Hippocrates await further development, and are presented here as an incitement to question their development as the dialogue proceeds.

Socrates has as well implicitly raised the question, by way of invoking ἔργον as the model of knowledge, of what the relation between *logos* and ἔργον in the process of learning might be. In particular, what might their relation be with respect to παιδεία, to that learning upon which one’s freedom and the goodness of one’s soul rests? These questions, too, cannot be dealt with apart from a consideration of measure, and we will attend closely to them as Socrates seeks a measure according to which the ἔργον of education proposed by Protagoras, in its content as well as its method, can be evaluated.
Notes

1 Jacob Klein has raised this point in his Commentary on Plato’s Meno: “A dialogue … presupposes people listening to the conversation not as casual and indifferent spectators but as silent participants … [u]sually it is not important to know how many people are listening and who they are. (In some cases it may well be.) But it is of prime importance to realize that we, the readers, belong to them in the sense of silently active participants.” (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1965), p. 6.

2 That Socrates is portrayed here by his acquaintance as a figure of *eros* should lead us to expect that the *Protagoras* will concern itself substantially with this issue in the philosopher’s activity as is the case in so many other dialogues, most particularly the *Symposium*. Yet the term ‘eros’ is hardly mentioned in the dialogue. The near-absence of explicit reference to *eros* is not to be taken, however, as an indication that *eros* has somehow been ignored in Socrates’ account. Rather, its lack of explicit appearance, signified first by the presence of the eunuch at Callias’ door, *eros* will continue to inform the issues operative at the heart of the dialogue. Most importantly, its absence will prove decisive in distinguishing the practice of Protagoras from that of Socrates, the sophist from the philosopher. This early identification of Socrates as a misguided eroticist, insufficiently attentive to those appearances in the sphere of becoming that dictate customary erotic activity, is itself to be transformed over the course of the dialogue through a consideration of appearance as such.

3 We find a critique of this particular convention among aristocrats of chasing young men who have not yet reached the age of facial hair in the *Symposium*, where Pausanias states that the onset of a beard in a youth actually marks the appropriate age in which *eros* is to be kindled, precisely because this is the time in which boys “begin to acquire mind (*νοῦν*)” (181d). The association between a beard coming in and mindfulness here casts Socrates’ current erotic relationship with Alcibiades in a wholly other light than his unnamed friend suspects.

4 Book 24, line 348.

5 Book 10, line 279.

6 Walter Burkert notes that “the interpreter, *hermeneus*, owes his name to the god. The allegorical equation of Hermes with speech *touι court, logos*, is reflected in our word *hermeneutics*.” Greek Religion. trans. J. Raffan. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 158.

7 Cf. the prologue to the *Sophist*, wherein Socrates playfully remarks that the stranger whom Theodorus has brought with him is perhaps not a stranger at all, but some sort of god of *elenchus* who has come to judge them (216a-b). In that dialogue, the theme of appearances – in particular the appearances of the sophist and the philosopher – plays as central a role as it does in the *Protagoras*.

8 This is an assumption made all too quickly, it seems to me, by Patrick Coby, who reads in the repeated use of *φαίνεσθαι* in this passage a reference to the insubstantiality of reputations that both Socrates and Protagoras have earned. While I do not disagree with Coby’s point about the linkage between appearance and *δόξα* here, it isn’t clear to me that he keeps hold of the double-sense of appearance at the outset, and he is led to conclude that it lends “to this brief exchange of pleasing fancies a sense of the insubstantial and the unreal.” Socrates and the Sophistic Enlightenment: A Commentary on Plato’s Protagoras. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1987), p. 20-21. What is said in this exchange is, in my thinking, to be grasped precisely as substantial and of the highest consequence if we are to go on to read carefully.
Socrates expressly states this just following his account of the second sailing, adding: “I do not grant in the least that he who looks at beings in *logoi* is looking at them in likenesses (*eikó̊sia*) more than the one who looks at them in deeds” (100a). What I take Socrates to mean by this admittedly ambiguous statement is that examining beings through *logos* – though *logos* must proceed through images, through appearances – is in no way inferior to examining beings through the appearances that are presented to our senses. Both involve likeness, and there is no guarantee that our perceptions can bring us any closer to the truth of things than *logos* can.


This is an observation made both by Coby (1987, 20), who states that “his audience is but a representative slice of Athenian citizenry,” and by Larry Goldberg in *A Commentary on Plato’s Protagoras.* (New York: Peter Lang, 1983), p. 339: “In short, this audience nicely typifies the *demos.*” However, neither author alludes to the significance of the distinction, as I do here, between the many and the κάλοι κάγαθοι.

One notable exception is the *Apology*, wherein Socrates is called to face the many and to confront directly their opinions which were instrumental in ultimately bringing Socrates to his death. It is important, however, to distinguish in Socrates’ various statements here and elsewhere, the many from the force that the many, acting together, wields. In fact, the form of Socratic dialogue, aimed as it is at one or two individuals, counteracts the mass mentality inherent in the όι πόλιοι by taking individuals out of their trust and security in popular, unquestioned thought. When his friend Crito insists upon taking common opinion into account, since it is capable of causing the greatest of evils, Socrates replies, “I only wish, Crito, that the many could accomplish the greatest evils, that they might be able to accomplish the greatest goods. Then all would be well. But now they can do neither of the two; for they are not able to make a man wise or foolish, but they do whatever occurs to them” (*Crito* 44d).

David Roochnik sees in Hippocrates’ explanation of the previous evening a veiled reference to Hippocrates’ actual activities. Roochnik makes the interesting, if tenuous, case that the slave’s name, Satyrus, as well as the name of the *deme* in which Hippocrates spent his time looking for Satyrus, both bear a relation to the activities of wine-drinking: the name “Oenoe” is a derivative of οἴνος, wine, and Satyrus is a reference to the attendant of Dionysus, the god of wine. Thus, Roochnik concludes, Hippocrates was spending his evening not looking for a runaway slave, but rather on an alcoholic binge, and therefore reveals himself to be more of a hedonist than he explicitly lets on. While I have reservations about this interpretation, it nonetheless dovetails with further indications, as I will go on to show, that Hippocrates is indeed more interested in the fruits of pleasure than he is in the wisdom that he claims to seek. See Roochnik’s *Of Art and Wisdom: Plato’s Understanding of Techne.* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), pp. 229-230.

Yet redirecting a desire as strong as that of Hippocrates would be undertaken, it seems, not without considerable effort. We should be moved to recall Socrates’ words to Crito while in jail not long before his death. Where Crito is moved by the pressures of common opinion and reputation to arrange an escape for Socrates, the latter states, “My dear Crito, your desire (προθυμία) is worth a great deal, if it should prove to be rightly directed; but otherwise, the greater it is, the harder it is to bear.” Setting aside Crito’s concerns about how his actions may seem to the many, Socrates turns his friend to a consideration of the goodness or evil of their alternatives taken in themselves. In this connection, it is to be observed that the *eros* of Hippocrates, or more properly, the direction of his *eros*, is at stake throughout the course of the dialogue.
I am here emphasizing the linguistic aspect of τέχνη in line with Socrates’ aim of bringing Hippocrates to an awareness of the logoi that inform his actions. In doing so, I do not wish to reduce τέχνη wholly to logos by overlooking the performative dimension of technical knowledge, those aspects of experience and skill, i.e., a “knowing-how” that is as well essential to such knowledge. Aristotle, while admitting that the man who only has knowledge of general principles without experience will often fail in his endeavors more frequently than the man of mere experience, nonetheless concedes that it is the knowledge of the requisite causes (αἰτίας) that distinguishes experience from τέχνη, and that the ability to teach these causes to others is the mark of the true technician (Metaphysics I, 981a-b).

C.f. the Republic, where Socrates lectures Glaucan for readily accepting logoi that only seem to be sufficient to their task of education in the polis: “My friend, a measure in such things, which in any way falls short of that which is, is no measure at all. For nothing incomplete is the measure of anything” (504c).

Protagoras will include these arts as part of civic education, as crucial for shaping one’s soul, and for giving one’s life as a whole a kind of harmony (326b).

We should recall in this connection the position of Gorgias in the Gorgias with respect to the capacities that his sophistry would bring to its student, namely that it “comprises in itself practically all powers at once” (456a). The indeterminacy of rhetoric, the sophist’s art, thereby allows the sophist, in his skill at persuasion, to appear to the many as having knowledge in any of the arts, and thus to appear to them as a doctor, carpenter, painter, and so on, through his power in speaking. In this case, the indeterminacy of the object of sophistic knowledge makes possible the sophist’s appearance as all-knowing, and therefore wise without qualification. We can see at this early point in the Protagoras Socrates already resistant to letting Hippocrates make such an assumption about sophistry on the basis of its appearance to the many.

In his analysis of Platonic dialectic, Hans-Georg Gadamer argues forcefully for the essential connection between questioning and the desire to know, between knowledge and the possibility of questioning. “Um fragen zu können, muss man wissen wollen, d.h. aber: wissen, dass man nicht weiss” (345) and further: “Wissen ist dialektisch von Grund aus. Wissen kann nur haben, wer Fragen hat …” (347), Wahrheit und Methode (Tübingen: Siebeck, 1960).

A similar conclusion about the soul is reached, if tentatively, in the Meno (88e-89a): “Then we can say this about everything: that all other human things depend upon the soul, and those things of the soul itself depend on intelligence (φρόνησιν), if they are to be good …”

Gregory Vlastos observes, in his introduction to the Benjamin Jowett translation of the Protagoras (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956) that Socrates has already begun to show himself as a member of Hippocrates’ community of care by acting “like a father” to him in pointing out the risk of entrusting his soul to a sophist in ignorance of what a sophist is (xxv).

The Greek word μάθημα is translated by W.R.M. Lamb as “doctrine” (Plato II: Laches, Protagoras, Meno, Euthydemus. [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924]). My translation, keeping to the broader sense of learning in the term μάθησις, seeks to avoid the associations implied by the term “doctrine” insofar as doctrines are usually taken to involve a set of propositions and systematic truth-statements. In doing so, I would like to hold open a Socratic conception of learning that is not reduced to the learning of propositions, but as well the sort of learning that takes place non-propositionally, as for example, in Hippocrates’ learning that he is ignorant, above, a kind of learning that takes place with respect to silence and inaction, in addition to their opposites. For a more thorough discussion of non-propositional learning in Plato, see Francisco Gonzalez’s Dialectic and Dialogue: Plato’s Practice of Philosophical Inquiry. (Evaston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), in particular, pp. 1-16.

Cf. Gorgias 525a, where Socrates relates to Callicles the judgment of the unhealthy soul after death: “Often when he has laid hold of the Great King or some other prince or potentiate, he
perceives the utter unhealthiness of his soul, striped all over with the scourge, and a mass of wounds, the work of perjuries and injustice; where every act has left its smirch upon his soul, where all is awry through falsehood and imposture, and nothing straight because of a nurture that knew not truth (افظ این ارثه‌ایان تئوثرایهای): or, as a result of a course of license, luxury, insolence, and incontinence, he finds the soul fraught with disproportion (اوسومیتریاژ) and ugliness (ائیکروتیوژ).

25 Aristotle captures this point in no uncertain terms: “… for the art of the sophist is the semblance of wisdom without the reality, and the sophist is one who makes money from an apparent but unreal wisdom …” *Sophistical Refutations*, Chapter 1 (21-24).

26 Cf. *Euthydemus* 277d-278b, where μανθάνειν, the verbal correlate of μάθημα, is discussed in the twofold senses of learning – taking in ἔποτημη – and understanding – the exploration (ἐπίσκεψις) of a particular matter with reference to what one has already learned. In the context of the *Protagoras*, this dual sense implied by μαθήματα as nourishment for the soul plays an increasing role throughout the discussion between Socrates and Protagoras on the nature of sophistic παιδεία, as I will argue.

27 One can imagine, for example, the harms to be derived from the adoption of a particular ethical relativism whose contradictory nature may not manifest itself to the awareness of person invested in it. In fact, positions of this sort are not only harmful to oneself and others, but also function to support a denial of such harm, function to turn one away from the otherwise compelling nature of sound logoi and to a life of lawlessness and mere flattery, as Socrates, in the *Republic*, details the life of the youth who becomes mistrustful of authority when exposed to dialectic too early (537d-539c).

28 As a follower of Gorgias, Meno boasts his teacher’s ability to answer any question put to him without exception as his demonstration of wisdom (*Meno* 70b-c), but also has at his disposal, as do Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, an array of sophistic puzzles that pretend to be real epistemological difficulties (*Meno* 80d, *Euthydemus* 275d-276d).

29 As Jacob Klein notes, “Words can be repeated or imitated; the thoughts conveyed by words cannot: an “imitated” thought is not a thought. But only actions of men, irrevocable as they are, lend themselves to genuine “imitation,” in life, on the stage – or in words.” *Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, p. 17.


31 Cf. *Meno* 75d, where Socrates states to Meno: “If … we were friends and chose to διαλέγεσθαι with each other, I should have to reply in some milder tone more suited to dialectic. The more dialectical way, I suppose, is not merely to answer what is true, but also to make use of those points which the questioned person agrees (προσομολογῇ) he knows.”

32 Jill Gordon characterizes the importance of their agreement succinctly: “That there was any agreement at all tells us that Hippocrates is someone with whom Socrates can reason and someone who is capable of the give and take required of one engaging in dialectic. One need only contrast Hippocrates here with many other interlocutors to see the great significance of this small act of waiting outside the doors to Callias’ home – with Protagoras just inside – to finish a conversation and to come to an agreement with Socrates.” *Turning Toward Philosophy: Literary Device and Dramatic Structure in Plato’s Dialogues*. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), p. 27.
Interlude: Logos, Τέχνη, and Measure

At this point in the dialogue, the question of acquiring wisdom, of becoming through the transmission of knowledge in logos, has been framed with reference to the model of τέχνη. Socrates does not elaborate on the relation between τέχνη and σοφία, other than to say that the technician is wise in respect to certain modes of production, and that through this wisdom the technician is also able to speak authoritatively on his craft – thereby possessing the power to pass this wisdom on to others. If we bear in mind, however, that the wisdom that marks technical knowledge depends to a large extent upon our grasp of its subject matter through discourse, then we are left wondering what that mode of logos is through which technical knowledge is made possible, and how, furthermore, such knowledge relates to the sort of wisdom that bears upon the condition of one’s soul. What conditions must be satisfied for logos to bring forth that wisdom that Socrates finds in τέχνη? This question is not taken up as a departure from the Protagoras, an occupation with a mere side-issue, as it were. Rather, dealing with this question shall allow us to interpret with more comprehensive means the implicit yet consequential role that τέχνη plays in the dialogue as a provisional model for the wisdom toward which Socrates attempts to steer Protagoras, and indirectly, Hippocrates. I will attempt to make clear in this excursus that the question of logos’ relation to τέχνη turns upon that notion of measure that we have thus far been able only to glimpse obscurely.

Given that τέχνη serves Socrates as a working paradigm for wisdom not merely in the Protagoras, but in quite a number of the dialogues, we cannot undertake anything
approaching a complete or definitive analysis of Socrates’ notion of it here.⁴ We shall attend instead to fleshing out key aspects of technical knowledge in Plato’s corpus fitting with our present hermeneutical objectives, and at the same time mark out the limits of technical knowledge against which the notion of παιδεία shall be set as the dialogue proceeds.

The first aspect of τεχνη that calls for examination is its link with that positive form of logos that Socrates has been developing thus far in his two initial conversations. For logos has been seen thus far in its capacity to reveal more fully the nature of that which, while appearing to us only in its incomplete form, presents itself as sufficiently grasped. That means of approaching knowledge, both through bringing the concealment inherent in immediate appearances to light and through seeking a fuller grasp of appearances through the mediation of the question, has been conceived by Socrates as means of seeing, or σκέψις, won through logos. It is a gathering of appearances in logos that seeks, through these appearances and through their interrelations, to gain a vision of the whole of that which appears, as the being of what appears in its completeness. The fulfillment of such wholeness and completeness of viewing a being in its nature, where it can be seen as what it is beyond the opposing appearances found in ἀισθησις and δόξα at differing times and in differing contexts, is a necessary condition of knowledge, of ἐπιστήμη. By looking first at the Republic, we find that the knowledge attributed to the technician is equated with a vision that is similar in kind.

In Book X, Socrates leads Glaucon through a discussion of production and imitation in human activity, whereby being is reproduced in kinds of copies. When humans bring things into being according to normal technical activity, for which Socrates
uses the manual artisan, the δημιουργός, as his prime example, they fashion material in accordance with a view of the ‘look’ (εἰδος) of the being of that which they produce. By holding in view the look (πρὸς τὴν ἰδέαν βλέπων) of the being of a couch, as Socrates’ example goes, the artisan guides his practice of bringing its particular embodiment into being (596b). By way of his training in a particular art, the technician gains access to the look of the being of a certain product, a revelation of being that presents itself to the artisan in its completeness, so that it can serve as a guide for the end, the τέλος, of his activity. In this sense, the practice of technical production is a mediated activity, wherein the particular end, the manifestation of the εἰδος, is embodied in his work.⁴

The ἰδέα of that which is to be brought into being through τέχνη is not, as Socrates here makes clear, a human product, but refers to the true being of which the manufactured product is only an imitation. “For presumably none of the craftsmen fabricates the ἰδέα itself. How could he?” (596b). Rather, it is, as Socrates states, God, the divine δημιουργός, who creates the being of each thing “in nature (ἐν τῷ φύσει)” (597d). In this sense, the vision in which the knowledge of the technician resides is not an otherworldly vision, beyond the natural, but is rooted in the being of nature itself. At the same time, as a guiding and sustained noetic vision, the appearance of the ἰδέα involved in technical knowledge does rise above the appearances cast forth in the sphere of becoming; it remains stable and complete where the activity of technical production operates properly. It is this character of completeness and stability in relation to a view of being that distinguishes technical knowledge from the partiality and mutability of δόξα as we have conceived it.
In the *Cratylus*, a similar approach to τέχνη is taken up as a means of understanding what conditions are necessary for judging the correctness of names. Borrowing the example of the carpenter once more, Socrates explains that in the manufacturing of implements, in looking toward (βλέπων) the εἰδῶς of that implement that is naturally best for each function, “the artisan must discover the instrument naturally fitted for each purpose and must embody that in the material of which he makes the instrument, not in accordance with his own judgment (οἶον ἐν νῦτος βουληθῇ), but in accordance with its nature (οἶον ἐπεφύκει)” (389c). In emphasizing that view toward the look of what is to be produced as a look of its nature in being, Socrates is not saying that all judgment is suspended in the practice of τέχνη, as if the technician were simply a conduit for more divine powers working through him. Rather, by aiming at the nature of the being of a product in one’s vision, one judges according to a standard that exceeds one’s own impressions, exceeds the way in which things seem to one who is not equipped with the look afforded by technical knowledge. One operates as a technician by taking the look of a thing’s being as a means for measuring such activity, a look which resists the force of seeming borne by one’s individual reliance upon αἰσθησις and δόξα. Seen thus, one’s activity as a technician accords with a mode of judgment that exceeds oneself, that looks to the nature of things in order to carry out one’s proper task.

The discussion of τέχνη with reference to names in the *Cratylus* sheds further light upon the vision bestowed by technical knowledge. For Socrates remarks that the lawgiver, who dispenses names with an eye toward (βλέποντα) the name that “is” (ἐστὶν), may embody that ἴδεα differently from other lawgivers, in different syllables – in similar fashion to the craftsman who may embody the ἴδεα of his product in a
manifold of different materials – while nonetheless properly realizing in such productive activity the look toward which they are turned (389d-e). While a number of couches, for example, may look quite unlike each other in a number of respects, each may nonetheless realize quite artfully the *idéa* of the true couch, placed in nature by the divine δημιουργός. Such variety in products (including names) testifies to the notion that what is grasped in the vision provided by *tékhē*, that which supplies it with its *eidoś*, is not simply an image before the mind, something reproduced by the imagination from what appears in aesthetic vision. The vision realized in different manners and with differing materials shows itself to be something that exceeds particular images, yet which at the same time gathers together all of its manifold copies in production under the same “look,” allowing us to identify each reproduction as belonging to the same kind. It is in this sense that the object of a technician’s knowledge is both one and many, one in terms of looking toward a single guiding *idéa*, and many with respect to the manifold of productions which embody that single look.

Yet if technical knowledge provides a look of the being of a product, and guides one’s activities in accordance with this look, then what are the conditions according to which it allows for a measure of correctness in such activity? If we turn to the *Statesman* for a much different approach to *tékhē*, we find that the notion of measure arises in the context of the attempt, between the Eleatic Stranger and young Socrates, to find an appropriate standard according to which the length of their *logoi* on the art of weaving – a discussion that threatens them both with unneeded tedium – might be gauged (283c). The Stranger suggests that their question of appropriate length cannot be decided without looking to the whole (*pásoy*) of excess and deficiency, which comprises the proper
object of a single art, the art of measurement (μετρητική). In looking at this art, however, the Stranger suggests that it is subject to a certain division into two parts, a division crucial for identifying that in which all τέχνη consists. The first part has to do with measuring the greater and the less in relation to one another, as if “the greater is greater than the less and than nothing else, and that the less is less than the greater and nothing else …” (283d). The second part entails speaking “of excess beyond the nature of the mean (τὴν τοῦ μετρίου φύσιν) as having come into being, whether in λογoi or in deeds.” As the Stranger adds, it is this second part of the art of measurement in which “the greatest difference between good and bad men lies” (283e).

The Stranger is not simply speaking of common technicians with respect to goodness here, but this remark has to do as well with the art that he and his young interlocutor are attempting to reveal, that of statesmanship (πολιτική), the governance of the polis. It is with reference to statesmanship that τέχνη and human excellence (ἀρετή) are brought most closely together, not only in the Statesman, but also, through quite different means, by Protagoras himself, who will identify πολιτική as the art that he teaches. However, it is in the context of the Stranger’s discourse that we find what must be common to human excellence and technical knowledge, namely, the art of measurement according to which human goodness as such is made possible. He continues:

If we assert that the nature of the greater has no relation to anything other than the less, it will not at any time have a relation to the mean. Right? Right.
Will not holding to this logos destroy the arts and their works altogether, and also those of statesmanship, which we are now seeking, and weaving, which we have already defined? For all of these are surely attendant to the mean; these are regarded not as non-existent, but real difficulties in
practice, and it is in this way, preserving the mean, that all of their works are good and beautiful … [therefore] we must believe that all the arts alike exist and that the greater and the less are measured not only to one another alone, but also to the coming-into-being (γένος) of the mean. For, if this exists, they exist also, and if they exist, it exists also, but neither can ever exist if the other does not. (284a-d)

In order to realize goodness in τέχνη, as the Stranger explains above, the fundamental art, that of measurement – and indeed, the form of measurement that concerns the mean – must be implemented in every craft if it is to be a craft at all. What the Stranger refers to as a difficulty (χαλέπον) in practice is precisely this skillful vision of the technician in letting the mean appear in the act of production in order that he can produce correctly.

In attempting to understand what is intended by “mean,” a notion of correctness in technical activity is indispensable. For correctness implies a knowledge of alternatives that fall short of one’s ends, that fail to realize a necessity in reaching one’s productive τέλος. To attune oneself to a mean signifies a certain determination, the marking of a difference between excess and deficiency in a given case, and thus, the uncovering or setting of a limit. Uncovering a mean is, in essence, seeing and responding to a limit that exists beyond the way in which things merely seem to one. Hence, when one goes wrong in a project, where one produces incorrectly, one can identify where or when a mean was missed, where what seemed to be the adequate point of measure did not correspond to the true mean. Seeing the mean means, then, drawing that limit according to which what is correct or proper is seen with regard to the whole of one’s alternatives of too much or too little, where either side of the mean is grasped as excessive or deficient.

Yet such vision is not to be equated outright with the look toward which the technician is oriented, but with the relation between that guiding look and those actions
undertaken to fulfill that look in their τέλος. That is, the technician does not keep his mind fixed solely upon the ἱδέα of what is to be reproduced, but must also attend, through and in accordance with that look, to the materials and implements at hand so as to put them into their proper order and measure in reference to the mean. Thus, the seeing, the σκέψις, of the technician must be a communicative vision between the look of what is, of being, and what appears before his eyes in becoming. By viewing, for example, pieces of wood suitable for erecting a house, the artisan cannot decide the proper length of each merely in relation to each other, as if the call for a smaller piece of wood than another could be fulfilled in choosing any piece that fits the indeterminate criterion of “smaller” in relation to the first. Rather, the process of producing “good and beautiful works” receives its goodness and beauty through an ordering of the whole, for which exactness and determination of quantities and qualities in light of a product’s τέλος are necessary. Hence, the look of the being of the house in its wholeness and integrity is what mediates one’s view of the materials and as well one’s actions in reproducing that look. Any layperson can produce an unordered, ugly, and disproportionate house with the first mode of measurement, which proceeds according to unmediated perception. Yet it is only the technician who can, with reliability, produce functional, well-ordered products in accordance with his knowledge of proper measurement.

In the work that corresponds to technical knowledge, the mean, as the Statesman tells us, is not pre-given in the look that guides his work; it comes into being (γένεσθαι) in relation to the task set before him, the τέλος, seen in relation to that εἶδος. Thus, the Stranger notes, the art of measurement that is true measurement, upon which all τέχνη
rests, measures “number, length, depth, breadth, and thickness … in relation to the moderate (τὸ μέτριον), the proper (τὸ πρέπον), the timely (τὸν καιρὸν), and the needful (τὸ δέον) and all such things situated in the middle between the extremes” (284e). What comes forth in certain circumstances, what is necessary for production in particular times and places and in reference to the resources at hand, is therefore to be measured by the technician in light of the look of his product, and it is only with regard to this look that the mean in relation to such circumstances is made manifest to his judgment.

In a particular way, then, the technician’s knowledge can be seen to lie both in access to that look of an object’s being according to which its good and beautiful embodiment can be produced, as well as in the communication of this look into the sphere of becoming, as a making manifest of the mean according to which measurement takes place. Yet, as we have noted above and as the Stranger confirms, we find that such measurement relies upon an even more fundamental human ability, namely the capacity to discriminate, to identify within becoming the opposition between sameness and difference in order to mark a limit.

For in a certain way all things which are within the realm of τέχνη do partake of measurement; yet people, through not examining (σκοπεῖν) things by dividing them according to εἶδη, immediately (εὐθὺς) set widely different things together, believing them to be like, and again they do the opposite when they fail to divide other things into parts. What is necessary is that when one at first senses the unity or commonality (κοινωνία) of many things, he must not give up before he sees all the differences in them as far as they are to be found in εἶδη, and in turn when all kinds of dissimilarities are seen in a plethora of things, he must not be discouraged or stop before he has gathered into one family (τὰ οἶκεῖα μιᾶς) like things, and has set them into some class (γένος) on the basis of their being (σύστασις). (285a-b)
The power to discern sameness and difference on the basis of which measurement is carried out, therefore, is itself a kind of σκέψις that must proceed with reference to an ἰδέα, to a look that exceeds any particular appearance within one’s immediate vision so as to guide the ordering and measuring of what one has before one’s eyes. Without reference to the look of a thing’s being given in technical knowledge, the mean that draws the limit between sameness and difference and that orients proper measuring cannot come forth in practice.

Of course, the Stranger does not say how one is to set about discerning the original sameness and difference according to which many are gathered into a single look and a number of things are to be divided. In fact, it is doubtful that the ability to see sameness and difference in general can be taught as if it were itself a τέχνη, either one can or cannot, of his or her own accord, identify true likeness and dissimilarity. Rather, this capability would appear to be the very condition for learning as such. We can see the ability to discern like and unlike already in the exchange between Socrates and Hippocrates. For Hippocrates follows Socrates’ examples with respect to the names of technicians, correctly identifying the name of Protagoras’ purported art in like manner with the guiding examples that had preceded this conclusion. Correspondingly, Hippocrates finds that his problem in answering Socrates’ questions – and thereby proving his knowledge of sophistry – arises in not being able to differentiate the sophist from any other artisan. Socrates’ questions gesture to the fact that one capable of learning (but perhaps not yet able to discern with sufficient clarity) can be brought of one’s own accord to identify similarities and differences, or, where one’s attempts break down, to see one’s inability to do so in a specific case, and thereby to begin one’s search
after correct discernment. This process according to examples reflects the beginning of measurement for the learner, of leading one’s understanding from one easily-grasped likeness or dissimilarity to more difficult ones.

Though Socrates’ way of questioning Hippocrates is similar to that aspect of measurement in τέχνη where similarities and differences are made evident in relation to the technician’s look of being, a significant difference here is that the εἰδος itself according to which Hippocrates might determine the sophist is lacking; even Socrates can only state what the sophist appears to be to him. Furthermore, that εἰδος involved in what Socrates calls “the physician’s art with respect to the soul,” namely, the look of the goodness or health of the soul, is not evident either. It is this latter knowledge that Socrates seeks from the sophist, who claims to teach a τέχνη roughly equivalent to this. Such psychiatry, however, poses a greater challenge to the learner than training in the other arts; the latter can be taken up with reference to examples which are easily seen and grasped. On the other hand, as the Stranger states,

The greatest and noblest beings have no image (εἰδωλον) wrought plainly for human vision, which he who wishes to satisfy the soul of the inquirer can apply to his ἀισθησις and by simple exhibition satisfy the soul. We must therefore endeavor to acquire the power of giving and accepting a logos of each of them; bodiless things, which are the noblest and the greatest, can be shown by logos alone … (286a)

We begin to see two primary distinctions here between the established arts and that capacity of treating the soul that Hippocrates requires for his safety. The first is that while τέχνη cannot be transmitted in teaching without logos, it avails itself nonetheless of other aids for learning through appearances given in ἀισθησις. To come to knowledge of the treatment of one’s soul, however, one can only rely upon logos, one can grasp the
meaning of what is to be taught in no other way than through discourse itself. This provides us with a key for understanding why Socrates’ second sailing, the turn to *logos* related in the *Phaedo*, is a necessary move for the investigation of beings; for Socrates, studying the order in which beings are situated is necessarily tied to the question of the goodness of that order, and hence demands in turn a οἰκήματι of goodness itself, which exceeds all aesthetic manifestation.

The second distinction has to do precisely with that look that is gained by the pupil in learning a τέχνη. While learning how to carry out an art through measurement according to a proper εἴδος, the learner of a craft can rely upon the clarity of that look in order to learn the relevant distinctions in the process of production. Thus, for the technician, the look itself is pre-given when attending to a particular case, and he must rely ultimately upon this look in order to carry out his work well. Yet in the case of those looks that the Stranger refers to as belonging to the “greatest and noblest beings,” one does not possess from the outset a full vision of them; they must be won through *logos*, and moreover through learning how to give and receive *logoi* properly for this end.

While τέχνη does serve in broad outline as guide for determining wisdom, we see that what appears to be an advantage of technical knowledge, the pre-givenness of its εἴδος, in fact has the tendency to impede that wisdom that has to do with the higher good of the soul that Socrates seeks on Hippocrates’ behalf. As Socrates recounts in the *Apology*, his own hermeneutical efforts to understand the Delphic Oracle’s pronouncement that he, who takes himself to be ignorant, is the wisest of all men, the productive artisan arises in the course of Socrates’ search as the only one amongst those claiming to possess knowledge who can make good on this claim. However, “because of
practicing his art well, each [technician] thought he was very wise in the other, greatest matters of wisdom, and this folly of theirs obscured that wisdom …” (22d). In their folly, technicians are often led to take their knowledge of a certain craft as a measure for wisdom as such, as if the look involved in their respective account were appropriate to guide one in living one’s life as a whole. That is, by not being able to attend to the limits of his own art, by forgetting the principle that a certain art corresponds to a certain subject-matter – as Socrates makes clear in the Ion⁵ – and mistaking the difference between the way in which one is to live well and the way in which one is to carry out a specific art well, the technician tends to project into the whole of his life that same pre-given structure that guides his respective technical activity, and hence is led into ignorance regarding the good into which the whole of his life might be gathered.

We see this obscuring tendency early in the Republic, with respect to Cephalus and his son Polemarchus (331a-336a). Cephalus treats the matter of justice in terms of his own art of money-lending, stating that justice should be defined by truth-telling and returning what one has taken from another. In similar manner, the notion of justice is transformed in the hands of the young warrior Polemarchus into a quasi-martial art of helping friends and harming enemies. In a relatively short time, however, under the inquisitive testing of Socrates, it becomes clear that each of these artisans has mistaken only one part of human goodness, based upon the model of their respective τέχναι, for human goodness as such and as a whole.

Socrates’ statement about the overstepping of one’s limits in technical knowledge reveals the fact that the technician’s art, in making use of a given εἴδως, measures out the limits of its proper objects, but does not bring with it a self-reflective understanding of
the limits of the knowledge within one’s art as such, of those matters in which it is not to
be applied. This is not only the case in those wider contexts where the structure of a
given art is insufficient to realize unqualified goodness, but also in those cases where
practicing one’s art well where it appears to be called for falls short of goodness seen
with respect to a broader measure.

Consider, for example, Socrates’ criticism of doctors in Book III of the Republic,
who practice their art of medicine only in reference to the health of the body, without
being able to determine whether ultimately undertaking healing would be good for the
city or for the individual treated. In opposition, the mythical founder of medicine, the
god Asclepius, was able to see the goodness or ill of medicine in relation to concerns that
exceed the limits in which medicine itself operates. Socrates relates of Asclepius that he
made “no attempt by regimens … to make a lengthy and bad life for a human being and
have him produce offspring likely to be such as he; he didn’t think he should care for the
man who is not able to live in his established round, on the grounds that he’s no profit to
himself or to the city” (407d). Thus, with respect to the τέλος that the technician sets in
view of the practice of his art, the technician can bring the good of health, or of a
completed house, or of a piece of clothing, into being, but is not able qua technician to
judge whether the good provided is unconditionally good according to a broader
perspective in a given case. The good to which he holds himself is determined within the
limits of his technical ἔιδος alone; he fulfills his function by presupposing the goodness
of his craft as something to be undertaken. Accordingly, the knowledge that composes a
given τέχνη does not include a more comprehensive standard by which to critique its
own goodness as such. Similarly, by mistaking the structure of one’s τέχνη as a valid
structure for the realization of human virtue, the technicians of which Socrates speaks in the *Apology* testify to a lack of a greater measure for those “greatest and noblest beings” that would differentiate and delimit the sphere of ends in ἀρετή with respect to the whole of one’s life, and as well, the life of the city.

By noting those aspects of ἀρετή that give it the character of knowledge – its observance of a single, stable ἐνδοκόημεν of the being of its object and the corresponding capacity to uncover a mean in what becomes by measuring production in reference to this ἐνδοκόημεν – we are identifying, in broad outline, aspects of wisdom to which Socrates as well holds himself in the process of bringing health to one’s soul, which we have identified as the process of philosophical dialectic. Yet dialectic for Socrates occupies a more originary position with respect to knowledge than ἀρετή, and reveals itself to be the condition for the possibility of the latter. As he explains in the *Philebus*, in a manner strikingly reminiscent of the words of the Stranger above, it is through the road of dialectic “that all the inventions of ἀρετή have been brought to light,” testifying to the kinship between that mode of Socratic logos that seeks to reveal things in their being and that sort of understanding which makes technical knowledge possible (16b). For dialectic is a way to knowledge through a delimitation of being that nonetheless remains, as Socrates insists, concealed in its mythic origins:

> A gift of gods to men, as it appears to me, was brought down from some divine source through a Prometheus together with gleaming fire; and the ancients, who were better than we and lived closer to the gods, handed down the tradition that all things which are ever said to exist are sprung from the one and the many and have inherent in them the limit and the unlimited. Things being ordered thus, we must always assume that there is in every case one ἑδεα of everything and search for it – for we shall discover it – and if we grasp this, we must look (σκοπεῖν) next for two, if there be two, and if not, for three or some other number; and again we
must treat each of these unities in the same way, until we can see not only that the original unity is one and many and unlimited, but just how many it is. And we must not apply the \textit{id\={e}a} of unlimited to plurality until we have a view of its whole number between infinity and one; then, and not before, we may let each unity of everything pass on unhindered into the unlimited. The gods, then, as I said, handed down to us this mode of investigating \textit{(skope\={e}n)}, learning \textit{(mu\={a}n\={d}a\={e}ne\={i}v)}, and teaching \textit{(d\={i}d\={a}\={s}o\={k}e\={e}i\={v})} one another; but these days the wise among men make the one and the many too quickly or too slowly, in haphazard fashion, and they put the unlimited right after unity; they disregard all that lies between them, and this it is which distinguishes between making dialectic and disputatious \textit{(\={e}ri\={s}tik\={a}\={o}\={s}) logoi}. \textit{(Phil. 16c-17a)}

It is, therefore, the revealing capacity of \textit{logos} in the form of dialectic that makes evident beings in their proper determination, that sets appearances into their limits in accordance with the being of that from which they appear. Only on the basis of such proper delimitation through their respective \textit{e\={i}d\={e}n} could the arts first be uncovered and practiced. Seen thus, Socratic dialectic is not to be identified as a \textit{t\={e}\chi\nu\eta} amongst the other established arts, but rather operates in that originary space upon which all art as such is founded. In revealing the limits of each \textit{id\={e}a}, in numbering and determining each through a particular mode of \textit{sk\={e}\={y}n\={i}s}, dialectic, as it is indicated by Socrates, must have reference to a measure more originary than the kind of ready-to-hand measure proper to any given \textit{t\={e}\chi\nu\eta}.

In seeking out \textit{e\={i}d\={e}n}, in the process of delimiting a thing in its being, the dialectician must measure and test each look of being, and in so doing, his activity already exceeds the restricted orientation to an \textit{id\={e}a} within technical knowledge, where the look of a being that itself delimits, circumscribes, all productive activity within a single art is accepted as given. With respect to the “greatest and noblest beings,” of which no \textit{t\={e}\chi\nu\eta} has been devised – perhaps could never be devised – the lack of a pre-
given, stable and complete look of their being is, in part, what prevents the dialectician from making the same mistake that, as Socrates states, is typical of the technician. In the activity of testing those appearances that present themselves as true reflections of being, the dialectician is able to measure not only appearances, but as well measure his own knowledge and ignorance in turn.  

Thus, in keeping vigil over the limits of one’s knowledge, by recognizing that one does not know, especially in matters of the highest human importance, one already reveals a kind of wisdom that the Delphic Oracle regarded more highly in Socrates than the wisdom possessed by any of the technicians. As the exchange with Hippocrates teaches us, one cannot begin to search after a measure for appearances where one has not first made evident the point at which one’s knowing has been delimited with respect to what one does not know. It is only, as both Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger emphasize above, on the basis of acquiring the capacity to give and take logoi properly that those incomplete, mutable appearances of the greatest things, appearances which threaten to lead people like Hippocrates into the opposite condition of what the appearance promises, can be brought forth as requiring measurement. It is here that an originary form of measure begins.

The model of τέχνη must be seen indeed as a model for Socratic knowing, in virtue of its reliance upon an ἴδεα, for Socrates seeks in his exchanges about human goodness that same requirement of a complete and unchanging look of which the technician makes use. However, the technical model of wisdom shows itself in the course of Socratic σκέψις as something to be transcended, precisely because it lacks that necessary character of self-reflexivity and openness to questioning that goes hand in hand
with an awareness of ignorance where no *eîðos* of the being sought, in its full revelation, is at hand. Transcending the limits of *têxvên* in the course of philosophical dialectic does not mean, however, that one occupies a more secure ground with respect to knowledge; rather, keeping to the road of dialectic necessitates keeping to a road that proceeds, however paradoxically, by depriving itself of any clear passage, a road that is *aporos*.

The *aporia* that dialectic faces in virtue of its openness and its consciousness of knowing and not-knowing is the question of how a measure might be gained for appearances in *logos* – and, more importantly, appearances of the greatest and noblest beings that decide between good and bad men – where there is no clearly grasped *eîðos* at hand that would guide this very measuring.

Such a question must bring with it the further questions of how it is that *logos* can serve as a measure in these all-important matters, and how a means of acquiring a capacity for a proper giving and taking of *logoi* for this purpose can begin. These questions bear upon the notion of *paideía* itself, of that human freedom of speech and action that resists the constraints of doxastic determination. Yet the *aporia* faced by philosophical dialectic points to the fact that the *skêpis* through which it operates must both begin in, and win for itself a distance from, the influence of *dôxa*. In making this observation, we must note that Socrates begins his *diáskêpis* of Hippocrates in the preceding section with a question that bears upon that general distinction according to which mere opinion and knowledge are to be gauged, namely, the question of becoming in relation to being within the sphere of human life. This fundamental distinction, even in its indeterminacy within the course of the dialogue, shall serve as a primary guide for the attempts at dialectic undertaken by Socrates, and it is with reference to this distinction
that the practice of giving and taking of *logoi* receives its guidance for drawing a measure for appearances in discourse.

By bearing in mind as well the separation between the technical and dialectical orientations to wisdom drawn above, we shall also be called to hold a second account of their shared origins in tension with the first; the significance of Prometheus for Socrates is to be countered by the invocation of Prometheus in a Protagorean *logos*. The meaning that this mythic savior of humankind has for each shall color not only what is said between them, but will also ultimately determine, in its opposed interpretations, the course and the outcome of the conversation that they share.
Günter Figal has pointed out that the tendency to understand all human knowledge as τέχνη was part of a general trend that accompanied the emergence of Athens into a predominant position in Greece in the Fifth Century, and that, by the time Socrates took up the term in his conversations, had already reached full prominence as the model of knowledge. Sokrates, p. 55.

It has been acknowledged by numerous commentators, ancient and recent, that Plato’s utilization of certain key terms—wisdom being only one of them—is not univocal, and therefore must be set within the context in which these are found. Consider the testimony of Diogenes Laertius: “Plato has employed a variety of terms in order to make his thinking less intelligible to the ignorant. But in a special sense he considers wisdom (σοφία) to be the science of those things which are really existent, the science which, he says, is concerned with the divine and the soul as separate from the body. And especially by wisdom he means philosophy, which is a yearning for divine wisdom. And in a general sense all experience is also termed by him wisdom, for example when he calls a craftsman wise. And he applies the same terms with very different meanings.” Lives of Eminent Philosophers, (III, 63).

For a broader, more extensive account of τέχνη in the Platonic dialogues, see David Roochnik’s Of Art and Wisdom: Plato’s Understanding of Techne. Cf. also Edward Ballard’s Socratic Ignorance: An Essay on Platonic Self-Knowledge, pp. 48-79.

As Ballard formulates it rather broadly, τέχνη is essentially “a communication of something to something. The term is used to describe any variety of such rational activity from the ordering of human life to the production and preservation of physical objects, from activity of the Demiurge to that of the humblest artisan, for all of these communicate an intelligible structure to material through a process or technique.” Socratic Ignorance, pp. 48-49. Though I wish to avoid reducing the notion of the ἐθισος to a “rational structure,” Ballard’s explanation of the work of art otherwise aptly captures the sense of embodiment I have in mind above.

537c-538a. As Kahn notes, “Plato’s theory of technē gets its start in the Ion with the fundamental principle of a one-to-one mapping between a science and its subject-matter. This principle is so carefully articulated in [the Ion] that it can be taken for granted in other discussions of technē.” Plato and the Socratic Dialogue, p. 108.

As Gadamer states in this connection, “Knowledge of the good would seem to be different in kind from all familiar human knowledge. Hence, if measured against such a concept of specialized expertise, it could indeed be called ignorance. The anthropinē Sophia (human wisdom) that is aware of such ignorance must inquire beyond, and see beyond, all the widespread presumed knowledge that Plato will later call ‘doxa’ (belief, opinion).” The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy, p. 23-24.

The term ἀπορία, with its alpha-privative, marks the sense in which a road or a space of passage (πόρος) is lacking, and where movement is impeded. As we shall see, Socrates regards an aporia not as something to be avoided, but instead as the necessary starting point from which questioning—and therefore the search after wisdom—must begin.

The importance of this distinction for philosophical education in the Platonic dialogues cannot be overstressed. It is most clearly developed in the central books of the Republic, and particularly in Book VII, where Socrates describes such education as a “turning of the soul” that would “draw the soul from becoming to being” (521c-d). Such a study begins, similarly to the process of dialectic described by Socrates in the Philebus quoted above, with the foundational capacity to draw a limit, and to determine the proper number of each thing as it appears to the senses in the
contradictory form of simultaneous oneness and multiplicity (523a-525e). Seen thus, the
dialectical activity that I have been formulating in the present section has a common source in
relation to the beginning of education detailed by Socrates in the *Republic*: both begin out of the
experience of *aporia.*
Chapter Two

I. The Promise of Σοφιστική

Our discussion of the relation between τέχνη, as it appears in Plato’s works, and Socratic dialectic has served to indicate the centrality of measure to each of these pursuits, and as well to develop the notion of measurement in its connection with the revealing function of logos. In particular, we have seen measure as borne out of the primary capacity of distinguishing sameness from otherness and unity from multiplicity through the originary act of making manifest the limits of that which is put into question. As the Protagoras proceeds, the question of sophistry in its presentation as a τέχνη elicits from Socrates the task of searching for those necessary limits through which Protagoras’ presumed art may be brought to light and submitted to testing. This search, carried out in and through logos by means of Socratic questioning, has the effect of bringing differing modes of discourse themselves into question, and in the process sets into relief more radically that relation between logos and measure that we have been investigating thus far.

At the same time, the process of placing a particular logos into question functions in turn to cast light upon the soul of the speaker to whom that logos belongs. As we were able to glimpse certain aspects of Hippocrates’ character in the course of Socrates’ σκέψις (namely, that his motivations were other, and less noble, than originally formulated), so too are we in a position to draw out in what and how Protagoras speaks – both in his self-presentation and as he is subjected to Socratic dialectic – a set of implicit
concerns that conditions not only what is said in his discourse, but as well his comportment to logos itself.

Having waited for the light of the sun, and proceeding in the wake of the dawning of Hippocrates’ newfound self-awareness, Socrates and Hippocrates find themselves, upon entering Callias’ estate, plunged into another kind of darkness, a realm wholly obscured from the sun, an otherworldly darkness. Despite the marvelous and beautiful sights that they both behold immediately inside, it is Socrates who signals to his listeners that the scene unfolding within those guarded walls constitutes a mode of descent, and what is more a descent that bears upon one’s soul.

Borrowing again the words of Homer, Socrates speaks of what he sees as if he were Odysseus himself – or rather, a Hermes in the guise of Odysseus – crossing over from the realm of the living into that of the dead. Looking at Protagoras, and then toward the exalted Hippias, who sits above his listeners on a teacher’s chair and offers them accounts of nature and of the heavens in accordance with their questions, Socrates quotes, “And next did I see …”.¹ In addition, turning toward Prodicus, who lies in bed covered in wraps in Callias’ former treasury, and whose deep voice thunders for his visitors inside, making his words – famous for their fine distinctions² – utterly unclear, Socrates quotes again, “And there too I saw Tantalus …”.³ Both of these references are designed unmistakably to call forth associations with Hades. What is it that casts this atmosphere of the underworld over the illustrious gathering?

The portrait of Hades as it is presented in the Odyssey is instructive. In the first place, the character of Hades most strikingly arises as the space of opposition to life as such; it lies beyond the limit of human life, in fact occupies the place of limit for human
being, into which no mortal can see. In Homer, Hades is the realm of death as coextensive with our own non-being; those whom Odysseus encounters are mere “empty, flitting shades,” as Circe puts it, mere appearances with voices, mere shadows of being, as Odysseus learns when he attempts three times to embrace his mother. This limit-character of Hades bears upon the figure of Protagoras, who will identify himself almost immediately as one committed fiercely to preserving his life; the fear of enmity and punishment that he points out as a necessary danger for sophistry is to be mitigated precisely by rejecting those deceptive appearances employed by his sophistic forerunners, and by showing himself as he is. Furthermore, it is Protagoras who will claim to teach a τέχνη that preserves one’s life, that safeguards one from descent into Hades. Given that this is the case, Socrates’ initial reference to Hades should warn us that an atmosphere of death already infects those who purport to teach such a τέχνη.

Secondly, the very purpose of Odysseus’ visit to the underworld helps to thread together a second opposition that runs through both of these texts. For Odysseus is an exception to mortals in his living access to Hades, and he likewise seeks that one shade that is an exception to all others. Whereas the dead depicted by Homer are trapped in the immediacy of their sorrow and pain – Tantalus, Tityus, and Sisyphus the most extreme cases – Teiresias is the one amongst them who retains his power of foresight, allowing him to withdraw from the immediacy of the timeless present of the underworld and to see distant events unencumbered by it. This power of foresight is Odysseus’ necessary aid to preserving his own life and those of his crewmen on their voyage homeward. A similar Promethean power is to be promised in Protagorean education, where the sophist’s τέχνη will aspire to an exceptional foresight in guiding human judgment.
It is already plain that these oppositions of life and death, temporal mediation and immediacy, arise in tandem with those of darkness and light, concealment and unconcealment; addressing such oppositions will have the effect of multiplying these sets of opposites into many more, and will furthermore serve to make manifest that underlying opposition between sophist and philosopher with regard to the notion of παιδεία itself. It is between these two figures that the space separating what is given and accepted in logos, what is intended and what is understood, will have to be traversed by the hermeneutic efforts of Socrates himself.

And what of the vision of Protagoras? Socrates likens him to Orpheus, enchanting (κηλών) students from various cities with his voice, compelling them to follow wherever it sounds in their stupor. Not merely does this particular association present Protagoras as an enchanter of men, one who, by means of his eloquent and dazzling speeches, renders others incapacitated to lead themselves, but there is as well an unmistakable tie between the Orphean sophist and Hades. As the popular myth goes, it was Orpheus who was able in virtue of his musical talent to make his own passage into the underworld to recover his beloved Eurydice, charming even the denizens of the underworld for his own safety. Thus, if Protagoras is as well underway to Hades, one cannot but suspect that those who blindly follow his voice are led into the same peril of the darkness of the underworld.

As Socrates first spies him, Protagoras is indeed underway, walking in the courtyard. Yet Socrates’ delight in beholding the orderly (κόσμιος) scene of the enchanted followers, breaking apart when Protagoras turns round in the other direction and regathering themselves behind him after he has passed by, tells us something more
revealing about the particular movement in which Protagoras is engaged (315b).

Speaking and walking, the great sophist alternates between opposite directions, opposite courses, going back and forth as he delivers his *logos* to the charmed. We see him first, as Socrates does, as a figure of turning, and moreover a turning in constant reversal (*ánastrephoi*), proceeding this way and that, given the room he is allowed. For the power of Protagoras’ voice, as will be made clear in his extended speech on *paièia*, will not lie simply in its elegant delivery, but as well in that enchanting way by which he carries out such self-opposing turns while concealing this very opposition from his listeners who are forced likewise to turn in circles as they listen to him. The question, therefore, of Hippocrates’ turning toward Protagoras for his desired education is a question of the fate of Hippocrates’ soul – whether it will be led in opposing directions under Protagoras’ charms, or, on the contrary, whether it can find a consistent direction toward which to turn.

As for those visitors in attendance, both foreign and native, it is an illustrious and exclusive gathering, primarily of aspiring young men: future politicians (Charmides, Alcibiades, Paralus, Critias), sophists (Antimoerus), orators (Phaedrus), doctors (Eryximachus), and poets (Agathon), among others. The many aspirants, with their manifold interests, reflect the various dimensions of culture within reach of the sophists’ influence, and point to the fact that the consequences of their teachings extend far beyond the souls of these individuals. Here, the many sides of Athenian life – especially politics, given what historical accounts tell us about the fate of Charmides, Critias, and Alcibiades in particular9 – are at stake in the *paièia* of these distinguished youths. This collection reflects as well the growing emphasis in Athens at the time to mark oneself off as a
member of the *kaloĩ kágatoi* through a formidable command of speech. Clearly, Hippocrates is not alone in his educational aspirations.

The original question upon which Socrates and Hippocrates have come, namely whether to begin an education with the great sophist, gives way at the start to questions of how to begin their speaking. Protagoras is eager to set the terms of their interchange, first by asking whether they are to speak with one another alone or in front of others. It is, Socrates states, for Protagoras to examine the reason for their arrival first so that he can arrange the terms of their discussion as he sees fit. Now, in stating his cause for coming, Socrates in effect carries out all that Hippocrates originally required of him: he sings the young man’s praises, certifying that his family is noble and prosperous, his nature is among the highest of youths his age, and that his desire to become famous (ἐλλόγιμος γενέσθαι) has brought him to Protagoras’ company. If, it seems, Socrates were to do Hippocrates the favor originally asked, the dialogue would cease here with handing the young man over into Protagoras’ care. Yet Socrates will first require a diagnosis of the sophist’s soul if his favor to Hippocrates can be a favor at all.

In response, Protagoras gives an account of why the terms of speaking are necessary, and in the process reveals that such terms are of initial concern for his own well-being:

> You use foresight (προονθή) correctly (ὀρθῶς), Socrates, on my behalf. For when a man goes as a stranger into great cities, persuading the best of the young to leave their own circles – either of their houses or foreign ones, both old and young – and to join one’s own so as to be better through association with him, this practice requires caution; no small grudges, enmities, and plots come into being. (316c-d)

If the prospect of attending the sophist’s lessons requires great caution, we are led to believe, on Protagoras’ side, that his own vocation puts himself as well in considerable
danger. The prudent sophist is required, therefore, to make use of a kind of foresight in speech for the sake of avoiding harm as an outcome of his practice.

We should note here that incurring enmity, grudges, and plots puts Socrates and Protagoras in shared territory. For Socrates’ willingness to test anyone claiming authority on one subject or another has the consequence, as we find in the *Apology*, of being sentenced to death. Thus, if Socrates and Protagoras both make use of foresight in their respective practices of speaking, Socrates’ own kind of προμήθεια proceeds with an other end in sight than the avoidance of physical suffering or the loss of his life.

As for Protagoras, the danger inherent in sophistry, the danger for the sophists themselves, lies precisely in deception, albeit of a different sort. In providing an ancient and distinguished pedigree to the “sophistic art” (σοφιστική τέχνη), Protagoras includes among its practitioners Homer, Hesiod, Simonides, Orpheus, Musaeus, Iccus, Herodicus, and others, all of whom veiled their σοφιστική in the disguise (πρόσχημα) of other arts such as poetry, soothsaying, physical training, and music out of fear of suffering what the ill-will of such broken circles in each city might cause them (316c-e). The well-being and safety of former sophists required them to deceive, to appear not as sophists but rather as technicians of other arts; therefore, the art of sophistry was, in the beginning, a double-art, necessitating imitation of the technician as a cover for its own operations. Hence, to a young man just fresh from Socrates’ warnings about sophistry, it appears that the danger to one’s soul is now multiplied where the prospect of learning any τέχνη whatsoever brings with it the possibility that behind the name of the teacher, potentially behind the appearance of any practitioner, stands a sophist in disguise.
Protagoras goes on to explain why such disguises are insufficient, and to single himself out as the exception to this deceptive practice in the tradition of sophistry. Despite the fact, as he states, that the many “perceive nothing” (οὐδὲν ἄισθάνονται), but merely repeat what their leaders tell them, it is the powerful of the city, whose capacities of perception are truer, who were able to unmask the sophists of old. In being caught, those terrible consequences that the sophists sought to avoid by means of their technical veils were only increased all the more.

Hence the road I have taken is wholly opposite to theirs; I agree that I am a sophist and that I educate humans, and this precaution I believe to be better than the other: to agree to it rather than deny it. There are other factors that I have considered as well, so as to avoid, by the divinity, terrible suffering, through agreeing that I am a sophist. And I have been in this τέχνη for many years, and many years I have yet lived; without exception, I am old enough to be the father of any of you. Thus, it is more pleasant (ἡδίστοτον) for me, if you wish, to give a logos on these things opposite all in the house. (317b-c)

The special innovation brought by Protagoras in the sophistic art, as he claims, is to secure one’s own safety by reducing σοφιστική from two arts to one; by doing away with deceptive appearances afforded by the cover of practicing various other τέχναι, Protagoras has achieved the end sought by his predecessors by opposite means. An honesty about who one is is now the greater precaution, and the proof that his own device of openness is superior to sophists of old is Protagoras’ own age: the measure he takes as success in sophistry is the greatness of time spent not only in this art, but as well the time he has spent continuing to stay alive.

It should be noted that Protagoras’ strategy of agreeing to be a sophist does not rid the practice of his τέχνη of danger. The ills of enmity and jealousy are, we are to understand, necessary parts of its practice, as long as sophistry demands that the best of
young men must be taken from their families and friends, from their associations of care, in order that they be made better through the sophist’s program of παιδεία. For the picture of sophistry first given by Protagoras sets it against anchorage in a single place, as if it were unavoidable that education for the best of young men demands their withdrawal from the life of their cities. Thus, it appears that sophistry presupposes those necessary evils within each city if it is to improve certain individuals, and therefore presupposes as well a fundamental distinction between individual self-betterment and public well-being. Insofar as a distance from the polis is required for education so understood, the practice of σοφιστικὴ manifest itself as opposed to communal, i.e., political, life.

On the basis of this first agreement, whereby Protagoras and Socrates are to hold their dialogue openly, Socrates is compelled to begin again. Yet Socrates’ reiteration is not a mere restatement of Hippocrates’ good nature and promise, but is rather more pointed; he re-emphasizes Hippocrates’ desire to study with Protagoras, yet now asks what result Protagoras can promise as a fulfillment of such desire. Thus, Protagoras, and not those laymen with respect to σοφιστικὴ like Hippocrates and Socrates, is now set in the position of accounting for what it is that the sophist teaches, and therefore what Hippocrates is to become as a result of this desire.

Protagoras’ initial answer does little to shed light upon the sophist’s actual teaching, and furthermore only appears to confirm Socrates’ own characterization of the sophist as a merchant who praises all of his wares:

Young man, such will come to you, when you join me, that on the day you join you will return home having become (γεγονότι) a better man, and on the following day it will be the same; each day you will always advance in betterment. (318a-b)
Protagoras’ response proves to be as vague and devoid of content as Hippocrates’ earlier statement that the sophist is wise in wise things, an answer, as Socrates follows, that requires little wonder (θαυμάζειν), “since even you, of such an age and so wise, would become better if someone taught you that which you do not happen to know (ἐπιστάμενος)” (318b). Socrates’ words here, given so tersely, are not insignificant. Here, ἐπιστήμη is explicitly aligned with goodness for the first time in the dialogue, the first of several times that Socrates will offer this identification. The significance of ἐπιστήμη with respect to becoming lies here in part in its resistance to becoming; what is known, as opposed to merely opined, is itself not subject to change insofar as its content persists as selfsame throughout time and throughout the fluctuation of opposing forces that identify becoming as what it is. The determination of such betterment, or rather, the attempt to determine that goodness by which betterment is gauged, is perhaps the central point of dispute within the dialogue.

In explaining further what he is asking after, Socrates hints at this character of change by supposing, hypothetically, that Hippocrates changes his desire all at once (αὐτίκα), and chooses to pursue the courses of others who promise betterment, Zeuxippus from Heraclea or Orthagoras of Thebes. When asked in what Hippocrates would become better under their tutelage, each would have something definite to say: painting, in the former case, and flute-playing, in the latter. Directed now to Protagoras, Socrates revises his question by asking into what and concerning what will Hippocrates advance into betterment in association with the sophist. This analogy with other technicians is not unsolicited, since Protagoras has just claimed to belong to a tradition of technicians himself, and by referring to ὁσφιστικὴ as a τέχνη. The challenge for
Protagoras, therefore, is not only to reveal the content of his art, but also to distinguish its choiceworthiness from all other arts that Hippocrates, or any other prospective pupil, may find himself desirous to take up.

Protagoras sees Socrates’ question not merely as a challenge to distinguish *σοφιστική* from the other arts, but as well to distinguish the particular brand of sophistry that he promises from other forms of it. Before he goes on to demarcate the Protagorean sophistry from its competitors, he states offhand that he is glad to answer those who ask their questions well or nobly. One cannot but think of the resonance here with the sophist Gorgias, whose specialty it was to answer any question put to him, as is to be commonly expected of the man of wisdom. Protagoras’ statement serves to reveal his orientation to providing answers rather than questioning, as if, for the wise person, it is answers that matter rather than questions themselves; questions imply ignorance, and therefore are unseemly for those claiming already to possess the relevant knowledge. Like Hippocrates then, albeit out of different motivations, Protagoras suggests an inattentiveness to what might inspire his own questioning.

In demarcating his own brand of sophistry from the others, Protagoras turns to Hippias to signify whom in particular his criticism of inferior *σοφιστική* is directed:

> For Hippocrates, if he comes to me, will not suffer those things he would in the association of other sophists. Those others abuse the young; having escaped the arts, [other sophists] bring the young back into the arts against their will, teaching them calculation (ἀριθμεῖν) and astronomy and geometry and music; however, coming to me, he will learn nothing other than that on account of which he has come. This learning is good judgment (εὐδοκία) concerning his own occupations, how best to manage his home; and concerning the affairs of the *polis*, how to have the greatest capability (δυνατότατος) in the *polis* in practice (πράττειν) and in speaking (λέγειν). (318d-319a)
In opposition to the other sophists who represent a kind of compulsion and slavery in the process of learning by turning students back to that which they have already learned, forcing the young into a needless kind of repetition of various τέχναι, Protagoras claims to offer only what the student seeks willingly. To the extent that Hippocrates, as is likely the case for most young aspirants to sophistry, is unsure of exactly what he seeks from Protagoras, the sophist implies that his teaching consists in that which all of his students want, whether they are aware of this or not. Rather than further enslavement, the pupil seeks, in Protagoras’ eyes, to govern and to direct his own affairs and to exercise his power in the city.

We must hold in mind at this point two concerns arising out of Protagoras’ formulation of becoming better. First, we must ask what the limits of such political power might be, or whether there are any limits to it at all from what Protagoras will go on to say. Secondly, recalling Hippocrates’ self-promoting ambitions in becoming a student of sophistry, it is also necessary to ask whether self-direction and the direction of others in the city as Protagoras refers to them lend themselves to a single measure of goodness. Or, on the other hand, does one’s own betterment necessitate sacrificing the betterment of others within one’s community? Attending to what, and how, Protagoras comports himself as an authority on these subjects will aid us in coming to grips with these questions.

An additional point is to be observed in regard to Protagoras’ delimitation of his own art set out above: the arts of calculation, geometry, astronomy, and music are especially to be left out of proper education in σοφιστική on the way to developing oneself as a free individual. The gravity of this omission is striking to any reader of the
Republic, wherein Socrates explicitly marks out these four *téχναι* as essential parts of the soul’s education, aspects of the *μάθημα* that would “draw the soul from becoming to being” (521d). As Socrates there goes on to explain, the primary *μάθησις* of calculation, having to do with number, is a necessary corrective to our powers of *αἰσθησις*, which on occasion presents one and the same thing – Socrates’ example here is the finger, which is large with respect to its neighboring digit, and small in relation to another neighbor as manifesting opposite determinations at the same time. In order to find one’s way out of this confused alternation between opposing appearances, thought (*νόησις*) is summoned to make use of calculation in order to determine what is one, unchanging, and selfsame from what appears to be both one and many. This “lowly business of distinguishing the one, the two, and the three,” what Socrates denotes as number and calculation (*άριθμόν τε καὶ λογισμόν*), is not simply a basic *téχνη* in itself, but also that in which “every kind of *téχνη* and *ἐπιστήμη* is compelled to participate” (522c). It is the task of determining, that is, measuring, those *logoi* that attempt to capture *εἰδη* in their utter singularity, such that these *logoi* are not found to lead into opposition with themselves in the process of inquisitive testing. The supplementary arts of geometry, astronomy, and music are further mentioned as aiding in the pursuit of distinguishing between those things that are confined to becoming, on the one hand, and those things that are ever selfsame, that are not subject to change within themselves, on the other.

Thus, by noting the fundamental role that number and calculation play in both *téχνη* and *ἐπιστήμη*, it should be clear that Protagoras’ omission of these basic arts in *σοφιστική* already constitutes a grave oversight in two ways: (1), the turn away from
these founding arts reflects an ignorance on Protagoras’ part as to what is involved in
téchnē as such; if he wishes to put forward a mode of knowledge and education that
ignores the foundational arts, what he preaches cannot qualify as an art at all; (2), without
recourse to a study of number as Socrates characterizes it in the Republic, the teachings
of Protagoras will remain caught within the sphere of becoming, compelled to play out in
logos what he enacts in deed in Callias’ courtyard – a mere turning and alternation
between opposite poles.

In logos, such movement of opposition, where the subject at hand is that
collection of accounts according to which one is to direct oneself and others well, would
amount to taking guidance from one logos at one juncture, and an opposing logos at
another. If, therefore, that notion of goodness that underpins the name “good judgment”
is itself subject to change, is thus not reducible to a single determination that holds
throughout time, the good itself will be reduced to becoming, to nothing more than a
series of haphazard appearances. In fact, such a consequence yields the necessity that to
speak of goodness itself as a single thing is at the same time to speak against oneself, to
utter an absurdity and a falsehood. The test for Protagoras, already at this early stage of
his performance, will be that of preserving the very sense of goodness in the good
judgment he promises as a single look that can guide his téchnē, while at the same time
taking leave of those other téchnai essential to such preservation.

As a last stab at clarifying Protagoras’ profession, Socrates tests the sophist’s
statements by asking whether this art of good judgment is the same thing as the political
art (πολιτική téchnē), by which men are made into good citizens (ποιεῖν ἄνδρας
ἀγαθῶς πολίτας), which Protagoras wholeheartedly confirms. Protagoras’ art, then,
in this reconceptualization, is to be a τέχνη of making, of production, where the material to be shaped into its proper form is human material, and more specifically, human understanding as the locus of good judgment. Here, teaching (διδακτείν) and production (ποίησις) are now indirectly admitted by Protagoras to be identical acts in the process of education. The further question of whether such an identification can be maintained with respect to the goodness of judgment in one’s personal and civic affairs is a question that will be have to be considered, as we progress in our study, in light of Protagoras’ ability to provide that εἰδος necessary for all technical production. Furthermore, we shall be compelled to ask whether humans can be shaped according to a particular look as if they were a kind of material upon which the didactic technician works.

As a preface to his own reservations about the possibility of πολιτική so understood, Socrates remarks what a beautiful device (τέχνημα) Protagoras has acquired (κέκτησαι), if he has indeed acquired it, “[f]or I should say to you nothing other than what I think. For this is a thing, Protagoras, that I did not think to be teachable (διδακτόν), but when you say it is, I have no means to take it as untrustworthy (ἀπιστῶ)” (319a). As Socrates implies, Protagoras’ σοφιστική commits the sophist not merely to an art of teaching the political art, but to a possession of that knowledge that consists in good judgment in private and public affairs, whereby what is possessed by one is transmitted through teaching to another. As in the analogous cases of learning a τέχνη, one goes to the individual who can demonstrate facility in his art; thus, in claiming to teach this art of good judgment, and thereby claiming to make others good, Protagoras sets himself the challenge of exhibiting possession of that art that he is to teach to others.
Furthermore, by pointing out his own gesture to speak according to his own opinion, Socrates invites Protagoras to do the same. For if the sophist conceals his thoughts and leads others to believe otherwise than he believes, while at the same time being in possession of knowledge of how to be a good citizen, then his listeners would thereby be taking into their souls μαθήματα that would not improve them as Protagoras asserts. In his self-proclaimed role as a teacher of goodness, then, Protagoras could only speak according to what he does not believe at the cost of his students’ ill faring. By Protagoras’ own (albeit unacknowledged) lights, his logoi must conform to his νόησις if he is to avoid charlatanism. From his first determination of his own σοφιστική, then, the issue of teaching goodness is tied to a conception of goodness as acquired and possessed, the acquisition of which demands self-acknowledged truthfulness (understood in this case precisely as the unconcealment of one’s thoughts) from its teacher. Protagoras’ precaution of unconcealment as a practitioner of sophistry will from this point onward demand further unconcealment of his own thinking if σοφιστική is to justify itself as a form of knowledge at all.

Socrates’ reasons for doubting the truth of Protagoras’ profession are twofold, each arising out of observations that appear to contradict a notion of πολιτική not merely as teachable, but also, as he puts it, “provided (παρασκευαστὸν) by humans for humans” (319b). He cites as the first piece of evidence the custom of the Athenians in their governing council, wherein those who attempt to advise the city leaders on technical matters without the requisite technical knowledge are met with ridicule and annoyance, regardless of how handsome, wealthy or nobly-born they are. Thus, if one is to have a voice in the council on such matters, his voice is only entertained if it proceeds from
acknowledged and identifiable knowledge in the particular issue in question. “Such is their practice in matters they believe to be technical (ἐν τῇ χειρῇ)” (319c). On the other hand, when the issue pertains to deliberation about the management of the city, any citizen, no matter what his station in the city, is allowed to provide counsel on the matter, without the fear of being ridiculed for not being trained by experts in city management. “It is clear (δῆλον) that no one regards it as teachable” (319d). One need only observe, therefore, Athenian custom in order to show that good citizenship is not taught by experts, but is a matter in which all are laymen. With reference to the obviousness of this conclusion, we should see that Socrates begins by taking a commonsense view of the matter; that is, he begins with straightforward appearances: good judgment in purportedly non-technical city affairs does not appear teachable precisely because there are no teachers of it to be found.

Socrates’ second reservation stems as well from a position of obviousness when considering those relations of care – first and foremost the family – wherein goodness appears to be untransmittable. Moving from the sphere of public to private phenomena, he states that the most virtuous (ἄριστοι) and wisest (σοφῶτατοι) are unable to pass on their excellence to others, including those they care for most, their sons (319e). One must only consider people like Pericles, who exhibit qualities of excellence, yet have their sons educated in all possible studies for which there are teachers, short of their own excellence in those very matters that Protagoras now claims to teach. “And there are a great many others whom I could mention to you as having never succeeded, though good themselves, in making anyone else better, either of their own or of other families” (320b).
It is in this passage that \( \dot{\alpha} \rho \varepsilon \tau \varepsilon \overline{\eta} \) is first mentioned in the dialogue, and specifically with reference not to excellence in the acknowledged arts, but with respect to human excellence, whereby one is called a “good person.” The translation of Protagoras’ \( \varepsilon \iota \beta \omicron \upsilon \omicron \lambda \iota \iota \alpha \) first into \( \pi \omicron \lambda \iota \iota \iota \kappa \iota \iota \) and then into \( \dot{\alpha} \rho \varepsilon \tau \varepsilon \overline{\eta} \) is not at all contested by Protagoras; in fact, this translation allows Protagoras the room to develop his case for justifying excellence in human life in general as a technical matter, and moreover, precisely that \( \tau \acute{e} \chi \nu \eta \) that he teaches for a high fee. In doing so, however, Protagoras faces the challenge of meeting Socrates’ objections, wherein the task lies of showing how the appearance of things in Socrates’ commonsense view is actually a false appearance that can only be corrected by Protagoras’ teaching. This is just what Socrates asks for in his state of \( \alpha \rho \omicron \iota \alpha \) about the matter: caught between his own opinion that \( \dot{\alpha} \rho \varepsilon \tau \varepsilon \overline{\eta} \) cannot be taught, on the one hand, and the authority of Protagoras, whom Socrates regards as “having become experienced in many things, having learnt many, and having discovered some things [himself]” (320b), who maintains the opposite, on the other, Socrates asks for an \( \acute{e} \pi \iota \delta \epsilon \iota \xi \iota \zeta \), a demonstration, whereby the matter may become manifest more plainly than his own observations have thus far brought to light.

The potential student of Protagorean sophistry, therefore, is to begin his \( \pi \alpha \delta \epsilon \iota \alpha \) by means of a revision of the way in which appearances come to light for him, a revision that is to be the work of good judgment. Through the \( \log \omicron \) of Protagoras, one is to gain a kind of vision that makes plain the insufficiency of what appears to commonsense wisdom – even where current opinion shows itself to be set in opposition to the way in which matters do in fact stand – beginning with a view of those teachers that are commonly held not to exist.
Before examining Protagoras’ proposed solution to this *aporia*, it is crucial to note that Socrates’ objections are not unanticipated by the sophist. If we consider the evidence of the anonymous treatise entitled *Dissoi Logoi* (Contrasting Speeches), to be dated at the end of the Fifth Century B.C.E., wherein the subject of the teachability of ἀρετή is explicitly posed, we find objections identical to those raised by Socrates: first, that if wisdom and virtue are able to be taught, there would have existed recognized teachers of them the way there have been recognized teachers of the arts, and second, that if the men in Greece who became wise would have taught this wisdom to their own children and their friends. The author of the *Dissoi Logoi* explicitly notes that such objections are “neither true nor new,” supporting the case that Socrates is expressing not merely his own view, but a view that any sophist – as a self-proclaimed teacher of ἀρετή – of the time would be prepared to defeat. The “Great Speech” that Protagoras will give in answer to Socrates, as extensive and detailed as it is, could thereby hardly be seen as a brilliant show of extemporizing.

We should expect, therefore, that Protagoras – as Plato portrays him – is revisiting a common topic in answering Socrates’ objections, and is more than prepared to give a rehearsed *logos* in return. Bearing this in mind, Socrates’ characterization of the sophist as a merchant of μαθήματα serves to provide evidence that the “wisdom” identified with Protagoras consists in those *logoi* that have been memorized by the sophist, and we are to take Protagoras’ Great Speech as no exception here. The acquisition of that teaching which the sophist holds for sale is to be tied, then, to a form of memorization of speeches, to be recalled and reproduced wherever the corresponding question or objection is raised. Accordingly, being wise for Protagoras is to be associated with a kind of
mental possession of *logoi*, whereby one can be counted as a formidable speaker by putting such speeches to voice. This conception of sophistical knowledge adheres to that structure of technical knowledge wherein a set of principles are to be learned and passed on through teaching, with the corresponding guidance of the student in the correct application of such principles.

The question, therefore, of whether there can be a τέχνη of excellence in private and public affairs of management rests upon a certain conception of wisdom as something capable of being possessed and transmitted “by humans for humans” as Socrates puts it. In Protagoras’ ἐπὶδειξις, this character of technical knowledge as procured and possessed must be made primary in his rendering of πολιτική if he is to support his claim to be a teacher of it.
II. *Mýðos and Logos*

In beginning his ἐπίδειξις, Protagoras offers his listeners a choice of whether they would prefer a *µύθος* or a *logos*, as if the manifestation of the truth of his art can be accomplished in either form of speaking, and as if the content of what Protagoras has to share is indifferent to the very form into which it is set. For Protagoras, as he implies, the bringing to light, the showing, of a particular matter may be carried out equally well either through giving a reasoned account of it, or through a mythic mode of speech. The effectiveness of each depends only upon the personal taste of the listener, we are to conclude, and in this offer of a choice between modes of presentation, it is hinted that the sophist has the ability to make manifest one and the same subject in a number of ways. Where those gathered express a willingness to hear either form, Protagoras opts for the “more favorable one” (χαριέστερον), thus presenting himself in the role of a teacher who puts himself at the service of his students’ tastes (320c). Whether his form of discourse actually functions as a favor, as a benefit, to his students, is to be put into question as we examine it.

Protagoras begins, then, with reference to another time, a time before mortal creatures, a time before death as such. His *µύθος* begins with a recounting of origins and a story of human genesis, which is at the same time a story of the city and a story of human ἀρετή. Beginning in a pre-mortal age, and what is more under the earth, in a time before Hades had become full of its dead, the gods set to work molding the forms of various creatures out of earth and fire. Just before the creatures were to be brought out of the darkness and into the light, the fraternal titans, Prometheus and Epimetheus, were
charged with giving each class (γένος) of creatures its particular order (κοσμήσαι) by a fitting (πρέπει) distribution of powers to each. We find here already a curious mirror of Socrates’ own reference to Hades in the distinction between those titans responsible for human life: as Hades has been seen to contain within it those forces of foresight in the figure of Teiresias and attention to immediacy – where thinking and determination are infinitely deferred – on the part of the rest of the dead, so too do we find parallel opposites in the figures of Prometheus (fore-understanding) and Epimetheus (afterthought). Thus, between these two poles we can also discern the alternation of human thinking, as if those forces that made possible human life have left their indelible mark upon their product. The intermingling of these two influences, the movement of human thinking between a kind of guiding pre-understanding of the nature of things and a corresponding forgetfulness of them, has its tragic counterpart in the separation of these forces from each other in the beginning.

Rather than working together, Epimetheus persuaded Prometheus to let him work alone, distributing the powers to each, after which Prometheus would be allowed to examine (ἐπίσκεψαι) the ordering that his brother had carried out. With an eye toward the preservation (σωτηρίαν) of each γένος, where the powers of one class of creatures were counterbalanced by those of another, and where each class achieved its preservation against the elements, Epimetheus gave to each γένος sufficient resources for survival.

Epimetheus’ mode of production is not to be confused with an originary kind of τέχνη. The arts of Hephaesteus remain safeguarded from others, leaving Epimetheus without a proper measure for his distribution. He is compelled to work within his own impoverished measure of what is appropriate, estimating the correctness of his work on
the basis of relative proportion, seeking a harmony between all classes of mortal creatures in survival. Having dismissed Prometheus, Epimetheus has also done away with the possibility of being reminded of what he has forgotten, of the mediation of another’s view of the whole that he is to fashion.

Protagoras, however, attributes Epimetheus’ oversight to a personal shortcoming of wisdom, creating a harmony of self-preservation amongst creatures that is nonetheless out of proportion (ἀλογα) to the whole (321c). It is, therefore, due to an original lack of τέχνη and foreknowledge (or, rather, a lack of foreknowledge in τέχνη that humans were left, in the beginning, unordered (ἀκόςμητον) and without resource (ἄπορος), the discovery of which was mirrored in Epimetheus’ own aporia once all of the powers had been distributed (321c). It is out of this double aporia, caused by forgetfulness, that the need for judgment as an aid to humankind arose.

Our original aporia was consequently overcome by a titanic εὐβουλία, the first decision on behalf of humans: to provide them with τέχνη for the preservation of their lives. For τέχνη, and the gift of fire necessary for its use, is that additional measure required for humans beyond all other creatures to order their lives. The knowledge transmitted to humans by Prometheus in the form of τέχνη was more than a kind of bodily property like fur or an enhanced capacity like quickness, but first and foremost a new kind of vision, one that was able to hold in view an image of a particular εἶδος serving to mediate and guide our action in accordance with that image. Noetic access to such εἶδη, completed, stable throughout the flux of becoming in our aesthetic vision, was the original anchor of human practice, and the first underlying principle of order in human life. Thus, the Promethean gift bequeathed to humans for their salvation was the
very thing that Epimetheus lacked in his own work, that vision measured according to a
single determinate whole, wherefrom human productive activity receives its proper
limits.

Protagoras calls the demiurgic arts as a whole “the wisdom of living” (τὸν βίον
σοφίαν), in distinction to that other art that Prometheus was unable to procure, the
πολιτικὴ residing in Zeus’ quarters (321d). Humanity, we are to understand, is
essentially a technical γένος, where one’s nature and livelihood are not given at birth,
but require cultivation if the human race is not to suffer the original fate set for it by a
titanic oversight. Such cultivation is the reflection of that divine dispensation (θεία
μοῖρα) necessary for the definition of the human as such (322a). The results of this
divine dispensation were, according to Protagoras, not merely the procurement of food,
clothing, and shelter, but also the institution of religion and language. Conspicuously
absent from Protagoras’ version of the Promethean myth is that further allotment to
humans highlighted by Aeschylus in Prometheus Bound, whose Prometheus calls it
“preeminent of subtle devices,” namely the art of numeration (ἄριθμον). Protagoras’
omission here serves to support his oversight with respect to those very conditions –
number, geometry, and those other arts for which he chides Hippias’ curriculum – of
knowledge necessary for τέχνη as such. It should come as no surprise, then, that
Socrates, who listens silently throughout the Great Speech, will first question him about
the oneness or manifoldness, in short, the determinacy, of ἀρετή as Protagoras
understands it.

The indeterminacy of human capabilities in Protagoras’ μῦθος plays itself out in
his further account of the human condition prior to the reception of πολιτική. Humans,
he goes on, lived in separation from one another at first, until the need for defense against
the other creatures – for which their τέχναι were insufficient – fashioned by Epimetheus
drove humans together in the attempt to preserve their lives by founding cities. Aside
from the threat of destruction from other animals, then, the implication is that the τέχναι
provided to humans allowed each to be self-sufficient, despite the fact that, as Protagoras
has Hermes report, each of the arts was dispensed to only a small portion of humans
(322c). Insofar as each individual does not possess all arts necessary to the preservation
of one’s life (and here we would have to imagine that if this were not so, each human
would have been given possession of doctoring, building, weaving, tool-making, and so
on, resulting in the possibility of transmitting each τέχνη to all, whereby any individual
would be able to advise upon any technical matter in the city as well) there already exists
the need for humans to live together, beyond the issue of each individual’s vulnerability
to attack.

In Protagoras’ µύδος, humans appear to vacillate between self-sufficiency and
need for one another, where it is only an external threat, rather than an essential mutual
dependency, that forces humans into communities. Thus, the order brought to humans
through Prometheus’ gift was an ordering of individuals, a form of completeness – which
remains aporetic and undelimited – for each, in need only of safeguarding. The question,
therefore, of what the human is, what limits define humanity as such, stands open. The
task of delimiting τέχνη, therefore, is raised into the task of delimiting the human as
such.

What each human in separation from the others lacked for its self-preservation,
Protagoras states, was πολιτική, yet only, it seems, insofar as this art comprised within
itself the art of war, with which other creatures could be held at bay (322b). Strikingly, Protagoras’ art of εὐβουλία, equated with πολιτική, already begins to blend with the arts of generalship and military training, thus making it less clear what sort of limits give πολιτική its singular identity. The preconditions for fighting together, namely mutual trust and the carrying out of orders, were already manifestly absent in the initial attempts of humans to live together; humans could not form communities because they could not help committing injustice upon one another (ηδίκουν ἀλλήλους), and so continued to disperse again and perish (322b-c). “So Zeus, fearing for our γένος, that it may wholly perish, sent Hermes to bring shame and justice (αἰδώς τε καὶ δίκη) to humans, in order that there be order (κόσμοι) for cities and bonds of friendship to bring them together (δεσμοὶ φιλίας συναγωγοῦ)” (322c).

Following the sense of the μύθος here, we find that justice, shame, and the friendship that follows from their mixture, are all instituted as a second divine dispensation, and for the same end as the first: to secure human survival. The precondition for warfare is thus friendship, and further, friendship derives its purpose and significance from the need of each to preserve his own life. Precisely through the mythic ἐπίθεις of Protagoras, it becomes clear that the goals of self-preservation and self-protection form that underlying basis from which πολιτική is to derive its primary value. Justice in particular, if it is to prove its efficacy and purpose, must be held ultimately to the test of protecting the lives of those who partake of it. Justice, therefore, is presented already as set into a determining measure: the primal drive to security and salvation.

Πολιτική differs from the other Hephaestean arts not merely in its function of unifying humans in communal life. It also differs in the scope of its distribution.
According to Zeus, all humans must “have a share of it” (μετέχειν), otherwise cities cannot exist (322d). In πολιτική, there is to be no such thing as a layperson, since the founding and preservation of the city depend upon its possession by all members alike. Moreover, this general distribution comes with dictates for those who have properly received Zeus’ gift: “And set a law of my ordaining that whoever is not able to have a share of justice and shame is to be put to death as an illness to the city” (322d).

The first law of human society, therefore, serves to emphasize the fundamental logic of πολιτική itself: if the city, and therefore its inhabitants, is threatened with destruction and death from an individual, the guilty party is to be put to death himself. Thus, both in terms of its ultimate directives and its functioning, death serves to delimit the welfare of the city as a whole, and the threat of death compels its citizens to hold to what Zeus has given them. The extent to which this message reflects Protagoras’ own motives should become clear upon recalling that he had referred to his own continued survival in the practice of sophistry as a mark of his own success (317b). We are to be reminded at several points that it is Protagoras’ own perceived safety that will likewise serve as the standard for excellence in his own art.

According to Protagoras, then, πολιτική is a possession of all citizens, and it is due to this universal possession that Athens, as well as all of the other cities, exists. Thus, Protagoras has inverted Socrates’ original position: rather than there being no one possessing this special art, everyone has it. Insofar as the knowledge that marks πολιτική is not an esoteric subject, reserved for the elite, it would follow that justice, and the accompanying virtues Protagoras will go on to cite, is itself an obvious, straightforward matter for any Athenian adult. Despite the claim that it was Hermes the
god of disguises and tricks who carried out Zeus’ distribution, the subject of πολιτική appears in this initial phase of civilization to require no interpretive efforts. Furthermore, if πολιτική is to be justified as an art, there must also be a universal standard of correctness with respect to its content, such that all political artists can agree upon its implementation in action, as well as upon those principles whereby it can be taught. Protagoras does not address these implications in his μύθος, nor does he seek to account for why Socrates, a citizen, can be ignorant of the art that he possesses, or why practitioners of it (again, like Socrates) are unable to identify a fellow expert where the matter is, supposedly, an obvious one.

Such critical observations of Protagoras’ Promethean myth are not advanced simply as a means of revealing his confusion. Rather, they are intended to throw into relief that distance that Protagoras takes with respect to the content of what he has to say. It is manifestly true that what it means to be human demands an acknowledgment of our intimate ties to communal living, on the one hand, and the necessarily technical aspect of our being, on the other. Seen thus, Protagoras’ μύθος carries within itself the seeds of profound insight, yet an insight that he does not appear concerned to treat seriously. For myths serve in part to give voice to that concealed region of human being and to unfathomable human origins as a way of letting the aporias of humanity become manifest in their questionableness. On the other hand, where Socrates elsewhere takes up the mythic mode of speaking, in nearly every case he reveals, precisely through the strangeness and otherworldliness of images, the need to investigate further those shared aspects of human life that remain indeterminate or without accessible grounds. In passing over those crucial questions that he unknowingly unearths through his μύθος,
Protagoras seeks instead to use the myth as a self-evident ground for establishing his case. ¹⁹

Whether or not Protagoras is aware of the inconsistency of his myth, and whether he consciously exploits its indeterminacy, Plato’s portrait of him in this early section nonetheless reveals the extent to which Protagoras’ conclusions about Athenian practices based upon his μύθος compose a prism through which the incoherence of Protagoras’ own set of values is to be detected. For as he suggests in his “further proof,” the goal of protecting oneself from suffering and shame provides the context in which πολιτική is determined:

In all other virtues, as you say, when one professes to be good at flute-playing or any other art in which he has no such skill, they either ridicule him or are annoyed, and his relations come and reprove him for being so mad (μαινόμενον); but where justice or any other πολιτική ἀρετή is concerned, and they happen to know that one is unjust, if he tells the truth about his injustice before the many, that truth-telling which before was regarded as temperance (σωφροσύνη) is here called madness; everyone says that one must call oneself just, if he is or not, and whoever does not pretend to be just is mad, since it is thought that all without exception must necessarily partake of it somehow, or not be among the human. (323a-c)

This example is remarkable for a number of reasons, the first of which is that the possession of πολιτική now provides a measure for humanity itself; all humans, in being what they are, are excellent practitioners of it. Therefore, if one has practiced injustice, one is, apparently, thereby inhuman. In one fell swoop, Protagoras has done away with the possibility for human evil! Injustice, it is now assumed, belongs to the province of the non-human: the savage or the insane or the monstrous.

Yet in doing away with human evil and vice, Protagoras has also done away with that opposition in human life by which the term ἀρετή, or excellence, can have meaning.
Thus, Protagoras confronts us with two equally absurd consequences of the reduction of \( \textit{politik\'\i} \) to humanity: either those who possess this art, as possessors of it, can do no wrong (and must thereby \textit{be} good humans, persisting in their goodness), or those who possess it can somehow fail to implement it, and, in causing evil, become inhuman in the very act of misuse. These two alternatives serve to underscore Protagoras’ lack of understanding, or his indifference, to the way in which we exist in the world, that is, to the human condition as immersed in the sphere of becoming. As a result of Protagoras’ attempt to overturn Socrates’ supposition that all are laypeople with respect to \( \textit{politik\'\i} \), the common notion of human being as a movement between goodness and evil is replaced with a scheme in which one must choose between a notion of human goodness as a kind of being that is possessed, or a notion of humanity as a movement of becoming between itself and its opposite.

Protagoras’ example shows, moreover, in referring to the person who contradicts both of these alternatives – the unjust human – that \( \textit{politik\'\i} \) has a relation to true speech that marks it off from the other arts. Where temperance is aligned with truth-telling concerning one’s facility in demiurgic matters, in \( \textit{politik\'\i} \) it is aligned with self-protection: the move to avoid punishment or shame determines the virtuosity of one’s \textit{logos}. In this sense, the tie between \( \textit{\acute{a}rpeti} \) and \( \textit{\acute{a}lithieia} \) (unconcealment) is itself reduced to the situational, where self-concealment becomes temperate behavior, and speaking truly becomes madness. It is precisely here that Protagoras implies that for the teacher of \( \textit{politik\'\i} \), demiurgic disguises are no longer necessary where one can disguise oneself through \textit{logos}. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, Protagoras has
collapsed the distinction between appearance and truth with respect to ἀρετή. appearing virtuous becomes itself virtuous.

In attempting to show that πολιτική is possessed by everyone, and that there is, accordingly, good reason for allowing all to give counsel in political matters, Protagoras manages to reduce human excellence to human being, and likewise being human to appearing human. It is to be observed, however, that such consequences arise not merely from Protagoras’ own claim to teach people to be good, but also from a certain priority of value in his thinking. Both his livelihood and his own personal safety are bound to maintaining honor and good repute with respect to sophistry. As a self-proclaimed teacher of goodness, he must present himself as possessing that τέχνη whereby the good are made good, and hence, must appear good to his listeners. Insofar as Protagoras is kept physically safe from harm and death at the hands of those he professes to teach, appearing to be good, i.e., appearing to possess πολιτική, and being good amount to the same thing for him.

Protagoras’ logos therefore are utilized in the service of self-preservation, and are measured by the extent to which the appearance of goodness is carried out through those logos. Safety demands, then, a certain circumscription of what a man in his position can say and what he cannot: to call all Athenians experts in goodness is much safer than proclaiming them to be laypeople in it, and, furthermore, openly calling into question the conventions of those whom he is trying to educate will necessarily lead to more danger for him than praising them. Hence, the goodness that is tied merely to being human for all citizens has its correspondence in Protagoras’ own conception of goodness as survival, and what is more, a survival that depends upon the mere appearance of truth in speech.
Due to Protagoras’ own concealed ends, it should not be surprising that he sets the genesis of human virtue into relation with punishment. In proceeding to show how it is that all can be experts in \( \text{politik} \), Protagoras uses the context of punishment to demonstrate that this \( \text{techne} \) is regarded by all to be teachable. For \( \text{politik} \) is not something that comes spontaneously (\( \alpha\upsilon\upsilon\omicron\mu\alpha\tau\omicron\upsilon \)), but rather, he states, is something taught and gained out of care (\( \delta\delta\alpha\kappa\tau\omicron\upsilon \tau\epsilon \kappa\iota \epsilon \zeta \epsilon\pi\iota\mu\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota\alpha\varsigma \pi\alpha\rho\alpha\gamma\iota\gamma\nu\epsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota \)) by those who have already acquired it (323c). As teachable, \( \text{politik} \) is therefore within human control, as opposed to human characteristics that come by nature or chance (\( \varphi\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota \eta \tau\upsilon\chi\eta \)) like weakness, smallness, or ugliness (323d). While the latter sorts of deficiencies do not provide us with occasions for teaching, punishment, anger or reprobation in order to overcome them, those in the former class do, at least in principle.

Within the institution of punishment as Protagoras goes on to describe it, we are to see the workings of human reason, to be distinguished from that madness previously mentioned. Those who “take unreasoning (\( \epsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\omicron \)) vengeance like a wild animal” punish others out of the harm that has been caused by a certain injustice, whereas those who punish “with reason” (\( \mu\epsilon\tau\alpha \lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\upsilon \)) do not attempt to unmake what has already become, but rather one “looks to the future, and aims at preventing that person and others who see him punished from committing injustice again” (324a-b). It is here, however, that Protagoras begins to blur the distinction between punishment and \( \pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\iota\alpha \): the “reasonable approach” does not, as \( \mu\epsilon\tau\alpha \lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\upsilon \) would imply, involve a change on the part of the wrongdoer through \( \log\alpha\sigma \), but rather through \( \alpha\iota\sigma\theta\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma \), either by way of suffering pain or of seeing someone else suffer it. Hence, in informing one’s actions
through this experience of suffering, one relies upon one’s memory of a certain experience of \textit{aἴσθησις} as a guide for further actions. The immediate experience of pain is to serve as a measure for choosing better and worse modes of behavior in the future.

This promethean approach to punishment reflects, therefore, a notion of education that takes its basis, at least in part, to lie in the force of \textit{aἴσθησις}. The educative result of such punishment, however, is left undetermined with respect to the knowledge that is supposed to come of \textit{παιδεία}, namely, as Socrates has asserted, the learning associated with the betterment of one’s soul.\textsuperscript{20} As punishment has been linked here with reasonable behavior, there remains the strong possibility for individuals who wish to avoid punishment to act reasonably as well with respect to Protagoras’ earlier example: one may commit injustice, yet still act reasonably by speaking falsely about that injustice, and so avoid suffering and shame, or worse, the loss of one’s life. In fact, reason, as he implies, appears to demand this course of concealment.

It is not to be overlooked that among those deficiencies in the realm of \textit{πολιτική} that are causes for punishment and reprobation Protagoras mentions injustice, impiety, “and all of those things opposite to \textit{πολιτικὴ ἀρετὴ}” (323e-324a). At this point, sophistic \textit{πολιτική} undergoes a division into parts, two of which receiving names and the rest left for the present indeterminate in both name and number. It is, however, Protagoras’ use of opposition that is to be especially noted here. For it is precisely through considering concepts with respect to their opposites that such concepts gain a measure of determination and content. Through differentiation, through those aspects of an idea that are opposed to aspects of another idea we are able to separate out the nature of that which is put into question and to see it most clearly. Such clarity is itself opposed
to that orientation to the self-evident and obvious that Socrates’ unnamed friend, Hippocrates, and the citizens within Protagoras’ μύθος, too, exhibit. As we have observed above, πολιτική ἄρετί must be an obvious, straightforward matter to all who practice it in the city, and accordingly, for Protagoras as well. If Protagoras is to make good on his claim to teach ἄρετί, he must be able to make clear those points of differentiation and opposition that serve to delimit not merely ἄρετί itself, but as well those parts into which he has divided it.

Yet as Protagoras describes the phenomenon of punishment in order to demonstrate that ἄρετί can be taught, ἄρετί itself becomes subject to a strange kind of opposition. For Protagoras concludes his point about the reasonableness of punishment by stating: “And thinking in this way, [the man who punishes with reason] must think that ἄρετί is gained by education; for you see that he punishes in order to deter” (324b). Hence ἄρετί, in opposition to injustice, impiety, and so on, becomes the avoidance of such deficiencies; excellence is curiously reduced to not being bad, to not committing various sorts of evil. In short, Protagoras equates otherness with opposition, leaving the ἄρετί that is πολιτική τέχνη once more without any determinate content of its own.

In turning to the second objection raised by Socrates, having to do with the private transmission of ἄρετί, where those men deemed to be good are unable to make their progeny good in the same way, Protagoras leaves off his mythic account to give, as he says, a logos. However, rather than giving an account that leaves behind the influence of his Promethean myth, we find that Protagoras will have need of what he takes himself to have established through that myth, namely the belief on the part of the Athenians, reflected in their system of law, that all humans must possess a share of virtue if their
institutions are to have meaning. It is, in particular, the curious link between these two accounts through an emphasis upon punishment that calls into question the apparent independence of each account from the other. Yet, as we shall find, the shifting discourse of Protagoras with respect to goodness serves to undercut the sense of those legal institutions by eradicating the very opposition between good and bad citizens in general.

Protagoras begins: “Is there, or is there not, some one thing of which all citizens necessarily partake if there is to be a city? Your _aporia_ is to be solved in this, and nowhere else if not here” (324e). Protagoras appears to begin as the dialectician would, seeking out a single _eîðos_ by which to determine human goodness, and according to which the existence of the _polis_ is to be accounted for. Yet this singularity is immediately converted into a plurality by setting a number of virtues – justice, temperance, and holiness – under one name, “what I may collect together and call a man’s virtue ( _ánôdros àretiάν_ ) …” (325a). Protagoras’ general thrust throughout the Great Speech, as we know, is to convince Socrates that _àretiά_ is teachable. But what is not yet clear to Protagoras is the fact that the possibility of teaching it, if teaching it is possible at all, consists to a large extent in bringing the unity and multiplicity of _àretiά_ into a coherent and determinate relation, in showing how the one and the many within virtue coexist in a consistent manner. However, this essential aspect of teaching virtue, namely bringing to light what that “some one thing” is ( _tí èsèti_ ), is passed over in Protagoras’ more immediate attempt to show not what it is in its being, but why human participation in this as yet indeterminate one-and-many is a requirement for the city itself. 21
The unity of virtue, expanded now from justice and shame to the collection of justice, temperance, and holiness, is, moreover, stressed here again as something of which all (πάντας) must partake, in line with Zeus’ instructions to Hermes. Protagoras is quite clear about this; for those who cannot partake of it, after teaching and punishment have failed to yield the adequate results, exile or execution, even the confiscation and overthrow of their homes, await them. Thus, the implicit directive of Protagoras’ Jovian city entails that the virtuous must have the power to identify those who are like and unlike themselves with respect to goodness, and to separate out all who are unlike. It is here in particular that ἀρετή appears in Protagoras’ speech as something that must come to one as a whole, rather than piecemeal; for, it seems that it is not enough to possess a part of virtue and be lacking in other parts if such a lack is to determine whether or not one can belong to the city. Hence, if Protagoras is to be a teacher of ἀρετή, he must as well claim to teach all of the parts that fall under this name, lest his students reveal themselves to be unfit to participate in the city after joining his lessons. For here the difference between life and death rests upon being virtuous.

Protagoras, relying upon his earlier “demonstration” through myth that humans regard virtue as something teachable, points out that in view of all the evils that face one by law who does not show himself to possess virtue, were good men to have their sons instructed in everything but this, “what wondrous (θαυμάσιοι) people the good are found to be!” (325b). The apparent wondrousness of those who can avoid the death of their kin by having them taught virtue, but who refuse to do so, mirrors the kind of madness that Protagoras has pointed out with respect to the unjust individual who refuses to lie in order to save himself from the punishment of law. Protagoras implicitly appeals to a sense of
reason in both cases, in opposition to the mad and the wondrous. Within this logic of self-preservation, Protagoras skillfully argues that Socrates’ conclusion that there are no teachers of ἀρετή would, given the punishment facing those who fail to realize it, make all citizens absurd in their reasoning. It must be shown, in contrast, that there are hidden teachers of virtue all around. As Protagoras goes on to explain, the good are the first teachers of their children in a process that spans “from earliest childhood until the last day of their lives” (325c).

Protagoras turns to an extended catalogue of stages in παιδεία, beginning with the child’s apprehension of logos:

As soon as one of [the children] understands what is said, the nurse, the mother, the tutor and the father himself struggle so as to make him the best, and as each word and deed arises they teach and impress upon him that this is just, and that unjust, one thing noble, another shameful, one holy, another unholy, and that he is to do this and not do that. If he willingly obeys, so; but if not, as if he were a bent and twisted piece of wood, they straighten him out through threats and blows. (325c-d)

One’s first lessons begin here with an indication of particular instances of good behavior, where the name of a given virtue or vice is attached to each. Through what is presented to one’s perception, one first begins to learn what is regarded as good and bad behavior, and if one is a slow learner, if one does not first obey the orders of one’s house, one is taught through both fear (threats) and pain (blows).

One cannot but notice throughout Protagoras’ illustration of παιδεία the stress that he puts on fear, pain, and force throughout the educative process. What Protagoras describes as the “care” (ἐπιμέλεια) taken by parents and by the city – mentioned seven times in his logos – to educate the young is to be considered in relation to the notion of human force or compulsion (ἄνάγκη) as the overriding means through which this care
is expressed, a term which occurs eight times in the context of his speech on Greek education. That force receives such emphasis in Protagoras’ understanding of παιδεία, accompanied by a picture of youths as bent lengths of wood that are in need of straightening, suggests that students of ἀρετή are to be produced on the model of making, of the shaping of material into a certain form from without. Where the virtue of the artisan resides in forming materials by his own labor of force to suit a proper end, it is implied here that the souls of the young are to be molded on a similar understanding, forcing them into a form that is regarded as virtuous. Thus, a τέχνη aimed at producing virtue through teaching begins by shaping one’s actions through the fear of pain, where the lesson of submission to external authority is reproduced in punishment as the submission to the power of one’s αἰθήσεις, by setting pain as the limit-point, the boundary, of goodness as such. At bottom, Protagoras’ description of punishment in education replaces a mediated, reflective understanding of goodness and evil with the immediacy of goodness and evil in feeling.

Thus, an education in justice, holiness, and nobility begins at home, prior to schooling; once schooling begins, however, temperance (σωφροσύνη) and the avoidance of cowardice follow in the course of the political curriculum. The teacher is, as Protagoras says, charged with
caring far more for the good order (εὐκοσμίας) of the children than their grammar and harp-playing … and when the children have learned their letters and are coming to understand the written word as before they did only the spoken, they are given works of good poets to read as they sit in class, and are forced (ἀναγκάζουσιν) to learn them by heart (ἐκμαθάνειν), in which they find many admonitions, many descriptions and praises of good men of old, so that the child may imitate (μυιται) them out of envy and yearn to become as they. (325e-326a)
The measure of learning in Protagoras’ educative scheme is to be the reproduction or forced repetition of written *logoi*, as a demonstration that one has learned what is to be taught; memorization is to determine the success of the teacher’s activity. One must recall here Socrates’ opinion of sophists as those who hold in reserve, in their memory, *logoi* for sale, along with the inclination on the part of the many to judge wisdom by long-winded, seemingly extemporaneous speeches, such as the current one by Protagoras. In neither case is an understanding of what is said in the youths’ lessons touched upon, and it is clear that the pupil’s imitation of “good works of poetry” proceeds more in line with the praise won by the models given in poetry than in an understanding of that goodness itself which Socrates reveals to be, in nearly every dialogue, the most difficult of things to learn. In Protagoras’ technical approach to education, we are called again to pose the question of whether it is possible to “make” the child understand what is to be taught in the way that one can make a house or a pair of sandals, and whether, accordingly, the demonstration of understanding through a vocal repetition of lessons is merely an expedient and ultimately insufficient standard for judging the understanding of the student.

What does not appear to trouble Protagoras here is how the goodness of poetic works are to be identified, especially in relation to the young who are to imitate what comes forth in them. Whereas a significant portion of the early books of the *Republic* are devoted to this problem,²⁴ Protagoras has already, in effect, done away with such concerns by making human virtue an obvious matter. The criterion of goodness must be self-evident, and the danger of possible misinterpretation of any “hidden sense”²⁵ within the works of the greatest poets is not addressed. Both in *logos* and in what comes to one
through ἀιδοθησίς, there is no need for questioning the measure of ἀρετή, since only the mad or the inhuman are unable to grasp it for themselves. Once, it seems, Hermes has provided justice and shame to humans, there is no longer any need of the god’s other gifts; interpretation, and in fact any σκέψις in discourse, has no place in Protagoras’ vision of education.

The care that marks the striving of good men to have their sons taught virtue can, it seems, be measured as well in terms of wealth. The sons of the κάλοι κάγαθοι are those who begin their education at the earliest age and leave their schooling at the latest. “This is what people do who are most powerful (μάλιστα δυνάμενοι); and the most powerful are the wealthiest” (326c). Protagoras’ odd insertion of this point in the midst of his cataloguing of education implies that there is a kind of conventional order to the division of the city between the κάλοι κάγαθοι and the οἱ πολλοὶ where power, money, and virtue rationally belong together. Thus, Protagoras had no need at first of mentioning ἀρετή as the subject of his teaching good judgment, since the accruement of power in the city already implies such virtue. At the same time, however, his admission that, as Socrates states, all men may speak up in the council on matters of the city that are not connected with a specific art, whether he be “a rich man, a poor man, of good family or of none,” appears to conflict with a notion of power and wealth as the signs of virtue (319d). As we shall see, Protagoras’ supplementary appeal to differences in nature (φύσις) will be necessary to account for this discrepancy.

At the end of formal forced instruction, the individual is then called to submit to the highest of authorities, the body of laws in the city:
And when they are released from their teaching, the city next constrains them to learn the laws and to live in accordance with them as after a model (παράδειγμα), so that their own practice may not be carried out randomly and without guidance (ἀπερίγραπτα), but as grammar teachers first draw letters faintly with the pen for their slower pupils, and then give them the copy-book and constrain them to write according to the guidance of their sketches, so the city sketches out for them the laws invented by ancient and good lawgivers, and constrains them to govern and be governed according to these. (326c-d)

Education, from childhood to maturity, proceeds along a single structure of learning, where one submits to a series of models for imitation in speech and practice. Such education culminates in one’s ability to obey the law, to take the limits marked out by ancient law as the boundaries for one’s actions. As in his account of poetic mimesis, however, Protagoras does not invoke a notion of interpretation of those laws passed down for governance, nor does the education of which he speaks appear to provide individuals with the means for critiquing such laws, for understanding what it is in them that makes them good. And as with each stage of education, the merit of following what one learns appears to descend from an avoidance of instituted pain and punishment, rather from any positive content in the lessons and laws themselves.

Protagoras has at this point given an argument for the teachability of virtue through an examination of the educative process common to the majority of Greek cities. Educative practices, including legal dictates and punishments, reflect the belief of the citizenry that virtue can be procured through didactic care. However, a demonstration of the consistency between opinion about virtue and the organization of societal norms with respect to this opinion does not establish the very thing Socrates has asked of Protagoras at the beginning, namely whether or not virtue can be taught, outside of common belief about it. That is, where Socrates asks for a demonstration of the truth of virtue’s
transmission, Protagoras has only given him an argument for why one should assume that it is teachable. Appealing to the apparent rationality of humans, Protagoras takes himself to have established the obvious. “Seeing that so much care (ἐπιμελεία) is taken regarding private and public ἀρετή, do you wonder (θαυμάζεις), Socrates, and find yourself in aporia, that it may be taught? Surely there is no need to wonder at that, but it would be much more [wondrous] if it were not taught” (326e).

With this appeal to the apparent rationality of the polis, Protagoras calls, in essence, for a repression of wonder, and a fortiori calls for an end to questioning not only about the goodness of the institutions of the polis, but as well for the goodness of its citizens who follow such institutions. Hence, the unhindered operation of the state demands the repression of philosophy itself, born as it is out of the very wonder that Protagoras wishes to wave away in the course of his speech. As we have seen in his view of education, there is no space reserved for the sort of wonder and subsequent questioning through which the goodness of private and public customs may be critiqued and examined; in fact, since this form of παιδεία supposedly produces virtuous citizens, it follows that the best are those who have no need of asking such questions. In this sense, ἀρετή and philosophy appear to belong to mutually exclusive realms; the freedom that Socrates sees arising out of education as he understands it is reduced, in Protagoras’ version, to unquestioned obedience to the authority of law.

As the final step in his Great Speech, Protagoras must resolve the last problem of why it is that so many offspring of good men appear to turn out badly, a matter that requires once more little question. “This is not to be wondered at, if I spoke truly before in saying that no one, if there is to be a city, must be a layperson in the matter of virtue”
(326e-327a). We are to note, in this reformulation of participation (μετέχειν) in virtue by all, that the kind of participation that Protagoras has in mind is a kind of professionalism or technical skill that comes through education. If virtue is the mark of the truly human, then ἀρετή as the human τέχνη requires that all must become technicians in being human. The human is technical in his or her very essence.

Protagoras advances his argument by way of setting ἀρετή into an analogy with the art of flute-playing – as suitable a candidate for bringing the teachability of virtue to light “as any other pursuit or learning (μαθημάτων) that you may choose to mention” (327a). If, his argument goes, flute-playing were the “one thing” upon which the existence of the city rests, and in which all must be a professional in accordance with his or her capabilities – with each person offering and accepting instruction to and from all, each person blaming others who do not practice this art well – the difference between good and bad players would not be decided on the basis of whose father is a better or worse player. Rather, the difference between them would rest upon differences in natural ability for learning that specific art:

[w]herever the son happened to be born with the best nature (εὐφυέστατος) for flute-playing, he would be found to have made a name for himself, and where this nature is lacking, he would be without fame. Often the son of a good player would become a bad one, and often of a bad one, a good one. But nonetheless, all would be sufficient players when considered with respect to laypeople who had no sense of flute-playing. Likewise, you must regard, in the present matter, any person who appears (φαίνεται) to you to be the most unjust person ever nurtured among human laws as a craftsman (δημιουργόν) of this matter if he were judged against humans who had no education and law courts and any constant compulsion (ἀναγκαζομαι) to care in virtue, but were a kind of savage like those portrayed by Pherocrates in the last Lenaea. (327c-d)
The appeal to φύσις as a means of accounting for the difference between those good and bad pupils who are constantly compelled to practice an art has the effect of disrupting that rational basis of praise and blame upon which the institutions of political virtue rest. That is, within the distinction between good and bad players measured in relation to one another in the city, the worse cannot be blamed for not being better where any elevation beyond their practice is limited by the uncontrollable influence of φύσις. If one’s nature inhibits one’s ability to learn ἀρετή in the same way that it conditions the learning of flute-playing, then such inhibitions would not be cause for “anger and punishment and blame,”27 but rather for pity. As a naturally underdeveloped body may incline one, in Protagoras’ account, to the opposite of courage, so may a natural difficulty in learning the lessons that make up political education result in a comparatively lower capacity to procure virtue as a whole. The indeterminacy of the purported limit between φύσις and νόμος (law or custom) therefore calls into question the distinctions between civilized and uncivilized, human and mad, intentional and accidental, according to which the institutions of the polis are devised. As any careful listener may suspect, only a determinate account of ἀρετή, appropriate to the limits of humanity itself, could reveal the coherence or incoherence of Protagoras’ demonstration.

Yet Protagoras suggests something quite revealing in his analogy between virtue and flute-playing: those whom we deem most unjust in the city would nonetheless appear to be technicians – that is, skilled professionals – of virtue when compared with those lacking παιδεία and laws and the ongoing constraint to be virtuous. That is, Protagoras uses the wickedness of the “savage” (ἄγριος) as a relative measure for the goodness of those who live in the polis; seen in relation to those who, then, know nothing
of human virtue, the vice apparent in the city appears as its opposite – virtuous. Those metaphorical “laypeople” in ἀρετή, according to whom the “professionals” in virtue are to be gauged, are those living outside the city, and from this perspective, all who take part in the life of the city are to be considered good. In order to carry out this conversion of political vice into virtue, Protagoras must go beyond the city, beyond the political, in order to find his standard. However, insofar as virtue and vice have been developed in his μῦθος and logos as belonging within the sphere of the city, as proper to the sphere of the political, Protagoras converts what lies on the other side of the limits of the city – and therefore what is other than virtue and vice – into the opposite of virtue.

In this Protagorean logic, otherness is converted into opposition, and the opposites that were formerly considered by Socrates within the bounds of the polis are now made to appear as one and the same thing. It is, therefore, only by applying an improper measure to the citizenry that Protagoras can maintain the view that ἀρετή is possessed by all in the city alike. This confusion between otherness and opposition, and therefore sameness and difference, serves to further the suspicion that if πολιτική is a matter of technical production of good citizens, then in Protagoras’ hands it appears to be without a stable and guiding εἶδος for determining the nature of human goodness.

Socrates’ own assumption about the general lack of teachers of virtue, Protagoras goes on, is due to his being spoiled (τρυφάς), “because everyone is a teacher of virtue to the extent of his powers, and you think there is no teacher. Why, you might ask, too, who is a teacher of Greek – none would appear (φαίνεται) to you at all” (327ε). Socrates is spoiled because he has not adopted the proper Protagorean standard of judging ἀρετή with respect to those who have no knowledge of it at all, as if the measure of speaking
well in one’s native tongue were to be judged with reference to those who do not speak
one’s language at all. The strangeness of this second analogy, that between logos and
ἀρετή, is illuminative for what follows Protagoras’ speech, and for the education that he
purports to transmit. Protagoras’ parallel implies that in “knowing” one’s language, in
knowing how to use the appropriate names along with rules of grammar, one is thereby
made a good speaker. Yet if we consider that the virtue of logos, as Socrates displays in
his σκέψις, lies in bringing to light what remains concealed from one’s understanding and
in letting what is passed over in common, everyday speech show itself in its nature, then
a knowledge of correct names and grammar does not itself suffice to mark the
distinction between speaking well and speaking badly in any language. Rather, learning
the basics of one’s language is the first precondition for differentiating between its good
and ill use. And Protagoras, obviously knowledgeable in the Greek language, does not
yet see the intrinsic relation between logos and virtue, or, more precisely, does not grasp
the way in which the virtue of logos consists in the very access that it provides to the
nature of virtue, provided the distinction between speaking well and speaking poorly is
judged according to its proper measure. Thus, the question of what ἀρετή is cannot be
decided without gaining a measure of that form of logos through which ἀρετή is to be
glimpsed.

The “spoiled” power of perceiving virtue on Socrates’ part, given that all in the
city are skilled in it, amounts to the same as asking the absurd question of where artisans
are to be found to teach the sons of artisans the very τέχνη their competent fathers have
passed on to them (328a).
It appears that it would not be easy, Socrates, to find them a teacher, but easy for those who are wholly inexperienced (ἀπείρων) in it; and so it is with virtue and all other things – if there is someone who differs (διαφέρει) ever so little in showing the way to virtue, thanks is in order. Such a person I believe myself to be, differing from all other humans in assisting them to become καλός κάγαθός … (328a-b)

The “inexperienced” to whom Protagoras refers are those, as the Greek word ἀπείρων signifies, who lack limit (πέρας), those who cannot draw the necessary distinctions according to the proper bounds of that which they take up. As we have seen, those who lack the requisite limits of ἁρετή in Protagoras’ logos are those who live beyond the limit of the polis, in a region that is other than the polis. Yet within such limits, Protagoras claims to distinguish himself from those experienced (ἐμπείρων) in this matter. If he is to make good on this claim, Protagoras must therefore be able to differentiate between better and worse within the limits of the city, those limits proper to ἁρετή.

Protagoras closes his demonstration with an emphasis upon Socrates’ inability to grasp the obvious, that it is, once again, “no wonder” that the sons of good men turn out to be bad and the sons of bad men are found to have become good, “since even the sons of Polycleitus, companions of Paralus and Xanthippus here, are not to be compared with their father, and the same is the case for those [sons] of other craftsmen” (328c). Yet if differences in technical ability (including, as we are to understand, πολιτική) are not to be judged in reference to other technicians, but instead to the all-encompassing difference between those who have passed through a course of education and those who have not, Protagoras inadvertently undercuts the very distinction that he claims for himself and the value that he sets upon being that much more capable of leading citizens to virtue than
the average teacher of it. In casting aside, therefore, Socrates’ spoiled estimation of the
good and the bad in the city, and relying upon an extra-political standard of judgment,
Protagoras at the same time trivializes that crucial difference according to which he
makes his living. Hence, that excellence with respect to human faring signified in the
meaning of ἀρετή appears to be in need of further determination within the opposition
between good and ill proper to the city if it is to count for anything at all.

Protagoras’ Great Speech champions the primacy of τέχνη in human life as the
guiding structure for virtue by making it a possession of all, and in fact, making it the
measure of what it means to be human in general. We find, in its conclusion, that ἀρετή
is not only teachable, but as well already taught by all mature citizens and even by those
who are no longer alive. From parental lessons through formal schooling in poetry,
music, and physical training, all the way to the institution of civil law, the teaching that
composes παιδεία is so ubiquitous and obvious that it can appear virtually nonexistent to
someone with a needlessly wondrous affliction like Socrates. In a dazzling display of
sustained rhetoric, Protagoras appears to his audience to be worthy of the reputation that
has preceded him.

Yet as we have seen above, a number of significant questions and aporias ensue
from his demonstration along the way, provided one has time to interpret his ἔμπνευς and
logos at each step. For it remains unclear in what sense each citizen partakes or
participates (μετέχειν) in ἀρετή, in what sense the technical manipulation of each
student makes each of them virtuous, and furthermore, in what the very nature of ἀρετή
and its opposite consist. Virtue has been identified as a single thing, yet again as a
collection of indeterminately many things, some named, along with their opposites, and
some not. As well, individuals have been mentioned as performing viciously, yet virtuously concealing it, while at the same time everyone, in virtue of belonging to the city, has been deemed virtuous. Thus, as we have already stressed, the resolution of the quandaries arising out of Protagoras’ performance depends upon making manifest the limits of ἀρετή, of marking out its selfsameness and difference from what does not belong to it. Protagoras’ impressive speech demands, then, a supplementary logos bearing upon what as yet remains concealed. It is Socrates’ turn, now, to undertake a σκέψις to this end.
III. The Search After Unity

The effect that Protagoras’ speech has on Socrates is not inconsiderable. For Socrates remains sitting in silence, looking at Protagoras as if he were going to say more, caught up in his desire for the man to continue. In fact, Socrates describes his state as being “enchanted” (κεκλημένος), as if the Orphean voice of Protagoras still held sway over his thoughts (328d). Such enchantment has the effect of scattering one’s thinking, of the dispersion of thought, as Socrates attests when he notes his effort to gather himself together (συναγείρας) once he realized that the sophist had indeed come to a finish. It is significant that Socrates does not readily apprehend the end of Protagoras’ demonstration; the question of how such limits might be determined – whether there can be a clear and full determination, once and for all – of any subject matter, much less that of virtue, is implicitly raised here.29

One might say that it is due to Socrates’ own state of enchantment that he cannot readily grasp Protagoras’ speech as a completed whole and cannot see that the ἐπὶδειξις has come to its proper limit. Yet our analysis of Protagoras’ extended speech has shown the manifold ways in which the unity and selfsameness of its central theme – ἀρετή – have given way to dispersion and otherness, where the single notion of virtue is itself subject to becoming one and many, virtuous and vicious at the same time. Thus, the dispersion characteristic of Socrates’ enchantment derives from the disunity and confusion of Protagoras’ discourse itself; where the nature of that which is presented in logos remains indeterminate, so too, do the limits of that logos itself remain indeterminate and without measure.
As Socrates turns to Hippocrates, he proclaims what a favor (χάρις) he has carried out by inducing him to come to speak with, and listen to, Protagoras. Thus, the favor asked of Socrates has become double, wherein the search after wisdom is transformed into a mutual favor of questioning and answering, with the result now, as Socrates states, that whereas “I formerly regarded that there was no human care (ἐπιμέλεια) by which the good become good, though now I am persuaded that there is” (328e). Yet Socrates does not go so far as to say that his persuasion about human care agrees with the form of care that Protagoras has illustrated, which reduces care to compulsion, punishment and unquestioning submission to authority. If Socrates’ newfound notion of care does in fact differ from that of Protagoras, we are to look closely at how Socrates comports himself to Protagoras in speech and deed in order to mark out this difference.

Socrates mentions, however, that there is one “small obstacle” (ἐμποδών) in need of clearing away, which Protagoras will assuredly take care of. Before attending to this difficulty, Socrates subtly calls for an arrangement about the way in which their dialogue should proceed:

If one should be present when any of the public orators were treating these things, one could probably hear similar logoi from Pericles or some other capable speaker; but if you question one of them, they are like books, in no way capable of answering or even putting their own questions. If you question even a small thing in what has been said, much like brazen vessels sound long after they have been struck and prolong this sounding unless you put your hand on them, these orators also stretch out their speeches into a full-length course when asked a small question. But Protagoras here, as he has demonstrated that he can give a long and beautiful logos, can also reply in short manner when questioned, and after asking a question can await and accept the answer, things which only a few men are able to possess. (329a-b)
If Protagoras is to show himself to be different from the average orator, the first condition is that he must distance himself from these “booklike” speakers. Yet what does Socrates have in mind by likening these others to books?

Socrates’ opinion about sophistry, related earlier to Hippocrates, helps to shed light upon the sense of this analogy. Recall that the sophist was regarded as essentially a merchant of lessons, who may be ignorant of the good or ill effect of his *logoi* upon the soul of the patron. The implication is that what the sophist has to offer is a collection of memorized speeches upon a number of different subjects. And where what has merely been memorized, but not subjected to a κέψις in light of its goodness with respect to the soul, is put forth in speech, the orator is not thereby in a position to elaborate or interpret its meaning for the audience. Only one who has a critical understanding of such content can carry this kind of elaboration out. The display of wisdom through such ordinary oratory is, then, nothing more than a feat of memory, a mimetic activity that reproduces little more than words honed to the end of making their mouthpiece appear knowledgeable. The average sort of speaker mimics, in effect, not the lessons or underlying meaning of his *logos*, whatever they may be, but only mimics the text itself, and to this extent, the orator seeks as much as possible to liken himself to a book. Thus, Socrates indicates the deficiency that books and speakers who mimic them must share: a book does not answer questions, nor does it pose them, once what it has to say has already been said.

Accordingly, those who imitate books of wisdom in speech are generally not unaware of this deficiency. The extension of further speeches in response to questions of detail is instituted to mask the lack of understanding hidden behind the original *logos*. 
Furthermore, the masking carried out through long speeches functions as a means of evading and discouraging further questioning by overtaxing the listener’s memory of the very subject at issue. In this sense, overly long and winding speeches reproduce the effect of a written text without, however, allowing those to whom it is delivered that one advantage that a text possesses over spoken logoi, namely the ability that inscriptions, in their concrete subsistence, afford to the reader who wishes to go back to reexamine what was said previously. Orators, therefore, allow themselves to be booklike in a way that exploits the asymmetry between written and spoken texts, an exploitation that burdens the understanding of those who are to judge the validity of what has been delivered in speech. It is unsurprising, then, that the power of speeches like the one Protagoras has just given lies not in their clarity and transparency of meaning, their ability to bring to light the matter addressed, but in their enchanting, that is, obscuring effect.

Yet the fact that Socrates sees as a shortcoming of typical orators the inability to put questions of their own – just like books – appears strange. If the speaker already knows the subject of his own speech, then what need is there for him to ask questions along with simply delivering his logos? Given what we have said already (with regard to Hippocrates) about the intrinsic relation between questioning and wisdom, we can speculate that Socrates refers to the absence of an original question on the part of the orator about the matter that he gives the appearance of knowing, an original lack of wonder that gave rise to the memorized speech in the first place. If, that is, an orator’s speech is born out of a concerted questioning in light of the desire to know the answer, then the orator would presumably be able to give reasons for constructing his speech as he has. As well, the ability to put one’s hard-won conclusions into a number of forms in
relation to the specific questions he faces, for the purpose of better clarifying what he means to say, could only come as a result of an original mode of meaningful questioning. Though we do find Protagoras putting a question to his listeners in the course of his speech,\(^{32}\) it is a question that already has its answer prepared; it is, therefore, a question lacking wonder, a rhetorical gesture rather than an epistemological precondition.

The appeal for Protagoras to answer briefly (\(\beta \rho \alpha \chi i\)) is, therefore, the first means of differentiating between what has been merely repeated from memory and what one can claim as one’s own answer, informed by one’s understanding. Thus, the measure of Protagoras’ self-proclaimed superiority in teaching has its first prerequisite in the measure of the length of his *logoi*. The question of length of speeches is the question of how one might let questions arise and how one is to respond to them in such a way that obscurity gives way to revelation.

Socrates’ *σκέψις* begins with respect to a particular point at which he wondered (\(\epsilon \theta \alpha \iota \mu \alpha \sigma \alpha\)), a point which, when made clear, would satisfy his soul. Thus, if one’s soul is to be nourished only by learnings (\(\mu \alpha \theta \iota \mu \alpha \tau \alpha\)),\(^{33}\) then what would qualify as a lesson to Socrates’ soul is still wanting in all that he has yet heard from Protagoras. The implication here is that true learning is not to be equated with mere listening, with following along with a speech or a text in thought, but with that kind of testing, driven by wonder and questioning, that characterizes Socratic *σκέψις*. If Socrates is to occupy the place of Hermes in the dialogue, interpreting – and therefore testing – discourse about human goodness, we are to observe that this hermeneutic function, this crossing of limits between speaker and listener, writer and reader, is for Socrates a movement associated with the process of learning. Whereas the testing of the learner in Protagoras’ speech has
to do with the student’s repetition of lessons and with carrying out instructions in deed, the testing after which Socrates seeks will not consist in mere restatement of words already given, but in one’s ability to translate the content of a lesson into one’s own discourse – in a precise (ἀκριβῶς) logos (329c).

Socrates’ request for precision has to do with the nature of ἀρετή, which has thus far in Protagoras’ demonstration been called by many names (justice, shame, temperance, holiness). He asks Protagoras to say “whether virtue is one thing, of which justice and temperance and holiness are parts, or whether these things I have just spoken are all names (ὁνόματα) of the same one being (τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἑνὸς ὄντος)” (329c-d). As with his investigation of Hippocrates, Socrates seeks first to move beyond the impression of understanding attendant to names, and to uncover that to which the name (or here, many names) refers. As well, we should note that Socrates’ question begins dialectically, that is, by asking after the number of that which is at issue in the subject of ἀρετή, whether it is essentially one or many. For, without this initial understanding, a logos treating virtue cannot be set into its proper limits.

Protagoras replies that this is easy (ῥᾴδιον) to answer, as if it were, once more, an obvious matter. Virtue, he states, is one thing, while the names he has used are parts of it. Yet, as Socrates’ following question makes clear, if there are parts gathered into a single whole, then an understanding of this single whole cannot be ventured without an account of the sameness that allows each part to belong to that whole, as well as an account of those differences where each part is distinct from the others. Accordingly, Protagoras is asked whether such parts of virtue are like the parts of the face, where each part has its own function and is different in kind from the others, or whether these parts
are like the parts of gold, where “there is no difference among the parts, either between the parts or between a part and the whole, except in greatness and smallness” (329d).

It is *prima facie* troubling that Socrates only offers Protagoras rather extreme options here: homogeneity and utter difference. Might there be subtler alternatives through which to examine the relation of the virtues to virtue itself and to each other? Are the terms of Socrates’ *σκέψις* somehow skewed here? Such an answer itself calls for an alternative somewhere between ‘yes’ and ‘no’. For it is necessary to observe a striking aspect of Socrates’ testing: he takes up what is said by Protagoras, accepting terms as they are given, and he also adopts the manner in which Protagoras deals with these terms. That is, just as Protagoras has left no alternative for humans between virtue and its opposite, setting them into an either/or framework, so too does Socrates begin his questioning by the same means.

In doing so, Socrates carries out more than simple imitation of Protagorean discourse – as if speaking like Protagoras were equivalent to learning from him. Rather, this mirroring of the sophist’s mode of speech serves to measure what is said and how it is said according to its own scheme; through questions that recreate Protagoras’ form of thinking, Socratic dialectic composes a testing whereby Protagorean logic must confront itself. It does so, moreover, with the end of determining whether such logic is adequate to maintaining a position that does not change, that stands in agreement with itself while elucidating its own content. Hence, Socrates’ line of questioning following upon the Great Speech is not to be read simply as pushing his own agenda of belief about the relations between the virtues. Instead, we find Socrates posing – and attempting to
answer with Protagoras – difficult questions that arise out of a logic that Socrates nowhere claims as his own.

Protagoras opts for the face as a model by which the differences among the virtues are to be understood, and this route allows him a certain consistency with respect to what he has said about virtue already. For when Socrates goes on to ask him about the way in which men partake (μεταλαμβάνουσιν) of these parts, whether they may come piecemeal, or whether the procurement of one must entail all of the others, Protagoras can answer that “many are brave but unjust, and many again are just but not wise” (329e). Thus, while one may, as Protagoras has noted earlier, be unjust yet temperate, so too, may humans possess other virtues singly while being deficient in the rest.

Socrates has not missed this further addition of virtues in Protagoras’ example. Upon being pressed to state whether wisdom and courage are also parts of virtue, Protagoras admits as much, with the addendum that “of the parts, wisdom (σοφία) is the greatest” (330a). We, too, should not miss the fact that σοφία does not come up in Protagoras’ account of the stages of political education. Wisdom appears to be a late entry in his scheme of the polis, as if it were an afterthought. Yet it is this “part” of virtue that will be for him the least easy with which to reckon under Socrates’ σκέψις.

Proceeding in accordance with Protagoras’ chosen model of the face, Socrates has him state his position more clearly – that if the virtues are like the parts of the face, each is different from the others “both in itself and in its function,” and none of the parts is like any other (330b). Socrates calls for them to “examine together” (κοινῇ σκεψώμεθα) the sort of thing each of these parts of virtue is. This common σκέψις begins by way of establishing an initial agreement from which a view of the matter can be shared by both.
It is a simple agreement, perhaps deceptively simple as a first general point of determinacy: “First, let us ask, is justice a thing (πράγμα), or not a thing at all?” (330b-c). Once they have both agreed to this statement, Socrates supplements their common σκέψεις by introducing a third, hypothetical interlocutor into the conversation to question them both. By importing a third voice by which to question Socrates and Protagoras in their agreements, Socrates puts himself on Protagoras’ side, setting himself alongside the sophist as one whose position is no less under scrutiny. Socrates thereby issues a gesture of shared responsibility for what is said in their dialogue, a common stake in looking together at the matter at hand.

From the perspective of sophistry, with its stress upon conflict in rhetorical tests between individuals – that kind of skill in logos that Hippocrates has described as “formidable speaking,” – Socrates’ move here is unorthodox, perhaps even contrary to the spirit and practice of sophistical refutation. And in light of Protagoras’ myth, Socrates’ gesture could well be interpreted as a recapitulation in logos of that move from a vulnerable individual position to friendship and community in defense of one’s livelihood against the beasts; here, the threatening beast appears to be the questioner, and the efforts of both men together might seem necessary to preserve their position intact. However, as Socrates goes on to show, the crucial point in speaking together is to reveal the individual’s position as vulnerable in the first place, to show that vulnerability is an ineluctable aspect of attempting to stand on one’s own, preserving one’s own opinions, in logos. For Socrates, the move to community in logos is not, contra the logos of Protagoras, to be undertaken in response to threats in the form of questions, beating each one away as it arises, but to re-determine the entire exchange of question and answer as a
means of cultivating friendship without the force of fear and punishment in losing one’s original position. We shall return to develop this aspect of Socratic dialectic as the exchange proceeds.

At this point their hypothetical interlocutor begins to make trouble for Protagoras’ thesis of unlikeness among the virtues. Their questioner seeks a reconfirmation of the earlier statement that none of the virtues is like the others. It is here that Socrates, in making his answer, points to the difference in positions between himself and Protagoras, despite their agreements about justice and holiness. “Here my answer would be: as to what was said, you did hear correctly, but as for it being something that I said, you are mistaken. Protagoras made this answer, and I was merely the questioner” (330e-331a). Socrates does not withdraw his support for what has been agreed between them, yet he indicates that difference about which he questioned Protagoras. In part, Socrates elicits a call for focused and careful listening in what is said, and as well, by whom; their discussion is not to be an abstract, purely academic consideration of popular theses, but instead an exchange of particular interpersonal commitments to the truth of a matter that is of utmost importance for the life of each speaker.

Protagoras readily agrees (ἵμολογεῖν) to his former statement, tentatively accepting the appeal to responsibility in what was said. Yet when faced with the following question from their interlocutor, Socrates offers Protagoras the opportunity to aid in agreement on a second point that would undercut Protagoras’ previous admission.

Is not holiness something such as to be just, and justice such as to be holy, or can it be unholy? Can holiness be not just, and therefore unjust, and justice unholy? What is to be our reply? I should say myself, on my own behalf, that both justice is holy and holiness just, and with your permission I would make this same answer for you, too, since justice is either the same (ταύτων) as holiness or very much like it, and as well, justice is of
the same kind as holiness, and holiness as justice. Are you set on hindering this answer, or does this seem to be so to you? (331a-b)

Considered in terms of kinds, a common-sense approach to the relation of holiness and justice would allow for an overwhelming similarity between them, especially if their purported difference results in opposition to one another. For if justice is not holy, then it is therefore unholy, which entails that taking up one virtue in practice necessitates the opposite of another. By utilizing Protagoras’ own logic with respect to ἀρετή, wherein otherness and difference are reduced to opposition, Socrates’ imaginary questioner leaves Protagoras with the only alternatives that the latter has set. Thus, whatever is other than justice can only be unjust, and likewise for holiness. Faced with a problem that arises out of his own apparent mode of thinking, Protagoras must either choose between giving up his statement about the difference between the virtues, or he must admit that the virtuous person is no more virtuous than vicious, and hence must retract the notion that all citizens are virtuous as such.

Protagoras does not capitulate to Socrates’ appeal for agreement on the similarity between justice and holiness, stating that the matter has been formulated in too simple (ἐπλοῦν) a fashion to posit that each is of the same kind. It is also necessary to remind ourselves of the stake that Protagoras, as a self-proclaimed teacher of virtue, has in his dialogue with Socrates. If he is shown to be in disagreement with himself, if he is vulnerable to error on the subject of his apparent expertise, then he must give up the claim to be an authority on virtue, and consequently lose his livelihood. Thus, where it is a matter of perceived importance to Protagoras, he calls for greater determinacy in the terms of their exchange – a determinacy he has not seen fit to provide in his demonstration of the teachability of virtue.
Protagoras is not, however, forthcoming with respect to the nature of the difference required; he merely states that “there seems to me to be some difference in this. Yet what difference does it make? If you wish, let us say that justice is holy and holiness is just” (331c). Since Socrates appears to Protagoras to be harping on a point of little importance in his σκέψις, a point that appears to make no difference at all to the sophist, we find evidence here that Protagoras much more likely belongs to that class of sophists who, as Socrates has put it, is unaware of which of his logoi are beneficial or harmful to one’s soul. For Protagoras is unable to recognize the implications of his own position regarding the multiplicity of the virtues that are at the same time “one thing;” exactly how these many relate to one another and to virtue as a whole will determine the extent to which humans can act virtuously without at the same time acting in opposition to virtue. Thus, the very coherence of virtue, and thereby the coherence of a life lived with the aid of good judgment, hangs upon the determination of a point of difference to which Protagoras the expert is indifferent. For all of his lip service in the name of care for the young, he shows himself to be careless with respect to the nature of that which he claims to teach.

Yet, more than overlooking the implications of his own answers, Protagoras reveals an indifference to his commitment in logos, to speaking in accordance with what he thinks; he does not grasp the necessity of holding to one’s belief in the giving and taking of logoi that aims at uncovering the truth of things. The turn to hypothetical considerations removed from his own position is not, however, merely a sign of his indifference, but a move away from a point in which his position is endangered. Thus, like the individual who, to all appearances, exhibits the virtue of temperance in speaking
other than what he knows about his injustice, Protagoras, too, sees safety in speaking otherwise than along the lines of what he takes to be true, lest his statements — and his reputation — are proved to be as devoid of understanding as the hollow speeches of common booklike orators.

Socrates decisively objects to Protagoras’ attempted maneuver. “I do not want this ‘if you wish’ or ‘if it seems to you’ to be tested (ἐλέγχεσθαι), but you and me; and saying ‘you and me’ I think that the logos will be best tested if we take away the ‘if’” (331c-d). Rather than letting their logos meander into a form wherein neither of the participants agrees to what is said, where the convictions of each are left unspoken, Socrates attempts to hold Protagoras to what he takes to be true. By saying, if offhandedly, that both of them are to be tested, and in the same breath, that their logos is to be tested as well, Socrates points to that intimate relation between what a person states to be true and the condition of that person’s soul. In distinction to the ability to repeat what others have said, or even to repeat what sounds charming without understanding what one repeats, the ability to claim a statement as one’s own has to do with one’s judgment on a matter, relying upon what one has learned and chosen as a guiding truth. Thus, speaking with conviction is the practice of revealing one’s soul, of putting forth what one thinks, so that the testing carried out through Socratic σκέψις is at one and the same time a testing of what is said and of that thinking that gives rise to it. This is an essential part of dialectic.³⁹ Seen thus, Protagoras’ preference for examining logoi that do not conform to his thinking is a means of concealing the state of his own soul from Socrates and the audience. Having taken leave of those other kinds of disguise characteristic of his sophistic forerunners, Protagoras nonetheless is not above using
logos as a means for disguising his thoughts. The irony here is that while it was access to those technical ἐἰδὴν that brought about self-preservation to humans, Protagoras’ own safety now resides in obscuring access to that technical ἐἰδος of πολιτική, so crucial for saving the lives of his students.

Against this stance, Socrates makes clear that the logos itself takes priority over the seeming comfort or prestige of the interlocutors, and this means that the truth of their logos must be tested. Such testing through Socrates’ σκέψις is, once more, to be a matter of measuring, of looking together at logoi put forward to determine their agreement or disagreement with each other. As such, it is a testing that seeks to determine the difference between knowledge and mere opinion. Thus, the first means of measurement carried out in Socratic σκέψις is a means of measuring logoi in light of each other, comparing them in terms of their sameness or opposition, in order to determine whether they can be brought together into unity. In this way, we can see that the question of the oneness of virtue pertains at the same time to the unity of Protagoras’ belief, and therefore, the unity of his own soul.

Protagoras, compelled to defend his position regarding the difference and separation of the virtues from each other, provides a qualification that serves to qualify the nature of difference and similarity in general. While there is “some” resemblance (προσέοικέ τι) between justice and holiness, he admits, “anything whatsoever has some resemblance with anything else” (331d). Protagoras even confers upon those things regarded as “most opposed” (ἐναντιώτατα) to one another, like white and black, hard and soft, some kind of attendant resemblance. “But it is not just to call things alike which have some small thing alike, however small, or as unlike that have some thing unlike”
(331e). Protagoras’ protestation, with its reference to justice in determining likeness and difference, puts into question the very measure of likeness and difference according to which justice – as well as the rest of the virtues – is to be measured. For if such similarities and differences are not an obvious matter, as is increasingly becoming the case, then the need for a fundamental measure – one that can, as Protagoras suggests, determine the greatness or smallness of likenesses – is implicitly invoked.

Where Protagoras, despite himself, calls for a clear measure to settle their difficulty, he shows himself unprepared, or rather, unwilling, to give one. For when Socrates, in astonishment, asks him whether he regards justice and holiness as only sharing a small likeness with one another, he answers, “Not at all, nor, on the other hand, as I believe you regard them” (331e-332a). Protagoras reasserts his position, yet at the same time withdraws into a space somewhere between smallness and greatness of similarity between the two virtues. We are to notice that by taking this stance, Protagoras rejects that very Manichean framework with which he was content to treat virtue in his Great Speech. Instead of speaking in terms of either/or, he takes refuge in an insistence upon neither/nor. Rather than pressing on to look for a means of settling what his own indeterminate determination amounts to, Protagoras stops there, refusing to go any further; he contents himself with what he takes to be mutual disagreement about a matter that appears more obscure.

Protagoras’ refusal to go on, to bring clarity to that ‘greater’ difference that distinguishes justice from holiness, is more than a defensive, self-protective maneuver. It is also a refusal to seek a common measure according to which the greatness and smallness of similarity between these two virtues – and by implication, the virtues as a
whole – can be seen clearly for all. For it is only in this way that a freely-given agreement on the matter can be reached. Just as measurement is necessary where two individuals disagree about the greatness or smallness of size, weight, number, and so on, where a means of measurement can be brought in to overcome disagreements that have their seat in the variance and incomplete grasp of δόξα or αἰσθήσεις, so, too, should Protagoras, who claims to know best about virtue, provide a standard in logos according to which these crucial distinctions can be made.

Yet it is not only the distinction between justice and holiness that is at issue here; clearly identifying the limits of the virtues as such, discerning where they differ from each other and from their opposites, has to do with that difference between friendship and enmity that marks the fundamental possibility of the generation and preservation of the polis. Enmity arises out of disagreement, and the most violent conflicts have to do with disagreements, directly or indirectly, about the nature of noble and good things.

Where they have reached an impasse through examining the relation between the virtues in terms of similarity, Socrates, noting that Protagoras finds the direction of their discussion disagreeable (δυσχερώς), shifts to a consideration of the virtues in terms of opposition. For, if their disagreement lies in an indecipherable space of difference, it is Socrates’ task to question Protagoras about that greatest difference that his interlocutor takes to be a clearer matter. “Let us examine (ἐπισκεψόμεθα) another thing that you have said” (332a). Socrates does not make explicit reference to that particular thing that Protagoras has said, and given the nature of the σκέψις that Socrates carries out, it seems that he has in mind as much Protagoras’ comment about those things that are “most
opposed” to one another, on the one hand, as well as his use of the temperate but unjust liar as a demonstration of virtue’s ubiquity.

In a fashion parallel to that of their discussion of justice and holiness, yet without the aid of a hypothetical interlocutor, Socrates uses the concept of opposition to reveal the way in which Protagoras is opposed to himself in *logos*. By eliciting a number of agreements from Protagoras – among them that folly (*ἐφροσύνη*) is the opposite of wisdom, and that it is also the opposite of temperance, as well as the agreement that opposites can only have one oppositional counterpart, and no more⁴¹ – Socrates points out to his interlocutor that he is caught in an *aporia* to which he himself has given assent at every step:

> Then which, Protagoras, of our *logoi*, are we to do away with? The one in which one thing has only one opposite, or the other, in which wisdom and temperance are different, and each is a part of virtue, and what is more, a different part, and that the two are as unlike, both in themselves and in their powers, as the parts of a face? Which do we remove? These two are neither in tune, nor are they in harmony with one another. How could they be, if one thing must have but one opposite and no more, while wisdom and temperance too, appear both to be opposite to folly, which is one thing? Such are things, or are they otherwise? (333a-b)

For Protagoras, adherence to the short form of speaking, as Socrates has requested, is not going well. Without the aid of memorized *logoi*, both the reasonableness of Socrates’ questions, as well as his limited memory in live discussion, have unmasked the fact that Protagoras does not possess in his thinking a position on virtue that agrees with itself. One may object that by posing his questions in a certain order, where the questions of folly’s opposite occur at a distance from one another, Socrates has intentionally tricked Protagoras into forgetting what he had admitted previously, and that Socrates is merely using sophistic trickery against the sophist.
However, that Protagoras is given to assigning two different opposites to folly – that of wisdom and temperance, two aspects of virtue whose nature he claims to know – whether he remembered his previous answers or not, is evidence for the fact that his grasp of virtue is no better than mere opinion, which changes in accordance with the way things seem to him in the moment. Where the context of discourse is moved away from set speeches and focused upon speaking from understanding – and not from memorized words – Protagoras shows himself to be no better than a layperson on the subject of human goodness (and hence, does not qualify for inclusion in the polis according to his own standards).

In opposition to the long speech of Protagoras, with its enchanting, scattering effect, the method of σκέψις undertaken by Socrates functions to gather together what is agreed upon and to view these logoi together, comparing them with another. It is through this mutual comparison, this initial mode of measuring the logoi with respect to one another, determining whether they can belong to one and the same logos or whether they oppose one another, that the distinction between mere opinion and knowledge can first be shown.

Yet the aim of Socrates’ dialectical σκέψις exceeds the simple disclosure of self-contradiction. Unlike the Protagorean stance of stopping short in the disagreement arising out of live discourse, Socratic dialectic makes use of aporia as a means of moving forward in the search after the truth of what appears opposed to itself. Hence, aporia calls, as Socrates indicates, for a choice between conflicting logoi, for letting go of the weaker alternative in favor of the stronger. Since the nature of opposition, demanding no more than one opposite for each, is not to be challenged, the more vulnerable position is
that of the dissimilarity and separability of virtues that Protagoras has been advocating. Thus, once Protagoras has, albeit unwillingly (ἀκόντως), admitted his contradiction, Socrates, suggesting that temperance and wisdom must therefore be one thing, as justice and holiness were seen to be “almost” the same, exhorts: “Come, Protagoras, let us not falter, but examine (διασκέψόμεθα) what is left” (333b).

We must note that even Socratic examination is not without its aspect of compulsion, as Protagoras’ admission against his own will testifies. Yet, in distinction to that kind of compulsion in Protagoras’ view of education, the compulsion does not come from external force, but instead from the force of a logos woven from free admissions on his own part. Thus, in the vision won through logos that characterizes Socrates’ οἶκος, Protagoras becomes, paradoxically, a free participant in his own unwilling education.  

For Socrates has put no words into Protagoras’ mouth, but, as he says, has only asked him questions and held him to his answers. In short, he has held Protagoras in submission to the course and the dictates – that is, the necessity manifest at each step – of their logos, and held at bay any individual “wishes” or even fears that might steer them away from holding to their agreements.  

With justice and holiness presented in their likeness – perhaps their identity – as well as temperance and wisdom appearing to be the same, Socrates now moves to link each of these pairs with the other by asking Protagoras whether a man seems to him to be temperate in carrying out injustice. Protagoras has already made clear in his speech that one can commit injustice and then go on to practice temperance through concealing his offense; thus virtue and its opposite can be found in one and the same person. Yet now,
the question concerns whether these can be practiced together in the same activity: can they arise simultaneously in the same person?44

Protagoras does not say outright that injustice can be carried out temperately, but instead appeals to the shame that he would suffer if he did admit this “in spite of what many people say” (333c). It is evident that Protagoras is contriving a means to deflect the questioning away from himself with his invocation of the many, and that he furthermore attempts to draw a distinction between himself and popular opinion. However, in doing so, he unwittingly unravels his thesis that all – and this includes the many – are not only practitioners of virtue, but teachers of it as well. Conflicting opinions about virtue, especially in the matter of whether vices can accompany virtues, bespeak an ignorance or incorrectness on the part of at least one side in a debate; if the young are to take advice from all in the city, each person being an expert in the matter in question, then conflicting advice can only serve to confuse, rather than educate, the young. If education demands learning from those who know, then clearly, not all can have knowledge of virtue as Protagoras claims. Thus, while Protagoras attempts to laud and align himself with all of the Athenians on the subject of virtue as a measure of his safety, he is pressed to separate himself from them where this safety is once more threatened.

Socrates allows Protagoras this move of introducing, in effect, his own set of voices into their discussion, by giving him the choice of directing their logos at the view of the many or at his own views. When Protagoras, unsurprisingly, requests that Socrates discuss (διάλεγειν) the logos of the many, Socrates readily obliges him, stating however, “It does not make a difference to me, as long as you answer, whether these things seem to
you to be so or not. For, although I seek most of all to test the *logos*, the result will perhaps be that both I, the questioner, and my answerer are brought to the test (ἐξετάζοσθαι)” (333c). Rather than setting to the task of directly critiquing the *logos* of the many, of providing points upon which it is flawed, Socrates continues to hold Protagoras in the position of answerer. Hence, if the many are to be proven wrong, the testing that yields this proof will nonetheless come about dialectically.

While the many are not present to represent more thoroughly and clearly this view, Socrates and Protagoras are compelled to interpret what their *logos* means. And through venturing their own interpretation, putting it at stake in the process of testing, each of them must necessarily invest something of their own beliefs to be tested as a result. Thus, unlike the previous series of questions about the other virtues, we find Socrates and Protagoras first attempting to interpret the meaning of temperance, translating it into a number of terms that, gathered together in their interrelations, would aid in placing this virtue into its proper limits. Properly testing a *logos*, Socrates suggests here, is no less a matter of submitting one’s soul to testing where the *logos* belongs to another than when it is claimed by oneself; every dialectical ἑκατόμετρον demands an unveiling on the part of each participant, whether through the assumptions upon which questions are formed, or through the thinking that informs each corresponding answer.

Before their interpretation is begun, however, Protagoras, in realizing that he is nonetheless put on the spot despite the fact that they are no longer discussing a view that he claims for himself, attempts to forestall this vein of questioning by pretending to be above such a shameful subject; as Socrates earlier appeared to drop a line of questioning because it was disagreeable to his interlocutor, Protagoras himself claims that this, too, is
a disagreeable (δυσχέρην) logos, yet to no avail (333d). We begin to suspect here that perhaps any mode of dialogue in which Protagoras must hold to agreements is for him disagreeable. Accordingly, as Socrates takes up their σκέψις once more, Protagoras’ answers are converted from assurance and bold agreement to circumspection and caution, tempering his admissions with the word ἔστω, roughly equivalent to our noncommittal phrase “let us suppose so.” These answers mark not only Protagoras’ caution, but as well his lack of invested engagement with the matter at hand; the success of his participation continues to take as its measure more his own self-protection than the unconcealment of the truth to be found in their examination.

Protagoras grants to Socrates the supposition that people can be temperate in being unjust, and he furthermore agrees to the equivalence in meaning between being temperate and being sensible (φρονεῖν). Once more, Protagoras grants as well (ἔστω) that being sensible (i.e. being temperate) is being well-advised (εὖ βουλεύομαι) in one’s injustice. It is here that the good judgment (εὖ βουλία) touted by Protagoras as the fruit of his irreplaceable teaching comes into danger by revealing its weakness as a sufficient notion of education. For Protagoras has shrewdly withheld any account of the ends of such good judgment, other than tying it, as we recall, to the vague phrases of “best ordering one’s home” and “having the most power in matters of the city” (318e-319a). By leaving the ends of good judgment undetermined, the space is provided in which any particular individual may determine him or herself the goodness of any specific end. Yet can such relatively-determined ends include injustice, thereby making the good judgment that is equivalent in Protagoras’ eyes to virtue capable of bringing about the opposite of virtue?
In posing this question, we pose at the same time the questionability of virtue’s status for Protagoras as a τέχνη. As we have noted in our discussion of τέχνη, the technician qua technician cannot, in virtue of his specific mode of knowledge, determine the ultimate ends of his art’s application. The artisan may use his τέχνη for a pernicious cause, while nonetheless practicing it excellently, as the doctor applies his medicine to the extent of its powers to keep alive a man who, in virtue of his ultimately failing health, is only a burden to himself and to others. If Protagoras’ idea of good judgment is conceived strictly in adherence to other models of τέχνη, then its excellent application could very well encompass ends for which it, as a form of knowledge so limited, has no means of measuring in truth.

In view of these considerations, Socrates asks whether good judgment in the present case can be counted as such if one fares well or badly by it, to which Protagoras adds the condition of good faring (ἐὖ πράττειν). We must not overlook in this connection the fact that Socrates has explained to Hippocrates that in which all good and ill faring consists: the condition of his soul. Thus, we may reasonably suspect that Socrates intends to lead Protagoras to a consideration of the criterion of good faring that is tied to the nurture of the soul, and whether injustice, despite its apparent benefits to one who has gotten away with it, nonetheless works some sort of damage upon a person that is not measurable through αἰθίησις or δόξα, but only through the kind of logos that Socrates is presently practicing upon Protagoras and himself.

Socrates turns to the question of goodness, or more properly, things that Protagoras calls good. At Protagoras’ admission, Socrates goes on to elicit an interpretation of the goodness of good things (and hence, the goodness that determines
good judgment) by asking whether these are the same things that are profitable (κόφέλιμα) to men. Thus, his question has to do with whether the same notion of goodness in which good judgment consists can measure at the same time that very profitability of the ends toward which it is put. If it is true, then, that the εὐβουλία that characterizes Protagorean temperance results in good faring in one’s injustice, then vice, no more than virtue, is the mark of the good citizen – educated by those like Protagoras.

The sophist does seem to have a sense of where the discussion is leading him, namely to the admission that successful injustice can be counted by him as a good thing when aided by another of the virtues. In this sense, Protagoras would be held to the explicit thesis that only the appearance of justice is what essentially matters in his teaching, and that seeming good takes priority over being good. In order to avoid this admission, Protagoras attempts to forestall Socrates’ inquiry by once more leaving the sphere of the human and withdrawing the application of a proper measure from this sphere. He retorts, cryptically, that things may be called good when they are as well not profitable to men.

Socrates interrupts his narrative at this point to note Protagoras’ comportment to his questions. He appears to Socrates to be “exasperated and in anguish, and to have drawn himself into battle (παρατετάξθαι) against answering” (333e). Protagoras, cornered, has begun to regard their discussion in terms of victory and defeat, where, as in the contests in speech amongst the sophists, the participants can only be determined in the end as victors and losers. In order to protect his status as an expert and a teacher, he must therefore abdicate his role as a teacher – that is, the role of the person attempting to
educate and foster learning through care for his student – and take on the role of the enemy combatant.

Observing this change in Protagoras’ manner, Socrates proceeds “cautiously” (ἐνελαβούμενος) with his questions. Ironically, where the sophist is the one who must “take care” (ἐνελαβεῖσθαι) in practicing his τέχνη, out of fear of enmity (316d, 317b), it is the sophist who now expresses animosity when one such as Socrates attempts to learn more clearly that thinking that informs the teaching of the sophist. Thus, Socrates asks, more gently, whether Protagoras means by ‘not profitable’, yet good, things that are not profitable to any human, or things that are not profitable in any way at all. “Can you call such things as these good?” (334a).

Seizing his chance for escape, Protagoras leaves their agreement to speak in the shorter form, and resorts to another extended logos, one that, in virtue of its extension beyond the human terms of their discussion, takes on the feel of yet another memorized speech.45 Protagoras speaks of a number of undetermined forms of drink, food, potions, and so on that are profitable or unprofitable to men, and those that are neither of these to men, but one or the other to horses or cattle or dogs. He goes on to speak in this vein of trees, dung, plants, branches, roots, human and animal hair, and the beneficial or ill application of oil to the different parts of the human, whether sick or healthy. In so doing, Protagoras shifts from his purported expertise in matters of human virtue to matters of doctoring, horticulture, and animal husbandry. This answer should indeed be striking in light of the fact that it was Protagoras who was famous for the dictum that “man is the measure of all things.” For here, goodness and profitability, however similar
or different they may be, are measured not by humans alone but by living creatures in general.

Most enlightening in Protagoras’ diversion is his statement about the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν), which he calls “such a changeable (ποικίλον) and manifold (παντοδαπόν) thing that in this moment it is good for the outward parts of a man’s body, but at the same time most bad for the inward …” (334b-c). We cannot help but notice that Protagoras unwittingly answers Socrates’ question about goodness more thoroughly than it has been asked; for goodness itself has to do for him with physical health, preservation, and the avoidance of pain, arising, it appears, only with respect to bodies. On this account, goodness itself does not belong to the realm of being, but is rather to be found wholly in the realm of becoming; it is nothing stable, complete, and selfsame. The good is bound to coming to be and passing away, and cannot therefore be determined in itself, as one thing, beyond its manifold appearances. It only emerges out of a relative measure between the coming to be and passing away of perceptions and bodies themselves.

In providing this answer as a means of protecting himself, Protagoras has dealt the most damaging blow to his own position as a technician of virtue. For if the good – that according to which the good judgment of the good citizen is determined – is itself without being or determination, but instead wholly dependent upon an innumerable wealth of contexts, situations, and individuals, the very possibility of teaching such goodness in a technical manner that is the same for all is therefore foreclosed. It turns out, then, that the “one thing” upon which the preservation of the city rests is in fact an indeterminate number of things, of instances of apparent goodness that differ according to the different perspectives of those individuals who make up the city. The need for
each citizen to save himself determines what will amount to good citizenship in each case; thus, justice, temperance, courage, wisdom, and piety all take as their measure the preservation of the individual. To submit to any other measure of virtue wherein one’s physical safety and well-being might be compromised amounts, in the end, to madness.

While the comportment that Protagoras takes to the give and take of *logoi* is consistent with the objective of self-preservation here, we find as a result that the overall collection of his *logoi* is pushed into inconsistency. For how can one “possess” virtue, how can one be a good citizen, when such goodness comes into being and passes away in the flow of becoming? The dispersion of the good into utter multiplicity places an unbearable strain upon the very terms in which human goodness has been set according to his μῦθος and his *logos*.

By looking to his own advantage in the exchange of *logoi*, crafting his answers in such a way as to stave off Socratic σκέψις, Protagoras enacts that kind of foresight for which he commends Socrates at the beginning of their encounter. Yet such foresight only results in an Epimethean crisis for the integrity of his discourse and for his listeners, who remain in *aporia* (despite their unawareness of it) with respect to that life-saving art that Protagoras advertises. As such, it impedes the success of that other, Socratic, form of foresight for whose end the discussion has been inaugurated: the collection, through testing, of accounts into a unity whereby a vision of the good itself – unchanging and selfsame – might be glimpsed and might serve as a guide for our lives.
Notes

1 *Odyssey*, Book XI, 601.
2 While it is in the *Protagoras* that Prodicus displays his special art of distinguishing the supposedly correct application of words to phenomena, he is noted in several other dialogues for possessing this skill (c.f., *Laches* 197d, *Cratylus* 384b, *Phaedrus* 267b), and Socrates elsewhere also speaks of him in a reverent fashion, claiming to be a student of his in the *Meno* (96d), and even confessing in the *Theaetetus* that he occasionally sends young men with whom he is ill-matched to Prodicus for further education (151b). Given that Prodicus appears to maintain a relatively favorable place amongst the sophists in the dialogues, at least in Socrates’ view, the pairing between him and Tantalus (or any of the shades of the underworld) in Socrates’ reference here remains a puzzle.

3 *Odyssey*, Book XI, 582.
4 It is clear that Socrates no more accepts the ghastly portrait of Hades given by Homer in the *Odyssey* than he does Homer’s portrait of the gods. For, in the *Apology* (37b) in particular Socrates admits his ignorance of what awaits the soul beyond death, and can only state his hopes that on any probability his own soul’s fate would be a pleasant one, whether there is a Hades or not (40c-41c). At the same time, however, Socrates also shows that human access to what lies beyond death can come only in the form of myth-telling, the paradigmatic cases of which we find in the *Republic* (614b-621b) and in the *Phaedo* (108d-114c), as well as in the *Gorgias* (523a-526d).

5 *Odyssey*, Book X, 546.
6 Ibid., Book XI, 236.
7 Ibid., Book XI, 660-689.
8 Cf., *Phaedrus’* speech in the *Symposium*, where Orpheus’ failure to bring back his beloved from Hades is a consequence of his perceived cowardice by the judges of the underworld, whereby Orpheus was punished for his unwillingness to give up his own life to join his beloved in Hades.

9 Each of these individuals had in store a dubious political future at the end of the Peloponnesian War. Critias and Charmides – the former to a greater extent than the latter – were part of the notorious Thirty Tyrants, who sent Athens into political decline, and Alcibiades, the colorful figure that he was, was ever playing the part of the traitor (with Sparta, Persia, et cetera) for his own gain. See Munn (2000), pp. 105-114, 211 ff.

10 I wish to stress a particular point in referring to Protagoras’ use of the term *τέχνη* here to describe his own activity, since it has been maintained by several commentators (cf. Roochnik [1990] 216, as well as Weiss [1990] 18) that Socrates is the one who first calls Protagoras’ expertise a *τέχνη*, and hence foists upon Protagoras a category that the latter would not otherwise readily accept. When this is kept in mind, Socrates comes out looking like less of a manipulator in this respect than he has often been portrayed, and more like a questioner whose probings follow from the free admissions of a self-proclaimed authority.

11 C.f., *Meno* 70b-c, where Gorgias, Meno’s teacher, is described by Socrates as one who instructs others in “answering any chance question in a fearless manner befitting those who know, [setting] the example of offering himself to be questioned by any Greek who chooses, and on any matter one likes, and he has an answer for everybody.” Also recall *Gorgias* 448a, wherein Gorgias’ first words are to confirm his reputation given above in the *Meno*, adding, “Nobody has asked me anything new for many years now.”

12 Protagoras’ oversight here, and its connection with philosophic study in the *Republic*, is made also by G.M.A. Grube, yet left somewhat undeveloped. *Plato’s Thought*, p. 263.
We find a parallel objection to the teachability of ἀρετή in the Meno, where Socrates chooses Themistocles as the model of a good citizen and leader who had his son taught all manner of skills that could be gained through identifiable teachers, but who was unable to pass on to his son his goodness in political judgment (93b-e).

I am here following T.M. Robinson’s commentary on the Dissoi Logoi, wherein he makes what I take to be a strong case, based upon the content within the writings and the estimations of other classicists, for dating the manuscript between 400 and 395. See Robinson (1979).

Ibid., p. 131.

Prometheus Bound, 457.

This is especially the case in dialogues such as Meno (81a-e, where the legend of the soul given by high priestesses serves as an impetus for seeking out and inquiring after knowledge, in response to Meno’s sophistic paradox that would neutralize all attempts to learn as such) and Symposium (201d-212a, wherein Diotima’s myth of the birth of Love out of resource and poverty finds in Love that philosophical nature that desires to know the beautiful, and which therefore must continuously investigate the varieties of its manifestations until it finds fulfillment in beauty itself).

As Seth Benardete notes, “[E]verything Protagoras says is very profound while he himself remains a man of extraordinary thoughtlessness.” (2000), p. 191. Though one need not go so far as to characterize Protagoras in such extreme terms, Benardete does nonetheless point our attention to the failure on Protagoras’ part to clarify the implications of the myth that he presents; without investigating the questions that arise within his own logos, he stands removed from the significance to which his own words lay claim. As a speaker, and therefore as one in possession of a vocabulary, Protagoras may call himself one who is skilled in speech. Yet by failing to subject the very logos that he gives to critical interpretation, by passing over what is questionable therein, Protagoras maintains an orientation to speaking that – as indeed Socrates indicated to Hippocrates through his διάσκεψις – contents itself with the skillful creation of the appearance of sense, and thus with the appearance of cohesion and self-evidence. This orientation need not be taken, however, for a complete obliviousness on his own part, as Benardete would have it. According to Francisco Gonzalez, Protagoras’ device here lies in a self-conscious presentation of this mere appearance of sense and coherence to his listeners: “[A]ny clear meaning would be disastrous to his purpose … Protagoras’ strategy is to use the vagueness of the idea of universal expertise to move back and forth between [two conflicting interpretations] as suits his purpose.” (“Giving Thought to the Good Together: Virtue in Plato’s Protagoras,” in Russon and Sallis [2000], p. 118). Gonzalez and Benardete need not be seen as disagreeing with one another here; conscious inconsistency and vagueness in speech for one’s own ends may indeed go hand in hand with a fundamental thoughtlessness about one’s ends themselves. In this sense, Protagoras is a figure who knows what he is doing in presenting this profound yet incoherent myth (namely, keeping his students in confusion that masquerades as education), yet who does not evaluate the larger significance of doing it (what sort of goodness this yields for himself). “Protagoras’ Myth and Logos,” (2000), p. 191.

It is in the Republic, in Socrates’ early exchange with Thrasymachus, that we find Socrates’ alternative approach to punishment, which, it should also be noted, also prepares the ground for his claim later in the Protagoras and elsewhere that human evil is to be equated with ignorance, and hence that no one commits evil willingly. When asked what punishment Socrates should suffer for hearing an account of justice better than his own, Socrates replies to Thrasymachus, “What else than the one it is fitting for a man who does not know to suffer? Surely it is fitting for him to learn from the man who knows. So this is what I think I deserve to suffer.” (337d). Socrates’ suggestion here is that punishment is not, to counter Protagoras’ claim, the reasonable
course for instruction and learning, but rather teaching through *logos* and according to knowledge. Cf., also *Apology* 26a, where Socrates, addressing his accusers, makes a more explicit distinction between punishment and learning: “For it is clear that if I learn of [my corrupting the youth] I shall stop doing that which I do involuntarily. But you avoided associating with me, and were unwilling to do so, but you hale me in here, where it is the law to hale in those who need punishment, not learning (*μάθησις*).”

21 This oversight on Protagoras’ part recalls Socrates’ prudent observation of the limits of his knowledge in the *Meno*. Where Meno first sets the question of whether ἀδέτης is teachable at the fore of their discussion, Socrates replies, “If I do not know what a thing is (τί ἐστιν), how can I know the sort (ὁποῖον) of thing it is?” (71b).

22 A comparison with Socrates’ words in the *Republic* on the proper means of educating the young in their studies should tip us off that Protagoras is missing something fundamental about the nature of learning itself. As Socrates states at 536dff, “the free man ought not to learn any study slavishly. Forced labors performed by the body don’t make the body any worse, but no forced study abides in a soul … therefore, o best of men, don’t use force in training the children in the studies, but rather playing (παῖζοντας). In that way you can better discern what each is naturally directed toward.” Already having separated nature (*φύσις*) from education, Protagoras here assumes that virtue can be sufficiently established in each soul through teaching. Yet he will be forced later to bring nature back into his *logos* in order to account for those cases in which sufficient learning has been exceeded by those who are more excellent than others. Thus, excellence for Protagoras is to be found in the extent to which one responds to authority, and those with a nature suited to obeying commands, those whom Socrates describes as slavish learners, are regarded as the best in the *polis*. This is also a key for understanding why Protagoras will be unable to see Socrates’ playfulness at further points in the dialogue (336d, 341d).

23 In a hyperbolic formulation befitting of his own style of commentary, Benardete notes that Protagoras’ *logos* contains “an extraordinary emphasis on beating,” and that “Protagoras the rationalist urges the brutalization of man.” (2000), pp. 194-196.

24 Cf., *Republic* 378d-e, wherein Socrates attempts to guard against the ὑπόνοια in the works of Homer, saying, “A young thing can’t judge what is hidden sense and what is not; but what he takes into his opinions at that age has a tendency to become hard to eradicate and unchangeable.”

25 The connection between wonder (ὡς ἐκείνη) and philosophy is most explicitly stated in the *Theaetetus*, where, in response to Theaetetus’ *aporia* about the nature of knowledge, Socrates explains: “For this *pathos* is that of a philosopher, this wonder; the beginning of philosophy consists in nothing other than this” (155d).

26 As we have seen, Hippocrates’ apparent knowledge of the nature of sophistry is based upon this distinction between knowing the correct name for a thing within one’s language and using one’s language to make manifest the nature of that which is named.

27 Paul Friedländer, however, sees in Socrates’ expectation of more to come from Protagoras a reference to the distinction between philosophical, or what he calls “dialogical,” (and which I refer to as “dialectical”) discourse and sophistic oratory: “‘Dialogical’ discourse, as we know from the conversation with Hippokrates, achieves ‘completion’ by its very nature; the sophistic type goes on without aim or limits.” (1964), p. 18. Friedländer’s remarks here are sensible on the surface, yet once we begin to ask about the ‘completeness’ of an exchange of *logoi*, or as well the ‘completeness’ of our understanding, the matter becomes much more complicated, as I will show in Chapter III.
Hippias’ admission about his craft in the *Hippias Major* underscores the connection between memorization and speech-giving in sophistry, and more particularly as it has to do with discourses similar to that of Protagoras: “[The Lacedaemonians] are very fond of hearing about the genealogies of heroes and men, Socrates, and the foundations of cities in ancient times and, in short, about antiquity as a whole, so that for their sake I have been obliged to learn all that sort of thing by heart (ἐκμεθαυθηκέναι) and practice it thoroughly” (385d-e). Note here the reliance upon “learning by heart” shared between Hippias’ statement here and the memorization (ἐκμνανθάνειν) of poetry as a necessary aspect of education in Protagoras’ speech above.

Raphael Woolf refers to this limitation of textual speaking as a kind of “inflexibility” representative of texts themselves: “Socrates’ thought … seems to be that a text cannot elaborate on or explain its own content. It is fixed and inflexible” (1999), p. 22. The fixity or rigidity of texts mentioned by Woolf is an apt means of conveying that sense in which texts are determinate with respect to names and words that remain the same no matter how many times we revisit them, but also that corresponding sense in which texts are indeterminate: they do not of themselves drive that activity of thought requisite for understanding that content to which their *logoi* refer.

Cf., 324e: “Is there or is there not some one thing whereof all citizens must partake if there is to be a city?”

Coby, among others, points out the extremity of the two options proposed by Socrates, and rightly indicates the difficulties with each, concluding that “[o]rderly language would have one believe that virtue must lie somewhere in between.” (1987), p. 74. However, Coby does not take note of the fact that apparently unreasonable extremes are designed to mirror Protagoras’ own approach to virtue, as I explain below.

Michael Stokes comes close to arguing the same as I do here: “Whether Protagoras’ logic is bad or not is perhaps still open to discussion; but, bad or no, it is a logic very similar to that which Socrates asks him to follow …” (1986), p. 286. I agree with Stokes’ method of reading Socrates’ line of questioning in relation to Protagoras’ Great Speech, yet we part ways where Stokes attempts to account for the similarity of linguistic usage a bit further on (286-288) in terms of an analysis of common Greek grammar, most particularly in reference to the common conflation of contrary and contradictory locutions emblematic of Protagoras’ statement about the virtuous and vicious as well as Socrates’ similar conflation of them in proceeding to discuss the relation between justice and holiness. I will address the latter case below.

This is the overwhelmingly predominant view of commentators. John Cooper, for example, interprets the thrust of Socrates’ questions as supporting a Socratic position against the Protagorean one, in terms of what Socrates manifestly ‘believes’ (1999), p. 82), as does Richard McKirahan, who states that “[m]ajor philosophical passages of the *Protagoras* (330-334, 349-end) see Socrates attempting to win Protagoras over to his view.” (1985), p. 342.

Benardete concludes that wisdom is implicitly accounted for in Protagoras’ speech in the laws of the city. Yet insofar as the laws must be enforced by the threat of punishment, the education prior to learning the laws – music and poetry and gymnastics – in which the virtues of temperance, justice, holiness and courage are learned, turns out to be “wholly inadequate for instilling obedience to the law” (2000), p. 195. Furthermore, since it was the earlier wise men, the sophists, who, according to Protagoras, disguised their art in poetry and music and gymnastics, Benardete finds that the lawgivers of old and the sophist poets actually stood in an antagonistic relation to one another, thus putting the wisdom of the poets and the wisdom of the lawgivers into conflict. Since both of these forms of wisdom make up civic education, Protagoras’ city can only be a city blind to its own contradictory notions of virtue in public and private. While Benardete’s thesis lends further support to our present study of the incoherence of Protagoras’ vision of the city, it is not clear to me that Protagoras understands wisdom as
belonging exclusively to any of the stages of education as he lays them out; he nowhere calls the ancient lawgivers wise, but rather good. I find it more plausible that he assumes wisdom to be somehow inherent in education as a whole, as omnipresent as virtue itself (which would imply that he identifies virtue with wisdom, which he will soon deny), since virtue as a whole resides in the province of sophistry, whose proper object is to teach virtue more excellently than anyone else. The fact that Protagoras states otherwise here when challenged – that wisdom is only a part of virtue – is, on my reading, a testimony to his falling victim to the very elusiveness of memory that his Great Speech is intended to exploit.

Socrates asks a very similar question to Hippias in the Hippias Major regarding justice (as well as wisdom, goodness, and beauty) in order to establish that being according to which just things are just (287c). While there Socrates does not use the term πράγμα, but rather τι (something), the function of the strange-sounding question becomes more meaningful once we realize that in both cases, the “thingness” of the virtue in question is posited in order to refer to that unified source of all phenomena that we term “just” or “wise,” and so on. In essence, Socrates is referring to the very being of a thing that dialectic must assume if it is to win a view of such being in its εἰδος. Thus, Socrates’ question here bears upon that relation of participation and εἰδος that he finds so troubling in the Parmenides, and which is no less troubling in Protagoras’ account of it in relation to the virtues here. As Friedländer puts it, “the basic flaw of the Protagorean system is its failure to account for knowledge and the realm of being that corresponds to it” (1964, p. 18).

Cf. Meno 75d-e: “[I]f my questioner were of the eristic and agonistic sort of wise man, I should say to him: I have made my statement; if it is not correct, your work is to take the logos and test it. But if, like you and me on this occasion, we were friends and chose to dialogue with one another, I should have to reply in milder, more dialectical way. The more dialectical way, perhaps, is not merely to answer what is true, but also to make use of those points which the questioned person agrees to know.”

Cf. Euthyphro 7b-e: “If you and I were to disagree about number, for instance, which of two numbers were the greater, would the disagreement about these matters make us enemies and make us angry with one another, or should we not settle it quickly by resorting to arithmetic?” “Of course we should.” “Then, too, if we were to disagree about the relative size of things, we should quickly put an end to the disagreement by measuring?” “Yes.” “And we should, I think, come to terms about relative weights by weighing?” “Of course.” “But about what would a disagreement be, which we could not settle and which would cause us to be enemies and be angry with one another? … Is it not about justice and injustice, noble and shameful, good and bad? Are not these the questions about which you and I and other people become enemies, when we do become enemies, because we differ about them and are unable to reach any sufficient judgment?” “Yes, Socrates, this is the difference about which we should become enemies.”

The agreement that Socrates and Protagoras forge with respect to the singularity of opposites – that each opposite is opposed by only one opposite – is revisited in a parallel form in the Phaedo as a means of clarifying the sphere of becoming over against the sphere of being (70d-74e). The movement of becoming, Socrates there makes clear, is a movement between two opposed states or poles, whereas being admits of no movement or change whatsoever. Though Socrates does not explicitly point, at this juncture in the Protagoras, to the essential tie between knowing opposites and knowing the movement of becoming, Protagoras’ conspicuous incompetence with respect to opposition here suggests precisely his inattentiveness to the distinction between becoming and being. This incompetence is dealt with more directly in the discussion of poetry in Chapter Three.

With respect to this distinctive form of “free compulsion” in education, where one is compelled through unwillingly learning that his or her opinions do not conform to the truth of things in their being, we can also make better sense of that continued reference to compelled education in the
Republic, where one is “compelled” to turn around in the cave and look upward toward the light of the sun (515e ff.). For, both in the present case of Protagoras and in the case of the one who is forced to turn around in the cave, such compulsion is nonetheless a compulsion to follow the dictates of a discourse that reveals one’s ignorance and points the way to a more complete and stable view of things in their truth.

43 It is reasonable to believe that had Protagoras been aware of the direction in which his answers led him, namely, into self-contradiction, he would have attempted more forcefully to evade direct statements and straightforward agreements with Socrates’ questions. In terms of his end of maintaining authority with respect to the subject of virtue, Protagoras cannot but be likened to Epimetheus, who only asks afterward what it is he has done. Thus, as we shall see, Protagoras becomes more cautious, attempting to liken himself more to Prometheus than to the other titan when questioned, looking to see where questions might lead, and taking the necessary action in order to protect his own position. Seen thus, the Promethean sophist attempts to bring about the opposite of Socratic dialectic; his forethought is focused on self-preservation premised upon the concealment of his own thoughts. Accordingly, it is, oddly enough, precisely the Epimethean answerer who stands to benefit most from Socratic σκέψις.

44 One might object that the act of lying about one’s injustice is itself an act of injustice, yet neither Socrates nor Protagoras appears to accept this perspective at present. However, if deceit is in fact deemed unjust, then the typical sophist who manages carefully to avoid being caught in his deception while maintaining the disguise of the teacher of virtue would most closely approximate the individual who is temperate in his injustice – if such a notion were admissible. 45 Goldberg notes as well that, due to the “needless detail” that inflates Protagoras’ extended response, his answer carries the “tenor of a set-speech.” (1983), p. 127.
Chapter Three

1. The Communal Search for a Measure

At the close of Socrates’ first attempt to subject the unity of Protagoras’ τέχνη to testing, the logos that was initially intended to make clear the structure of the sophist’s proclaimed knowledge has debilitated from a shared σκέψις into an agonistic struggle. Socrates’ dialectical efforts to hold Protagoras to three specific standards have all failed once Protagoras has given his small lecture on the manifold nature of the good. The first two of these standards have to do with the manner in which their exchange of logoi was to proceed. First, Protagoras was requested at the outset to answer Socrates’ questions in short form in contrast to the bookish mode of oratory, a request that his final, extended answer ignores. Second, the standard that Socrates has stipulated along the way of holding to one’s own admissions, allowing one’s logos to be examined in its coherence or incoherence, is forsaken in Protagoras’ elusive turn away from the specifically human framework of the questions put to him, distributing goodness across the realm of all living things. The third standard of which their logos falls short has to do with this dispersion and elusiveness of the good upon which all εὐβουλία, and therefore all of virtue, rests. Since τέχνη, as we have seen, relies upon the apprehension of a singular, unchanging and unified εἴδος, Protagoras’ insistence that the good according to which good judgment is determined is itself diverse and subject to change from context to context deprives the subject-matter of his purported τέχνη of any consistent, selfsame unity and therefore of any measure of correctness beyond momentary aesthetic determination. To proceed in carrying out a task with reference only to the way in which
things appear, and without a measure according to which appearances may be judged
together across contexts and throughout time, is to partake in activity that remains
inferior to the criterion of technical knowledge.

In wriggling free of those standards to which Socrates had attempted to hold his
interlocutor, we have found that Protagoras takes a momentary refuge from being tested
at the ultimate expense of his own authoritative knowledge. By attempting to rescue his
position from that process of delimiting the subject matter of virtue through sameness and
difference, Protagoras essentially withdraws the ground of virtue from all measure as
such. Indeed, their audience, as well as perhaps Protagoras himself, does not see the
implications of this move; they burst into loud applause at such a seemingly clever and
shrewd maneuver. It is clear at this point that Socrates finds himself alone amongst the
company of Callias in his search to make clear that kind of education that, as Protagoras
insists, would help one to avoid the greatest physical dangers and engender the highest
goods in the city. The audience has been given over to following the exchange of *logoi*
as if its goodness consisted in separating out the victor from the vanquished, as if
Socrates were, like Protagoras, speaking out of a motivation to distinguish himself and
performing, ultimately, for the amusement of the audience.

Socrates rejects the audience’s response as the standard of a sufficient answer –
and rejects as well the obligatory shame that would attend a speaker in his position if he
accepted that standard – by reminding Protagoras of their initial agreement to give
answers in short form, the first standard to which their *logoi* was to be held. In doing so,
Socrates indicates that effect of long speeches that serves as a methodological advantage
for the eristic speaker engaged in a contest, on the one hand, and a marked disadvantage
for one committed sincerely to the fostering of education, on the other. That is, Socrates refers to the limitations of his own memory, stating that “if someone speaks to me at some length, I forget that to which his *logos* is devoted” (334c-d). In effect, this is precisely what Protagoras was aiming at by cutting off their dialogue with his extended, memorized speech; if Protagoras does remember the subject of virtue’s unity as Socrates’ aim in posing each question, the audience has indeed forgotten it.

We are to keep in mind as well that the “one small thing” that would satisfy Socrates’ soul, and which guided his dialectic, is part and parcel of Protagoras’ overall demonstration that virtue is teachable. Despite the fact that Protagoras was originally set this task of teaching Socrates, his present concern of saving himself from shame and professional emasculation forces him now to foster ignorance and forgetfulness, the opposite of that educational end that teaching is designed to accomplish. Socrates’ rejection of the eristic measure of crowd-pleasing, indifferent as it is to learning and searching, is, then, a result of his commitment to the position of the student, and likewise an appeal to Protagoras to hold to his admitted role as a teacher.

Of course, Socrates cannot but be ironic in his pretense to mnemonic inferiority. The fact that Socrates recounts his entire dialogue with Protagoras – and as well Hippocrates – with his companions later that day is sufficient evidence of such insincerity. But what end does this irony, so thinly veiled, serve? Are we to take the *βραχυλογία* upon which Socrates insists as dialectic’s commitment to accommodating the forgetful? This can hardly be the case, since, as we have seen in Socrates’ dialectical exchange with Protagoras just prior, the process of keeping track of their points of agreement, and of who asks and answers at each juncture, demands a significant exercise
of memory for gathering together and ‘reckoning’ the various agreements made. Even though Socrates is perhaps more adept than anyone present at recollecting what has been said, his plea nonetheless has to do with just this use of memory in live discussion. Given time and application, even the forgetful person can memorize a speech like the one Protagoras has given.\(^1\) Yet in the embodied, living give and take of *logoi*, it is quite difficult to keep in mind a flow of statements that seem to have little internal unity amongst themselves other than that of belonging to the same speaker.\(^2\)

Socrates’ request here for Protagoras to “cut up” (*sEntemne*) his answers into shorter form so that he can follow is not only a means for prohibiting the kinds of answers that tax one’s memory and that lead the interlocutors beyond the scope of a question (and thus beyond the subject matter at hand); it is also a means for allowing the listener to grasp the integral order (or disorder) of a given *logos* precisely by submitting to the necessities with which that *logos* presents one’s thinking at each juncture. For, logical necessity\(^3\) cannot have any compulsory effect upon the listener other than through being understood, through being revealed as what must be the next conclusion to adopt in light of what has been accepted up to that point. The shorter form of answering is therefore more conducive to those learners who wish to take nothing for granted in what is said and who demand to understand for themselves why a particular line of reasoning, examined point by point, is better than other considered alternatives; participating in the development of a given line of reasoning through question and answer is an essential part of such understanding. What the short form of answer makes possible, then, is the taking of a stand in *logos* informed by the answerer’s own thinking at each stage of a discussion, whereby he may become an active participant in his own learning.
Socrates’ wish to ‘follow’ (ἐποδθαί) Protagoras in the latter’s discursive peregrinations gestures to the opportunity to cover the same terrain in logos, therefore, by allowing the listener to familiarize himself with the path taken, letting the learner make that path his own as well through understanding it. The only way to ensure that the learner is following, however, is by securing agreement between questioner and respondent about the affirmation or denial called for by each successive question. Agreement functions in this case as a kind of pedagogical check upon the learner’s thinking, evidence that he is following (i.e. submitting to) the logos, and that both participants in the exchange are united in their thinking. This function of agreement is appropriate to those situations in which one who possesses a certain knowledge – for example, a technician – teaches the student by leading him step by step, subjecting him to testing to ensure that his answers correspond to the thinking of the teacher, in the process of transmitting that knowledge.

However, Protagoras’ failure to exhibit a kind of knowledge about the parts (as well as the whole) of virtue that would demonstrate his facility as a technician of virtue sets the notion of agreement here in a different light. Socrates cannot learn about virtue by attempting to measure his answers by the extent to which they agree with those of Protagoras, precisely because Protagoras’ lack of agreement with himself on the subject of virtue relieves his thought of being a measure of correctness for the thought of others. Without any clear authority on the matter, as Socrates is by now aware, the only means of bringing to light the unity of virtue is by aiding one another in the search after a measure for such unity. Yet one cannot provide assistance to his interlocutor where each proceeds with a conflicting set of premises in mind. Agreement in this context means, then, that
both interlocutors “say the same together” (συνωμόλογεῖν), and thus that a common
vision in logos of the matter at hand is established.

We have noted⁴ that discerning sameness and difference is a fundamental
capacity that serves as the basis for measuring, and hence for learning as well. Since
learning presupposes this capacity, one must begin from a point of discernment that can
only have the uncertain status of an appearance, of seeming, in distinction from
knowledge. Saying the same together where there is no pre-given measure of the subject
at hand entails, then, that the interlocutors bring their respective appearances of relevant
commonality and otherness together, comparing them and attempting to bring them into a
provisional common measure of sameness to which each admits. By carrying out an
agreement in this way, that initial task of discernment according to which limits are
drawn becomes a mutual endeavor, so that the search for a measure according to such
limits begins in what both participants take to be the strongest basis for their search.

Beginning with common appearances of a single subject entails as well that both
seekers set their beliefs at stake together, and that the project of bringing to light the
matter in question necessitates either a shared accomplishment, if they are successful, or
a shared failure, if they are not. In short, the act of agreement in dialectic attests to
dialectic’s cooperative, rather than competitive, procedure. Holding to an agreement in a
search of this kind is the ongoing act of recognizing that the good at which each
interlocutor aims is a common good, and that the favor of answering and asking so that
one’s addressee can follow the logos is essentially a double-favor. In consisting of
mutual, freely granted favors in logos, dialectic proves to be a practice that therefore
requires, as well as fosters, friendship.
Within the context of their discussion, it is to be observed that the method of investigation that Socrates promotes is not extrinsic to the subject investigated. Insofar as those “bonds of friendship” ordained by Zeus in Protagoras’ speech are intrinsic to virtue, a gathering of different opinions about virtue cannot succeed in making manifest what it is if such a gathering is not conducted in a way that realizes elements of virtue in the process. This means, first and foremost, that the interlocutors must commit to forming bonds in the course of their discussion, forging freely given agreements about the way in which matters appear, and thus each holding himself open to questioning with a willingness to revise the manner in which things seem to him. The search after the nature of ἀφεττήριμα begins with the recognition that one’s thinking stands in need of a measure; dialectical inquiry, as a form of mutual testing, represents the truth that such a measure cannot be brought to light without the reciprocal granting of favors in logos.

It is in response to Socrates’ appeal for short answers that Protagoras most radically rejects the cooperative search for truth in dialectic. He asks Socrates what kind of short form he has in mind, and whether his answers should be shorter than necessary (δεῖ) or as long as necessary. When Socrates assents to this second alternative, Protagoras finds the opening that he needs: “Then are my answers to be as long as seems to me (ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ) to be necessary, or as long as seems necessary to you?” (334e).

This objection, which appears at first glance to be a disagreement about methods of speaking, cuts to the very heart of the matter at issue between Socrates and Protagoras, and its placement at the midpoint of the dialogue is certainly not accidental on Plato’s part. As we have seen in our earlier discussion of measurement in knowledge, what is taken to be ‘necessary’ in technical activity has been identified as a mean according to
which measurement is to proceed, in opposition to the inferior, relative kind of measurement that “destroy[s] the arts and their works altogether.” Protagoras’ implicit objection points, in effect, to the absence of a pre-given mean, manifest to both speakers as the same, that would determine the proper length of their answers. Without reference to an objective measure to which they can hold their respective *logoi*, the participants in a dialogue are forced to contend with the difference between competing appearances of an appropriate mean. Accepting another’s impressions of the limits in which a dialogue should be set, where there is no immediate justification on either side, would amount, then, to giving up one’s own impressions without sufficient cause. Seen in this light, Protagoras’ objection to a form of discourse with which he is not comfortable seems warranted. Its implications, however, are disastrous not only for an agreement in *logos*, but for any agreement whatsoever, particularly for the kinds of agreement that sustain the life of the *polis*.

Perhaps the most insightful aspect of Protagoras’ Promethean myth is its linkage between friendship, justice, and the foundation of the political community. The gift of *πολιτίκη*, with its attendant notions of justice and shame, could not engender friendship without a communal adherence to these notions, without an agreement to recognize them as applicable to all, and thus recognize those values thanks to which the whole of the city could be preserved. The status of Protagoras’ myth as a myth, in particular its portrait of the works of the gods occupying that place of obscurity in human understanding, gestures to the fact that the very beginning of human agreement and friendship, the beginning of the *polis*, remains as distant from our comprehension as the birth of language itself.

What was the point at which two humans forged the agreement about how to have a
discussion, and thereupon set further agreements about the notions of justice and
goodness? How did that form of dialogue that directs itself to unveiling the nature of
things first begin? Protagoras’ objection serves to reduplicate this original aпория,
confronting Socrates with that source of obscurity out of which his myth of Prometheus
was born. Yet by exploiting the hiddenness of this beginning, by resting in its apparent
insolubility as a means for saving himself, Protagoras reveals his ultimate preference for
his own perceived good, over against that communal standard of goodness upon which
the polis and πολιτιķη rest. In this sense, Socrates’ earlier question of whether good
things are useful provides an appropriate distinction by which to grasp Protagoras’
disposition: a common measure of goodness is taken to be good only as long as it is
deemed useful; beyond that point, the measure is to be discarded. Thus, in taking refuge
in this impasse, Protagoras enacts in deed the very principle that he proclaimed in his
Great Speech – that one should attempt to appear just, whether he is so or not.5

The apparent justice of Protagoras’ stance can be formulated in the popular
maxim (as popular today as ever) that everyone has a right to his or her own opinion, and
this principle extends, in Protagoras’ thinking, to the varying opinions about how a
dialogue should be carried out. Adherence to this maxim may well prove effective in
eristic contests of speech, where the aim is to make one’s opponent appear inferior
through whatever argumentative devices necessary. Yet even in those contexts, this
principle cannot be consistently maintained; arranging to have a contest in the first place
must be based upon some initial dialogical agreement, and hence upon the mutual act of
making oneself understood by the other.
On the other hand, where one claims to possess a \( \tau \varepsilon \chi \nu \eta \), and thereby to be able to communicate this knowledge to others through teaching, the very idea of teaching must include the pupil’s act of learning. Teaching necessitates understanding on the learner’s part, and in this sense, the student’s ability to follow what is said by his teacher functions as a limit to the latter’s manner of giving \( \logoi \). Thus, the situation of teaching carries with it a standard of necessity, a certain mean, that the teacher \( qua \) teacher is compelled to recognize. In this connection, teaching, as a communal and cooperative activity in contrast to agonistic display, demands that priority be given to the understanding of the student in determining a measure for the exchange of question and answer.

Protagoras shows his own confusion between the situation of \( \pi \alpha i \delta e i a \) and that of eristic display by admitting to Socrates that he conceives their dialogue as one of his many “contests of speech” (\( \acute{\alpha} \gamma \acute{\omega} \nu \alpha \; \lambda \acute{\omicron} \gamma \omega \nu \)), and that “if I were to do what you demand, and speak in the way that my opponent (\( \acute{\alpha} \nu \tau i \lambda \acute{\epsilon} \gamma \omega \nu \)) demanded, I would not appear better than anyone, nor would have ‘Protagoras’ become a name amongst the Hellenes” (335a). If we recall that Protagoras has admitted earlier that his excellence consists in being better than all others in showing the way to virtue, then it becomes more probable that he has not simply forgotten that the discussion with Socrates had begun within the context of teaching – from whence he has now shifted to contestation – but instead that he is unable to mark the fundamental difference between competitive and cooperative discourses. In absence of the determination of the limit between these two forms of \( logos \), and as well, without a ready standard for setting the terms of their exchange, Protagoras cannot therefore even begin to search for the coming-into-being of the mean with reference to which his own \( \logoi \) are to be measured. Worse yet, he does not allow
himself an awareness of the need for a common mean in discourse where one is not pre-
given to both.

As it stands now, Protagoras’ resistance to the unity of their common object of
investigation has proceeded one additional step to separate the speakers themselves into
their own mutually-exclusive spheres of δόξα. In effect, their possibility of saying the
same together, of agreement in dialogue, is withdrawn by conferring upon speech the
status of a monologue. A gathering of monological speakers such as that which Socrates
first beheld upon entering Callias’ home can only have, once more, the appearance of a
kind of unity in speech, held together only by a common place and a common time.\(^6\) In
such a gathering, there is no space afforded to questions, insofar as true, rather than
rhetorical, questions presuppose an actual dialogue. In this way, we can understand
Protagoras’ resistance to questions; they threaten to disrupt the appearance of unity in
sophistic gatherings by challenging it with the actual unity that real dialogue fosters.

Having failed to win his appeal, Socrates acknowledges Protagoras’ position, and
in his statement of resignation, he implicitly contrasts the common space of a sophistic
gathering with the common space created by dialectic. “Surely you, who have the power
of both ways [of speaking] should have made us this concession (συγχωρεῖν), in order
that we could have held our gathering (συνουσία)” (335c). The Greek term for
‘concession’ carries the sense of allowing a shared (σύν literally meaning ‘with’) space
(χώρα) within which a mutual endeavor can be taken up or furthered, a creating of place
for another in logos that, in its creation, is a gesture of favor toward one’s interlocutor. In
absence of this form of favor, Socrates insists, there can be no genuine gathering, no true
‘being together’, but only – as in Protagoras’ view of the virtues – a collection of
individuals who have no means of forging unity with one another. Socrates rises to leave as a way of making his point; there is no value in participating in a pseudo-gathering of monologues where each speaks past, and not with, others. Without any true communication, neither teaching nor learning is possible.

Oddly, Socrates meets not only with an attempt at persuasion by Callias to remain with them all and continue his dialogue with Protagoras, but also with a show of force: Callias grasps Socrates’ arm, and his cloak as well. In this small act of physical compulsion, Callias’ deed serves as an implicit testimony to the alternative at hand where free agreement, in the context of an informal gathering as well as in that of a political community, cannot be forged. A gathering or a community can be held together by cooperation and mutual favor, or it can be held together by force, where the measure of cohesion is a set of limits determined by the more powerful party. Here, we should note the cleverness of Protagoras’ sophistry; in cultivating forgetfulness on the part of his listeners, he does not assert any direct form of power over them as much as he gradually whittles away their means of resisting his appearance of authority. Thus, the gathering of listeners over which he manages to hold sway are held powerless, and are therefore, in light of their lack of resistance to his meandering and confusing *logoi*, made complicit in their own subjection.

Socrates, showing himself to be the only one able to resist Protagoras, responds to Callias’ attempt to persuade him to do the gathering a favor (*χάρισαι*) and remain in discussion by indicating his own powerlessness to grant any such favor.

Son of Hipponicus, I always admire your love of wisdom (*φιλοσοφίαν*), but I especially love and praise it now, so that I wish to do you this favor if you asked of me something that were in my power; but now it is as if you asked me to match the pace of Criso, the runner of Himera, in his prime,
or to keep up with one of the long-distance or day-course runners, and I can only say that I wish this much more than you, that I could keep pace with such runners, but I am certainly unable; but if you want to behold Criso and me running together, it is necessary to adapt the pace. For, whereas I cannot run fast, he can run slowly. So if you desire to hear Protagoras and me, he must resume the manner of answering that he took before – through answering briefly and toward the very questions asked. Otherwise, in what way are we to have a dialogue? For I thought there was a separation between being together in a dialogue with each other (συνεῖναι ἀλλήλοις διαλέγομένους) and making a public speech (δημηγορεῖν). (335d-336b)

The bent of Socrates’ analogy of running with Criso is, at first glance, rather preposterous. For who would wish to see Criso, whose excellence consists in running more quickly than any of his competitors, run slowly so as not to leave his competitor behind? However, Socrates’ point here is that the very expectation of excellence proper to contests and competitions is alien to the practice of mutually giving and receiving *logoi*. One would be disappointed to see Criso slow down in order to accommodate another runner, only because Criso’s excellence is the product of a relative measure, of the extent to which his speed exceeds the speed of others. And within the scope of competition, there is no place allowed for the granting of favors between participants. As in running, so is it with the practice of public oratory; speaking before a group, and in opposition to one’s interlocutor, demands that no favors be given, lest the one granting them be shown inferior in *logos* as a result. As Socrates contrasts being together in dialogue with this sort of public competition in speech, we need to bear in mind the fact that the dialogue that Socrates has in mind, and that towards which he has been working, demands an enactment of virtue in its very procedure if the subject discussed is to come to light. Thus, the ἀρετή proper to contests – in speech and in deed – manifests itself according to a fundamentally different, competitive standard than the ἀρετή proper to
political life; the latter measure of excellence applies as much to its manifold expressions as it does to the process of searching for this very measure.⁷

Socrates’ analogy inaugurates participation on the part of the audience, who all wish, as Callias does, to have the discussion continued. Each contributor exhibits his own attempt to rehabilitate the original agreement between Socrates and Protagoras to hold a dialogue together, even though it becomes clear – despite occasional flashes of insight from the contributors – that Socrates’ distinction between the cooperative, friendly spirit of dialogue and the competitive relation of eristic is ultimately lost on the listeners. Nonetheless, participation by a number of listeners here reflects the kind of counsel proper to communal life; each will have his say on the matter at issue, attempting to aid in deliberation about what course the gathering as a whole should pursue. We should be attentive, then, to the fact that what is at issue in these attempts at rehabilitating the discussion is more than the particular fate of their dialogue; the proposals on the part of each speaker reflect the original search for a measure of being together, living in common, as such. Without recourse to language and discussion – and hence, to reasoning – human interaction, where individuals are at odds with one another, can only take the form of power relations, of the exertion of force and a corresponding acquiescence to it. Thus, the fate of their logos about how to share a logos proceeds hand in hand with the possibility of political life, of the search for a standard upon which all can agree and to which all can hold themselves. As such, the proposals and the agreement reached in light of them at the center of the dialogue gesture to the creation of law as well as to the assumptions about justice that inform its genesis.
The first to speak is Callias, their host, who sees in Protagoras’ position a conception of justice that appears to foster and respect freedom on the part of speakers. “Protagoras appears to say what is just (δικαία), that he be allowed to dialogue in the way that he wishes, in return for your claim that it should be as you wish” (336b). Callias’ defense of Protagoras only replicates the problem that Protagoras himself has raised. Yet we are asked thereby to pose the question of whether such a conception of justice can be maintained; to allow two interlocutors to discuss in the way that appears correct to each, dependent upon their wishes, is to do away with the possibility of any agreement, and therefore with the possibility of rules for determining how things are said, as well as what is said. In political terms, if it is just for each individual to do as he pleases without specific limits, there can be no distinction between just and unjust action; no action is any more or less just than another. Hence, Callias’ defense of Protagorean justice calls for the effacement of justice as such by emptying it of the need for any criterion.

Alcibiades takes issue with Callias’ suggestion, on the implicit grounds that justice must proceed in reference to common ability. For Socrates has already confessed that he is unable to follow Protagoras’ long speeches, and gives way to him in this sense. On the other hand, by focusing upon what each of them is capable of doing, namely speaking in short form, Alcibiades finds Socrates to be more than a worthy opponent:

I should be surprised if [Socrates] gives way to any man in dialogue and in knowing (ἐπίστασθαι) the giving and taking of logoi. Now if Protagoras agrees that he is worse than Socrates in dialogue, that will suffice for Socrates; but if he challenges (ἀντιποιεῖται) him, let him discuss through question and answer, not making an extended speech out of each question, not putting off logoi, refusing to give them, or prolonging his discourse to the point at which most of his listeners have forgotten what it concerns. For Socrates, I assure you, will not forget, despite his play (παίζει) in
claiming to be forgetful. Socrates appears to me to be speaking more moderately; yet each of us must bring to light his opinion. (336b-d)

Alcibiades shows that he has been keeping relatively close account of Protagoras’ behavior in the dialogue with Socrates, and furthermore that he does see a difference – perhaps unseen by Protagoras and the others – between dialogue, on the one hand, and oratory, on the other. If Socrates is in fact inferior in the matter of speech-giving, Alcibiades suggests, this is of no consequence, since their contest takes place in dialogue, rather than in oratory. Since Protagoras claims to be able in dialogue as well, then the competition must proceed in reference to that kind of sport of which each is capable. Callias’ defense of Protagoras, then, allows for a confusion between different ‘games’, as it were, wherein no excellence can be exhibited given the confusion between their respective activities. If what Protagoras and Socrates are holding is a dialogue, on the other hand, Protagoras’ wish to conform to the dictates of speech-giving is clearly inappropriate in this context.

While Alcibiades does offer a constructive distinction between the modes of discourse proper to dialogue and to oratory, he nonetheless fails to grasp the point of Socrates’ analogy of running with Criso. That is, Alcibiades still understands the giving and taking of *logoi* between Protagoras and Socrates to be, like sophistic displays, a contest wherein one interlocutor comes out superior and the other inferior. And if there is a playing field in which short answers – proper to dialectic – are necessary to their game, then Socrates will prove to be a match for his ‘challenger’. Thus, Alcibiades treats Socratic dialogue as if its essential trait lies in βραχυλογία alone, and as if the distinguishing point between oratory and dialogue is to be found in a difference in purely quantitative measures of speaking.
Critias, offering his brief contribution, emphasizes Alcibiades’ assumption about the ends of dialogue by stating that “Callias seems to me more in support of Protagoras, while Alcibiades is always a lover of victory (φιλόνικος) in that which he takes up” (336d-e). If Alcibiades, therefore, clever as he is, resists the enchanting force of Protagoras’ words – and in this sense proves himself to be less vulnerable than Hippocrates, with his dogmatic attraction to the sophist – his impartiality in favor of beholding victory in contests over and above the contestants themselves reflects the fact that the kind of φιλία arising out of contests is other than that which is to be forged in the founding of justice. Critias’ playful jibe at Alcibiades acknowledges the latter’s apparent support for Socrates against Protagoras, but only as motivated by a love of spectacle. However, Critias does not go so far as to say what end the love in dialogue is to have, but rather adds another distinction: that between their loving victory (συμφιλόνικειν) on one person’s part or another’s, on the one hand, and a common appeal to both (κοινῆ ἀμφοτέρων δεῖσθαι) contestants not to break up their gathering, on the other.

Like Alcibiades’ proposal, Critias makes use of a distinction that serves to advance the preservation of the dialogue, but which at the same time remains ignorant of dialogue’s proper end. A spectacle of competition is still to be expected, yet the way of allowing each interlocutor to participate is furthered by calling upon a common effort by the audience for them to settle their dispute. The irony here is that while Socrates has in mind a search through logos that must be carried out in common by both speakers, Critias turns to the audience itself and hopes to rehabilitate the dialogue by proposing that the audience take part in a common, unified appeal. Thus, the means of conducting a dialogue here suggested is to institute a common pressure upon the speakers from
without, compelling them into dialogue; an external standard of supplication and perhaps even the invocation of shame are used to force two interlocutors into an agreement where the rules for such agreement are still lacking. As in Protagoras’ Great Speech, one is compelled by external means to be just without the requisite understanding of that in which justice consists.

Prodicus is next to speak, and in his rather dazzling soliloquy the common project of inducing Socrates and Protagoras to preserve their dialogue not only wins a host of further distinctions, but also takes on a new dimension. For in the process of dispensing a list of impressive subtleties, Prodicus confers upon his own participation the quality of a spectacle that serves to promote the appearance of his knowledge. His first distinction comes by way of agreement with Critias, insofar as he states that those present should be listeners “in common” (κοινούς) to both speakers, yet not be “equal” (ἴσους) listeners. “We should listen in common to them, yet not give equal weight to both, but more to the wiser (σοφωτέρω) and less to the more ignorant (ἀμαθεστέρω)” (337a). Loyalty to one speaker or another is not to be given out of anything other than the relative measure of wisdom between them. While this sounds, at first blush, a sensible precept, Prodicus leaves unaddressed the very measure that would decide between knowledge and ignorance in dialogue. Where the measure according to which Socrates and Protagoras are to conduct a conversation is still lacking, Prodicus remains untroubled by gesturing toward a measure of that which can come to light only through conversation. Furthermore, as a dialogue consists in giving and taking *logoi*, the matter of determining wisdom on the part of the one who questions, on the one hand, and the one who answers, on the other, is far from apparent.
Yet in his second distinction, Prodicus – perhaps unwittingly – makes reference to the spirit of speaking and hearing that Socrates has implicitly attempted to conjure in his σκέψις of Protagoras. While quarrelling (ἐρίζειν) signifies a relation of enmity, disputation (ἀμφισβητεῖν) bears the mark of φιλία, arising from good intentions (εὐνοια). Thus, Prodicus calls for a ‘friendly argument’. Yet, as we have seen with Callias, Alcibiades, and Critias, the friendship and good intentions of which Prodicus speaks are set within the sphere of a contest, wherein each strives against the other to display his greater intelligence. Carrying out a contest of good sportsmanship, therefore, will have the effect of bestowing upon the speakers a greater share of ‘good repute’ (εὐδοκιμεῖν) in contrast to mere praise (ἐπαινεῖσθαι), the latter of which is clearly inferior since it is so often cloaked in deceit. Despite the fact that Prodicus wisely sees the weakness of praise as a measure for speaking well, the option he considers more attractive, good repute, nonetheless falls short of Socrates’ aims in dialectic as well. The end of giving and taking logoi is not to have sincere adherents, or to be thought well of, but instead has in view the unconcealment of the matter at issue.

Lastly, Prodicus puts forth as an addendum the benefits that their friendly contest would confer upon the listeners, and in this sense, Prodicus moves closest to thinking in Socratic terms. He states that the audience would be ‘gladdened’ (εὔφραινομεθα), rather than pleased (ηδοίμεθα). “For he is gladdened who learns something and takes good sense (φρόνησις) into his thinking (διανοια) itself, whereas he is pleased who eats something or has some other pleasant experience only in body” (337c). Even though the terms of Prodicus’ distinction here may be suspect – especially the reduction of pleasure to the bodily – he is keen enough to see that as a listener, he expects the measure of
what is said to meet the standard of learning and understanding (μάθησις), in contrast to pleasure (which includes the kind of mesmerized pleasure under which Protagoras’ students fall when listening to his voice). However, the fact that Prodicus refers to the understanding of the audience, who do not participate directly in the giving and taking of logoi, and overlooks dialogue as a place for interlocutors themselves to take part in learning, tells us that Prodicus falls short of grasping the intrinsic value of the practice that Socrates has in mind. Prodicus’ conception of dispute in friendship still presumes that the speakers already possess a kind of knowledge that is made known to the audience in the course of their ripostes and verbal jabs at one another, instead of seeing the speakers themselves implicated in their own cooperative project of learning and teaching each other. He does manage to win approval from many of the other listeners, but such approval appears to be motivated more out of delight in hearing his clever distinctions – as if the measure of one’s intelligence were to be found in the correctness of distinctions and their corresponding names – than out of his ability to uncover a measure for the deadlocked interlocutors.

Hippias rounds out the series of proposals with his own self-serving creation of spectacle, as Prodicus has done, but manages at the same time to put forth the only positive plan for settling Socrates’ and Protagoras’ disagreement. Prefacing his proposal of agreeing upon a supervisor to “oversee the mean (τό μέτριον) of each other’s logoi,” Hippias distinguishes between the power of nature (φύσις), according to which those present, in their noble capabilities, are akin to one another, on the one hand, and that of law (νόμος), which constrains them against their nature, on the other. In effect, Hippias’ prescription of instituting a supervisor by way of agreement undercuts his criticism of
law insofar as law receives its inherent authority only through mutual agreement to abide by it. Since Hippias regards law as an external force that perverts one’s nature – or at the very least is in tension with it – Socrates and Protagoras must likewise submit to a kind of constraint in allowing an external judge to oversee them. While Hippias does not see the tension in his own account, it becomes clear in his proposal that the differences between Socrates and Protagoras, which can only derive from their distinct natures, are to be settled by way of compromising the natural inclinations of each. He calls upon Socrates to relax his commitment to precision (ἐκπίθεια) and short form in dialogue if Protagoras finds it displeasing, but rather allow Protagoras’ logoi more space, “so that they may give us a more splendid and elegant appearance (φαίνονται)” (338a). Accordingly, he calls upon Protagoras not to “let out full sail, as you run before the breeze, and escape into the ocean of logoi leaving the earth nowhere in sight; rather, both of you must take a course in the middle (μέσον)” (338a). If both sides can have a share in what each demands, then both may have a share in satisfaction as well.

Hippias’ appeal for a middle course addresses, much like Callias’ statement, the wishes of each interlocutor to speak as he likes, but in such a way that they can speak with one another through a kind of compromise. Yet the mean proposed by Hippias concerns only the length of their respective logoi, rather than the motivations of each speaker. For Socrates, the end of dialogue, as we have seen, does not merely concern exchanging logoi of moderate length; it has to do with the manner of, and interest in, dialogue as a cooperative activity in which both participants have a shared stake. A compromise in length alone does nothing to transform the intentions and the understanding of each speaker, who is free to pursue in the activity of dialogue either a
common goal in understanding, or his own personal gain in securing a reputation for wisdom. Allowing Protagoras to shorten his speeches moderately merely opens the way for the sophist to curtail answers that he has already memorized, and therefore to avoid taking a specific stand according to his own opinion within the dialectical limitations set by Socratic ἀφήγησ.

Once Hippias’ suggestion receives approval by all in the audience, Socrates is able to call into question the more fundamental flaw in the plan that appears at first most sensible to them all. “To this I answered that it would be shameful to choose a judge for our logos; if he who is chosen is to be inferior to us, it would not be correct to have the inferior overseeing the better; if he is our equal, the case will be the same, since our equal will only do as much as we, so that such a choice would be superfluous as well” (338b-c). Nor is it, as Socrates further states, possible even to choose one who is wiser than Protagoras, and any pretension to do so would likewise be shameful, implying that the great Protagoras is in need of someone to watch over his words, and is therefore some lowly and unfit interlocutor.

Despite Socrates’ ironic praise of Protagoras (for, it should not escape our notice that Protagoras has yet to make good on the wisdom that he claims), the real problem raised by his objection has to do with the very ground of setting a standard in and for discourse. If neither participant in a dialogue possesses sufficient knowledge of that which stands in question, and both are therefore in search of such knowledge, questioning and answering one another, what means do they have at their disposal for correctly choosing an arbitrator to oversee their discussion of it? By calling into question the fitness of any external measure for exchanging logoi, Socrates in essence raises the
question of how the measure for such a measure is to be gained. In other words, what is the standard of correctness according to which a proper standard of correctness may be determined? Such a question leads ultimately to an infinite regress of asking after measures for setting measures, and in this way presses upon the questioner the fact of the ultimate epistemic groundlessness of the terms of dialogue. Seen thus, Socrates’ rejection of Hippias’ plan reflects the Protagorean truth that there is no pre-given objective measure at hand to decide how a dialogue is to be conducted.

Yet such a question of the ground of measure can only be asked by someone who has an investment in the truth of what is put into question; for Protagoras, the correct measure of his *logoi* is based, as we have seen, in the kind of pleasurable forgetfulness of the matter at hand on the part of his audience, and thus in an evasion of, or an indifference to, its truth. Hence, Socrates’ objection serves to underscore the extent to which Protagoras looks to both δόξα and αἰσθησις as the primary determinants of proper discourse. As a result, Protagoras’ challenge to Socrates at the beginning of this section is to prove that there is a pre-determined, justified measure that applies to them both; if Socrates cannot do this, then, it seems that Socrates is in the position of accepting the alternative as Protagoras sees it: admitting that exchanging *logoi* can only be a matter of power relations arising out of the creation of appearances from the start, where each interlocutor struggles against the other for victory.

In light of these equally untenable options, Socrates proposes his own ‘middle course’:

If Protagoras does not wish to answer, let him ask questions, and I will answer; at the same time I will attempt to show him how the answerer, as it seems to me, should answer; and when I have answered all of the questions he wishes to ask, in his turn he shall promise to give a *logos*
similar to mine. So if he does not seem desirous to answer the question put to him, you and I will join in beseeching him, as you have besought me, not to dissolve our gathering. And for this there is no need to have one man as supervisor; you will all supervise it together (κοινή). (338d-e)

As an alternative to finding an external measure for the appropriateness of the terms of conversation, and as well, in the avoidance of maintaining self-enclosed, mutually exclusive measures, Socrates offers an ‘internal’ solution to their dilemma. By exchanging roles in dialogue, and calling for a likeness of answering between them, Socrates offers Protagoras the chance to undertake his own σκέψις, to hold Socrates to a measure through questioning in return for like treatment. Instead of one participant submitting to the rules of the other, Socrates calls, in essence, for a mutual submission to terms that they set as they go along. In this way, Socrates enacts the middle principle between either extreme and impracticable option: the appropriate measure for dialogue must be worked out in common by both interlocutors in the course of giving and taking logoi. For Socrates has been attempting, if indirectly, to point out that the mutual understanding of what is said forms the mean according to which each speaker speaks correctly. His emphasis on agreement underscores this notion, insofar as agreement implies an understanding of that upon which both parties agree. And, since one cannot know what one’s interlocutor understands, or how best he comprehends specific kinds of subject-matter, prior to engaging in dialogue, each must seek this mean of understanding as the exchange of question and answer develops.

As Socrates’ word κοινή suggests, they will take part in a common mode of submitting themselves to testing, common not only in the sense that each of them puts himself in the other’s place, but also in the sense that their audience will hold each man to this agreement. Of course, through quite clever trickery, Socrates has called upon the
audience to serve as a judge, yet the only role of supervision that the audience claims is that of urging Protagoras to hold to the agreement proposed by Socrates. While mollifying the attendants and letting them believe that all may serve as overseers, Socrates in effect uses the audience’s power of conferring shame – the very power upon which Protagoras banked initially by preferring a public exchange with Socrates – to compel Protagoras to take up the dialogue again, and therefore to let dialogue develop in such a way that Socrates can attempt to let a dialogue, and therefore a mutual measure, come into being.

We should note that Socrates’ arrangement, which is accepted by all, allows him to accomplish two things commensurate with the notion of dialogue that he has been supporting thus far. First, the exchange of roles in question and answer allows each to be both teacher and student, and therefore comprises a mutual gesture of helping the other to learn. Secondly, Socrates does not set a predetermined limit upon Protagoras’ number of questions, nor on their length; he gives his interlocutor the freedom to begin as he wishes. The only limit set is that of adhering to likeness in the way in which Socrates answers. Seen thus, Socrates’ position of answerer is essentially a granting of favor toward Protagoras to reply to the latter’s questions; assuring that this favor is returned ensures, then, that Socrates will encourage his interlocutor to take part in a relation that carries the structure of an act of friendship. Of course, that Protagoras may be compelled by others to take up this relationship and sustain it does not diminish its significance; it is the first step toward learning the value of abiding by an agreement.
II. Interpretation I: Protagoras’ Challenge

Protagoras’ skillful evasions have proven successful only in the short term. Due to Socrates’ invention of a new arrangement, Protagoras is now faced with a challenge that threatens to bring him at least as much, if not more, shame than the pressing questions put by his interlocutor. Since the ball is now placed in his court, however, Protagoras refers to his repertoire of sophistic lessons not as a means of bringing any new understanding to the matter of ἀρετή, but of getting the better of his persistent young questioner, and hence, restoring his own authority. He prefaces his question with a remark on the nature of his art: “Socrates, I regard the greatest part of a man’s παιδεία to lie in being formidable (δεινόν) in verses; that is, to be able to understand what has been correctly (ἀρετή) and incorrectly composed in what has been said by the poets, and to know how to distinguish them and give a λόγος on them when questioned” (338e-339b). As he has noted earlier, the works of good poets compose a formative stage of one’s education, and are to serve as models for the imitative impulses of the student. Being able to separate out good poetry from inferior works implies, then, that one is sufficiently learned to accept or reject varying models of presumed good character or competing conceptions of virtue portrayed in poetry, and therefore to determine a criterion of goodness after which the learner is to strive. Thus, the question of the appropriate measure of a λόγος, and in particular a λόγος that has to do with the subject of virtue, is transferred from spoken to written discourse. By testing Socrates, submitting him to a measure of correctness in distinguishing between fit and unfit poetry, Protagoras
attempts to reveal Socrates as uneducated, and therefore to shame him before the audience.

Protagoras’ plan has certain self-protective advantages that should not be overlooked. By setting their discussion within the sphere of poetry, he can refer to the composition of another author without putting forth his own substantial views on the matter of virtue. While Protagoras has claimed to disabuse himself of any “outer coverings” characteristic of the sophists who preceded him, his refuge in the words of another underscores the fact that Protagoras uses different modes of logos as screens instead. At the same time, he attempts to catch Socrates in a problem whose answer he knows (or believes he knows) already, and can thus save himself from the dangerous extemporizing that had brought him to grief earlier. Once more, then, Protagoras can rely upon his own memory of texts or solutions to puzzles already solved in order to convey the appearance of wisdom. Despite the fact that he states that the move to poetry will be the “only difference” from their previous discussion on virtue, his reliance upon memory in this connection will be shown to make no small difference in the way that wisdom and goodness are conceived.

Protagoras cites several opening lines from an ode by Simonides to Scopas, and is gratified to learn that he need not recite the whole of it for his discussant, since Socrates has already, as he puts it, “happened to have given the poem much care (μεμεληκός)” (339b). Both men can be said to ‘know’ (ἐπίστασθαι) the poem in the minimal sense that both have memorized it and could pass the test of recalling it as proof. Yet Socrates’ reference to the care he has given it will play a significant part in distinguishing his own conception of education in poetry from that of Protagoras, and will serve furthermore to
bring Protagoras himself – his own thoughts and beliefs – back into the focus of their discussion.

For Protagoras, on the other hand, the strategy is to pay Socrates back in full for trapping him in an admission that he could not adequately defend. Hence, Protagoras goes on to ask whether Socrates regards the poem as “finely and correctly composed” (καλῶς ... πεποιήσθαι καὶ ὁρθῶς), which Socrates readily admits, and further, whether he regards it as finely and correctly composed “if the poets contradicts (ἐναντία λέγει) himself,” in the composition (339b). Socrates answers the second question in the negative, and though Protagoras does not explicitly agree, it is made clear that both men take a similar view of speaking against oneself in poetry as a mark of incorrectness. The same principle has been observed, if we recall, in their preceding discussion where Protagoras’ logoi generated two lines of thought that did not “chime in harmony” with each other. Thus, we should not be surprised that the strategy Protagoras utilizes here is his own version of bringing Socrates to a similar form of illegitimate speech. The previous dispute between interlocutors who fail to come to agreement with one another about how to carry on a discussion is, therefore, framed on each side by an exchange of logoi wherein agreement remains at issue, yet has to do not with the agreement between speakers, but with agreement with oneself.

Protagoras invites Socrates to look more closely at the ode, given Socrates’ admissions thus far, and proceeds to a further point in the work that composes an apparent difficulty for the person who finds Simonides’ words in this case ‘fine and correct’. The difficulty has to do with statements that appear to Protagoras to contradict one another: on the one hand, Simonides writes, “For a man, indeed, to become
(γενέοθαι) good (ἀγαθόν) truly is hard, in hands and feet and mind foursquare, fashioned without reproach,” (339b) and, on the other, “Nor is for me the dispensation of Pittacus appropriate, though it was said by a wise man; hard, he said, is it to be (ἐμεναί) good” (339c). With Socrates’ adherence to the position that Simonides does agree with himself with respect to these lines, and Protagoras’ confidence that they do not, a difference is opened up between apparent and true contradiction in logos, whether both interlocutors can ‘see together’ that limit-point between correct and incorrect works that distinguishes, again, in Protagoras’ view, the educated man from the uneducated. The difference between apparent and true marking of this limit has to do, however, precisely with the differences in care that each devotes to the poem at hand. This difference affects as well the contrast in confidence that each has with respect to his reading of the work; Socrates confesses that even though the ode appears to agree with itself, he remains open to the possibility that there may be an even more careful reading of it available, and therefore becomes fearful that there might be “something in what Protagoras says” (339c).

Socrates’ openness to other possibilities of reading the poem attests to his willingness to hold the work open to questioning, with the realization that one may discover new interpretations by further σκέψις, further testing of its meaning. Yet, as we find, Protagoras is not invested in returning to the poem in order to question it more thoroughly; his questions to Socrates are not true questions, born out of wonder and aporia, but rather have answers already prepared in his repertoire. Seen thus, Protagoras is unable to allow himself that space of insecurity and acknowledged ignorance out of which true questions issue, since the spirit of contestation precludes a sense of wonder
and a common search where each individual is committed to the appearance of possessing unquestionable knowledge. Sincerely taking up the role of questioner amounts, on this understanding, to betraying one’s weakness of knowledge, and would, given the rules of sophistic display and disputation, amount to a kind of madness. Any engagement in dialogue on the sophist’s part only result, therefore, in inauthentic dialogue.¹²

Hoping to exploit an assumed weakness on Socrates’ part, Protagoras moves in for the kill:

How can anyone, he replied, appear to agree with himself, who says both of these things? First he set it down that it is hard for a man to become good in truth, and then a bit later in his poem he forgot, and he proceeds to blame Pittacus for saying the same as he did, that it is hard to be good, and refuses to accept from him the same statement that he himself made. But as often as he blames the man for saying the same as himself, it is clear (δήλον) that he blames himself, too, so that in either the former or the latter place his logos is not correct. (339d)

This point, at which Protagoras takes himself to have established the upper hand in a contest of words, is in fact a point in which Plato’s irony is as rich, as concentrated and manifold as any other place in his dialogues. The initial irony has to do with Protagoras’ careless confusion of two distinct notions that have plagued him from the outset: that of being (eίναι, of which ἐμέναι is the epic form), on the one hand, and becoming (γενόσθαι), on the other. This confusion is manifest most fundamentally at the very heart of his supposed τέχνη, wherein the good that is to ground and serve as the guiding, selfsame εἶδος of his art of virtue is reduced to manifoldness and change in itself. That the good is subject to becoming and lies wholly within the realm of becoming proves furthermore to undercut his pretension to an objective criterion of correctness in poetry, where the works of good poets may appear good to one person but bad to another. This
irony is ingeniously encapsulated precisely in the difference of appearance of sameness and difference in reading the words of the poem; Protagoras, in implying that there is no way to bridge the variance of appearances between speakers, has left open the possibility for arguing against any measure of correctness he assumes. Accordingly, while Protagoras finds it “obvious” that Simonides says the same as Pittacus in his opening lines, Socrates will go on to argue quite persuasively that Protagoras’ assumption of obviousness in what is read – and therefore the expectation that others will see the same thing in the poem that he does – is, in fact, anything but.

A second level of irony is to be unveiled by considering the charge that Protagoras makes against Simonides. As an explanation for the poet’s ‘mistake’ in composition Protagoras states that Simonides had forgotten what he had written in the previous lines. More than simply suggesting that Simonides was confused, and therefore delivered no real insight based upon knowledge, Protagoras sees the poet’s principal shortcoming to lie in the very thing upon which Protagoras himself relies in order to save himself from being caught outright in contradiction: the use of memory. Though it may be odd that in such a short space of lines an accomplished poet should forget what he had written before, and even more so in the present case, where the particular poem has been deemed worthy of serious study by Socrates, Protagoras’ charge against Simonides becomes absurd when we turn to the question of who Simonides was. Protagoras has listed Simonides as belonging to the line of sophists preceding him, to be sure. But Simonides was regarded as well to have developed an art of mnemonics; the Suda reports that Simonides had “an outstandingly good memory,” and Pliny, in his Natural History, writes that “a technique of mnemonics was created by the lyric poet Simonides … which
allowed anything once heard to be repeated in the identical words.” Simonides would be, therefore, the last of people (excepting perhaps Socrates) liable to such a charge of forgetting. Protagoras’ accusation only attests, once more, to his lack of care in considering the poem.

Lastly, this same charge against Simonides can be seen as a veiled self-reference by Plato himself, a kind of hermeneutic cue for reading this dialogue, as well as any of the others. The apparent contradictions between dialogues, or those given at times by Socrates, are occasions to look more closely at what is said, and how it is said, rather than assuming that Plato has simply forgotten what he wrote the page before. Apparent contradictions, whether written or spoken, call for closer examination, for their own form of σκέψις, not merely with an eye toward logical consistency, but also toward the actions of the speakers in carrying out their logoi, as well as the contexts in which such speaking takes place. The end here is not to show that someone is mistaken, and therefore rest content in having shown that a logos has not lived up to a specific measure of what a correct logos should be, but rather to unearth what such a mistake – or the appearance of a ‘mistake’ – reveals about the understanding and beliefs of those coming to terms with it.

In the present case, we find that Protagoras’ assurance that their discussion will continue to be about virtue is an empty one. Protagoras does not address the content of what Simonides says, namely whether or not it is hard to be good (or to become good, as the case may be), or much more importantly, what it is in which such goodness consists, but instead simply approaches the ode in terms of its logical form. All that he has attempted to show is that the poet speaks against himself, and that Socrates, too, in
supporting Simonides, must also necessarily be in disagreement with himself. One might conclude that Protagoras is indirectly striving to make a point about virtue itself, but by leaving off with his accusation of contradiction, all he manages to do is point out a mistake in reasoning by Simonides and Socrates that confers upon him the appearance of superiority. Being ‘formidable in verses’ is shown, therefore, to mean using poetry not as a means of unconcealment of the truth of virtue, but using it for one’s own competitive advantage.

The combative nature of Protagoras’ participation in their renewed discussion is made clearer by Socrates’ response to the clever trick that Protagoras has played upon him. Socrates states that the effect of the sophist’s words, as well as the noise of the audience’s applause, was like that of a boxer’s punch, making him dizzy and plunging him into darkness. Thus, Protagoras has not brought anything to light, but rather made matters more obscure, so that Socrates is forced to buy time in order to win a vision of it once more in logos (σκέψει), by bringing Prodicus into their discussion. Socrates calls upon Prodicus to help him “rehabilitate” (ἐπανόρθωμα) Simonides, a fellow native of Ceos, lest Protagoras cause his countryman to look like a simpleton. Socrates’ reference here to medicine should remind us of the physician of the soul to whom Socrates gestured earlier in the dialogue. Insofar as poetry is one of the customary forms of μαθήματα, it is precisely this kind of doctor who is fit to examine poems such as the present one to see whether they are good or bad for the soul. Yet in the present reference to rehabilitation, Socrates makes clear that the activity of such a physician is not a mere disinterested form of σκέψις, but a kind of testing and examining that, by its own activity, serves to bring a
form of health to the very logos under investigation. Yet in what manner, we must ask, is this rehabilitation to be carried out?

Socrates provides a beginning for this question’s solution through reference to another poet. Quoting Homer, he calls upon Prodicus, as if he were Scamander calling Simois to his aid against Achilles, “Dear brother, let us both together (ἄμφότεροι) stay this warrior’s might” (340a). While his discussion with Protagoras has not been significantly altered by their reversal of positions in questioning and answering – it remains a one-sided competition – Socrates seeks to forge a cooperative endeavor with Prodicus as a means of resisting the force of Protagoras’ attack. Socrates responds, therefore, with a formation of a communal σκέψεως of the point at issue by asking Prodicus to join with him in putting the terms of the passage into question.

Prodicus is chosen as suitable candidate for looking into their problem because of the “art of music” (μουσική) in which he is skilled. As we have seen earlier, Prodicus’ art has to do with making fine distinctions (διαίρεσις) between words for the sake of the kind of clarity after which Socrates had been pursuing in his exchange with Protagoras. As such, Prodicus’ skills are aimed at the very heart of the dispute about measure that has developed over the course of the dialogue, specifically at the ability to recognize sameness and difference in logos, and therefore to be able to draw a limit according to which measurement may be carried out. We should note as well that in calling upon the skills of Prodicus, Socrates is not importing anything new or external to the understanding of education as Protagoras has articulated it. Insofar as Protagoras’ notion of education has to do with separating and distinguishing (διέλευθ) verses correctly, it would be foolish, in Socrates’ eyes, to attempt to carry out a reading of the poem without
consulting one who claims expertise precisely in this knowledge of separation. In the present situation, determining whether the terms ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ are to be distinguished in meaning shall in turn be the deciding factor between apparent and true contradiction in Simonides’ verses. As Socrates declares to his partner, “Simonides does not appear to speak against himself” (340b). A method of distinguishing holds the promise, therefore, of bridging the space that separates the appearance of contradiction to Protagoras from the appearance of self-agreement to Socrates.

Prodicus’ aid is limited here, however, to answering Socrates’ question whether being and becoming are the same or different (unsurprisingly, Prodicus affirms the latter), and then giving his own agreements with two of Socrates’ further proposals: that Simonides only commits himself to saying that it is hard to become good, and that Prodicus himself would likely second the thrust of Hesiod’s words in this connection, that while it is hard to make one’s way to virtue, it is an easy thing to possess. Thus, while playfully utilizing Prodicus’ supervision – for it soon becomes clear that Socrates does not support Hesiod’s statement – Socrates’ practice of involving another interlocutor, another voice to match the imported voice of Simonides, aids in demonstrating to Protagoras two things: a) that the difference in apparent contradiction between the two interlocutors involves more than mutually-exclusive opinions that are equal in weight, since Socrates has managed to secure agreement in his denial of poetic contradiction, and b) that by reading the terms used by Simonides with an inquisitive orientation, one is able to propose new possibilities of its meaning, and hence new lines of investigation of the nature of virtue, rather than halting all questioning and searching at the first sign of contradiction.
Socrates is, to be fair, baiting Protagoras by offering this new interpretation of Simonides’ meaning, and even more so given that one of Protagoras’ rivals has given his assent to it. It is debatable whether Socrates is adhering to the agreement to answer Protagoras in such a way that Socrates would like him to answer in return. However, considering that Protagoras’ pseudo-question does not leave Socrates many avenues for giving his interlocutor a fitting example of how one should reply, one can argue that Socrates does promote two objectives that Protagoras’ previous extended answers have served to resist. First, Socrates is able to prioritize the function of drawing clear distinctions and setting limits for the *logoi* at issue, taking a stand with respect to sameness and difference as they apply to the matter of discussion. Secondly, Socrates’ formulation of a new, as yet uncontested, hypothesis on the basis of relevant distinctions allows their dialogue to push forward so that the central question of virtue can be further examined.

Protagoras does indeed respond to Socrates’ provocation, yet without addressing the distinction itself that worked to foil the trap he had set. Instead, Protagoras objects to the thesis that Prodicus is now found to support. “Your rehabilitation, Socrates, contains a mistake bigger than that which you are rehabilitating” (340d). Socrates admits that if this is indeed the case, then he is a “ridiculous physician” whose treatment only “makes the sickness (νόσημα) greater” (340d-e). There is an odd equivocation in Socrates’ retort. Is it actually Simonides’ poem that is ailing, or is it perhaps the dialogue between Protagoras and Socrates that is infected with a kind of sickness? Socrates’ proposal for a particular reading of the poem, which at the very least preserves the consistency and unity of the lines in question, does, as we have noted, manage to keep goodness within
their purview as a central issue. However, given that the *logos* shared between them is a dialogical undertaking, Socrates’ baiting of Protagoras in this way has the effect of making the latter more contentious – especially since Prodicus has been brought in – and therefore risks putting the orientation of each interlocutor even more at odds with one another. Putting the dialogue at sharper cross purposes entails, in turn, a progressive atrophy, on the part of both interlocutors, of the ability to see clearly in *logos* what remains in question.

We see, accordingly, in Protagoras’ riposte that the matter of virtue becomes even more confounded. “Great, he replied, would be the ignorance of the poet if he calls it such a small matter to possess virtue, which is the most difficult of all things, as all men agree” (340e). With his appeal to common opinion, Protagoras places yet another strain upon his original position that virtue is taught by all in the city. This is not to say that the omnipresence of virtue in the *polis* necessarily entails that its acquisition be easy, but it does nonetheless challenge Protagoras’ further notion that the possession of virtue is a necessary condition for being human (as opposed to the sub-political “wildfolk” of which he makes mention in his Great Speech). We are left to wonder how virtue could be seen as the most difficult of all achievements when all humans are not merely capable of possessing it, but in fact do possess it. The ‘common view’ that Protagoras ascribes to the Athenians in believing all must have a share of virtue, along with the common view that all regard it to be the hardest thing of all, reflect once more the ambivalence of common opinion. And it is highly probable that the sophist is not unaware of this aspect of widespread δοξα; one can, as we have seen, appeal to common opinion with great flexibility precisely because of its ambivalent, unstable, and at times, even inconsistent
character. While it may be a well-worn philosophical point that truth is not reducible to the opinion held by the greatest number of people, Protagoras appears to see that the vulnerability of the masses themselves to this thesis only serves to propagate the bias of the many, and hence furthers a sense of self-forgetting in the spread of popular δόξα.

The mounting problems of Protagoras’ many-sided account of virtue suggests not only a confusion about what virtue is (though Socrates has not even broached this question directly), but whether or not it can be taught (a question that appears also to be deferred). Protagoras’ new insistence that virtue is difficult to possess, with the emphasis here on possession, or as he has formerly put it, ‘acquisition’ or ‘procurement’, also constitutes a particular difficulty for one who wishes to account clearly for virtue’s nature as something that can be possessed. To the extent that Protagoras exhibits a conception of wisdom, it comes only in the form of memorized contents, whether they be speeches or rhetorical devices. If Protagoras claims to be able to transmit virtue through teaching, his attempts to give proof of his own wisdom serve to underscore an understanding of virtue as a possession of the soul in like manner with logoi retained in his memory. On this conception, the mind functions as a repository of learnings, recalling, perhaps as Simonides taught his followers, such learnings word for word.

Implicit in this conception is the notion that virtue, as knowledge in the soul, remains essentially selfsame, as if it were something that subsists in being, on its own, inseparable from the words that have been taken ‘directly into the soul’ by the student, and at hand in a mental storeroom for recall. The fact that Protagoras makes use of speeches prepared beforehand, not tailored to the understanding and situation of specific individuals, only further attests to a notion of wisdom as indifferent to the person who
possesses it, a wisdom that exists in the specific formulation of one teaching or another. It is not difficult to reason that for one with such an assumption about knowledge, words are elevated to possessing meaning – and what is more, wisdom – in themselves, above all human involvement and scrutiny; speeches become fetishized objects, taking on the illusion of wisdom without the accompaniment of the act, the movement, of understanding.

This tendency in sophistic thinking is paired with a second, opposed tendency to speak in such a way that the meaning of a given concept can be tailored to the momentary wishes of the speaker. For example, we have noted in the previous chapter that for Protagoras, virtue can be both one and many, provided the meaning of virtue can be kept vague enough to straddle both sides of the distinction, keeping open the possibility for using either aspect of it in avoiding self-contradiction. For a speaker such as Protagoras, there is the assumption, then, that words and speeches possess stable meanings, on the one hand, and manifold, mutable meanings, on the other. Wavering between these principles, resisting clarity for the sake of preserving his position – equally unclear – Protagoras finds discursive resources for keeping himself alive in competitive discussion.

Prodicus represents a counterweight to Protagorean proteanism by insisting upon clear distinctions between words, and rigid meanings that transcend the particular contexts in which they are employed. For Prodicus, wisdom lies in the ability to differentiate terms with increasing subtlety, and in adhering strictly to the discursive limits carved out thereby. It is not surprising, then, that Socrates keeps Prodicus within the bounds of their dialogue by calling upon his specific “wisdom,” which is “very likely a gift of long ago from the gods, beginning either from Simonides or even earlier” (340e-
Socrates even admits to being a follower of Prodicus, and therefore to be experienced in a matter for which Protagoras has no skill. As Socrates has pointed out, being and becoming are to be understood as distinct, a point which has helped to defend Simonides against the charge of contradiction. Now that a new possible interpretation hangs on a dispute over what is ‘hard’, Socrates suggests that they attempt to determine whether ‘hard’ also carries a meaning other than that assumed by Protagoras. Socrates uses the example of ‘awful’ (δεινώς), the utilization of which Socrates is often upbraided for by Prodicus, who insists that since ‘awful’ means ‘bad’, one should be ashamed to use the term for praise, as when Socrates calls a man ‘awfully wise’.

Socrates’ playfulness here gestures to the fact, counter to what Prodicus maintains, that words and phrases are capable of multiple and shifting meanings, dictated by context and common usage. That is, words are subject to a certain slippage, a transformation or accumulation of meanings, a certain play within the bounds of discourse. It is due to this fact that a word like ‘awful’ can come to take on contradictory meanings, either of which can only be decided within a specific situation.

Prodicus’ wisdom is called upon in this case in order to determine whether Simonides’ use of ‘hard’ within the context of his poem can have a meaning in the customary usage or dialect (Socrates uses the term φωνή, most commonly translated as ‘voice’) of the Cears that would differ from the meaning that it has in other regions. “So perhaps ‘hard’ also is taken by Simonides and the Cears either as ‘bad’ or something else that you do not understand” (341b). Prodicus asserts, when asked, that Simonides has ‘bad’ in mind by the use of ‘hard’. And when Socrates re-inserts this modified meaning into the poem, the result is that Simonides chastises Pittacus for saying that it is bad to be
good. The effect that Socrates achieves thereby is to allow Prodicus to reformulate
Simonides’ objection to Pittacus as a lesson for those who do not practice the Prodicean
“music” of exact terminological distinction, and therefore to promote his own brand of
sophistry in the bargain as a supplement to the education that Protagoras has already
proposed.

It is difficult to tell whether Prodicus is serious in his support of Socrates, and
thus whether he, too, is having fun at Protagoras’ expense. In either case, Socrates is
assuredly engaging in a kind of playfulness that not only pokes fun at Protagoras and
Prodicus together, but also a playfulness with the meaning of words as well. In essence,
Socrates, as interpreter, takes part in a play of reading that tests out the limits of possible
meaning for the terms at issue. Once more, the question of that according to which such
testing is to proceed becomes more apparent when Protagoras insists, against Prodicus,
that Simonides was using ‘hard’ as other Greeks do, namely as “that which is not easy,
and which demands a great deal of trouble” (341d). Faced with the initial snippets of the
text, each man has little more than his bare insistence of what Simonides means to
support him, and on this account, the two are reduced to disagreement about the
appearance of the poem’s meaning without any ready ‘middle course’ to decide between
them. Socrates has, however, gained from Protagoras an implicit admission that the
elements of language must have certain semantic limits upon which all can agree, and
therefore that there must be, even if they have not yet determined it, a communal measure
for the proper and improper use of language. Thus, it is only when Protagoras invests
himself in a position, and sees that this position is imperiled, that he acknowledges a
standard to which all are to be held.
It is here that Socrates, having made this initial, albeit inexplicit, point, conciliates Protagoras by saying that Prodicus is only playing (παίζειν) with him. Yet this play, he explains, is at the same time a means of testing (ἀποπειράσθαι) Protagoras’ thinking in order to see whether he can “support his own logos” (341d). Prodicus is, it seems, only playing along in a form of play that Socrates has inaugurated; as such, Socrates’ playfulness has not abandoned the mode of testing that we have seen to be intrinsic to dialectic. And though Socrates has directed this testing overtly at the meaning of Simonides’ composition, we find that Protagoras has been put to the test as well. Socrates’ rather outlandish supposition that χαλέπόν could mean ‘bad’ serves to raise the question of how far the limits of textual interpretation can be pushed, and whether education in verses – and for that matter, in any text – can be reduced to the mere appearance of meaning for any given reader. Thus, even this playfulness calls for a manner of support (βοηθεῖν) in one’s interpretation, of coming to the aid of one’s logos.

We should not overlook the fact that Protagoras has not, in fact, come to the aid of his logos, and that it is Socrates who provides this support for him by finding “proof” (τεκμήριον) in a further line of the poem. He states that Simonides could not have meant χαλέπόν to be ‘bad’, since he set down just following the verse that “God alone can have this privilege” (341e). Socrates continues, “Surely he cannot be saying that it is bad to be good if he goes on to say that God alone can have this thing, and attributes this privilege to God only; otherwise Prodicus would call Simonides a rogue, and in no way a Cean” (341e). Yet in offering support to Protagoras’ reading of ‘hard’, Socrates at the same time furthers his own position with regard to the ode by helping those present understand why Simonides takes issue with Pittacus: Simonides insists on becoming
good, as opposed to being good, because being good is reserved to the sphere of the
divine. Pittacus’ mistake, therefore, arises out of a confusion between the human and the
godly, which is played out in the confusion between being and becoming. As such, the
mistake seen by Simonides bears precisely on the heart of virtue in the question of the
good, but is at the same time brought to light through the dimension of virtue known as
piety. For, who can be pious who mistakes his own potential for that of a god? Socrates
will return to this point in his own reading of the poem.

At this point, it has become clear that Protagoras’ hope of demonstrating his
powers of education has yielded little in the way of a lesson about education itself. All
that one can gather from his use of the poem is that education has to do with recognizing
contradictions in verses (at which Protagoras shows himself to be less than adept), and
conjuring psychological _ad hominem_ explanations as a means for accounting for such
mistakes. In the present case, it is Simonides’ poor memory, Protagoras argues, that
leads him to contradictory conclusions. Yet has not Protagoras himself not been guilty of
this very charge minutes prior? Once again, we are led to believe, it is Protagoras’ task to
wipe this defeat from his audience’s memory, to neutralize, in effect, the past, and at the
same time to adhere as closely as he can to his memorized _logoi_, the essence of his
understanding of what it means to be educated.

Socrates, on the other hand, has sought to keep Protagoras within a dialogical
framework of speech, importing even another sophist to ensure Protatoras’ provocation
and participation. In doing so, Socrates has thereby kept his interlocutor closer to
speaking and acting in accordance with his true thinking, gradually interrupting
Protagoras’ self-concealment behind, as it were, prepared, doxastically-detached _logoi_.


By engaging with and testing the elements of *logos* in Simonides’ poem, Socrates is able to win from Protagoras more of the sophist’s thoughts about the subject of virtue, or, at the very least, the ease or difficulty of its procurement. Though the poem was intended to be a smokescreen for his own δόξα, Protagoras betrays himself further not only by resisting a particular interpretation of it, but also in his very act of using the poem as a means of defense in dialogue. Protagoras’ disinterest in giving anything but the most cursory of interpretations without searching for a unity of meaning within the ode as a whole is to be countered by Socrates’ attempt to seek an overall coherence within it; unlike his interlocutor’s aim of dethroning the supposed wisdom of Simonides’ wisdom as a sham, Socrates undertakes to further the aid to Simonides that he and Prodicus have already, if only playfully, begun. It is in this rehabilitation of a particular written *logos* that Protagoras’ presuppositions about education, and more specifically about the condition of human knowledge therein, are to be revised.
Socrates’ playfulness at the level of isolated words in Simonides’ poem gives way to a kind of playfulness that attempts to link the parts of the ode together in light of its composition as a whole. He proposes his own reading of Simonides’ thinking (διάνοια) in composing the poem as the real, more proper, way of testing his capability in verses, over and against the technique of clever entrapment first employed by his interlocutor (341e-342a). Though Socrates will pursue his play further – to the point of outright comedy in his preface to the interpretation – we are to observe that this play is not a meaningless, frivolous exercise, but is directed precisely to revealing meaning in the work in a way that Protagoras’ brusque and agonistic approach could not. Furthermore, even at its most comic moments, Socrates’ logos on the poem is directed as much to recovering its integrity as it is to uncovering the lack of integrity in Protagoras’ own comportment to discourse.

Socrates prefaces his interpretation of the poem with a secret genealogical account of philosophy. It is, in fact, difficult not to see this account as a response to, and what is more, a parody of, the lofty genealogy of sophistry given by Protagoras as a preface to his own ἐπιδειξις. In providing a background and context in which to consider Simonides’ aims, Socrates allows himself at the same time to have fun at Protagoras’ expense. The comedy in this episode begins immediately with Socrates’ attribution of philosophy’s birthplace to Lacedaemon and Crete, where “there is the greatest amount of sophists on earth” (342b). While Sparta in particular was feared and respected for its military prowess, hardly anyone in Athens, the self-proclaimed city of wisdom, would
confuse Sparta’s strengths with philosophical wisdom. Socrates’ provocative claim here contradicts what the Athenians take to be obvious, and in this sense, his account re-enacts the Protagorean ploy of inverting customary opinion, as he did in accounting for virtue not as unteachable, but taught by all. Likewise, where Protagoras spins a secret history of a guild of sophists, putting himself in noble company with Homer, Simonides, and all manner of other famous men, Socrates also makes use of claims to secrecy and hiddenness in attributing philosophy to its least likely candidates. Where neither story can be tested for its truth, Socrates seems to suggest, then each man is free to create his own hidden history, no matter how outlandish it may appear. If all men in the city possess and teach virtue, even if what they have and do is concealed to themselves, and if all sorts of previous athletes, doctors, and musicians were concealed sophists, then what is so strange about the love of wisdom being most plenteous where one would least expect to find it? Thus, Socrates can easily say that “the people [in Crete and Sparta] deny it and veil (σχηματιζονται) themselves as ignorant, in order to prevent the discovery that it is by wisdom that they have ascendancy over the Hellenes, like those sophists of whom Protagoras was speaking” (342b).

We should heed Socrates’ pairing of Spartan veils with the veils employed by Protagoras’ sophists. For the matter of concealed thought has been at issue between Socrates and Protagoras from the beginning, and continues to be a central problem as Simonides’ thinking in the poem presently evades their grasp. The outer coverings employed by the Spartans, as Socrates goes on to state, are so convincing to outsiders as the source of their dominance that the followers of their cult “get broken ears by imitating (μιμουμένοι) them, bind their knuckles with thongs, go in for muscular exercises, and
wear dashing little cloaks, as though it were by this means that the Spartans were the leaders of the Hellenes” (342c). Despite the humor of Socrates’ observations, there is a serious point to be made here. The laconizing outsiders who appear ridiculous in Socrates’ account are to be likened to the students of Protagorean sophistry; they mistake sophistic speeches and techniques of trickery for wisdom itself, and imitate the *logoi* of Protagoras once these are bought and memorized. In taking these veils of speech, which in fact are instituted to hide the sophist’s real thinking or lack thereof, for the source of wisdom, such students can only be injured, misled, or subjected to ridicule by those who know better. In each case, the Spartans and Cretans, as well as Protagoras, conceal their intentions as a mode of self-protection, and propagate false appearances to maintain their power.

At the same time, however, Socrates makes use of his ironic account of the Spartans to distinguish their purported mode of education from Protagorean practice. The Spartans and Cretans, Socrates explains, keep their young at home, disallowing them to travel to other cities “so that they do not unlearn (ἀπομαθάνωσιν) the things that they are taught,” in opposition to Protagoras’ habit of traveling widely with his own students (342d). For the Lacedaemonians, it seems, preserving one’s education has to do with keeping oneself rooted in the city, enmeshed in the networks of care that compose political life.

The more decisive difference between the sophist Protagoras and the ‘philosophical’ Spartans lies, however, in the mark of the Spartans’ “most excellent education in philosophy and logos,” namely, their ἑραχυλογία:

If you choose to spend time with the worst of the Spartans, you will initially find him appearing poorly in discourse; but soon, at some point or
other in speaking, he strikes with a worthy remark, short (βραχύ) and compact, as if it were a fearsome (δεινός) shot, that makes his interlocutor appear no better than a helpless child. This has been observed by certain people in our day and of old, that to be Laconic is much more the love of wisdom (φιλοσοφία) than the love of gymnastics (φιλογυμναστική); for they know that one’s ability to put forth such remarks is to be ascribed to his perfect education. (342e-343a)

By aligning βραχυλογία with the superior form education, Socrates strongly counters Protagoras’ own pretensions to παιδεία through extended logoi. Yet Socrates also attempts to convert his interlocutor to the mode of short speeches by presenting him with an account of their effectiveness in debate, as illustrated in the formidable use of short remarks by the Spartans. Seen thus, Socrates appeals to Protagoras’ own goals in dialogue, offering an account of how the short form of speaking is more useful than the long in accomplishing what Protagoras seeks to achieve. Disarming his opponents by means of enchantment belies a kind of education that is inferior to that of the Spartans, who prefer short, concisely executed paralysis.

According to our foregoing discussion of dialectic, it should be clear that Socrates is constructing his genealogy with heavy irony; dialectic, as we have seen, is not directed to the end of making one’s partner helpless and depriving him of all resources for discussion, nor is βραχυλογία by itself, as Socrates implies here, the real and only measure of education. These observations, coupled with the absurd notion of Spartan wisdom and perfect education, serve to reflect the fact that Socrates is appealing more to Protagoras’ concealed motivations and his assumptions about proper education in order to counteract his pretensions to epistemic authority.

Socrates trumps the authoritative power of Protagoras’ vocational forebears by attributing to the acknowledged Seven Sages – Thales, Pittacus, Bias, Solon, Cleobulus,
Myson, and Chilon – this Spartan pedigree. “You can perceive this in their wisdom by the short sayings, worthy of memory (ἀξιομνημόνευτα), coming from each of them; they came together and dedicated these first offerings of their wisdom to Apollo in his Delphic temple, writing there these things that are sung by all: ‘Know thyself,’ and ‘Nothing in excess’” (343a-b).

Socrates, too, is implicated in this Lacedaemonian lineage as a philosopher; he not only describes himself as such on a number of occasions in the dialogues, but he also confesses to be a follower of Apollo, the pronouncement of whose oracle incited Socrates to begin questioning others and eventually to be able to interpret this pronouncement on the basis of that very questioning.\textsuperscript{15} The inscriptions mentioned above, despite the fact that they are familiar to all, as Socrates notes, are not to be seen as the source of the authority with which he confronts Protagoras’ competing tale. While sophistry implies the possession of knowledge, philosophy has to do with the \textit{pursuit} of knowledge out of a love for it; as such, those who think that they possess the wisdom emblematic of the sages because they can repeat the words and phrases left behind are the natural counterparts to sophistic pretension. Yet it should be clear that these sayings remain ambiguous, and therefore without authority, by themselves. Not only do they stand in need of interpretation, but they comprise the beginning of interpretation; the exhortation to know oneself proceeds hand in hand with uncovering and adhering to the limits that determine one as a human being and, moreover, as a specific person who is guided by specific opinions that always stand in need of a measure. Thus, Socratic \textit{σκέψις} as we have been considering it is an enactment of Apollonian – and therefore philosophic – duty.
If we observe that philosophical activity entails at the same time interpretive activity – a constant questioning of the truth of what is said in light of the limits that define not only what one knows and does not know, but also those limits that determine our mode of knowing – we can understand Socrates’ preface here as a Janus-faced appeal. It is both an appeal to a kind of authority that appears enticing to self-promoting sophists (its laconic power of victory in speech\textsuperscript{16} and the inclusion in a lineage of the famous wise, which gives philosophy a stronger appearance of prestige than the sophistic story), and correspondingly an effacement of authority, insofar as the products of philosophy, the short maxims like those recounted by Socrates above, have no power in themselves. To transmit such maxims, and to possess them in one’s memory, without subjecting them to a kind of σκέψις for the sake of understanding them within the situatedness of one’s life, is little more than playing with and safekeeping collections of speeches for one’s amusement or for the amusement of others.

The power of philosophy here lies in the activity of questioning and testing through which certain logoi are generated as products. The sophist, as a merchant of μαθήματα, cannot trade in questioning, examining, and understanding; for how are these activities to be possessed or transferred? What one can possess, and therefore that for which one can exchange money, are the products of these activities, products that are detached from the noetic undertakings from which they originally issued. Insofar as authority is to be sought in and through such activities, disclosing the logical strength or necessity of accounts that bring determinate meaning to short words of wisdom, the sophist would have to abandon the structure of trade and commerce according to which he conceives the relationship of teaching and learning; if he remains tied to this structure,
his shift to *βραχυλογία* remains as epistemically worthless as the set of *logoi* he already utilizes in sophistry.

One additional difference between sophistry and philosophy is to be noted in Socrates’ account. He states that the philosophical sages came together (*κοινή Ἑυνελθόντες*) to dedicate their maxims to the temple of Apollo, and furthermore that Pittacus’ saying at issue in the poem of Simonides was passed around among the sages and extolled (*ἐγκωμιαζόμενον*) by them. This picture of the beginnings of philosophy in community and a respect for mutual agreement runs in sharp contrast not only to Protagoras’ sophistic forerunner Simonides, whom Socrates portrays as attempting to unseat Pittacus’ saying for his own reputation, but also to Protagoras, who undertakes to give Simonides the same treatment. Consistent with Socrates’ analogies to running and boxing in his exchanges with the sophist, he likens Simonides to a wrestler, whose intentions were to “throw down (*καθέλοι*) this saying as one might some famous athlete, and become its conqueror, winning fame for himself amongst men of his day” (343c). On this supposition, Socrates first gathers the motivation of Simonides’ poem into this single agonistic end, a sophistic performance that appears to differ from Protagoras’ mode of display in this respect only in being written.

If Socrates sees a sophistic, rather than a philosophical, intention in Simonides’ composition, we might wonder why it is that Socrates goes on to devote a significant amount of effort to defend it from the attacks of Protagoras. The assumption that Socrates would want to defend his philosophic forebear Pittacus from a fame-hungry sophist like Simonides appears *prima facie* to be the more sensible option. However, for Socrates to turn himself against one with Simonides’ attributed intentions, attempting
simply to prove him wrong as Protagoras does, would only reproduce the very approach to *logos* that Socrates finds to be a self-defeating aspect of sophistic comportment. Instead, Socrates sees in the disputed words of the poem an opportunity to forge a mutual understanding between those present, and to assume, as far as possible, a consistent general meaning in what Simonides offers as a superior *logos*. Thus, it may be the case that philosophy’s task, when confronted with the challenge of sophistry, is to aid sophistic thinking as well; and in this support given, sophistry does not remain what it is, but becomes thereby something more like philosophy, a concerted, critical effort to gather together *logoi* into a meaningful whole.

Accordingly, Socrates entreats the company to “all come together (*κοινῇ*) in examining (*ἐπισκόπην*) whether I speak truly” (343c). His interpretation to come is an occasion for all to question and test Socrates’ own understanding of the wisdom to be extracted from the poem. He begins, in turn, by setting Simonides’ ode into conversation with the saying of Pittacus, attempting to grasp the poem within its relational framework of meaning. While Simonides is nonetheless “wrangling” (*ἐριζοντα*) and “disputing” (*ἀμφισβητοῦντα*) against Pittacus, even perhaps misinterpreting his foe’s meaning, it may nonetheless be the case that Simonides’ agonistic dialogue with Pittacus is conducive to producing philosophical *μαθήματα*.

In this connection, Socrates states, “Let us suppose Pittacus himself to be speaking and Simonides answering: People, he says, it is hard to be good; and the poet answers: Pittacus, what you say is not true, for it is not being but becoming good, indeed – in hands and feet and mind foursquare, fashioned without reproach – that is truly hard” (343e-344a). In making use of a dialogical scheme for interpreting Simonides’ poem,
Socrates is able to make a reasonable case for understanding the thrust of Simonides’ revision. ‘Truly’ is now no longer modifying ‘good’, but instead ‘hard’, where one may speak of real, rather than impossible, difficulty. To effect this transposition of words, Socrates allows Simonides to avoid the “silly” charge of saying that a person can be good without being ‘truly good’, as if goodness lay in mere seeming rather than in truth. This is, of course, a veiled response to Protagoras’ manifest position that goodness is a matter of appearing good to others. “In this way,” Socrates continues, “we see a purpose in saying ‘indeed’ [at the outset of the poem] and that the ‘truly’ is correctly placed at the end; and all that comes after corroborates that it is to be said thus” (344a).

Having made this interpretive revision, Socrates insists that the poem is indeed well-composed, favorably and very carefully (χαριέντως καὶ μεμελημένως) conceived, and that it would take too long to go over all of its fine points. That the poem can appear carelessly drafted is, we are to gather, a function of the careless thinking of its reader – an inability for, or indifference to, understanding its parts in light of its overall structure of meaning. Seeking to gather its parts into a whole, on the other hand, in distinction to attacking its parts in isolation from one another, requires an act of favor in reading that asks what each of its parts can mean when brought together into a single vision in logos; it is to begin with the tentative assumption that a written work does have a consistent meaning, and that one’s efforts to understand such meaning must transcend the level of what appears obvious.

Accordingly, Socrates calls for them to “go over [the poem’s] character (τύπον) as a whole (δόλον) and its intention (βουλησιν), which is assuredly to refute Pittacus’ saying, throughout the ode” (344b). This dedication to examining the poem as a whole
should recall for us the earlier dispute between Socrates and Protagoras on the unity or
wholeness of virtue. We should be attentive to the analogous structures here between
Socratic interpretation in this respect and the \( \sigmaκέψις \) of the manifoldness of virtues; a
subtle implication of Socrates’ hermeneutic tutorial is that while a poem cannot be
properly understood by separating out its parts and looking at it piecemeal, neither can an
appropriate understanding of virtue be ventured by assuming that that which makes any
of the virtues what it is can be grasped without asking after virtue as such.

Once Simonides has been made to place emphasis upon what is ‘truly hard’,
Socrates can go on to provide a richer account of what Pittacus is taken to mean in saying
that being good is hard, and accordingly, to explain how Simonides is to be understood in
response. According to Simonides, it is becoming good that is hard in truth, but, as
Socrates notes, “not but what it is possible for some span of time (\( \chiρόνου \, \tauινά \))” (344b).
Opposed to the fleeting nature of becoming, its temporal disappearance and
reappearance, is the notion of enduring throughout, or even beyond, time: “but to abide
(\( διαμένειν \)) in this state of what one has become, and to be a good man is, as you say,
Pittacus, impossible and inhuman (\( \ο\υκ \, \ανθρώποιον \)) – for God alone can have this
privilege:

For that man cannot but be bad
Whom irresistible mischance has overthrown. (344b-c)

By conceiving being and becoming with regard to time, Socrates is able to draw
out of Simonides’ words an initial boundary, a set of limits, in which human existence
must necessarily be understood. More specifically, it is within the sphere of time that
humanity’s comportment to goodness is carried out. This means, in turn, that our relation
to goodness and virtue is temporally mediated, rather than immediate in the sense of
possessing, remaining in, and therefore identifying ourselves wholly with, goodness. For humans strive after goodness; it is the “irresistible” ( ámbíχανος) force of events that decides ultimately whether we are to be called good or bad in any instance. Chance, or more properly said, fate, exercises an inevitable power, therefore, over human affairs.

Thus, we can already see a Socratic riposte to Protagoras’ conception of human goodness, as well as to his conception of transmitting it. Protagoras’ implicit notion of virtue as the possession of some abiding noetic property or content, passed on through teaching into the minds of the young, is therefore countered by an emerging picture of our relation to goodness as a kind of activity or human striving that comes into being and passes away again in the course of time. In this sense, Protagoras’ explanation of the possibility of the polis as relying upon acquisition and possession of virtue arises on the basis of a misunderstanding of human limits and possibilities, and therefore on a conception that fails to address the measure of the human himself.

Socrates goes on to clarify this notion of irresistible mischance by way of an analogy with technical knowledge, and hence with ἀρετή in the realm of τέχνη. In the situation of commanding a ship, it is not the layperson who may be overthrown at any time, “just as you cannot knock over one who is lying down, but one who is standing; you might knock over a standing man so as to make him lie down, not one who is lying down already. So it is a man apt to resist ( ámbíχανος) whom an irresistible mischance would overthrow, and not one who could never resist something” (344c). Socrates goes on to mention examples of irresistible mischance that technicians would face: with a pilot it is a great storm, with a farmer, it is a harsh season, and the circumstances are similar for the doctor as well.
Socrates’ analogy is odd, to say the least, but not elusive; those who can be overcome by the forces of fate or chance are those who are ‘on their feet’, so to speak, and standing is correlated here with a kind of technical education. Laypeople, on the other hand, are to be considered as lying down, not even in the position to resist or be overcome without the requisite knowledge; with respect to their goodness, they are neither good nor bad, but simply ‘other’ in considerations of technical excellence. The compass of virtue and vice with respect to a given art unfolds, then, on the basis of education, and is only appropriate to those who have first undertaken to learn.

If we recall in this connection Protagoras’ estimation of virtuous citizens with respect to those who have never been exposed to law, justice, and education, and whom he thereby calls ‘bad’, we can better see the point of Socrates’ suggestion. It is as absurd to conceive of humans utterly lacking in civic education as evil as it is to call a person who has never undertaken the study of medicine a ‘bad doctor’. The dichotomy previously used by Protagoras, Socrates implies, is a false one; ἀρετή – both technical and ethical – requires specific determination based upon the proper limits of the human condition. A careless utilization of the term, taken as an obvious matter, serves to confuse an apprehension of opposites befitting the nature of human life.

Socrates’ explanation of chance carries the upshot that once our relation to goodness – and not the essence of goodness itself – is understood in terms of becoming, the opposites of good and bad are contained within the virtuous life. “For the good man has the capacity of becoming bad, as we have witness in another poet, who says, ‘Nay more, the good man is at one time bad, at another good’ … so that when an irresistible mischance overthrows him who is resourceful, wise, and good, he cannot but be bad”
By translating the language of being into that of becoming, furthermore, Socrates uses Simonides’ following lines to re-conceptualize what one would, in customary, everyday language, call ‘being good’ into ‘faring well’ (εὖ πρᾶττειν).

“Having fared well, every man is good; bad, if badly” (344e). Thus, by taking up Simonides’ vocabulary, Socrates is aiming at an understanding of human goodness as a form of praxis, instead of a sort of inhering, subsisting property or attribute. As an activity that, like any other human undertaking, cannot be sustained indefinitely, human goodness must necessarily give way to its opposite; it partakes of transformation and change, as is proper to the medium of becoming.

But then what is this kind of becoming, this goodness that is good faring?

Socrates explains, once more making use of the technical analogy of which his interlocutor is so fond:

Now what is good faring in letters, the thing that makes a man good at them? Obviously, it is the learning (μάθησις) of them. What good fare (εὖπραγία) makes a good doctor? Obviously, learning the treatment of those who are ill. “Bad, if badly”: who could become a bad doctor? Obviously, he who in the first place is a doctor, and secondly, a good doctor; for he could become a bad one also. But we, who are laymen in respect of medicine, could never by faring badly become either doctors or builders or anything of that kind; and if one cannot become a doctor by faring ill, obviously one cannot become a bad one either. In the same way the good man may at some point become bad through the effect of time (χρόνου) or toil (πόνου) or illness (νόσου) or some other calamity; for there is only one kind of bad fare – the deprivation of knowledge (ἐπιστήμης στερηθῆναι). (344e-345b)

It is here that Socrates most forcefully aligns human goodness with knowledge. Yet we must be careful about how this alignment is to be formulated. Once more, time is brought in to aid in contextualizing Socrates’ interpretation of the poem, and this helps us to understand knowledge itself as something subject to becoming. That is, knowledge is
not to be taken as a mental possession, but rather as the *act* of knowing, correspondent with the acts of learning and understanding, both of which are signified by the word μάθησις. In this sense, we see perhaps the most decisive difference in conceptions of education between Socrates and Protagoras. As we have seen, Protagoras’ notion of education presumes knowledge to be identified with the memorization, the mental possession, of sayings, speeches, techniques and the like. The case that Socrates is developing here, on the other hand, places education within the transformative framework of becoming, in which the practice of learning, understanding, and knowing is synonymous with knowledge. Put differently, Socrates’ interpretation signifies that outside the *act* of knowing, there is no human knowledge at all. Each event of knowing, whether it is of something that one has learned previously, or something which one is understanding for the first time, is its own singular occurrence, taking place in a specific moment of time and in specific, irreproducible circumstances.

We find a kindred account of becoming in knowledge in the *Symposium*, wherein Diotima speaks of the ladder of *eros*. While each human retains his or her sameness of identity, she states, each person is continually becoming a new person, and never staying the same. Likewise,

> With regard to things known, not merely do some of them become (*γίγονται*) and others perish in us, so that neither in what we know are we ever the same persons, but a similar fate attends each single sort of thing known. What we call study (*μελετᾶν*) implies that our knowledge is departing, since forgetfulness (*Λήθη*) is an exodus of knowledge, while studying substitutes a fresh one in place of that which departs, and so preserves our knowledge so as to make it seem the same. (*Symp. 208a*)

In both of these cases, we find an emphasis upon the activity of learning or study as the essence of knowledge, an activity that must be ever-renewed in order to preserve
what comes to light in our learning. In this way, we can also understand how it is that, according to Socrates, the deprivation of knowledge, and therefore of goodness, is an inevitable part of our human nature. Insofar as we are bounded within time, we are subject to forgetting those learnings that nourish our souls, and it is only through the act of recollection, or re-understanding what we have once learned, that we can reconstitute – always in a more or less subtly different manner – our knowledge. This mode of recollection is to be held distinct from the act of simply reproducing memorized *logoi*, but refers to that process of comprehension that must accompany the intake of *logoi* into one’s soul if it is to be called knowledge in the first place. Accordingly, the force of fate, of chance and mischance, is not, as Hermann Gundert has noted, a force that exists outside of us or outside of our thinking; it manifests itself as surely within our νόησις, as the play between forgetting and recollecting, as it does in our exterior lives.

Socrates’ interpretation of faring badly as well serves to complicate an easy or straightforward understanding of the division between soul and body that he first laid out in his words of caution to Hippocrates. For we find here that the supposed ‘interior’ and ‘exterior’ correlates of soul and body carry between them a permeable relationship, wherein knowledge is not lost or obstructed merely by a solely mental lapse of forgetting, but also by kinds of sickness, as well as the hardship of physical labor. In mentioning these conditioning factors, Socrates gestures to a fragility of our excellence which runs in accord with the fragility of the human organism as such. In light of these insurmountable aspects of human life, faring well is to be judged in our relation to the supra-temporal powers of the divine. He goes on thus to quote: “Best also for the longest time are they whom the gods love” (345c).
In marking out these limits of human faring, Socrates makes use of Simonides’ voice to set their consideration of virtue within a measure of human capacity and potential; Protagoras’ implied determination of all citizens as virtuous due to their enduring ownership of παιδεία is a result of his lack of familiarity of the boundaries according to which human life manifests itself. Overlooking these natural limits allows Protagoras, however unsuccessfully, to resist – or rather, deny – becoming in human life altogether. On his understanding, people ‘are’ simply good or bad; to admit his ignorance of the very subject of virtue not only bespeaks a point of personal disadvantage, but as well points up the fact that Protagoras is himself subject to becoming, and thus subject to the oppositional moments of goodness and badness attendant to one’s knowledge. The status to which he pretends is therefore super-human, attempting to claim the position of a god. This is precisely the point with which, according to Socrates, Simonides takes issue in regard to Pittacus’ saying:

Therefore never will I, in quest of what can never come to pass, vainly cast my share of life upon a hope impracticable – of seeking out a man wholly blameless (πανάμωμον) among us who partakes of the fruit of the broad-based earth. If I happen upon him, be sure I shall send word. (345c-d)

For a sophist, as Simonides is reputed by Protagoras to be, the notion of the impossibility of there being a blameless man seems to run counter to the spirit of sophistic exchange, wherein the victor is precisely the one who wins praise and seeks as far as possible to avoid blame and the shame that accompanies it. We may begin to suspect here, however, that the Simonides of Socrates’ interpretation does not come out looking like the sophist that he is held to be. Whatever Simonides’ intention in composing the ode, his words are utilized in the service of Socrates’ ends of producing a
relationship of goodwill and friendship in word and deed, out of which a mutually-based *logos* about virtue can be developed. Yet, as we have seen, such a *logos* remains stalled without the recognition of ignorance on the part of both interlocutors, and thus the need to become, to learn, through their cooperative efforts. These efforts of seeking knowledge belong to the characterization of faring well as Socrates has interpreted it, and hence already belong to human goodness.

Accordingly, Simonides is made to preach a more accepting, even laudatory, comportment to those who are able to embrace the force of chance with respect to knowledge, those who move between goodness and badness: “But I praise and love all willingly (ἐκέων) committing nothing shameful; against necessity (ἀνάγκη), not even the gods do battle” (345d). In fact, despite their censure of Pittacus, Socrates interprets Simonides’ words so as to emphasize their reference to love and friendship (φιλία), as an additional means of opposing the competitive thrust of Protagoras’ discourse. This fact is all the more remarkable when we bear in mind that Socrates manages this by means of the words of a sophistic competitor. Of course, the explanation of the poem belongs to Socrates, and in this sense it is not unreasonable to infer that while sophistry is in itself an insufficient means of developing wisdom and knowledge, it can be brought closer to this aim with the supplement of philosophical guidance. Such guidance demands once more that Socrates uncover in the lines of the poem a less than straightforward meaning.

By calling upon another poetic transposition, Socrates transforms the characteristic rendering of ‘willing’ in the lines above not as a modifier for ‘committing nothing shameful’, but for ‘I praise and love’. While this interpretive move flies in the face of the intuitive meaning of Simonides’ statement, it is nonetheless permitted by the
grammar of the sentence. This allows Socrates to put forward an additional limit-point of human nature, namely that “none of the wise men believes that anyone ever willingly errs or willingly commits shameful (σιχρᾶ) and bad (κακᾶ) deeds; they are aware that all who commit shameful and evil things do them unwillingly; and so Simonides does not say that he gives his praise to the person who willingly does no evil, but uses the word ‘willingly’ of himself” (345d-e).

That Simonides knew this, too, is a testament, Socrates asserts, of his good education. In this light, the discourse of human faring or praxis as tied to the loss or gain of comprehension becomes more determinate. It is the loss or deprivation of what has been reached in understanding that affects our will; faring badly is re-conceptualized as the inability to be guided by understanding and knowledge, and hence to act according to our will. To be led, for example, by adopted and unexamined δόξα is not to be led by one’s will, but by a kind of mischance that, precisely because it hinders us from resisting or even noting its influence, prevents us from bringing into unconcealment a guiding vision of goodness, and therefore prevents us from faring well.

Socrates’ interpretation of Simonides addresses the theme of enmity and its opposite, friendship, as an extension of the principle that finds the will aligned with knowledge of goodness. At the same time, this principle is developed by returning to Protagoras’ emphasis, in the Great Speech, on a relationship between educators and students through compulsion (ἀνάγκη). We recall that the course of education, as Protagoras has presented it, moves from one stage of exterior compulsion – forcing the student to obey the teacher’s dictates – to the next, culminating in adherence to the law in the face of extreme punishment. Socrates takes up Protagoras’ vocabulary of
compulsion, yet sets it within the context of the individual’s self-constraint manifest in discourse. Simonides, he says, holds that it is the part of the man who is καλόν κάγαθόν to compel (ἐπαναγκάζειν) himself to become a “friend and approver” (φίλον ... καὶ ἐπανέτην) of those who fare badly and whose faults cause some sort of harm to the one capable of praising or blaming (345e-346a). To follow the examples Socrates uses, one might have had the misfortune of being born to “monstrous” (ἄλλοκοτον) parents or within a monstrous country, who appear deserving of blame. In opposition to this,

when the worse type (πονηροῦς) are subject to this, they appear pleased to see their parents’ or country’s faults, and complainingly display them and denounce them, so that their own lack of care (ἀμελοῦσιν) in these things may not be denounced by their neighbors, who might otherwise reproach them for being so careless; and thus they multiply their blame and add willing (ἐκουσίους) to unavoidable enmities (ἐχθρας). (346a-b)

Thus, Socrates sets the notion of compulsion within the individual’s relation to himself, wherein the individual exercises a particular limitation to his activity of speech that is marked and instituted as a limit from within himself. The καλοὶ κάγαθοὶ are to be distinguished from their lesser political counterparts, who lack the capacity to exercise a particular control over their ill-will in discourse, and who speak as they feel, both – we may infer – from a motivation to see others punished (whether through shame or worse), and also from a motivation to avoid punishment.

Though Socrates’ rather lengthy explanation of the relation between willing and committing evil appears to stray somewhat from the poem, we can see that what looks like a digression is in fact a means of bringing the themes of Simonides’ ode to bear upon Protagoras’ Great Speech, and upon his overall comportment to dialogue as well. From
the point of view of the interpretation offered by Socrates, we find that what was lacking in Protagoras’ account of the genesis of virtue was a notion of friendship, as well as care, that must be awakened within the citizenry, in opposition to a conception of these relational qualities as imposed from without through law and force. Thus, against these kinds of external limits employed in Protagoras’ depiction of παιδεία, whose justification or necessity as specific limits remain obscure to the learner, we find Socrates implicitly lobbying for the development of a kind of internal authority for speech and action that takes the coherence of the city in friendship as its directive. While the lowlier kinds of citizens tacitly choose self-protection and vengeance over friendship in the acceptance of the imperfection of others, “good men, [Simonides] knew, conceal (ἐπικρύπτεοθαί) the trouble and compel themselves to praise, and if they might be angered against their parents or country for some injustice (ἀδικθέντες) done to them, they pacify themselves and reconcile, compelling themselves to love and praise their own people” (346b).

It is important to observe that, according to Socrates, such self-compulsion practiced by the good and noble of the city is to be distinguished from willing. As he goes on to state: “And often, I believe, Simonides was aware that he had praised and eulogized some tyrant or other like person, not willingly, but through compulsion” (346b-c). The exact way in which this distinction between self-compulsion and willing is to be understood is not readily apparent. We can see, however, that the language of self-constraint is a means of explaining those cases wherein one’s logos is not in harmony with one’s true thinking – as in those cases of insincere praise – where one must conceal one’s opinions or knowledge so as to avoid greater evils to the city than those of
misrepresenting one’s thoughts in speech. If Simonides’ praise of certain tyrants and ignoble persons is found to be in error, such praise is nonetheless justified by its service to the larger whole of the polis thanks to which all are to preserve their own lives.

This interpretation of the distinction is borne out by Simonides’ further statements in the ode that “He who knows justice, the advantage of the city, is a healthy (υγιής) man; him I shall never blame, for a lover of blame (φιλόμας) I am not” (346c). Looking to the higher, more comprehensive aspect of human virtue in justice, which demands a regard not only for one’s own good, but for the good of others, is precisely what allows one to practice the kind of self-compulsion to praise that takes its directive from the city’s advantage. Setting one’s own goods in line with the goods of one’s community – and hence, caring for oneself in a way consistent with the networks of care in which one is, as a citizen, already enmeshed – and attempting to pursue these goods in mutually supportive ways is a reflection of one’s ‘health’, as Simonides puts it. This choice of words should resonate with Socrates’ earlier appeal to the physician of the soul. In this light, those who can promote and engender justice amongst the citizens would be, at least in part, practicing a medicine of the soul. And, insofar as such health is tied to μαθησις, such promotion of justice must attend one’s furthered understanding of justice itself, in opposition to Protagoras’ scheme of education as mere repetition of logoi and submission to instituted authority out of fear and physical punishment. Education, directed to questioning the nature of justice with others, presupposes, once again, that the apparent goods that each individual pursues stand in need of a measure that is informed by the good of the whole; by keeping the foundation of law and what is called ‘justice’ by
the many concealed through an emphasis on uncritical obedience and submission, the Protagorean scheme of politics can only produce diseased, blind souls.

There is, however, a way of concealing the truth about things that leaves one open to justified blame, as Socrates explains. For Pittacus has, unlike the average sort of human, earned blame from Simonides not because Pittacus conceals ugly truths about individuals, but rather because Pittacus fails to speak “moderately (μέσως) and truthfully” and lies “so excessively (σφόδρα) about the greatest matters (τῶν μεγίστων) while seeming to speak the truth” (346e-347a). These are, of course, Socrates’ words, and by presenting Simonides as a vehement critic of Pittacus in the last stage of his interpretation, Socrates confers here, more than anywhere else, a tone of sophistic ἄγωνια upon the poet. Has Pittacus, in his attempt to contribute to Lacedaemonian education, erred so egregiously in failing to distinguish his terms, as Prodicus would charge? It seems to be much more the case that Simonides, in seeing the expectations to which the notion of “being good” would lead the citizenry – namely, to aspire to godlike status – censures Pittacus because he does not take note of a measure for his maxim; his obliviousness of the measure of human life, determined to a large extent by the limits embodied in the divine, represents perhaps the greatest oversight and danger to those who would speak of virtue in an authoritative manner without troubling themselves about the need to seek a measure for such virtue. In the hands of Socrates, this is what the disagreement between the two amounts to. With the acknowledgement of the implications of becoming good, instead of being good, several aspects of human faring and human understanding are allowed determination and measure; with this
change, education, and the virtue to be fostered through it, stand in need of re-conceptualization in accordance with the limitations of our incomplete, temporal nature.

“These things seem to me, Prodicus and Protagoras, to be what Simonides was thinking in composing his ode” (347a). With this conclusion, Socrates desists. We are left to wonder, however, to what extent Socrates has given a sincere exposition faithful to Simonides’ own intentions. Yet, as an interpretation, this exposition cannot but bear the mark of its interpreter. We are to note that Socrates has labored over the poem as a whole, and attempted to give it a unity that was not apparent to his interlocutor, a unity that, in view of Simonides’ varied statements therein, appears to be somewhat strained and open to contestation. Hippias, in fact, while praising Socrates’ performance, offers to give his own alternative reading of the poem. Yet Alcibiades holds him back, in an effort to continue the discussion between Socrates and Protagoras without interruption. It is, of course, a comic insertion to have Hippias chomping at the bit to give his own performance and win a measure of praise for it. However, Plato does seem to be acknowledging that one coherent interpretation of a text does not in principle exclude others. As Socrates has discerned in Simonides’ words a particular set of lessons, so too might another reader find a different unity of meaning therein along other lines.

In his interpretation, Socrates has managed to make use of a consequential distinction in our understanding and our actions between being and becoming. By setting human knowledge within its temporal condition, education ceases to look like a transmission of *logoi* and, therefore, a transmission of virtue, and is reconceived as a continued active process of questioning and incessant efforts at comprehending. Such efforts do not seek to reproduce a selfsame object of knowledge, but rather a new object
in each situation of understanding. Seen thus, virtue becomes, correspondingly, not that in which each possesses a share – so as to ensure that each citizen ‘is’ virtuous – but that pole opposite vice towards which we strive in our education. Being good is thus replaced with faring well, conceived as the undertaking of learning and knowing, and faring badly becomes the loss or deprivation of knowledge. As we can see, Socrates makes his own bid at establishing what Protagoras was not willing to concede: that virtue and knowledge are the same.

Coupled with this revision of what it means to know is Socrates’ further statement that one does not err or commit evil willingly. All wickedness, therefore, arises as a result of ignorance, which, due to our nature as becoming, cannot be avoided indefinitely. Socrates has yet to establish this principle with explicit and convincing reasons, and we must await its re-visitation at a later point in his resumption of dialogue with Protagoras. We are left to wonder, however, how it is that an apparently obvious fact of human life – giving in to what we know to be bad for us – can actually not be the case. It will be important, then, to bear in mind Socrates’ revision of what it means to know as we go on to examine his position in further detail.
IV. The ‘Dismissal’ of Poetry

As the hermeneutic performance of Socrates has come to a close, a decision about how to proceed is called for. It is at this point that Socrates proposes a return “to those things about which I questioned you at first, Protagoras, of which I would be pleased to come to a conclusion (τέλος) with the aid of your examination (σκοπούμενος)” (347c). Such a proposal is, of course, consistent with Socrates’ aims thus far, yet it is the declaration in which this proposal is cast that appears most surprising. For, after going to such pains to produce a coherent account of Simonides’ poem, and countering Protagoras’ methods and aims in the process, Socrates utters a verdict on the apparent value of his performance that requires quotation in its entirety:

For it seems to me that discussing poetry resembles the symposia of lowly market-folk. Such people, due to their inability to carry on a gathering of their own over wine by means of their own voices (φωνής) and logos – such is their want of education – put a premium on flute-girls by hiring the extraneous voice of the flute at a high price, and through that voice conduct their gathering with one another. But where the gathering consists of καλοὶ κάγαθοι, who have been well-educated, you will see neither flute-girls nor dancing-girls nor harp-girls, but only the gathering contenting themselves with their own voices, and none of these games and showy displays – each speaking and listening orderly and in his turn, even though they might drink a great deal of wine. And so a gathering like this of ours, when it includes such men as most of us claim to be, demands no extraneous voices (ἀλλοτρίας φωνῆς), not even of the poets, whom one cannot question on what it is that they say; when they are brought up in discussion, we are told by some that the poet thinks (νοεῖν) this, and by others that he thinks something different, and they go on discussing a matter that they are powerless to ascertain. No, this sort of gathering is avoided by such men, who prefer to hold their gatherings through each other (αὐτοὶ δ’ ἐαυτοῖς σύνειοι δι’ ἐαυτῶν), using their own mode of logos to put each other to the test. It is this sort of person that you and I ought to imitate; putting the poets aside, let us hold our discussions through ourselves, making trial of the truth and ourselves. (347c-348a)
This passage is among the most provocative in Plato’s entire corpus. It represents a point at which Socratic and Platonic irony coalesce and therewith challenges us, the readers, to work out their radical implications. To begin with, Socrates has put forth a forceful statement about the necessity of dialectic for education, demoting Protagoras’ literary interpretation from the status of the highest expression of παιδεία to a mark of those who are least educated. Given that Protagoras has indeed attempted to use the poem as a self-protective veil and diversion from his own ‘voice’, as Socrates puts it, there must be a serious note in the criticism of literary interpretation above.

At the same time, however, Socrates appears to undercut the value of his interpretation of Simonides, in which he has invested significant time and attention, and from which he has drawn several points about the nature of humanity and the pursuit of goodness – notions that could scarcely be called worthless or that would pass for mere forms of low entertainment. For while he has in fact managed to develop a coherent and profound rendering of Simonides’ poem as a whole, he insists that this has not brought their gathering any closer to determining decisively Simonides’ thinking; as a written work that remains in the author’s absence, they may all take part in interpretation indefinitely without ultimately being able to test their interpretations against the ‘correct’ one, namely, Simonides’ inaccessible intentions in composing his work.

This last, consequential point has implications not merely for the notion of education at issue between Socrates and Protagoras, but for the activity in which we, as Plato’s readers, are engaged. For Socrates’ statement about the shortcomings of literary interpretation analogously holds for all written texts, including the Protagoras itself. If Socrates’ role as Hermes, crossing that space between the intentions of the author and the
understanding of the reader, is doomed to inevitable failure, so too must our hermeneutic
efforts to interpret Plato come to nothing in the end but worthless diversions from the real
activity of education. Taking Socrates’ critique of interpretation straightforwardly
amounts to a tacit appeal on Plato’s part to his audience that flies in the face of that initial
directive that we discerned at the outset: “Do not read.” Can Plato really be requesting
that we put down his text – and all other written or memorized works – and pursue
education purely by way of speaking with one another, unaided by any textual tradition?
Such a response on our part would be patently absurd, as absurd as the straightforward
thrust of Socrates’ dismissal of the poets. A considerable amount of circumspection
with respect to Socrates’ dismissal is necessary if we are to preserve Socrates’ point
about the value of dialectic – in opposition to ‘speaking in another’s voice’ – on the one
hand, and if we are to avoid the tacit directive to devalue all texts to the point of
epistemological impotence, including Plato’s, on the other. Where interpretation is here
essentially called useless, we should, I propose, take it as an invitation to interpret most
closely and carefully this point in the text.

We must recall that Socrates has already pointed out the shortcomings of texts
when held against the model of dialogue. Books can neither answer the questions put to
them, nor can they ask any – and therefore hold the reader to question himself as a
dialogical partner would. The poverty of texts in these respects amounts to an irreducible
vagueness on their part, and as well an inert quality proper to any composition that cannot
engender the kinds of self-imposed limits characteristic of dialectic’s power to reveal the
ignorance of its interlocutors. It is, first of all, this ambiguity in texts left behind by their
authors that not only leaves them open to interpretive mistreatment, but also fosters an
uncritical acceptance of their truth in readers who take them as straightforward
transmissions of one doctrine or another. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates explains to his friend
Phaedrus precisely this problem, appearing to damn all written works to an unflattering
fate at best: “He who thinks, then, that he has left behind him any art in writing, and he
who receives it in the belief that anything in writing will be clear and certain, would be an
utterly simple person … if he thinks written words are of any use but to remind him who
knows the matter about which they are written” (275c-d). Socrates continues in this vein,
echoing the criticism of texts that we have mentioned above:

> Writing, Phaedrus, has this formidable quality, and is much like painting; for, the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with written words; you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence (φρονούντας), but if you question them, wishing to know about their sayings, they always say only one and the same thing. And every *logos*, once it is written, is bandied about, alike among those who understand and those who have no concern for it, and it knows not to whom to speak or not to speak; when ill-treated or unjustly reviled it always needs its father to help it; for it has no power to protect or help itself. (275d-e)

It is essential to bear in mind that Socrates’ observations about writing here, as
well as those about reading and interpreting, are all set within written texts. In the
*Protagoras*, and the *Phaedrus* too, Plato lets us know that he is aware of the dangers and
drawbacks of producing and transmitting texts, and he does little, at least explicitly, to
ease our difficulties or provide us with a simple path out of the *aporia* that attends all
reading and writing. For it appears that all reading, if we hold texts to the standard of
conveying the author’s thoughts, can only be *mis*reading, and thus commits any act of
writing to an ineluctable betrayal of its intended purpose. Plato therefore presents us with
the equally unsatisfying alternatives of hopelessly trying to establish what it is that he
thought in his writings, on the one hand, and of casting aside our written (or even oral, as
it has to do with memorized texts handed down from generation to generation) tradition in the process of pursuing philosophical truths. Yet, insofar as one’s written tradition provides resources not merely for the posing of philosophical problems, but also is the source of the normative meanings of the *logoi* particular to one’s language as such, disabusing oneself of all written works whatsoever would amount to the inability to use language with any understanding at all; for what would be the measure of correct and incorrect usage of words where such normative resources are withdrawn? We are, it seems, left without any mean between these two alternatives.

Socrates does make it clear that taking refuge in the ‘voices’ of others must be replaced by utilizing one’s own ‘voice’ in dialogical practice. The solution to the problem raised in interpretation is, I believe, to be broached by determining what ‘speaking in one’s own voice’ can mean in this context. Our ability to make such a determination must begin with a return to the tacit criticisms of Protagoras’ approach to dialogue, and also to the very interpretive exercise that Socrates explicitly disavows.

We have made clear thus far that in the display that Protagoras has first made – the *μύθοι* and the *logos* following from it – a certain mode of speech was enacted that, insofar as it is a speech prepared beforehand and reproduced verbally, approximates the quotation of a text. Furthermore, Protagoras’ elusive mini-lecture on the good, as well as his importation of Simonides into their discussion, follows this same discursive move to take refuge in what one remembers where one is faced with questions that bear upon one’s own thinking and beliefs. Such refuge in rehearsed *logoi* or rhetorical set-pieces constitutes a move away from the dialectical process of *σκέψις*, based as it is in the sharing of one’s actual thinking. Now, the question of whether Protagoras’ speeches and
sophistical tricks are of his own making remains open; yet in the practice of giving and
taking *logoi* directed to the truth of a subject, the authorship of these speeches is beside
the point. For we have seen Socrates prioritize the influence of time upon our thinking in
his interpretation of Simonides, which transforms the notion of knowledge from retained
selfsame thoughts stored in one’s soul to a conception of knowledge as a continuous,
going achievement that must be won time and again due to our temporal nature and our
oscillation between learning and forgetting. As such, this transformation opens up a
distinction between ‘knowing’ *logoi* in the sense that one can remember how a *logos* –
poem, speech, or narrative – ‘goes’ (e.g., that one can remember the lines of Homer
correctly word for word), on the one hand, and ‘knowing’ *logoi* in the sense of
understanding and interpreting their coherent meanings, on the other. Thus, one may be
able to remember quite well how Simonides’ poem goes, without at the same time
undertaking an understanding of that poem; even where one has exercised a certain
understanding or interpretation of it previously, there is nonetheless the impossibility of
knowing what it means without re-enacting the movement of understanding along with
one’s memory of certain words.

Now, where Protagoras is content to speak with others by means of the repetition
of certain beautifully-composed or clever texts, such speaking would not qualify, in
Socratic terms, as speaking with one’s own voice. Whether these speeches are the
children of Protagorean ingenuity or not, the point touched upon by conceiving our
knowledge as temporally-conditioned reflects the fact that such speeches no longer
belong to us when they are merely repeated without our understanding them in the
present, and with regard to particular circumstances and particular interlocutors.
Speaking in one’s own voice, then, has to do with acknowledging the temporality of human understanding, and bringing our thinking to bear upon our current circumstances, such that our *logoi* are informed by this enactment of thinking at each point.

If we accept that Protagoras is recycling his previous thoughts in discussion and repeating the words to which these thoughts were originally attached, the voice of which he makes use qualifies as the voice of another in this sense; this repetition of *logoi* represents an avoidance of our responsibility to bring our current thoughts and our current actions into unity with one another, and in this sense, the author of Protagoras’ original speeches is as absent as Simonides is. Seen thus, speaking in one’s voice has to do with taking on the responsibility of understanding that which one speaks (or, we should note, reads). The abdication of this responsibility has the effect of keeping the speaker noetically distant from the content of what is said, and thus relieves him from putting his own informed thinking to the test in dialectical ὑγιή. As we have noted before, keeping one’s beliefs and true thoughts from such testing disallows one an awareness of one’s mistakes in thinking, and thus prohibits not only a search for the truth of the matter at hand, but also an acknowledgment of one’s epistemological limitations.

According to these considerations, we must ask whether Socrates’ interpretation constitutes speaking in an extraneous voice – and hence, whether his hermeneutical efforts come to nothing more than a sham or a demonstration that texts are useless in the search for knowledge – or whether there is a way in which his interpretation is an exception to those lowly activities of the uneducated. It is true that Socrates has explicitly begun his interpretation by identifying what Simonides appears to have thought in composing the ode. If this were all Socrates was hoping to establish, however, then
aside from attempting to determine what he clearly takes to be ultimately indeterminable, he would have been able to do only so much as to persuade his audience that Simonides held certain views, a point that would be utterly beside the point. Yet what we find in the course of his interpretation is an account of the poem’s meaning through a Socratic lens. That is, Socrates proceeds not as if Simonides’ intentions are still present in the text, with a meaning of its own that subsists throughout its transmission from one person to another, but rather as if the poem constituted a basis of discourse, with its words and grammatical structure, from which one begins to develop a coherent and meaningful account through which that basis can be understood. Understanding is meant here to include asking what certain *logoi* can mean according to one’s own present beliefs and presuppositions, working out a unified conception of a text as a whole in the initial assumption – contra Protagoras’ approach – that the author is saying something educationally ameliorative.

It has been argued that Socrates has been too charitable to Simonides’ texts, practicing all manner of transpositions and shifts and biased prioritizations of certain lines over others in order to develop his own take on the poem.²² Such charitableness, I propose, is to be taken as an awareness of the ambiguity of the text – of all texts – and a subsequent acceptance of responsibility for what one takes the text to mean. In this sense, a distinction between the author’s thoughts and those of the interpreter is acknowledged in the interpreter’s endeavor to construct a coherent meaning from the text. The voice that results, therefore, from an interpretation undertaken along these lines can only be that of the interpreter.

As Nickolas Pappas has observed, the term *diávoia* can refer to what one means in saying something as well as to what the content of what is said means to the listener or
reader. In Socrates’ interpretive efforts and in his own explanations of how to understand the different *logoi* in the text, it is clear that Socrates is working with the latter sense of the term, and not the former. And in assuming guardianship of the poem through his own rendering of its meaning, Socrates overturns Protagoras’ strategy of alluding to Simonides in the first place; the question of authority in the matter of virtue is transferred from the thought of the poets, whom Protagoras wishes to unseat, to the examination of ideas derived from textual interpretation that are held open for questioning.

Yet, generating a coherent account of a text’s meaning is only the first step in the process of testing the strength, and thus, the authority, of that account through dialectical *σκέψις*. Understanding the meaning of a text through interpretation is not to be seen as strictly equivalent to adopting its content as conviction; rather, an interpretation, as the interface of one’s beliefs and one’s understanding, provides a starting-point for that kind of discursive examination that attends to the beliefs of each interlocutor. By providing an account of what a certain text means, and by providing the logic that underpins this meaning, one is able to submit the content of one’s interpretation to testing with other interlocutors, to see whether it is worthy of adoption as belief according to the reasons given, and therefore to use it as a way into the process of giving and taking *logoi* in speech. As we shall see, Socrates goes on to incorporate aspects of his interpretation, implicitly and explicitly, into the ensuing dialogue with Protagoras so that they may be examined and questioned further.

If we take these considerations in mind, then what emerges in Socrates’ interpretation, as well as in his dismissal of a “correct” interpretation based on authorial
intent, is an illustration of the way in which a reader authentically makes a text his own. In the process of bringing one’s own thoughts to bear upon a text, respecting the boundaries of its grammar while acknowledging its corresponding inherent ambiguity, the reader allows a text to speak “as if it had intelligence,” to borrow a phrase from the Phaedrus. Such intelligence, or φρόνησις, is what gives a text its voice, which is at the same time the voice of the interpreter, and as such, is not an intelligence that inheres in the arrangement of a texts’ elements, but is nothing other than the becoming, the γένεσις, of human understanding.

At the close of Socrates’ exposition, then, we find a decisive kinship between an educational comportment to dialogue and an educational comportment to written logos. For where a dialogue directed to mutual understanding and revealing the truth of a matter does not admit of any pre-given measure for determining how logos are to be given, there is lacking as well a standard for determining how any given logos, as a text, is to be correctly understood. Each activity, as we have seen, calls for its limits to be worked out in the course of achieving an understanding of the object of inquiry, as appropriate to the temporally-conditioned work of human understanding. Essential to each form of comportment is an attitude of friendship and cooperation; for embodied dialogical interchanges, this has to do with maintaining an openness to one’s interlocutor and a mutual disclosure of thoughts and beliefs for examination. In the case of interpretation, this must begin with an intention to understand, rather than to merely overthrow, what one finds in a text. And while the relationship between reader and text cannot in principle provide of itself the sharing and testing of views possible in dialectic, this relationship can nonetheless be supplemented by the activity of dialogue once one or
more interpretations have been undertaken; in this sense, an authentic relation to texts can be forged that does not rely upon extraneous and inaccessible authorities, but instead serves as an impetus and guide for the critical development of our own views.

Looked at broadly over the course of the dialogue, Socrates has attempted repeatedly to get Protagoras to speak in his own voice, that is, to reveal his thoughts and to take a critical stance toward them in light of their truth or falsity. For the freedom implied by education has to do not only with being able to harmonize one’s speech with one’s thinking, but also to develop a relationship of responsibility and openness toward such thinking. In order to forge such a relationship, one must abandon the move to borrow *logoi* from others or merely to repeat what one has once thought, thus distancing the authority of a discourse from what one is able to grasp and give reasons for in the present.

We have also seen Socrates tacitly criticize the notion that one can receive education as the result of external efforts to shape the learner, whether through fear or force or shame. The shortcoming of external compulsion is to be found along the same lines of adopting the voices of others. Such compulsion emphasizes a particular kind of care for oneself that can only be an inferior kind in opposition to the kind of care that Socrates is attempting to awaken in Protagoras. As I have argued, Protagoras comports himself to discussion as if the self for which he cares is determined fully by those institutions of punishment that he finds to be so well-founded. On the other hand, the cultivation of one’s own voice, according to Socrates, can only mean speaking from that aspect of oneself that is ultimately inaccessible to external influence and punishment; it is that spontaneous human faculty that has the power to determine goodness by questioning
and seeking to understand a matter at issue for itself, and not for the sake of external factors like one’s own prestige, one’s pleasure, or one’s inability to admit ignorance or oversight. The care for one’s soul involved in developing one’s own voice can only come through the kind of self-critique that derives from holding the truth as one’s highest end. And such a voice is, like knowledge, never possessed once and for all, but must be achieved in every situation that calls for a specific determination of ends – including the situation of dialogue.

Protagoras remains distant from the thrust of Socrates’ implicit efforts to get him to speak in his own voice. In fact, once Socrates has suggested that they imitate such educated men who can put each other to the test, Protagoras preserves a silence and noncommittal demeanor that can only be broken by the chiding of Alcibiades. For Socrates appeals to the spirit of dialogue that he has been attempting to foster all along, stating, “If you wish to question me further, I am at your service (εἰμί σοί παρέχειν) as answerer; but if you like, put yourself at my service, so that we may reach an end (τέλος) for those points of our inquiry in which we paused midway” (348a). This mutual service of asking and answering, this double favor of and in logos, represents an orientation to dialogue that preserves a coherence of ends which can only be reached through the enownment of one’s logoi. Such an orientation still appears alien to Protagoras, and only the shame of being unseated as an interlocutor brings him out of his speechlessness, a fact that only emphasizes Protagoras’ unwillingness to accept responsibility and accountability for the logoi that he has given. He is still responsive only to the forces of external compulsion, urging him to protect himself, and hence has no choice but to bow to the exhortations of those in attendance and admit questions put to him by Socrates.
It is at this point that Socrates finds it necessary to offer an explicit account of his friendly intentions to his interlocutor:

Protagoras, do not think that in engaging in dialogue with you that I have any other wish than to examine (διασκέψασθαι) the aporias that occur to me at each point. For, I regard that there is much in what Homer says – “When two go together, one discerns (εύνόησεν) before the other.” For, somehow it makes all of us humans more resourceful (εὐπορο̱τέροι) in every deed or word or thought; but if one thinks (νο̱ίσῃ) something by oneself, immediately one must go about searching until one finds some person to whom one can display it and who can corroborate it. (348c-d)

The project of dialogue, as Socrates understands it, testifies to the fact that neither he nor any individual is sufficient to overcome the wealth of problems that arise out of an inquiry into human virtue. In this sense, no individual man can be the measure of all things; the task of making progress in one’s understanding calls for the participation of others who can submit that understanding to testing. The discernment of the individual can only be perspectival and incomplete, and thus requires the resources afforded by the conflicts or agreements in perspective from others who can bring their own thoughts and experiences to bear upon the question at issue. As Diomede calls upon Odysseus to aid and safeguard him in infiltrating the camp of the Trojans, Socrates elicits a plea similar in spirit to Protagoras: to be his ally in gaining a vision of virtue in logos. Yet to be allies presupposes a shared end, and until Protagoras can recognize a mutual, cooperative aim in dialogue, each man is left with only his own partial, unsubstantiated thoughts. Aporia cannot be replaced with eὐπορία in human faring without putting one’s thoughts at stake and accepting a measure for thought and speech that exceeds oneself.

In connection with Socrates’ invitation to speak in their own voices, we can see that the ability to enown one’s voice demands the participation of the voices of others.
To conceal one’s thoughts from others while claiming to have knowledge constitutes an irresponsibility and a lack of care for one’s soul, as well as a lack of care for others. For one such as Protagoras, who is guilty of this charge, this kind of irresponsibility and carelessness, this flight into booklike *logoi*, makes him the perfect soul-patient for Socrates. Thus, the compliments that Socrates bestows upon Protagoras are more a veiled reference that he is in need of being treated than a straightforward mode of praise:

Not only do you consider yourself to be καλὸς καγαθός, like many other people, who are sensible enough themselves, but cannot make others so; but you are both good yourself and have the gift of making others good. And you are so confident of yourself that, while others conceal this τέχνη, you have had yourself publicly proclaimed to all the Greeks with the name of sophist, and have appointed yourself a teacher of education and virtue, and are the first who has ever demanded a fee for such a thing. What then could I do but call upon you in this σκέψις by way of question and communication (ἀνακοινοθῆκαί)? I had no other course. (348e-349a)

Such praise, ironic as it may be, conforms to Socrates’ explanation of the man who is truly καλὸς καγαθός, namely the one who constrains himself to praise those who are less than noble. And for Socrates, these flattering words are directed to a similar end: the cultivation of friendship, as that which not only supports a city, but also provides the necessary fundament of philosophical, rather than eristic, dialogue.

On another level, however, his mock-charitable treatment of Protagoras, modeled on the sophist’s own boasts, reveals that Protagoras is more in need of Socrates than Socrates is of Protagoras. The latter still lacks his own voice, and it will be Socrates’ aim to help him find it, provided the sophist can find the courage to open himself to the kind of testing in *logos* that equips all involved with resourcefulness.
1 In this connection, it is worthwhile to observe that Aristotle characterizes sophistic education in general in terms of the distribution of memorized speeches, referring to the practice of Gorgias as a prime exemplar, who “used to hand out speeches to be learned by heart.” *Sophistical Refutations* (183b37-38).

2 Recall that Socrates had to “pull himself together” after Protagoras’ Great Speech, as a result of its enchanting, scattering effect (328d). We may infer that Protagoras’ smaller speech on goodness has a similar effect on the audience, who may well not have applauded had they borne in mind that Protagoras was no longer fulfilling his promise to demonstrate adequately that virtue is teachable. If we consider that the audience’s response arises out of their delight in seeing the sophist sidestep Socrates’ challenge, we note that such pleasure is a condition of forgetting, similar to the way in which the pleasure of intoxication is tied to forgetting those various concerns that trouble one in his or her daily life. Seen thus, Protagoras’ mode of giving prepared logoi is a kind of discursive potion that plays upon pleasure and forgetting, one which, as I argue in slightly different terms below, requires the antidote of dialectic for the learner who seeks real soul nourishment.

3 By ‘logical necessity’ I do not have in mind here the narrow apprehension of the formal logical aspects of truth statements (a technical mode of investigating the ‘validity’ of Platonic ‘arguments’ which dominated scholarship in the previous century). Rather, I am following Klein’s illuminating analysis of the position of the answerer in dialectic, wherein the choice between attending to the subject matter of the logos alone, on the one hand, and attending to matters external to the subject in question (e.g. one’s reputation, the adoption of the opinions of others, one’s aspirations), on the other, distinguishes the successful learner from the one who for personal reasons remains content with maintaining appearances. As Klein makes clear, one’s attunement to the scope of a question is primary. For, if we remain within this scope, “we may make our answer depend uniquely on the matter that the question is concerned with … [I]f the question asks what we think about a given subject, we would try to find and to state what seems necessarily inherent in, or connected with, that subject … [therefore] [t]he choice we have, so far as our thinking is concerned, is thus the choice of submitting or not submitting ourselves to the necessity revealed by our thinking. It is the only necessity that is in our power to submit or not to submit to.” (1965), p. 104.

4 p. 71.

5 Gonzales explains Protagoras’ position thus: “In the arena of competing perceptions of the good, only the appearance of justice can have any value; the good judgment needed to promote one’s own good can often recommend injustice.” Russon and Sallis (2000), p. 124.

6 We may even speculate here that the scene of the sophists speaking to separate groups, and not to one another, is the effect of the failure of one or more attempts to hold conversations in the previous days of their gathering.

7 Cf., again, Gonzales: “The very idea of such cooperation is, of course, absurd in a competitive sport; such cooperation is, however, essential to dialogue, precisely because it is characterized by a give-and-take in a shared pursuit. Since Protagoras sees no distinction here between dialogue and competition, he is no more likely than Crison to ‘give way’ to his ‘opponent.’” *Ibid.*, p. 123.

8 Here we find a subtle recapitulation of Protagoras’ logic in the Great Speech that all in the city are virtuous, and thus, within the city, there is no working distinction between justice and injustice precisely because injustice is impossible. 

9 Socrates will, in fact, playfully proclaim the measure of wisdom to be determined in large part by the brevity characteristic not only of the Spartans, but also of the Seven Wise Men in prefacing his interpretation of a poem.
Cf. Philebus 12c-d, where Socrates complicates this very distinction between the intellect and the body with reference to pleasure: “[W]e say that the man who lives without restraint has pleasure, and that the self-restrained man takes pleasure in his very self-restraint; and again that the fool who is full of foolish opinions and hopes is pleased, and also that the wise man takes pleasure in his wisdom.”

This Stranger of Plato’ Statesman warns against making pleasure the standard of the length of one’s logos: “But we must not always judge of length by fitness (τὸ πρέπον), either. For we shall not in the least want a length that is fitted to give pleasure, except, perhaps, as a secondary consideration … [b]y far our first and most important object should be to exalt the method itself of ability to divide according to ἔλθη, and therefore, if a logos, even though it be very long, makes the hearer better able to discover it, we should accept it eagerly and should not be offended by its length, or if it is short, we should judge it in the same way” (286d-e).

Cf. Gadamer’s conception of inauthentic dialogue in Wahrheit und Methode: “Wer im Reden nur das Rechtbehalten sucht und nicht die Einsicht in eine Sache, wird freilich das Fragen für leichter halten als das Antworten. Dabei droht ja nicht die Gefahr, einer Frage die Antwort schuldig zu bleiben. In Wahrheit zeigt sich aber am neuerlichen Versagen des Partners, dass der überhaupt nicht fragen kann, der alles besser zu wissen meint,” p. 345.


Excerpted and translated by David Campbell, Ibid., p. 351.

Cf. Apology 20e-23c.

Goldberg notes an interesting ambiguity here in Socrates’ account of the Spartans with respect to their use of short speech: “… these citizens wield language like weapons, that is, without necessarily understanding what they say” (174). Seen thus, Socrates’ comic account of Lacedaemonian education supports the notion that Socrates is appealing to Protagoras’ interest in dialogue, while at the same time observing his indifference to understanding his own logoi.

Observe that in using these phrases synonymously to describe Simonides’ activity, Socrates rejects those ‘neat distinctions’ drawn by Prodicus earlier in his small speech on friends and enemies. This rejection serves to highlight the notion that Socrates is less concerned with distinctions made according to a rigidity of word-assignment than he is with clarifying one’s meaning in a specific context. In the Charmides, we find Socrates explicitly stating just this to Critias, who attempts a fine – and suspect – distinction between making, doing, and working: “… in fact, I have heard Prodicus drawing innumerable distinctions between names. Well, I will allow you any application of a name that you please; only make clear to what thing it is that you attach such-and-such a name” (163d).

Numerous scholars have remarked upon what they take to be a disturbing violence committed by Socrates upon Simonides’ text. Stokes takes what Socrates refers to here as a “poetic transposition” (ὑπερβατόν) to be a “perverse displacement” of Greek words (p. 319). Arieti sees the same move as the first step in “piling one crazy interpretation upon another” (p. 125). Likewise, Jaeger calls Socrates’ interpretation as a whole “historically false” (p. 387n57), stating, moreover, that by “skillfully distorting the meaning of the poem, he shows that by this method anyone can prove anything” (p. 118). While it is not my aim here to settle disputes about the reasonableness of Socrates’ mode of hermeneutics in this case, it is worthwhile to approach what appear to be interpretive liberties in his reading with a measure of circumspection and self-examination. Rather than assuming that Socrates is merely attempting to show, within an interpretation that will yield precepts of decisive consequence for what follows in the dialogue, that anyone can prove anything when the author is removed from direct questioning, it seems to me that outright dismissals of the ‘correctness’ of Socrates’ reading are to give way to questions about the assumed standard that one uses to criticize such a reading. For I take this section to be a prime example of a Socratic discourse that not only implicitly calls into question the
interpretive assumptions of his interlocutor, but as well those of Plato’s readers. If Socrates’ correctness remains in question, then it is we the readers who are put into the position of responsibility for finding a measure of correctness as well. Appeals to the common way of speaking in Socrates’ day as a means of proving his interpretation to be distorted seem to me to argue, in principle, too strongly for adherence to calcified rules of language that admit of no meaningful exceptions, and therefore miss, in my view, the spirit of this passage, which is to introduce new possibilities of conceiving a subject that all take for granted while preserving meaningful speech in the process.


20 Platonstudien, p. 35: “[Συμφορά] ist bestimmt vom eigenen Denken, aber dieses Denken ist der Einwirkung der συμφορά‘ unterworfen, die es in Not bringen und vergessen machen.”

21 It is remarkable to note how often scholars of the Protagoras emphasize Socrates’ point about the importance of dialectic without acknowledging the problems raised by his dismissal of textual interpretation. Charles Griswold, for example, states, “Through his elaborate if forced exegesis, Socrates has shown that he can outdo Protagoras at his own game, and … he has declared the game not worth the candle” (1999), p. 289. Weingartner, as well, notes: “The best men – and Socrates is no longer joking – do not entertain themselves by relying upon the words of others … [s]ince knowledge cannot be achieved by having the living attempt to extract the truth from poets who are not present to tell us what they believe, the inquiry must once again take the form of dialectic” (1973), p. 102. In addition, cf. Coby: “Poetry as a genre is unreceptive to interrogation, and particular poems are susceptible to specious explication that the poems themselves can neither substantiate nor refute. This latter point Socrates has amply demonstrated, and he is informing his listeners – if perchance there are any still unaware – that his own explication was an example of just how easily poetry can be abused. Like rhetoric … poetry and literary criticism are vulgar modes of speech unfit for use by gatherings that include men” (1987), p. 127-128. What each of these authors does not apparently notice is the fact that by engaging in interpretation of this text, they are violating the Socratic principle that they seem to accept without question. As a literary text (whose literary status makes it no less philosophical, were a distinction between literature and philosophy intended), the Protagoras is not only open to such claims of inevitable abuse by interpreters, but also would appear to have no ‘use’, as a text, for these scholars at all.


23 Ibid., p. 256. Ruth Scodel, however, challenges Pappas’ assertion here, yet nonetheless allows for the validity of interpretive exercises: “[t]he absence of the author, even if it means that meaning is not completely recoverable – for the meaning of the literary text in Greek and Roman criticism always depends on the author’s intention – does not make discussion or criticism of poetry futile or purely subjective …” (1986), p. 26. Aside from the lack of evidence Scedel provides for her statement that the ancients conceived meaning exclusively in terms of authorial intent, there is also the assumption that Plato could not have disagreed with such a conception. While Scodel is making a philological point about the characteristic attitudes of the ancients toward texts, to assume that Plato be read simply as a proponent of a wider trend only serves to pass over the provocative philosophical nature of what Plato is challenging his readers with here.

24 Iliad, 10, 224.
Chapter Four

I. Reviving the Question of Virtue

Thus far, the efforts that Protagoras has devoted to securing those aspects of himself that he most values have a common result of dissolution, whether it be the effect of enchantment and mental scattering upon his listeners, the piecemeal and dissimilar status of the several parts of virtue, the dispersion of goodness itself into purely situational determination, the aesthetic relativity of a measure for *logoi*, or even the apparent disagreement of a text with itself. It is entirely appropriate, then, that after providing a coherent meaning to the ode whose consistency Protagoras has challenged, Socrates resumes his role as questioner by first turning back to the question of the coherence of that which the sophist proclaims himself most authoritative – virtue.

By noting this fact, we can see the revival of the question of virtue at this point in the *Protagoras* not as a resumption of themes that have been utterly interrupted by the breakdown of the discussion and the move to contests of interpretation, but a continuation of those threads that are woven throughout. And it is not simply the theme of coherence in meaning that provides a link with the final sections of the dialogue; the opposition between being and becoming (especially in terms of human knowledge), the idea of faring well in one’s life, and the provocative thesis that willingly committing evil is an impossibility, all play fundamental roles in the further dialogue between Socrates and Protagoras, as we shall see.

Socrates offers Protagoras the chance to revise his stance with respect to the multiplicity of virtue along more defensible lines, with a most charitable means of
accommodating such a revision. “If these things seem to you be as they seemed then, say it; but if you have some other notion, determine (dióρισαι) it, as I will not hold you to the logos you gave before. Indeed, I would not be in wonder if you were merely testing me when you spoke before” (349c-d). By thus allowing Protagoras to save face before their audience, and to speak according to the way in which he now thinks, Socrates not only gives Protagoras a free chance to change his logos, but also implies, in this chance, that the sophist may have learned something about the relation between the virtues since the beginning of their dialogue.

This invitation comes, however, with a more overt emphasis upon the way in which Protagoras is to speak – he is told to determine whatever new logos he puts forth. The Greek word used here is διόριζειν, an activity of marking out the ὀρίσματα, the boundaries or limits, of something. Thus, Socrates’ role as a kind of Hermes continues as it began, with the end of aiding his interlocutor in marking out boundaries in logos. For it is only, as we have noted, through marking out the limits of something in logos that it can be submitted to a measure in accordance with these limits, and thus be comprehended. Given that Protagoras has already, in a rhetorical move, determined goodness as such precisely as indeterminate while claiming at the same time to know how to make others good, this condition on Protagoras’ speech holds the utmost consequence for his distinction as an authority on the matter of virtue.

Protagoras does indeed take Socrates up on the invitation to change his story, yet he concedes only that “while four [of the parts of virtue] are fairly like one another, courage is very much different from all of the rest. That I speak truly you will know from this: you will find many humans most unjust, unholy, dissolute, and ignorant, and
yet distinguishing themselves as most courageous” (349d). From a common-sense point of view, the revision that Protagoras offers is not, in respect to courage, especially controversial, and Protagoras presents this position as if one need only look around to see its obvious truth.

We should already anticipate a difficulty for Protagoras’ common-sense answer, however. If many ignorant men, that is, men who are without learning (ἀμαθῆς), are courageous, then courage would come otherwise than from learning and the teaching implied by it. Yet if Protagoras, as a teacher, claims to educate others in all of the virtues, how might he account for instilling courage in them? We might well expect Socrates to raise this objection. Instead, he presses on to ask Protagoras questions more focused upon distinguishing his conception of courage through the mode of knowledge that Protagoras also claims in his teaching – that of τέχνη.

We should note as well that Socrates’ line of questioning is not unrelated to Prodicus’ art of distinguishing differing names from each other. Yet, unlike Prodicus, Socrates does not declaim the distinctions himself, but rather has Protagoras attempt to determine them in response to his questions. Thus, after Protagoras’ statement that courage need not be accompanied by the other virtues, Socrates calls for him to pause so that they may investigate (ἐπιθεσμοσθήσατε) what his partner says. “Do you say that the courageous are bold (θαρραλέους), or something else?” (349e). As we shall see, how Protagoras responds to this question, and those which follow, will have particular damaging consequences for his conception of τέχνη as well.

Protagoras replies that the courageous are indeed bold, and adds that they are impetuous (ἴτασ) as well, where the many are fearful of going. Already, then, courage is
to be one of those factors of excellence that separates the virtuous individual from the *οἱ πολλοὶ;* if some possession of virtue is necessary for one simply to be a part of the city, as Protagoras has asserted, then clearly courage is not included in that scheme. Once more, the class of the *καλοὶ κάγαθοί* is tacitly invoked as a practical distinction within the city, and we are obliged to recall that Protagoras’ self-ascribed distinction lies in his ability to make his students into members of the *καλοὶ κάγαθοί* (328b).

Socrates does not miss Protagoras’ implication, and elicits from him the agreements that virtue as a whole (*ὁλὸν*), and not merely some part or other, is noble (*καλὸς*), and that Protagoras offers himself as a teacher of this noble whole. As we have seen that Socrates’ efforts to receive from Protagoras a determination of goodness as such have come to naught, we find him turning to the other term of *καλὸς κάγαθος* as a way of testing out what, to the sophist’s mind, that factor is which draws a limit between the many and the excellent, according to which these two groups are to be measured. If Protagoras wishes to maintain that it is *πολιτικὴ* which confers the distinction of nobility upon its user, he must not only be able to distinguish, as their discussion continues, courage from simple boldness, but also that *τέχνη* which he claims to teach from the curricula of other technicians, whom someone like Hippocrates might sooner seek out.

These distinctions are accompanied by a third, most provocative distinction, which we have encountered earlier in Protagoras’ Great Speech, namely, that between virtue and madness (323a-b). In fact, as Protagoras confidently asserts his agreement that virtue is the noblest of all things, he adds offhand, “unless I am crazy” (349a). The lack of obviousness in properly determining this distinction in practice shall begin to lead us back into the relation between perception and language with which the *Protagoras*
begins. Yet this foray into the question of nobility – a function of malleable appearance and δόξα no less than goodness for Protagoras – shall also be implemented to separate out mere seeming from truth as they continue their σκέψις.

Having established a link, and in fact what appears to be an identity, between courage and boldness, Protagoras is called upon to clarify this link further by way of answering Socrates’ questions about those technical contexts in which boldness is commonly ascribed to a particular technician. Protagoras manages to gather together these questions, with their exemplary bent, by agreeing that divers, warriors on horseback, and peltasts all carry out their functions boldly due to their special knowledge, adding “and so with all other cases, if this is what you seek; those who are knowing (οἱ ἐπιστήμονες) are bolder than those who are not, and individually they are bolder after they have learnt (μάθωσιν) than before learning” (350a-b).

That which at this point appears to distinguish the few bold individuals from the fearful οἱ πολλοὶ would be equivalent to the difference between the skilled technician and the layperson, where a particular kind of learning draws the limit between them. However, when Socrates asks about those whom Protagoras has seen acting boldly without being knowledgeable in these requisite affairs, whether such people could be called courageous, we find Protagoras reverting to the notion of nobility just discussed in order to mark off boldness from courage. For the sophist, acting without knowledge “would make courage a shameful thing,” as he asserts, “for those you speak of are mad” (350b). Given his admission that virtue as a whole, including courage as one of its parts, could only be noble, Protagoras is compelled to posit a distinction within boldness itself,
one aspect of which, involving a particular kind of knowledge, would qualify as courage, the other proceeding out of ignorance, which is not only shameful, but insane.

One implication of Protagoras’ admission here is that virtue is not, in opposition to his earlier claim, an obvious matter, is not determinable through simple \textit{a\io\sigma\theta\eta\omicron\iota\varsigma}, as if beholding a person undertake a particular action were sufficient to decide between virtue and madness. The boldness necessary for one to march into war with a light shield is not enough to qualify as courage, despite how it might appear to the observer. Rather, it is the content of one’s thinking, what one knows in performing a given action, that occupies a more decisive place in marking the limit between the courageous and the mad, the noble and the shameful. Of course, this limit can only be discerned by revealing one’s thinking so as to make clear to others the ground of one’s virtuous or mad behavior.

As well, we can begin to see a unifying consideration between the cases of the madman who tells the truth about his injustice and the madman who evinces a kind of ignorant boldness; madness here becomes a function of putting one’s body, and also one’s honor and reputation, at risk. The guilty truth-teller faces physical punishment levied by the \textit{polis}, and the unknowing bold man faces damage to his person – to the point of death – in his bold activity. On this line of thinking, the mad are distinguished by willingly exposing their physical well-being, and their reputations as well, to greater danger and destruction, while the virtuous take technical safeguards for the preservation of their bodies and their good name. Analogously, if Protagoras were to submit himself to similar risks, especially that of admitting his ignorance on virtue, he could only regard himself as mad. The fact that the greater part of his students, and the many, too, regard virtue as obvious is a greater impetus for him to pursue the appearance that conforms to
their ideas of virtue and, accordingly, to keep his thoughts concealed from them, lest they discover his true epistemological deficiencies.

Protagoras is given a chance to further clarify the relation between courageous and bold men in light of the admissions just made, yet he insists that the courageous are still the bold. Socrates goes on to ask: “Then these men, who are so bold, appear not to be courageous, but mad? And in those former cases our wisest men are boldest too, and being boldest are most courageous? And according to this logos, wisdom is to be courage?” (350c). A number of scholars have taken Socrates’ latter question as a proof that Socrates attempts to bring courage back into unity with the other virtues by aligning it with wisdom. Yet we must take care not to assume hastily that Socrates is urging a unification of these particular conceptions; he is not making a statement, but putting another question to Protagoras by gathering the likely implications of the sophist’s previous answers. If Socrates’ intention were simply to unify courage and wisdom in this way, as if the wisdom that qualifies as courage were simply one of several varieties of τέχνη, such a demonstration would render the dialectical, self-reflective approach to truth and knowledge superfluous, and the sophistic-technical model of education would thereby be equivalent to virtue.

On the other hand, presenting courage and wisdom as identical to one another at this point challenges Protagoras to provide a clearer and more complete διόρισις of courage, not only with respect to other, vulgar kinds of boldness, but as well with respect to the other virtues. Here, Protagoras is confronted with two alternatives: either he assents to the identification of specific kinds of technical wisdom with courage (which means that the province of ἀρετή that Protagoras holds to be distinct from any of the
other arts could actually be transmitted by other technicians), or he finds another means by which to separate courage from madness and from the four remaining virtues.

In his lengthy response, Protagoras chooses the second of these courses as a means of escape. Yet his attempt to free himself of contradiction does not have the effect of bringing his notion of courage to greater clarity. In fact, how one develops courage, and what courage is, are both made more elusive and confusing by Protagoras’ ensuing “explanation.” For Protagoras begins by remarking that Socrates is guilty of “not remembering well,” what the sophist had said in reply to his questions (350c). Memory, however, is much like boldness as it is discussed here in relation to courage; that is, memory is a necessary condition of their carrying on a dialogue aimed at the truth of things, but not a sufficient condition. Not only remembering, but gathering together different responses into one *logos* is what Socrates is initially after, so that this *logos* gleaned from the various admissions of his partner can be brought to the test of self-agreement. In his response, it becomes clear that Protagoras has been holding in reserve an unmentioned distinction as a way out of being brought to such a test, at least for the time being. It is in answering not with the nature of courage in mind, but rather with respect to his own supposed good or safety, that Protagoras shows himself to be answering strategically. But this agonistic strategy backfires insofar as it renders Protagoras unable, or unwilling, to follow the bent of Socrates’ σκέψις.

Protagoras protests that while he has called the courageous bold, he does not consider all who are bold to be thereby courageous. Thus, the implication here is that those bold men who are courageous do not exhaust the class of the bold; this was, in fact, understood by Socrates in clarifying that the mad who exhibit boldness are not
courageous – such shameful activity would disqualify such boldness from virtue.

Protagoras appears to overlook the care with which Socrates treats the distinction between boldness and courage, and his objection aims only at the last two questions asked by his interlocutor: “And in those former cases our wisest men are boldest too, and being boldest are most courageous? And by this logos, wisdom is to be courage?” It seems here that Protagoras’ accusation of forgetfulness against Socrates would be more appropriately leveled against himself. It is difficult to account for Protagoras’ misguided riposte here, otherwise than saying that Protagoras has only listened selectively, attempting to keep guard against being contradicted, rather than following the give and take of logoi with invested care. In fact, this objection turns out to be only a further agreement with the course of their discussion. Like the charge made against Simonides, wherein what appeared at first to be a contradiction turned out to be self-agreement, in this case Protagoras mistakes agreement for apparent disagreement. Thus, even in the most fundamental aspects of carrying on a dialogue, the determination of agreement and disagreement, sameness and difference in speaking, Protagoras proves himself, through his vain efforts, to be sorely in need of the education required of virtue.

Upon assuming that Socrates attempts to trap him into saying that the courageous are not bold, Protagoras shows that his answer anticipates the avoidance of just this charge: “[Y]ou have nowhere pointed out that I was not correct in my agreement that they are [bold]. Next you show that such persons individually are bolder when they are knowledgeable, and bolder than others who are not, and therewith you take courage and wisdom to be the same” (350d). More than responding to intentions that Protagoras only attributes to Socrates, to the objections that Protagoras anticipates but which are not even
posed, it becomes clear that the sophist has forgotten who has actually made the admissions that individuals are bolder when they have learned, and are bolder than those who have not; for it is not Socrates who spoke these words earlier, but Protagoras himself. Furthermore, the notion that Socrates believes courage and wisdom to be the same is an inference made by Protagoras, who has mistaken a question – arising out of the implications of his own answers – for a statement of belief.3 Once more, then, it is Protagoras’ lack of care and its effect upon his memory of their discussion that keeps him from following their logos adequately.

Lastly, Protagoras likens Socrates’ logic with respect to courage and boldness to the case of power and strength, stating that in the same line of thinking, Socrates would go so far as to identify strength with wisdom. As he explains, while the strong are powerful, the powerful are not all strong. In learning to wrestle, one may become more powerful, and would be more powerful than those who do not know how to wrestle.

And on agreeing to these points it would be open to you to say, by the same token, that according to my agreement wisdom is strength. But neither there nor elsewhere do I agree that the powerful are strong, only that the strong are powerful; for I believe that power and strength are not the same, but that one of them, power, comes into being (γίγνεσθαι) from knowledge, or from madness or rage (θύμος), whereas strength comes from nature (φύσις) and nurture (εὐτροφία) of the body. So, in the other instance, boldness and courage are not the same, and therefore it results that the courageous are bold, but not that the bold are courageous; for boldness comes into being (γίγνεσθαι) for a man from τεχνη, or from rage or madness, like power, whereas courage comes from nature and nurture of the soul. (350e-351b)

This attempt to reduce Socrates’ line of questioning, along with its proposed conclusion, to absurdity by showing how following its structure would lead one into identifying wisdom with physical strength – a flatly implausible notion – is only persuasive insofar as Protagoras ignores the condition of nobility necessary for achieving courage, which is
operative in distinguishing between noble and shameful forms of boldness. Protagoras does not include such a condition for strength, and simplifies the terms of discussion made formerly in his polemical analogy. In fact, his analogy is disanalogous to Socrates’ earlier questions precisely because physical strength, while a subspecies of power, applies only to the body and bears no relation to wisdom at all in the way that courage, to all appearances, does in Protagoras’ account. Thus, the shamefulness that attends ignorance in certain kinds of boldness (out of rage or madness, as Protagoras explains above) functions as a limit within the class of bold behavior, marking out courage by contrast in its status as a kind of noble boldness – a nobility conferred upon it precisely by the virtue of wisdom. Physical strength, on the other hand, insofar as it does not necessitate wisdom, need not be noble or shameful as such.

With this analogy that fails to be a proper analogy due to Protagoras’ inattention to the terms of sameness and difference at play, Protagoras does offer a determination in each case according to requisite causes. That is, he gives an account of the source of the coming-into-being of each. As we have quoted above, power comes from madness, knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), or rage, and strength from one’s nature and the nurture of his body. Likewise, boldness arises out of madness, τέχνη, or rage, while courage comes into being from nature, again, and the nurture of one’s soul. On logical grounds, Protagoras creates a particular difficulty of which he seems not to be aware in laying out the different causes of each notion. In making the causes of power and strength mutually exclusive, he effaces the initial link set between them; if the strong are to be powerful, then at least one of the causes of power must be shared by strength. Yet Protagoras, in emphasizing that these terms are not strictly the same, thereby differentiates them to the
point of denying strength’s original kinship to power. If there is no sameness of cause between them, it is not the case that the strong would be powerful, and vice-versa. In short, Protagoras’ insistence upon difference by way of mutually exclusive causes undercuts the very link between strength and power with which he began.

If there is an analogy between the two sets of terms, Protagoras constructs their similarity only by way of the same form of contradiction. For like the initial relation set between strength and boldness, Protagoras had claimed earlier that the courageous are bold, and afterward made clear that he does not take the bold as such to be courageous. As with the other set of terms in the analogy, Protagoras eradicates the status of the courageous as a subset of the bold by identifying mutually exclusive causes of each, such that one need not be bold at all in order to be courageous. Thus, counter to Socrates’ appeal to determining a clear stance with respect to the relations between the virtues, Protagoras takes refuge in obscurity and confusion, overlooking his own admissions in order to reach a position whose inherent disagreement with itself Socrates would be at pains to pin down. Given the inappropriateness of the lengthy analogy, along with Protagoras’ almost smug declaration that he has not been caught in a contradiction, it becomes clear that the sophist is once again recycling rehearsed arguments and that he remains uninterested in bringing to courage, or any other part of virtue, a determination that can be maintained. Even the reader is forced to review more than once the elusive and tangled logic that Protagoras presents as if it were elementary.

There is, however, an informative point to be raised about Protagoras’ explanation of the causes of courage. As he has mentioned earlier in his Great Speech, nature, φύσις, is one necessary aspect for excellence in the city; the other aspect of such excellence was
there noted to be learning that τέχνη for which one’s nature was best suited. Here, however, the knowledge proper to τέχνη, in being relegated to boldness rather than the virtue of courage, is left out of the recipe for courage, and replaced by “the nurture of the soul.” It is, of course, unclear what Protagoras means by this phrase. Yet, insofar as he wishes to resist the identification of wisdom with courage, and insofar as he explicitly aligns τέχνη on the opposite side of the distinction with boldness, whatever the nurture of the soul connotes for Protagoras, it must be something other than knowledge.

Correspondingly, we must not forget that Protagoras has agreed that what he teaches is a τέχνη, so that by his own lights his lessons are not sufficient to make others virtuous; they may, however, make one appear to be virtuous, as the bold might appear courageous, where the criterion for distinguishing terms such as these remains occluded.

Taking this position, however, does not allay the demand, voiced by Protagoras earlier, that action undertaken without the appropriate knowledge is shameful, and therefore fails to meet the noble measure of virtue in its parts and as a whole. We find, therefore, an opposition between Protagoras the interlocutor, who responds to questions in accordance with the way things seem to him when coaxed into a give and take of logos, and Protagoras the orator, who retraces in speech those pre-rehearsed, rigid logos inscribed in his memory. Though he offers “clever” accounts of virtue, the disharmony between these accounts and his responses to Socratic σκέψις reveal that gulf between mere imitation in speech, on the one hand, and real efforts at understanding, on the other. It is this lack of coherence which serves as the measure for Protagoras’ desperately and stubbornly concealed ignorance. In fact, Protagoras reveals himself to be the
embodiment of ἀπορία, and what is more, an ἀπορία that remains unaware of itself as such.

The more striking irony in Protagoras’ flight into the vagueness of the soul’s nurture is that this phrase is an echo of that used by Socrates in his lecture to Hippocrates, in which the soul’s nourishment – the word τρέφειν, to nourish, is a verbal form of τροφία, nurture – was said to be the activity of learning, and therefore, for Socrates, is precisely a matter of knowledge. While both men use the same words to speak of an essential aspect of virtue, their dialogue makes it apparent that they in no way share the same understanding of what such words mean in reference to the soul. If, as Protagoras would have it, the soul’s nourishment or nurture does not come through μαθήματα, through things learned and therefore through that learning which consists in understanding and knowing, then what might be the sophistic notion of soul-nurturing that, accompanied by a certain nature, brings virtue into being? The end of education, as Protagoras has made clear, is precisely to cultivate such virtue in citizens, and if knowledge is not that thanks to which virtue comes into being, then Protagoras must have in mind some other source of education.

It is to this prospective alternative source, already implied in Protagoras’ Great Speech, that Socrates turns in his ensuing questions. Yet we cannot but be aware of the soul’s fate in the care, or lack thereof, of the sophist; in Socrates’ eyes, Protagorean nourishment constitutes, in its isolation from knowledge, starvation and atrophy, rather than true εὐτροφία. If we note that Protagoras’ evasive answer to the being of goodness – that it is essentially becoming, and becoming in relation to the specific physical nurture of individual life forms – presupposes a criterion of the body’s condition without any
mention of the soul, then it should not surprise us that Socrates’ lecture to Hippocrates about the need to place his soul higher than his body in decisions of gravity is as appropriate to the famous sophist as it is to the young aspiring student. For Protagoras, perception, whether it be in the form of reputation or of bodily and affective perceptions, determines what is of highest value.
II. Living Well: The Problem of a Sophistic Ἐκκλησία

Protagoras has sought refuge once more in prepared logoi, leaving in his verbal wake a number of disparate admissions wanting of collection into a single, unified account. Likewise, courage remains in isolation from the rest of the virtues, in isolation even from wisdom, resting upon the notions, as yet to be determined, of nature and the nurture of the soul. Once more, the sophist has produced a logos that recedes from the understanding of his audience, concealed in vague terms that allow him a haven from committing himself to anything definite. In fact, rather than providing aid to that form of judgment in which good citizenship consists, the clouded and disparate speeches offered by Protagoras would have the effect of confusing judgment, and of preventing any clear correlation between what is said and what is to be decided in action at any given moment.

It seems at this point, and perhaps so to Socrates, that they could continue in this vein indefinitely. Indeed, once Protagoras has finished his soliloquy on courage and boldness, Socrates puts to him a series of questions that appears to be an abrupt shift in topics:

Do you speak of some men, Protagoras, I asked, as living well (εὖ ζῶν) and others badly (κακῶς)? - Yes.
Then does it seem to you that a man would live well if he lived in distress and pain? - No, he said.
Well, if he lived pleasantly (ῥήδεως) and so ended his life, would it not seem to you that he had lived well? - I would, he said.
And, it appears, to live pleasantly is good (ἀγαθών), and unpleasantly, bad? - Yes, he said, if one lived in the pleasure of noble things. (351b-c)

It is helpful to understand this apparent shift not as an interruption of the theme of their conversation, but as a continuation of the problem of bringing virtue and its parts into a particular coherent measure. We must recall in this connection Socrates’ statement to Hippocrates that it is the soul upon which the good or ill of one’s faring (πραττεῖν)
depends (313a). The question, then, of living well or badly has a direct relation to the condition of one’s soul – whether it is nurtured or treated without proper care. The way in which Protagoras speaks of what it means to live well is to provide insight into what he takes the soul’s nurture to mean. Since Protagoras has partitioned courage off in its source from knowledge, from that noetic vision of wholes gained through *logos*, Socrates turns to question him regarding human goodness in its relation to *aíðēs*, beginning with the most fundamental perceptual opposites of pleasure and pain. Moreover, by the invocation of *living* well, that is, living a good life, Socrates brings into their discussion the theme of the individual’s life as a whole, rather than viewing it in terms of this or that technical capacity. This shift to a consideration of one’s life as a unity, while furthering the present direction of their discussion, also returns the orientation of their dialogue to the original, practical issue under contention: whether there may be a *téchnē* of making individuals better people as such, as Protagoras maintains.

It is in Protagoras’ resistance to identifying pleasure strictly with goodness that we can better see what is at stake in this turn to an examination of virtue through *aíðēs*. Goodness, he maintains, cannot be achieved through good feeling alone, but requires, as courage was formerly seen to, nobility. Pleasure, like boldness, may come in shameful or honorable forms, so that it is open for Protagoras to claim analogously that while living well is pleasant, not all pleasant living is living well. But why does Protagoras choose to invoke nobility as a necessary condition of the good life? One explanation would be perhaps the most straightforward, namely that the life of the *kalói* *kágadoi* demands both of the elements to which its name corresponds, and that one cannot overlook nobility and still be deserving of such a title. We must not forget that
Protagoras has chosen to speak in front of an audience, an audience to which he frequently plays in making his points, and here the audience is not ignored in his answer; in fact, the presence of the audience constrains him to appear noble, despite his real opinion of the relation between goodness and pleasure, by answering in a way with which they would agree.

This explanation is tied to a second, namely that for Protagoras, at least in appearance, he must acknowledge a measure of the good that exceeds his own private determination of it. As we have noted, shame and nobility, or honor, are broadly and for the most part publicly-conditioned determinations; one is moved to either of these states before others, and they presuppose the presence of a community. Yet being moved to shame or honor, as Protagoras has experienced both of these in the course of their discussion, is largely a function of how one appears in the eyes of others, especially when one is unable to articulate a sound notion of shamefulness and nobility in themselves, beyond the way in which they seem to one’s community. And for Protagoras, who has already admitted what he takes to be everyone’s belief – that all should pretend, that is, appear, virtuous (and therefore noble) to others, whether one is so or not (323b) – there would therefore be no distinction between appearing noble and living nobly. Goodness thus, in theory, becomes pleasure accompanied by the persuasion of others that one’s pleasure is noble.

Socrates calls into question his interlocutor’s qualification by asking whether he would side with the many on this issue, who also believe that the good life is pleasurable and noble. It is the many, we need to recall, whom Protagoras has derided by saying that they “perceive (αισθάνονται) practically nothing themselves, but merely echo the
pronouncements of their leaders” (317a). How could the sophist, therefore, side with those on the subject of good or ill perceptions who themselves are incapable of clarity in their own perceptions? In tandem with this provocation, Socrates restates his question in slightly different, more immediate terms. “Are not things good insofar as they are pleasant, setting aside any other result they may have; and again, are not painful things in the same way bad – insofar as they are painful?” (351c). Thus, challenging Protagoras to leave nobility out of the equation, as well as anything that ensues from one’s pleasure, Socrates puts to Protagoras the question of the immediate identity of goodness and pleasure, as well as evil and pain.

The primary issue arising from this question is whether goodness can be reduced purely to \( \alpha\iota\sigma\theta\eta\iota\varsigma \), and hence whether goodness is a matter of pure seeming, determined by the individual’s private perceptions. If so, then the good would therefore admit of no communal measure, would in fact be set to the measure of each individual, whether human or even animal. Not only would the good be subject wholly to the change and flux of temporality, to pure becoming, but it would also possess no discernible unity, no selfsameness; it would be nothing more than an infinite number of instantaneous and discrete feelings, physical or emotional, which have no connection to each other. Of course, Socrates is holding before Protagoras a radicalization of the sophist’s earlier thesis that goodness itself, manifold and changeable, cannot be determined other than situationally.

It is quite probable that Protagoras senses a trap in Socrates’ challenge of an absolute identity of goodness and pleasure. Yet his answer nonetheless betrays, if only negatively, a certain alignment with the very position he goes on explicitly to reject. “I
think it safer (ἀσφαλέστερον) for me to answer, not simply for the present, but with
regard to my whole life, that some pleasant things are not good, and also that some
painful things are not bad, and some are, while there is an indifferent third class, neither
bad nor good” (351d). Where one might expect an expert on such affairs to answer in
accordance with what is true, Protagoras instead answers according to what is safe to say.
In fact, Socrates is speaking with a man who has claimed it necessary to exercise caution
in practicing his art, and whose safety and success he measures in terms of staying alive
and avoiding “fearful suffering” (316c-317c). And, as we have seen earlier, the
underlying aim of Protagorean education is the avoidance of punishment, whether it be in
terms of pain, shame, or even death. Contrariwise, the tacit end of such education would
point to the attainment of pain’s opposite, pleasure. These are the fundamental values
reflected in Protagoras’ Great Speech, and moreover, the values of the many, despite – as
Socrates will soon show – what they might tell themselves and others. For Protagoras, as
we have also seen repeatedly, his safety begins with eluding the discovery of
contradictions in his logoi, preeminently by avoiding any commitment to unity among
ideas and choosing rather to keep those notions about which he speaks discrete and thus
harder to track.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Protagoras opts to divide pleasure into three
classes, that of the good, the bad, and that space between that is neither. Once more,
Protagoras forgoes offering a criterion according to which these three forms of pleasure
are to be determined. It is puzzling, in any account, how pleasure, without regard to its
effects and taken in its immediacy, could be judged by any other means than the
instantaneous aesthetic impression of goodness – by feeling, and therefore seeming,
good. And even if it were considered in light of those things that follow from the experience, what sense are we to make of those pleasures Protagoras calls neither good nor bad? These questions suggest more strongly that Protagoras is dividing pleasure up in this way to provide options and escape routes for himself, approaching the inquiry from the standpoint of his own security, rather from a desire to understand and make comprehensible the relation between pleasure and goodness.

Protagoras accedes to Socrates’ further attempt at a clarification of what is referred to as pleasurable things – whatever partakes of (μετέχειν) or produces (ποιεῖν) pleasure. Yet when Socrates again tries to put the question to Protagoras of whether things are good to the extent that they are pleasant, and hence whether “pleasure itself is not a good thing,” Protagoras finds an opportunity to maneuver himself out of the focus of Socrates’ inquiry (351e). He proposes that they both examine (σκοπέω) the subject as Socrates formulates it at each point, “and if the speculation (σκέμμα) seems to be reasonable (πρός λόγον), and pleasant and good appear to be the same, we will agree on it; if not, we will dispute it straightaway” (351e). This is, it is important to note, the first point at which Protagoras calls for a σκέψις of any particular notion, and it is not irrelevant that it comes at a time at which he finds himself on the verge of another onslaught of piercing, and potentially damaging, questions. By turning their discussion to an examination of pleasure and goodness as Socrates speaks of them, Protagoras almost certainly hopes to relieve himself of the burden of defending his own thinking. The invitation for them to investigate this topic, and even work toward an agreement, is Protagoras’ way of dissociating himself from dialectic, and allows him – so he appears to
assume – to have a conversation in which he is not obliged to commit himself to any particular position.

Yet when Socrates is given permission to lead their inquiry, he brings Protagoras back into the middle of their focus more pointedly:

Well, then, I said, will this produce the illumination (καταφανές) we need? Just as, in examining (σκοπῶν) a man’s health or his bodily efficiency from their looks (εἴδους), one might look at his face and the lower part of his hands and say, “Come, uncover your chest and your back as well and expose them, in order that I may examine more clearly (ἐπισκέψαμαι σαφέστερον),” I feel the same yearning with regard to our σκέψις. Beholding the way in which you are disposed toward the good and the pleasant, I find it necessary to say something like this: “Come, Protagoras, uncover your thoughts (διανοία): how are you disposed toward knowledge (ἐπιστήμη)? Does this seem to you as it seems to most humans, or some other way? The opinion of the many concerning knowledge is that it is no strong or guiding or ruling thing; it is not thought to be any such thing, but thought that when a man has knowledge in him, he is not ruled by it, but by something else – at one time rage, at another pleasure, at some point pain, at another love, and often by fear; knowledge is thought simply to be like a slave, dragged about any other thing. Does it seem to you to be of this sort, or is knowledge noble and able to rule a man, and that whoever knows what is good and bad will never be swayed by anything to conduct himself otherwise than as knowledge commands, and that intelligence (φρόνησις) is a sufficient aid for humans? (352a-c)

Once more, Protagoras is held to account for his own views, and Socrates makes clear here that the examination of any subject is not properly conducted in isolation from those who engage in the examination themselves. There is no detached, impersonal perspective to be gained in education properly considered, but instead, the pursuit of knowledge demands that the pursuers submit a subject to investigation through the way it appears to them, and thus test themselves – their thoughts – along with the subject in question. This principle has already been demonstrated by Socrates with respect to the meaning of
Simonides’ poem, namely that one cannot give a defensible determination of its meaning without importing one’s own views into the process.

We have noted earlier that what Socrates asks for in dialogue is a mutual submission (παρεξείν) to questioning, carrying out a service to one another, wherein each holds himself open to investigation in turn. It is only by undertaking such service, engaging in a cooperative project where each holds the other to the logos, that virtue, as the fundament and end of communal life, can be shown and thus pursued by all. Insofar as such mutual service has the structure of an exchange of favors to the other, we can see that Socratic dialogue presupposes a relation of friendliness as that which grounds the integrity of the city and, as well, provides a basis for those virtues mentioned in Protagoras’ μύθος. Thus, examining the nature of virtue in the giving and taking of logoi demands that the ground of virtue in friendship already be present in the process.

Socrates’ analogy between himself and a doctor is, of course, not accidental. We recall that Hippocrates was originally in need of a soul-doctor, and it is precisely Protagoras’ soul that Socrates now seeks to see and diagnose. Just as virtue cannot be sufficiently determined in action through αἰσθησις alone, just as an account is necessary from the one who is purportedly virtuous, so too must the one claiming to teach virtue put his soul on display through a logos supported by understanding. Thus, the work of the physician of the soul is not only to subject μαθήματα to examination, but also to examine the soul of the individual putting them forth. Whereas the doctor refers to the look (εἴδος) of his patient’s body, wherein in a view of the body as a whole is necessary for proper diagnosis and treatment, the physician of the soul must likewise judge the health of his patient’s soul through a full disclosure that cannot be carried out any other
way than through truthful, sincere discourse. What Socrates has surely discerned by now is that Protagoras’ thinking and his speeches are alienated from one another, and that treatment of his soul cannot begin until they are brought into unity with each other. The prerequisite for such unity is, of course, an awareness by Protagoras, an admission, that there is a distance separating what he knows from what he says. Their current project of investigating goodness in relation to pleasure, of coming to understand this relation as a result, depends upon seeing the intrinsic relation between goodness and knowledge itself, which Protagoras forsakes in his efforts to appear knowledgeable.

As with the question of the value of pleasure, Protagoras is also challenged here to take a position on knowledge in reference to the way in which the many regard it. At the heart of Socrates’ account of knowledge with respect to the power of human affects— that the former is taken by the many to be subservient to the latter—lies a fundamental problem for those who pursue wisdom, and more specifically wisdom regarding virtue. For if knowledge does not govern us and direct our actions adequately, if it does not possess the requisite strength to overcome emotional and aesthetic influences, then one must question its value. What good is knowledge if learning it does not give us any advantage in the way in which we live our lives?

Here we must also note the kind of knowledge that Socrates implies. For if Socrates were merely speaking of τέχνη, one could easily remark that technical knowledge certainly wields no directive power over its possessor. That is, the craftsman is free at any point to make his product badly, the pilot has it at his disposal to send his ship into the high seas in a terrible storm, and the doctor is free to use his medical knowledge in order to promote sickness rather than health. In fact, no technician is
compelled purely by his specialized knowledge to practice it at all. Socrates’ repeated use of the alternate terms ἐπιστήμη and φρόνησις in this passage, as well as his statement that “whoever learns what is good and what is bad” will never behave in a way contrary to the direction set by knowledge, both lend support to the view that Socrates is gesturing to a knowledge that is other than technical. As we shall soon see, Socrates will in fact demonstrate – if not to his careless interlocutors, then to Plato’s careful readers – the absurdity of a τέχνη of goodness and evil, and hence, the absurdity of the Protagorean educative enterprise.

Protagoras’ agreement with the account of knowledge as strong, guiding and governing is not surprising. Not only does he have a stake in differentiating himself from the largely oblivious masses, but his position as a teacher compels him just as strongly to side with such an account. Yet even here Protagoras cannot, given his earlier admissions, escape irony. Formerly he wished to separate strength and knowledge, yet here we find him agreeing to the notion, in the same word (ἰσχύς), though with a modified sense, that knowledge comprises a kind of strength. In fact, he goes so far as to add that “it would be shameful for me above all men to say that wisdom and knowledge were anything but the mightiest (κράτιστον) of all human things” (352d).

Socrates commends Protagoras for his answer and attempts once more to conduct his σκέψις by forging an alliance between them against the many. He entreats Protagoras to join him in convincing the many that they are misinformed about what they take people to be undergoing when they fail to carry out what is best when it is in their power, despite the fact that they know it to be best choice. The popular explanation for this phenomenon, states Socrates, is “that those who act so are overcome by pleasure or pain,
or under the control of one of the things I have just mentioned” (such things being love, fear, passion, and so on) (352d-e). Since Protagoras, like Socrates, disagrees with this diagnosis of human behavior, their task, as he explains, is to teach the many what “being overcome by pleasure” really is.

The larger implication of this attempt to revise the explanation of the *olla polloi*, many of whom no doubt take themselves to have had this experience, is that individuals may be quite mistaken about the causes of their own action, that they are in need of dialogue with others to sort out their own, most private experiences, and that the individual by himself is not necessarily in a privileged position to determine how or why he does what he does. This was the case, as we recall, with Hippocrates at the beginning of the dialogue, directed by an inexplicit desire for self-promotion and left without any self-critical means to see through the cloak of “obviousness,” generated by public opinion. Insofar as Protagoras finds success in manipulating explanations of experience and of the human condition with the aid of apparent obviousness – but without subjecting his explanations to critique – his success depends upon the ignorance and lack of self-transparency of the many and of his students alike.

Protagoras’ resistance to educating the many via engaging their views only underscores his awareness that the predominant character of public opinion is confused and capricious, determined more by chance than anything else. “Why, Socrates, must we examine the opinion of the many among humans, who say whatever occurs (τύχωσι) to them?” (353a-b). Protagoras’ contempt for the many, on the grounds that they are prone to opposing and incoherent views, as well as being incapable of perceiving anything for themselves, is especially ironic when we recall that the many are included in Protagoras’
insistence that all citizens must be virtuous. Like those in Simonides’ ode who excoriate their neighbors out of a fear that the same faults will be discovered in themselves, Protagoras’ objection to the many – that they are confused and inconsistent – betrays the same shortcoming that he displays in his own examination. As we have seen above, this fault on the part of the many is precisely what constitutes an advantage for the sophist; their lack of education is not merely exploited but also fostered by those like Protagoras.

Socrates calms Protagoras by noting that an engagement with the many will bring them closer to determining the relation between courage and the other parts of virtue. From here, he begins an extended diagnosis of what being overcome by pleasure really amounts to. Such cases, he explains, have to do with pleasures such as eating, drinking and sex, wherein a person is said to know what he is doing despite knowing the wickedness (πονηρία) of it. The first problem to be addressed here, according to Socrates, is the way in which this wickedness is determined. It cannot be the case that these pleasures are called wicked due to the immediate (παραχρήμια) perceptions and feelings of pleasure that they elicit. Rather, they are called evil because of the results that they have in store for us, like disease and poverty and other such misfortunes, which all amount, in one way or another, to pain.

Thus far, along with Protagoras’ agreement, Socrates extracts from the position of the many a determination of evil pleasures, and to this extent, Protagoras’ earlier position with respect to pleasures appears to agree with that of the many: there are pleasures that are bad, and pains that are good. Socrates goes on to offer examples of the latter, citing bodily conditioning, military training, and medical treatment, all of which are agreed to be painful, yet also good due to the further pleasurable results that come of them, such as
health, the preservation of one’s city, and rule over others and the wealth such rule
brings.

In sketching out the position of the many, with its attendant determinations of
good and bad, Socrates illustrates the thinking of those for whom there is no greater
criterion for choiceworthiness than the positive affects of pleasure and pain. As he asks
his hypothetical interlocutors, “And are these things good through anything other than
that they terminate (ἀποτελεύτα) in pleasures and relief and avoidance of pains? Or do
you have some other end (τέλος) to utter toward which you look (ἀποβλέψαντες) to
call these things good, apart from pleasures and pains? They could not find one, I think”
(354b-c).

Socrates’ statement here is telling. If the many, or even Protagoras, had in view a
higher measure of goodness than these affections, then perhaps the terms of Socrates’
explanation could be revised and re-ordered. In fact, he repeats this point about the
incapability of the many to look toward some guiding end for judgment (again, using the
same words, τέλος ἀποβλέπειν, each time) other than pleasure or pain twice more as he
continues his explanation, as if to bait those present in his audience, and foremost
Protagoras himself, into offering something higher than what the many can come up
with. In fact, it is Protagoras’ inability to identify a nobler and better criterion of
goodness that puts him into company with the many, rather than distinguishing himself
from them. As Protagoras has earlier stressed the variable and ephemeral nature of the
good, here the passions of pleasure and pain provide appropriate candidates for
identifying this conception of the good in action. Socrates’ re-education of the many is in
reality an attempt to re-educate the sophist.
It is crucial to be aware of the language that Socrates is here repeating. The ‘looking toward’ or ‘holding in view’ (ἀποθεοπεῖν) of something according to which action is to be carried out is often invoked by Socrates when speaking of one’s guidance in reference to an ἐἴδος, whether it be in relation to the look involved in a certain τέχνη or in relation to the ἐἴδη of holiness, justice, and the other virtues, as well as the good itself. Here, however, Socrates does not use the term ἐἴδος at all, but rather τέλος, the end of one’s actions. That all mention of ἐἴδη is avoided reflects a critical difference between what Socrates means by τέλος, on the one hand, and what exists unchanging and pure, selfsame and alone by itself in the realm of being, on the other. In fact, it should already be clear at this point that the many, as well as Protagoras, are operating with reference to a notion of goodness that is wholly confined to the realm of becoming, and which does not approximate being at all. Thus, as we follow Socrates’ dialogue with the hypothetical many, we shall begin to discern how deeply the distinction that Socrates introduced in his interpretation of Simonides is brought into play here. The τέλος held in view by the many in the cases named cannot be an ἐἴδος, unchanging and selfsame, precisely because the good that is signified by this τέλος is determined by the flux of our temporality; what the many – and we, too, in our everyday lives – determine to be ‘good’ undergoes change in line with the experience of time:

So one thing you hold to be bad – pain; and pleasure you hold to be good, since the very act of enjoying you call bad at that point when it deprives us of greater pleasures than it has in itself, or leads to greater pains than the pleasures it contains. (354c-d)

and again,
Then is not the same thing repeated in regard to being pained? You call being pained a good thing at that point when it either rids us of greater pains than it comprises, or leads to greater pleasures than its pains. (354d)

At bottom, then, the common notion of goodness arises out of this interplay of opposing aesthetic forces. Pleasure, in its immediacy, is good, and pain is immediately bad, yet either one of these poles can be determined as its opposite (good or bad) through the mediation of that eventual opposing end to which either may lead. Given that pleasure is ultimately one’s goal in decision-making, it remains identified with the good, despite the fact that certain instances of pleasure can be seen in retrospect as evil. This is because that point from which one makes such a retrospective determination is itself determined by the relation between one’s immediate affective state and those affective states leading up to it.

Yet it is in this ongoing oscillation between temporal immediacy and mediation that we can start to glimpse the way in which the good begins to take on a schizophrenic character in their logos. Pleasure, in its immediacy, is experienced as something good. However, in being conscious of one’s existence as temporal, in our awareness of and orientation to past, present, and future, we cannot rest in immediate determinations of value. To do so would be to deny our noetic transcendence beyond the immediate, to pretend that we have no meaningful past or future, and that what we value has no connection with what we are to do in the next moment. Rather, we are beings who intend things, and the ends that we intend are conditioned by our anticipation of what is to come as much as by our memories of what has transpired. Hence, a mediated determination of goodness is necessary to suit human life when one has no other conception of goodness than pleasure. And as Socrates emphasizes several times, the many do not.
On the other hand, a temporally-mediated determination of goodness dependent upon pleasure must be set as a relation between amounts of pleasure and pain. On such a determination, it is not pleasure *per se* that is good, but rather a pleasure in each case whose amount is greater than the amount of pain that precedes it. For no one would call ‘good’ a course of action that demands a greater amount of pain than the amount of pleasure that it yields. In this sense, that mediated good appropriate to human life must be the result of a relative measure between pleasures and pains, a measure that proceeds without the guidance of a single, selfsame *eidos* and hence without a mean by its very nature. And, as we have noted, such a means of proceeding in accordance with only a relative measure denies us access to those proper human limits with reference to which might be able to live consistent, noble, and harmonious lives. Seen thus, Protagoras’ motivations of avoiding pain and securing pleasure condition his inattentiveness to the limits of humanity, the ignorance of which Socrates will underscore as he goes on to outline the nature of that *techne* to which Protagoras is unwittingly committed in his presuppositions.

For the present, Socrates aims at demonstrating the incoherence of the notion that one may be overcome by pleasures (or pains, or any other pathos) when one understands goodness in terms of pleasure, as he addresses the many:

Is it sufficient for you to live out your life pleasantly, without pain? If it is, and you are unable to tell us of any other good or evil that does not end in pleasure or pain, listen to what I have to say next. I tell you that if this is so, the *logos* becomes ridiculous when you say that a man, knowing the evil to be evil, nevertheless commits it when he might avoid it, because he is driven and put out of his senses by pleasure; while on the other hand you say that a man, knowing the good, refuses to do good because of the immediate pleasures by which he is overcome. (355a-b)
Here we see Socrates setting this notion of the powerlessness (ἀκρασία) of knowledge in the face of one’s passions and feelings into relation with one’s life as a whole, and of taking pleasure as one’s highest end throughout the course of one’s life. That is, Socrates is here suggesting that one’s criterion for judgment must be considered in light of the coherence of one’s existence, of one’s life taken as a unity. The implicit direction in which Socrates is leading is to examine whether one’s life can be adequately unified in terms of becoming, can be grasped and determined through those moments of pleasure and pain, both endured and anticipated, or whether there is not some source of value beyond becoming in being according to which one can bring one’s life into unity. The refutation of ἀκρασία will be directed ultimately to refuting the former position.

In order to demonstrate the manifest absurdity of the inferiority of knowledge against αἰσθησις, Socrates proposes a consolidation of names in line with each of the correlates at issue. Pleasure is to be called simply ‘the good’, and pain ‘the bad’. When reformulated, the position of ἀκρασία thus laid out amounts to one committing evil (experiencing pain) when one is free to choose another course, because one is overcome by the good (pleasure). Here Socrates even adds an arrogant interlocutor to chide the implication of the position of the many. “What a ridiculous thing you say – that a man does evil, knowing it to be evil, and not having to do it, because he is overcome by the good!” (355d).

As Socrates shows, where what seems to be a straightforward identity between goodness and pleasure, as the many would admit them to be related, a consolidation of these ideas and their opposites into the names ‘good’ and ‘bad’ produces a particular resistance, a disharmony, in the way in which these names can be utilized in everyday
speech. However we regard the good in our common thinking, however vague a notion it might be for us, it appears counterintuitive at the least to believe that what is truly good brings about its opposite in evil. In our common experiences we most often revise our identification, as Socrates’ illustration of the opinion of the many as shown, of what we first took to be good as merely an apparent good when we find that it leads to a bad end. Thus, there is a disharmony regarding the good between the beliefs of the many and the way in which the many speak.

Nonetheless, Socrates presses on in his inquiry into what being overcome by pleasure (now called the good) can mean according to the presuppositions of the many. In a rather paradoxical formulation, one can only explain the experience of being overcome by the good where the good is of a lesser amount than the evil operative in one’s experience taken as a whole. The hypothetical interlocutor asks,

Is this because the good is not worthy (οὐκ ἄξιόν) of conquering the evil in you, or because it is worthy? Clearly we must reply: Because it is not worthy; otherwise he of whom we speak would not have missed the mark. But in what sense, he might ask us, is the good unworthy of the bad, or the bad of the good? This can only be when the one is greater and the other smaller, or when there are more on one side and fewer on the other. We shall not have anything other to say than this. (355d-e)

Thus, strangely, we are overcome by the lesser proportion of goodness, and receive in turn that greater proportion of evil when we take ourselves to be overcome by pleasure. And what ‘being overcome’ amounts to on this formulation is, as Socrates puts it, “getting the greater evil in exchange for the lesser good” (355e). Insofar as the value of such experiences is determined by the larger force in this relative relation, then, the problem of “being overcome,” and in fact the problem of the power of knowledge in relation to immediate affective influences, becomes a problem of calculating relative
amounts. “What unworthiness can there be in pleasure against pain, other than an excess or deficiency of one compared with the other? That is, when one becomes greater and the other smaller, or when there are more on one side and fewer on the other, or here a greater amount and there a less.” (356a)

As they have constructed their logos, the problem of the efficacy of knowledge is set within the scope of one’s life as a whole, wherein – like discrete experiences – one determines one’s life as valuable or good through the overall prevalence of amounts of goodness in relation to evil. At the end of one’s life, we must suppose, a reckoning is called for, whereby one can determine whether he or she has generally lived well or not. And during one’s life, one can aim at greater proportions of good over evil (again, pleasure over pain) at each step, in order to insure one’s positive fate at the end. Seen thus, one’s life becomes devoted to the production of pleasure, to setting in each case a telos consisting in pleasure’s excess over pain that becomes the telos of one’s life as such.

In working out the implicit logic of this belief on the part of the many, Socrates has demonstrated thus far that it leads to an understanding of one’s life in terms of calculable quantities of aesthetic experience. Pleasure and pain are reduced to number and comparative degree. In order to speak of such experience in these terms, however, an abstraction from our very experience of aisthēsis is necessary. In fact, Socrates calls attention to this abstraction and its propriety in light of the only explanation for what it means to be overcome by aisthēsis. “For if you should say: But Socrates, the immediately pleasant is very different from the subsequently (ústeron xhrónon) pleasant or painful, I would answer: Do they differ in anything other than pleasure and
pain? There is no other way” (356a-b). Of course, one who prioritizes pleasure as a, or the, primary value in life will acknowledge the phenomenological difference between the stronger affective “pull” of more immediate pleasures and the diminished affective attraction or repulsion that more subsequent prospects for pleasure and pain have. In fact, to be a bodily creature, subsisting within the spheres of space and time, makes us liable to this force of immediacy. Yet here Socrates suggests that the only way to overcome the intoxicating possession by one’s feelings and passions and to make progress in achieving that goodness agreed to by the many as pleasure and the avoidance of pain, is to divorce oneself from immediacy and one’s body to the point that one transcends the limits of his or her humanity.

This transcendence is thrown into relief where Socrates proposes a sketch of the tékhē necessary for securing a good, that is, a pleasurable, life. It is, we should note, a sketch of the politicē implied by Protagoras’ Great Speech and implied as well by his speeches and deeds throughout his conversation with Socrates. Socrates outlines this new art thus:

Like a good weigher, put pleasant things and painful on the scales, and with them the nearness and remoteness, and tell me which count for more. For, if you weigh pleasant things against pleasant, the greater and the more are always to be taken; if painful against painful, then always the fewer and the smaller. If you weigh pleasant against painful, and find that the painful are outweighed by the pleasant – whether by the near or the remote or the remote by the near – you must take that course of action to which the pleasant are attached; but not that course if the pleasant are outweighed by the painful. Can the case be otherwise, I would ask, than this, men? I think they would have nothing other to say. (356b-c)

The solution, therefore, to the problem of akriōsia as it is understood by the many, is at the same time linked to a means for achieving the many’s conception of the good life. In order to secure a greater proportion of pleasure throughout one’s life, and to
embrace successfully that immediacy of positive feeling after which they all strive, one must withdraw oneself from the immediate, from temporality, altogether. That is, one must remove oneself from one’s embeddedness in time and therefore from one’s susceptibility to the influence of things as they appear to us in order to gain a clear, undistorted view of amounts of pleasure from which to choose. One must, in short, transcend the realm of becoming and assume a position with respect to it that is superhuman, that is the perspective only of a god. More appropriately, we can say that the view presupposed by this calculative τέχνη is that titanic perspective possessed by Prometheus.

Socrates’ fantastic proposition here is to be taken in light of the import he had discerned in Simonides’ poem. For as he there explained, human life with respect to virtue and knowledge is characterized by becoming, and can never ascend to the status of being, to which only the gods can claim adherence. Only the gods possess knowledge and goodness as belonging intrinsically to what they are, in distinction from humans, whose condition and fate it is to strive after these in becoming – achieving them only for a short span at a time – precisely because we are in and of time. As temporal beings whose power of understanding and knowing are as well temporally-conditioned, becoming testifies to our essential incompleteness and to the limits of our ability to calculate what the advance of time, the inherent obscurity of coming events, does not let us calculate.

That the many cannot but agree with the technique of weighing pleasures and pains, of implementing a measure that can only be accessed by the divine, reflects the extent to which the many (and, as we shall see, the sophists, who gradually accede to the
perspective of the many) remain ignorant of the limits of human life, and therefore violates those two well-known maxims of wisdom inscribed at Delphi: “Know thyself,” and “Nothing in excess.” Though the many may be familiar with these maxims, knowing them in the sense that they can repeat them when asked, the absurdity of Socrates’ proposal for a τέχνη of measuring that which they take to be of highest value marks the degree to which mere repetition of phrases and authentic understanding diverge radically.

Protagoras’ πολιτική, which was first characterized by the sophist as making one a better person through learning εὐβουλία, is given content and formulation by Socrates as a τέχνη of good judgment that – provided it could ever be practiced – fulfills Protagoras’ explicit criteria of “best ordering one’s home” and “gaining the most power in the polis in speech and action” (318e). For if both power and good order are defined in reference to pleasure, if both serve this end, then Protagoras now has a specific τέλος to which to refer in measuring one’s progress or lack thereof in these pursuits. This τέχνη fulfills, perhaps much more closely, Protagoras’ implicit ends of avoiding the various forms of pain – punishment for charlatanism, shame, poverty, and even death – against which he wields his logoi so cleverly. Moreover, this art, above any other, would be the sophist’s only means for making good on his tacit assumption that individuals, and he preeminently, can be good in truth.

In what must seem to Protagoras, and those in attendance, a benevolent gift of outlining the τέχνη that best suits the ends of sophistry, Socrates slyly begins to lay out the significance of this proposal:

Does not the same size appear larger to your sight when near, and smaller when distant? They will admit this. And is it the same with thickness and numbers? And sounds of equal strength are greater when near, and
smaller when distant? They would agree to this. Now if our faring well 
(eû πράττειν) consisted in doing and choosing things of large 
dimensions, and avoiding and not doing those of small, what would appear 
to be our salvation (σωτηρία) in life? Would it be the art of 
measurement (μετρητική τέχνη), or the power of appearance 
(φανομένου δύναμις)? Is it not the latter that leads us astray, as we saw, 
and throws us into confusion so that in our actions and our choices we are 
constantly accepting and rejecting the same things? Whereas the art of 
measurement would have made appearance powerless, and by showing us 
the truth would have brought our soul to rest, abiding in the truth, thus 
saving our life? Would men agree, in the face of all this, that the τέχνη 
which saves our life is measurement, or some other? 
It is measurement, he [Protagoras] agreed. (356c-e)

Protagoras, who has resisted all of Socrates’ efforts up to this point at providing a 
measure according to which his notions of goodness, virtue, and even dialogue are to be 
tested, now agrees that it is precisely a τέχνη of measurement that would ensure the 
good life. For we notice above that Protagoras has forgotten that Socrates’ exposition 
here is addressed to the many, whose presuppositions he has originally opposed. He is 
caught up in the promise of this fantastic new art, and now finds himself in agreement 
with its ends. He is virtually ready, at least in word, to abandon all pretense to 
made appearances, and to adopt an objective measure for his activity, since he 
sees in it an advantage for himself.

Despite the fact that a number of prominent commentators have taken Socrates 
seriously in putting forth this art of measurement as a means for guiding our lives, we 
have already begun to see how difficult it is to find Socrates’ meaning in this passage as 
anything other than utterly ironic. We find in this passage several more hints that 
Socrates is being playful in order to draw Protagoras, by the sophist’s own spoken and 
unspoken commitments, toward an understanding of the falsity of his professional 
enterprise, and furthermore toward a truer understanding of what living well entails.
Socrates takes care, first of all, to begin with the hypothetical status of faring well in its determination by the many, now formulated as “doing and choosing things of large dimensions and avoiding and not doing things of small,” asking what the salvation of one’s life would “appear to be.” Yet we must ask: by what art would this appearance be separated out from the truth? Certainly not μετρητική as Socrates has outlined it; for it proceeds upon the presupposition of pleasure as the highest value, and, like τέχνη in general as we have shown, cannot critique this overriding determination of value itself.

This first point in which Socrates cannot be taken as sincere is closely related to a second, namely the questionability of drawing an essential difference between truth (ἀλήθεια), on the one hand, and appearance, on the other. As if truth, in its character of unconcealment, could be apprehended in any way other than through the way in which it appears, either in speech or in action. For, as we have noted with respect to the engagement in discourse, for which an objective, pre-existent measure of correctness can never be found, the “scales” to which Socrates here refers for measuring pleasure and pain are just as surely beyond our reach, beyond a pre-possessed human truth, which, like falsity, remains within the domain of appearances.

The third point in this rich passage that suggests Socrates’ irony has to do with the salvation of one’s life and what it can mean, given the determination of goodness as pleasure, and given that it is Protagoras to whom this hypothetical conversation with the many is truly addressed. As we have seen, it is ultimately the preservation of his own life that Protagoras is concerned to secure in formulating his speeches and answers, and in admitting openly that he is a sophist. Socrates describes this σωτηρία, moreover, in terms of the soul, which is particularly revealing. Earlier, in his discussion with
Hippocrates, the soul that was to be valued most highly, above the body, was described as akin to a living organism, demanding nourishment, and prone to movement and change between the poles of goodness and evil. Salvation in this passage, however, amounts to the soul’s lack of movement, its stillness, as if the culmination of the soul’s efforts were to make it rest in an eternal state. Such a state, for those organisms to which the soul is likened, would not be life or its preservation through nourishment and nurture, but rather death. In effect, the end of Socrates’ proposed μετρετική, insofar as it concentrates almost exclusively upon the gratification of the body, is the disregard of the soul’s condition, a lack of care and nurture through learning. For all of Protagoras’ efforts to keep himself alive and to preserve a condition of painlessness for himself, he must – insofar as his claims entail the appearance of him as being good and being wise, insofar as he resists in his pretenses the influence of becoming – at the same time assume a pose that bespeaks a kind of death, a kind of resistance to the necessary vicissitudes, the perpetual incompleteness of one’s understanding and one’s deeds, of life.

Of course, these implications remain concealed to Socrates’ audience. Once Socrates has established that this art of calculating true amounts of pleasure and pain would appear to be that which could save one’s life, and that such an art must be either a τέχνη or an ἐπιστήμη, the sophists are in full agreement. Thus, Socrates is able to counter the claims of the many in their understanding of being overcome by pleasure or pain: the wrong choice of pleasures and pains is not due to the weakness of knowledge in us, but rather to its absence.

For you have admitted that it is from defect of knowledge that men err, when they do, in their choice of pleasures and pains – that is, in the choice of good and evil; and from defect not merely of knowledge but of the knowledge you have agreed also to be that of measurement. And surely
you know well enough for yourselves that the erring act committed without knowledge is done ignorantly. Accordingly, to be “overcome by pleasures” means just this – the greatest ignorance, which Protagoras here and Prodicus and Hippias profess to cure. (357d)

An added touch of irony is at play in the sophists’ enthusiastic agreement to what they take to be the truth of Socrates’ account. When Socrates looks to them for confirmation, they all state together that what they have heard seems to be true “beyond nature (ὑπερφυσι)” (358a). Insofar as the art of measurement provided by Socrates demands the elevation of the human beyond his nature, beyond his embodied, temporal existence in becoming, such an art must indeed be “beyond nature.” In this sense, what each of the sophists share, to the extent that they agree in having the ‘cure’ for such human ignorance, is a lack of attunement to that nature proper to human life.

Yet if Socrates is indeed going to such great lengths to produce an account of an impossible art, to what end are his ironic efforts devoted? In order to answer this question, we must recall the stance that Protagoras has taken with respect to his own logoi. His preference for vagueness and discursive enchantment, as well as his inattentiveness to previous admissions, bespeaks an indifference to the application of his own speeches in action. Now, however, Protagoras is provided with the outline of a τέχνη that speaks to his own hitherto concealed values; this novel account of a science of judgment holds promise for the sophist, and such promise is to be realized only in the act of its application. By appealing to Protagoras’ desire, Socrates is now able to bring his interlocutor to the point of investing himself in the unity between speech and deed, without compulsion from outside. But this is only the first step in Socrates’ design. The second has to do with the μαθήματα to be won from attempting to apply this divine art.
Though Protagoras does not take up this art within the context of the dialogue, it is our task to interpret what its practice would entail for the sophist, once he has been left to his own leisure. We must ask, therefore, what this unity of *logos* and praxis can mean in light of this superhuman *téchnē*. Let us take up the thought experiment, then, of Protagoras’ attempt to put this art of measurement into play. Let us imagine Protagoras left to himself in Callias’ guest quarters. Imagine him choosing to beat one of his students about the head in order to make himself feel better after the extended shame he has suffered in the company of Socrates. This feels so good that he rates it as a sixty-five out of one hundred on the pleasure scale he’s creating. Let’s say that the next evening, he opts for a nice warm bath instead, which is also quite pleasurable. In attempting to determine where this pleasure of somewhat comparable strength would rate – somewhere in the sixties, perhaps – Protagoras is obliged to recall the feeling he’d experienced on the previous afternoon. The impression isn’t as fresh in his recollection as the original experience, obviously, but he remembers that it was quite pleasurable. It’s more distant now, and he takes efforts to recall that past feeling clearly. Finally, he thinks he has done it, but then it occurs to him that he only *feels* like he is remembering it correctly; it seems right, but how can he know? He remembers that it was a sixty-five, but how much pleasure does sixty-five signify again? He’d have to try to recall. Yet his inability to distinguish the appearance of that remembered sensation from the original itself is precisely what led him to refer to the number he’d attached to it in the first place. There is no means of getting beyond his entrapment within the instability of appearances. Since this is the case, Protagoras is therefore unable to judge the better choice from the worse, insofar as the better choice is defined by the greater amount of pleasure between them.
What we are aiming at in this playful exercise is what I believe Socrates wants Protagoras to learn by his own efforts: that pleasure, as a purely private, subjective, and immediate phenomenon – whether it be an emotional state or a bodily impression – cannot be the object of a τέχνη insofar as we have no stable, unchanging measure for it, within or outside of our thinking. The power of appearance, in which Protagoras seeks refuge in discourse time and again, here arises as that which prevents him from reaching what it is that he wants. With respect to both forethought and afterthought, then, the ‘true amounts’ of particular affects remain beyond our possession, and are therefore incalculable for humans, whose activities of thinking, remembering, and anticipating, all are confined to the realm of becoming.

It is only through pursuing this art sincerely, moreover, that Protagoras can be brought to an acknowledgement of his human limits; only by way of suffering, firsthand, the human deficiency of his powers of memory and foresight. By offering this gift of an art to Protagoras, Socrates equips the sophist with the means of revealing for himself that boundary which separates his own nature from that of a god. While a god may possess the knowledge for calculating affects this way – and therefore possess such a τέχνη – no human is able to do so, precisely because of that foundational difference to which Socrates has gestured between being and becoming.

Thus, in Socrates’ veiled gift, the sort of gift that would be most fitting for the playful trickster Hermes to distribute, we also find the limits of his power of dialectic. For Protagoras has continued to resist external influences (questioning, exhortation, dialogical agreements) urging him to examine his own concealed beliefs. With this apparently Promethean gift of μετρητική, however, the process of dialectic finds a
supplement to its ends of bringing each interlocutor to an acknowledgement of the limits of one’s knowledge. Yet more in keeping with the devices of Hermes, Socrates has offered this deceptive gift nonetheless as a favor, as a kind of resource by means of which Protagoras is able to view more clearly the folly of his deepest values. In this sense, Socrates does not ‘teach’ Protagoras a lesson about his own capacities so much as he gives the sophist the means for discovering it through his own efforts.

Socrates has, therefore, managed to bring the sophists into agreement with one another about the ends of their τέχναι through his logos, while at the same time convincing his listeners of the power of knowledge in human affairs. Yet this power is a strange one, to the extent that the knowledge of which he speaks is otherworldly. In fact, Socrates conspicuously defers the examination of this form of knowledge for another time (357b), a time, we may suspect, beyond time, beyond the embodied temporal existence of Socrates and his interlocutors.

But what, then, of the original problem raised with respect to the opinions of the many, the challenge to the belief that one can know what is bad for oneself yet nonetheless choose it? The task of resolving Socrates’ position here – referred to by scholars as the Socratic paradox of intellectualism, or the argument against ἀκρασία – goes beyond the scope of our present study. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to note that the formulation of that knowledge that Socrates first mentions, that of the person who first “learns what is good and what is bad” must be knowledge of another sort than that which comes to one through τέχνη. As we have noted, technical knowledge like that possessed by the craftsman does not have a compulsory effect of itself upon its practitioner. One is free to practice one’s art badly if one so wishes. With respect to Socrates’ art of
calculating pleasures, we find that its power, were one able to utilize it, only makes clear what is more pleasurable, and the sophists do not object to the fact that what remains to be explained is how it is that one must be compelled to choose the better of these clearly-seen options. For Socrates has only outlined a particular method for choosing; he has not given an account of why someone might be drawn to exercise this method where he or she is already under the spell of immediate pleasures. In other words, where this art is useful, one must already be inclined to privilege knowledge over the effect of one’s passions.

The possibility, then, of teaching one to love knowledge and pursue it appears to be just as elusive as the possibility of teaching one originally to distinguish sameness from difference. Where these modes of knowing are learned, it remains doubtful whether they can be the product of teaching. Hence, Socrates’ objection that virtue is teachable persists, even while he plays at teaching the sophists that art which they already claim as their own. At the very least, should Protagoras take up Socrates’ calculus seriously, he may come to learn for himself the value of knowing. For the present, however, their dialogue continues.
III. Conclusion: Fragile Unities and the Laughter of the Logos

Socrates resumes his discussion of the unity of virtue with Protagoras by gathering together the implications of the sophists’ mutual agreement with respect to living well. In voicing these implications, Socrates in effect makes explicit both the underlying motives of Protagoras’ behavior, as well as their harmony with the opinions of the many. We must recall that in his μύθος Protagoras preferred to speak about the beliefs of the many in reply to Socrates’ objections about the teachability of virtue as an artful means of protecting his own ideas from vulnerability. Here, however, the conceptions of goodness and living well that provided the basis for human custom and education within the city prove to be shared, in the end, by the sophist as well. They agree with respect to three basic notions: a) that the pleasant is good and the painful bad, b) that all actions aimed at living painlessly and pleasantly are honorable, and c) that the honorable deed is both good and beneficial. In this gathering, self-preservation and pleasure are openly admitted now to be the highest overarching concerns common to sophistry and the οἱ πολλοὶ.¹¹

Yet in this unity agreed to on behalf of the sophists and the many, another curious unity has been produced. For now, the pleasant, the good, the honorable, and the beneficial are all combined into one as a result of their logos. Previously, Protagoras had objected to any straightforward identification of honor with pleasure, goodness with pleasure, or beneficence with goodness. Each of these at this point appears to be unproblematically linked with the others. As we shall see, however, this curious unity
will come to produce curious effects when re-inserted into their discussion of the unity of virtue.

Socrates addends this unity, to the agreement of the company, with the consequences it has for action, in light of the further principle that no one chooses what he knows to be evil.

Then if, I proceeded, the pleasant is good, no one knowing or thinking of other things as better than those he is doing and as he is able will do as he proposes if he can do the better ones; and this ‘being overcome’ is nothing but ignorance, and being stronger than oneself is as certainly wisdom (σοφία). They all agreed.

Well, then, by ignorance (ἀμαθία) do you mean having a false opinion and being deceived about matters of the greatest worth? They all agreed to this as well. (358b-c)

Once again, we must refer back to Socrates’ lecture to his young friend early on. That which was of the greatest worth, to be valued more highly than one’s body, is one’s soul. We must pause to wonder whether in fact the sophists as a group are being made to assert their own ignorance of the greatest matters, Protagoras most of all. Insofar as he resists with all of his efforts the μάθησις invited by Socrates’ questioning, and insofar as he clings stubbornly to his own directives,12 tied as they are to pleasure and the avoidance of its opposite, is not Protagoras precisely the one who is already ‘overcome’ by pleasure from the start? Just as one who lives only for certain pleasures is led to neglect the care of one’s body, so too, we must suspect, Protagoras’ commitment to what he believes to be good is led to neglect the care, the nourishment, of his soul. The ignorance or false belief represented by Protagoras implies, therefore, more than simply being misinformed – as if one were to take the wrong path in a forest – but rather a closure of opportunities to overcome one’s ignorance, to revise one’s belief. It is
ignorance of ignorance, with the corresponding effect that one is unaware of being in ἀπορία, that one does not really have a path (πόρος) at all; it is a form, in short, of blindness with respect to one’s choices of what is best for one’s soul.

Having established a unity in goodness, honor, benefit, and pleasure, Socrates pushes their logos forward to combine this principle of unity with the principle to which the sophists have given assent as well, namely that “no one willingly goes after evil or what he thinks to be evil; it is not in human nature, it seems, to do so – to wish to pursue what one thinks to be evil in preference to good things; and when compelled to choose one of two evils, no one will choose the greater when he is able to choose the lesser” (358c-d). As we have noted above, this principle of human nature in deliberation is not argued for explicitly either by Socrates or Protagoras; it is, rather, a necessary presupposition for those who would claim to teach good judgment – and furthermore, for those who would claim to ‘make’ others better in this way – or for those who believe that appearances of goodness exercise their own pull, their own direction, upon human action.

Yet if we accept Socrates’ principle here, we might wonder how it is that such appearances of goodness, beliefs about what is good, might be revised or critiqued. In other words, how might someone be compelled to see the good in calling one’s beliefs about goodness into question? For if pleasure is presupposed as the good, the previous conversation between Socrates and Protagoras reveals that whatever is entailed by calling one’s beliefs about goodness into question, it is hardly a pleasurable activity, nor does it make one such as Protagoras look honorable. In fact, the gift of μετριτική, which functions only as a means for making clearer ends that are predetermined, appears to be of little help in this
aspect. Thus, other means are necessary for determining whether or not one is mistaken in his or her conception about the good itself.

As we have seen, however, the educative function of Socrates’ μετρική lies both in its desirability for Protagoras, as well as in its impossibility. Protagoras must discover, through a fundamental ἀπόρια, the illegitimacy of taking pleasure and the avoidance of pain as his highest ends. Thus, in order to revise those ends which determine what we take the particular ends of action to be, in order to set one’s notion of goodness into another measure, a radical form of contradiction between opinions about goodness and their implementation in practice must be made manifest. As we shall see, it is precisely the identification of goodness with pleasure that brings about a crucial contradiction within the common-sense thought of the sophist.

Socrates turns, then, to a reconsideration of courage in relation to the rest of the stated virtues by honing in on the very motive according to which Protagoras sets the terms of their discussion from the outset. That is, Socrates turns to the nature of fear as the expectation of evil (358d). It was, we recall, the fear of suffering pain at the hands of the citizens that persuades Protagoras to declare himself a sophist, and to choose those before whom he delivers his λόγοι. Thus, in line with the principle of human nature that Socrates has just described, Protagoras is consistent with this principle in avoiding the pursuit of what he takes to be painful, i.e., evil. Yet with respect to virtue, the question here has to do with those ends that people pursue which delimit virtuous individuals – that is, good citizens – from their opposite.

Within the context of courage, one must therefore ask what it is that distinguishes the deliberation and action of the courageous man from that of the coward. As
Protagoras has stated earlier, this distinction cannot be due to ignorance, to being deceived about things of the greatest weight as Socrates has just put it, since the sophist believes that one need not be wise in order to be courageous. Protagoras’ only means of determining the courageous man are, according to their previous discussion, threefold: a) the courageous readily go where others fear to, b) courage comes from \(\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\zeta\), and c) courage comes also from the good nurture (\(\epsilon\upsilon\tau\rho\omicron\omicron\eta\omicron\alpha\)) of the soul.

As we will discover, there is an element of truth in this trinity of determinations for the courageous person. Yet whether Protagoras conceives these determinations truly is another matter; it is simply not sufficient to speak truly, but to understand the import of what one says. Everything turns, then, upon how these statements are to be interpreted. Socrates begins such an interpretation by eliciting from Protagoras a restatement of the first distinction between the courageous and the cowardly: when one is acting courageously, one goes to meet other things than those which are pursued by cowards. Yet when Socrates tests the distinction in these terms, Protagoras can no longer maintain that the courageous pursue dreadful things; this would be tantamount to choosing what one believes to be evil, and hence, contrary to human nature as the sophists have admitted it. Thus, whatever courage is, it must arise out of, and be consistent with, the \(\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\zeta\) of the human. With respect to human nature, then, the discussion continues, the courageous and the cowardly are no different; each pursues what he can face boldly, that is, without the expectation of evil. “And in this respect,” Socrates states, “the cowardly and the brave go to meet the same things” (359d-e).

Socrates’ challenge here elicits an excited objection from Protagoras, as well it should. Yet the point established thus far has been to show that \(\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\zeta\) by itself cannot
determine the measure of the virtuous, since both the courageous and the cowardly act in accordance with human nature. If Protagoras, as the teacher of virtue, is to provide a criterion according to which his students are made better, it can come neither from this determination, nor from the admission that he can teach individual to be courageous by persuading them to pursue what is fearful. Another measure is needed. Yet the unity of goodness with honor, benefit, and pleasure will serve to complicate the search for such a measure.

Protagoras’ objection has to do with those observable practices according to which common opinion judges courage and its opposite, and his resistance to Socrates’ statement comes with reference to that sphere of activity in which the highest honors in the city are distributed: warfare. “But still, Socrates, what cowards pursue is the very opposite of what the courageous pursue. For example, the latter choose to go to war, but the former do not” (359e). It is at this point, however, that we begin to see the tension within goodness’ identity with the abovementioned terms. Upon agreeing that going to war is honorable, Protagoras is compelled to admit, in light of his previous agreements, that it must also be good and pleasurable as well. Yet this admission, more than being counterintuitive, is an absurdity, especially from the perspective of the sophist.¹³ For where Protagoras seeks his own preservation more than anything else, the very opposite of this condition, risking one’s life in clearly painful circumstances, contradicts the identification between honor and pleasure in which Protagoras has invested himself. What is more, military service, which Socrates had earlier¹⁴ listed among those practices that are painful, but which lead to greater avoidances of pain than they contain in themselves, must now be admitted by Protagoras to be an activity that is pleasant in
itself! The effect, then, of that strange unity in goodness is to lead the sophist into
confusion about what he regards to be pleasurable in his own case. Given this state of
affairs, then, even if Protagoras had at his disposal the art of measurement, it seems that
he would nonetheless be unable to implement it properly.

While we have seen that the gathering of pleasure, honor, and benefit into identity
with goodness bespeaks Protagoras’ underlying conception of value, we find now that a
techn constructed in the service of this unity has the effect not of making the sophist’s
choices clearer, but of working a kind of enchantment upon his powers of deliberation.
Protagoras is now clearly confused about what choosing well entails, and hence, his
would-be expertise of teaching others the art of good judgment is compromised by the
fact that he is conflicted in his own case. It is, of course, only one whose practice is
divorced from his logos who would make the admission that engaging in war is a
pleasurable act in itself. Once more, perhaps most forcefully, Protagoras is forced to
reveal the extent to which what he says and what he understands are at odds with one
another.

As Socrates continues, their logos does not imply that the courageous are fearless,
but rather that when they fear, such fright is not of a shameful sort. Correspondingly,
what it means to be a coward is that one feels shameful, therefore evil, fear. Hence, as
Protagoras is further compelled to admit, the source of cowardice is ignorance of what is
in one’s own interest, namely, the ignorance of what is dreadful (360c). Consequently,
Protagoras has no other course than to accept Socrates’ final statement on the matter, that
“the wisdom that knows what is and what is not dreadful is courage, being opposed to the
ignorance of these things …” (360d).
Thus, Protagoras is compelled to accept the opposite of his stance with respect to the unity of virtue. Courage, which was to be that part of virtue separate from and independent of the rest of the virtues, is now identified with a kind of wisdom. In one sense, then, Protagoras has spoken truly when he noted that courage is due to nature and the *eútrofía* of the soul. Yet the meaning of these terms has been revised in the course of Socrates’ *sképsis*. The good nurture of the soul is shown here to lie precisely in that which Socrates had announced much earlier – that such nurture lies in learning, in *μáþēsís*, and therefore in wisdom. Furthermore, inasmuch as such wisdom has to do with what is truly to be feared, it must thereby pertain to what is of greatest value, namely the health of one’s soul. For it is the soul’s condition, we must again remind ourselves, upon which all good faring depends, good faring defined, as Socrates has made clear in his interpretation of the ode, as learning. Therefore, to the extent that good faring is due to virtue, it is the soul’s activity of learning and understanding that distinguishes the virtuous from the vicious.

Seen in this way, the kind of wisdom to which Socrates refers cannot lie in the mere transmission of *logoi* from one person to another, as if such *logoi* contain wisdom in themselves. Rather, this wisdom has to do with the individual’s striving to examine – to engage in *σκέψις* – what is said with respect to goodness in light of its benefit or harm to one’s soul. Such striving means attempting to gather together, in and through *logos*, appearances of goodness into a unity, attempting to make manifest its limits so that it can serve as a guide for ordering one’s life. As a striving-gathering, the wisdom with which Socrates is concerned remains an open task to be taken up continually, a search after unity that must be enacted within the course of one’s embodied, concrete circumstances,
and with the aid of others who seek likewise to nourish their souls through this sharing of favors in *logos*.

That Protagoras, with his adherence to recyclable speeches and his commitment to dispersion, embodies all that is opposed to the spirit and pursuit of Socratic wisdom, has been made clear. In fact, as Socrates looks to him for the final admission that would unify courage with the rest of the virtues in accordance with their *logos*, Protagoras remains withdrawn, refusing to answer. And when prompted by his interlocutor to aid in bringing their *logos* to its limit, Protagoras responds petulantly, “Finish it (πέρανον) by yourself” (360d-e). Despite having been a partner, albeit an unwilling one, in dialogue with Socrates, Protagoras wishes to withdraw himself from this communal practice of searching once it becomes clear that such searching demands that he give up his own authoritative position.

Socrates, however, will not be denied so easily. Rather than parade that conclusion that belongs more to Protagoras than to himself, he asks Protagoras whether he believes now what he did at the beginning of their gathering: “Do you still think, as at the start, that there are any people who are most ignorant and yet most courageous?” (360e). Within the context of Protagoras’ advertised expertise, it is obvious that his manifest misconception about the unity of virtue relieves himself of the claim to authority in his art. That the sophist is compelled to admit his mistake on such a fundamental point of orientation puts him in the class of those who come before the council of Athenians in order to advise them on an art in which he is only a layperson, the class of those who are deserving of laughter and ridicule. Protagoras therefore attempts to direct attention away from himself once more, pretending to tire of Socrates’ game: “You seem to me to be
loving of victory (φιλονικεῖν), Socrates, and that I am to be your answerer; as a favor (χαρισσάμενος) to you, I say that according to what has been agreed, it seems to me to be impossible” (360e).

Of course, it is Protagoras himself who has invited a contest of logoi, in keeping with his vocation; it is he who has maintained a competitive stance in their discourse, leaving open only the alternatives, as he sees them, of victor and vanquished. Yet what Protagoras does not acknowledge, perhaps cannot acknowledge, is that his favor to Socrates is in reality a favor to himself. For being reduced to ἀπορία is, as we have seen in Hippocrates’ case, the necessary prerequisite for beginning to search in earnest after the nature of virtue. But from the perspective that sees goodness only in terms of maintaining one’s wise reputation, such a favor can only appear as an affront to one’s well-being.

It is perhaps in light of their difference in orientation to the problem of virtue that Socrates restates to Protagoras his own motive in their dialogue, namely that Socrates is moved by a “desire to examine (σκέψασθαι) the various relations of virtue and what virtue itself is” (360e). Thus, Socrates makes it clear that in the end their discussion is not aimed at either interlocutor, but at the question before them. This does not, however, mean that neither must risk something of himself, namely putting his thoughts to the test of the strongest logos. In a matter that is not divorced from one’s thinking about it, in a matter that necessitates self-reflection precisely because virtue does not arise without self-reflection, there is no other way to proceed than examining its nature through the voices of those very individuals who would pursue it.
Yet it is here that Socrates, in reflecting upon their logos, finds it curiously reflecting back upon them, mocking them:

Our logos, in its result, seems to me to be denouncing us and laughing us down, as if it were some human; if it were given a voice, it would say, ‘What strange things you are, Socrates and Protagoras! You on the one hand, after having said at first that virtue cannot be taught, are now urging yourself in the opposite direction, undertaking to demonstrate that all things are knowledge – justice, temperance, and courage – which is the best way to make virtue appear teachable. For if virtue were anything else than knowledge, as Protagoras tried to show, obviously it would not be teachable; but if as a matter of fact it appears to be wholly knowledge, as you urge, Socrates, I would be in wonder if it were not teachable. Protagoras, on the other hand, thought at first he claimed that it was teachable, now seems eager for the opposite, declaring that it appears to be almost anything but knowledge, which would make it the least teachable of things!’ (361a-c)

Despite Socrates’ efforts to hold to the question of virtue, it appears nonetheless that their logos has been subject to the sway of Protagorean discourse; it remains divided, broken into two, and this break has been doubled on either side, where each appears to be in opposition to himself, as well as the other. As if having suffered abuse, their logos excoriates them both. For it has been paralyzed – perhaps even enchanted – in its proper function of gathering together appearances into their wholes such that the source of these appearances may be made manifest.

On the other hand, it is equally likely that the laughter of the logos in the absurdity of its adherents bespeaks that point at which common discourse reveals its inadequacy with respect to the subject of virtue. For we have found in the course of their discussion that virtue remains elusive with respect to the ready resources of language at hand. Here, the sort of knowledge implied by virtue serves to unhinge that common, foundational relation of teaching and learning. The language of transmission and possession with respect to knowledge appears to recoil back upon itself where procured
logoi reveal themselves to be not containers of what is to be learned, but rather incitementsto the activity of μάθησις.

With respect to the extended logos culminating in Protagoras’ perceived defeat, it should not be hard to see that no explicit learning in the form of a transmission of doctrines has taken place, either for Socrates or Protagoras. The odd unity of virtue, with its inclusion of courage, can hardly be taken as an adequate demonstration that virtue is in fact a unity. Given that it proceeds on the basis of agreements that base themselves upon absurdity and impossibility, and which make use of the sophists’ lack of understanding, there is no real wisdom to be gleaned from their shared logos. What lessons we can discern, however, take place in the interplay of their logoi, in the enactment of their exchanges, to the extent that these reveal particular orientations to learning. That these orientations can themselves be subjects of μάθησις for Socrates’ audience at the beginning, and for us the readers, must be demonstrated in each case of examination as Socrates likewise carries out his modes of σκέψις. What is to be learned, therefore, in the Protagoras, does not adhere to a pre-set measure of knowledge residing in the text itself; as in the encounter with the words of Simonides, such learning demands that what is said in the text be set to a particular measure of understanding in each act of reading.

Socrates gestures to the fact that their logos remains far from complete, given the lack of unity between the interlocutors, as well as the lack of unity of each speaker with himself. Thus, he issues an appeal to Protagoras to examine their subject once more, but by considering first what virtue is, and then whether it is teachable, “lest your Epimetheus should happen to trip us up and deceive us in our σκέψις as he neglected us in your account of his distribution” (361c-d). Their investigation, then, requires a turn back to
the beginning in its orientation, not from the perspective of teaching virtue, but rather from the desire first to know what virtue is itself. It is only from this point that a means of making manifest the nature of virtue might be unconcealed, and that the ruling logic of transmission and possession – which led them to turn against themselves in their *logos* – of it could be circumvented.

Socrates continues: “I like the Prometheus of your μύθος better than Epimetheus; for he is of use to me, and I take Promethean thought continually for my own life when I am occupied with all these questions; so, with your consent, as I said at the beginning, I would be pleased to examine this together (συνδιασκοποίην) along with you” (361d). It is, of course, not the Promethean thinking – representative of Socrates’ *μετριτική* – which calculates the coming vicissitudes of fate that Socrates has in mind here. Rather, by looking to his practice over the course of the dialogue, we can interpret Socrates’ meaning in light of the gift that Prometheus brought to human life. That is, the significance of Promethean thought lies in its attention to a single *εἶδος*, which marks technical production and enables humans to live lives of order and mutual aid. Promethean thought in Socrates’ case has to do with examining appearances in *logos* and the attempt to bring them into the unity of their proper look. For it is this fore-thinking, this searching after the selfsame source of manifold appearances, such that they can be brought into their proper measure, which is to be the guide for good judgment over the course of one’s life. It is of this ongoing striving, this attempt to consider appearances as standing in need of measure, that Socrates avails himself, a task that must be undertaken anew in each circumstance, and with the help that is available.
In the end, such help is denied to Socrates. Protagoras offers a gracious deferral, one that he in all probability does not intend to keep. “We shall go through this subject on another occasion, when you like; for now, it is due time to turn (τρέπεσθαι) to something else” (361e-362a). In Protagoras’ turn away from dialogue on virtue, we find at the same time the limited power of Socratic dialectic to turn souls to a consideration of goodness, or even of themselves. Taking the goodness of one’s soul as the highest of values, caring for one’s soul through learning what is to its benefit, appears itself not to be a teachable enterprise. The παιδεία with which Socrates and Protagoras have occupied themselves over the course of their long discussion must begin with a soul that is already in a position to seek its own nourishment. Insofar as this originary attunement to caring for oneself must elude all calculation, all attempts at technical management, it remains alien to the grasp of logos. It appears, rather, to reside in the concealed depth of one’s soul, and as such, its most appropriate mode of expression is myth.
Many scholars have remarked upon the reasonable and widely-held position that Protagoras takes here on courage as entailing none of the other virtues, including wisdom, and this, I take it, is part of the point of the sophist’s particular answer. As Weingartner puts it, “Protagoras here asserts what everyone believes” (1973), p. 103. Russel puts it more modestly: “Protagoras’ position on courage, then, is rather strong. But of course it is not a particularly foreign view” (2000), p. 315. On the subject of courage, Protagoras gives an answer that would be no different from that of the many; either he is simply borrowing the views of others, and speaking in another’s voice, or he is speaking what he really thinks, which does not distinguish him at all as the greatest educator on the matter.

Weingartner, for example, ignores the distinction between the technical knowledge mentioned in the present passage and the kind of knowledge achieved through dialectic, and furthermore treats Socrates’ questions to Protagoras more as proofs that he is trying to push through Protagoras’ mouth: “When Socrates sets out to refute the common view of courage and replace it by the thesis that this virtue is tantamount to wisdom, he aims at the heart of the Protagorean enterprise. Specifically, Socrates twice sets out to demonstrate the identity of courage and wisdom” (1973), p. 103-104. While Socrates’ questions are of course not without aim, it is worthwhile to note, as Weingartner fails to, that if Socrates were straightforwardly attempting to press this “thesis,” then the virtue after which he seeks in dialogue would, as a τέχνη, make dialogue superfluous, insofar as it could be instilled in the student through a monological form, accompanied by repeated imitation, as anyone learns an art.

This is an assumption shared by the majority of commentators as well. We commonly hear such remarks by scholars as: “Socrates counters [Protagoras’ assertion that courage is distinct from the other virtues] with an argument whose conclusion is that wisdom is courage” (Weiss [1985], p. 12). While it might be the case that Socrates does indeed share this view, the evidence that we have from the text is only that Socrates offers the apparent conclusions of his interlocutor’s answers, rather than setting his own unspoken beliefs into combat with them.

This point has also been made by Weiss, who adds quite trenchantly, “Protagoras, who triumphantly declares that Socrates has failed to refute him because Socrates nowhere shows that the courageous are not confident (350d1-2), now refutes himself.” (1985), p. 19.

This principle of looking to the whole of one’s body in order to treat one of its parts recalls Socrates’ lecture to Charmides, wherein he attempts to engage the young man in conversation: “I daresay you have yourself sometimes heard good doctors say, you know, when a patient comes to them with a pain in his eyes, that it is not possible for them to attempt a cure of his eyes alone, but that it is necessary to treat his head too at the same time, if he is to have his eyes in good order; and so again, that to expect ever to treat the head by itself, apart from the body as a whole, is utter folly. And on this principle they apply their regimen to the whole body, and attempt to treat and heal the part along with the whole …” (Charm., 156b-c).

As Goldberg notes, “The tendency of these persistent utterances is not only to suggest that Socrates associates this hypothesis with Protagoras but that he dissociates himself from it” (1983), p. 250.

Cf. Euthyphro 6e, Cratylus 389a-b, and Republic 596b for several instances of the use of ἀπορρέω in relation to a particular εἶδος.

Pp. 67-70.

Many scholars, it should be noted, represent a range of subtly different positions with respect to Socrates’ sincerity here. Irwin, for example, accepts Socrates’ art of measuring pleasure wholesale, on the evidence that none of Plato’s earlier dialogues explicitly rejects hedonism, and that Socrates’ presentation of it in the Protagoras most likely reflects Plato’s considered views at the time of its composition (1995, 87). Others, like Martha Nussbaum, maintain that Socrates is serious in his attempt to develop a science of human choice-making, but interpret Socrates as
using pleasure only as a place-holder for which other, nobler values might be substituted (1986, 89-121).

10 Cf., for example, Kahn (1996, 224ff.), Irwin (1995, 83ff.), and Ballard (1965, 4ff.).

11 G.M.A. Grube has captured quite succinctly the shortcomings of sophistry in general in this connection: “[E]ven the best of [the sophists] have not examined the implications of their own position, they either teach mere rhetorical technique, or else they cleverly express the prejudices of the mob” (1980, 232). In the present case, we have found that all three of these criticisms are true of Protagoras.

12 An illuminating perspective upon the kind of stubborn ignorance represented by Protagoras here is offered by the German translation of ἀμαθία as ‘Unlehrbarkeit’, literally, ‘unteachableness’. This translation carries a richness lost to the English ‘ignorance’ insofar as the latter refers to a lack of knowledge, whereas the German carries with it the sense not only of lack, but also of resistance to learning as well. Cf. Krautz (1987, 131).

13 Gonzalez has astutely commented on the absurdity of this point, as well as its force in undercutting Socrates’ art of measurement: “Are we really expected to believe that the coward runs away from battle because he does not realize just how incredibly pleasurable it is? Socrates, of course, is no more committed to this position than he is to hedonism. This is not to say that Socrates does not in some sense believe courage to be “knowledge of ta deina.” But Socrates interprets this knowledge in terms of the technē he has just induced the sophists to profess in order to expose the absurdity of such a technē. To teach me to be courageous without changing my desires … the sophists would have to teach me that the same pleasure I seek in running away from battle is, in fact, to be found in greater quantity by running into the battle. The sophists would truly be in possession of a remarkable skill if they could do that!” Sallis and Russon (2000, 138).

14 Cf. 354a.

15 Cf. 313a.
Works Cited


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