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RELYING ON YOUR OWN VOICE: AN UNSETTLED
RIVALRY OF MORAL IDEALS IN PLATO'S *PROTAGORAS*

CHARLES L. GRISWOLD, JR.

I

PLATO'S *Protagoras* is composed of three distinct frames. The outer frame consists in Socrates' brief discussion with an unnamed companion. The remainder of the *Protagoras* is willingly narrated by Socrates to the companion (and unnamed others), from memory of course, and apparently right after the main action. The inner frame consists in Socrates' dialogue with Hippocrates. Roused before dawn by the impetuous young man, Socrates leads Hippocrates to reflect on the wisdom of his enthusiastic desire to study with Protagoras. This is a classic and successful little example of Socratic dialogue. He then takes Hippocrates to meet Protagoras; the bulk of the dialogue—call it the innermost frame—consists in Socrates' exchanges with Protagoras. Hippocrates does not utter a word in this part of the dialogue, though it is initiated at his request and seems undertaken by Socrates for his benefit.

I use the word "exchanges" because one of the striking aspects of the innermost frame of the *Protagoras* is its failure as a philosophical dialogue. Indeed, a recurring issue in the exchanges concerns the desirability and character of a philosophical conversation. Protagoras does not want to have such a conversation, as he makes clear already at 331c; and on no less than five subsequent occasions, the same issue flares up.¹ The conversation keeps breaking down, not so much because of irreconcilable views about some thesis or other, but because the interlocutors seem to have irreconcilable views about the value of Socratic account giving as such. The fourth time this happens,

Correspondence to: Department of Philosophy, 745 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215-1401.

¹*Plato's Protagoras: A Socratic Commentary*, trans. Anthony F. Hubbard and Ellen S. Karnofsky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 333c-d, 333e, 334d-338e, 338e3-5, 348b-c. Throughout I have used this translation.

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Socrates literally gets up and prepares to walk out. He is restrained from doing so, and there ensues a lot of talk about procedures governing any further talk. While Socrates agrees to carry on, and Protagoras bows to the pressure, it immediately becomes clear once again that Protagoras is not interested in continuing on Socrates' terms. Protagoras simply is not convinced of the virtues of philosophical conversation, at least not given how Socrates conceives of that conversation. Indeed, he is explicit that he views this as a verbal contest, the prize being reputation.² For his part, Socrates implies (when narrating the day's events) that he regards his entry into Callias' house as being like Odysseus' descent into Hades.³ The gathering of the sophists is closed off from the sun, from what Socrates thinks of as true enlightenment.

Plato has structured the dialogue such that the breakdown of communication is its most salient and striking dramatic feature. The innermost frame exchange is also characterized by four other noteworthy features. First, a great deal of attention is given to the exegesis of a poem of Simonides. Socrates' exegesis is forced—hardly a model of fair literary criticism—and, in its length and in its mostly monological character, contradicts his own insistence on the importance of short exchanges. Indeed, in a passage to be examined in a moment, he turns around and rejects the entire project of providing such exegeses. All this seems to hinder the conversation. Second, a number of Socrates' arguments about the unity of the virtues are unpersuasive if not downright poor.⁴ His arguments often seem rhetorical. On other occasions, notably 351a, when it seems that Protagoras has offered a congenial point and has done so in good philosophical spirit, Socrates turns his back on it. In a way, the richest part of the innermost frame's dialogue consists, ironically, in Protagoras' justly renowned

²*Protagoras* 335a4–8.

³*Protagoras* 315c–e.

⁴For example, Socrates' argument for the unity of the virtues based on a relation of likeness (330e–331e) trades on different senses of "like," as noted by Christopher C. W. Taylor, *Plato: Protagoras*, translated with notes by C. C. W. Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 120. Socrates leads into the argument with a question that is so vague it is hard to know what it could mean ("is justice some thing or no thing at all?"; 330c1), with an underdetermined assertion of the self-predication of justice (330c4–5), and with a misleading treatment of "just" and "unjust" as contradictories rather than contraries (Taylor concludes: "the treatment of these pairs as contradictory pairs is thus fallacious"; 114). Socrates shifts to an argument from opposites at 332a in an effort to show that wisdom (*sophia*) and self-control (*sophrosyne*) are "the same thing" (333b4–5). But as Taylor shows, that argument "involved a slip between senses of 'opposite'"; 129.

"Great Speech." Even in responding to that brilliant performance, Socrates seems to decline a chance for continuing the discussion fruitfully. For he poses a question about the unity of the virtues, an issue of seemingly marginal importance to the speech and not obviously related to the challenge to which the speech is a response. Third, perhaps the most famous exchange concerns the hedonistic calculus, and a well-known point of disagreement about it centers on the question of responsibility for the argument. It is not entirely clear on first hearing whether or not Socrates affirms the governing equation of pleasure and the good, and yet that is a matter of the utmost importance. When a substantial argument is collaboratively set out, then, we are not initially sure whose voice speaks it. All this has been a source of significant frustration to readers of the *Protagoras*.⁵

Fourth, the dialogue ends with an unexpected reversal of positions, suggesting that the interlocutors have quite lost their way in the course of their unhappy exchanges. As Socrates puts it, if the outcome of the discussion had its own voice ("φωνή"), it would laugh at and reproach the two of them for their unintended flip-flops.⁶ Socrates then makes it clear that he is willing to have a real conversation about these matters; but the sort of *aporia* reached at the end of the *Protagoras* does not seem to be a particularly suggestive or fruitful one, not much of a basis for continued discussion. Protagoras declines the invitation to converse further, and Socrates leaves Callias' Institute of Advanced Sophistical Studies. Then, as mentioned, he meets his companion and narrates the story of the day's events, thereby publishing them.⁷

My point is that the bulk of the dialogue portrays a failed conversation between Protagoras and Socrates, and indeed that Plato structures things such that the desirability and character of conversation are themselves made salient questions. The battle between Socrates and Protagoras is markedly rhetorical, and therefore personal; it sometimes seems to have more to do with establishing superiority or mastery than with a collaborative pursuit of the truth. The collapse of genuine conversation is not unique, in Plato's oeuvre, to the *Protago-*

⁵ A typical reaction may be found in the preface to the Hubbard and Kariofsky translation: "[In the *Protagoras*] Socrates is, as always, the gadfly. But the gadfly is here somewhat waspish, temperamental, not always on solid ground, in short, not the totally admirable character of, say, the *Apology* or the *Crito* . . ."; xv. See also Scott R. Hemmenway's "Sophistry Exposed: Socrates on the Unity of Virtue in the *Protagoras*," *Ancient Philosophy* 16 (1996): 1-23.

⁶ *Protagoras* 361a.

ras. What makes this particular failure so interesting is that Socrates' interlocutor is a person of unquestionable intellectual brilliance and achievement. We would be tempted to call him a philosopher (at least if we have in mind the now familiar, academic sense of the term); though, notably, nobody in the dialogue—least of all Protagoras—disputes Socrates' characterization of him as a sophist. In some ways, his views are eerily similar to Socrates'—for example, the view that wisdom and knowledge are the more powerful force in human life, capable of ruling (*archein*) a person.⁸ Had his writings come down to us, Protagoras might be known as one of the greatest of the Greek thinkers.⁹ And this makes Protagoras' unwillingness to have a philosophical conversation with Socrates—not to mention Socrates' seeming departures from the norms of philosophical conversation—very interesting indeed.¹⁰

Why did Plato portray the philosopher's encounter with Protagoras as a failure, in particular, a failure of conversation? Is there a

⁷ With these four points in mind, consider Gregory Vlastos's spirited comments: "[Socrates] is not a wholly attractive figure in this dialogue. His irony . . . seems clumsy, heavy-handed here. His fulsome compliments to Protagoras, continued after they have lost all semblance of plausibility, become a bore. In his exegesis of the poet he turns into a practical joker, almost a clown. He is entitled to his opinion that looking to poets for moral instruction is like getting your music from the clever harlots who dance and play the flute for the stupid bourgeois. But why act out this dubious metaphor in a labored one-man charade, throwing in some philosophical edification on the side, as when he drags in (by a misplaced comma) his doctrine that no man sins voluntarily? And his handling of Protagoras is merciless, if not cruel"; *Protagoras*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, rev. Martin Ostwald (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), xxiv.

⁸ *Protagoras* 330a and 352b1–d3.

⁹ Granted, this point assumes a continuity between the Platonic treatments of Protagoras, and the historical person (and indeed between the two different Platonic treatments in the *Protagoras* and *Theaetetus*). But it seems safe to say that the Protagoras of the *Protagoras* has sufficiently much in common with that of the *Theaetetus* (where Protagoras is treated as the author of a treatise), and that with the historical character, to make my point.

¹⁰ One such departure is that just mentioned, namely, Socrates' long and forced exegesis of Simonides. An explanation of this, as well as of other such oddities in the dialogue (Socrates' seeming endorsement of the hedonism argument, for example), is offered by René Schaerer's "Le mécanisme de l'ironie dans ses rapports avec la dialectique," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 48 (1941): 181–209. Schaerer interprets Socrates as on occasion miming his interlocutor's position, in order to hold up the mirror the interlocutor (see pages 199 and 203 in particular). A less generous explanation would hold that Socrates has momentarily succumbed to the desire to beat Protagoras at his own game.

philosophical point embedded in the odd action of the innermost frame of the dialogue? I think that the answer to this last question is affirmative. To anticipate, the point is, broadly speaking, an ethical one; and in this sense, the *Protagoras* is indeed about ethics. The clash between Protagoras and Socrates embodies a deep disagreement about moral ideals, a disagreement that goes so deep as to condition the possibility of their carrying on philosophical discussion about the disagreement. It is not really a disagreement either within philosophy or between philosophy and a non- (or, anti-) theoretical outlook. It is not, at least initially, a disagreement about the unity of the virtues, though it is connected with that topic. It would be more accurate to say that the disagreement concerns the rival virtues of philosophical theorizing and sophisticated but humanistic theorizing, and as such that the disagreement hinges on broadly ethical considerations.

I cannot here offer a comprehensive interpretation of the *Protagoras*. I shall instead focus on a relatively neglected passage which takes place at a decisive moment in the exchange between Socrates and Protagoras, namely just after the competing exegeses of Simonides' poem and just before the renewed attempt at dialogue represented by the hedonism section.¹¹ The passage provides commentary on the difficulties they are having in conducting a philosophical conversation, suggests a diagnosis of the root cause of these difficulties by means of the rich metaphor of the voice (the word crops up repeatedly in the dialogue), and prescribes a particular conception of rational inquiry. The passage suggests that at the heart of the breakdown of conversation that is the *Protagoras*' central drama lies an unsettled rivalry of moral ideals. I shall argue that the ideals may be understood as different interpretations of what self-rule, or autonomy, come to.

II

Relying on Your Own Voice: "Protagoras" 347c-348a. The Simonides section of the dialogue is a result of the agreement, reached after some multilateral negotiations, as to procedures for continuing the discussion. The idea is that Protagoras will first ask questions, and Socrates will answer in such a way as to show how one answers questions well (that is, with short answers). Then Protagoras will be

¹¹ *Protagoras* 347c-348a.

similarly accountable to Socrates. Having been dragged into this agreement, Protagoras chooses a set piece, on the grounds that “the greatest mark of erudition [*paideia*] in a man is his skill at discussing verses; that is to say, his ability to discriminate what is sound from what is unsound in a poet’s writings, and to give a reasoned account in reply to questions.”¹² This is supposed to continue the topic of virtue, but “transferred to the context of poetry.”¹³ As already indicated, Socrates soon violates the agreement, by giving an extremely long answer—or rather, his own lengthy interpretation—of the poem.

Immediately after his own exegetical tour de force, Socrates argues that the entire project of explaining poetry is unworthy of serious people and that, by implication, Protagoras’ view of the greater part of liberal education is vulgar and mistaken. Let me quote the key passage at length, as it is the central focus of the present essay:

Intellectual discourse [*dialegesthai*] on poetry, it seems to me, is very like the drinking parties of common unsophisticated types who, because of their inability to provide their own voices or their own conversation while they drink—such is their lack of education—bid up the price of flute-girls, and pay large fees to hire the extraneous voice to compensate for their own lack of conversation. But when companions are well-bred [*kaloï k’agathoi*] and educated you won’t find flute-girls, dancing girls or female acrobats: they are capable of entertaining themselves by the use of their own voices, without silly fun and games of that sort, taking turns at speaking and listening in good order even after they have drunk deeply. So it should be in the case of gatherings like this, with men of the sort most of us claim to be; there is no need for an extraneous voice or for poets, who cannot be asked to explain their meaning, while the vulgar introduce them into their conversations and offer varying explanations of a poet’s meaning, since they are discussing a subject in which they aren’t open to refutation. No, they leave such debates alone and provide each other with their own entertainment through the medium of their own discourse, testing and being tested by each other. Such are the people you and I should emulate [*mimeisthai*], in my view: we should set aside the poets and hold discourse directly with one another, putting ourselves to the test of truth.¹⁴

Socrates here sketches an ideal and tells us to model ourselves on it. The ideal is that of a person who relies on his or her own voice (strikingly, “φωνή” is used five times in this short passage), and whose self-reliance is manifested in the capacity for philosophical conversation, understood as the giving and receiving of a logos such that both opin-

¹² *Protagoras* 338e7–339a3.

¹³ *Protagoras* 339a5–6.

¹⁴ *Protagoras* 347c3–348a6.

ions about the truth and the interlocutors are tested. Interestingly, the passage relies heavily on reflexive pronouns. This linguistic fact underlines the idea that resources for discussion are drawn from within oneself through one's own efforts, thanks to reason's ability to form a coherent pattern of questions and answers. The pronouns in this passage, as well as the emphasis on voice, assume a presence and availability of the self to itself. The sort of person worthy of our respect will cultivate the self's grasp of itself. I want to argue that Socrates is oriented by this general ideal in such a way that philosophical conversation is its paradigmatic expression, while Protagoras has a very different understanding of what it would mean to have one's own voice. His understanding of the character of admirable self-possession leads him to avoid Socratic *dialegesthai*.

The last clause of the last line quoted might also be translated "to make trial of the truth and ourselves." The ambiguity of this formulation is echoed by shifting statements of the matter elsewhere in the *Protagoras*.¹⁵ Why should testing "me and you" have anything to do with getting at the truth of the matter under examination? While I will not attempt to answer that question here, the view I am working toward is that Socrates tries to get Protagoras to say what he thinks in order to force him to acquire a stake in the continuation and outcome of philosophical dialogue. Only so will Protagoras come to place value where it ought to be placed—on his own self understood in a certain way, in short—and only then will his outlook become philosophical and worthy of admiration.

Through his elaborate if forced exegesis of Simonides, Socrates has shown that he can outdo Protagoras at his own game, and in the passage quoted he has declared that the game is not worth the candle. It is worth repeating that Socrates is disputing Protagoras' core methods (speech giving) and conceptions (that the "the greatest mark of erudition [*paideia*] in a man is his skill at discussing verses"). This

¹⁵ At 331c Socrates says he wants Protagoras to take responsibility for his views because he wants to examine "me and you" since "I believe that the question will best be examined" in this way. At 333c we are told that in Socratic exchange the given thesis is tested, but perhaps also the interlocutors. At 348a2 he speaks of making a test of and being tested by each other. The relation between testing the interlocutor, and testing the soundness of the thesis explored, is unclear. For one well-known discussion, see G. Vlastos's "The Socratic Elenchus," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983): 27–58. Also see pages 59–74 for the response by R. Kraut as well as the partial recantation in Vlastos's "Afterthoughts."

comes to a harsh criticism of Protagoras. It is not entirely surprising, then, that immediately after our passage about the virtues of relying on one's own voice, Protagoras is described as yet again unwilling to continue the discussion, and only the application of the communal force of opinion induces him to go another round with Socrates. Quite obviously he is simply not persuaded by the thrust of Socrates' critique or recommendations. As already indicated, his unwillingness forms part of an established pattern, just as does Socrates' insistence on discussion (*dialegesthai*). If Protagoras is rightly accused here of failing to rely on or provide his own voice, then that is a failure he exhibits throughout. As the passage also indicates, to speak in one's own voice is closely linked to a receptiveness and responsiveness to the voices of others; self-reliance and accountability to others are here presented as two sides of the same coin. I will return to this point in a moment.

But what does it mean to fail to rely on one's own voice? In what sense might Protagoras be said to exhibit this failure? Initially, the suggestion that Protagoras does not rely on his own voice seems unfair, even bizarre. He has just been relying on his own powers of interpretation in providing an exegesis of Simonides, and indeed the specific issue treated in the poem, namely, human excellence, is apposite to the discussion. He is perfectly willing to defend his interpretation, and thus be accountable for it. He thinks it important that one "reply to questions" about one's exegesis.¹⁶ He certainly claims this interpretation as his own. Still further, in narrating his Great Speech, Protagoras spoke in his own voice, answering Socrates' challenge point by point and giving every indication of taking responsibility for his account. Later in the dialogue, Protagoras sketches his view of the relativity of value terms such as "good";¹⁷ this certainly looks like his own theory. He has worked out his intellectual position. He has students, and a teaching to convey; he charges for it and must certainly see it—whatever it is exactly—as a distinctive teaching of which he is the author. He himself indicates that it differs from the sorts of things the other sophists supply.¹⁸ Finally, Socrates explicitly comments on Protagoras' mesmerizing voice ("φωνή").¹⁹ Protagoras has a notable and indeed famous voice. What then is Socrates getting at in suggesting that Protagoras fails to rely on his own voice?

¹⁶ *Protagoras* 339a.

¹⁷ *Protagoras* 334a–b.

¹⁸ *Protagoras* 318e.

¹⁹ *Protagoras* 315a8–b2.

Socrates dismisses the exegesis of verses on the grounds that it is impossible to decide ultimately whose interpretation is right.²⁰ This might provide one answer to our question. Yet the open endedness of interpretation applies equally to the interpretation by others of what he says and vice versa, as well as to the reader's interpretation of Plato, and so forth. Socrates' point that the poets speak but "cannot be asked to explain their meaning" is somehow more relevant.²¹ And yet the poets may certainly have a distinctive voice, and may rely on themselves quite admirably in originating their poems. Indeed, one poem may be intended by its author as a response to an other's production; for example, Socrates interprets Simonides as attempting to refute Pittacus, that is, as engaging in an exchange with Pittacus.²² But Socrates' point is presumably something like the following: the poets cannot account for claims made in their poems in the particular sense that they cannot sustain a give-and-take conversation about what it is their poems seek to establish. To the extent that they fail in this regard, Socrates seems to be saying, they have not appropriated their utterances or made them their own, they do not have their voices properly. They lack proper self-possession. A voice that cannot explain itself philosophically, that cannot respond to a certain type of Socratic question, is somehow extraneous to its nominal possessor, and therefore will not help anyone else rely on his or her own voice. In the standard game of exegesis, Socrates is suggesting, neither the exegete nor the author whose works are explained can be questioned or refuted. Neither has his or her own voice or helps the other to find his or hers.

It seems to me that what is essential here is not the conduct of the discourse through short answers to pointed questions, even though that mode of conversing is paradigmatic. For on occasion other modes of discourse may meet the envisioned standard of self-reliance and proprietorship. And the criterion of a discourse being one's own is not that of originality, nor whether it focuses on explaining what another has said or written, nor whether it precludes multiple interpretations. Thus all the voices Socrates adopts in this dialogue—including his lengthy interpretation of Simonides' poem, his provisional adoption of the position of the many in the hedonism argument, and indeed

²⁰ See *Protagoras* 348e6–7: "no particular interpreter can be refuted."

²¹ *Protagoras* 347e3–4.

²² *Protagoras* 343b–c. Both Simonides' and Pittacus' "φωνή" (language or dialect) is noted, and Prodicus is called upon to interpret the meaning of their words (*onomata*).

his public narration of the bulk of the dialogue—could in principle meet the standard to which he is holding Protagoras. What Socrates seems to be driving at is the idea that our discourse—whatever shape it may take—should express a certain moral ideal. That ideal involves a cluster of related concepts, namely those of self-sufficiency or self-reliance, responsibility, and accountability. Self-sufficiency, in that the speaker does not rely without questioning on what is conveyed by the voices of others but rather relies on what passes the test of one's own examination; accountability, in that one holds oneself to standards of reason giving in response to questions; responsibility, in that one assumes the burden of standing by or abandoning one's views in accordance with what reason indicates. These virtues express the ideal of care for self qua soul, a point to which I shall return when discussing the inner frame of the dialogue (the exchange with Hippocrates). To meet the requirements of this ideal is somehow to become the true speaker—or if one may so put it, the true author—of one's views.

Protagoras fails to measure himself by this ideal. He adheres to a different ideal of self-rule through knowledge,²³ and his resistance to Socratic dialogue would seem to be one of its consequences. The details of Protagoras' life (as here portrayed) embody that rejection. In Socrates' unforgettable depiction of the scene at Callias' house, Protagoras is walking up and down the portico lecturing to students who flank and trail him; it is a perfectly choreographed ballet in which Protagoras' students work hard to stay out of his way. Protagoras' authoritative presence could not be more clearly indicated. I would infer that Protagoras speaks without looking into the eyes of his students, declaims without questioning, and voices his views without demanding that his students hold him accountable for them through questioning. His students are eager and yet passive consumers of whatever it is that he is selling. Socrates does not tell us what Protagoras was saying to them, but as already noted he does remark upon Protagoras' enchanting "φωνή."²⁴ It is a voice that lets Protagoras

²³ *Protagoras* 352b1–d3.

²⁴ Socrates says that Protagoras, like Orpheus, enchants his followers "with his voice, while they follow after his voice spellbound" (315a8–b2; at 316a1–2 Socrates also remarks upon Prodicus' "φωνή"). Socrates does not hesitate to break up the scene, thereby establishing himself as independent of Protagoras' voice: he steps in front of the parade and, without so much as a greeting, tells Protagoras that he and Hippocrates have come to see him. I note that Callias' doorkeeper hears Socrates' and Hippocrates' voices through the door and, assuming by their voices or conversation that they too are sophists, initially refuses to let them in (314c–d).

make himself public but not accountable to others. The *mathemata* conveyed by the sophists are, Socrates earlier remarked to Hippocrates, like commodities, and their purveyors like merchants.²⁵ The externality to self of sophistic discourses is implicit in their commodification. Protagoras confirms this picture of the sophist as merchant.

In observing how Protagoras teaches, it would be natural to say that he lacks a real interest in his students considered as individuals; by which we might mean, that he does not really care about them in a way that would foster their growth as self-critical and independent thinkers who will, by virtue of their improved critical abilities, be able to lead their lives more responsibly. This mirrors, we might continue, Protagoras' refusal of the invitation to discourse Socratically, and suggests that Protagoras fails to place the right weight on the education that a conversation with Socrates might foster. By contrast, Socrates explicitly comments on the benefits he might derive from conversing with Protagoras.²⁶ For Socrates, Protagoras has not appropriated or possessed his own voice in the right way, cannot truly rely on his voice, and consequently is not interested in the voices of others when they would examine his.²⁷

These quite natural judgments may help refine the underlying assumptions of Socrates' ideal of self-reliance. Socrates wants one to have or possess oneself such that one recognizes what is of supreme value and directs oneself accordingly. A view of that which is most valuable in oneself and most important to make fully one's own (by directing one's life in accordance with it), is one half of what Socrates is here invoking. It is a question of identifying, identifying with, and

²⁵ *Protagoras* 313d–e.

²⁶ *Protagoras* 348d–349a. It is striking that while Socrates stresses self-reliance, care for one's own soul, and the like, he genuinely cares for the souls of others (such as Hippocrates). By contrast, Protagoras emphasizes (in his Great Speech) sociality and cooperation, and elsewhere proclaims that "man is the measure of all things," cares little about the welfare of individual selves (it is inconceivable that he would take the kind of interest in Hippocrates that Socrates does). Socrates' care for self ties him more deeply to conversation and sociality than does Protagoras' humanistic outlook.

²⁷ It would be interesting to connect this point with Socrates' inner voice (*Phaedrus* 242c1). I note that in his Great Speech, Protagoras comments that humans began to articulate "φωνή" and names (*onomata*, 322a6), through their *technē*, very soon after receiving the goods stolen from the gods by Prometheus (the practical *technai* and fire). "φωνή" is, on this account, part of a list of useful tools we provide ourselves in an effort to survive. Protagoras' own voice—his rhetorical ability—would thus be, on his account, a highly developed deployment of this instrument.

fostering that which I most truly am. To talk in this way (as Socrates does especially in the Hippocrates section) is to take a view of what the good human life consists in; hence the link to what I have called a moral ideal. Socrates is also invoking a conception of reason—call it Socratic dialogue—as just that form of thinking that best allows us to discover and sustain our best selves so understood. Protagoras is not moved by this ideal or by its envisioned realization through *dialegesthai*, not because he is insufficiently intelligent to grasp it, but because he does not think it is an ideal, at least given how Socrates interprets it. His difference with Socrates is in this way an ethical one: he places value elsewhere, and conceives the discursive realization of that value very differently. From Socrates' standpoint, Protagoras' failure to rely on himself in the right way, and thus his failure to welcome *dialegesthai*, derives from a failure to value himself appropriately. For Protagoras, such an accusation has got to seem polemical to the extreme, for as already mentioned, by his own lights he does show self-reliance in developing his famous voice, his own theories, in listening and responding to others, and so forth.²⁸

Protagoras proudly tells us that the person who studies with him goes home every day improved, better at sound deliberation in domestic as well as public matters.²⁹ What good, Protagoras might ask in table-turning vein, will a student derive from studying with Socrates? The dialogue's inner frame—the Hippocrates section—provides us with a sense of the answer, and so with a clearer sense of the deep difference in ethical orientation that divides Protagoras and Socrates. Here we are provided with a link to a substantive ideal of the self to which Socrates is committed and which he takes the sophists, including Protagoras, to have rejected.

III

The Inner Frame: Socrates and Hippocrates. In this section of the dialogue, Plato shows us the step by step movement from the

²⁸ Protagoras nonetheless volunteers in his concluding words that he himself (Protagoras) is not a *kakos anthropos* (361e1), as though to acknowledge that his exchange with Socrates, and in particular his repeated unwillingness to engage in philosophical dialogue, has ethical implications about the sort of person it is admirable to be.

²⁹ *Protagoras* 318a and 318e5–319a2.

prephilosophical scene of Hippocrates' impetuous dissipation to Socratic philosophizing. This section demonstrates the genesis and perhaps justification of a mode of discourse and reflection in which Protagoras himself has no interest. In so doing, and in pointing to the commitments that underlie such discourse, this section is important to one's understanding of the *Protagoras*. What Protagoras is implicitly rejecting is developed, albeit in very abbreviated form, in the Hippocrates section. It should not be treated simply as "an edifying curtain-raiser to the elenctic drama it precedes."³⁰

Hippocrates at first appears as a take-charge sort of person whose loud voice is immediately recognizable,³¹ a person who knows what he wants and will not be deterred from getting it. But when faced with the simplest Socratic (yet non-Protagorean) questions, it turns out that he has not taken charge of the most important thing, namely himself. The implications of this seemingly banal point underlie Socrates' confrontation with Protagoras. For Socrates successfully leads Hippocrates to see that answers to certain questions are implicit in his (Hippocrates') passion to study with Protagoras, that these answers are in fact unclear or untenable, and that the questions must be raised and pursued if that which is of most value is to be preserved. The normative heart of the reasoning here lies in the idea that one must care above all for one's soul, that part of oneself being of supreme value.³² The soul is here spoken of as that which is most valuable one's own (one's "dearest possession," 314a1), most truly oneself, and hence that whose welfare one ought to take most seriously.³³ My soul is that which I fundamentally am; the cultivation of its virtues must thus be of the most profound importance to me, if I identify with that which is most deeply me. Thanks to this placing of value on oneself so understood, nurture of the soul becomes normative. The soph-

³⁰The quoted phrase is to be found in Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 116 n. 46.

³¹*Protagoras* 310b2-4; "φωνή" is used twice here.

³²*Protagoras* 313a-314a.

³³This idea is not, of course, unique to the *Protagoras*; compare *Republic* 443d-e, where Socrates speaks of that which is truly "one's own" and of possessing it rightly through self-rule by reason; and also *Gorgias* 482b7-c3 on the supreme importance of psychic unity. A deep problem, which I cannot begin to address here, concerns the relation between one's soul and the "I" that might (or might not) identify or value that soul. The difficulty is implicit in statements to the effect that I have a soul: is this "I" also part of the soul? The homunculus problem raises analogous questions.

ists advertise that their wares are good for the psyche; are they? This leads to Hippocrates' culminating and excellent question which is also his last recorded utterance in the *Protagoras*: on what is the soul nourished?³⁴

Protagoras improves you day by day, but does he encourage you to think about what becoming better could really mean?³⁵ Socrates implies that Protagoras teaches you how to become better given a conception of betterment you have already let yourself be persuaded by. Socrates makes you better in part by encouraging you to think about what it would mean to become better. Actively possessing what one most values in oneself requires, on this latter account, reasoning that pursues normative questions about what is best for the agent qua soul. As Socrates puts it, one must conduct oneself not as an uncritical consumer of teachings (*mathemata*) that claim to nourish the soul, but as a physician of the soul capable of telling which teachings are in fact good to consume.³⁶ Self-governance requires philosophical reason. There is no evidence whatever in this dialogue that Protagoras would have such a conversation with Hippocrates or anybody else, that he would raise the sorts of questions which Socrates has just forced Hippocrates to confront. When Socrates later insists that we model ourselves on people who rely on their own voices, he has in mind, I suggest, the sort of person capable of self-governance in accordance with philosophical reason. In a preliminary but revealing way, his discussion with Hippocrates shows us what self-governance so understood would entail. In particular, it would entail reflection on ends and not just means, on whether the objects of one's desire are desirable and worthy of being desired, and so on what those objects (in the present case, sophistry and its teachings) truly consist in. Hence it is not simply a question of my soul being that which I most truly am, but of my being most truly a soul

³⁴ *Protagoras* 313c6–7.

³⁵ I note in passing that the subject of the much disputed Simonides poem seems fundamentally to consist in just this question as to what it would mean to become good (*agathos*). Initially, therefore, it might seem that Protagoras is interested in exactly this question as to how we become better. In one sense this is true, as his claims to make his students better indicate; at the same time, I would argue that his interest in the poem's theme is motivated not by a philosophical impulse but by the desire to show off his rhetorical powers.

³⁶ *Protagoras* 313d–e.

whose welfare is examined and furthered by reason, by the proper exercise of one's voice. Therein lies proper care for self.

What would matter most for such a person is not so much the length of one's speeches, but the purposes to which one puts them. The stance should be that of the physician of the soul; and to discourse with this ideal in mind is to make every effort to ensure that one espouses only views that one would be willing to consider part of oneself qua rational soul, views that, on reflection one would be willing to live with and by. It turns out that the discourse most appropriate to this purpose is *dialegesthai*.³⁷ The form of one's discourse matters, then, but only in light of a deeper ethical goal that ought to govern discoursing.

It seems extraordinary that Hippocrates—an impetuous young man untutored in philosophy—should so easily be led even to an initial recognition of fundamental points of which the great Protagoras cannot be persuaded. But Hippocrates possesses two qualities that Protagoras seems to lack.³⁸ The first is brought out by Socrates' comment that Hippocrates' passionate insistence on immediately seeing Protagoras shows a certain *andreia* or manliness,³⁹ and that he wanted to test Hippocrates' strength (*rhome*).⁴⁰ At a minimum, *andreia* makes one stand up for something, be prepared to sacrifice something for one's view. It is a necessary condition of courage, though not the same as courage. Protagoras shows little of such spiritedness in his exchanges with Socrates. Further, to make a long story short, Protagoras cannot account for courage: he avoids the term in his Great Speech, and is subsequently cornered by Socrates on the question of the relation of courage and knowledge—a question that explicitly brings up the matter of what truly is and is not to be feared and so, by implication, of what is and is not worth standing for.⁴¹ To

³⁷ Why is that so? I offer an answer in "Plato's Metaphilosophy: Why Plato Wrote Dialogues," in *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings*, ed. C. Griswold (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), 143–67. Of course, in order rationally to care for the soul appropriately, one must know what it is.

³⁸ It is not irrelevant to note that Protagoras is here portrayed as both highly successful and elderly, and thus perhaps as established in his ways, while Hippocrates is young. But this does not suffice as an explanation of Hippocrates' superior educability.

³⁹ *Protagoras* 310d3.

⁴⁰ *Protagoras* 311b1.

⁴¹ *Protagoras* 360d4–5.

entertain such a discussion about what it is most valuable to possess is to go down the path Socrates has led Hippocrates.⁴²

This leads me to Hippocrates' second notable characteristic. When Socrates asks him (just as the light is dawning) whether he would be ashamed to present himself to the Greek world as a sophist, Hippocrates blushes and says yes.⁴³ By contrast, as Socrates notes just after the passage on relying on one's own voice, Protagoras openly presents himself to the Greek world as a sophist.⁴⁴ Hippocrates' susceptibility to a sense of shame about this matter indicates that he identifies himself with certain values that decent people profess. The point I want to suggest—I can do no more than that here—is that Protagoras' views about self-betterment are oriented not by what people profess but by what they, in their ordinary moments, pursue. He no longer finds that orientation in any way shameful; but Hippocrates does, for he intuitively recognizes that Protagoras' outlook somehow undermines norms of moral evaluation and honor to which we ordinarily hold ourselves and one another accountable. Hippocrates' susceptibility to shame is linked to his surprisingly rapid recognition of the point of Socrates' questions concerning what in us is most worth our fostering.⁴⁵

Protagoras' entire intellectual outlook places value elsewhere—namely, to make another story painfully short—on comfortable self-preservation, worldly success, and virtues in the sense of the qualities of character required for efficacious promotion of these goods. This is not to deny that he agrees with Socrates that we ought to rule ourselves through reason and that knowledge is most valuable. It is a question of what “ourselves” and “reason” mean. In his Great Speech, he takes the standpoint of the detached theorist who, like a sort of so-

⁴² Ironically, it is Protagoras who introduces the notion of courage in support of his view that the virtues are not one (229e), thereby handing Socrates a crucial opening.

⁴³ *Protagoras* 312a.

⁴⁴ *Protagoras* 348e4–349a4.

⁴⁵ I realize that Protagoras introduces the idea of shame in his Great Speech, and that he refers to shame at 333c1–3 and 352c8–d3. But none of these references vitiates the point I am making, for while Protagoras certainly sees that shame is of great social utility, he also sees himself as superior to the general run of humankind, thanks to his detached and synoptic theoretical standpoint (see also 317a4–6, 353a7–8 for his disparaging comments about the many, and 328b for his claim to be a superior teacher of virtue). He is quite explicitly not ashamed to present himself as a sophist, contrary to current convention.

cial anthropologist, studies the *polis* and determines what virtues promote its welfare.⁴⁶ His theoretical standpoint is that of the demythologizing and enlightened social scientist. This standpoint, and its practical advantages to those who endorse it, may constitute the heart of what he teaches his students.⁴⁷ If my interpretation is right, this comes to a deep level ethical orientation; Protagoras is, in this sense, a teacher of virtue. But this standpoint is at odds with that of a citizen of a *polis* who believes in its virtues, takes its ideals and myths to be true, and is prepared to die for the community he or she loves. Protagoras could never deliver, in his own voice and as a citizen rooted in a particular community, anything like Pericles' funeral oration. Similarly, Protagoras' third person perspective is at odds with that of the

⁴⁶ Protagoras' detachment is embodied in the fact that he floats from city to city, as market conditions, prudence, and inclination recommend, selling his teachings to those wealthy enough to afford them, a gaggle of tongue-tied admirers in tow. He is not rooted in any one tradition or set of conventional moral ideals. His apparent cosmopolitanism comes to the same as his detachment from standing moral ideals; he is moved by the prospect of acquiring ever more goods of a certain mundane sort—money, reputation, long life. (Mitchell Miller has pointed out to me that since Protagoras recognizes nothing higher than the human, the *polis* floats free as a self-contained context in which to aim for power and success; for what else is there than those aims?) One can understand the suspicion with which ordinary citizens seem to have regarded Protagoras. That some interpreters have seen him as a benevolent democratic humanist is a tribute to his genius for persuasive self-presentation.

⁴⁷ The Protagoras of the *Theaetetus* is here consistent with that of the *Protagoras*. In the *Theaetetus* Protagoras is made to say that "I certainly do not deny the existence of both wisdom and of wise men: far from it. But the man whom I call wise is the man who can change the appearances—the man who in any case where bad things both appear and are for one of us, works a change and makes good things appear and be for him"; and "Whatever in any city is regarded as just and admirable is just and admirable, in that city and for so long as that convention maintains itself; but the wise man replaces each pernicious convention by a wholesome one, making this both be and seem just. Similarly the professional teacher who is able to educate his pupils on these lines is a wise man, and is worth his large fees to them"; *Theaetetus*, trans. Margaret J. Levett, rev. Myles Burnyeat, *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 166d4–7 and 167c4–d2. At 167a Protagoras draws an analogy between the sophist and the physician, and at *Protagoras* 357e3 Socrates says that Protagoras "here claims to be the physician." Protagoras' conception of therapy is obviously at odds with Socrates' conception of philosophy as the true therapy or medicine for the soul (*Protagoras* 313c1, 313d4, 313e1, and context; compare the analogy between medicine and (philosophical) rhetoric at *Phaedrus* 270b).

agent who seeks to persuade citizens to live up to their professed ideals of virtue (as Socrates does here and elsewhere).⁴⁸

To adopt a Protagorean perspective is therefore to detach oneself from professed moral ideals, to become distanced from the sort of concern that (for Socrates) ultimately matters most, and instead to concentrate on how to manage self and others in such a way as to become “δυνατώτατος” (most able, powerful) in both deed and word in civic matters.⁴⁹ Paradoxically, Protagoras’ standpoint is superficially continuous with that of the natural prephilosophical outlook, but in fact is quite profoundly disruptive of it. Socrates’ standpoint seems in its zetetic and aporetic aspects disruptive of a healthy everyday life, but in fact is continuous with the general assumptions about value implicit in that outlook’s professed ideals of virtue. Protagoras is a radical masked as an ally of tradition and of the ordinary person.⁵⁰ Socrates conserves essential features of ethical life—just those features, for example, that make courage a virtue we aspire to possess—and then insists on clear philosophical articulation of these features. The inability of Socrates and Protagoras to agree even on how to converse with each other is therefore not surprising, for they are governed by incompatible views about self-governance.

It does not follow that they are unable to converse at all; after all, they do manage several exchanges. Immediately after our central passage, Protagoras is portrayed as being dragged back into a discussion of the unity of the virtues. In order to refute Protagoras’ thesis that courage is absolutely different from the other virtues, Socrates leads him into the well known analysis of pleasure, the good, and self-governance. The argument is far too complex to examine in detail here, but I do want to concur with those interpreters who hold that

⁴⁸ Socrates said just that when enjoining his auditors to be “men of the sort most of us claim to be” (347e1–2). See also *Apology* 29d–30b; and Alcibiades’ confession that he is deeply ashamed of the fact that when away from Socrates he does nothing about his way of life, contrary to Socrates’ injunctions, and instead cares about the demos (*Symposium* 216b–c). That Protagoras and Pericles were reputed to be friends does not refute my point. I do not claim that Socrates could himself deliver Pericles’ speech; his own views about Pericles are complex, as the *Menexenus* parody and the *Gorgias* comments about Pericles (515d–516d) indicate.

⁴⁹ *Protagoras* 319a1–2.

⁵⁰ But for reasons of political prudence (of which Protagoras explicitly shows awareness), he is impeded from saying openly what it is that he teaches, in spite of his avowal of frankness at 316d–317c. That avowal itself is a prudent rhetorical move. His rhetoric was nonetheless effective enough to keep him relatively safe; Socrates’ rhetoric ultimately failed in that regard.

Socrates is here getting Protagoras to spell out his (Protagoras') position, rather than articulating his (Socrates') own.⁵¹ It is a dialectical or ad hominem argument which is then turned on Protagoras in order to refute the thesis that courage is absolutely different from the other virtues. As the consequences of Socrates' brilliant rhetorical maneuver becomes clear, Protagoras once again begins to resist participating in the discussion, and eventually refuses to answer any further.⁵²

Along the way it has become apparent that for Protagoras we ought to rule ourselves through wisdom understood as the "art of measurement,"⁵³ that is, as the *techne* that allows us to master the power of appearances over us such that we preserve our safety and maximize life and the good (that is, pleasure).⁵⁴ For the assembled sophists, to possess this art or science is to exercise proper self-governance. The kind of pleasure they have in mind is not explicitly stated; I have already suggested that for Protagoras the relevant pleasure is that which would be experienced by one who successfully mastered the art he teaches, namely, the art of becoming "most capable in both deed and word" in managing domestic as well as civic affairs.⁵⁵ Such success would presumably bring with it wealth and wide reputation, such as Protagoras himself here enjoys. In his discussion with Hippocrates, by contrast, Socrates is leading him to reflect critically about whether pleasure understood along such lines ought to be our goal. Hippocrates' question "on what is the soul nourished?" is precisely the sort of question that would lead to critical assessment of the nature of

⁵¹ Charles Kahn, among others, argues that Socrates never explicitly adopts the core premise of the hedonism argument (the identification of the good with the pleasant) as his own. See his *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 240. While Protagoras initially resists what he takes to be its core premise, he does so on ambiguous grounds of safety (351d3). By 354c3 he agrees in his own voice with the many that there is no criterion other than pleasure and pain on the basis of which something is called good. At 358a4–6, Socrates reports that all the others present agree with the hedonism argument as it has been set out, and thus with the view that "the pleasant is good, the painful bad," and this is taken by the assembled sophists to establish an identity of the pleasant and the good. This suggests that the hedonism argument articulates a view that is in fact held or implied by the basic outlook shared by Protagoras and the other sophists present. For useful discussion, see also Marina McCoy, "Protagoras on Human Nature, Wisdom, and the Good: The Great Speech and the Hedonism of Plato's *Protagoras*," *Ancient Philosophy* 18 (1998): 21–39.

⁵² *Protagoras* 360e.

⁵³ *Protagoras* 356d4.

⁵⁴ *Protagoras* 356e2–4 and 357a5–b3.

⁵⁵ *Protagoras* 319a1–2.

human excellence or virtue; but as presented in this dialogue, Protagoras is disinclined to examine this or any other topic philosophically.

My point is not the metaphilosophical one that their positions are incommensurable in principle, with the result that no rational adjudication between them is possible. As already emphasized, Protagoras has the intelligence to engage in rational discussion—indeed, this is one reason his dislike of Socratic *dialegesthai* is so striking. Protagoras has a strong aversion to Socratic *dialegesthai* because he does not share in the moral ideal that motivates the dialogical search for truth. Protagoras' picture of the admirable and successful human being makes the picture of the Socratic inquirer seem at best otiose, and at worse self-destructive (because both imprudent and not guided by an accurate understanding of pleasures of a certain kind of fulfillment).⁵⁶

The *Protagoras* is a failed dialogue in several ways: first, and most strikingly, in that the conversation between Protagoras and Socrates keeps breaking down; second, in that so little progress gets made in real philosophical examination of key philosophical issues such as the unity of the virtues; third, in that the interlocutors end up espousing theses at odds with their respective starting points, something for which the discussion would reproach them if it had its own voice;⁵⁷ finally, in that the topics are not examined in due order (they first ought to have considered what virtue is, and only then discuss whether it is teachable).⁵⁸ Protagoras declines to start the discussion over from the beginning—namely, by attempting to answer the question “what is virtue?”—and Socrates takes his leave.

⁵⁶In the *Theaetetus*, by contrast, Protagoras seems entirely amenable to philosophical discussion, and indeed is made (by Socrates) to reprimand Socrates and Theodorus for proceeding polemically rather than in the spirit of genuine (one might say, Socratic) inquiry, through question and answer if that is the preferred method (166c and 167d5–168b2). This “philosophical” Protagoras is, however, the instructive projection of Socrates' own philosophical spirit. Were Protagoras himself present the discussion would presumably have gone very differently. I note that at 179e3–180b3 Theodorus complains that it is impossible to have a conversation with any of the Heraclitean or Homeric tribe; Socrates goes on to argue that partisans of the theory of flux, such as Protagoras, could not even state their theory coherently (183a–c; compare Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 4.1007b18–25 and 1009a6–15 for the view that followers of Protagoras must reject the principle of noncontradiction). If the argument is sound, then the *Theaetetus* points to a reason why it is impossible to converse with Protagoras that goes beyond anything said in the *Protagoras*.

⁵⁷*Protagoras* 361a3–c2.

⁵⁸*Protagoras* 361c2–d6.

This is not to say that the *Protagoras* is a failure so far as the education of the reader goes; if my interpretation is at all right, then the dialogue's failures have much to teach the reader. In this respect, among others, the dialogue is a success at the level of Plato's conversation with us. It must nonetheless be admitted that because of the various failures of conversation Plato here depicts, the reader is left in the somewhat frustrating situation of piecing together an explanation of the central drama of the dialogue (namely, the failures of conversations) from relatively meager materials (such as Socrates' exchange with Hippocrates, and our central passage quoted in section 2 above). As another step in that partly speculative enterprise, I will conclude by fleshing out a little bit further the character of Socrates' moral ideal and of Protagoras' disinclination to discuss its virtues.

IV

Concluding Comments: Autonomy, and the Philosopher's Spartan Genealogy. In insisting that we rely on our own rather than extraneous voices, Socrates clearly recommends that we pursue a life shaped by our own reason. This recommendation embodies a view of self-reliance, independence, of the self's capacity to draw upon and govern itself. Keeping in mind the reflexive pronouns of our central passage, and with awareness of the potential for misunderstanding, we may say that Socrates is recommending the virtues of autonomy.⁵⁹ While Protagoras too is an advocate of self-rule through reason—this is part of the burden of the hedonism argument—he does not see the value of autonomy understood along Socratic lines. From Socrates' standpoint, rational self-rule as Protagoras understands it is heteronomous. To be sure, each of their views might satisfy the requirements

⁵⁹ See *Protagoras* 347b–348a. My use of the term “autonomy” here finds its inspiration in Vlastos's comment that “The concept of moral autonomy never surfaces in Plato's Socratic dialogues—which does not keep it from being the deepest thing in their Socrates, the strongest of his moral concerns”; *Socrates*, 44. For some of the phrasing of the first sentence of this paragraph I am indebted to Julia Annas's comment that “In the central books [of the *Republic*] we find a long discussion of the autonomous life of reason, the life which is shaped by your own reason rather than somebody else's imposed from outside.” From Annas's unpublished commentary on M. Burnyeat's Tanner lectures (commentary and lectures delivered at Harvard University on December 10–12, 1997). The word “*autonomos*” is not a post-Platonic invention, as is shown by *Antigone* 821 (consider too Thucydides' use of various forms of the word).

of autonomy understood in a common-sense meaning of the term as "independence from others." But the self-rule each is claiming depends on competing notions of self-governance through reason. To avoid another misunderstanding, it should be said that neither Socrates' nor Protagoras' conception of self-rule would satisfy the requirements of Kantian autonomy. The character and goals of Protagorean self-rule (as unfolded in the hedonism section, among other passages) show why it qualifies as a heteronomous view for Kant. But the Socratic notion of autonomy too would be heteronomous because in the end it subjects self-legislation or self-governance to knowledge of the Forms, that is, to a substantive metaphysical view. This is not a connection Socrates even begins to make here (the Forms are not mentioned in the *Protagoras*); how could he, given that Protagoras so stubbornly resists engaging in the sort of conversation that could lead to a meaningful examination of reason's dependence on something like the Forms?⁶⁰ Socrates' argumentative strategy here must be of an entirely different order.

In the course of his exegesis of Simonides immediately preceding the passage about relying on one's own voice, Socrates proposes the seemingly bizarre view that Sparta is a true home of philosophy. Just as Protagoras spoke of Simonides and many other great (and not so great) figures as concealed sophists, so Socrates speaks of the Spartans as true, though concealed, philosophers.⁶¹ Viewed in light of my discussion, there is a point to Socrates' joking proposal. For the philosopher embodies something analogous to the Spartans' famous self-reliance and independence.⁶²

⁶⁰ For a recent comparison of Platonic and Kantian conceptions of moral agency, see Christine Korsgaard, "Self-Constitution in the Ethics of Plato and Kant," *Journal of Ethics* 3 (1999): 1-29. Her remarks about Plato are built on *Republic* 443d-e, and entirely omit the role that knowledge of the Forms plays in Plato's conception of "self-constitution" or "autonomy." Her argument that Plato and Kant agree that "integrity is the metaphysical essence of morality" and that "Platonic justice, and Kant's categorical imperative, are internal standard [sic] for actions", would have to be qualified in light of the role Socrates gives the Forms in *Republic* 5-7; Korsgaard, 28 and 29.

⁶¹ *Protagoras* 342d and context.

⁶² Of course, the Spartans are also laconic (as Socrates here points out), in contrast with Protagoras' penchant for long speeches. In identifying himself with the Spartans, Socrates is rather humorously underlining his allegiance to short dicta. At 342b1 and c5, Socrates uses the term "sophists" to refer to the (Spartan) philosophers; while he undoubtedly means "wise men," his use of the word in this context pointedly suggests to the audience that the true "sophist" is none other than the philosopher.

Socrates could argue about this ideal with Protagoras only if Protagoras were already prepared to accept it; for *dialegesthai* is itself paradigmatic of living in accordance with the ideal. Unlike Protagoras, Hippocrates is sufficiently susceptible to the ideal to be Socratically educable.⁶³ This suggests that Socrates is incapable of compelling Protagoras, through force of argument alone, to accept the ideal and the standards of discourse it involves. Socrates can throw a lot of sand in the gears, so long as Protagoras is willing to talk at all; but he ultimately cannot persuade someone, however intelligent and discursive, to philosophize (in his sense of the term) in a sustained way, unless that person already is prepared to commit to a certain view of what is ethically valuable for a human being. This in turn suggests that Socrates cannot, through force of argument alone, justify to someone his own stance about what fundamentally matters unless his interlocutor is already disposed to Socrates' base line view of what matters. Protagoras is not so disposed.

We now see why Protagoras, might coherently resist the claim that he simply has to answer Socrates on Socrates' terms. Or to be more precise, Protagoras could coherently resist answering Socrates on Socrates' terms just so long as he also resists explaining, in Socrates' terms, his resistance. And this is exactly what Plato portrays Protagoras as attempting to do.⁶⁴ Insofar as he does agree to discuss with Socrates in the manner Socrates demands, it is not because he thinks it worthwhile, but because he succumbs to the pressure applied to him by his audience (an audience that includes a number of his competitors as well as students). Protagoras is reputed to be capable of short exchanges,⁶⁵ he talks about virtue, he claims to teach it, and he is impressively intelligent and discursive. He has the appearance of

⁶³ How educable is he? Plato leaves this, and so the ultimate efficacy of Socratic *paideia*, unclear. We are not explicitly told whether or not Hippocrates leaves Callias' house with Socrates, or remains behind; and if he does depart with Socrates, whether he was permanently improved by Socrates.

⁶⁴ And if we assume that Socrates understands that, then we see why his response to Protagoras' Great Speech is so crucial: Socrates must both explode Protagoras' views from within, as it were, and simultaneously do so in a way that forces Protagoras to face Socratic questions Socratically. I imagine this challenge is what he is contemplating in the moments after the Great Speech, when he is (by his own account) staggering a bit; and that the question he puts to Protagoras must be, in spite of its seemingly marginal relevance to Protagoras' discourse, understood as Socrates' best effort to accomplish this complex goal.

⁶⁵ *Protagoras* 329b1–5 and 334e4–335a1.

being a philosopher. But he is not a philosopher, has no wish to be one, and does not see why he should have to defend his outlook philosophically.

If we assume that Socrates would accept the description of his stance I have adumbrated in this essay, then his playful genealogy of philosophy suggests two further ways in which his ideal philosopher is Spartan. First, to espouse the ideal of relying on one's own voice is to take a view about what is most valuable, a view whose merits one cannot communicate philosophically except to those disposed to philosophy. When faced with an intelligent nonphilosophical theorist, the philosopher's rhetoric will very likely be polemical at times. The philosopher will on occasion have to play the part of the warrior who, through force of rhetoric, somehow drags his opponent into philosophy's territory. As I have noted, Socrates' behavior in the *Protagoras* has irritated, even repulsed more than a few readers, on account of its polemical, seemingly sophistical character. That behavior can now be seen as part of the philosopher's Spartan side that must on some occasions be pressed into service.

Second, if what I have suggested in this concluding section has merit, then to espouse the ideal of relying on one's own voice is also to take a view that one cannot fully defend without risk of begging the question. Hence the life devoted to formulating that defense rests in part on a sort of sustained resolve and endurance in standing one's ground in the search for truth, analogous to the Spartan soldier's famous resolve.⁶⁶ Given what Socrates himself says here and elsewhere about the connection between courage and wisdom, though, this endurance may look a bit more like boldness than it does courage proper.⁶⁷ The disturbing implication of the ideal of the laconic tough Spartan philosopher may be just this: the life of self-governance through philosophical reason is founded on commitments about value one resolutely insists upon for oneself and others, but could not fully justify rationally to someone not disposed at the outset to accept those commitments, however intelligent and discursive that interlocu-

⁶⁶ Compare *Meno* 86b6–c2, where Socrates says he is willing to do battle in word and deed for the proposition that we are better and more courageous if we investigate what we do not know, even though he cannot vouch for every part of his supporting account about soul, immortality, and recollection.

⁶⁷ Compare *Protagoras* 351a4–5.

tor might be. The result is the unresolved confrontation that is the central drama of the innermost frame of Plato's *Protagoras*.⁶⁸

Boston University

⁶⁸ Drafts of this paper were presented at the Third Annual Arizona Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy (Tucson); at a meeting of the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy (Boston); at the University of Louvain (Belgium); and at a colloquium on "Plato as Author: The Rhetoric of Philosophy" (University of Cincinnati). I am grateful to Alessandra Fussi, Marina McCoy, Mitchell Miller, Andrea Nightingale, David Roochnik, Dan Russell, Malcolm Schofield, and Paul Woodruff for their comments on earlier drafts, to T. K. Seung for correspondence about some of the ideas sketched here, and for the various audiences for their comments and criticisms. I bear sole responsibility for whatever shortcomings this essay may possess