

CHARACTER AND CONSENSUS IN PLATO'S *PROTAGORAS*

If we look to the *Protagoras* for philosophical lessons, it may seem an irritating patchwork of niggling argument, irrelevant digressions, false starts and downright fallacy. Read as a play in which the most outstanding and individual minds of a brilliant period meet and engage in a battle of wits, it will give a different impression. That is how it should be read. A serious discussion of the nature of virtue, and how it is acquired, must be left, as Protagoras said, for another occasion – and, we may add, for different company: it is not to be achieved in the competitive atmosphere of a public gathering of Sophists.¹

The *Protagoras* is palpably interested in character, vividly reviving a lost intellectual generation. But it also seems to argue for a conclusion, albeit a very provisional one. How should we relate the dialogue's array of luminaries to its argument? A reader may be tempted, as in the quotation above, to use the dialogue's literary lustre merely to excuse its arguments from charges of philosophical clumsiness. But by the end of the work we have been shown apparently successful arguments for the unity of virtue, with Protagoras' attempt at a counter-example refuted (360d8–e5). And it is claimed near the dialogue's end that Socrates has 'attempted' to show that all the virtues are knowledge, a thesis that would be particularly effective for corroborating Protagoras' claim that virtue is teachable (361a6–b3).² It would be strange if a dialogue with such a conclusion had no 'philosophical lessons' to offer. It is stressed, of course, that what we read has merely been an 'attempt' (361b1) and that Socrates' arguments jar with the position he took at the beginning of his conversation with the sophist (361a6–b3, b5–7). Socrates then proposes further inquiry into the nature of virtue (361c2–d6). But a thesis has been vindicated, and no fresh arguments are raised against it here.³

¹ Guthrie (1975) 235.

² Socrates ascribes this claim to 'the recent outcome of the arguments', which accuses and mocks them 'like a human being' (*Prt.* 361a3–5). But in 361c2–3 Socrates himself endorses the charge of contradiction levelled at him and the sophist by the 'outcome'. (Unless specified otherwise all references are to Plato's *Protagoras*.)

³ See O'Brien (2003) 85–6. Frede has argued that the *Protagoras* should be read as 'aporetic', noting that in this dialogue Socrates 'keeps his audience in suspense about his committal to hedonism and does not claim the victory that he seemingly achieved' ((1986) 735–6). But even if Socrates' hedonism is merely a hypothesis (on which see n. 45 below), 'aporetic' seems to me an unduly modest reading of a dialogue which has hypothetically and provisionally confirmed Socratic ethical theses. But nor am I convinced by the claim of Gosling and Taylor ((1982) 52) that Socrates' concluding remarks in 361a–d seem 'more like irony than qualification, since Plato has already indicated how the apparent contradiction in Socrates' position is to be resolved'. They suggest that Socrates meant to claim only that it is impossible to teach virtue 'as conceived by Protagoras'; 'the apparent volte-face indicates neither confusion nor uncertainty, but the conscious rejection of an incorrect conception of *aretê* in favour of the correct one' ((1982) 52). But while the contradiction may admit of such a resolution, there is still room for 'uncertainty', for in 360e8–361a3 Socrates suggests that he has *no* conception of virtue of whose correctness he is confident. His suggestion here may be merely 'ironic' as well, but further argument is needed to establish this.

It may be the case that the dialogue's conclusion is indeed of little significance for the literary aspects of this work; perhaps Plato wished merely to portray the eccentricities, pretensions and foibles of a generation of sophists and to contrast them with the acuity of Socratic dialectic, and so *any* Socratic argument would have sufficed for his purposes, as long as Socrates emerged the clear winner.⁴ But a reading of the drama of this work which makes the particular arguments Plato chose relevant to his literary enterprise would be, I think, a more attractive hypothesis. And several recent studies of the *Protagoras* have attempted to relate the dialogue's arguments to its characters. But such readings have overwhelmingly emphasised the work's *negative* dialectic, proposing that Socrates' arguments are tailored to the refutation of Protagoras' credentials and convictions.⁵ The tentative conclusion of the dialogue has tended not to feature so prominently in scholarly reflections on the significance of the drama of this work.⁶ In this paper I aim to show the importance of the theses Socrates 'attempts' to confirm for our interpretation of Plato's use of character in the *Protagoras*.

I begin by setting out the contrast between Socratic dialectic and Protagoras' variety of discourses, emphasising the inflexibility of Socrates' commitment to the form of questions and answers. I then discuss why Socrates should stick to his chosen form so staunchly, suggesting that Socrates' formal commitments arise from the degree of *consensus* he wishes to secure from his interlocutors. Socrates sets himself the ambitious task of obtaining sincere assent to his paradoxical ethical theses from his interlocutors and other parties represented in the discussion. He succeeds. And the diversity and independence of the characters from whom he secures assent provide dialectical support, I propose, for the conclusions he reaches. The positive argument of the work thus proves indispensable for understanding the significance of the *Protagoras*' stellar cast of characters.

⁴ For readings of the *Protagoras* as primarily an attack on sophists see Grube (1933), Klosko (1979) 128, Zeyl (1980) 258 and Wolfsdorf (1998).

⁵ Hemmenway argues that Socrates' objective is to counter 'Protagoras' sophistry and his view of human nature' and explains the dialogue's positive arguments in terms of that agenda: 'Socrates' arguments for the unity of the virtues are aimed, at least in part, at exposing the nature of Protagoras' sophistry and thus ... some of the puzzling features of the arguments can be explained by that aim' ((1996) 2 and 3). McCoy (1998) claims that Socrates uses hedonist arguments to bring into greater relief Protagoras' conception of human nature and the good, and to expose the failings of that conception. See also Russell's proposal that 'Socrates' strategy is negative and dialectical' and that 'Plato's purpose is to indicate how intimately linked the issue of the distinctness of virtues is to the issue of their teachability, and to show how *dangerously negligent the purported teachers of virtue – and their students – are of this connection*' ((2000) 314 and 313).

⁶ A notable exception is the scholarly recognition of the relevance of sophistic claims to teach virtue for the Socratic thesis of the sufficiency of knowledge for virtue. See n. 70 below.

I

In our text Plato contrasts Socratic dialectic with the discourse of the dialogue's eponymous sophist; more specifically, he contrasts Socrates' exclusive commitment to question and answer dialogue with Protagoras' resourceful malleability.⁷ In this section I outline this contrast and account for passages where Socrates seems surprisingly accommodating or Protagoras oddly refractory.

Protagoras offers both 'μῦθος' ('a tale') and 'λόγος' ('argument') as the form for the defence of his claim to teach civic virtue (320c2–4). In a slyly bathetic move he chooses the former on the grounds that it is 'χαριέστερον' ('more elegant'). By choosing mere modishness as the criterion for his choice the sophist suggests that he could just as easily or cogently defend his profession with one form as with the other.⁸ And during the subsequent speech he displays his flexibility by shifting from a tale to argument and noting this change of form (324d6–7).⁹

Now Protagoras' malleability is not presented as a threat to the sort of dialogue to which Socrates is committed. Indeed, Protagoras not only champions no particular alternative to interrogative dialectic, but even claims to enjoy answering people who pose questions 'well' (318d6–7).¹⁰ In Socrates' response to the sophist's long speech he states that Protagoras can, of course, deliver 'long and fine discourses', but also answer questions succinctly and play the questioner's part himself (329b1–5). Protagoras does not disavow these abilities.¹¹ Nor does he disagree with Socrates when

⁷ On versatility as a central trait of Plato's conception of the sophist see Woodruff (1982) 114–15; for sophists' claims to have mastered interrogative dialogue as well as extended discourses see *Hp.Mi.* 363c–d, *Grg.* 447c5–8, 447d6–448a3, 449c7–8 and *Men.* 70b–c. *Phdr.* 267c may contain another indication of Protagoras' professed versatility. Baxter argues that this passage, given its context, suggests that Protagoras claimed to be able to make the right speech for the right occasion ((1992) 147–8).

⁸ Taylor suggests that Plato may wish Protagoras' words here to imply that 'the sophist has a somewhat cavalier attitude, not indeed to the essential truth of what he has to say, but to truth and rigour in matters of detail' ((1991) ad loc.).

⁹ See also 328c3.

¹⁰ But Plato may wish to invite a jaundiced reading of Protagoras' statement here; the sophist could take a 'well'-put question to be one which invites a response that will allow him to display his expertise and merits. Note that Protagoras uses his answer to Socrates' question to contrast his own teaching with the 'harm' other sophists provide (318d7–319a2).

¹¹ Socrates, quite naturally, adduces Protagoras' speech as evidence of the former (329b2–3). The compliment to Protagoras' dialectical skills, however, might seem to be an unscrupulous ploy to trap the sophist into committing himself to an uncongenial form of inquiry: see, for example, Wardy's claim that Socrates' praise is 'disingenuous' ((1996) 60). As I have noted, Protagoras has claimed to enjoy responding to good questions (318d6–7), but he has nowhere claimed to be skilled either in providing *brief* answers or in patiently receiving answers to his own questions. But Socrates and Protagoras are supposed to know one another (361e2–3), and so Socrates could have seen Protagoras in action as a dialectician on a previous occasion. Socrates also claims to have heard about Protagoras' abilities by reputation (334e4–335a3, 335b7). And if he wished to corroborate his claim that the sophist is an able dialectician on the strength of this encounter Socrates could cite Protagoras' brief reply at 319a6–7 and the sophist's questions at 316b3–4 and 316b7. Protagoras could object that the rather inconsequential questions he asks in these earlier passages are no part of his professed expertise. But he makes no such objection. And Socrates could meet such an objection with the argument that if Protagoras can play the patient questioner in more mundane contexts he can presumably do so in ethical inquiry as well.

the latter subsequently says that he has heard that Protagoras excels at both prolixity and concision (334e4–335a1).¹²

By this stage in the dialogue Protagoras has become reluctant to stick to the form of questions and answers, but it is not suggested that this reflects any aversion to such dialogue *per se*. Here the sophist objects to Socrates' request for brevity on the grounds that it would be unwise in *general* for him to allow his opponent to dictate the form or manner of their verbal exchange (335a4–8). And when Protagoras was loath to answer Socrates' questions in an earlier passage it is the *argument* that he faults and not the interrogative form Socrates requires.¹³ The sophist does indulge in a long discourse on the good (334a–c), but, again, this choice of form need not indicate a dislike of concision as such. Protagoras may be dissatisfied simply with the answers he has given during this particular stretch of dialectic and hope that he will fare better in other discursive territory.¹⁴ Or he could wish simply to flaunt the range of his talents.

So Plato has not given Socrates an interlocutor particularly inimical to question and answer dialectic.¹⁵ Nor is Protagoras unable to fend for himself in this sort of exchange; we find him raising objections and drawing relevant distinctions during Socrates' questioning.¹⁶ And, indeed, after the end of the sophist's Great Speech at 328d we should expect him to be quite amenable to a request for some Socratic dialectic. What better way to display *his versatility to the assembled company than to engage in dialogue directly after delivering a prolonged lecture?*

But a few pages later we find Socrates proposing to leave Callias' house and saying that he will converse with Protagoras when (and, presumably, *only* when) the sophist is willing to forgo long speeches (335b3–c7). Socrates claims that he requests brevity only because of his poor memory (334c8–d5), insisting that it is his own inabilities and lack of time that provoke his formal requirements (335b5–c2, 335c4, 335e2–336b1). But I take Socrates to be less than fully sincere here, following Alcibiades, Robinson and Stokes.¹⁷ This impasse is surely something of a surprise. Protagoras, as he is characterised by Plato, promises to be an able and accommodating interlocutor. So why should the dialogue between him and Socrates risk premature closure and occasion an interlude in which the form of the discussion has to be carefully negotiated?

Plato's strategy in the interlude of 334–8 is, I suggest, to emphasise *Socrates'* intransigence over form. Socrates has already criticised demagogues and books specifically

¹² See also 335b7–c1.

¹³ 333d1–3. It is possible that 'λόγος' (333d2) refers to the discussion as a whole, rather than merely to the argument; the *formal* characteristics of the inquiry could thus fall under the sophist's criticism as well. But I think this unlikely, given that 'λόγος' has just been used to refer to a thesis or argument (333c5, c7).

¹⁴ This would fit with Socrates' diagnosis at 335a9–b1.

¹⁵ Protagoras also seems far from hostile to Socrates himself, even after the sophist's patent irritation at 360e3–4: see 361d–e.

¹⁶ See 331c–e and 350c–351b; for discussion see Gosling and Taylor (1982) 59 and Taylor (1991) ad locc.

¹⁷ 336c4–d4; Robinson (1953) 9; Stokes (1986) 312. Socrates has, after all, just resolved to question the sophist 'gently' (333e3–4). Compare *Men.* 71c8–d2. And compare his plea of 'ἀσχολία' (335c4) with the claim that 'σχολή' is the mark of a philosopher in *Thr.* 172c–e.

for their inability to answer or pose questions.¹⁸ Note that Protagoras says not a word between his protest at 335a4–8 and the resumption of his conversation with Socrates at 338e6. It is Socrates who is coaxed to remain and who negotiates the terms of their dialogue. And he negotiates in such a way as to avoid any compromise of his chosen dialectical practices.¹⁹

There is a sense in which anyone in Socrates' position would have to be inflexible. Callias protests to Socrates that 'Protagoras seems to be right in asking for him to be allowed to converse as he wants, and for you to be allowed to converse as you want'.²⁰ Our sympathies may also be with the beleaguered sophist at this point. But if Socrates and Protagoras are really to *converse* ('διδάσκεισθαι') with each other, rather than merely talk at one other, they cannot simply agree to disagree over the form of their exchange.²¹ So Callias' even-handed observation only reminds us that if an exchange is to be possible its form must be agreed upon by both participants. Indeed, Prodicus seems to note precisely this point when he urges Socrates and Protagoras to *agree* to argue but not bicker with each other ('συγχεῖν' 337a6–b1). Socrates is right to press for consensus here.

But Socrates is more ambitious than this. An apparently natural solution to the impasse would be a *via media* between Socrates' request and Protagoras' preference for an alternative. And this is what is proposed. After Prodicus' speech Hippias advises Protagoras and Socrates 'to agree on a compromise' ('συμβῆναι ... εἰς τὸ μέσον' 337e4–338a1), with the assembled company acting as mediators. Socrates should not, Hippias proposes, insist on excessive precision and brevity, so that the discussion may appear more imposing and graceful to its audience (338a1–4). And Protagoras should not 'flee into an ocean of words and lose sight of land'; in short, an umpire should be established and 'both should hold a middle course' (338a6–7).

Socrates then argues against the institution of an umpire with some elegant irony: only a superior person should be chosen, he says, and there is nobody wiser than Protagoras to choose (338b–c). But it is important to see that he also rejects the middle course Hippias proposed. Indeed, while it is the proposal of the umpire that he explicitly rebuffs, I suspect that the motivation for this refusal is precisely his reluctance for the imposition of any such Third Way. How does Socrates reject the proposed compromise? Hippias suggests *one* modified stretch of conversation in which Protagoras would curtail his speeches and Socrates forget his fussiness. Socrates proposes instead that their conversation be divided into two halves: Protagoras is to ask questions first, with Socrates endeavouring to provide model replies, and the sophist is then to answer questions himself (338c6–e2).

Socrates' proposal may seem strangely compliant at first. Protagoras may ask 'as many questions as he wishes' (338d4), and Socrates does not specify the nature of these

¹⁸ 329a2–b1. It is with demagoguery that Socrates later contrasts dialectic (336b1–3).

¹⁹ Socrates has even been accused of 'gamesmanship' during this interlude (Schofield (1992) 128). For an interpretation of the political and educational content of the interlude see Cohen (2002).

²⁰ 336b4–6 (reading 'σοί' rather than 'σύ' in 336b6; see Taylor (1991) ad loc.). See also 334e2–3.

²¹ This point is obscured by Taylor's translation of 'διδάσκεισθαι' as 'to speak' ((1991) 29).

questions, giving the sophist a free hand to set the agenda of the first part of their exchange as he sees fit. But Socrates only concedes this so that the *subsequent* dialogue will be conducted on his own terms. Socrates gives Protagoras a *carte blanche* for one stretch of dialogue precisely to ensure that his demand for question and answer dialogue will be met afterwards. And here the other sophists' participation is required; they are to supervise Protagoras' responses during this part of the proposed exchange (338d5–e2). Socrates transforms Hippias' proposed compromise into a simple *quid pro quo* to ensure that the second part of their dialogue is suitably and inviolately Socratic.²²

Protagoras then initiates a discussion of Simonides. This passage might seem to suggest a more flexible side to Socrates, inasmuch as he forgoes short questions and answers and apparently lets Protagoras determine the programme for their dialogue. But from the interlude it is clear that Socrates' exegesis is merely part of a barter and not a concession to Protagorean tastes. This is also patent when the exegesis is complete. Alcibiades insists that Socrates and Protagoras should stick to their agreement and resume interrogative dialogue, though he allows Protagoras to choose whether he or Socrates plays the questioner (347b3–7), protesting when Protagoras is unwilling to state his preference (348b3–5). Whatever Protagoras' preference may be, he says, some dialectic is to be forthcoming, whether with Socrates or someone else entirely (348b5–8). And Socrates himself is unequivocally dismissive about the entire exegetic enterprise (347b–348a), complaining specifically that one cannot *question* poets about what they discuss (347e3–4).

I will not discuss the sincerity of Socrates' exegesis of Simonides here.²³ I will, however, note that the context of the passage suggests that any failure of the exegesis to satisfy dialectical standards should not cause us alarm. We may well be disquieted to find Socrates pursuing tactics that do not become a dialectician (see, for example, 339e1–6), but this need not be unsettling if Socrates' policy is merely to give Protagoras free rein over the discussion temporarily in order to ensure that he can complete a subsequent inquiry into the virtues in properly dialectical conditions.²⁴ Nor, if this reading of his strategy is correct, is there any conflict between the exegesis and Socrates' disparaging remarks about discussions of poetry in 347b–348a.²⁵

Plato even, I propose, demarcates the exegesis as distinct from Socrates' usual dialectical practice by having Socrates engage in clearly Protagorean strategies during

²² Socrates seems to succeed. When this second part of the dialogue is undertaken Protagoras uses clearly Socratic language (351e3–4) and agrees that Socrates is to lead the discussion (351e8–11), an agreement to which he later sticks (353b3–6).

²³ See Taylor (1926) 254–7, Guthrie (1975) 219, Frede (1986), Taylor (1991) xiii, 148 and Vlastos (1991) 135–8. Woolf suggests that the Simonides passage sets out a 'Socratic position' on the correct use of texts ((1999) 25).

²⁴ For Socrates' behaviour in the exegesis see, for example, Schofield (1992) 128 and Beversluis (2000) 272.

²⁵ *Pace* Beversluis, who asks 'If poetic exegesis is a frivolous activity unworthy of serious truth-seekers, why has Socrates himself been indulging in it with such gusto for the last nine Stephanus pages?' ((2000) 274).

its course.²⁶ Protagoras has earlier claimed an ancient and distinguished pedigree for his profession, describing Homer, Hesiod, Orpheus and an assortment of other heavy-weights as covert sophists (316d–317a). At the beginning of the Simonidean exegesis Socrates claims to study Prodicus' wisdom and emphasises its *antiquity*, presumably to enhance the authority of Prodician teaching (340e9–341a2).²⁷ And just as Protagoras projects his own profession onto a long line of ancient sages and experts, so too Socrates reads some of his own idiosyncrasies into Spartan behaviour, stressing that the most *ancient philosophy* is to be found there (342a7–b1).²⁸ The Spartans are said to pretend to be ignorant (342b1–2), behaviour similar to Socrates' feigned forgetfulness in this dialogue (336d2–4). Like Socrates, they are aped slavishly by followers who misunderstand the reasoning behind their practices (342b6–c3).²⁹ And, like Socrates, 'βραχυλογία' ('brevity') is the hallmark of their philosophy (342d4–343a1, 343a5–b5).³⁰

So the discussion of Simonides does not militate against ascribing to Socrates an exclusive commitment to question and answer dialogue. Socrates embarks on it precisely because he has chosen traffic over compromise, seeing in the exegesis a way of ensuring that the sophist will be a suitable dialectical partner when the discussion of the virtues is resumed, as well as an opportunity to demonstrate the inferiority of such hermeneutic pursuits.

II

What is Socrates' rationale for this commitment? The question may seem otiose; after all, what *else* should we expect from Socrates? But Plato surely invites us to reflect on this issue when he has Socrates explain his preference for dialogue in 348c–d. This passage has been read as evidence for a comprehensive Socratic (and, indeed, Platonic) commitment to interpersonal dialogue as the only appropriate medium for philosophical inquiry.³¹ But the text is rather more nuanced than such an interpretation suggests.

²⁶ I have argued elsewhere (Long (2004)) that in Plato's *Theaetetus* the absent Protagoras is made to defend himself in a conspicuously *Socratic* manner.

²⁷ Compare 340e9–341a2 with 316d3–4.

²⁸ The similarity between Protagoras' extravagant claims about sophistry in 316d–e and Socrates' discussion of the Spartans is made all the more pronounced by Socrates' apparent enthusiasm about the number of *sophists* in Crete and Sparta ('σοφιστῶν' 342b1; see also 342c7) and his explicit reference to the earlier passage in 342b3–4.

²⁹ To my knowledge there are no good Socratic parallels for this in the *Protagoras*. But compare *Symp.* 173b1–2.

³⁰ A parallel made all the sharper by the fact that Socrates has to forgo his usual brevity in precisely this passage.

³¹ See Gill's citation of this passage in support of his claim that Plato requires inquiry to be 'shared' ((2002) 150 n. 16). Note also the prominent quotation of this passage at the opening of the Preface to Gonzalez (1998); Gonzalez goes on to claim that a comprehensive commitment to interpersonal dialogue explains Plato's choice of the dialogue form ((1998) 274).

Socrates insists that his sole intention in conversing with Protagoras is to investigate subjects for which he himself lacks sufficient intellectual resources (348c5–7).³² He then cites with approval the following Homeric line:

σύν τε δὺ' ἔρχομένω, καί τε πρὸ ὃ τοῦ ἐνόησεν.³³

Two going along together – and one realises something before the other.

Socrates then explains his admiration for this sentiment by noting that we are all more resourceful in twos.³⁴ Even if one has an idea by oneself, he adds, one immediately finds someone to whom it can be shown and with whom one's suppositions can be 'confirmed' ('μεθ' ὅτου βεβαιώσηται' 348d2–5). Now the claim that we are more creative and inventive when with companions merely implies that collaboration is *preferable* for philosophising; there is no suggestion, at least here, that it is essential.³⁵ But while he allows that a philosopher can make discoveries alone, Socrates offers only an interpersonal model for the *confirmation* of suppositions. And what Socrates says next suggests that he himself is currently engaged in precisely this sort of collaborative confirmation: 'just as I too on account of this would rather converse with you than with someone else'.³⁶

So Socrates represents his agenda as 'confirming' through conversation matters he cannot settle by himself. But he does not explain precisely to what this confirmation amounts,³⁷ or *how* other people supplement his own resources and thus make confirmation possible. Nor does he give a transparent account of why he particularly wishes to talk with *Protagoras*. For his declaration that he would rather converse with this sophist than with anyone else (348d5–e1)³⁸ is followed by some painfully ironic

³² I understand 'ἀπορώ' (348c6) here to mean quite generally the lack of intellectual resources, rather than any specific sort of bewilderment; it is surely to be contrasted with 'ἐυπορώτεροι' in 348d2, and the latter must denote general resourcefulness.

³³ 348d1; *Hom. Il.* 10.224.

³⁴ Socrates does not actually say that we are more resourceful 'in twos', but the notion of collaboration is surely to be imported from the quotation in 348d1. Note that Socrates carefully avoids presenting his explanation as an account of Homer's own meaning, moving directly from quotation to observation about human discovery. Hardly surprising, given his dismissal of exegesis in 347b–348a.

³⁵ Compare Arist. *EN* 1177a34–b1. For the importance of collaboration in the *Protagoras* see also my discussion of Prodicus in section III below. Note that when this line from *Iliad* 10 reappears in the *Symposium* Plato cannot mean to suggest that intellectual collaboration is a philosophical must. Socrates quotes this line to Aristodemus as they set out together for Agathon's house (174d2). But two lines later Socrates needs to reflect on a problem *by himself*, leaving his companion to make his own way to the symposium (174d4–7). This occurs, of course, *before* the main dialogue of the *Symposium*; perhaps, then, it corresponds to the preliminary stage of 'ἀπορία' Socrates says he regularly undergoes in *Prt.* 348c6. If so, the *Symposium* passage indicates that this initial reflection is *internal*.

³⁶ 348d5–6.

³⁷ But see n. 63 on dialectical confirmation as verification in the *Gorgias*.

³⁸ Compare 335c6–7 and 361d5–6.

praise (348e2–349a4).³⁹ It is left to us, then, to grasp why Protagoras should strike Socrates as a particularly promising interlocutor.⁴⁰

I will return to this last question in the next section; let us now see how the interpersonal exchange in which Socrates is engaged enables him to confirm suppositions. In the *Protagoras* Socrates uses *consensus* to confirm ethical theses, and I suggest that this practice explains his formal commitments. The importance of consensus to Socrates' enterprise is clear from the end of his opening conversation with Hippocrates:

ἴν' οὖν μὴ ἀτελής γένοιτο, ἀλλὰ διαπερανάμενοι οὕτως ἐσίοιμεν, στάντες ἐν τῷ προθύρῳ διελεγόμεθα ἕως συνωμολογήσασμεν ἀλλήλοις.⁴¹

Now as we did not want the discussion to be incomplete, but to enter only after we had reached the conclusion, we stood in the doorway and conversed until we agreed with one another.

Consensus is the criterion for completion. And here Schofield is right, I think, to read this dialogue between Socrates and Hippocrates as 'paradigmatic' of Socratic conversation.⁴² For Socrates equally seems to regard consensus as the objective in his conversation with Protagoras; note the insistence with which he asks Protagoras to accede explicitly to his conclusion at the end of the dialogue (360d6–e5). Overt consensus must be essential to Socrates' project in this work: otherwise Protagoras would be right to take Socrates' doggedness here to be merely a case of contentiousness (360e3).⁴³

Socrates' aim to construct agreement between parties in his corroboration of moral theses is clear from his celebrated discussion of hedonism and *akrasia*. Here he deftly engineers consensus between 'the Many', Protagoras and other sophists to support his own apparently idiosyncratic ethical tenets. 'The Many' initially doubt that knowledge exerts overwhelming influence in human behaviour and believe that agents can act against their own moral knowledge (352b3–c2, 352d4–e2). But it transpires that they

³⁹ Note especially the mention of Protagoras' fee (349a3–4).

⁴⁰ Two protests might be made. First, have I not shown Protagoras to be a surprisingly accommodating and capable interlocutor? If so, does this not explain Socrates' eagerness to converse with him? But these traits are hardly distinctive of, let alone unique to Protagoras: Socrates' conversation about Hippocrates (311b–314c) occasioned no impasse and, indeed, seems to have been conclusive. So why not simply converse with Hippocrates and his ilk? Second, surely Socrates is merely conversing with Protagoras because Hippocrates asked him to do so on his behalf (310e)? And, it might be urged, Socrates can hardly show Hippocrates up by mentioning this. But Socrates is quite candid with Protagoras about Hippocrates' request (316b–c, 328d–e). And in the second passage Socrates suggests that while Hippocrates urged him to attend, he has since found meeting Protagoras to be of value for himself.

⁴¹ 314c5–7.

⁴² Schofield (1992) 125.

⁴³ Socrates will later envisage an art of measurement in his discussion of apparent *akrasia*. Note that one of the attractions of such an art is the *consensus* it promises to build: compare *Euthphr.* 7b–d, where measurement is suggested as a way of eliminating disagreement.

are unable to produce any criterion other than overall pleasure and pain in their assessment of states as good or bad (353c–354c).⁴⁴ The covert hedonism of ‘the Many’ then proves to be incompatible with the possibility of agents acting against their own knowledge.⁴⁵ Socrates thus vindicates the supreme importance of knowledge. He then turns to Protagoras’ claim that courage need not entail the other virtues. But rather than addressing Protagoras alone he consults Hippias and Prodicus (358a1–4) and secures the agreement of ‘everyone’ to his previous argument and subsequent claims.⁴⁶

Now when Socrates refutes the claim that an agent can possess courage without the other virtues he speaks to Protagoras alone (359a–360e). But this is no surprise: Protagoras alone has tried to challenge the unity of virtue, and so his is the only voice of dissent to be silenced. And here Socrates is *only* interested in hearing Protagoras’ voice: when the sophist concedes that ‘people’ agree with Socrates, the philosopher is quick to insist on being told what Protagoras himself has to say (359c6–d2). Moreover, as I have already noted, Protagoras’ explicit assent to the argument’s conclusion is required (360d–e).

This strategy explains Socrates’ formal commitments. Interpersonal dialogue is, of course, required if he is to establish theses by building consensus and eliminating disagreement between parties. And, as we see in 359c–d, only sincere and genuine assent suffices.⁴⁷ This necessitates, I suggest, the interrogative, concise form of Socratic

⁴⁴ See also 354d1–3, 354d7–e2, 354e8–355a5 and 356c1–3.

⁴⁵ As Socrates wishes to establish consent to his belief in the supremacy of knowledge and the unity of virtue from hedonistic premises he should not, I think, be committed against the hedonism he uncovers in ‘the Many’. But he need not be committed to it either; he could (and should) take establishing the truth or falsehood of hedonism to be indispensable for thorough ethical understanding, but nonetheless believe that some useful philosophy can be done if hedonism is provisionally assumed. Compare his attitude to the nature of virtue (360e–361c) and the description of such a use of hypotheses in *Men.* 86d–87b. Woolf argues that Socrates’ hedonism cannot be merely hypothetical on the grounds that the impossibility of akrasia, established as it is by this hedonism, is stated unconditionally at 358c6–7 and 358c7–d2 ((2002) 226 n. 7). But given that hedonism has been presented as a hypothesis only a few lines earlier (358b6–c1), as Woolf notes, there is no need for Plato to emphasise the hypothetical nature of the argument in these passages. Woolf later suggests that ‘Socrates takes hedonism to offer a *plausible* account of ordinary human motivation, and his argument proceeds on that basis’ ((2002) 248 n. 44, emphasis added). On the question of Socrates’ commitment to hedonism in the *Protagoras* see also Taylor (1926) 260–1; Vlastos (1956) xl n. 50; Irwin (1977) 103, 106 n. 13; Zeyl (1980); Gosling and Taylor (1982) 47–57; Nussbaum (1986) 110–11; Stokes (1986) 358–62, 419; Taylor (1991) 176, 209; Irwin (1995) 86–8; Kahn (1996) 236–42; McCoy (1998).

⁴⁶ See 358a4–5, 358b2–3, 358c3, 358c5–6, 358d4 and 358e6–359a1. Disagreement surfaces only very briefly in the form of a Prodician quibble and is quickly swept aside (358d–e). It is uncertain whether or not ‘everyone’ refers to the entire group in Callias’ house, but 358d7–e1 and 359a2–4 suggest that Socrates has in mind only Hippias, Prodicus and Protagoras. Hemmenway’s thesis that Socrates’ arguments are responses specifically to Protagoras (Hemmenway (1996)) unduly neglects Socrates’ interest in the other sophists present.

⁴⁷ See also 331c4–d1, where Socrates says that sincerity provides him with the best way to test an argument or thesis. Taylor contends that here ‘the demand is not so much that Protagoras should state his personal opinion as that he should state his thesis in an unconditional form’ ((1991) 132). But what could have motivated Socrates’ insistence on ‘an unconditional form’ here if not a wish to ensure sincerity? Since the classic study of Vlastos (1983) attention has been lavished on sincerity and Socratic method; for a recent survey of Socratic ‘sincerity texts’ see McCabe (2000) appendix to ch. 2. For discussion of the *Protagoras* see McCabe (2000) 55–7; I largely agree with her interpretation, but suggest that in the *Protagoras* (as in the *Gorgias* – on which see McCabe (2000) 58) sincerity is ‘the means to truth’ ((2000) 57).

dialogue, which ensures that the interlocutors' assent to each stage of the argument is secured and allows Socrates to keep a tight rein on the conversation, correcting any insincere or non-committal responses.

A Socratic argument with 'the Many' might be thought to constitute an exception to this requirement. Protagoras sets out a popular view he would be ashamed to endorse himself, and asks Socrates to address his argument to this position rather than his own (333c1–5). Socrates replies:

ἀλλ' οὐδέν μοι διαφέρει, ἐὰν μόνον σύ γε ἀποκρίνη, εἴτ' οὖν δοκεῖ σοι ταῦτα εἶτε μή.⁴⁸

But it makes no difference to me, as long as *you* give an answer, whether you actually believe this or not.

He explains that it is the thesis or argument that he principally wishes to examine; the examination of himself and his interlocutor is only a possible further outcome of his inquiry (333c7–9). This latter point may well describe the aspirations with which he approaches any investigation. But note that Socrates' point in the passage quoted above is specifically about the popular thesis Protagoras has mentioned, rather than about any general dialectical permissiveness on his part: Protagoras should answer, whether or not he believes 'ταῦτα' ('this'). In the present context, then, I take Socrates to be saying merely that Protagoras can answer for the popular view regardless of his own beliefs, an allowance preparing the reader for the more elaborate use that will be made of 'the Many' later in the discussion. But Socrates could still require Protagoras to answer his forthcoming questions in precisely the way in which the sophist would expect 'the Many' to respond.⁴⁹ This passage shows merely, then, that Socrates aims to secure consensus with absent parties as well as his current interlocutor. But for this project an accurate account of the party's beliefs is still required.⁵⁰

Contrast Protagoras. He also wishes to build consensus to confirm his tenets, but, unlike Socrates, his method is not to extract assent through the scrutiny of theses to

⁴⁸ 333c5–7.

⁴⁹ See Taylor (1991) ad loc. and Irwin (1993) 12. Vlastos suggests that in 333c and 352e ff. Socrates wishes to save Protagoras from the embarrassment of refutation ((1983) 38); Irwin rightly argues against this interpretation ((1993) 7), proposing that Socrates discusses views other than Protagoras' own in these passages so that Plato can 'give a hearing' to powerful alternatives to the Socratic position ((1993) 10).

⁵⁰ If Socrates can build consensus with *absent* individuals or groups why does he need interpersonal dialogue at all? Why not have himself play both questioner and the other party's vicarious respondent? Presumably external dialogue is needed if Socrates is to gain initial access to other views. Socrates may also believe that questioning individuals or groups directly makes for a more accurate account of their views, and a more rigorous test of his own. And, as Vlastos notes, Socrates seems to work with 'a double objective: to discover how every human being ought to live, *and* to test that single human being who is doing the answering – to find out if *he* is living as one ought to live' ((1994) 10, *emphases original*). See 333c7–9. This second objective of course requires engagement with others.

which the other parties are committed.⁵¹ Instead he tries to show how people's *behaviour* reflects beliefs compatible with his profession as a teacher of civic virtue. He claims, for example, that 'all people' believe that every man shares in this virtue and offers our reactions to disavowals of probity as a 'proof' (323a5–c2). He similarly cites human behaviour to prove that we all think that virtue is teachable (323c5–324d1).⁵² During the discussion of Simonides he cites an allegedly universal conviction in support of his criticism of the poet (340e7). And he evidently does not deem it important to guarantee sincerity, for he thinks that Socrates will be happy with merely ostensible consent (331c3–4).

Indeed, while Protagoras is happy to refer to universal agreement as a prop for his own views, there is a sense, I think, in which rigorously Socratic consensus is disquieting for the assembled sophists. For their mutual dissent offers them invaluable opportunities to display their erudition and talents. During the interlude of 334–8 Alcibiades and the sophists studiously correct Protagoras, Socrates and one another.⁵³ And note that although Hippias agrees with Socrates' exposition of Simonides he is still particular about offering to display his *own* discourse on the poem (347a6–b2). For all that Hippias describes the company of sophists as a natural political community (337c), to attain distinction and attract fresh clientele a Prodicus or a Protagoras needs to stand out from both Greek civic society and his fellow sophists. The co-operative nature of Socratic dialectic and the consensus it fosters threaten the differentiation on which these sophists thrive.

III

Socrates sets demanding standards for the consensus he wishes to achieve, and his adherence to these standards makes the way in which he devises consent between the assembled sophists and 'the Many' all the more impressive. But we may still be discomforted by Socrates' overall policy. How can consensus between parties guarantee the truth of the thesis to which they agree?

- ⁵¹ Contrast also Socrates' resolve to build consensus with popular views with the sophist's disdain for 'the Many'; see n. 61 below. And, unlike Socrates' practice (see n. 50 above), Protagoras' way of arguing from people's behaviour is not better served by contact or conversation with them, but merely requires familiarity with their habits. My thanks to an anonymous *PCPS* referee for bringing to my attention this further dissimilarity between Socratic and Protagorean consensus.
- ⁵² Socrates himself constructs an argument from behaviour to beliefs in 319b–d: there he claims that democratic practice in the assembly shows that the Athenians do not believe that civic virtue can be taught. But we should not, I think, take Socrates to be committed to this argument: note his praise of the Athenians as 'wise' (319b3–4). See Stokes (1986) 203–5.
- ⁵³ 336b4–6, 336b7–d5, 336d7–e4 and 337e2–338a7. Prodicus' speech does not fault anyone else (except, perhaps, in 337a6–b1) but still flaunts his lexical expertise (337a1–c4). Compare the way in which Protagoras criticises the education of other sophists (318d–e). For sophistic competitiveness in the *Protagoras* see Schofield (1992) 123 and 129. Alcibiades also takes a thoroughly agonistic view of the entire debate (336b8–c4); for Alcibiades as an embodiment of thumoeidic passions (particularly in Plato's *Symposium*) see Hobbs (2000) 254–61.

This is not a new problem. Much scholarly attention has already been devoted to the question of how objectivity is meant to feature in the narrowly dialectical methods Socrates champions in Plato's 'early' works. Irwin has suggested an intriguing solution. He argues that in these works 'argument is offered to show that the Socratic position is a reasonable development of common beliefs; Socrates shows that his claims about unity and harmony offer a solution to some puzzles and difficulties in ordinary beliefs.'⁵⁴ But other consistent revisions of common sense are possible. Why, then, should we have confidence in Socrates' corrections? Irwin argues that Plato provides dramatic 'allusions' that provide moral grounds for rejecting rival proposals.⁵⁵ Plato alludes ominously, for example, to the future careers of Socrates' interlocutors. These allusions give the reader grounds for privileging the Socratic solution.

I propose that a broadly similar strategy is at work in the *Protagoras*: characterisation serves to provide additional reasons for favouring Socrates' conclusion. But in our text the grounds Plato offers are more dialectical than moral. The nature of the characters with whom Socrates converses suggests that his attainment of *their* assent is likely to signal objective success. For the characters Plato chooses as Socrates' interlocutors in the *Protagoras*, Hippocrates and Alcibiades excepted, are clearly outside the Socratic circle. Not only are they formidable intellectuals in their own right, but as *foreigners* they enter the discussion with ethical perspectives independent both of Athenians in general and of a philosopher in particular who only left his native Athens when on military campaign.

Protagoras' alien status is noted almost as soon as he is introduced: he is described first as more beautiful than Alcibiades, second as a 'ξένος' ('foreigner' 309c2–6).⁵⁶ It is his own foreignness that Protagoras mentions first when discussing his profession (316c5ff.).⁵⁷ Protagoras is also initially unsympathetic to the Socratic position on the unity and reciprocity of the virtues (329d–330b): as Irwin notes, 'Socrates does not rely simply on the agreement of a sympathetic interlocutor; Plato wants to show that the conclusions rest on a fair examination of the merits of the case, as they appear to someone who is not initially disposed to agree with Socrates.'⁵⁸ And, we might add, to someone capable of providing defence for this initial disposition: as we have seen, Protagoras is an able interlocutor.⁵⁹ Yet Socrates secures assent to his ethical theses not only from this sophist, but also from Hippias and Prodicus,⁶⁰ as well as from 'the Many'. The views of 'the Many' are, of course, independent of both Socratic ethics

⁵⁴ Irwin (1998) 63.

⁵⁵ Irwin (1998) 63. For an alternative response to what Vlastos dubbed 'the problem of the elenchus' see, for example, Kraut (1983) 61–5.

⁵⁶ See also 313b2.

⁵⁷ Most of his followers are also 'ξένου' (315a5–b1), as are some of Hippias' retinue (315c2–5). This would be important for Socrates' arguments if *everyone* present were supposed to agree with Socrates at, for example, 358c3, 358c5–6, 358d4 and 358e6–359a1. But see n. 46 above.

⁵⁸ Irwin (1995) 94.

⁵⁹ See n. 16 above.

⁶⁰ See n. 46 above.

and the wisdom of the sophistic polity.⁶¹ It may even be that the selection of intellectuals such as Socrates and Protagoras, and non-intellectuals ('the Many'), is supposed to be jointly exhaustive; on such an account, both those who are committed to the supreme power of knowledge and those who are without such a commitment are questioned and won round.

Contrast the exchange between Socrates and Hippocrates in 311a–314c. In the stretch of dialogue narrated in our text Socrates challenges and unsettles the young man with ease. We then find the two of them reaching agreement before they enter Callias' house. But even if we are convinced by Socrates' arguments that Hippocrates is being rash in seeking Protagoras' services as a teacher, we may well think that winning Hippocrates round to his views is a rather paltry achievement for Socrates. For Hippocrates seems an intimate member of Socrates' entourage, at liberty to rush into the philosopher's bedroom in the early hours (310a–c). Note also that Socrates states that he knows Hippocrates' character (310d2–3). As Schofield notes, Hippocrates serves as a 'partner in a proper Socratic conversation',⁶² but the effortlessness with which this dialogue's propriety and conclusion are secured undermines their significance. The door to Callias' house thus leads not merely to a more competitive forum but to a venue where richer dividends can be reaped for a dialectician as capable as Socrates. There he can show that diverse, independent characters are really covert Socratics, in that they hold beliefs which entail Socratic conclusions. And this is a more promising mark of objective success than the assent of an intimate like Hippocrates.⁶³

This is not the only promise Callias' guests afford. As I have noted, at 348c–d Socrates presents a thoroughly interpersonal model for the confirmation of theses, a model reflected in his own practice in the *Protagoras*, where he uses the consent of others to vindicate his own ethical position. But interpersonal dialogue allows for collaboration as well as corroboration, and I propose that Plato also uses

⁶¹ In *R.* 493a–e Plato suggests that sophists teach merely the beliefs of 'the Many'. But even if this is his view of sophistic *teaching* in the *Protagoras*, the sophists' own views, at least, would seem to differ from the opinions of 'the Many'. For 'the Many' are represented as disagreeing with Protagoras' position (352a–e). See also the sophist's dismissive attitude to 'the Many' in 317a4–6, 352e3–4 and 353a7–8.

⁶² Schofield (1992) 127.

⁶³ Contrast Socrates' encounter with the sophists with other Platonic passages where the concern is raised that interlocutors may be all too ready to agree (*Phd.* 91b8–c6, *Sph.* 236d5–7). And compare the 'touchstone' method of *Grg.* 486d–487e. There Socrates states that Callicles' character suggests that any agreement they reach will be objectively true: 'τῷ ὄντι οὖν ἡ ἐμὴ καὶ ἡ σὴ ὁμολογία τέλος ἦδη ἔξει τῆς ἀληθείας' (487e6–7). In the *Gorgias*, however, Socrates says he considers Callicles to be a good touchstone on the grounds that he is wise, frank and benignly disposed to Socrates; there is no mention, at least, of a *diversity* of positions converging on Socratic conclusions. But Irwin is probably right to suggest that it is really Callicles' status as one of Socrates' 'radical critics' that makes his assent particularly telling ((1979) 183).

Note also that in the *Gorgias*, at least, dialectical confirmation seems to amount to verification. Socrates says that consensus with Callicles will 'confirm' him in his views ('βεβαιώσωμαι' 489a5; compare *Prt.* 348d5); this refers, I take it, to his earlier claim that the 'goal of truth' will be secured by agreement between him and Callicles (487e6–7). For confirmation through agreement see also *Phlb.* 14c1–2 and *Lg.* 966a1–3.

characterisation in this work to indicate the merits of collaborative dialogue.⁶⁴ After Socrates' description of Prodicus as 'all wise and divine' but inaudible because of his booming voice (315e7–316a2) we may suspect that this sophist will have little of substance to contribute to the discussion. But Prodicus is not only a figure of fun; quibbling though some of his distinctions may be, other contrasts he draws suggest that his sort of practice has a valuable contribution to make to philosophic inquiry. At 337a–b he urges Socrates and Protagoras to 'dispute' ('ἀμφισβητεῖν') rather than 'squabble' ('ἐρίζειν'), a distinction which is both helpful for clarifying our notion of proper dialectic and similar to a contrast Socrates himself draws in *Men.* 75c–d.⁶⁵ Prodicus is, admittedly, only called upon to assist Socrates during the discussion of Simonides, and even there it is so that Socrates can gain time to reflect on the poem (339e).⁶⁶ But Prodicus then endorses a distinction between being and becoming which will prove central to later Platonic metaphysics (340b3–6). And in the *Protagoras* itself this distinction is put to use in Socrates' subsequent discussion of Simonides (343c ff.), as Frede has noted.⁶⁷ Note that in both the *Meno* and our text Prodicus is described as Socrates' teacher.⁶⁸ No doubt this overstates their rapport, but Plato may well believe that Prodician expertise has its place in philosophy, even though Prodicus himself would be riled if approached as anything less than a teacher.⁶⁹

Characterisation serves, then, to advertise collaboration as well as to demonstrate the strength of Socrates' case. But given that Plato is at liberty to choose how his characters respond, can characterisation really make such a contribution to the arguments of the work? If my account of his use of the characters in this dialogue is correct, is Plato not open to the charge that he has merely fabricated the way in which Socrates' arguments compel assent from Protagoras and his kind?

No, for Plato also uses characterisation to show that these sophists *should* be attracted to Socratic tenets. Several scholars have noted that the sophists should indeed fall in with Socrates' position on the sufficiency of knowledge for virtue, given their claims to inculcate virtue by transmitting knowledge: 'Socrates might argue that if

⁶⁴ For Socratic dialogue as collaborative see 330b6–7; Socrates' use of 'συνεῖναι' ('come together') at 336b2 may also suggest collaboration.

⁶⁵ But a quibble attributed to Prodicus is dismissed shortly afterwards (*Men.* 75e).

⁶⁶ Prodicus is later subjected to some mockery in this passage: he is presented as a Socratic questioner, toying with Protagoras and testing his ability to justify his account (341d6–9). But note that when Socrates appeals to Prodicus to aid him he quotes lines from the *Iliad* (21.308–9) which stress precisely the value of collaboration: 'dear brother, let us both contain the man's strength' ('φίλε κασίγνητε, σθένος ἀνέρος ἀμφοτέροί περ σχῶμεν' 340a4–5). Compare 348c–d.

⁶⁷ Frede (1986). But Frede is disappointingly dismissive about Prodicus himself: when casting doubts on Socrates' initial use of the being/becoming distinction in his exegesis she remarks that 'Socrates indirectly confirms its implausibility by giving credit for the distinction to his apprenticeship in Prodicus' art ... – indicating thereby that this is not a natural reading' ((1986) 739).

⁶⁸ See *Men.* 96d and *Prt.* 341a; for an explanation see *Cra.* 384b–c.

⁶⁹ For Plato's cautious appraisal of verbal distinctions see *Th.* 184c, where Socrates states that 'there are times when it is necessary.' Note that in the *Theaetetus* Socrates says that he sends many people who are not pregnant in soul to Prodicus (151b). This seems to suggest that Prodicus would only agree to be consulted as a *teacher*; he would not respond well to independent creativity.

Protagoras really claims to teach virtue, and not simply to teach a skill that can be used well or badly, then he must agree with Socrates' view that knowledge is sufficient for virtue.⁷⁰ Note that when Socrates argues against 'the Many' that 'being overcome by pleasure' is really 'the greatest ignorance', he adds that Protagoras, Prodicus and Hippias claim to cure this ignorance (357e2–4). The three sophists then agree enthusiastically that Socrates is right (358a4–5).

Protagoras himself claims to impart virtue in several other passages.⁷¹ Given his assertion that he of all people should regard wisdom and knowledge as of supreme importance for human action (352c–d), it would seem that he also purports to transmit knowledge.⁷² If he regards the transmission of knowledge and that of virtue as one and the same project he should indeed believe that knowledge is sufficient to ensure virtuous behaviour.⁷³ And Protagoras nowhere suggests that he offers knowledge and virtue as the results of distinct pedagogical programmes; when he is discussing his teaching the distinction he draws is merely between its civic and its domestic applications (318e5–319a2) and he is happy to hear his political education characterised as both imparting a 'τέχνη' ('expertise') and making people 'good citizens' (319a3–7).⁷⁴ Now it is unclear whether Protagoras believes that to teach knowledge is *ipso facto* to teach virtue, or whether he envisages the relationship between knowledge and virtue as purely causal. But he should at least be prepared to agree to Socrates' claims about the *sufficiency* of knowledge for virtue.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Irwin (1995) 93. 'The sophists, no less than Socrates, are committed to some form of intellectualism; they offer an intellectual training for the good life' (Stokes (1986) 354). Stokes later argues that when Socrates explains away the phenomenon of *akrasia* 'the sophists, to defend the primacy of intellect, must adopt against the "many" on weakness of will the line of defence Socrates shows them, since they can think of no other' ((1986) 425). See also Kerferd (1981) 138.

⁷¹ See 316c9–d1, 318a6–9, 319a3–7 and 328a8–b5.

⁷² Protagoras agrees here that wisdom and knowledge are 'the most powerful of all human things' (352c8–d3). This in itself does not commit him to the view that knowledge is sufficient for virtue; indeed, no mention is made of virtue here. But Socrates has proposed not merely that knowledge rules us and is 'sufficient to help humans', but that it is 'noble' ('καλόν' 352c3); Protagoras agrees to this in 352c8. If he believes that knowledge can be characterised in such a way, he would seem to believe not only that knowledge determines how we behave, but also that it makes specifically for *virtue* in its influence on human behaviour. It is 'εὐβουλία' ('good counsel') rather than 'ἐπιστήμη' ('knowledge') which Protagoras initially promises to teach (318e5–6), but I do not see this as incompatible with a claim to teach knowledge. Protagoras wishes here to contrast his teaching with other sophists' emphasis on proficiency in mathematics, astronomy and poetry, and 'εὐβουλία', unlike 'ἐπιστήμη' or 'σοφία' ('wisdom'), captures the *practicality* which Protagoras claims for his teaching.

⁷³ Though note that the sophist regards courage as decidedly different from the other virtues, to the extent that he does not consider knowledge to be even necessary for courage at 349d. So perhaps he should make no claim to teach courage at all, and regard knowledge as sufficient for practising the virtues other than courage. But it is possible that he does indeed think that knowledge is sufficient for courage; he states that one can be brave and foolish, not cowardly and wise (349d6–8).

⁷⁴ For criticism of this description of Protagoras' education see Taylor (1991) ad loc.

⁷⁵ Protagoras' loyal entourage of followers should also accept the sufficiency of knowledge for virtue, if they have heard Protagorean education described in these terms and expect to receive virtue at Protagoras' hands. It has been argued that Protagoras is (or, at least, should be) committed to other Socratic principles. For example, Irwin suggests that Protagoras should accept the reciprocity of the virtues to defend claims made in his Great Speech. He notes that Protagoras claims both to provide something advantageous for

I do not think that this is simply a matter of Protagoras' *statements* making him vulnerable to Socrates' arguments. Stokes has tried to vindicate Socrates' tactics by attempting to show that the sophist 'is as much the victim of his own rhetoric as of Socrates' acumen', claiming that 'Socrates is working on Protagoras not with mere sophistry but with a clever use of Protagoras' own confusions of thought, carelessness of expression, and widely shared inadequacies of logic.'⁷⁶ But Socrates should not be happy with such a victory, for he is willing to allow Protagoras to revise or withdraw former answers (349c–d).⁷⁷ Rather than trading on imprudent replies he should draw on Protagoras' beliefs and 'out' him as a genuine, if clandestine, Socratic. As scholars have noted, Socrates seems confident that this more ambitious project is possible: 'it is quite common for Socrates to argue that although his interlocutors initially disagree with him, they are also committed to principles that require them to agree with him.'⁷⁸ In the *Protagoras* itself Socrates states confidently and without argument that Hippocrates accepts the Socratic tenet that the state of one's soul is of more importance than that of one's body (313a6–7).⁷⁹

And note that Protagoras holds an attenuated form of the very thesis that we are all committed to true ethical principles, either directly or through other beliefs which entail them. In his Great Speech he describes Zeus sending Hermes to bring 'shame and justice' to humankind and enjoining that *all* humans should have a share of them to ensure that civic communities can arise (322c1–d4). Here Protagoras must, I think, impute to humankind a richer share of the virtues than mere willingness not to harm one another, despite his description of our earlier plight in 322b6–8, for Protagoras says that the virtues we have been given bring about 'the bonds of *friendship*' (322c3). Now Zeus adds that there should be a law that those who cannot partake of these virtues should be killed off 'as a plague to the city' (322d4–5); Protagoras thus seems to hold that some people come into the world without a share (or even the possibility of

Note 75 continued

his pupils and to make people good citizens, objecting that 'it is not clear how far the skills and abilities that promote an individual's success are connected with the virtues of justice and shame that are attributed to all the citizens alike' ((1995) 79; see also Adkins (1973)). The thesis that the virtues are reciprocal thus 'turns out to provide a better defence of Protagoras' view of teaching virtue than Protagoras can provide from his own resources' ((1995) 81).

When Socrates begins to question the sophist he quotes a claim made by Protagoras in 325a2 that the virtues are 'one, taken together' ('*ἐν συλλήβδην*' 329c5). But Socrates does not (and should not) claim that considering the virtues to be 'one, taken together' commits Protagoras to the Socratic thesis of the unity of the virtues. For discussion of the similarities between the hedonism accepted by 'the Many' and Socrates' own view about the importance of considerations of the good for human choice see Irwin (1977) 105. Even if Socrates is no hedonist himself, he should applaud the way in which 'the Many' recognise the *unity* of what we value: their mistake lies in calling it 'pleasure'.

⁷⁶ Stokes (1986) 311 and 303.

⁷⁷ Compare *R.* 340c. Stokes notes what Socrates says in *Prt.* 349c ((1986) 324), yet strangely also claims that 'Socrates' interlocutors in Plato are required in their replies to respect all their previous pronouncements' ((1986) 311).

⁷⁸ Irwin (1995) 86; see also Vlastos (1983) 44–57. Irwin cites *Cri.* 49c11–d1 and *Grg.* 472b6–c2 and 474b2–8. See also Diotima's confidence that Socrates does not believe Eros to be a god in *Smp.* 202b–d.

⁷⁹ But Socrates' confidence may reflect merely his intimacy with Hippocrates; see the text to n. 62 above.

attaining a share) of these virtues.⁸⁰ And it is not clear to what extent Protagoras holds that this share of virtue is *innate*: Taylor suggests that the story of Zeus' gift should be read as the tale of the development 'by a long process of trial and error' of a 'universal habit of mind'.⁸¹ But however he thinks this universal distribution really arose, Protagoras should agree with Socrates that anyone with whom one converses will be committed either to some true moral principles or to beliefs that entail such principles, provided that Zeus' law has been vigilantly observed.⁸²

This is confirmed by the case of Protagoras himself. I have argued that Protagoras' final submission does not reflect an arbitrary or partisan decision on Plato's part; as scholars have already observed, we should expect a sophist like Protagoras to be amenable, after reflection, to Socratic principles. But I have also argued that Protagoras and the other sophists are sufficiently *independent* of Socrates to make their agreement suggestive of objective success, particularly when it is shown that the beliefs of 'the Many' require them too to toe the Socratic line. Of course, there may be other interlocutors, such as Thrasymachus, who would not prove vulnerable to the sort of moves Socrates makes in the *Protagoras*; his conclusions are thus only provisionally corroborated. Plato's use of character can thus provide only this limited confirmation for Socrates' theses. But it is precisely as *provisional* that Socrates himself urges us to view his achievements at the end of our text. So reflections on character and form accord with content.⁸³

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⁸⁰ See also 323b7–c2 and 325a2–b1.

⁸¹ Taylor (1991) 81.

⁸² Note that the sophist is confident that even 'the Many' regard the preservation of cities as important (354b). So he does not seem to think that Zeus' law has been neglected.

⁸³ Many thanks to David Sedley for supervising the initial assembly of this paper, to Malcolm Schofield for guiding my first reflections on character and dialogue form, and to M. M. McCabe, James Warren and the anonymous referees for *PCPS* for their detailed comments and criticism.

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