

## PLATO'S REJECTION OF PROTAGOREAN ETHICS

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NB: I am circulating this draft though I remain undecided about some central points of substance (and not merely about the rhetoric, which needs more than a little improvement). See especially note 38 for a hint at how I think I might alter my reading of Protagoras 349-360.

### Introduction

Plato's dialogues contrast a Socratic approach to ethics with several alternatives. Perhaps the most puzzling alternative is Protagoras'. Socrates wrestles with Protagorean ethics in two dialogues, the Protagoras and Theaetetus, and it is far from clear how these discussions are supposed to fit together. It is, in fact, not even clear that the Protagoras of the Protagoras accepts the Protagoreanism of the Theaetetus.<sup>1</sup> My first goal here is to argue that both dialogues suggest a single Protagorean approach to ethics. According to this approach, what appears to be F to a human being is F to him or her, where F stands in for any ethically evaluative predicate. My

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<sup>1</sup> Vlastos (1956) offers the best attempt to fit them together, and much of what I say in the second part of this essay agrees with him. Some accounts of the Protagoras (Adam and Adam 1893, Frede 1992) do not even try to fit that dialogue's Protagoras to the claim that "man is the measure," and another (Taylor 1991, 100-103; cf. Barney 2006, 86n16) claims that Plato intends for the Protagoras of the one dialogue to be inconsistent with the Protagoras of the other. Commentaries on the Theaetetus (Cornford 1935, McDowell 1973, Burnyeat 1990, Chappell 2004), on other hand, barely mention the Protagoras. Nor do more direct treatments of Protagoras or Protagoreanism show how to reconcile the portrayals of the Protagoras and the Theaetetus. Indeed, the fullest recent study (Lee 2005) says almost nothing of the Protagoras, and there are exceptions that prove the rule, since Woodruff (1999, 304-305) and Decleva Caizzi (1999, 318-321) find Protagoreanism in the Protagoras only by setting aside most of what the Theaetetus says before characterizing Protagoreanism.

second goal is to show that in both the Protagoras and the Theaetetus, Socrates concentrates on a single strategy against Protagorean ethics. He chiefly argues that Protagorean ethics ignores how reason can take the measure of appearances. Both goals concern how Plato understands and responds to Protagoreanism, and so in this essay, I ignore the question of whether Plato's account of Protagoras' thought is historically accurate.

### Theaetetus

In the Theaetetus, Protagorean ethics is not carefully demarcated and not specifically targeted. The dialogue at least gestures toward more several Protagoreanisms, and it offers a slew of criticisms most of which do not even pretend to target all of the Protagoreanisms. The challenge, then, is to isolate Protagorean ethics, and to determine which, if any, of the criticisms apply to it.

Protagoreanism enters after Theaetetus defines knowledge as perception (151e1-3).<sup>2</sup> This definition can be interpreted in several ways. But Socrates clarifies it by identifying it with something Protagoras said:

You have likely uttered no worthless account of knowledge but the one that Protagoras also gave. He said this same thing in a different way. For he says, I think, that a human is the measure of all things, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not. (151e8-152a4)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For the Theaetetus (and Cratylus), I cite the text of Duke et al. 1995, and translations are mine.

<sup>3</sup> The traditional rendering of Protagoras' dictum—"Man is the measure"—retains the Greek's ambiguity about whether an individual human or humanity is the measure. My translation disambiguates in accordance with the sequel in the text (152a6-8 and esp. 158a5-7).

In other words, Socrates asserts that Theaetetus' definition is the same as Protagoras' measure doctrine. This is a startling identity claim, but Theaetetus does not demur (and cf. 157d10-12). So Socrates immediately explains Protagoras' point: "He puts it something like this, that as each thing appears to me, so it is for me, and as it appears to you, so it is for you" (152a6-8). In sum, Socrates introduces Protagoras' measure doctrine by identifying it with Theaetetus' definition and then by explaining it in terms of some relativity. This introduces Protagoreanism as the measure doctrine, elucidated, but each of Socrates' elucidating moves raises questions.

First, the identification of the Protagorean doctrine with Theaetetus' definition suggests that Protagoreanism concerns not just any appearances but perceptual appearances (that is, perceptions) (cf. 152b12). Indeed, at first glance, Socrates seems to construe Theaetetus' definition and the measure doctrine in terms exclusively of sense-perceptions (152c1-2), but he goes on to give the Protagorean a broad view of perceptions, including not just vision, hearing, feeling cold, feeling hot, pleasure, and pain, but also desires, fears, and "many others, infinitely many without names and very many with names" (156b2-7). So we might think that Socrates is introducing two distinct Protagoreanisms, a narrow view about sense-perceptions and knowledge and a broader view about any sort of perceptual appearance and knowledge. Alternatively, we might think that (at 152c1-2) Socrates simply takes sense-perceptions to be especially clear examples of the perceptual appearances Protagoreanism concerns.<sup>4</sup> Not much turns on this. Socrates plainly goes on to assume an even broader Protagoreanism about appearances, and then to acknowledge that one could be a narrower Protagorean about sense-perceptions.

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<sup>4</sup> Perin, in his comments, took the first of these, against my taking the second.

As Socrates fully develops it, the measure doctrine applies to appearances that are not easily construed as perceptual, such as the judgment or belief that the measure doctrine is false (e.g., 171a6-9).<sup>5</sup> But Socrates nowhere suggests that this counts against identifying Theaetetus' definition with Protagoreanism. Instead, he imagines Protagoras characterizing his view both as a claim about perceptions (aisthēseis, 166c4) and as a claim about judgments or beliefs (doxazei, 167d3; cf. 158e5-6), without any worry that these claims might be different. So the general Protagoreanism that Socrates ultimately articulates concerns perceptual appearances that are understood so broadly as to include beliefs.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Perin, in his comments, would have us notice that 156b2-7 does not mention thought or judgment. This opens up the possibility that Socrates means to introduce three Protagoreanisms, one about sense-perceptions, one about appearances that do not include beliefs, and one about appearances that do include beliefs. Again, I incline to think that Socrates is just taking his time in making fully explicit the commitments of a single, general Protagoreanism, but nothing much hangs on this disagreement. What matters is how Socrates characterizes the most general Protagoreanism.

<sup>6</sup> Some scholars (including Perin) balk at this reading. Fine (1998, 207n13), for example, says, "Protagoras has quite a broad view of what can be perceived... Nonetheless, there seem to be some limits, which are never clearly specified, on what counts as a perception." But we should be careful, lest we assume that there are limits because we incline to distinguish between perceptions and other thoughts. For example, when McDowell (1973, 145) suggests that it would be "odd to regard good [agathon] and beautiful [kalon] as perceptual predicates," he speaks for himself. There would be nothing odd for the Protagorean to think that goodness and beauty are perceptible, especially since the Protagorean takes desire to be a perception (156b). What we need is evidence that the Theaetetus' Protagoreanism recognizes limits on what counts as a perception. Evidence that Socrates distinguishes is insufficient, obviously, as is evidence that Socrates distinguishes in the course of articulating a restricted Protagoreanism and criticizing it (as at 179c2-5 and following, discussed below). Perin, in his comments, helpfully cites three passages. First, at 161d2-3, Socrates formulates the measure doctrine as the claim that "Whatever each human being judges through perception, is true for him." But Perin simply assumes that 'perception' here (aisthēsis) is sense-perception, though Socrates has broadened the scope of aisthēsis. But let Socrates have only sense-perception in mind, as he might, given the immediate context. In that context, Socrates is raising an objection to Protagoreanism by noting that it entails that mere sense-perceptual judgments suffice for knowledge. The objection does not imply that Protagoreanism is concerned only with sense-perceptual judgments. Second, at 166b2-4, Socrates' Protagoras says that recalling an experience is not the same pathos as the experience recalled. Perin infers that perception and memory are different kinds of pathē. Perhaps so, but Protagoras can think that there are differences among thoughts—between sense-perceptions and memories, say—and yet believe that all thoughts are perceptions. (One could even use the same word aisthēsis for the genus and one of its species.) Third, at 167a7-8, Socrates' Protagoras says, "It is impossible to judge things that are not or to judge them other than as one experiences them, and these things [viz., the things one is experiencing] are always true." Perin takes this to say that judgments track perceptions, not that they are identical. But the sentence says that it is impossible for judgments to pull apart from perceptions, and it does not say why. Surely their identity is one possible reason, as is Perin's suggestion that judgment necessarily tracks perception. He would favor the latter explanation by appealing to the conversational implicature of the sentence. But I doubt that we should extract how A and B do in fact relate from a claim that asserts the impossibility of A and B relating in some way. The evidence that Protagoreanism distinguishes thoughts and perceptions is strikingly weak, especially next to the clear assertion that the measure doctrine is identical with Theaetetus' definition, Protagoreanism's manifestly broad conception of perception, and Protagoreanism's readiness to treat thoughts and judgments within the scope of the measure doctrine.

In a way, this extended construal of perception is natural. Like us, ancient Greeks could say the equivalent of "it appears to me that *p*" or "I perceive that *p*" when one might expect "I believe that *p*." Socrates, of course, does not think that all thoughts are perceptions; one of his arguments against Protagoreanism sharply distinguishes between perception and thought (184b-186e). But before he develops that objection, Socrates offers Protagoras an account of perception that helps to explain how Protagoreanism could identify thought with perception. According to this account, a perceiver is passively acted upon by percepts (156a-b, 159a-160c).<sup>7</sup> So Protagoreanism can identify thoughts and perceptions just by treating all thoughts as passive receptions. The Protagoreans can reject as irrelevant the fact that some of our mental appearances depend upon our bodily sense-organs, by insisting that mental appearances should be classified by their intrinsic characteristics, and they can insist that all mental appearances share the same essential intrinsic characteristic of being passive receptions. So, precisely because one can have a passive appearance that the measure doctrine is false, one can have a perceptual appearance (that is, a perception) that the measure doctrine is false.<sup>8</sup> As we shall see, Socrates rejects Protagoreanism in part because he rejects this view of thought as passive receptivity. On Socrates' view, the mind can actively sift through the passive appearances; he distinguishes between calculating thought and passive appearances (184b-186e, esp. 186b11-c5).

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<sup>7</sup> Note well that this account of perception (at 159a-160c) immediately follows a characterization of the measure doctrine in terms of thought (158e5-6). This, too, suggests that the account of perception is supposed to apply to all thoughts and not merely to sense-perceptions.

<sup>8</sup> Again, I am concerned with Plato's understanding of Protagoreanism and not with what Protagoras actually thought, but it is not impossible that Protagoras actually believed that every mental appearance is perceptual. Cf. Diogenes Laertius IX 51: "He used to say that the soul is nothing beyond perceptions (aisthēseis), as Plato also says in the Theaetetus." The 'also' suggests that the Theaetetus is just one source of the attribution. One cannot assume that the other, unnamed source(s) are independent of Plato, but one can certainly wonder. At any rate, Diogenes Laertius records that my interpretation of the Theaetetus' Protagoreanism is ancient.

Socrates' introduction of Protagoreanism includes a second prominent feature, in addition to the identification of appearances with perceptions understood very broadly. The Protagorean thesis relies on a kind of relativity. Because some of Socrates' arguments seem to presuppose that Protagoreanism relativizes truth (see esp. 170a-171c), some readers attribute to Protagoreanism the general thought that if it appears to A that X is F, then it is true for A that X is F.<sup>9</sup> But Socrates presents this as secondary to a more fundamental kind of relativity. He attaches the homomensura thesis to what he calls Protagoras' "secret doctrine" (152c10), according to which nothing is one thing in itself because everything always manifests opposites and becomes in relation to others (152d-e).<sup>10</sup> Socrates explains how this works for (plainly) perceptible properties such as white by elaborating the theory of perception he gives the Protagorean. According to this theory, there is no white independent of perceivers, but white must come to be in relation to a perceiver. So, on this view, when it appears to A that X is F, then X is F for A, but the relativization attaches to the property perceived, and not to truth. So if X appears F to A and X appears F to B, while a relativist about truth could say that the same proposition is true for A and true for B, the Protagorean adherent to the secret doctrine must say that there are two different propositions, that X is F for A and that X is F for B, because being F-for-A and being F-

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<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Burnyeat 1976 and 1990. Some readers (e.g., Chappell 1995) go a step further and attribute to Protagoreanism the view that 'true' just means 'true-for-someone'.

<sup>10</sup> Following my general policy here, I want to bracket the question of whether Protagoras actually held the secret doctrine. I take the phrase 'secret doctrine' (tais mathētais en aporrētōi, 152c10) to imply that Protagoras did not say anything of this sort in his Truth, but this does not settle the matter. Plato seems to think that if every belief is true, if there must be straightforward truth-makers for true beliefs, and if the principle of non-contradiction is true, then Protagoreanism requires something like the secret doctrine. So if it is reasonable to attribute those antecedent commitments to Protagoras, it would not be unreasonable to attribute the secret doctrine to him. Of course, Protagoras' attitude toward the principle of non-contradiction is disputed, and his commitment to straightforward truth-makers is murky.

for-B are not the same property (see esp. 154a2-3).<sup>11</sup> Now, the secret doctrine is introduced as a perfectly general thesis, and not as a restricted claim about (plainly) perceptible properties, and Socrates clearly means to join the secret doctrine to Protagoreanism generally.<sup>12</sup> So, on this view, Protagoreanism is committed to a broad relativism about what there is and not a special relativism about truth.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the remarks that suggest a special relativism about truth should be understood in other ways. Sometimes, 'p is true for A' is just a way of asserting how things are in relation to A, and sometimes, 'true for' enters as a consequence of the broader "relativism of fact," since truth is just another property that is relativized to a perceiver when a perceiver believes that some other belief is true.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> If X appears F to A and G to B, is X itself neither F nor G, or is it both F and G? This depends upon how we locate these relativized properties. If being F for A and G for B belong to X itself, then it is, in a sense, both F and G. But as I read it, the secret doctrine suggests that X itself is neither F nor G because F-ness obtains only in the relation between X and A, and G-ness only in the relation between X and B. On my reading, X is F for A if and only if X appears F to A. See esp. 152b1-5—if the wind does not seem cold to X, the wind is not cold for X—with Burnyeat, **178-179**.

<sup>12</sup> The wording of the doctrine is perfectly general when it is articulated and when it is attacked (181c-183c). There is no reason to think that the doctrine is supposed to bolster only Protagoreanism about sense-perception. The same pressures that lead to relativity to make sense of Protagoreanism about sense-perception apply to Protagoreanism about non-sense-perceptions, and Socrates could have made it clear that the relativity is different in the two cases if he had thought that it is. In the *Cratylus*, for what it is worth, Socrates also attributes to Protagoreanism a perfectly general relativism about what there is (385e-386e, esp. 385e4-386a3): "Come let us see, Hermogenes, whether the things that are also appear to you to be in this way, that their being is for each privately, as Protagoras said when he said that a human being is the measure of all things, that things are for me as they appear to me to be and that things are for you as they appear to you to be."

<sup>13</sup> So Protagoreans should not say merely that the wind which appears warm to A is warm for A and which appears cold to B is cold for B. For how can the same wind appear to both A and B? Don't the properties that make the wind the wind have to be relative in just the way that hot and cold are? The Protagoreans should instead say that the wind for A is warm for A, or even that the wind for A is for A warm for A. Although Socrates does not draw this implication explicitly, he does go on to criticize the Protagorean's secret doctrine for annihilating any consistent being to be named by shared language (181c-183b).

<sup>14</sup> The issues in this paragraph are much debated, and my purposes here do not require settling the debate. The view I attribute to the *Theaetetus*' Protagoreanism—for which, see also Lee 2005, 44 and 46-47 and Waterlow 1977, 33-34—resembles what Burnyeat (1976) calls subjectivism (which interpretation he rejects) and what Fine (1994) calls infallibilism (which interpretation she favors). It lies between relativism about truth (for which see Burnyeat 1976 and 1990) and the objectivist view according to which everything is at it appears to be to every observer because it really contains every property (for which see Kerferd 1949-1950, and cf. Sextus, *PH* I 217-219).

So much, then, for Socrates' account of Protagoreanism generally. Protagorean ethics first enters only implicitly, as a domain-specific version of Protagoreanism. Socrates slips ethical properties into the discussion when he asks for Theaetetus' assent to the secret doctrine by saying, "Say again whether it pleases you that nothing is but is always coming to be good and honorable and all the other things we were discussing" (157d7-9). Socrates does not highlight that one could be a Protagorean about all evaluative properties without being a Protagorean about non-evaluative properties, but he does show awareness of how one might restrict the domain of one's Protagoreanism. First, as we shall see, some of his arguments target not Protagoreanism generally but only a narrow Protagoreanism about sense-perception. Second, as we shall also see, he explicitly suggests that Protagoreanism might be more plausible in some domains than in others, and he suggests some restricted Protagoreanisms (171d-172c, 179c). So although the Theaetetus does not introduce a general Protagorean ethics as a target for refutation, it encourages thought about the possibility of general Protagorean ethics. And of course it also encourages thought about the defects of general Protagorean ethics, since some of its arguments against Protagoreanism tell against general Protagorean ethics, as well.

Socrates offers a battery of arguments against Protagoreanism. He begins with several quick criticisms:

- (1) Protagoreanism denies distinctions in wisdom. (161c-e, 162c-d)
  - (1a) No humans could be wiser than any percipient animals. (161c-d)
  - (1b) No human (including Protagoras!) could be wiser than another. (161d-e)
  - (1c) No god could be wiser than a human. (162c-d)
- (2) Protagoreanism makes dialectic absurd. (161e-162a)

- (3) There are cases of sense-perception without knowing. (163a-c)
- (4) There are cases of knowing without sense-perception. (163c-164c)
- (5) There are cases of knowing and not-knowing. (165b-d)
- (6) There are cases of sense-perceiving in some way without knowing in that way. (165b-e)

The third and fourth of these criticisms do not apply to Protagoreanism unless Protagoreanism is committed to identifying appearances with sense-perceptions. So they might make trouble for Theaetetus' original understanding of his definition, but they do not make trouble for the Protagoreanism that Socrates has fully elucidated (or, a fortiori, for Protagorean ethics). The same can be said of the fifth and sixth criticisms, since their development depends upon differences between sense-perception and knowledge.

The first two quick criticisms might seem to be more damaging to Protagoreanism (and thus Protagorean ethics), but Socrates apparently thinks that all his initial parries are somehow disreputable. The fundamental problem seems to be that the initial criticisms do not show that Protagoreanism is mistaken but only that most people are likely to think that it is (162d-163a, 164c-d, 165d, 166c, 167d-168c). The third through sixth criticisms even use verbal trickery (cf. 164c-d, 165d), since they appeal to an ordinary, narrow sense of perceptions as sense-perceptions where the Protagorean assumes a less common, broader understanding of perceptions.

To appreciate this fundamental problem with the initial criticisms, notice the responses a Protagorean could make. Socrates is quick to show how Protagoras might respond to the first two criticisms, by refusing to discuss the gods (162d-e) and by accepting the apparently unsavory conclusion that every being that perceives knows what it perceives (perhaps implicit at

162d-163a, cf. 167d3). This still allows Protagoras to conceive of a kind of wisdom that only some have (166d-167d). He could argue that the wise are those that make better appearances appear. At first blush, this seems un-Protagorean. If the wise are distinguished only by making objectively better appearances appear, then there must be some objective property or properties of goodness. But Socrates' Protagoras can and should be understood to be saying that the wise person changes the appearances, making things appear better.<sup>15</sup> On this view, the person wise in the way of medicine makes patients have appearances that appear better to the patients, and the person wise in the way of politics makes things seem just to the city that also seem good to the city. Given this conception of wisdom, Protagoras can say that some are wiser than others, and he can say that there is a point to dialectic (cf. 167d-168c).

So Socrates needs to offer better criticisms, and he proceeds with five. First, he appeals to disagreement to turn Protagoreanism against itself (169d-171d). Sometimes a person believes that another has a false belief. If his beliefs are true, as Protagoreanism asserts, then the other has a false belief. If the other's belief is true, as Protagoreanism also asserts, then the assessor has a false belief. Either way, Protagoreanism's insistence that all beliefs are true is apparently undermined. More directly, some people believe that the measure doctrine is false. But their dissenting belief must strike Protagoras as true, since he takes all beliefs to be true. So he must concede that the measure doctrine is false for the dissenters. But that is to concede that the dissenters are not measures of what is and is not for themselves. And this is tantamount to

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<sup>15</sup> When Socrates' Protagoras explains that "for one of us to whom bad things appear to be and are, the wise person effects a change and makes good things appear and be" (166d6-7), we could render this as, "For one of us to whom things appear to be and are bad, the wise person effect a change and makes things appear to be and be good." Even without taking 'good' and 'bad' predicatively, though, the coupling of appearing and being makes the Protagorean point plain. One might try to argue otherwise, by taking Socrates' proposal for restricting Protagoreanism at 171e-172b to pick up (and clarify) what he imagines Protagoras saying at 166d-167d. But in the later passage Socrates says (*contra* Cornford 1935, 82) that the restricted Protagoreanism appeals to those who do not go so far as Protagoras goes (172b7-8). Contrast, too, 171e with 167d and 179a-b.

surrendering the measure doctrine, which asserts that everyone is a measure (cf. 167d3-4 and 179b).

There is considerable controversy about these so-called "self-refutation" arguments,<sup>16</sup> but I can justifiably duck most of it. These arguments threaten the unrestricted Protagoreanism according to which all appearances are true. If the Protagorean restricts his measure doctrine to ethical matters—holding that each is the measures of value but not of other things—then he does not need to concede that anyone has a true belief that Protagorean ethics is false or even that anyone has a true belief that anyone else has a false ethical belief. This last point might be contested. If I believe that setting cats on fire for fun is not shameful, and you believe that my belief is false, it might seem as though your belief must inherit truth from your true ethical belief that setting cats on fire for fun is shameful behavior. But there is a difference between first-order beliefs about value and second-order beliefs about beliefs. Protagorean ethics promises infallibility only in the former, and according to the secret doctrine, this promise rests on a confidence about direct private access to evaluative properties. Protagorean ethics recognizes no such grounds for confidence about second-order beliefs about beliefs, and no way of ascending from the commitments that setting cats on fire for fun is not shameful for me though it is for you.

In other words, Socrates is correct to record immediately that restricted Protagoreanisms are not vulnerable to the so-called "self-refutation" arguments. He imagines two restricted Protagoreanisms. First he suggests that Protagoreanism might be especially plausible in the domain of sense-perceptions (171e, cf. 179c). This introduces an alternative for Theaetetus and Protagoreanism: instead of identifying all appearances as knowing perceptions, they could hold

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<sup>16</sup> The label is due to Sextus Empiricus (M VII 389).

that all and only sense-perceptions are pieces of knowledge.<sup>17</sup> Then he suggests that Protagoreanism might apply to questions of right and wrong in the political community, without applying to what is good or advantageous for a human being or community (171e-172b). This is not perfectly general Protagorean ethics. Instead of affirming that justice is as it appears to an individual, Socrates now says for the Protagorean that justice is as it appears to his or her city—though for all he says, the Protagorean might assume that justice is also as it appears to an individual—and more importantly, Socrates cancels the suggestion (157d7-9) that whatever appears to be good to a person is good for him or her. I call this view restricted Protagorean ethics to contrast it with unrestricted Protagorean ethics, though both are restricted versions of unrestricted Protagoreanism.

Restricted Protagorean ethics prompts a response (172b-177c) that Socrates calls a "digression" (177b8). He contrasts the abilities and aims of the politically engaged person with those of the philosopher. Among other things, the philosopher inquires into what a human being is in order to determine what actions and passions are natural for a human (174b), and he inquires into justice and injustice themselves, beyond what appears to be just or unjust to people (175b-c). So Socrates suggests that the pursuit of wisdom is opposed to Protagoreanism, that is, generally against relying on unexamined appearances and especially against taking justice and injustice for a city to be whatever seems just and unjust to it. Of course, the Protagorean rejects this conception of wisdom, in favor of one that involves making better appearances appear (166d-167d). But if we take 'better' to be an objective matter, as restricted Protagorean ethics does, then Socrates can argue that better appearances require escaping the political community's

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<sup>17</sup> Alternatively, if one thinks that the alternative was implicit at 151d-152c, Socrates does not introduce it here but returns to it, after he had abandoned it by expanding the Protagorean conception of perception and thereby expanding Theaetetus' definition.

reckoning of right and wrong. He can say that engagement in local politics in accord with established standards of right and wrong undermines one's health and what is objectively good for one (cf. 173b1). In this way, the digression offers seeds of a much larger case against restricted Protagorean ethics, but its primary purpose in the Theaetetus seems to be only to remind us that there is a larger case to be made and that it is of great importance that it be made. Perhaps, then, the digression can be taken to suggest that there is a larger case against unrestricted Protagorean ethics, as well, but it cannot be said to develop that case.

After the digression, Socrates moves more quickly through three final responses. Socrates first reminds us of restricted Protagorean ethics, according to which whatever a city judges to be just for itself is just for itself although what is beneficial for the city is an objective matter (177c-e). He points out that the city makes judgments with a view to what will be beneficial for it (177e), and he asks whether cities always manages to bring about benefits for themselves (178a). This suggests a weakness for restricted Protagorean ethics, just as the digression suggested.

But Socrates immediately generalizes the problem for unrestricted Protagoreanism. The beneficial, insofar as we aim to bring it about, belongs to a broader class of future concerns (178a). Protagoreanism holds that every person is the measure of what is for him or her. But we can ask whether every person is also the measure of what will be for him or her. This does not require any covert assumption of objectivity. Socrates' question is "whether an individual human is the best judge for himself concerning what is going to seem and be for him" (178e2-3). It applies even to sense-perceptions (178c-d). The layman may think that drinking this particular concoction will make his body appear good to him to be and thus be good for him, but future experience will convict this thought of error. The doctor might have been the better measure of

how the man's body would appear to him after he drank the concoction. So it is false that every human being is a measure, and Theodorus rightly agrees that this is a special problem for Protagoreanism (179b).<sup>18</sup>

At this point, Socrates and Theodorus appear to consider unrestricted Protagoreanism dead. Socrates proceeds to consider the restricted position of Protagoreanism about sense-perception, imagining that the Protagorean could retreat to "the immediate experience [pathos] of each, from which arise perceptions and judgments (doxai) in accordance with these perceptions" (179c2-5).<sup>19</sup> Socrates first argues that this retreat will fail, because the Protagorean relies on the secret doctrine's claim that "all things are always in every kind of motion" (182a1-2; cf. 182c3-4, 183a2-8) and this, if true, would undermine every attempt to represent anything in language. Socrates might have advanced this argument against unrestricted Protagoreanism, since the secret doctrine makes a perfectly general claim to bolster unrestricted Protagoreanism,

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<sup>18</sup> Whatever the status of the "self-refutation" arguments, which Theodorus also endorses at 179b, there is little doubt that the argument from predictions has force. It will not do for the Protagorean to resurrect doubts about personal identity through time (cf. 166b). When I predict that X will appear F to A tomorrow, it does not matter whether I am identical with A. If X does not appear F to A tomorrow, my prediction has been shown false. The Protagorean would do better to characterize my prediction more carefully. She should say that it appears to me now that X will appear F to A tomorrow, for X's not appearing F to A tomorrow does not contradict how things appear to me now. (To go beyond the Theaetetus' account of Protagoreanism, for whatever it is worth, this reckoning fits neatly with Protagoras' reported denial that one person can contradict another (DL IX 53; cf. Plato, Euthydemus 283e-286d), though it is not necessary to make sense of that denial (see Bett 1989, 158-161). On the other hand, it makes it harder to understand Protagoras' reported claim that there are two opposed logoi about everything (DL IX 51), but see Kerferd 1981, 90-92.) But in this case, I can only say how tomorrow seems to me here and now, and that is not to say anything about how things will be tomorrow. I fail to make a robust prediction about the future (see also Chappell 2004, 132), and this is a serious cost to the theory, given the practical importance of predictions, which Socrates' discussion makes plain. A person could, conceivably, muddle through with nothing more than appearances of what will appear to be the case tomorrow. But if he or she never thinks that later appearances make a difference to the value of earlier predictions and if his or her judgments of what will appear to be the case in the future never change accordingly, then he or she will be incapable of learning by trial and error, which requires recognizing error. Such a creature's life will be very short or very lucky. Others could perhaps help him or her by making apparent to him or her things that will keep him or her safe. But the creature could not say that these helpers are wise, for the creature could not say that the helpers make the appearances better than they were before. Protagoras' grounds for thinking himself wise evaporate.

<sup>19</sup> This assumes that judgments are not perceptions but something distinct, such that some of them are in accordance with perceptions and others are not. But it does not show that unrestricted Protagoreanism distinguishes judgments from perceptions. Socrates is characterizing a retreat from unrestricted Protagoreanism, and he is doing so in his own words. Still, notice how he ties passivity to the remaining stronghold of Protagoreanism.

including unrestricted Protagorean ethics (cf. 157d-9). But Socrates has left unrestricted Protagoreanism for dead. His argument focuses on "such things as warmth and whiteness" (182a4-5) and on "a particular kind of perception" such as "seeing and hearing" (182d8-e1), and he concludes that Theaetetus' definition, which now seems to represent restricted Protagoreanism about sense-perception, is problematic (182e-183a).<sup>20</sup>

Finally, Socrates gives one last reason for rejecting Theaetetus' definition (184b-186e). He argues for a distinction between thoughts and perceptions, on the grounds that some mental appearances occur through, and are thus dependent upon, the body whereas others are not, and he then argues that only thought can apprehend being and that one cannot apprehend truth without apprehending being (because one needs to be able to apprehend what is the case). So he concludes that perception cannot be knowledge. This argument is toothless against unrestricted Protagoreanism, which takes all thoughts to be perceptions. Against that broader target, Socrates could not assume so easily that there is a sharp distinction between calculating thought (independent of the body) and passive perception (dependent upon the body), and he would need to earn the assumption that we are capable of calculating thought.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Earlier, after Socrates identified Theaetetus' definition with Protagoreanism, he explained that identification by inflating 'perceptions' so that Theaetetus' definition could match the scope of unrestricted Protagoreanism. But now that he takes himself to have slain unrestricted Protagoreanism, he talks as though Theaetetus' definition is identical with restricted Protagoreanism about sense-perception. I suspect that this shift encourages some readers to be skeptical of the earlier Protagorean account of perceptions according to which all passive thoughts are perceptions (see note 00 above).

<sup>21</sup> Though the final argument by itself is effective only against Protagoreanism about sense-perception, it would have force against Protagorean ethics if the Protagoreans took all ethical predicates to name something accessible to sense-perception and allowed that there is some important difference between sense-perception and other kinds of perceptions. The Theaetetus might allow such a specification of Protagorean ethics—surely it is possible to think that one could see what is honorable, to feel what is good (pleasure?), and the rest—but it does not encourage it. In fact, the way that restricted Protagorean ethics is developed—according to which what the city judges to be just is just for the city—discourages it, and it is not clear why the Protagorean should concede any significance to the distinction between sense-perception and what he will see as just other kinds of perception. So I treat Protagorean ethics as one domain of unrestricted Protagoreanism and not as a subdomain of restricted Protagoreanism about sense-perception.

In sum, Socrates makes two objections that have clear purchase against unrestricted Protagorean ethics. The first uses predictions to show that some people are wiser than others. The second complains about the ontology assumed by unrestricted Protagoreanism in any domain. For what it is worth, Socrates also makes exactly these two objections to Protagoreanism in the Cratylus (385e-386e). But curiously, in the Theaetetus, Socrates only pushes the first of these as a problem for unrestricted Protagoreanism (and thus for unrestricted Protagorean ethics). The ontological objections he leaves to the side until he focuses on restricted Protagoreanism about sense-perception. So I think it is fair to say that the Theaetetus' main argument against Protagorean ethics is that it cannot account for the difference between the wise and unwise.

### **Protagoras**

In the Theaetetus, Protagorean ethics is entertained only implicitly, although what it would be and why Socrates rejects it are tolerably clear. In the Protagoras, we get much more explicit discussion of Protagorean ethical commitments, but it is far from clear that we get what I am calling Protagorean ethics.<sup>22</sup> Protagoras nowhere intimates that man is the measure. At one point, he insists that some things are good for one kind of animal but not for others, or good for the external parts of the human body but bad for its internal parts, and so on (334a-c). But for all he says, each of these claims might be an objective matter, true whether it appears to you to be as he asserts or not.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For the Protagoras, I cite the text of Burnet 1903, and translations are mine.

<sup>23</sup> For further discussion of this sort of claim and its difference from relativism, see Bett 1989.

In fact, most readers suppose that Protagoras actually rejects the Protagoreanism of the Theaetetus. There seem to be three principal causes. Some are misled by Protagoras' Great Speech. Others think that Protagoras' particular sales pitch requires that he recognize some objective values. And many miss the anti-Protagorean force of Socrates' discussion of akrasia because they are distracted by a couple of bright red herrings.

There are three increasingly more difficult challenges to fitting Protagoras' so-called "Great Speech" (320c-328d) with the view according to which whatever appears to be F to a person is F for him, where F is any ethically evaluative predicate. First, Protagoras claims that Zeus and Hermes gave justice and shame to all human beings so that they might live together in cities (322b-c). It might seem as though these "innate moral instincts" ground at least some values in nature, prior to any broad conventions, let alone the variable appearances of diverse individuals.<sup>24</sup> If Zeus gave us innate knowledge, that would be inconsistent with Protagorean ethics. But an innate capacity is perfectly consistent, as Protagoras must think that we all have the innate capacity to perceive what is right and wrong. In fact, a central moral of the Great Speech, that everyone (or nearly everyone (322d, 325b)—exceptions considered below) has a share of the virtue justice (322c-323c), fits perfectly with Protagoreanism's insistence that everyone knows about justice (and whatever else they perceive). Indeed, Protagoras is perfectly explicit that justice is innate in us merely as a capacity and not as any particular content, for he explains that we acquire our share by practice (323c ff.).

But Protagoras' account of how we acquire our share of justice might seem to threaten the Protagorean dictum that if X appears to be F to an individual, then it is F for the individual. He

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<sup>24</sup> See Cornford 1935, 82n2, and cf. Taylor 1991, 101. Protagoras also makes it clear that Prometheus gave humans specialized technai (321d), but we should not suggest that these arts are inconsistent with the Theaetetus' Protagoreanism (see Tht. 167a-c).

stresses the importance of justice to the city, and the role that the city and all its citizens play in teaching each of us what justice is. This might suggest not the unrestricted Protagorean ethics that the Theaetetus hints at but the restricted Protagorean ethics it actually develops (Tht. 172a-b, cf.167c). That is, perhaps justice is fixed for a city by the city's conventions.

I do not doubt that Plato's Protagoras holds this view. But it is consistent with him holding that that justice is also fixed for an individual by the individual's appearances. The question is, if X is just for the city, is it also thereby just for all the city's citizens, regardless of how it appears to be to these citizens? The Great Speech does not encourage an affirmative answer to this question. Protagoras underscores how justice for a city (and the existence of a city) depend upon some convergence among the citizens on what is just. That is, he takes the justice of the city (and the existence of the city) to be a function of how things appear to individual citizens. On this view, if all, or nearly all, the citizens did not possess the art of justice and agree about what is right and wrong, then there would be no justice for the city, and the city would not exist. Of course, the city and its justice can survive the defection of some individuals. But it and most of the citizens will see the defectors as unjust and will treat them accordingly (322d, 325b). This does not mean that defection is unjust for the defector. Protagoras does not consider this part of the issue in his Great Speech, but if he thinks, as unrestricted Protagorean ethics would demand, that defection is just for the defector to whom it appears just, then he would have excellent self-interested reason for ignoring this part of his views. He is in a tight spot both by his profession and by Socrates challenge. To avoid suspicion, he needs to play up

the pro-social, pro-democratic implications of his thinking and ignore its destabilizing tendencies.<sup>25</sup>

Still, and this is the third problem, one might think that the Great Speech offers an objective account of justice, defined by the functional role of constituting and conserving the city.<sup>26</sup> If we take Protagorean ethics to hold that justice for the city is whatever a city says it is, this might seem to conflict with the thought that justice for the city is defined by the conventions that constitute and conserve a city. But I doubt that Protagoras and Plato would see these as conflicting views. Any would-be city whose members agree that justice is such that they do not share a life together is not a city. If the conventions establish that some things are just and others unjust for the city, then the conventions must succeed in sustaining the city. Because justice can be given a thin, objective specification, we might decide that Protagoras is not a relativist. But the central commitments of the Theaetetus' Protagoreanism are still in place. What appears just to a city or an individual is just for the city or individual.

In the Great Speech, everyone teaches political virtue or excellence. By our praise and blame, rewards and punishments, we condition each other to agree on what is right and wrong, and so conditioned, we appear to each other to be basically just. But Protagoras also claims for himself a special role as a teacher of political excellence. He claims to be able to make Hippocrates better and better every day (318a-b), so that he may best manage his household and be most powerful performing and addressing the affairs of the city (318e-319a). This might seem as though it requires objective values, so that pupils can assess Protagoras' claim by measuring

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<sup>25</sup> (Need citations here for the Sophist's reason for caution, for Socrates' sneaky challenge, drawing on Adkins 1973, etc.)

<sup>26</sup> See Barney 2006, 86n16, and cf. Taylor 1991, 101. One might compare and contrast this interpretation with Epicurus' view of justice, for which see Brown 2009. Cf. **Rep 339a**.

their wealth or prestige.<sup>27</sup> But whether the pupil is in fact better off depends upon what is good for the student. If it appears to the student that his general circumstances right now are good for him, then his general circumstances right now are good for him. If it appears to the student that his general circumstances are better for him than they were before he studied with Protagoras, then he is better off having studied with Protagoras.

This general reply might not quiet the skeptic about Protagoras' sales pitch.<sup>28</sup> Whether a student has been made better off depends upon two things. First, what is good for the student, and second, whether the student has come to enjoy more of that. One might well think that whether the student comes to enjoy more of what is good for him is an objective matter, or at least that it would be difficult for Protagoras to convince his pupils otherwise. But still this leaves the question of what is good for the student untouched, and Protagorean ethics denies the objectivity of that (and other evaluative predicates).

The upshot of these considerations is that although Protagoras does not present himself as a Theaetetus Protagorean and although Socrates does not directly query his view of knowledge, Protagoras says nothing to contradict the Protagorean ethics suggested by the Theaetetus, and he says a few things that fit especially well with it. But the best evidence that the Protagoras of the Protagoras accepts the unrestricted Protagorean ethics of the Theaetetus comes from Socrates' final line of argument. To see this, though, we have to look past the distractions.

The first red herring is Protagoras' agreement with Socrates, against the many, that knowledge cannot be dragged around by a passion (352b-d). He is either lying or confused. The

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<sup>27</sup> Taylor 1991, 102.

<sup>28</sup> Taylor 1991, 219-220.

coarse-grained way of appreciating this asks why Protagoras changes his mind about the relation between wisdom and courage. The final line of argument begins with Protagoras insisting that courage is distinct from the other parts of virtue (349d), and he ably resists Socrates first, hasty attempt to show that courage is wisdom (349e-351a). But at the end of the full line of argument, he concedes that wisdom is courage (360d-e). Something in the intervening argument must have forced Protagoras to change his position. The only momentous change of view in the argument is explicitly forced on the many: they have to surrender their view that knowledge can be overcome by passion and accept an alternative account of apparent akrasia. If this does not change Protagoras' view, too, it is difficult to see what in the final line of argument does.<sup>29</sup>

But we can do better than this.<sup>30</sup> Protagoras initially resists the thought that courage is wisdom because he thinks that courage requires more than just knowledge. Some other factor is required. Without that factor, knowing the right thing to do does not guarantee doing the right thing. He does not say what the other factor is, but he does say that the courageous are bold and that boldness comes not just from knowledge but also from spiritedness (thumos) and from madness (351a-b). Further, he says that those who are bold without knowledge are mad (350b). So his view seems to be that boldness comes from spiritedness, which can be, without knowledge, madness, and can be, with knowledge, courage. Or, as he puts it, "courage comes to be from nature [viz., spiritedness] and good nurture [viz., cultivation of knowledge] of souls" (351b1-2).

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<sup>29</sup> So, too, Weiss 1985, Russell 2000, Shaw 2007.

<sup>30</sup> I here draw heavily on Shaw 2007.

This analysis plainly implies that knowledge alone, even well-trained deliberation about what to do,<sup>31</sup> does not suffice for courage. One needs a certain natural spiritedness, as well. Otherwise, fear might cause one to fail to do what one knows one ought to do. It plainly implies, in other words, that Protagoras agrees with the many that knowledge can be overcome by passion. Moreover, it implies that Protagoras is inclined to believe that this problem can be addressed only by another passion (thumos), and not by more knowledge or a different kind of wisdom.

So when Protagoras affirms that knowledge cannot be dragged around by passion, either he is lying, or he is seriously confused about his view. I suspect that he is lying. He is in the business of selling special knowledge (evidence) and scorning the masses (317a, 353a). If the masses are right that his knowledge is easily dragged about by the passions, then he is not so special.<sup>32</sup> But my interpretation of his considered view and of Socrates' rejection of it does not depend upon this suspicion. You may prefer to think that he is merely confused.<sup>33</sup> Either way, Socrates is plainly correct to suggest that their examination of the many's view will lead to clarity for him and Protagoras about courage and wisdom (353a-b).<sup>34</sup>

For us, though, there is a second red herring. Readers of the Protagoras are distracted by the hedonism that Socrates uses to make trouble for the many's account of akrasia and to

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<sup>31</sup> I assume that "good nurture of souls" includes what Protagoras promises to teach, the euboulia that produces successful household management and political power (318e-319a). It would be a disaster for his view if he thought that his teaching contributed nothing to courage.

<sup>32</sup> I here depart from Shaw 2007, 44-45.

<sup>33</sup> I thank Casey Perin and Rachana Kamtekar for insisting on this possibility. But note Sophist 268a-c, where the sophist's self-ignorance and pretense are linked.

<sup>34</sup> Compare 333b-334c and 351c-d, where Protagoras also seems to hide his views and where Socrates also proceeds by treating the many as a proxy for Protagoras. Shaw (2007) discusses these well.

motivate his own alternative account. If we think that hedonism is the sine qua non for the final line of argument, then we will miss Socrates' broader target and his broader response.

Of course, we might think that hedonism is the sine qua non for the final line of argument because Socrates seems to say that it is (354e5-8).<sup>35</sup> I take Socrates to be saying that it is crucial to his argument against the many (addressed in the second person from 354a), and implicitly, Protagoras, to understand that they have no criterion of value other than pleasure and pain (this is the main point of 354b-355a). If one thinks that there is no criterion of value other than pleasure and pain, one cannot recognize anything good or bad other than pleasure or pain motivating a person. So how could a person act against what they think is best except by changing his or her mind about what is best? Any apparent cases of weaknesses are just cases of ignorance, confusion, or regret, and a person needs only to assess the pleasures and pains carefully to avoid such cases.

But none of that makes hedonism crucial for Socrates' larger purposes. First, when he originally articulated the many's position, knowledge could be overcome by spiritedness (or anger, thumos), lust, or fear, in addition to pleasure and pain (352d7-e2 with 352b3-c2). He initially focused on being overcome by pleasure as an example of their claim, to offer an argument that he would then need to generalize. Second, Socrates' final argument ends only when he has brought Protagoras to see that wisdom and courage are not distinct virtues. The dust-up concerning the many's view of akrasia is just one step along the way.

So how is his argument against the many's view of akrasia supposed to generalize? One way of generalizing is to abstract from all the particular passions and to insist that only pleasure

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<sup>35</sup> (citation of those who think that hedonism is ineliminable for Socrates' position, and Shaw's attempt to evade this evidence).

and pain really move us. This approach says that the argument from hedonism is the generalization. But we should not think that hedonism is crucial to Socrates' entire project, critical and constructive, unless we are certain that he intends to abstract from all the particular passions by insisting that only pleasure and pain really move us.<sup>36</sup> We need at least to consider other ways of understanding the generalization.<sup>37</sup>

Instead of abstracting from the various passions, one could offer a richer account of the various passions and explain how they get no grip on us apart from what we take to be good or bad. In fact, in the Protagoras, Socrates suggests just this sort of approach. He defines fear, one of the potentially overruling passions, as the expectation of bad (358d). If every passion can be so understood as a cognition of good or bad, then to act on a passion is just to be moved by some cognition of good and bad, regardless of whether one conceives of good and bad as pleasure and pain or more generally. Even if there are goods other than pleasure, still one's passionate actions manifest a commitment about what is best, just as non-passionate actions do. Again, apparent cases of akrasia are really cases of ignorance, confusion, and regret, and again, the way to avoid ignorance, confusion, and regret is to take the true measure of good and bad. This measuring might be quantitative, as the hedonic calculus would have it, but Plato elsewhere imagines non-quantitative measuring (Statesman 284e). So we can attribute to Socrates in the Protagoras a much broader conception of the target he rejects and a much broader understanding of the measuring art he prefers.

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<sup>36</sup> Here I am worried only about the prospects of Socrates' argumentative strategy. There are evidentiary considerations within and without the Protagoras for attributing hedonism to Socrates, but I am not going to argue about those here. I am fully convinced that they tell against attributing hedonism to Socrates, and I think the best account of how they do so is in Shaw 2007.

<sup>37</sup> Nussbaum (1986) provides one such alternative, by pointing out that the argument works not only from hedonism but also from any quantified consequentialism. The alternative I am keen to articulate was anticipated by Frede 1991, xxix-xxx; see also Shaw 2007, 48-53.

Significantly, this broader reckoning of passion is where Socrates turns to complete his argument against Protagoras (358d-360d). In this stage, Socrates articulates fear as the expectation of bad without insisting that this is an expectation of pain (358d), and he recasts his conclusion from the akrasia argument, without hedonism, as the claim that no one goes willingly (knowingly) toward what he or she takes to be bad (358e). He argues first that this "Socratic paradox" renders the courageous and cowardly similar: because both go for what they take to be good and avoid what they take to be bad, both avoid what they take to be fearsome (358d-359e). So, to distinguish between the courageous and the cowardly, we need to explain why the courageous go for what is noble and the cowardly avoid it (359e-260a). Here Socrates sticks Protagoras to his earlier concession that what is noble is good (359e), and he reminds Protagoras, in line with the Socratic paradox, that if the cowardly go for what is less noble and thus less good, they must do so without knowledge (360a). This ignorance, Socrates maintains, is what distinguishes the cowardly from the courageous and explains why the cowardly are shameful (360a-b). In fact, he and Protagoras agree that there seems to be nothing more to cowardice as an explanation of shameful actions than ignorance (360b-c), which leads them to conclude that cowardice and ignorance are the same thing (360c). Then, by some standard claims about opposites, Socrates infers that courage and wisdom are the same (360c-d).

At just one point in this argument does Socrates appeal to hedonism (360a), and the appeal is utterly superfluous. The argument turns on the broader force of the Socratic paradox that no one willingly goes for what he or she takes to be bad, which needs only the thought that nothing can motivate an action but some cognition of good. That is, it works with broad Protagorean assumptions just as readily as it does with narrow hedonism.

Plato gives us two hints that we should see how this argument works against broad Protagorean ethics and not merely against hedonism. First, as Socrates is developing his argument concerning akrasia, he contrasts "the measuring art" that we need with "the power of appearance" (356d-e). Of course, the power of appearance is precisely what Protagoreanism offers in the Theaetetus: how things appear to you establishes how things are for you. Then, at the very end of the dialogue, when Socrates summarizes his and Protagoras' apparently shifting positions, he characterizes himself as having tried to prove that

πάντα χρήματά ἐστιν ἐπιστήμη

all things are knowledge (361b1-2).

This is a strange way of referring to the virtues, but it neatly echoes the Protagorean dictum that

πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπον εἶναι

of all things a human being is the measure (Tht. 152a2-3).

Twice, then, Plato has Socrates suggest that his conclusions in the Protagoras oppose general, relativizing Protagoreanism.

To take these suggestions seriously, we must not be misled by the Great Speech, Protagoras' sales pitch, or the red herrings of the final argument. But then we can see that Protagorean ethics allows a wide range of evaluations and evaluative attitudes. Socrates does not have to lock Protagorean ethics into hedonism to explain what is wrong with Protagorean ethics. What is wrong is that it finds value in mere appearances, claiming that things are for a person as they appear for him or her, whether the appearance is cool and collected or passionate, measured or unreflective. Socrates urges, instead, that appearances of value can be assessed in comparison

with each other and other possible appearances of value, and that this careful measuring yields how things really are.<sup>38</sup>

### Implications

So the Protagoras and Theaetetus offer a consistent account of Protagorean ethics and a consistent response to it. I conclude with three ways in which my interpretation of Plato's response might seem especially noteworthy.

First, it is hotly contested whether Socrates in the Protagoras commits himself to hedonism or merely uses hedonism in an ad hominem argument against Protagoras. If I am right, though, this misses the depth of the Protagorean position and of Socrates' response to it.

Second, it is tempting to look to Plato's response to Protagoras for some illumination on his rejection of naturalism. After all, the Protagorean formula 'If X appears F to A, X is F for A' resembles a kind of subjectivism, which is a view many naturalists find appealing.<sup>39</sup> If I am

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<sup>38</sup> I am then essentially arguing that the Protagoras 349d-360e needs to be read on two tracks: there is an argument assuming hedonism and another argument that does not assume hedonism. The possibility of the second track becomes clear only in the homestretch, 358d-360e, and its clarity depends in part on fitting Socrates' argument and his target with the Theaetetus. This seems to me better than supposing that Socrates is making a merely rhetorical connection between the Protagoreanism he is attacking and the Protagoreanism of the measure doctrine. (To redeem that suggestion, one could suppose that the rhetorical connection's failure to be a real connection has punch because it reveals how confused or shifty Protagoras really is. But Socrates' words don't seem to have this sort of import in their context. Protagoras, for one thing, does not blink.) Still, there is a third reading that might be best of all. Perhaps Socrates thinks that the Protagorean ethics of the Theaetetus is a kind of hedonism, because any perceptual appearance of good or bad must be a pleasure or pain, respectively. On this view, pleasure and pain just are the passive ways in which we perceive goodness and badness. Socrates could think, in addition, that if one has the measuring art, one gets at goodness and badness by means other than passive perception (other than pleasure and pain). I suspect that Shaw (2007) would go for this sort of reading if he tried to connect the Protagoras to the Theaetetus.

<sup>39</sup> I use 'subjectivism' broadly, for those views according to which there are ethical truths but no mind-independent ethical truths. Such views befit naturalists who find ethical realism and ethical non-cognitivism implausible. But I say that the Protagorean formula resembles such a view rather than instantiates one because if Protagoreanism is committed to the secret doctrine, its ontological commitments outstrip naturalist subjectivism.

right, though, Plato's response to Protagoreanism does not manage to motivate anti-naturalism or even anti-subjectivism. Socrates' principal objection to Protagorean ethics is that it ignores our ability to take the measure of appearances. But the formula 'If X appears F to A and A has taken the measure of the appearances, X is F for A' is still available to the subjectivist and thus the naturalist.

But if Plato's immediate concerns are not hedonism or naturalism, what are they? I am struck by this fact: by tying Protagoreanism to passivity and favoring activity, Plato lays the groundwork for a long-running debate in antiquity, between skeptics who aim to avoid error by living by passive appearances and dogmatists who insist that we have the power of reason to sift what is the case from what appears to be the case.<sup>40</sup> This deep divide is perhaps the most important lesson from Plato's rejection of Protagorean ethics.

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<sup>40</sup> It is tempting to describe these sides as favoring passivity and activity, respectively—compare Spinoza—but that could be misleading. There is something passive about the Stoic sage's receptivity, though much activity has made her inerrant passivity possible. I thank Hendrik Lorenz for discussion of this point.

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