ἀρετή, τέχνη, DEMOCRACY AND SOPHISTS:
PROTAGORAS 316b–328d

AT *Protagoras* 316b8 Socrates introduces Hippocrates to Protagoras, and explains why Hippocrates wishes to be his pupil; and for the next twelve pages of the dialogue the sophist, encouraged by Socrates, expounds his views and methods, and explains what Hippocrates may expect to learn from him. The passage is a confused and confusing piece of Greek, and forms the philosophical introduction to one of Plato's more baffling dialogues. The confusions are, I believe, present in the Greek: we are not here concerned merely with problems created for the modern reader by his misunderstanding of Greek words. In translation, however, and in the light of the intervening centuries of philosophy, Protagoras' position may well appear much less plausible than it must have appeared to a Greek of Protagoras' (or Plato's) own day. My purpose in this article is to try to explain why a Greek might have found it more plausible; what type of Greek was most likely to be convinced; and the motive of Protagoras in presenting his case in the manner in which he does present it. ('Protagoras' throughout, of course, is to be understood as 'the Protagoras of Plato's dialogue'. I should not myself distinguish sharply between Plato's Protagoras and the historical Protagoras; but the question is not relevant to the present discussion.)

I shall inquire what the young Hippocrates wanted to learn from Protagoras, what Protagoras offered him in return, and why he did so.

At 316b8 Socrates thus introduces Hippocrates to Protagoras:

> Ἱπποκράτης ὅδε ἐστὶν μὲν τῶν ἐπιχωρίων, Ἀπολλοδώρου υἱός, οἰκίας μεγάλης τε καὶ εὐδαίμονος, αὐτὸς δὲ τὴν φύσιν δοκεῖ ἐνάμιλλος εἶναι τοῖς ἡλικιώταις. ἐπιθυμεῖν δέ μοι δοκεῖ ἐλλόγιμος γενέσθαι ἐν τῇ πόλει, τοῦτο δὲ οἴεταί οἱ μάλιστ' ἂ⟨ν⟩ γενέσθαι, εἰ σοὶ συγγένοιτο·

Hippocrates is the son of a great and wealthy house, who wishes to make a name for himself in politics, and thinks that the best way of achieving his goal is to become a pupil of Protagoras. This was, of course, the principal reason why the wealthy Athenian young thronged to the sophists;[1] and after some pages of discussion, Protagoras proclaims that unlike other sophists he will not waste his pupils' time on arithmetic, astronomy, geometry or music, but will teach him οὐ περὶ ἄλλου του ἢ περὶ οὗ ἥκει (318e5):

> τὸ δὲ μάθημά ἐστιν εὐβουλία περὶ τῶν οἰκείων, ὅπως ἂν ἄριστα τὴν αὑτοῦ οἰκίαν διοικοῖ, καὶ περὶ τῶν τῆς πόλεως, ὅπως τὰ τῆς πόλεως δυνατώτατος ἂν εἴη καὶ πράττειν καὶ λέγειν.

To which Socrates replies (319a3):

> Ἆρα, ἔφην ἐγώ, ἕπομαί σου τῷ λόγῳ; δοκεῖς γάρ μοι λέγειν τὴν πολιτικὴν τέχνην καὶ ὑπισχνεῖσθαι ποιεῖν ἄνδρας ἀγαθοὺς πολίτας.

Protagoras agrees that he means πολιτικὴ τέχνη, and that he promises to make men ἀγαθοὶ πολῖται. What Hippocrates wishes to learn, and what Protagoras claims to teach, appears to be a skill;[2] and Socrates seems to be of the same mind: when Protagoras (318a6 ff.) promises Hippocrates that he will become βελτίων every day as a result of his instruction, Socrates, to 'clarify' Protagoras' position, asks a series of questions (318b1 ff.) in which

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[1] On this see, for example, my *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford, 1960) 226 ff.

[2] For ἀγαθοὶ πολῖται, see *Merit and Responsibility* 226 ff.

analogies are drawn with other τέχναι, and Protagoras' 'subject' is evidently assumed to be a comparable skill.   Socrates expresses his doubts whether the subject is teachable (319a8 ff.), and adduces evidence from Athenian practice: when the Athenians are discussing technical matters in the Assembly, they only allow experts to speak, and no-one else, even if he be πάνυ καλὸς . . . . καὶ πλούσιος καὶ τῶν γενναίων,[3] could expect a hearing; but when they are taking counsel περὶ τῶν τῆς πόλεως διοικήσεως, anyone may address them, and no-one asks what qualifications he has for so doing.   Evidently they do not suppose that one can be taught περὶ τῶν τῆς πόλεως διοικήσεως.   Nor is it only the average Athenian who holds this view (319e1):

> ἀλλὰ ἰδίᾳ ἡμῖν οἱ σοφώτατοι καὶ ἄριστοι τῶν πολιτῶν ταύτην τὴν ἀρετὴν ἣν ἔχουσιν οὐχ οἷοί τε ἄλλοις παραδιδόναι·

Even talented individuals, and individuals who are talented in this very field, make no effort to teach their sons, or to have them taught by others, the skills in respect of which they are themselves σοφοί (320a); and Socrates concludes from his observations that ἀρετή is not διδακτόν.   (He has, of course, demonstrated at most that it is not taught, not that it is not teachable; but this does not concern my present argument.)[4]

Now even when Socrates is denying that ἀρετή is διδακτόν, he is nevertheless here treating it as a skill: it is Pericles' σοφία that he has not imparted, or been able to impart, to his sons; and that σοφία is evidently his political skill, not his justice or any other 'co-operative' excellence.   (Granted, Pericles' fear that Alcibiades would corrupt Cleinias is based on Alcibiades' incorrigible immorality; but I shall discuss this below.)[5]   Furthermore, when Socrates says that ἀρετή is not διδακτόν, he is controverting Protagoras' assertion that he teaches his pupil περὶ τῶν οἰκείων, ὅπως ἂν ἄριστα τὴν αὑτοῦ οἰκίαν διοικοῖ καὶ περὶ τῶν τῆς πόλεως, ὅπως τὰ τῆς πόλεως δυνατώτατος ἂν εἴη καὶ πράττειν καὶ λέγειν; an assertion which Socrates himself glossed as teaching τὴν πολιτικὴν τέχνην and making men into ἀγαθοὺς πολίτας.   It would appear, then, that the ἀρετή of which Socrates is thinking, and which he is denying to be taught (or teachable), is identical with Protagoras' πολιτικὴ τέχνη and that both are skills.

This is not a surprising conclusion; but the usage of ἀρετή at this period is complex, confused and confusing.   Traditionally, ἀρετή has denoted and commended excellences deemed most likely to ensure the success, prosperity and stability of the group, primarily that with which one feels oneself most closely associated, thereafter with a larger group (the πόλις), provided its interests do not conflict at the moment with those of the group to which primary loyalty is given; and these excellences have traditionally been 'competitive'. Up to this point in the discussion ἀρετή is evidently being used of such a competitive success-producing activity.   In the later fifth century, however, ἀρετή and ἀγαθός began to be used by some Greeks to commend in addition the 'co-operative' excellences.[6]   The usage in part reflects, in part helps to cause, the turmoil of values still discernible in the surviving documents of the late fifth and early fourth century;[7] a situation frequently exploited by Socrates in his arguments.   (In this passage it facilitates Socrates' treating together the different deficiencies of Pericles' sons and Alcibiades.)   The word ἀρετή is now applied to a much

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[3] An interesting sidelight on the kind of qualities whose possession benefited the Athenian orator when general political questions were under discussion.

[4] He attempts to strengthen his argument at 319b4 by emphasizing the σοφία of the Athenians, the implication being that what they made no attempt to teach cannot be teachable. (The irony of many of Socrates' remarks does not affect the present discussion.)   The fact that διδακτός spans both

'taught' and 'teachable' renders the discrepancy more difficult to detect in Greek.

[5] P. 5.

[6] For the terms 'competitive' and 'co-operative excellences' see *Merit and Responsibility* 6 ff.; and 'Homeric Values and Homeric Society', *JHS* xci (1971) 3 f.; and for loyalty to smaller and larger groups, *Merit and Responsibility* 231 f., 236 ff.

[7] See *Merit and Responsibility* chapters ix to xiii.

wider range of qualities and activities than has previously been the case; the implications of such a usage, spanning the competitive and the co-operative, have not yet been explored; and all kinds of verbal confusion and/or sleight-of-hand are possible. The remainder of Protagoras' exposition illustrates one of the possibilities.

Protagoras next (320c8 ff.) relates his myth. When Epimetheus had failed to reserve any other form of defence for human beings, Prometheus κλέπτει Ἡφαίστου καὶ Ἀθηνᾶς τὴν ἔντεχνον σοφίαν σὺν πυρὶ and gave it to mankind. τὴν μὲν οὖν περὶ τὸν βίον σοφίαν ἄνθρωπος ταύτῃ ἔσχεν, τὴν δὲ πολιτικὴν οὐκ εἶχεν· ἦν γὰρ παρὰ τῷ Διί (321d). The τέχνη of Hephaestus and Athena is a skill, or a corpus of skills; and πολιτικὴ σοφία is treated as something similar. But when Protagoras describes the precarious condition of men before the foundation of cities, able to practise the arts and crafts, but too weak to defend themselves against wild beasts, he adds the following (322b3):

> καὶ ἡ δημιουργικὴ τέχνη αὐτοῖς πρὸς μὲν τροφὴν ἱκανὴ βοηθὸς ἦν, πρὸς δὲ τὸν τῶν
> θηρίων πόλεμον ἐνδεής—πολιτικὴν γὰρ τέχνην οὔπω εἶχον, ἧς μέρος πολεμική—ἐζήτουν δὴ
> ἀθροίζεσθαι καὶ σῴζεσθαι κτίζοντες πόλεις· ὅτ᾽ οὖν ἀθροισθεῖεν, ἠδίκουν ἀλλήλους ἅτε οὐκ
> ἔχοντες τὴν πολιτικὴν τέχνην, ὥστε πάλιν σκεδαννύμενοι διεφθείροντο. Ζεὺς οὖν δείσας
> περὶ τῷ γένει ἡμῶν μὴ ἀπόλοιτο πᾶν, Ἑρμῆν πέμπει ἄγοντα εἰς ἀνθρώπους αἰδῶ τε καὶ
> δίκην, ἵν᾽ εἶεν πόλεων κόσμοι τε καὶ δεσμοὶ φιλίας συναγωγοί.

This passage too begins by treating πολιτικὴ τέχνη as a τέχνη like others; but if we ascribe to τέχνη the same usage as our 'skill', 'art', 'craft', we shall surely be surprised by some of what follows. True, though we may find it a little odd that one should need the πολιτικὴ τέχνη to fight successfully against wild animals, we may reflect that in a city whose effective defence by land depended on the hoplite phalanx, by sea on the trireme, the training of each of which must have required much organisation and many regulations, such an attitude is explicable. (The statement may in fact be an inapposite projection back into primitive conditions of the proposition, entirely defensible in the context of a πόλις, that in the analysis of the functions of a city, πολεμικὴ falls under πολιτική.)[8] Again, when we reach the statement that early men committed injustices against each other because they lacked πολιτικὴ τέχνη, we may regard this as a characteristic example of Greek intellectualism; but when Protagoras informs us that Zeus cured this condition by sending to man αἰδῶ τε καὶ δίκην, we must find the statement very odd indeed; for αἰδώς bears no resemblance to anything which we should regard as a skill; and though δικαιοσύνη is elsewhere held to be a τέχνη,[9] αἰδώς never reappears in this guise.[10] We cannot simply write this off as mythological language: even mythological language has to appear plausible to its readers; and though αἰδώς, and δίκη in the sense of δικαιοσύνη, are uncommon in the Attic prose of the period, their usage would be entirely familiar from poetic diction.

It seems unlikely that in the late fifth century the proposition that one could endow all mankind with the πολιτικὴ τέχνη by giving them αἰδώς and δίκη was as implausible as rendering τέχνη by 'art' or 'skill' would suggest. The range of τέχνη seems readily to allow it to be used of justice: a Polemarchus does not reply 'but δικαιοσύνη isn't a τέχνη', even when in a logical ἀπορία (*Republic* 332c ff.).[11] τέχνη seems applicable to any activity which reliably attains to an end, however diverse the means to the different ends may be; and in

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[8] *Cf.* Aristotle *EN* 1094b2 ff. The passage quoted in the text itself indicates that such analyses already existed.

[9] E.g. *Republic* 332c ff.

[10] Nor was it likely to do so. Aristotle's reasons,

EN 1128b10 ff., for not treating αἰδώς as an ἀρετή are even more cogent reasons against treating it as a τέχνη if this be interpreted as 'skill'; and Aristotle here reflects the common usage of αἰδώς.

[11] See also *Merit and Responsibility* p. 241 (10).

the intellectual climate of the sophistic, it is a highly commendatory word.[12] In these circumstances, any kind of purposive activity of which the speaker approves may be dubbed a τέχνη by him, and thus endowed with intellectual respectability; for no criteria of τέχνη-hood exist before the *Gorgias*, and the definition there offered is not *necessarily* relevant even to later dialogues of Plato, and is certainly not relevant to those which are earlier.

Protagoras' account may appear more plausible in Greek; but the range of τέχνη has undoubtedly permitted him to equivocate. At 318e Protagoras was claiming to impart a success-producing skill: εὐβουλία, ἄριστα διοικεῖν, and τὰ τῆς πόλεως δυνατώτατος . . . καὶ πράττειν καὶ λέγειν all commend success and efficiency, and raise no questions of αἰδώς τε καὶ δίκη; but now (322b ff.) πολιτικὴ τέχνη is that whose absence causes men to ἀδικεῖν ἀλλήλους, and whose absence may be cured by endowing all with αἰδώς τε καὶ δίκη; for αἰδώς τε καὶ δίκη appear to be not merely necessary but also sufficient. (I shall discuss this point further below.)

Protagoras now draws conclusions from the foregoing. All men must have αἰδώς and δίκη: οὐ γὰρ ἂν γένοιντο πόλεις otherwise. Accordingly (322d5 ff.) it is the Athenian custom to allow only a few—the experts—to discuss questions of ἀρετὴ τεκτονικὴ or any other δημιουργικὴ ἀρετή; but when the discussion concerns πολιτικὴ ἀρετή . . . ἣν δεῖ διὰ δικαιοσύνης πᾶσαν ἰέναι καὶ σωφροσύνης, they very reasonably allow anyone to contribute, since it is a condition of the existence of cities that everyone should partake of *this* ἀρετή. As an indication that all mankind believes that everyone has a share in δικαιοσύνης καὶ τῆς ἄλλης πολιτικῆς ἀρετῆς, Protagoras points out that in the case of the other ἀρεταί men mock at or grow angry with anyone who pretends to be an ἀγαθὸς αὐλητής or to possess any other τέχνη, whereas even in the case of someone whom they know to be unjust they regard the admission of injustice as madness, though in the case of the inexpert flute-player they regarded it as mere σωφροσύνη to acknowledge that one had no skill in playing the flute; for all must claim to be δίκαιοι whether they are so or not.

Now the emotive charge on ἀρετή was much higher than that on τέχνη (though the use of τέχνη, as I have already said, itself conveys approval); but an examination of Protagoras' exposition shows clearly that ἀρετή and τέχνη are being used to *denote* the same kind of activities. πολιτικὴ τέχνη and πολιτικὴ ἀρετή have the same implications; but ἀρετῆς τεκτονικῆς . . . ἢ ἄλλης τινὸς δημιουργικῆς employs ἀρετή where τέχνη is usually employed. There is in one sense no reason to be surprised at the phrase ἀρετὴ τεκτονική: anything which is ἀγαθός may be said to have an ἀρετή, so that the ἀγαθὸς τέκτων undoubtedly has a claim to possess ἀρετὴ τεκτονική; but such uses of ἀρετή are unusual, and I shall argue below that the choice of the word here has an ascertainable motive.[13]

But whether the activity is termed πολιτικὴ ἀρετή or πολιτικὴ τέχνη, Protagoras is equivocating. πολιτικὴ ἀρετή, which is simply the excellence of the ἀγαθὸς πολίτης, and was a skill at 319a4, has now become largely an assemblage of co-operative moral excellences, said—very reasonably—to be necessary if there are to be cities at all. But to say that it is necessary to be just in order to be a citizen, while it presumably entails that it is necessary to be just in order to give advice on general political questions, since only a citizen would be permitted to do this, does not entail that it is *sufficient* to be just in order to give good advice, 'skilful' advice, on such questions, as Protagoras implies, for example at 323a5 ff.; for though Protagoras speaks there of δικαιοσύνης τε καὶ τῆς ἄλλης πολιτικῆς ἀρετῆς, and though, as I shall try to show, the addition has a part to play in the case Protagoras is (illogically) putting, the rest of the paragraph is concerned only with justice; and Protagoras has claimed no more than that all mankind have been endowed with αἰδώς τε καὶ δίκη.

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[12] Note Polus' dismay (*Gorgias* 462b5 ff.) at the suggestion that rhetoric is not a τέχνη but merely an (intellectually much less respectable) ἐμπειρία.

[13] The fact that ἀρετή is traditionally a 'success-word' renders the substitution of ἀρετή for τέχνη valid in many contexts; and this renders substitution in all cases easier.

Furthermore, Protagoras' 'proof' (323a ff.) proves no more than the necessity for justice. It may well be true that, whatever the status of justice relative to other qualities in their society, it would be thought madness by most people at most times to proclaim one's injustice; but it is not apparent, whether in ancient Athens or anywhere else, that it is madness to say that one is unqualified to give an opinion on a question of general politics because one has neither the skill nor the necessary specialised knowledge to do so. (Even Pericles merely terms such a person ἀχρεῖος, Thuc. ii 40.2.) Protagoras is confusing co-operative excellences with administrative and political skills. Whether he has motives for so doing, or is led to do so by a confusion of thought prevalent at the period, will be considered later.

Protagoras now (323c5 ff.) offers a proof that πολιτικὴ ἀρετή does not come to one φύσει but is διδακτόν: no-one is angry when men possess certain κακά—ugliness, weakness, small stature—φύσει or τύχῃ, nor does anyone admonish or teach or punish anyone in this condition, whereas they do punish, admonish and grow angry with those who lack the ἀγαθά which are thought to come ἐξ ἐπιμελείας καὶ ἀσκήσεως καὶ διδαχῆς; and ἡ ἀδικία καὶ ἡ ἀσέβεια καὶ συλλήβδην πᾶν τὸ ἐναντίον τῆς πολιτικῆς ἀρετῆς fall into this category.

The argument is reasonable, and 'advanced' for its date; but it demonstrates no more than the need for co-operative excellences. Protagoras may hint at more with πᾶν τὸ ἐναντίον τῆς πολιτικῆς ἀρετῆς; but he has proved no more. We may perhaps be rather surprised to find the emphasis on the teachability of ἀρετή combined with the assertion that πολιτικὴ τέχνη is a gift from Zeus; for even if it was originally a gift from Zeus by special dispensation, surely Zeus does not send Hermes to endow each infant with αἰδώς τε καὶ δίκη individually. Surely it is now part of the essential nature of human beings that they possess αἰδώς τε καὶ δίκη; so that we might expect Protagoras to hold that these qualities exist φύσει. One might, of course, hold that the capacity for αἰδώς τε καὶ δίκη existed φύσει, but needed teaching to develop it; and Protagoras does indeed use εὐφυέστατος and ἀφυής (327b8 and c1) in connection with learning flute-playing; but in the case of φύσις too the presuppositions are more complex than might appear at first sight, as I shall endeavour to demonstrate below.

The confusion between co-operative excellences and administrative skills continues. At 324a6 and b6 ἀρετή is concerned primarily with co-operative excellences, and opposed to injustice (324a3, a6, a7, b2, etc.); but at 324c5 Protagoras sums up thus:

> ὡς μὲν οὖν εἰκότως ἀποδέχονται οἱ σοὶ πολῖται καὶ χαλκέως καὶ σκυτοτόμου συμβουλεύοντος τὰ πολιτικά, καὶ ὅτι διδακτὸν καὶ παρασκευαστὸν ἡγοῦνται ἀρετήν, ἀποδέδεικταί σοι, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἱκανῶς, ὥς γέ μοι φαίνεται.

These are not separate 'proofs'. The appropriateness of all giving their advice in the assembly depends on their possession of this teachable ἀρετή; and this consists in the possession of αἰδώς and δίκη.

In the next paragraph Protagoras returns to the question why οἱ ἀγαθοί have their sons taught everything that schoolmasters teach, and make them σοφοί at this, ἣν δὲ αὐτοὶ ἀρετὴν ἀγαθοὶ οὐδένος βελτίους ποιοῦσιν. 'Skill' seems to be in question; but Protagoras next asks Socrates—not in a μῦθος but in a λόγος—whether there is something which all the citizens must have if a city is to exist (324d7 ff.); and

> εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἔστιν, καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ ἓν οὐ τεκτονικὴ οὐδὲ χαλκεία οὐδὲ κεραμεία ἀλλὰ δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ τὸ ὅσιον εἶναι, καὶ συλλήβδην ἓν αὐτὸ προσαγορεύω εἶναι ἀνδρὸς ἀρετήν.

Once again *Protagoras* ends with a vague and unspecific phrase: the reader may begin to suspect that he is doing it on purpose. The other excellences are specifically co-operative; and the necessity of these alone has been demonstrated. But it was not for his co-operative excellences that Pericles was regarded as being supremely possessed of πολιτικὴ ἀρετή;[14] and it is not the absence of these that is imputed to his sons. It is true that the traditional ἀρετή of courage manifested in the successful defence of the πόλις has not been mentioned. The necessity for the presence of this ἀρετή would have been generally conceded;[15] but again, it was not Pericles' courage in battle that was his principal claim to ἀρετή; political skill has been smuggled into the argument, entirely without justification.

Protagoras continues by giving an account of Greek practice in imparting ἀρετή. He argues that since it is teachable, and since people have their sons taught other things the lack of which is not punishable by death, it is unreasonable to suppose that they do not make every effort to have them taught those things for which (325b7) ἥ τε ζημία θάνατος αὐτῶν τοῖς παισὶ καὶ φυγαὶ μὴ μαθοῦσι μηδὲ θεραπευθεῖσιν εἰς ἀρετήν, and in addition to death confiscation of property and the utter destruction of οἶκοι. Here we are not concerned with political skill; for though Greeks sometimes took cruel vengeance[16] on unsuccessful politicians and generals, no such fate was likely to overtake a Greek for not taking an active rôle in politics: it is lack of justice and the other co-operative excellences that is relevant here. Protagoras insists that the subject is taught (325c6): from youth upwards nurse, mother, παιδαγωγός and the father himself make every effort ὅπως ⟨ὡς⟩ βέλτιστος εἴη ὁ παῖς, παρ' ἕκαστον καὶ ἔργον καὶ λόγον διδάσκοντες καὶ ἐνδεικνύμενοι ὅτι τὸ μὲν δίκαιον, τὸ δὲ ἄδικον, καὶ τόδε μὲν καλόν, τόδε δὲ αἰσχρόν, καὶ τόδε μὲν ὅσιον, τόδε δὲ ἀνόσιον, καὶ τὰ μὲν ποίει, τὰ δὲ μὴ ποίει. Next come teachers; and they devote more effort to securing the εὐκοσμία of their pupils than to their learning their letters or cithara-playing. When they can read, the pupils (325e5 ff.) are given the works of ποιητῶν ἀγαθῶν to read, ἐν οἷς πολλαὶ μὲν νουθετήσεις ἔνεισιν πολλαὶ δὲ διέξοδοι καὶ ἔπαινοι καὶ ἐγκώμια παλαιῶν ἀνδρῶν ἀγαθῶν, ἵνα ὁ παῖς ζηλῶν μιμῆται καὶ ὀρέγηται τοιοῦτος γενέσθαι. The citharistai behave similarly, taking the young to the poems of other ποιηταὶ ἀγαθοί, and (326b1) τοὺς ῥυθμούς τε καὶ τὰς ἁρμονίας ἀναγκάζουσιν οἰκειοῦσθαι ταῖς ψυχαῖς τῶν παίδων, ἵνα ἡμερώτεροί τε ὦσιν, καὶ εὐρυθμότεροι καὶ εὐαρμοστότεροι γιγνόμενοι χρήσιμοι ὦσιν εἰς τὸ λέγειν τε καὶ πράττειν. πᾶς γὰρ ὁ βίος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εὐρυθμίας τε καὶ εὐαρμοστίας δεῖται.

The evident subject here is co-operative excellences; but the passages quoted again illustrate one of the ambiguities in the Greek of the period on which Protagoras' exposition depends. τόδε μὲν καλόν, τόδε δὲ αἰσχρόν may seem to us to be concerned with co-operative excellences; but the words traditionally belong to the competitive field, and now span both; while the παλαιῶν ἀνδρῶν ἀγαθῶν of the ἀγαθοὶ ποιηταί would certainly manifest competitive ἀρετή.[17] Accordingly the idea of being a good leader in war and peace is implicit; and this of course assists the case—though not the logic of the case—that Protagoras is making. The contribution of the citharistai in rendering their charges εὐρυθμότεροι and εὐαρμοστό-τεροι, while doubtless necessary, is certainly not sufficient to make one χρήσιμος in speech and action, for πολιτικὴ ἀρετή does not mean simply reliably doing what one is told, whether by a superior or by the laws: nothing could be further from the ἀρετή of a Pericles or a Themistocles. (The ἀγαθοὶ ποιηταί would in fact furnish only ideals and models of effective leadership in peace and war, and values rather than practical skills; but it is evident that at this time it was believed that practical skills could be learned from Homer and other admired poets;[18] and this too would assist Protagoras' case.)

The last stage of education, according to Protagoras, is supplied by the νόμοι (326c7 ff.):

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[14] *Cf.* the implications of *Gorgias* 503c ff.

[15] Its absence from the present argument may not be accidental; see below, pp. 10–11.

[16] For example, Miltiades, Hdt. vi 136, Pericles,

Thuc. ii 65. See also *Merit and Responsibility* 217(15).

[17] See *Merit and Responsibility*, chapters iii, iv, viii.

[18] Cp. Plato, *Ion passim*, Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1006 ff.

ἡ πόλις αὖ τούς τε νόμους ἀναγκάζει μανθάνειν καὶ κατὰ τούτους ζῆν κατὰ παράδειγμα.   The practice is similar to that of school-teachers in furnishing examples of letters for their pupils to copy (326d5 ff.): ὡς δὲ καὶ ἡ πόλις νόμους ὑπογράψασα, ἀγαθῶν καὶ παλαιῶν νομοθετῶν εὑρήματα, κατὰ τούτους ἀναγκάζει καὶ ἄρχεσθαι, ὃς δ᾽ ἂν ἐκτὸς βαίνῃ τούτων κολάζει· καὶ ὄνομα τῇ κολάσει ταύτῃ καὶ παρ᾽ ὑμῖν καὶ ἄλλοθι πολλαχοῦ, ὡς εὐθυνούσης τῆς δίκης, εὐθῦναι. This too is designed to ensure the ἀρετή of the citizen (326e2); and to make the passage logical it would be necessary to *identify* good administration with abiding by the laws. Now this is indeed the goal to which Plato aspires in the *Laws*; but it is not what Protagoras has in mind, and not the practice of Athenian democracy: Pericles would have received short shrift in Plato's *Laws*-state.   Protagoras is once again confusing the proposition that it is necessary to be law-abiding in order to have πολιτικὴ ἀρετή with the proposition that it is sufficient.

In the next paragraph Protagoras addresses himself to the question why τῶν ἀγαθῶν πατέρων πολλοὶ υἱεῖς φαῦλοι γίγνονται.   His answer is that it depends on the innate aptitudes of the sons (εὐφυέστατος, ἀφυής, 327b8, c1): after all, if flute-playing were as important as ἀρετή, and everyone paid as much attention to imparting it as they now do to imparting justice, the ἀγαθοὶ αὐληταί would not necessarily be the sons of ἀγαθοὶ αὐληταί.   The analogy suggests that ἀρετή is once again being regarded as a skill; but up to 328a8 at least Protagoras is evidently concerned with ἀδικία (though at 327b2 he uses another vague δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀρετή).

Protagoras now returns to his own professions as a teacher.   At 319e5 ff. he claimed to teach τὴν πολιτικὴν τέχνην, in terms which suggested a skill; but subsequently maintained that everyone possesses αἰδώς and δίκη (or the capacity for αἰδώς and δίκη), and that all teach ἀρετή interpreted as δικαιοσύνη, with which πολιτικὴ τέχνη now appears at least on some occasions to be identified; and sketched an excellent account of the 'socialisation' of the young in a Greek state.   Evidently Protagoras must now attempt to define his own contribution; and we might expect him to state that he teaches political and administrative skills to those whom the institutions and practices of the state have already rendered δίκαιοι.[19]

What he actually says (328a8) is that though all teach ἀρετή, κἂν εἰ ὀλίγον ἔστιν τις ὅστις διαφέρει ἡμῶν προβιβάσαι εἰς ἀρετήν, ἀγαπητόν.   ὧν δὴ ἐγὼ οἶμαι εἷς εἶναι, καὶ διαφερόντως ἂν τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων ὀνῆσαί τινα πρὸς τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν γενέσθαι.

In these lines, Protagoras is undoubtedly trying to give the impression that what he does is essentially the same as what citizens-in-general do; and they impart δικαιοσύνη and the co-operative excellences (according to Protagoras' account).   But he concludes (328c3 ff.):—

Τοιοῦτόν σοι, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἐγὼ καὶ μῦθον καὶ λόγον εἴρηκα, ὡς διδακτὸν ἀρετὴ καὶ Ἀθηναῖοι οὕτως ἡγοῦνται, καὶ ὅτι οὐδὲν θαυμαστὸν τῶν ἀγαθῶν πατέρων φαύλους ὑεῖς γίγνεσθαι καὶ τῶν φαύλων ἀγαθούς, ἐπεὶ καὶ οἱ Πολυκλείτου ὑεῖς, Παράλου καὶ Ξανθίππου τοῦδε ἡλικιῶται, οὐδὲν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα εἰσίν, καὶ ἄλλοι ἄλλων δημιουργῶν.

Here the analogy suggests that skill is once again in the forefront of Protagoras' mind, as does the allusion to Pericles' sons; for lack of justice is not the complaint against them. Again, it is difficult to suppose that Protagoras taught, or thought that he taught, to young Athenian ἀγαθοί merely the nature of the Athenian legal system[20] and how best to obey it.

To the end of the exposition, then, the proposition that it is necessary for an active

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[19] Compare and contrast Gorgias' position, *Gorgias* 456a7 ff.   seems to suggest that written laws are more in Protagoras' mind.

[20] Or customs, since νόμος spans both; but 326c7 ff.

politician to be just and law-abiding is confused with the proposition that it is sufficient for an active politician to be just and law-abiding. In the course of my discussion I have tried to indicate the vagueness of terminology (and hence, of course, the ideas and pre-suppositions which the terms reflect and carry) which renders such a confused exposition more plausible in Greek. In conclusion, I wish to consider whether Protagoras is a mere prisoner of his language, or in this sophistic ἐπίδειξις he is in fact using words with great rhetorical skill as a *captatio benevolentiae* addressed to as many sections of the Athenian public as possible. (We need not debate the extent to which it makes sense to discuss the intentions of a Protagoras who is a character in a dialogue written by someone else: it suffices to indicate the likely effect of the language on certain types of Athenian.)

Protagoras was the greatest and most influential of the first generation of sophists, an entirely new phenomenon in Greece. Plato and Aristophanes portray the sophists as dangerous but attractive. Attractive, certainly, to some; but many Athenians must have found them simply dangerous. In Athens as in other Greek states, a restricted number of families of ἀγαθοί (not the ἀγαθοί as a whole) had traditionally taken a prominent active part in politics. These were the repositories of political wisdom; and their older members, at least, must have resented the wandering 'foreign' teachers who claimed to be able to teach what was necessary to succeed in politics in any city. (The younger members doubtless flocked to the sophists, along with others who could afford to do so: we may note Protagoras' claim, 316c7, to attract τῶν νεῶν τοὺς βελτίστους away from their former associations; for βέλτιστοι certainly has socio-political overtones.) Again, many of the poorer citizens must have had suspicions of the likely political effect of the expensive education, which only the wealthier members of society could afford,[21] offered by the sophists. Such suspicions would have to be allayed; and I shall endeavour to show how Protagoras tries to allay them; but Hippocrates is one of the wealthy young, οἰκίας μεγάλης καὶ εὐδαίμονος, who wishes to become ἐλλόγιμος . . . ἐν τῇ πόλει; so that Protagoras can declare frankly to him that he will teach him οὐ περὶ ἄλλου του ἢ περὶ οὗ ἥκει. He wants to acquire πολιτικὴ τέχνη, πολιτικὴ ἀρετή, a skill which will enable him to succeed in politics; and the ends to which the ἀγαθός wished to direct this skill are apparent from other Platonic dialogues.[22] The poorer citizens might well be suspicious.

Socrates then challenges Protagoras to prove that ἀρετή is διδακτόν; and offers as his reason for not believing in its teachability not an analysis of the nature of ἀρετή and a doubt that one could teach any such thing, but the empirical observations mentioned above. Whatever Plato's motive for this, the effect is to enable Protagoras' speech to draw on all the vagueness of ἀρετή (and τέχνη). The ἐπίδειξις which follows is not directed at Hippocrates, and is the kind of utterance which might well have been made by a newly arrived sophist with the suspicions of a mass audience in mind:[23] a necessary precaution in a democracy, for even if most of the inhabitants could not afford the sophist's full course of instruction, they had votes and could expel a stranger whom they suspected. Now πολιτικὴ τέχνη is represented as being the possession of αἰδώς and δίκη—which all would suppose themselves to possess—while a skilful disposition of vague phrases such as τῆς ἄλλης πολιτικῆς ἀρετῆς (323a6) hints that, of course, his hearers really have the whole of πολιτικὴ τέχνη in its full sense too. Protagoras does not express as a formal proposition 'it is sufficient to have αἰδώς and δίκη to have the πολιτικὴ τέχνη'; he simply uses the demonstrable necessity of αἰδώς and δίκη, coupled with the ambiguities and vagueness of ἀρετή and τέχνη, to create in his hearers' minds the notion that they all have πολιτικὴ ἀρετή or τέχνη with all the implications of those terms. His ἐπίδειξις is an exercise of high rhetorical skill.

The nature of the supposed audience may well explain the surprisingly minor rôle of

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[21] *Cf.* Socrates' ironical regret that he did not hear Prodicus' fifty-drachma, but only the one-drachma, ἐπίδειξις, *Cratylus* 384b.

[22] *Cf.* Meno in *Meno* 71e2, 73c9, 77b4, 78c1.

[23] It may well have been modelled on an ἐπίδειξις of Protagoras known to Plato.

courage and warlike skill in Protagoras' exposition.   The manifest importance of successful defence of the city 'if there are to be cities at all' had traditionally given courage exercised in ensuring the city's victory in war a pre-eminent place among the ἀρεταί; but here, apart from a mention at 322b4, where the enemy are wild beasts, it does not appear in the discussion, though it is there said to be part of πολιτικὴ τέχνη.   The reason may be that Protagoras is emphasising qualities which *all* must possess 'if there are to be cities', and warlike ἀρετή was traditionally the prerogative of the wealthier members of society who could purchase their own hoplite-armour, those, that is, who were socially, politically, and militarily ἀγαθοί, in contrast with the mass of the κακοί.[24]

τεκτονικὴ ἀρετή, I suspect, has its part to play here too.   I have already said that the phrase is justifiable but unusual.   No τέκτων had ἀρετή unqualified, for this was the mark of the traditional ἀγαθός, the man of wealth and social position.   But such an expression as ἀρετὴ τεκτονική could be employed by the democratic theorist of the day to demonstrate that all artisans who were ἀγαθοὶ τεχνῖται, good at their τέχνη, had *an* ἀρετή arising from their possession of a τέχνη; and an ἀρετή, moreover, which rendered them qualified, as others (including those who were ἀγαθοί *tout court*) were not, to address the Assembly on certain subjects.   The ἀρεταί differ with the τέχναι; but if one can then argue that all have αἰδώς and δίκη, and that these constitute (an) ἀρετή which, being essential to the existence of cities, is πολιτική; use the vagueness of τέχνη to represent αἰδώς and δίκη as πολιτικὴ τέχνη; and the vagueness and range of both ἀρετή and τέχνη to imply that all possess all the skills and qualities which these terms are capable of denoting and commending; then the resulting picture is one that anyone who was not ἀγαθός in terms of the traditional evaluation would be likely to applaud, and one which should increase his confidence in speaking in the assembly on matters of general politics.[25]

Bait for a different group is furnished by οὐ φύσει ἀλλὰ διδακτόν (323c5) and ἐξ ἐπιμελείας καὶ ἀσκήσεως καὶ διδαχῆς (323d6), which contrast with φύσις (and in 323d1 also with τύχη) other means whereby ἀγαθά and κακά come to human beings.   As I have tried to show elsewhere,[26] in the earlier fifth century φύσις denoted and, where the birth was high, commended, all the qualities with which the Greek was endowed, or was believed to be endowed, by his being born into a particular family with a particular social status; so that it served to reinforce the effects of traditional ἀρετή.   Certain sophists and Presocratic philosophers, however, insisted that practice gives more than good φύσις gives (Epicharmus B33); that more have become ἀγαθοί from training than from φύσις (Democritus B242, *cf.* Critias B9); and even that long practice in the end becomes φύσις, or that φύσις and teaching are much the same, for teaching moulds the individual, and in so doing it imparts φύσις to him.[27]   Anyone who was not ἀγαθὸς φύσει—the majority of the citizens of Athens, or any other Greek state—would be pleased to learn that he could become ἀγαθός also by training, or even acquire a new, improved φύσις, a word rendered very attractive by its traditional implications.   Such a promise must have gained the sophists much good will and custom from those who, while not belonging to the families traditionally prominent in politics, now aspired to take an active part (and could afford sophistic education).

This group requires further definition.   For most purposes, ἀγαθοί could be regarded, in traditional terms, as being coextensive with the hoplite class; but by no means all members of that class belonged to families prominent in politics; and Athens' increased wealth in the

[24] The importance of Athens' navy had little effect on this situation.   See *Merit and Responsibility* 197 ff.

[25] A confidence which might otherwise be absent; *cf.* my *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece* (London, 1972) 140.

[26] See *From the Many to the One* (London and Ithaca, N.Y., 1970) 79 ff., 94 ff.

[27] The fact that all methods of learning are opposed to φύσις may help to emphasize their resemblances rather than their differences, and to encourage still further the tendency to treat both moral excellences and skills as τέχναι.

fifth century must have added to the numbers qualified to serve as hoplites. Some of the sophists' pupils were drawn from families that had traditionally been prominent politically; for example, Critias; but many must have been drawn from families who could afford such an education—and could accordingly be regarded as ἀγαθοί—but were not sons of old political families.[28] οὐ φύσει ἀλλὰ διδακτόν must have been a most attractive idea to such young men; but the idea is, of course, not so socially egalitarian as might at first sight appear to be the case.

The egalitarian and democratic effect is much reinforced here by the insistence of Protagoras (unlike the other writers mentioned, sofar as can be ascertained from surviving fragments) that everyone engages in this kind of teaching; but Protagoras' own rôle is now rather difficult for him to define. Since he has striven to give the impression that all teach the πολιτικὴ τέχνη, and indeed in a sense already possess it, he cannot say that he will impart a skill which is different in kind from that which is imparted by the average Athenian, or average Greek. He can only say that it is to be welcomed if anyone is better than the average at bringing people to ἀρετή, and that he is one of these. (This mode of expression might be designed to mollify the traditional ἀγαθοί or καλοὶ κἀγαθοὶ τὰ πολιτικά, in the sense of the politically active families, whose elder members believed that they too excelled in this.)

Protagoras' ἐπίδειξις thus contains something for everyone. It is, however, a smoke-screen, a *captatio benevolentiae*, a πρόσχημα: a πρόσχημα of a kind similar to that which he says he will not use in 316c5, a passage which is on the face of it a long, rambling and irrelevant speech. It is, in fact, I suggest, one of the numerous ironies of this dialogue: Plato portrays the sophist proclaiming that he will not do what he forthwith spends a considerable portion of the dialogue in doing. The πρόσχημα was needed. As Protagoras says (316c5 ff.), ξένον . . . ἄνδρα καὶ ἰόντα εἰς πόλεις μεγάλας, καὶ ἐν ταύταις πείθοντα τῶν νέων τοὺς βελτίστους ἀπολείποντας τὰς τῶν ἄλλων συνουσίας, καὶ οἰκείων καὶ ὀθνείων, καὶ πρεσβυτέρων καὶ νεωτέρων, ἑαυτῷ συνεῖναι ὡς βελτίους ἐσομένους διὰ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ συνουσίαν χρὴ εὐλαβεῖσθαι τὸν ταῦτα πράττοντα. He says that he will offer no such πρόσχημα as others have done, who pretended not to be sophists; for they did not escape the notice of τοὺς δυναμένους ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι πράττειν (317a3); while one need not trouble about 'the many', for they οὐδὲν αἰσθάνονται;[27] so that προσχήματα are in the one case fruitless, in the other, unnecessary. Now it is true that Protagoras' πρόσχημα is different: he does admit he is a sophist; but the whole of his long ἐπίδειξις is, I suggest, a πρόσχημα nonetheless, and a very necessary one. To reassure the mass of the citizens that what he was doing was 'democratic', and essentially the same as they did every day, was prudent. Both the traditional political families and the poorer Athenians had grounds for suspicion: the sophists were offering training in political skills to those who could afford to pay, not all of whom belonged to the old political families; and the ἀρετή which the sophists imparted had, like traditional ἀρετή, implications which were far from democratic.[30]

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[28] Cf. *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece* 64 f., 110.

[29] He is here, of course, speaking to a small and select audience of ἀγαθοί. The ἐπίδειξις, on the other hand, is suitable for general consumption.

[30] See *Merit and Responsibility* chapters x and xi.