

SOCRATES AND PROTAGORAS ON HOLINESS AND JUSTICE (*PROTAGORAS* 330c–332a)

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AN IMPORTANT QUESTION raised in the *Protagoras* is how the virtues are related to one another. Socrates believes that the virtues are the same,¹ Protagoras (330a–b, 349c) that they are distinct and dissimilar “parts” of virtue, different kinds of things, each with its own “power.”

Major philosophical passages of the *Protagoras* (330–334, 349–end) see Socrates attempting to win Protagoras over to his view. Initially he argues for the sameness of pairs of virtues. First justice and holiness (330c–332a), then wisdom and *sophrosyne* (332a–333b). He next apparently sets out (333b–e) to show that justice is the same as *sophrosyne*, but the argument is broken off. When the discussion resumes, Protagoras admits that these four virtues are fairly similar (ἐπεικῶς παραπλήσια, 349d), but insists that courage is quite different from the others. The rest of the dialogue consists of two attempts to bring courage into line with the rest.

It has long been held that some or all of these arguments contain fallacies and for some the main question was whether the fallacies are deliberate.² The most recent generation of critics has set out to formalize the arguments and analyze them with the tools of modern logic. (Taylor is a good example of this approach.) As a result we understand more precisely how the arguments work and where the problems lie. However, the received opinion is that the arguments are seriously flawed. Some of the alleged fallacies are so gross that even people not trained in logic and philosophy can spot them.

A perplexing and disappointing result if true. Since Socrates only rarely defends (rather than examines) philosophical doctrines and since he is so expert at finding fault in the reasoning of others, we would expect him to put up a better show than this. Why should Plato portray him so unfavorably? And in the context of the dialogue, why does not Protagoras protest more effectively? Or one of the audience? (Recall that the conversation takes place before many of the most celebrated intellectuals of Socrates' generation.) One view is that Socrates is playing a daring game, deliberately putting up bad arguments to show up Protagoras. Protagoras

Certain short forms of citation established for this paper and the preceding one are listed on 334.

¹What he means by this has been discussed by Vlastos and Penner. It is not part of the present project to examine precisely what his position is.

²Intentional: Bonitz, Shorey, Friedländer. Unintentional: Zeller, Gomperz, Gigon.

does not protest because he cannot see the flaws. But if this is Socrates' strategy, he throws away a rare opportunity to give a satisfactory proof of a number of his views in ethics, and readers who detect the fallacies may be left thinking that Socratic ethics is philosophically indefensible.

Another puzzle. The arguments at 330–333 purport to prove that four virtues are the same, and so refute Protagoras' view that they are dissimilar and different. When the conversation is resumed at 349, Protagoras no longer holds that they are dissimilar. But he does not admit that they are the same, only that they are fairly similar. What are we to make of this concession? Has he bought Socrates' arguments at 330–333? (Nothing else prior to 349 is germane.) But then he should admit that the four virtues are the same, not just fairly similar. On the other hand, if he does not accept the arguments, why change his position at all? The answer is easy if Protagoras is as dim as some have thought. Giving up some ground when he should yield either all or none is another sign of how badly he understands the business of philosophical argument.

On the other hand, if this change in Protagoras' views is taken seriously, it is a clue to understanding the arguments at 330–333. He does not accept them as proving the virtues to be the same, but they compel him to reconsider and modify his views. This in turn suggests that Protagoras and Socrates understand the arguments differently. In order to interpret the arguments we must consider how the two men would have understood them and supply as additional premisses further claims each may be expected to believe. Thus we need to take more careful account of the dialectical situation of the arguments than is normally done by those who formalize them. In the end I hope to show that Socrates, Protagoras, and the arguments themselves are logically and philosophically more sophisticated than they are frequently made out to be.

To carry out this project requires separate treatment for each of the three arguments and for later sections of the dialogue as well.³ I confine the present study to the first argument, which is generally thought fallacious.⁴

The Argument

The argument challenges Protagoras' conception of how the virtues are related, as expressed in the following propositions. Virtue is a single thing (329d4). Justice, *sophrosyne*, holiness, wisdom, and courage are parts of virtue (329d4, e6–330a2). The parts of virtue are related to virtue as the parts of a face are related to the whole face (329d4–e2), in particular, they

³For a similarly intentioned treatment of the third argument see my "Socrates and Protagoras on ΣΩΦΡΟΣΥΝΗ and Justice: *Protagoras* 333–334," *Apeiron* 18 (1984) 19–25.

⁴In fact it has been subjected to outright abuse. Cf. the comment of Friedländer (2.19), "The inference that Socrates draws from this artificially constructed piece of nonsense is made worthless: the complete identity of piety and justice."

are different from one another and from virtue as a whole. People may partake in one or another of the parts of virtue and may partake in one without partaking in them all (329e2–6). Each part of virtue is different from the rest, i.e., none is identical with any other (330a3–4). Each part of virtue has its own δύναμις (330a4–b3). No part of virtue is of the same sort as (οἶον) another, either in its δύναμις or in any other respects (330a5–b3).⁵ None of the other parts of virtue is of the same sort as (οἶον) knowledge (ἐπιστήμη used interchangeably here with σοφία), no other is οἶον justice, no other is οἶον courage, no other is οἶον *sophrosyne*, and no other is οἶον holiness (330b3–6).

Comparison with the features of a face might be intended to stress either the differences among the virtues or their harmonious cooperation and their function as organic components of a single totality, and when Protagoras accepts this analogy he might mean either. In developing the analogy Socrates stresses their differences (329e2 ff.) and Protagoras acquiesces.⁶ In pointing out that each feature has its own δύναμις, Socrates is suggesting that the virtues function independently of one another. Each is a state of a person which leads him to perform actions of a certain character.⁷ For example, justice leads him to perform just actions. Nothing is implied about other attributes such actions may possess. Moreover, since a person may have one or another of the virtues without having others, if a possible action were just and also unholy, then we would expect a person who was just (and therefore prone to do just actions) and was not holy (and therefore not prone to do holy actions) not to avoid performing that action. I shall refer to this view as the independence thesis. The claim at 330b3–6 is to be understood in terms of the independence thesis: no virtue is like (οἶον) any other in that each leads a person to perform different sorts of actions.

The claim at 330b3–6 yields

I.1: Justice (J) is not οἶον holiness (H) and H is not οἶον J.

The argument attacks I.1. Socrates secures Protagoras' agreement to the following propositions.

I.2: J and H are each a πρᾶγμα (330c1–2, d3–5).

I.3: J is just (330c3–7), H is holy (d8–e2).

I.4: J is τοιοῦτον οἶον δίκαιον εἶναι (330c7–d1), H is τοιοῦτον οἶον ὅσιον εἶναι (d5–e2).⁸

⁵On reflection Protagoras seems to maintain only the first half of this claim. Cf. 331d5–8 with n. 10 below.

⁶His references to the parts of a face at 331d may but need not indicate that he prefers the other interpretation. See n. 10.

⁷I shall have more to say below about virtues as states.

⁸330d5–e2 treats the statements that holiness is holy and holiness is τοιοῦτον οἶον εἶναι ὅσιον as virtually identical. It is clear that Socrates and Protagoras accept both. For the inference (ἄρα 330c7) to I.4 from I.3, see below.

Socrates combines I.1, I.2, and I.4 to yield

I.5: H is not οἷον δίκαιον εἶναι πράγμα, J is not οἷον ὅσιον [sc. εἶναι πράγμα] (331a7–8).

I.6: H is οἷον μὴ δίκαιον, J is οἷον μὴ ὅσιον (331a8–9).

I.7: H is ἄδικον, J is ἀνόσιον (331a9–b1).

Socrates rejects I.7, since

I.8: J is holy and H is just (331b2–3).

I.9: J is either identical with H or as similar as possible (331b4–5).

I.10: J is above all things⁹ οἷον H and H οἷον J (331b5–6).

Protagoras balks:

I.11: It is not so simple a matter that I should agree that J is holy and H is just (331b8–c2).

I.12: There is some difference (331c2–3).

He admits that

I.13: J is somehow similar to H (331d2).

But this hardly signifies, since

I.14: Anything at all is in some way or another similar to anything else (331d2–3).

I.15: All things are similar to each other (331e1–2).

He gives examples¹⁰ to substantiate these claims and adds

I.16: It is not right to call things similar if they have only a tiny amount of similarity, and the same goes for calling things dissimilar (331e2–4).

Socrates asks in astonishment whether Protagoras thinks that J and H have so small an amount of similarity as that. Protagoras replies, “No, but it is not the way you seem to think, either” (331e6–332a1). Thus Protagoras concedes

I.17: J and H have more than just a tiny amount of similarity to one another.

⁹ μάλιστα πάντων. This reading differs from that of Professor Weiss who takes these words as characterizing the inference: most of all it follows from the argument that J is οἷον H and H οἷον J, so that Socrates is not sure about I.8 and I.9, but is sure about I.10.

¹⁰ The examples are black/white, hard/soft, and the parts of a face. Is this a hint that Protagoras’ initial understanding of the analogies between the virtues and the parts of the face was different from the way the analogy was developed at 329e2 ff.? Certainly not a strong hint, since the cases in point are merely given as evidence that anything at all (ὅτιοῦν) is somehow or other similar to any other thing, and Protagoras even refers to his earlier admission that the parts of a face have different δυνάμεις (d5 ff.), and does not retract. At most he (reasonably) objects to Socrates’ gratuitous addition of “or in any other respects” at 330a7.

But he maintains that Socrates' position, expressed in I.8–I.10, is false:

I.18: I.8, I.9, and I.10 are not all true.

The argument divides into four stages: the argument proper (I.2–I.7), Socrates' position (I.8–I.10), Protagoras' reaction (I.11–I.16), and Protagoras' final position (I.17–I.18).

I.2 is controversial, but its precise significance does not prove critical and need not be determined for present purposes. (It should be remarked that Socrates and Protagoras may understand it differently.)

It is the stretch beginning with I.3 on which the argument turns. Here we have a series of moves from *y*-ness is *y* (I.3) to *y*-ness is τοιοῦτον οἶον εἶναι *y* (I.4) to *y*-ness is not οἶον *x* (I.5) to *y*-ness is οἶον not *x* (I.6) to *y*-ness is un-*x* (I.7), and commentators have frequently objected to the move from contradictories to contraries.¹¹ Why does Protagoras not object? Since Socrates is aware of the distinction between contrary and contradictory later on in the dialogue (346d), Protagoras' failure to protest here may seem to show that he is no match for Socrates in logic.¹²

This interpretation concentrates exclusively on the logical structure of the argument. The picture changes when we consider its dialectical structure. A significant feature of the stretch of argument from I.5 to I.7 is that Socrates puts it into the mouth of an imagined third party who is examining Protagoras' position (albeit in a highly Socratic fashion). This third party has made sure that Socrates and Protagoras each accepts I.3 and I.4 (330c2 ff.) and has led Protagoras to reaffirm I.1, while giving Socrates a chance to remind us that he has not subscribed to this view (330e3–331a5). Now the third party presents I.5 as an inference (ἄρα, 331a7) and states I.6 and I.7 in quick succession. Protagoras has no chance to object to these moves as they go by. Immediately afterwards Socrates offers a reply to the objector: *J* is holy and *H* is just (I.8), so I.7 is false; in fact its polar opposite is true. We may take it that I.8 also contradicts I.5, since "[τοιοῦτον] οἶον *x* [εἶναι]" and "*x*" have been treated as virtually identical throughout the argument (above, note 8). Since I.5 (and questionably I.6 and I.7) follow from I.1, I.2, and I.4, (below, 353), and since Socrates believes that I.2 and I.4 are true, he holds that the falsity of I.5 proves the falsity of I.1. I.10 is a strong denial of I.1, and I.9 entails that the independence thesis does not hold for *H* and *J*.

Protagoras' Reaction

Only now does Protagoras have a chance to speak. Given the turn the

¹¹Adam and Adam 133. Taylor agrees that this illegitimate move occurs, but he recognizes that the logical work of the argument is complete by I.5. More on this below.

¹²Protagoras is sometimes credited with distinguishing between contraries and contradictories at 327c–e, 334a, and 351d. But if he was aware of the distinction and even so failed to catch Socrates' fallacious reasoning here, he hardly deserves higher marks.

argument has taken, he would in any case be more inclined to react to what has just been said (I.8–I.10) than to go back to point out a flaw in the reasoning between I.5 and I.7. But it is not just a matter of inclination; his whole position is at stake. Socrates has answered the imagined third party on Protagoras' behalf as well as his own (especially at 331b3–4), and after asserting I.8–I.10 he asks Protagoras whether he agrees with the answer that has just been given in his name. It is imperative for him to disassociate his own view from that of Socrates and this is what he sets out to do at 331b8 ff. The dialectical considerations of the situation are paramount, the logical details of the earlier argument are left behind, and so there is no clear evidence that Socrates outwits Protagoras in the argument.

To the contrary, if Socrates thinks that I.7 (or I.5) will frighten Protagoras out of I.1 and into accepting I.8–I.10, he has underestimated his opponent's logical and dialectical abilities. So far from accepting I.8–I.10, Protagoras mounts a vigorous defence. He insists that H and J are different (I.12), and even if they are somehow similar (I.13), still that makes no odds, for the reason put forward in I.14–I.16. The defense of I.1 amounts to arguing that being similar to x in some respect does not entail being the same kind of thing as (οἶον) x. At this point Protagoras is entitled to claim a dialectical victory. He has maintained his thesis (I.1) against an attempt to force him to admit views that imply its contradictory.

But now something surprising happens. Socrates ceases to argue, and simply asks in amazement whether Protagoras really believes that H and J are so slightly related to one another as I.13–I.16 suggest. And Protagoras in effect forfeits his victory by admitting that they have a greater degree of similarity than that (I.17).¹³

I suggest that despite the fallacy of moving from contradictory to contrary in I.5–I.7, the argument strikes a responsive chord in Protagoras. He holds that J is just and H is holy, and tends to think of these virtues as being noble, proper, fine—in a word καλόν, and their opposites as disgraceful, αἰσχρόν (cf. 349e4 ff.). To call J unholy or H unjust would be to attribute something αἰσχρόν to it. Thus Protagoras will join Socrates in rejecting I.7. Socrates says (331b7–8) in effect, "Don't you agree that I.7 is false and I.8–I.10 are true?" This is Protagoras' opportunity to say, "No. I.7 is true and I.8–I.10 are false." Instead he stops short at questioning I.8, and not on the grounds that it must be false since I.7 is true, but that it is not so simple (ἀπλοῦν)¹⁴ a matter to accept I.8 (b8–c3).

To decide whether Protagoras is a reputable thinker we must examine his reasons for rejecting I.7, and whether doing so reasonably leads to

¹³I take these lines as evidence that Protagoras is more devoted to truth than to victory and count them to his credit as a philosopher.

¹⁴It is tempting to see a philosophical point here. Could Protagoras suppose that although H and J often coincide in the same person or action (κατὰ συμβεβηκός, as it were) nevertheless a just person or act is not unqualifiedly (ἀπλῶς) holy?

scrapping the independence thesis and adopting I.17 and I.18 but not accepting I.8–I.10. Much depends on how he takes I.3, I.7, and I.8 when they say that virtues (H, J) are virtuous or vicious.

We already know that for Protagoras virtues are things which people share in (μεταλαμβάνειν), acquire (λαμβάνειν), and possess (ἔχειν) (329e2–4 and similar vocabulary at 322b–325a), which they can be taught (328c4 and preceding pages from 320c), and which people differ in their capacity for having (326e6–327c4). Also they are crafts (τέχναι, 322d3–4, cf. 327b1). A little later Protagoras agrees that it is by σωφροσύνη that people σωφρονεῖν (332b1) and that things done ἀφρόνως are done by ἀφροσύνη (332b4–6). In the following lines he also agrees to several other similar propositions.¹⁵ This is adequate reason to think that he holds that it is by J (H) that all just (holy) things are just (holy).

It is reasonable to conclude from this evidence that Protagoras would hold that J (to pick a representative virtue: the same holds for the other virtues) is an acquired state¹⁶ of character¹⁷ which causes people and actions to be just.¹⁸ It causes people to be just in the sense that possessing it causes them to do just actions, i.e., to be just, and it causes actions to be just in that all and only just actions are due to J, i.e., are done by people who possess J and the fact that they possess J is what causes them to do just actions.¹⁹

It is reasonable further to suppose that this is the basis on which Protagoras and Socrates (strangely to modern ears) assign virtue and vice predicates (e.g., “just,” “unjust”) to states of character (e.g., justice): a state of character is virtuous or vicious according as it causes people and actions to be virtuous or vicious.²⁰ Thus Protagoras, believing that J is the cause of just things²¹ being just and H is the cause of holy things being holy, also agrees that J is just and H is holy. (This is how he understands I.3.)²²

¹⁵Sometimes it is the dative case that corresponds to the English preposition “by,” sometimes it is μετά + genitive, and sometimes ὑπό + genitive.

¹⁶They would almost certainly satisfy Aristotle’s criteria for being ἐξεις in *E.N.* 2.5, *Cat.* 8, and *Met.* Δ.20 (second definition).

¹⁷Discretion leads me to stop short of calling them psychological states. Since the *Protagoras* is less generous in its hints on Protagoras’ psychology than on his ethics, to do so would be to explain *obscurum per obscurius*.

¹⁸This interpretation disagrees with that of Professor Weiss, who holds that J is “the perfectly just thing” which has “the power or function of causing other things to be just.”

¹⁹Formally this amounts to $(x)(x \text{ is an action})[x \text{ is just} \leftrightarrow (\exists y) (y \text{ is a person and } y \text{ does } x \text{ and } y \text{ possesses justice and } y\text{'s possession of justice causes } y \text{ to do } x)]$.

²⁰The notorious problem of self-predication (as in “Justice is just”) is to be conceived more broadly, as the problem of assigning evaluative predicates to states of character. The analysis presented here agrees with Penner (e.g., 41) as against Vlastos (259–265) and Taylor (112 f.).

²¹I.e., just persons and actions. I shall use the word “things” in this restricted sense when speaking of “things” that are or can be just, holy, etc.

²²Moreover, among states of character, H is the obvious candidate for the cause of holy

On this reading Protagoras understands I.7 to say that H (J) causes people to be unjust (unholy), i.e., to do unjust (unholy) actions. He rejects I.7 since it would be *αἰσχρόν* for holiness or justice to have such effects. In fact, it would be *αἰσχρόν* if any unjust (unholy) act were due to H (J). Even if I.7 is derived invalidly from I.5 and even if the logical work is done by I.5, there proves to be great dialectical force in moving to I.7. No matter about its logical pedigree, Protagoras holds that I.7 is false.

This in turn forces Protagoras to give up the independence thesis, which implies that even though H and J apply to the same type of things, they function independently in how they apply to those things. Since some of these things are (1) holy, some (2) unholy, and some (3) neither holy nor unholy, and likewise some are (a) just, some (b) unjust, and some (c) neither just nor unjust,²³ the independence thesis states that there may be things characterized as 1a (i.e., holy and just) and similarly 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, and 3c. Anyone unwilling to accept all these possibilities cannot hold that the two virtues are independent. In particular, anyone unwilling to admit 1b (things that are holy and unjust) as a possibility must think that something in the nature of H prevents holy things from being unjust and so must concede that H and J do not function independently. The same reasoning applies to 2a.

But his reason for rejecting I.7 commits Protagoras to denying the possibility of actions characterized as 1b and 2a. He holds that no unjust act is due to H. Therefore, if every holy act is due to H, it follows that no holy action is unjust.²⁴ Thus Protagoras cannot admit 1b.²⁵ By parallel reasoning he cannot accept 2a. Therefore he must abandon his independence thesis. Thus I.7 makes Protagoras aware of the unacceptable consequences of the independence thesis. He must now alter his views.

things' being holy. If possessing H does not make holy people holy, it is scarcely likely that they will be made so by possessing J or wisdom or anything else. Thus Socrates and Protagoras might reasonably declare (as they emphatically do at 330d6–e2) that if H does not make things holy, nothing else could be holy: no other state will have the requisite effect, and so no people will be holy, and no actions will be holy for lack of holy people to do them. On this account H belongs primarily to persons, secondarily to actions. This view follows naturally if H is viewed as a state of character which makes people holy. For evidence that this is Socrates' view, see Penner 48, n. 17.

²³I am supposing that Protagoras admits that injustice and unholiness function analogously to their opposite virtues (cf. 332a6 ff. for *σωφροσύνη* and its opposite) and that not all persons and actions need be characterized by possessing either a virtue or its opposed vice.

²⁴The inference is (x) (x is an action)[x is holy \rightarrow ($\exists y$) (y is a person and y does x and y possesses holiness and y's possession of holiness causes y to do x)]; (x) (x is an action)[($\exists y$)(y is a person and y does x and y possesses holiness and y's possession of holiness causes y to do x) \rightarrow x is not unjust]; therefore (x) (x is an action) (x is holy \rightarrow x is not unjust).

²⁵The same does not hold for persons: if H makes holy people holy and H never makes a person unjust, it does not follow that no holy person is unjust, only that if he is unjust, he is not made so by H.

The final question is whether Protagoras must now adopt Socrates' view I.8–I.10, or can instead reasonably maintain his final position I.17–I.18. Since I.18 simply denies I.8–I.10, what must be shown is that I.17 is a view consistent with admitting that H and J are not independent and with denying I.8–I.10. Although I.17 is imprecise and correspondingly hard to interpret, the position which I shall suggest Protagoras adopts can reasonably be described by I.17.

First, it is clear that Socrates' belief in the identity of J and H²⁶ permits only three of the nine possible combinations listed above: 1a, 2b, 3c. Secondly, Protagoras believes that (as regards actions) two combinations cannot occur, while seven can: the three that Socrates allows and four others, namely, 1c, 2c, 3a, 3b. A person holding this view would say that H and J never conflict, but they need not coincide. No action can be both just and unholy, but one (say, repaying a loan) which is just to do and unjust to omit may simply be outside the province of H, counting as neither holy nor unholy. Similarly a person can be holy and neither just nor unjust. Contrariwise (cf. note 25), a person *can* be holy and unjust, although Protagoras maintains that no single action is due to both these states of character. This is the position which I suggest Protagoras adopts when he finds the independence thesis untenable. It is a reasonable halfway house between the extreme views that J and H are independent and that they are identical. Most importantly, it is ample warrant for asserting I.17.

This completes the vindication of Protagoras. His reaction to Socrates is intellectually honest (he does not simply claim a cheap victory after I.16), he is intent on finding the truth (he alters his views when led to see their unacceptable consequences), he is canny (he refuses to give up more than he believes he must), and wise (he finds a reasonable alternative view to adopt).

Socrates' Argument

Meanwhile how is Socrates faring? Dialectically he is doing as well as can be hoped. He has dislodged Protagoras from the independence thesis for J and H. He cannot yet reasonably expect him to accept their identity, since he has not given any good reason to think them identical. (For that we must wait until 351 ff.) Moreover, the result so far may make Protagoras more liable to abandon the independence thesis for the other virtues as well.

²⁶I.9 says that H and J are either identical or as similar as possible. I doubt that Socrates intends any significant difference between these two options. In any case, it is safe to say that Socrates' view is that "justice" and "holiness" are two names for the same thing (329c8–9): this view is the alternative offered to the position which Protagoras adopts and the discussion of wisdom and *sophrosyne* (which we may suppose Socrates believed were related in the same way as H and J) purports to prove that they are a single thing (333b4–5).

Socrates' strategic plans are going well, but what of his tactics? Here too the situation is not as desperate as it appears. Taylor's two main objections are to (1) the probable failure of Socrates or Protagoras "to distinguish between the different implications of 'like' [οἶον]" in moving from I.4 to I.5 (110 f.) and to (2) Socrates' treating "unjust" and "unholy" as contradictories of "just" and "holy" instead of contraries in I.5–I.7 (114).

Objection (1)

Taylor lists four implications the word "like" may have, depending on the context of its use:

x may be like y (i) in that x and y are qualitatively identical, (ii) in that x and y have most or a substantial number of significant characteristics in common, (iii) in that x and y have at least one significant characteristic in common, or (iv) in that x and y have at least one characteristic in common. (110 f.)

Correspondingly there will be four implications of the word "unlike." x may be unlike y (i') [negation of (iv)] in that x and y differ in all their characteristics, (ii') [negation of (iii)] in that x and y differ in all their significant characteristics, (iii') [negation of (ii)] in that x and y differ in most or all but an insubstantial number of their significant characteristics, or (iv') [negation of (i)] in that x and y differ in at least one characteristic.²⁷

According to Taylor (*ibid.*), Protagoras' claim I.1 is reasonably taken in senses (iii') and (iv') but not in senses (i') and (ii'), but Socrates' argument to I.5 depends on taking "unlike" in sense (i') or (ii'), and so the argument is fallacious. To decide whether this is so, consider how Socrates would understand what Protagoras means by I.1.

In stating that J and H are not οἶον each other, I.1 has more the force of saying that they are different sorts of things than simply that they are different or dissimilar.²⁸ But what does it mean to say that they are different sorts of things? It is clear that Socrates assumes that Protagoras means that H and J are significantly different. Recall how Socrates reacts when Protagoras asserts (I.16) that it is not right to call things similar if they have only a tiny amount of similarity (i.e., no significant amount), and that the case is the same for calling things dissimilar.²⁹ In the first half

²⁷It is tempting but unnecessary to add a fifth: x may be like y in that x and y have all significant characteristics in common, and correspondingly x may be unlike y in that x and y differ in at least one significant characteristic. The solution proposed below covers this case as well.

²⁸Gallop is right to stress this (86, n. 3) but he neglects to explain his criteria for being of the same kind. Cf. Vlastos 251, n. 84.

²⁹The argument begins by talking of things being of the same kind (οἶον) as each other and (*pace* Gallop, *loc. cit.*) shifts to language of similarity and dissimilarity (ὁμοιον, ἀνόμοιον; 331e2 ff.) and being alike (προσείκειν, 331d2 ff.). No weight is placed on the change. Cf. 331b5–6, d7–8.

of I.16 Protagoras is attempting to shrug off the force of Socrates' claim that J is most of all things the same kind of thing as H and *vice versa* (I.10), which is a strong denial of I.1. The second half of I.16 makes it clear that in asserting I.1 Protagoras meant that H and J are significantly different. Socrates responds to I.16 by asking in amazement whether Protagoras really thinks that there is so small an amount of similarity (i.e., no significant amount) as I.16 (read as a rebuttal of I.10) suggests (333e4–6). This makes it plain that he has assumed all along that the question being discussed is whether H and J are significantly similar or different. Thus he does not take I.1 according to the weak reading (iv').

Nor does he take it in sense (i'). He quickly discovers that Protagoras believes that H and J have one common feature: they are both *πράγματα* (I.2). Further, he already knows that Protagoras thinks that both are virtues and that they have a number of characteristics in common—at least those mentioned in 329d–330b.³⁰

Objection (1) therefore holds only if Socrates is trading on readings (ii') and (iii') of I.1 and it fails if we can show that he reasonably adopts one or the other reading throughout. The question is whether H and J differ in most or all of their significant characteristics. But this invites the further question what characteristics count as significant in the context of the discussion. Clearly the characteristics Protagoras takes them to share *qua* *πράγματα* and *qua* virtues are not significant. He can claim that they are different kinds of virtues even though he will agree that since they are virtues they have common features which in a different context would justify calling them the same kind of things.

I suppose that by I.1 Protagoras means that H and J are different kinds of virtues, and Socrates takes it in this way. In I.3 and I.4 he identifies one characteristic he takes to be significant for determining whether a virtue is the same kind of virtue as H and one for determining whether a virtue is the same kind of virtue as J. J is just and therefore (*ἄρα*, 330c7) the kind of virtue to be just, and likewise for H. I suggested above that Protagoras holds that J is just because it causes just people and actions to be just, and similarly for H. Also, since Socrates has heard some of the evidence for this view (320–329) and both agrees with the rest of the evidence and elicits it from Protagoras (332b1 ff.), it is reasonable for him to intend I.3 and I.4 in this way.

I suggest that Socrates considers being holy (just) not merely one of many significant characteristics of H (J) in the present context, but the only significant characteristic. In considering whether a virtue is the same kind of virtue as H (J), the crucial thing to determine is whether it is holy

³⁰Therefore I cannot agree with Gallop, who says that Socrates' argument depends on interpretation (i') and that at I.14–I.15 Protagoras objects to this interpretation (90 f.).

(just), i.e., whether it causes people and actions to be holy (just). Whatever other characteristics it may share with H (J), it cannot possibly be the same kind of virtue as H (J) unless it is the kind of virtue to be holy (just). On this reading of the argument, implications (ii') and (iii') of I.1 amount to the same thing: only one characteristic is at stake.

Therefore Socrates' reasoning stands. He believes (correctly) that I.1 means that H and J differ in significant characteristics. He assumes that only one characteristic is significant for determining whether a virtue is of the same kind as H (J) and infers from I.1 that they differ in that neither possesses the characteristic of the other. In I.3 he identifies these single relevant characteristics. It follows (unstated consequence) that H is not just and J is not holy. I.4 is inferred from I.3, evidently on the plausible principle

P: if anything has a virtue-predicate (e.g., just), it is the kind of thing to have that virtue-predicate.

I.5 follows from the unstated consequence of I.3, from the inverse of P,³¹ and from the shared agreement (I.2) that H and J are πράγματα.³²

This is not to say that Protagoras did not think that other characteristics of H and J were significant when he committed himself to I.1. As we saw above, he is not given a chance to say anything when the "third party" infers I.5 from his previous assertions. We therefore cannot say just how he would have reacted to this inference. And as to I.5 itself, neither Protagoras' independence thesis nor his final position as interpreted above requires him to find it false. The defense of Socrates need not go so far. All that was required was to show that the argument goes through without trading on possible ambiguities in I.1. And go through it does, on a reasonable interpretation of I.1 and a number of premisses which Socrates either knows or can reasonably suppose Protagoras accepts.

Objection (2)

Taylor claims that in moving from I.5 to I.7 Socrates unreasonably treats "unholy" and "unjust" as contradictories. Others hold that he simply confuses contradictories with contraries (e.g., Adam and Adam). What is important for Socrates' strategy, however, is the rhetorical, not the logical force of the move. As Taylor points out

The function of the steps from [I.5] to [I.7] via [I.6] is to highlight the unacceptability of the conclusions just reached by putting them in the shocking form

³¹In this case the inverse seems as plausible as the principle itself.

³²Why πράγματα and not ἀρετή in I.2? The argument is interpreted the same either way: the question is whether H and J are the same kind of things and in the context this is the same as whether they are the same kind of virtues. Perhaps Socrates chooses the broader term because of the apparent conflict between his and Protagoras' conceptions of the nature of virtue. It is sensible debating practice to keep the discussion as free as possible of disputed words.

'Holiness is unjust' and 'Justice is unholy.' Eristically this may be effective, but the logical work is complete by [I.5]. (115)

The logical work is complete because when Socrates states his own views (I.8–I.10), he denies not only I.7 but also I.5 (I.8 and principle P imply that I.5 is false.) And since he denies I.5 he also denies I.1, the questionable premiss on which I.5 is based. The rhetorical effect is to force Protagoras to reconsider his independence thesis. Protagoras might have rejected the inference to I.7 and those to I.5 and I.6 as well.³³ He might still wish to hold I.1. But, as has been observed, he is not given a chance to address these matters, and in reflecting on I.7 he finds himself unwilling to maintain his original view of the relation between H and J.

Conclusion

On the present interpretation Socrates appears a better philosopher than he does on other readings of the passage. One of his alleged fallacies is not a fallacy at all, but a valid inference based on a plausible interpretation of Protagoras' views. The genuine fallacy is introduced for reasons of dialectical strategy and has its intended effect. Protagoras fares better as well. It is not clear that he fails to spot the fallacy in the move to I.7. The reason why he does not protest is that he sees that he must alter his position and thinks it more important to do so than to chop logic. To be sure, Socrates comes out ahead. It is Protagoras who abandons his view, not Socrates. But Protagoras does not simply forfeit the discussion when he alters his view, rather he shifts to what he takes to be a firmer position. In facing the most distinguished of the Sophists (cf. *Meno* 91d–e, *Hipp. Maj.* 282d–e) Socrates confronted a worthy opponent. It is Plato's tribute to Protagoras to present him in a philosophically favorable light.³⁴

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³³Socrates can reject the moves from I.5 to I.7 as well. One of the purposes for having the "third party" carry this part of the argument may have been to keep Socrates' lips fallacy-free.

³⁴A version of this paper was presented at a meeting of the Southern California Readers of Ancient Philosophy. The friendly but persistent discussion which followed has led to changes incorporated in the present version.