

THE DRAMATIC DATE OF PLATO'S *PROTAGORAS*¹⁾

A recent editor of Plato's *Protagoras*, Charles Taylor²⁾, says of the dramatic date of the dialogue simply that one ought to consult the most recent examination of the question, namely, J. S. Morrison's article of 1941, "The Place of Protagoras in Athenian Public Life". Since Morrison's article is the latest thorough examination of the question of the dramatic date of the *Protagoras*, my contention that Morrison's argument is flawed will hopefully caution students of the *Protagoras*, lest they be misled in a basic hermeneutic issue.

1) I wish to thank Prof. Dr. C. W. Müller, and Prof. Dr. B. Manuwald for their comments on this paper.

2) C. C. W. Taylor, *Plato, Protagoras*, Oxford ²1991, 64.

Morrison argues that a consistent dramatic date of 433 can be established for the *Protagoras*. He specifically contends with the argument of Athenaeus of Naucratis, who, in his *Sophists' Dinner*, argues that the *Protagoras* is full of anachronisms. I claim that Morrison's argument is hopelessly flawed and that Athenaeus' argument, while partially flawed, should with some revampment be sustained.

In Egypt, or perhaps in Rome, in the early third century AD, the witty and erudite Athenaeus of Naucratis wrote a prose work which we call the *Sophists' Dinner*. As the title suggests, the text narrates a motley dinner conversation. One of the conversation topics is the falsehood of philosophers. The speaker argues that Plato's dialogues are full of lies. He supposes that the dialogues are meant to be mimetic, and when he reveals anachronisms in the texts, he accuses Plato of falsification. In particular, the speaker discusses the anachronisms in the *Protagoras*.

According to Athenaeus, the dramatic date of the *Protagoras* must be (1) after the death of Callias' father, Hipponicus, and (2) during Protagoras' second visit to Athens³). Athenaeus supports claim (1) by arguing that Hipponicus was still alive in the archonship of Euthydemus, 431–30, when Hipponicus served as a *στρατηγός* against the Tanagraeans⁴), and that Hipponicus must have died shortly before the production of Eupolis' *Flatterers* which was produced at the City Dionysia in the archonship of Alcaeus, late March 421, since the play shows that Callias' inheritance of his father's property was a recent event⁵). Athenaeus supports claim (2) by arguing that in Eupolis' *Flatterers*, which was produced in March 421, Protagoras is visiting Athens; whereas Ameipsias' *Connus*, which was produced in March 423, does not include Protagoras in his chorus of *φροντισταί*⁶). Athenaeus concludes that the arrival of

3) Ath. 5.218b. Claim (1) is presumably based on two statements in the *Protagoras*: Protagoras is staying at the house of Callias, the son of Hipponicus; and in this house, Prodicus is occupying an apartment formerly used by Hipponicus as a store-room, but now converted by Callias into a guest-room to accommodate his numerous visitors.

4) Ath. 5.218b.

5) Ath. 5.218c (Eupolis, *Κόλακες* test. ii K.-A.).

6) *ibid.* (Ameipsias, *Κόννος* test. ii K.-A.). Obviously, knowing nothing of Ameipsias' *Connus*, we have no way of critiquing Athenaeus' claim. But, given that Athenaeus is correct, Ameipsias' chorus of *φροντισταί* must have comprised all the prominent Sophists residing in Athens at the time.

Protagoras on his second visit to Athens falls between March 423 and March 421. Claims (1) and (2) converge on a dramatic date between March 423 and March 421.

Athenaeus also claims (3) that the dialogue must occur just after the conclusion of the year's truce between Athens and Sparta, 14. Elaphebolion 423, because Hippias of Elis and his countrymen are present at Callias' house⁷). Since Elis was then an ally of Sparta, Hippias and his countrymen would not have been able to enter the city until the truce had been concluded. Claim (3) converges with claims (1) and (2) on a dramatic date in the period of the year's truce, 423–2.

In contradiction to the chronology established by (1), (2), and (3), Athenaeus notes that Protagoras refers to the performance of Pherocrates' *Savages* as having occurred the previous year⁸). *Savages* was produced at the Lenaea in the archonship of Aristion, late January 420⁹). This fixes the dramatic date of the dialogue at 419, and is inconsistent with claims (1), (2), and (3). On the other hand, Athenaeus argues that the dialogue could not have occurred in 419, since this would be the fifth year from time of the conclusion of the year's truce in 423. By then, he argues, the truce had ended, and Hippias, as an Elean, would have been an enemy to Athens. Therefore, Hippias and his countrymen could not have been at Callias' house¹⁰).

Claim (3) depends on Athenian-Elean hostility between 422–19. In this Athenaeus errs. Although the year's truce ended in 422, the Peace of Nicias began in 421. Moreover, ever since the Spartans sided with the Lepreates against the Eleans in 421, Elis was increasingly antagonistic to Sparta¹¹). In fact, Elis was allied with Athens in 420¹²) and excluded the Spartans from the Olympic games that summer¹³). Therefore, in 419, Elis and Athens were actually allies. Even if Athenaeus had realized that Athens and Elis were no longer at war from 421 on, claim (2) would still be inconsistent with a dramatic date of 419. Such are the chronological problems Athenaeus introduces in his attack on the falsehoods of philosophers.

7) Ath. 5.218d.

8) Pl. Prot. 327d.

9) Ath. 5.218d (Pherocrates, "Ἀγροῦν test. i K.-A.).

10) Ath. 5.218d–e.

11) Thuc. 5.31.

12) Thuc. 5.43f.

13) Thuc. 5.49.

In 1940, that is, almost two millennia after Athenaeus wrote the *Sophists' Dinner*, J. S. Morrison presented a paper to the Oxford Philological Society that treats the place of the Sophist Protagoras in Athenian public life¹⁴). Morrison attempts to establish a summary biography of Protagoras. Since references to Protagoras that define points in the chronology of his life are rare in ancient literature, Morrison views Plato's *Protagoras* as a potentially important source of chronological and biographical information. Yet, since the accuracy of historical information in the dialogue is suspect, Morrison tries to discredit Athenaeus' claims of anachronism and to fix the dramatic date of the dialogue at 433.

Against Athenaeus, Morrison claims three chronological indicators consistent with a dramatic date of 433: (1a) "the opening words imply that Alcibiades is only just recently to be called a man¹⁵). It must be inferred that he had just finished his ephebate and thus been admitted to his full rights as a man and a citizen. Since he served at Potidaea in 432, his ephebate cannot have ended later than 433, possibly a year or two earlier¹⁶); (2a) "Pericles and his sons, who died in 429, are spoken of as still living¹⁷); (3a) "the presence at Athens of Hippias¹⁸), whose state, Elis, was a member of the Peloponnesian League, is only possible either before the outbreak of the Archidamian war [431] or after the Peace of Nicias [421]. We can infer from the *Hippias Major* that he was at Athens before the war." Claims (1a) and (2a) are valid. Remarkably, both are absent from Athenaeus' discussion¹⁹). Claim (3a) allows for Hippias' presence in Athens in 433, although nothing in the *Protagoras* indicates that Hippias is on his former or subsequent visit²⁰).

14) J. S. Morrison, *The Place of Protagoras in Athenian Public Life*, CQ 35 (1941) 1–16.

15) Pl. Prot. 309a. Πόθεν, ὦ Σώκρατες, φαίνη; ἢ δήλα δὴ ὅτι ἀπὸ κυνηγεσίου τοῦ περὶ τὴν Ἀλκιβιάδου ὥραν; καὶ μήν μοι καὶ πρόφην ἰδόντι καλῶς μὲν ἐφαίνετο ἀνὴρ ἔτι, ἀνὴρ μέντοι, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὡς γ' ἐν αὐτοῖς ἡμῖν εἰρησθαι, καὶ πάγωνος ἤδη ὑποπιμπλάμενος.

16) Morrison cites here Taylor's 'Plato, the Man and his Work', London 3¹⁹²⁹, 236.

17) Pl. Prot. 319e.

18) *ibid.* 315c.

19) Although in a later passage of the *Deipnosophists*, Athenaeus mentions the chronological problem resulting from the fact that Pericles' sons are still alive (11.505f–506a).

20) The validity of claim (3a) depends on evidence from the *Hippias Major*. Morrison argues, "in the *Hippias Major*, which apparently takes place during the years of the Peace of Nicias, Plato makes Hippias reply to Socrates's observation,

Morrison attempts to reconcile Athenaeus' three claims with a dramatic date of 433²¹). Regarding claim (1), Morrison admits that the dialogue does suggest that Hipponicus had in fact ceased to live at his house, but argues that this does not necessitate that Hipponicus had died. Morrison argues that Hipponicus divorced his first wife, Callias' mother, probably before 453²²). She subsequently married Pericles²³). Morrison concludes, "it is then not improbable that Hipponicus left his wife and son in the possession of his house and set up an establishment elsewhere, and that when his mother became the wife of Pericles Callias used the house as his own."

Morrison's argument on this point is not sound. Following Busolt, Morrison accepts 453 as the date of Pericles' marriage to Hipponicus' ex-wife. Since this woman was Callias' mother, and Callias was born to Hipponicus, and not Pericles²⁴), Callias would have had to have been born prior to 453. In his 'Kallias'²⁵), Busolt determines Callias' birthdate at 455; and in his 'Griechische Geschichte', Busolt writes, "Kallias [kann] nicht viel vor 452 geboren sein, weil er im Jahre 392 die athenischen Hopliten bei Lechaion befehligte und noch im Jahre 371 als Gesandter nach Sparta ging²⁶." Let us confirm then that Morrison, who follows Busolt, agrees to Callias' birthdate between 455 and 453. Hipponicus'

that it is a long time since he was in Athens, with the boast that Elis had been employing him constantly as an ambassador, particularly to Sparta. The previous visit, then, took place before the Archidamian war, and the circumstance that both he and Protagoras on that occasion were the guests of Callias provides the scene for the *Protagoras*" (p. 5).

21) To reiterate, Athenaeus' claims (in Morrison's words) are: (1) "Hipponicus, the father of Protagoras' host, Callias, is assumed to be dead although he did not actually die till shortly before 421."; (2) "Amipsias did not number Protagoras among the company of 'φρονητοῦται' in the *Connus* of 423, although Eupolis represented him as resident in Athens in the 'The Flatterers' of 421."; (3) "the 'Savages' of Pherecrates, to which Protagoras alludes in the dialogue, was performed at the Lenaea of 421." (p. 2-3)

22) Morrison's authority for this is Busolt, *Griechische Geschichte*, vol. III 1, Gotha 1897, 504.

23) Pl. Prot. 315a; Plut. Per. 24.5.

24) Pl. Prot. 315a.

25) *Philologus* 50 (1891) 87f.

26) Xen. Hell. 4.5.13; 6.3.2. Busolt (see n. 22) 504 n. 2. Incidentally, it struck me as worth checking the likelihood of such official positions for a sexagenarian and then octogenarian, and I have found a precedent. Robert Garland writes, "To judge from the career of the Phocion, who was elected to the post of strategos no fewer than 45 times and who last held it about the age of 80, there did not exist any upper age limit for councillors or magistrates." (*The Greek Way of Life*, Cornell 1990, 281)

divorce from Callias' mother would have had to occur just after Callias' birth, between 455–3. Therefore, according to Morrison, Callias must be about twenty at the time of the dialogue in the *Protagoras*. In sum, Morrison suggests that Hipponicus, when he divorced his wife, gave her his house, i.e. the house at which the dialogue in the *Protagoras* occurs. Hippias says that the group is present at the most opulent house in the city²⁷).

Hipponicus' donation of such a house to his ex-wife, however, contradicts ancient Athenian ethics and practice. In classical Athens, a man seeking a divorce simply had to dismiss his wife from his house and return her dowry. There is no evidence that a husband had to supply his ex-wife with alimony. It is even less likely that a husband would divorce his wife and give into her care his only legitimate son²⁸). There is no precedent for this action cited in the major works on Athenian law²⁹). And, although "The rules affecting children of divorced parents are obscure from lack of evidence³⁰," Beauchet says, "Si le mariage se dissout par le divorce, les enfants nés du mariage doivent dans tous les cas être remis au père. Il en est ainsi même quand le divorce a eu lieu par la volonté de la femme et qu'il a pour cause l'inconduite du mari. Autoriser le magistrat, comme le fait la loi moderne, à les confier à la mère, comme à la plus digne, c'eût été porter à la puissance paternelle une atteinte inconciliable avec les idées anciennes. Les femmes étaient, d'ailleurs, à Athènes, incapables d'exercer la tutelle³¹."

Furthermore, Morrison asserts that, "when his mother became the wife of Pericles Callias used the house as his own." This is impossible. According to Busolt and so Morrison, Pericles' marriage to Callias' mother took place about 453. This date is necessitated by the fact that Pericles' eldest son, Xanthippus, who was

27) Pl. Prot. 337d.

28) Callias apparently had one brother, Hermogenes (Pl. Crat. 391b); but Hermogenes received no part of his father's patrimony, οὐκ ἐγκρατῆς . . . τῶν πατρῶν (391c), and it is implied in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* that he is destitute (2.10). Davies infers that he was illegitimate (Athenian Propertied Families, Oxford 1971, 269–70). In any case, the fact that Hipponicus named his legitimate son, Callias, after his own father clearly indicates that Callias was intended to be the primary inheritor.

29) I am specifically referring to Harrison's 'The Law of Athens', Oxford 1971; Lipsius' 'Das attische Recht und Rechtsverfahren', Leipzig 1915; and Beauchet's 'Histoire du Droit Privé de la République Athénienne', Paris 1897.

30) Harrison (see n. 29) 44.

31) Beauchet (see n. 29) I 397–8. (For the possibility that a father was legally responsible for his son's upbringing see Harrison 44–5.)

born to Callias' mother³²), was in the midst of a tumultuous marriage when he died in 430 of the plague³³). If Callias' mother remarried when Callias was two or three years old, what would have happened to the house Hipponicus allegedly gave her? In conclusion, Morrison's attempt to rescue this problem in his scheme of a dramatic date of 433 cannot be admitted. Hipponicus must be dead in the dialogue and Callias must have come into his inheritance³⁴).

Morrison does not discredit Athenaeus' claim (2), but says, "[Athenaeus] infers that Protagoras did not return to Athens until after 423. There is, however, nothing in his conclusion to prevent

32) Pl. Prot. 315a.

33) Plut. Per. 36. Busolt (see n. 22) writes, "Er muß also spätestens um 430 geboren worden sein, da der früheste Termin für die Verheiratung bei Männern das vollendete 18. Lebensjahr war. Vgl. Meier und Schömann, *Att. Prozeß*², S. 504." (504 n. 2)

34) Incidentally, Beloch (*Griechische Geschichte*, vol. II, Straßburg 1916, 2) has made an ingenious suggestion regarding the troublesome dates of the Callias' mother's marriages and divorce. "Er selbst [Pericles] war vermählt mit einer Verwandten (γυνή προσήκουσα κατὰ γένος, Plut. Per. 24), deren Name nicht überliefert ist. Sie soll vorher mit Hipponikos vermählt gewesen sein und war von diesem Mutter des Kallias (Plut. a.a.O., Pl. *Protag.* 315a). Perikles hatte von ihr zwei Söhne, Xanthippos und Paralos (Plut. und Plut. a.a.O.), die beide 430/29 an der Pest starben (Plut. Per. 36, Protagoras bei Plut. *Cons. ad Apoll.* 33 S. 118), und zwar war Xanthippos bereits verheiratet mit einer Tochter des Teisandros, Sohnes des Epilykos (Plut. a.a.O. . . . Athen. XIII 589d), und demnach spätestens um 450 geboren, wahrscheinlich etwas früher. Andererseits kann sein Halbbruder Kallias, der noch 371 als Gesandter nach Sparta gegangen ist (Xen. *Hell.* VI 3,2), doch nicht wohl vor 450 geboren sein, dessen Schwester Hipparete, die um 420 sich mit Alkibiades vermählt hat . . . , ist etwa 440 geboren, und es liegt nicht der geringste Grund zu der Annahme vor, sie sei etwa Kallias' Halbschwester gewesen. Vor allem aber, Perikles' Gemahlin hat sich von ihm getrennt und ist eine neue Ehe eingegangen; wenn sie nun vorher mit Hipponikos vermählt gewesen war, wäre sie eine γυνή τρύγαμος gewesen, zweimal geschieden; und das paßt wohl in das Rom der Kaiserzeit, aber doch nicht in das Athen des V. Jahrhunderts. Allen diesen Schwierigkeiten entgehen wir, wenn wir annehmen, daß Plutarch sich geirrt hat, und die Vermählung mit Hipponikos nach der Trennung von Perikles erfolgt ist. Wenn ein geschulter Philologe, wie Toepffer, dessen Spezialität noch dazu die Genealogie war, Isodike, die Gemahlin Kimons, zur Frau von dessen Sohn Thesallos macht (Pauly-Wissowa I 2, 1562), werden wir Plutarch unbedenklich ein viel leichteres Versehen zutrauen können." (35–6) This argument condemns Morrison's argument. On the other hand, it does not affect, (it even supports), Athenaeus' argument.

More recent appraisals supporting Beloch's suggestion are Davies (see n. 28) 262–63, 457; Fornara and Samons, Athens from Cleisthenes to Pericles, Berkeley 1991, 162, and R. D. Cromey, Perikles' Wife: Chronological Calculations, GRBS 23 (1982) 203–12.

Protagoras being present in Athens in 433³⁵.” Therefore, both possibilities are sustainable. Finally, Morrison concedes Athenaeus’ claim (3): “there is no reason to question Athenaeus’ statement, which may rest on the play-lists themselves³⁶.”

In sum, Morrison’s attempt to reconcile Athenaeus’ argument with a dramatic date of 433 for the *Protagoras* is not persuasive. Morrison’s claim for a dramatic date of 433 is supported only by Protagoras’ second visit to Athens, Alcibiades’ implied age, and the presence of Pericles’ sons. In conclusion, between Morrison’s and Athenaeus’ arguments there remain a set of chronological inconsistencies. Protagoras mentions Pherecrates’ *Savages* as having been performed the previous year (419); Hipponicus is dead and Callias has come into his inheritance (after 423); Hippias is in Athens (not between 430 and 423); Alcibiades is a νέος and his beard is just filling out; given his birth at 450 he must be about 20 (430); Pericles’ sons are alive (before 429).

Athenaeus’ basic claim must be upheld: there are anachronisms in Plato’s *Protagoras*. The chronological indicators in the text converge on the general period of the first decades of the Peloponnesian War, but not on a single date. A consistent dramatic date cannot be established.

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35) Morrison (see n. 14) 3.

36) *ibid.* Morrison continues, “If, as the *Colaces* of Eupolis indicates, Protagoras was in Athens in 421, he is likely to have seen and commented upon the *Agrii* which apparently dealt with ‘Life according to Nature’; a subject in which, as a political theorist, he is likely to have been interested. Plato may have remembered the connexion between the play and Protagoras and have forgotten that he saw it on his third and not his second visit. Alternatively, he may have been conscious of the anachronism, but have thought it trivial enough not to disturb the reader.”