

SELECTIONS FROM PLATO'S

PROTAGORAS

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FRAME STORY

FRIEND: Where have you been now, Socrates? Oh, of course, you've been chasing Alcibiades and his youthful beauty.¹ When I was looking at him just the other day, I thought that he's still handsome as a man—for, between you and me, Socrates, he is a man, and with quite a growth of beard.² 309

SOCRATES: And what of that? Do you mean to say you disapprove of Homer, who said that the youth with the highest grace in him is the one whose beard is appearing, as is now the case with Alcibiades? b

FRIEND: Then how is the affair going? Have you been with him just now? And how is the young man treating you?

SOCRATES: Quite well, I thought, especially today; for he spoke a good deal on my side, supporting me in a discussion; in fact I've only just left him. However, I have to tell you something strange: although he was there, not only did I pay him no attention, at times forgot about him altogether.

FRIEND: Why, what could have happened between you and him? It must have been something strange; for surely you didn't find anyone else of greater beauty there—no, not in our city. c

¹ Alcibiades (451 - 404 B.C.) is a colorful figure in Athenian history. He was largely raised by the great statesman Pericles (on whom, see note 9, below), and was famous in his youth for his successes in the Olympic games, his beauty, and his flamboyant style. He played a significant role in the Peloponnesian war, first as a soldier, and then as a politician and a general. In 415 he was elected, along with two others, to lead a major navel expedition to Sicily. Shortly before the expedition was to leave a major scandal occurred. Among the popular religious objects in Athens were herms—busts of the Hermes atop pedestals, attached to which were sculpted genitals. In the middle of the night a group of people went around lopping the genitals off the herms. This generated a flurry of accusations of impiety, and Alcibiades and his friends were accused of mocking certain religious rituals at a party and suspected of having been involved in the desecration of the herms. Thus he was under a cloud of suspicion when he embarked for Sicily. Eventually the Athenians called him back to the city to face charges and he defected to Sparta, Athens' enemy in the war. The expedition was a massive defeat for Athens. Alcibiades helped the Spartans for several years, until 411 when the Athenians called him back and asked him to take command of their fleet. He did so and had some military success, before returning to Athens itself in 407. At this point, the earlier impiety charges were dropped and he was put in charge of the whole Athenian military, but he was discharged quickly after a major defeat. During Alcibiades' youth, Socrates was one of several men to love him, and indeed he saved his life in a battle near Spartolus in 429. Alcibiades appears or is alluded to in several dialogues.

² He would have been approaching 20.

SOCRATES: Yes, far greater.

FRIEND: What? One of our people, or a foreigner?

SOCRATES: A foreigner.

FRIEND: From what city?

SOCRATES: Abdera.

FRIEND: And you found this foreigner so beautiful that he appeared to you of greater beauty than the son of Cleinias?³

SOCRATES: My good sir, mustn't the wisest appear more beautiful?

FRIEND: Do you mean it was some wise man that you met just now?

SOCRATES: No, the wisest of our generation. Or that's what I'd say, if you agree to call d
Protagoras "wisest".

FRIEND: Ah, what news! Protagoras has come to town!

SOCRATES: Yes, two days ago.

FRIEND: And it was his company that you left just now?

SOCRATES: Yes, and I said a great deal to him, and he to me. 310

FRIEND: Then let's hear your account of the conversation at once, if you're free take my boy's place, and sit here.

SOCRATES: Very good indeed, I'll be grateful for an audience.

FRIEND: And we'll listen gratefully, I assure you.

SOCRATES: Then we'll be twice as grateful. Here goes.

CONVERSATION WITH HIPPOCRATES

SOCRATES: Late last night, or rather very early this morning, Hippocrates (Apollodorus' son and b
Phason's bother) knocked violently at my door with his stick.⁴ Someone opened it, and he hurried and called to me in a loud voice: "Socrates, are you awake, or sleeping?"

Recognizing his voice, I said: "Hello Hippocrates! Do you have urgent news for me?"

"Only good news, he replied."

"Delightful," I said. "What is it? And why have you come here at such an hour?"

³ I.e., Alcibiades.

⁴ This Hippocrates is not related either to the famous doctor, Hippocrates of Cos, or to the geometer, Hippocrates of Chios (but he may have been related to the statesman Pericles). Hippocrates would have been almost 20 at the time when the dialogue is set; and Socrates, in his mid-thirties.

“Protagoras has come!” he said, standing at my side.

“Yes, two days ago,” I said, “have you only just heard?”

“Yes!” he replied, “last night.” Then he groped about for the bed, sat at my feet, and continued: “It was very late at night, after I got back from Oenoë. You see my boy Satyrus had run away.⁵ I planned to let you know that I was chasing after him, but something else distracted me. Anyway, when I returned, after I’d finished dinner and was about to go to sleep, my brother told me, only then, that Protagoras had come. I tried, even at that hour, to get to you at once, but I realized that it was too late at night. But as soon as I had slept enough not to be dead tired anymore, I got up and came straight here.” c

Noticing that he was excited and all riled up, I said: “Well, what’s the matter? Has Protagoras robbed you?” d

He laughed at this and said “Yes, by the gods! He’s monopolizing all the wisdom and won’t give me any.”

“But, by Zeus!” I said, “if you give him money and make friends with him he’ll make you wise too.

“I wish to Zeus and all the gods,” he exclaimed, “that it were that simple! I’d give him everything I have, and everything that my friends have. But that’s why I’ve come to you now, to see if you’ll talk to him for me. I’m too young to do it myself. Besides, I’ve never even seen Protagoras or heard him speak. I was only a child the last time he paid us a visit. Socrates, you know how everyone praises the man and talks about how clever a speaker he is. Let’s walk over to him at once, to make sure we find him in. I’m told that he’s staying with Callias (Hipponicus’ son). Now, let’s get going.”⁶ e

I replied: “We’d better not go there yet, my friend, it is very early. Let’s get up and go into the courtyard and walk around there until sunrise. Then we’ll go. Protagoras spends most of his time indoors, you see, so have no fear, so we’ll be sure to find him in.” 311

So then we got up and walked in the courtyard; and to test Hippocrates’ resolve, I began examining him with a few questions. “Hippocrates,” I said, “We’re going to Protagoras and you’re prepared to pay him money as a fee for his services to you. So tell me, what do you think he is, and what do you expect to become? I mean, suppose your heart was set on going to your namesake, Hippocrates of Cos, the Asclepiad, to pay him money for his services to you.⁷ Someone might say to you ‘Tell me, Hippocrates, since you’re planning to pay Hippocrates a fee, what do you think he is?’ How would you answer that?” b c

“I’d say that he’s a doctor.”

“And what would you intend to become?”

“A doctor”, he replied.

“And suppose your heart was set on approaching Polycleitus the Argive or Pheidias the Athenian and paying them a fee. Someone could ask, “What do you think Polycleitus and Pheidias are that makes you want to pay them this money?” How would you answer that?”

“I’d say that they’re sculptors.”

“And what would you intend to become?”

“Obviously, a sculptor.”

“Very well then,” I said; “you and I will go now to Protagoras, prepared to pay him money d

⁵ By “my boy,” Hippocrates means his slave.

⁶ Hipponicus is reputed to have been the richest man in Greece. Among other sources of wealth, he owned a silver mine manned by six hundred slaves. At the time when this dialog is set, Callias is in his late 20s and has recently taken over the family business. But Plato’s readers would know that he ultimately squandered the fortune he inherited and fell into debt. Callias is also known for having held several political and military positions and for leading a scandalous lifestyle.

⁷ Hippocrates of Cos is the famous doctor for whom the Hippocratic corpus and the Hippocratic oath are named. Asclepius was the God of healing. “Asclepiad” means descendant of Asclepius, and by extension refers to a healer.

as your fee, spending our own money, if it's enough to persuade him, and, if not, drawing on our friends' money as well. Someone who observed our enthusiasm might ask us, 'Socrates and Hippocrates, what is it that you take Protagoras to be, that makes you want to pay him money?' How should we reply to him? What is the other name that we commonly hear attached to Protagoras? They call Pheidias a sculptor and Homer a poet. What title do they give Protagoras?" e

"They call him a sophist, Socrates."

"Then we go to him and pay him the money as a sophist?"

"Certainly."

"Now suppose that someone asked you this further question: 'And what is it that you yourself hope to become when you go to Protagoras?'" 312

He replied to this with a blush (the day had started to dawn by then, so I could see him clearly), "If it's like the previous cases, obviously, to become a sophist."

"By the gods," I said, "wouldn't you be ashamed to present yourself before the Greeks as a sophist?"

"Yes, Socrates, to tell the truth, I would be."

"Hippocrates, maybe this isn't the sort of instruction you expect to get from Protagoras. You might expect to get the sort you got from your grammar teacher, harp teacher, or wrestling coach. When you took your lessons from each of them it wasn't technical training to become a professional; rather, they were parts of a general education that befits a gentleman." b

"That's just it!" he said, "that's the kind of education that one gets from Protagoras."

"Then do you know what you're about to do? Or haven't you noticed?"

"What?"

"You're about to entrust your soul to the care of a man who you call a sophist, and yet I'll be surprised if you can tell me what a sophist is. If you can't, then you don't even know what you're entrusting your soul to, and whether it is good or bad." c

"But I think I do know," he said.

"Then tell me, please, what you think a sophist is."

"I'd say," he replied, "that, as the name suggests, it's someone who has knowledge of wise things."

"Well," I went on, "we can say that about painters too, and carpenters. They are the ones who have knowledge of wise things. And if someone asked us what those wise things are that painters have knowledge of, I suppose we'd tell him that they're wise about making likenesses, and so on for the others. But what if he asked 'What is it that the sophist is wise about? What job is he an expert at?'" d

"How should we answer him, Socrates? What could we answer be except that he's expert at making people speak cleverly."

"Perhaps", I replied, "we'd be telling the truth, but not the whole truth. Our answer raises another question. What does a sophist make people clever speakers about? A harpist, presumably, makes people clever speakers about the thing that he makes them know—namely, playing the harp. Do you agree to that?" e

"Yes."

"Well, then what does the sophist make people clever speakers about?"

"Clearly it must be the same thing as that he makes them know."

"So it would seem. Now what is this thing that the sophist knows and makes his pupil know?"

"By god," he said, "I don't know."

Then I went on to say: "Now tell me, are you aware of the jeopardy you're putting your soul in? If you had to entrust your body to someone, taking the risk of its being made better or worse, you'd first consider very carefully whether or not you ought to entrust to him, and you'd seek the advice of your friends and relatives and consider it for many days. But when it comes to 313

your soul, which you value much more highly than your body (since whether everything you do is done well or badly depends on whether your soul is made better or worse), you haven't discussed with your father or brother or with any us who are your friends whether to entrust your soul to this newly-arrived foreigner. Rather, having just heard of him last night, as you say, you come here at dawn, not to discuss this question or to get advice about it, but ready to hand over your property and that of your friends and determined at all costs to be with Protagoras, who you admit you don't know and have never spoken with, and who you call a sophist, though you obviously don't know what a sophist is or what you're entrusting yourself to." b

When he heard this he said: "It seems so, Socrates, from what you're saying." c

"Hippocrates, isn't a sophist a sort of merchant or dealer in provisions on which a soul is nourished? That's how it seems to me."

"What's a soul nourished with, Socrates?"

"With teachings, presumably", I replied. "And we must take care, my friend, that in advertising his merchandise, the sophist doesn't deceive us the way that merchants and dealers do with our bodily food. They recommend all their merchandise, without knowing which is good for the body and which bad. And their customers don't know either, unless one happens to be a trainer or a doctor. In the same way, the people who take their teachings from city to city, peddling them to every customer who comes along, recommend all their merchandise; and some of them may not know which of this merchandise is good or bad for the soul. And the same goes for their customers, unless one happens to be a doctor for the soul." d

"So, if you're knowledgeable about what's good or bad, you can safely buy teachings from Protagoras or from anyone else you like; but if not, be careful, my friend, and don't risk your greatest treasure on a toss of the dice. I'm telling you, buying teachings is much riskier than buying food. When you buy meats and liquors you can carry them away from the dealer or merchant in another container; and, before taking them into your body by drinking or eating, you can lay them out and call in an expert for advice about what should be eaten or drunk, and about how much and when. So there's not too much risk in buying these things. But you can't carry teachings away in another container; once you've paid the fee, you're compelled to take the teaching into your very soul by learning it, and so you leave having either been benefitted or harmed." e

"So these are questions that we have to consider with the help of our elders, since we're still too young to get to the bottom of such a big issue by ourselves. For now, however, let's go as we intended to hear this person; and once we've heard him, we can consult with some others; for Protagoras is not the only one there; we'll find Hippias of Elis and, I believe, Prodicus of Ceos, and many other wise men."⁸ b

We agreed to this and left. When we arrived at the doorway, we paused to finish discussing a question that had occurred to us on the way, and we stood in front of the door talking until we came to an understanding. Now I guess the doorkeeper overheard us. He was a eunuch and was probably annoyed by all the sophists visiting the house. In any event, when we knocked on the door and he opened it and saw us, he said: "Yuck. Sophists. He's busy." Then he immediately slammed the door hard with both hands. c

⁸ Hippias was a sophist who prided himself on being able to teach a wide range of subjects, ranging from geometry and astronomy to history and even various manual crafts. (In another dialog, Plato has him boasting about his homemade shoes [Hippias Minor 368b, cf. *Hippias Major* 285b].) Prodicus is also a sophist. Both men would have been about the same age as Socrates. d

MEETING PROTAGORAS AND COMPANY

SOCRATES: We tried knocking again, and then he spoke in answer through the closed door:
“Didn’t you hear, sirs, he’s busy?”

“But, my good fellow”, I said, “we haven’t come to see Callias, and we’re not sophists. Don’t e
be afraid. I’m telling you, we’ve come to ask to see Protagoras; so go and announce us.”

Then with a lot of hesitation the fellow opened the door to us. Upon entering we found Protagoras walking around in the portico with two groups trailing behind him. On one side were Callias (Hipponicus’s son), his stepbrother Paralus (Pericles’ son), and Charmides (Glaucón’s son). On the other side were Xanthippus (Pericles’ other son), Philippides (Philomelus’ son), and 315 Antimoerus of Mende, who is the most highly reputed of Protagoras’ disciples and is taking the course professionally with a view to becoming a sophist.⁹ The people who followed behind them, listening to what they could of the conversation, seemed to be mostly foreigners, brought by the great Protagoras from the various cities he visits—he enchants them with his voice like Orpheus, while they follow, enchanted, wherever the voice leads.¹⁰ There were also some locals dancing in this chorus. I found it delightful to watch how careful the chorus was never to get in b Protagoras’ way. Whenever he and the trailing groups turned around, they parted in an orderly manner, wheeled round, and reassembled beautifully at the back.

“The next thing I saw” (as Homer put it) was Hippias of Elis, seated high on a chair in the c opposite portico. Sitting around him on benches were Eryximachus (Acumenus’ son), Phaedrus of Myrrhinous, Andron (Androtion’s son), and a number of foreigners—Hippias’ countrymen and others. They seemed to be asking him a series of astronomical questions on nature and the heavenly bodies, and he was sitting in his chair and answering them in turn.

“And I saw Tantalus too”—you know Prodicus of Ceos is also in town.¹¹ He was in Hipponicus’ old storeroom, which Callias emptied and turned into a guestroom because he has d so many visitors. Prodicus was still in bed, and seemed to be wrapped up in lots of fleeces and rugs. Pausanias from Cerames was laying one of the nearby couches; he had a lad with him who was still quite young, of good birth and breeding, I’d say—in any event he was very beautiful. I thought I heard that his name was Agathon, and I wouldn’t be surprised to learn that he is e Pausanias’ favorite.¹² Besides this youth there were the two Adeimantuses, (Cepis’ son and

⁹ Pericles was Classical Athens’ most venerated statesman and general. Neither of the two sons mentioned here (Paralus and Xanthippus) amounted to much. Charmides is described elsewhere as having been a beautiful young man; in adulthood, he would be sentenced to death for profaning a religious ritual. Little is known about Philippides other than that he was wealthy; and nothing of significance is known about Antimoerus other than what is reported in text above.

¹⁰ Orpheus is a mythological figure with a beautiful singing voice who was reputed to have invented or improved various instruments and to have had various magical abilities. He became a central figure in cult religions based around the stories of his death and resurrection.

¹¹ This is a continuation of the Homeric reference from the last paragraph. It comes from *Odyssey* XI (582, 601), where Odysseus describes the various things he saw in the underworld. Tantalus was a mythological figure who was sentenced to spend eternity by a pool whose water receded whenever he stooped to drink it and a tree whose dangling fruit pulled away when he reached for it. This punishment (from which we derive the word “tantalize”) was due to his excessive love of luxury. This is probably what Plato thought he had in common with Prodicus.

¹² Agathon would go on to become a tragedian (though none of his plays survive); he and his lover Pausanias, both appear in Plato’s *Symposium*, which is set at a party celebrating the success of one of Agathon’s plays. Most of what we know about Pausanias concerns his somewhat unusual relationship with Agathon. Greek homosexual relationships usually involved an older man and a teenaged boy, and they ended when the boy was old enough to marry and/or to become the older party in a relationship of the same sort. Occasionally, however, such couples remained together, and this was the case with Agathon and Pausanias.

Leucolophidas'), and there seemed to be some others.¹³ From outside, I wasn't able to tell what they were talking about, despite my longing to hear Prodicus. I regard the man as all-wise and divine; but, because of his deep voice, the room was filled with a booming sound that made the talk indistinct. 316

We had only just arrived, when Alcibiades the beautiful (as you call him, and I agree) entered and (Callaeschrus' son) Critias.¹⁴ So, when we had entered, after spending a little more time looking around, we went up to Protagoras, and I said: "Protagoras, Hippocrates and I have come to see you." b

"Do you want to talk with me alone," he asked, "or in the company of the others?"

"It's all the same to us," I replied, "let me first tell you why we've come, and then you can decide."

"Alright, then," he asked, "why have you come?"

"My friend Hippocrates is a native of the city, a son of Apollodorus, and part of a great and wealthy family, and his own natural abilities seem to make him a match for anyone of his age. I think he is anxious to be distinguished in our city, and he believes he can best do so by associating with you. So now you should decide whether it will be better for you to discuss this matter privately with us alone, or in the company of the others." c

"You do well, Socrates," he said, "to be so considerate of me. A foreigner must be very cautious when he goes into great cities and tries to persuade the best of the young men there to drop their other associations (either with relatives or acquaintances, whether young or old) in order to associate with him, on the grounds that doing so will improve them. Considerable jealousies are apt to arise, and numerous enmities and plots." d

"Now I maintain that sophistry is an ancient art, but that, in ancient times, its practitioners disguised it, fearing the hatred associated with it. Some of them, like Homer, Hesiod, and Simonides, dressed it up as poetry. Others, like Orpheus, Musaeus and their sects, dressed it as mystic rites and sooth-sayings. And I have observed some who dressed it as athletics: Iccus of Tarentum is an example here, as is one of our contemporaries (as great a sophist as any) Herodicus of Selymbria (originally of Megara). Your own Agathocles (a great sophist) disguised his sophistry as music, as did Pythocleides of Ceos, and many others. All these people, as I've said, used these arts as covers, because they feared the ill will associated with sophistry. But I don't follow suit, because I do not think they achieved their end. They could not hide the purpose of all these disguises from the powerful men in each city. (Of course, most of the people hardly perceive anything and just echo the various pronouncements of their leaders.) Now, when someone tries to run away and fails, getting caught in the attempt, it's sheer folly, and it inevitably makes people much more hostile. Now, in addition to everything else, they regard him as a rogue. Therefore, I take a completely opposite course: I admit that I am a sophist and that I educate men; and I consider this precaution of admitting rather than denying to be the better of the two. I've considered some other precautions as well, so as to avoid, God willing, any harm that may come from admitting that I am a sophist. I've been in this profession for many long years now, and I'm now so old that I could be the father of any one here. So it suits me by far the best, if you have a request, to say my piece on these matters in the presence of everyone who is in the house." e 317 c

¹³ Nothing is known about the first of these Adeimantuses. The second was a life-long friend of Alcibiades. Like him, he would go on to become a general and would be involved in the scandal mentioned earlier concerning the mocking of religious mysteries. Neither Adeimantus should be confused with the character of the same name in the *Republic*, who was one of Plato's brothers.

¹⁴ Critias, who was Plato's uncle, went on to become one of the leaders of the Thirty Tyrants who briefly ruled Athens in 404-403 B.C. He died during the battle that led to their downfall. He was also, about a decade prior to that (but still well before the date in which this dialogue is set), arrested and then exonerated in the affair (mentioned above) concerning the mutilation of the herms.

As I suspected, he wanted to show off in front of Prodicus and Hippias and to preen because we came to him as admirers, so I replied: “Then let’s call Prodicus and Hippias and their followers to come and listen to us.” d

“By all means,” Protagoras said.

“Then do you agree,” asked Callias, “that we should make this a session, and that everyone should take seats for a conversation?”

The proposal was accepted; and all of us, delighted at the prospect of listening to wise men, grabbed the benches and couches and set them up near Hippias, where there were already some benches. Meanwhile Callias and Alcibiades came, bringing Prodicus (whom they had gotten up) and his circle. e

Once we had all taken our seats, Protagoras spoke: “Now, Socrates, since these gentlemen are also present, would you be so good as to repeat what you were saying to me a little while ago on the young man’s behalf?”

I replied: “I’ll begin as I did a moment ago. My friend Hippocrates is interested in joining your classes; and therefore he says he would be glad to know what result he will get from joining them. That’s all we have to say.” 318

Then Protagoras answered at once, saying: “Young man, this is what you will gain by coming to my classes: on the day when you join them you will go home a better man, and it will be the same on the next day; on every day you will continue to improve.” b

When I heard this I said: “Protagoras, what you say is not at all surprising; it’s very likely, since even you, old and wise as you are, would be improved if someone taught you something that you happened not to know. But let me put it another way: suppose Hippocrates here should suddenly change his desire and wanted lessons from that young fellow who’s just recently come to town, Zeuxippus of Heraclea. Suppose he approached him, as he’s now approaching you, and heard the very same thing from him as from you—that on each day that he spent with him he would be better and make constant progress. Now suppose he were to question him on this and ask: ‘At what shall I become better as you say, and in what will I progress?’ Zeuxippus’s reply would be, ‘in painting’. Then suppose he wanted lessons from Orthagoras the Theban, and heard the same thing from him as from you, and then asked of him at what he would be improved every day by attending his classes, the answer would be, ‘at playing the flute’. This is how you also must answer the youth and me on this point. Protagoras, tell us, *at what* and *in what way* will my friend Hippocrates walk away a better man after each day (and then similarly improve on each of the following days), if he studies with you?” c d

When Protagoras heard my words, he said: “You do well to ask that, and I am very glad to answer those who ask the right questions. For Hippocrates, if he comes to me, will not be treated as he would have been if he had joined the classes of an ordinary sophist. The majority of them mistreat the young, by forcing them back against their will into the arts from which they’ve just escaped. They teach them arithmetic and astronomy and geometry and music.” He glanced at Hippias. “If he applies to me, on the other hand, he’ll learn only and exactly what he’s come to learn: good judgment about domestic matters—that is, how best to manage his household—and about civic matters—that is, how to be most powerful in conducting the city’s affairs and in speaking about them.” e 319

“I wonder,” I said, “whether I follow what you are saying. You appear to be speaking of the art of citizenship, and undertaking to make men good citizens.”

“That’s exactly my point, Socrates,” he replied.

“Then it is certainly an admirable technique that you have developed,” I remarked, “if indeed you have developed it. For I can say what I think sincerely to a man like you. Protagoras, this is something that I did not think could be taught. But when you say that it can be, I don’t see how I can doubt it.”

CAN VIRTUE BE TAUGHT?¹⁵

SOCRATES: Let me explain how I came to think that virtue cannot be taught or imparted from one man to another: I say, in common with the rest of the Greeks, that the Athenians are wise. Now I observe, when we are collected for the Assembly, and the city has to deal with a question about building, we send for builders to advise us on what is proposed to be built; and when it is a case of laying down a ship, we send for shipwrights; and so in all other matters which are considered learnable and teachable. And, if anyone else, whom the people do not regard as a craftsman, attempts to advise them, no matter how handsome and wealthy and well-born he may be, none of these things convince them to accept him; they merely laugh him to scorn and shout him down, until either the speaker gives up, drown out by the clamor, or the police pull him from his place, or they throw him out altogether by order of the chair. This is their procedure when dealing with questions that they consider to be technical. But when they have to deliberate on something connected with the administration of the state, the man who rises to advise them on this may equally well be a smith, a shoemaker, a merchant, a sea-captain, a rich man, a poor man, of good family or of none, and nobody chastises him for presuming to give advice without any prior training under a teacher. The reason is obvious: they do not think this can be taught.

Moreover, not only in politics, but also in private life, our best and wisest citizens are unable to transmit their virtue to others. Consider Pericles, the father of these young fellows here. He gave them a first-rate education in the subjects for which he found teachers, but in the subject about which he is wise, he neither educates them himself nor commits them to anyone else's care. Rather, they go about grazing freely like untended oxen, on the chance of their picking up virtue haphazardly on their own. Or consider Cleinias, the younger brother of Alcibiades here. Pericles, when he became his guardian and was worried that he might be corrupted (by Alcibiades, I suppose) took him away from his brother and placed him with Ariphron's family to be educated.¹⁶ After less than six months, he returned him to Alcibiades, because he didn't know what to do with him. I could mention many others who were virtuous themselves but never succeeded in making anyone else better—neither their own children nor anyone else's. Therefore, Protagoras, in view of these facts, I believe that virtue cannot be taught. But when I hear you speak, I waver and suppose there is something in what you say, because I consider you to be a man of great experience who has learned much from others and had found out much for yourself. So if you can show clearly that virtue is can be taught, do not begrudge us.

IS VIRTUE ONE THING OR MANY?

SOCRATES: Protagoras, please answer me this. You say that virtue can be taught, and if there is anybody in the world who could convince me, you are the man: but there was a point in your speech at which I wondered, and on which I'd like you to satisfy my soul. You said that Zeus sent justice and respect to mankind, and furthermore it was frequently stated in your discourse that justice, temperance, piety and the rest all amount to one thing: virtue. Could you go through this again more precisely? Is virtue is a single thing, of which justice and temperance and piety are parts, or are the things I have just mentioned are all names of the same thing? This is what I am still intrigued by.

¹⁵ The dialog continues with Socrates narrating his conversation with Protagoras. For ease of reading I am recasting the remainder into direct discourse. (In doing this, I have transformed some of Socrates occasional descriptions of the conversation into stage directions, and I have omitted others.)

¹⁶ Little is known about this Ariphron other than that he was wealthy and respectable.

PROTAGORAS: Why, the answer to that is easy, Socrates, virtue is a single thing and the things you mention are parts of it.

SOCRATES: Do you mean parts in the sense that the mouth, nose, eyes, and ears are parts of the face? Or do you mean it in the sense that there are parts of gold, where there is no difference among the pieces, either between one part and another or between a part and the whole, except that some are pieces bigger and others smaller?

PROTAGORAS: In the former sense, I think, Socrates; like the parts of the face are to the whole face. e

SOCRATES: Well then, when men partake of these portions of virtue, do some have one, and some another, or if you get one, must you have them all?

PROTAGORAS: By no means, since many are brave but unjust, and many again are just but not wise.

SOCRATES: Then are these also parts of virtue, wisdom and courage? 330

PROTAGORAS: Most certainly, and wisdom is the greatest of the parts.

SOCRATES: Each of them is distinct from any other?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Does each also have its particular function? Just as, in the parts of the face, the eye is not like the ears, nor is its function the same; nor is any of the other parts like another, in its function or in any other respect: in the same way, are the parts of virtue unlike each other, both in themselves and in their functions? Are they not evidently so, if the analogy holds? b

PROTAGORAS: Yes, that's how they are, Socrates.

SOCRATES: So then, among the parts of virtue, no other part is like knowledge, or like justice, or like courage, or like temperance, or like piety.

PROTAGORAS: Right.

JUSTICE AND PIETY

SOCRATES: Come now, let's consider together what sort of thing each of these parts is. First let's ask, is justice something, or not a thing at all? I think it is; what do you say? c

PROTAGORAS: So do I.

SOCRATES: Well then, suppose someone should ask you and me: "Protagoras and Socrates, please tell me this: the thing you named just now, justice, is that thing itself just or unjust?" I would reply that it is just. What would your verdict be? The same as mine or different?

PROTAGORAS: The same.

SOCRATES: Then justice is the sort of thing that is just. That's how I'd respond to the questioner? d
Would you respond that way also?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now suppose he proceeded to ask us this: "Do you also speak of piety?" We would say that we do, right?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: "Then do you call this a thing also?" We'd say we do, right?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: "Do you say this thing itself is by nature pious or impious?" For my part I'd be annoyed at this question, and I'd answer: "Hush, my good sir! It's hard to see how anything e
could be pious, if piety itself isn't pious!" Wouldn't you make the same reply?

PROTAGORAS: I certainly would.

SOCRATES: Now suppose the questioner went on to ask us: "Then what about what you said a little while ago? Perhaps I did not hear you right, but I understood you two to say that the parts of virtue are related to one another so that no part is like the others." Here my answer would be: 331
"You heard right but, but you made a mistake in thinking that I had any share in that statement. It was Protagoras here who said that in answer to my question." Then suppose he were to ask: "Is our friend telling the truth, Protagoras? Is it you who say that one part of virtue is not like another? Is this statement yours?" What answer would you give him?

PROTAGORAS: I have to admit it, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Well now, Protagoras, after that admission, what answer should we give him, if he goes on to ask this question: "Isn't piety the sort of thing that is just, and justice the sort of thing that is pious? Or can justice be impious? Is piety the sort of thing that can fail to be just and so be unjust, and is justice the sort of thing that can be impious?!" What will we reply? For my part, b
I'd say both that justice is pious and that piety is just; and with your permission I would make this same reply for you too, since justice is either the same thing as piety or extremely like it, and above all, justice is the same kind of thing as piety, and piety as justice. Will you veto this answer, or are you in agreement with it?

PROTAGORAS: I do not take quite so simple a view of it, Socrates, as to grant that justice is pious c
and piety just. I think we have to make a distinction here. Yet what difference does it make? If you like, let us assume that justice is pious and piety just.

SOCRATES: No, no. I don't want any of this "if you like" or "if you agree" business. It's you and me that I want to test, and I think the argument will be tested better if we take the "ifs" out. d

PROTAGORAS: Well, at any rate, justice has some resemblance to piety; for anything in the world has some sort of resemblance to any other thing. Thus there is a point in which white resembles black, and hard soft, and so on with all the other things which are regarded as most opposed to each other. Even our earlier examples of things with different functions that are not of the same kind—the parts of the face—resemble one another in some way and are alike. So by your

method you could prove, if you choose, that even these things are all like one another. But it is not fair to describe things as alike just because they have some point alike, however small, or as unlike just because they have some point unlike. e

SOCRATES: What, do you regard justice and piety as having only a small point of likeness?!

PROTAGORAS: No, but I don't think of them as you seem to either. 332

WISDOM AND TEMPERANCE

SOCRATES: Well then, since you seem to be irritated by this suggestion, let's drop it, and consider another of your points: Is there a thing you call foolishness? 332a

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Isn't its direct opposite wisdom?

PROTAGORAS: I think so.

SOCRATES: And when men behave rightly and usefully, do you consider them temperate in so behaving, or the opposite?

PROTAGORAS: Temperate.

SOCRATES: Then is it by temperance that they are temperate? b

PROTAGORAS: Necessarily.

SOCRATES: Now those who do not behave rightly behave foolishly, and are not temperate in so behaving?

PROTAGORAS: I agree.

SOCRATES: And behaving foolishly is the opposite of behaving temperately?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now foolish behavior is due to foolishness, and temperate behavior is due to temperance?

PROTAGORAS: Sure.

SOCRATES: And whatever is done by strength is done strongly, and whatever by weakness, weakly?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And whatever with swiftness, swiftly, and whatever with slowness, slowly?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

c

SOCRATES: And so whatever is done in a certain way is done by that kind of faculty, and whatever in an opposite way, by the opposite kind?

PROTAGORAS: Sure.

SOCRATES: Ok then, is there such a thing as the beautiful?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Has this any opposite except the ugly?

None.

SOCRATES: Well, is there such a thing as the good?

PROTAGORAS: There is.

SOCRATES: Has it any opposite but the bad?

PROTAGORAS: No.

SOCRATES: Tell me, is there such a thing as shrill in the voice?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Has it any other opposite than deep?

PROTAGORAS: No.

SOCRATES: Now, each single opposite has but one opposite, not many?

d

PROTAGORAS: I suppose.

SOCRATES: Come now, let's count up our points of agreement. We have agreed that one thing has but one opposite, and no more?

PROTAGORAS: We have.

SOCRATES: And that what is done in an opposite way is done by opposites?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And we have agreed that what is done foolishly is done in an opposite way to what is done temperately?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And that what is done temperately is done by temperance, and what is done foolishly is done by foolishness?

PROTAGORAS: Sure.

e

SOCRATES: Now if it is done in an opposite way, it must be done by an opposite?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And one is done by temperance, and the other by foolishness?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: In an opposite way?

PROTAGORAS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And by opposite faculties?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then foolishness is opposite to temperance.

PROTAGORAS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: Now do you recollect that in the previous stage we have agreed that foolishness is opposite to wisdom?

PROTAGORAS: I do.

SOCRATES: And that one thing has but one opposite?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then Protagoras, which of our propositions should we reject? The statement that a single thing has a single opposite; or the other, that wisdom is different from temperance, and each is a part of virtue, and moreover, a different part, and that the two are as unlike, both in themselves and in their faculties, as the parts of the face? Which should we give up? The two of them together are not quite in tune; they do not chime in harmony. How could they, if one thing can only have one opposite and no more, while wisdom, and also temperance appear both to be opposite to foolishness, which is a single thing? This is our position, Protagoras, I said or is it otherwise? 333 b

PROTAGORAS (grudgingly): Alright.

SOCRATES: Then temperance and wisdom must be one thing? And indeed we found before that justice and piety were almost the same thing.

JUSTICE AND TEMPERANCE

SOCRATES: Come, Protagoras, let's not falter, but carry out our inquiry to the end. Tell me, does 333b

a man who acts unjustly seem to you to be temperate in so acting? c

PROTAGORAS: Socrates, I'd be ashamed to admit that, in spite of what many people say.

SOCRATES: Then shall I address my argument to them or to you?

PROTAGORAS: If you please, debate first against that popular theory.

SOCRATES: As you answer, it's all the same to me as long whether it's your own opinion or not. For although my first object is to test the argument, the result may be that both I as the questioner and my respondent are brought to the test.

Protagoras plays coy for a time, claiming that the argument is too difficult for him, but he eventually consents to answer Socrates' questions.

SOCRATES: Now, begin at the beginning, and tell me whether consider people to be temperate when they are unjust? d

PROTAGORAS: Suppose that I do.

SOCRATES: And by being temperate you mean being sensible?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And being sensible is being well-advised in their injustice?

PROTAGORAS: Let's grant it.

SOCRATES: Does this mean whether or not they get good results through their injustice?

PROTAGORAS: Only if they get good results.

SOCRATES: Now do you say there are things that are good?

PROTAGORAS: I do.

SOCRATES: Then are those things good which are advantageous to men?

PROTAGORAS (testily): Of course they are! And even if they're not advantageous to men, I can still call them good. e

SOCRATES: Protagoras, are you talking about things that aren't advantageous to any man or things that are of no advantage whatsoever? Do you call things good that are of no advantage whatsoever? 334

PROTAGORAS: Of course not! But I know plenty of things that are disadvantageous for men (for example, certain foods, drinks, drugs, and lots of others) and some things that are advantageous, and some that are neither one nor the other to men, but which are either advantageous or disadvantageous to horses; and some that are advantageous only to cattle, or again to dogs; some also that are not advantageous to any of those, but are to trees; and some that are good for the roots of a tree, but bad for its shoots—such as dung, which is a good thing when applied to the b

roots of all plants but tonally destructive when cast on the young twigs and branches. Also oil is very bad for all plants, and most deadly for the hair of all animals except man, but is helpful to man's hair and to the rest of his body. The good is such an elusive and diverse thing that in this instance it is good for the outward parts of man's body, but at the same time as bad as can be for the inward; and for this reason all doctors forbid the sick to take oil, except the smallest possible quantity, in what one is going to eat—just enough to cover the unappetizing aroma of a prepared meal. c

COURAGE AND THE OTHER VIRTUES

SOCRATES: I believe this was the question: "Are the five names of 'wisdom', 'temperance', 'courage', 'justice', and 'piety' attached to one thing, or is there a distinct thing underlying each of these names, a thing with its own particular function, each one unlike the others?" And your answer was that they are not names attached to one thing, but that each of these names applies to a distinct thing, and that all these things are parts of virtue; not like the parts of gold, which are similar to each other and to the whole of which they are parts, but like the parts of the face, which are dissimilar to the whole of which they are parts and to each other, and which each have a distinct function. If you still hold the same opinion say so; if you have a new one, explain what it is, for I make no objection to your replying now on other lines. Indeed I won't be surprised if you were merely experimenting upon me when you spoke before. c d

PROTAGORAS: Well, Socrates, I say that all these are parts of virtue, and that while four of them are fairly alike other, courage is something vastly different from all the rest. You may perceive the truth of what I say from this: you will find many people who are extremely unjust, impious, dissolute, and ignorant, and yet extremely courageous.

SOCRATES: Stop now, we must carefully examine what you say. Do you call courageous men confident, or something else? e

PROTAGORAS: Yes, and ready for action also; they go where most men fear to tread.

SOCRATES: Well now, do you say that virtue is a good thing, and offer yourself as a teacher of this of this good thing?

PROTAGORAS: It's the best thing, unless I am out of my senses.

SOCRATES: Then is one part of it base and another good, or is the whole good?

PROTAGORAS: Surely the whole is good in the highest possible degree.

SOCRATES: Now do you know who dives confidently into wells? 350

PROTAGORAS: Yes, divers.

SOCRATES: Is this because they have knowledge, or for some other reason?

PROTAGORAS: Because they have knowledge.

SOCRATES: And who is confident in riding into battle? Those who are practiced riders or those who are not?

PROTAGORAS: The riders.

SOCRATES: And who are bold in fighting with shields? Hoplites or non-hoplites?¹⁷

PROTAGORAS: Hoplites, and so with all other cases, if that's your point: those who have knowledge are more confident than those who lack it, and any given person is more confident once he has learned than he was before learning.

b

SOCRATES: But, at times you must have seen people who are ignorant of these affairs but who behave confidently in each of them.

PROTAGORAS: I have, they behave all too confidently.

SOCRATES: Is their confidence also courage?

PROTAGORAS: No, that would make courage a base thing; for those you speak of are out of their senses.

SOCRATES: What then do you mean by courageous men? Surely the same as confident men?

PROTAGORAS: Yes, I do.

c

SOCRATES: Then, these men who are so confident turn out to be mad rather than courageous? And in the other cases the wisest men are also the most confident? Because they're the most confident, won't they also be the most courageous? On this account then, won't wisdom be courage?

PROTAGORAS: You misremember what I said in replying to you, Socrates. When you asked me whether courageous men were confident I admitted it, but I was not asked whether confident men are courageous. If you had asked me that, I would have said "Not all of them." You haven't shown that I was wrong in admitting that courageous men are confident. Rather you showed that any given person is more confident once he has knowledge than he was before he had it, and that he is more confident than others who lack knowledge; and, because of this, you take courage and wisdom to be the same thing. But, by this line of reasoning, you could even take strength to be wisdom. You'd begin by asking me whether the strong are powerful, and I'd say "Yes." Then you'd ask whether men who know how to wrestle are more powerful than those who don't know how to wrestle, and whether any given man is more powerful once he has learned than he was before learning, and I'd say "Yes." Once I admitted these points, it would be open to you to say, by the same token, that according to my admission wisdom is strength. But nowhere in this process have I agreed that powerful are strong, only that the strong are powerful. In fact, I hold that power and strength are not the same. Power comes from knowledge, or from madness or rage, while strength comes from the nature and proper nurture of the body. Similarly in the other case: confidence and courage are not the same, and therefore it results that the courageous are confident, but not that the confident are courageous; for confidence comes to a man from art, or from rage or madness, like power, whereas courage comes from constitution and proper nurture of the soul.

d

e

351

b

¹⁷ The hoplites were Greek soldiers who fought with shields and spears.

PLEASURE AND THE GOOD

SOCRATES: Protagoras, do you speak of some men as living well, and others as living badly. 351b

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then would it seem to you that a man lived well if lived in distress and anguish?

PROTAGORAS: No.

SOCRATES: Now, if he ended his life having lived pleasantly, wouldn't you think that he lived well?

PROTAGORAS: I would.

SOCRATES: So to live pleasantly is good, and to live unpleasantly is bad? c

PROTAGORAS: Yes, if you live taking pleasure in honorable things.

SOCRATES: But, Protagoras, are you telling me that you agree with the majority in calling some pleasant things bad and some painful ones good?! Aren't things good insofar as they are pleasant, putting aside any other result they may have? And aren't painful things bad in just the same sense? Aren't they bad insofar as they are painful?

PROTAGORAS: I don't know whether to answer the question as simply as you posed it, Socrates, "that all pleasant things are good and painful things bad." With a view not merely to my present answer but to all the rest of my life, I think it's safer to respond that some pleasant things are not good, and also that some painful things are not bad, and some are, and that there is a third class of them that are indifferent (neither bad nor good). d

SOCRATES: Don't you call things pleasant if they partake of pleasure or cause pleasure? e

PROTAGORAS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Ok, so when I ask you if things are good insofar as they're pleasant, I am asking if pleasure itself is a good.

PROTAGORAS: As you always say, Socrates, "let us inquire into the matter, and if the claim seems to be reasonable, and the pleasant and the good are found to be the same, we shall agree upon it; if not, we shall dispute it there and then."

SOCRATES: Would you like to be leader in the inquiry, or should I to lead?

PROTAGORAS: You ought to lead, he replied, since you inaugurated this discussion.

SOCRATES: Well then, maybe the following example will make things clear. When estimating a man's health or other functions of his body by his appearance, you might look at his face and the lower part of his arms and then say: 'Let me see your chest and your back too, so that I can examine you thoroughly.' I want to make the same sort of investigation here. I've seen where you stand on the good and the pleasant, so I need to say something like this: 'Protagoras, let me see some more of your thoughts. Where do you stand on knowledge? Do you go along with most b

people or not? The common opinion is that knowledge goes something like this: Knowledge not a strong or guiding or governing thing. People don't regard it as that kind of thing, and they think that often, when a man has knowledge in him, he is governed not by it, but by something else—sometimes by passion, sometimes by pleasure, or pain, or love, and often by fear. They think that a man's knowledge is utterly dragged around by all these other things, as if it were a slave. Now do you agree with this view of knowledge, or do you think that it is something fine and capable of a governing a man? Do you think that, if someone knows what is good and bad, he will never be swayed by anything to act against the dictates of his knowledge? Do you think that prudence is sufficient to save a man? c

PROTAGORAS: I agree with you Socrates; my view is precisely as you say. It would be a disgrace for me above all men to assert that wisdom and knowledge were anything other than the highest things for man. d

SOCRATES: Well and truly spoken. Now you know that most people will not listen to you and me. They'll say that most men refuse to do what is best even when they know what is best and have the power to do it. I've asked them the reason for this, and they tell me that people who act this way are acting under the influence of pleasure or pain, or under the control of one of the things I mentioned earlier. e

PROTAGORAS: Yes, Socrates, I think this is one of many erroneous things men say.

SOCRATES: Come then, and join me in the endeavor to persuade the world and to explain what the experience is that they call "being overcome by pleasure," this experience which makes them to fail to do what is best, when they have knowledge of it. Because, if we told them that what they're saying isn't true, and is quite false, they might ask us: "Protagoras and Socrates, if this experience is not being overcome by pleasure, then what on earth is it, and what do *you* call it? Tell us that." 353

PROTAGORAS: Socrates, why do we have to consider the opinion of ordinary people, who just say whatever occurs to them? b

SOCRATES: I think it will help us find out about courage, and how it is related to the other parts of virtue," I replied. "We made an agreement a while ago that I would lead us in the direction that I think will make things clear. If you're willing to abide by that agreement, you must go along with me, but if you're not willing I'll let it pass.

PROTAGORAS: No, you're right. Continue as you began.

SOCRATES: Once more then, suppose they ask us what we call the experience that they describe as "being overcome by pleasures." I'd give them this answer—listen, Protagoras, and I'll try to explain it to you. c

"Gentlemen, don't you say that this experience occurs in cases like this: You are often overpowered by the pleasantness of food or drink or sex, and you do them even though you know they're destructive?"

They would admit it. Then you and I would ask them again: "In what way do you call such things destructive? Do you call them destructive because they are pleasant in themselves and produce pleasures in the moment, or do you call them destructive because, later on, they cause diseases and poverty, and many other things like that? Or, do you call them destructive even though they cause none of these things later on and cause only enjoyment? Would something like this still be bad, just because it causes some kind of enjoyment?" d e

Can we suppose, Protagoras, that they will give any other answer than that the things are bad, not because they cause pleasure in the moment, but because they result in disease and the like later on?

PROTAGORAS: I think that's how most people would answer.

SOCRATES: I imagine that they would admit that they cause pains in causing diseases and poverty.

354

PROTAGORAS: Right.

SOCRATES: "Then, my friends, does it seem to you that, as Protagoras and I maintain, the only reason why these things are bad is that they result in pains and deprive us of other pleasures?" Would they admit this?

PROTAGORAS: I agree that they would.

SOCRATES: Then again, suppose that we ask them the opposite question: "You who tell us that some good things are painful, aren't you thinking of cases like physical training, military service, and medical treatments like cauterization, incision, drugs, or starvation? You say these are good, but painful?" Wouldn't they agree?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

b

Socrates: "Then do you call these things good because they produce extreme pain and anguish in the moment, or do you call them good because later on they result in health and good bodily condition, the salvation of cities, power over others, and wealth?" I suppose they would assent to this.

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: "And are these painful things good for any other reason than that they result in pleasures and relief and avoidance of pains? Or do you have some other end to mention, with respect to which you call things good, apart from pleasures and pains?" I don't think they'd be able to find one.

c

PROTAGORAS: Neither do I.

SOCRATES: "Then do you pursue pleasure because it's good, and avoid pain because it's bad?"

PROTAGORAS: "Yes."

SOCRATES: "So you regard pain as bad, and you regard pleasure as good, since you call the very act of enjoying something bad as soon as it deprives us of greater pleasures than it has in itself, or leads to greater pains than the pleasures it contains. If you have some other reason for calling the act of enjoyment bad, if you had some other end in view, then you'd be able to tell us what it is, but, as things are you won't be able to tell us."

d

PROTAGORAS: I don't think they'll be able to either.

SOCRATES: And we can repeat the same thing about the state of being in pain: "You call being

pained a good thing as soon as it either rids us of greater pains than the ones it contains, or leads to greater pleasures than its pains. Now if, when you call being pained good, you had some other end in view than the one I mentioned, then you could tell us what it is; but you can't tell us." e

PROTAGORAS: Truly spoken.

SOCRATES: Now, again, if our friends ask me why I speak at such length and in so many ways on this point, I'll reply: "Forgive me. First, it's to show what it is that you call 'being overcome by pleasure'; and, second, it's because all our accounts rest on this point. But it is still possible to retract, if you're able to say that the good is anything other than pleasure, or the bad anything other than pain. Or, is it enough for you to live out your life pleasantly, without pain? If it is, and you are unable to tell us of any other good or bad that does not end up in pleasure or pain, then listen to this: I tell you that your position becomes absurd when you say that often men, when they know that a bad thing is bad, do it anyway, when they can avoid doing it, because they are driven and overwhelmed by pleasure. And it's also absurd when, on the other hand, you say that a man, knowing the good, refuses to do good because he's overcome by momentary pleasures. 355

"The absurdity of all this will be obvious if we stop using so many names at once, such as 'pleasant,' 'painful,' 'good,' and 'bad.' Since, it appears that there are two things, let's call them by two names. First let's call them 'good' and 'bad,' then later we'll go through it again, calling them 'pleasure' and 'pain.' On this basis, let's say that a man does bad things, even though he knows they're bad. Now if someone asks us: 'Why?' we'll answer: 'Because he is overcome.' 'Overcome by what?' the questioner will ask us, and this time we won't be able to reply 'by pleasure,' because pleasure has changed its name to 'the good.' So, we'll say 'He's overcome'; the questioner will ask "By what?" and surely our reply will have to be: 'By the good.' Now if our questioner happens to be rude he'll burst out laughing and exclaim: 'What a ridiculous statement, that a man does bad things, when he's knows they're bad and doesn't have to do them, because he is overcome by the good!' He'll ask, 'Well then does the good in you outweigh the bad or not?' Clearly we'll have to reply that it does not, because if the good outweighed the bad, then the person who was overcome by pleasure would not have made any mistake. 'How,' the questioner might ask, 'can the good outweigh the bad or the bad outweigh the good? Can't it only happen when the one is greater and the other smaller, or when there are more on the one side and fewer on the other?' We'll have to agree. 'So clearly,' he'll say, 'by "being overcome" you mean getting a lot of bad things in exchange for the fewer good ones.'" c

"So that's settled then, now let's go through it all again using the names 'pleasant' and 'painful' instead. Let's say that a man does what we previously called 'bad' things, but now we'll call them 'painful' things. Let's say that the man who does them knows that they are painful, and that he does them anyway, because he is overcome by pleasant things, although it is clear that the pleasant things do not outweigh the painful ones. But how can pleasure outweigh pain except in relative excess or deficiency? Wouldn't one have to be larger and the other smaller, or wouldn't there have to be more of the one and fewer of the other, or a greater degree of one and a lesser degree of the other? 356

"For if you say: 'Socrates, the immediate pleasure differs widely from the thing that's pleasant or painful later,' I'll reply: 'Do they differ in anything other than pleasure and pain?' That is the only way they could differ. It's like weighing on a scale. Put the pleasant things on the scale, and the painful ones too—both the ones that are near and the ones that are more remote. Then you'll be able to tell which counts for more. For if you weigh pleasant things against pleasant things, the greater and the more are always preferable; if painful against painful, then the fewer and smaller is preferable. If you weigh pleasant against painful, and find that the painful things are outbalanced by the pleasant ones (regardless of whether the near things are outweighed by the remote ones or the remote ones are outweighed by the near ones), then you have to take that course of action because the pleasant prevails. On the other hand, if you find c

that the pleasant things are outweighed by the painful ones, then you have to refrain from doing the action. Does the case seem any different to you, my friends?" I'm sure that they wouldn't be able to give an alternative.

PROTAGORAS: I agree.

SOCRATES: Since that is the case, then, I say to them, "Please answer this for me: Don't things of the same size appear larger when seen from close by and smaller when seen from a distance?" They'll admit this. "And isn't it the same way with thickness and number? And equal sounds seem louder when nearby and quieter when distant?" They'd agree to this. "Now if our welfare consisted in doing and choosing large things, and avoiding and not doing small ones, what would save our lives? Would it be the art of measurement, or the power of appearance? Wouldn't appearance often lead us astray and makes us wander about in confusion. Wouldn't it make us have to change our minds about what is large and what is small? Wouldn't it leave us regretting the actions we took based on our changing estimates? The art of measurement, by contrast, would strip the appearances of their power, by showing us the truth. It would bring peace to our souls, letting them rest in the truth. And it would save our lives." In light of all this, would these men agree that the art of measurement would preserve us, or some other art?

PROTAGORAS: The art of measurement.

SOCRATES: "What if saving our lives depended on choices of odd or even, when to count the greater and the lesser correctly (either the same kind against itself or against the other, be it near or remote)? What then would save our lives? Wouldn't it be knowledge; a knowledge of measurement, since that is the art concerned with excess and defect? In fact, wouldn't it be arithmetic, since it has to do with odd and even?" Would these men agree with us or not?

PROTAGORAS: They would.

SOCRATES: "Well then, my friends, since we have found that the saving our lives depends on making a right choice of pleasure and pain—be they more or fewer, greater or smaller, nearer or remoter—don't our lives seem to depend, in the first place, on measurement, which is the study of relative excess and deficiency and equality?"

PROTAGORAS: "It must be."

SOCRATES: "And since it is measurement, I presume it must be an art or science?"

PROTAGORAS: They'll assent to this.

SOCRATES: "We'll consider the nature of this art or science some other time; but the mere fact of its being a science will suffice for the proof that Protagoras and I need to give to answer the question you put to us. You asked it, if you remember, when we were agreeing that there is nothing stronger than knowledge, and that knowledge, wherever it may be found, always has the upper hand over pleasure or anything else. Then you said that pleasure often rules even men who have knowledge, and, when we refused to agree with you, you went on to ask us: 'Protagoras and Socrates, if this experience is not "being overcome by pleasure," then what is it, and what do you call it? Tell us.' If we had immediately replied 'Ignorance,' you would have laughed at us; but if you laugh at us now, you will be laughing at yourselves as well. For you have admitted that when people make mistakes with about to the choice of pleasure and pain—in other words, about good and bad—it is because of a lack of knowledge; not just from any lack of knowledge,

but from what you agreed was a lack of knowledge of measurement. And, as you surely know, a mistaken act, committed without knowledge is done through ignorance. So this is what ‘being overcome by pleasure’ means: ignorance in the highest degree. And this is what Protagoras here and Prodicus and Hippias claim to cure. But because you think it is something other than ignorance, you neither go to sophists, nor send your children to them for instruction. You think we’re dealing with something that cannot be taught. By worrying about your money and giving them none, you fare badly both in private and in public life.” 358

This would have been our answer to many. And I ask you now, Hippias and Prodicus, as well as Protagoras—for this is your conversation too—whether you think what I say is true or false.

Protagoras, Hippias, and Prodicus agree.

SOCRATES: Then you agree that the pleasant is good and the painful bad. And let me ask my friend Prodicus, who distinguishes between words, to indulge me; for whether you say “pleasant” or “delightful” or “enjoyable,” my excellent Prodicus, or in whatever style or manner you may be pleased to name these things, please reply to the intent of my question. b

PRODICUS (laughing): That’s right.

SOCRATES: Well now, my friends, what about this? All actions aimed at living painlessly and pleasantly are honorable, are they not? And the honorable work is both good and useful?

The sophists agree.

SOCRATES: Then if the pleasant is good, no one who knows or thinks that there are actions that better than the ones he is doing, and that are possible to him, will go on doing what he is doing when he could be doing something better. To “give in to oneself” is other ignorance, and to control oneself is nothing other than wisdom. c

They all agree.

SOCRATES: Well then, by ignorance do you mean having a false opinion and being deceived about matters of importance?

They all agree.

SOCRATES: Then surely, no one willingly goes after bad things or things he thinks are bad. It is not in human nature, apparently, to do so—to wish to go after things that you think are bad instead of things you think are good. And when anyone is forced to choose between two bad things, nobody will choose the greater when he can choose the lesser. d

Everyone agrees.

COURAGE AND WISDOM

SOCRATES: Well, is there something you call dread, or fear? And, I address this to you Prodicus, I say that, whether you call it “fear” or “dread,” it is an expectation of something bad. 358d

Protagoras and Hippias agree to this description of dread or fear; but Prodicus says that this is e

dread rather than fear.

SOCRATES: No matter, Prodicus, here's my point: if what we said before is true, will any man wish to go after what he dreads, when he can pursue what he doesn't dread? Surely this is impossible, since we've admitted that he regards the things he dreads as bad; and, as we saw, no one pursues or willingly accepts what he regards as bad.

Everyone agrees.

359

SOCRATES: Well, Prodicus and Hippias, since we have established all this, let Protagoras defend the truth of his first answer. I don't mean the answer he gave at the very beginning, when he said that there were five parts of virtue and that none was like any other and that each had its own function. I mean the statement he made later, when he said that four of them are very similar, but that one was quite different from the rest: courage. He told me I could know this from the following evidence: "You will find, Socrates, many people who are extremely impious, unjust, dissolute, and ignorant, and yet extremely courageous. And from this you can recognize that that courage is very different from the other parts of virtue." His answer caused me great surprise at the time, and I'm even more surprised now that I've gone over these things with your help. But anyhow, I asked him whether by the courageous brave he meant confident. "Yes," he replied, "and ready for action." Protagoras, I said, do you remember making this answer?

PROTAGORAS: I remember.

SOCRATES: Well now, tell us, what actions are courageous people ready for? The same actions as cowards?

PROTAGORAS: No.

SOCRATES: Other actions, then?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Do cowards go after things about which one can be confident, while the courageous go after dreadful things?

PROTAGORAS: So people say, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Quite true, but I want to know what actions *you* say the courageous are ready for. Are they ready for dreadful things, in the belief that they are dreadful, or are they ready for things that are not dreadful?

PROTAGORAS: No, according to what you just said, the former is impossible.

SOCRATES: Quite true again. So, if this proof was correct, no one goes towards what he regards as dreadful, since to be overcome by oneself was found to be ignorance.

PROTAGORAS: Right.

SOCRATES: So all men, both the courageous and the cowardly, go towards the same things—the things that they are confident about.

PROTAGORAS: But still, Socrates, what cowards towards is the very opposite of what the courageous go towards. For instance, the latter are willing to go to war, but the former are not.

SOCRATES: Is going to war an honorable thing, or a base thing?

PROTAGORAS: Honorable.

SOCRATES: Then if it is honorable, we have admitted, by our former argument, that it is also good for we agreed that all honorable actions were good.

PROTAGORAS: True, and I abide by that decision.

SOCRATES: You are right to do so. But which sort of men do you say are not willing to go to war, though it is honorable and good thing to go? 360

PROTAGORAS: The cowardly.

SOCRATES: Then, if it is honorable and good, is it also pleasant?

PROTAGORAS: That certainly has been admitted.

SOCRATES: Now do the cowards wittingly refuse to go to what is more honorable, better, and pleasanter?

PROTAGORAS: Well, if we admit that too, we shall undo our previous admissions.

SOCRATES: But what of the courageous man? Does he not go to the more honorable and better and pleasanter?

PROTAGORAS: I am forced to admit that. b

SOCRATES: Now, in general, courageous men do not feel base fears, when they fear, nor is there anything base in their confidence?

PROTAGORAS: True.

SOCRATES: And if not base, then it must be honorable?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And if honorable, then good?

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And the cowardly and the confident and the mad, on the contrary, feel base fears and base confidence?

PROTAGORAS: Agreed.

SOCRATES: Do they feel base and bad confidence solely through stupidity and ignorance?

PROTAGORAS: Just so.

c

SOCRATES: Well now, do you call the thing through which cowards to be the cause of cowards to be cowardly cowardice or courage?

PROTAGORAS: I call it cowardice.

SOCRATES: And didn't we find that cowards are cowards through ignorance of what is dreadful?

PROTAGORAS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And so they are cowards because of that ignorance?

PROTAGORAS: Alright.

SOCRATES: And the cause of their being cowards is admitted by you to be cowardice?

Protagoras: Alright.

SOCRATES: Then ignorance of what is dreadful and not dreadful will be cowardice?

Protagoras nods.

SOCRATES: But surely courage is the opposite of cowardice.

d

PROTAGORAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then the wisdom that knows what is and what is not dreadful is opposed to the ignorance of these things?

Protagoras nods.

SOCRATES: And the ignorance of them is cowardice?

Protagoras nods reluctantly.

SOCRATES: So the wisdom that knows what is and what is not dreadful is courage, and it is the opposite of the ignorance of these things

Protagoras can no longer bring himself to nod agreement, and he remains silent.

SOCRATES: Why is it, Protagoras, that you neither affirm nor deny what I ask you?

PROTAGORAS: "Finish it by yourself."

SOCRATES: I must ask you one more question first. Do you still think, as you did at the beginning, that there are any people who are very ignorant and yet very courageous?

e

PROTAGORAS: Socrates, I see that you have your heart set on making me your answerer. So, in order to satisfy you, I will say that, by what we have admitted, I consider it impossible.

SOCRATES: My only motive in asking all these questions has been a desire to answer these questions about virtue, especially what it is in itself. For I know that, if we could get clear on that, then we'd be able to settle the other question that you and I have discussed at such length—me arguing that virtue cannot be taught, and you arguing that it can. 361

CONCLUSION

SOCRATES: Our discussion seems to me to have turned on us. If it had a voice of its own, it would say, mockingly, “What strange creatures you are, Socrates and Protagoras! Socrates, you started by saying that virtue cannot be taught, but now you are hot in opposition to yourself, trying to prove that all things are knowledge—justice, temperance, and courage. But if you succeed, then virtue would appear to be quite teachable. On the other hand, if virtue is anything other than knowledge, as Protagoras has been trying to say, obviously it would not be teachable. But if it turns out to be entirely knowledge, as you now urge, Socrates, it would be very surprising if it could not be taught. On the other hand, Protagoras, who started by claiming that it was teachable, now seems eager for the opposite, declaring that it is almost everything except knowledge, which would make it quite unteachable!” 361a

Now, Protagoras, seeing the extraordinary tangle into which we have managed to get the whole matter, I am very anxious to clear it all up. I'd like us to work our way through it until at last we reach what virtue is, and then go back and consider whether it is teachable or not. So, with your consent, as I said at the beginning, I'll be delighted to have your help in the inquiry. d

PROTAGORAS: I approve your zeal, Socrates, and of the way you develop your arguments; for I don't think I'm ill-natured, and I'm the last person on earth to be envious. Indeed I have told many people how I admire you more than anyone I have met, and certainly more than anyone of your age. I say I won't be surprised if you win high repute for wisdom. We shall pursue the subject on some other occasion, whenever you wish. For now, it is time to turn to another affair. 362 e

SOCRATES: I quite agree, if you think so. I'm long overdue for that appointment I mentioned. I stayed merely to oblige our excellent Callias.