Protagoras

PLATO

c. 428–348 BC

Protagoras

Πρωταγόρας

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited

FORAGE
forage.com

Protagoras · Plato (c. 428–348 BC)

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited. Reading edition, Forage, October 2026. forage.com/plato/protagoras

Greek text: John Burnet, *Platonis Opera*, vol. 3 (Oxford, 1903), via the Perseus Digital Library (github.com/PerseusDL/canonical-greekLit), CC BY-SA 4.0. English: translated from the Greek with AI (Claude), then edited for accuracy and consistency. Not reviewed by a human specialist. Free to reuse under CC BY-SA 4.0. The small numbers set in the text are the standard Stephanus references (page and section of Henri Estienne's 1578 edition).

The original text is in the public domain. This translation is free to share and adapt under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International license (CC BY-SA 4.0): creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0

Set in Source Serif 4.

CONTENTS

Introduction vii

Protagoras 1

Hippocrates at dawn 3
The house of Callias 8
What Protagoras teaches 12
The myth of Prometheus 15
Why good men have ordinary sons 19
Is excellence one or many? 23
Long speeches or short answers 30
Simonides' poem 34
Back to the argument 44
Courage 46
Pleasure and the good 48
The art of measurement 54
Courage is wisdom 57
The reversal 59

INTRODUCTION

Before dawn one morning the young Hippocrates bangs on Socrates' door: Protagoras, the most famous of the sophists—traveling teachers who charged high fees to make young men successful—is in Athens, and Hippocrates wants Socrates to get him taken on as a pupil. Socrates goes with him to the house of the rich Callias, crowded with sophists and their admirers, and later tells a friend the whole story.

Protagoras claims to teach excellence: how to manage one's own affairs and the city's. Socrates doubts it can be taught at all, and Protagoras answers with a myth of how Zeus gave every human being a share of justice and a sense of shame, followed by a long speech. What follows is a contest of styles as much as of arguments: long speeches against short questions, a quarrel about procedure that nearly breaks up the meeting, a mock-learned reading of a poem by Simonides, and finally Socrates' argument that no one does wrong willingly, and that what is called being "overcome by pleasure" is really a failure of knowledge, to be cured by an art of measuring pleasures and pains.

At the end the two have changed places: Socrates, who doubted that excellence can be taught, is arguing that it is knowledge, while Protagoras, who teaches it, is denying that. Socrates says they must take the question up again from the beginning.

Protagoras

Athens, at the house of the rich Callias, where the most famous sophists of the day are staying. Socrates tells a friend how he questioned Protagoras about whether excellence can be taught.

FRIEND 309a Where have you just come from, Socrates? No, it's obvious: from your hunt for Alcibiades in his youthful bloom. I did see him just the other day, and he struck me as still a beautiful man. But a man, Socrates, just between ourselves, and already filling out with a beard.[1]

SOCRATES Well, what of it? Aren't you an admirer of Homer, 309b who said that youth is at its most charming when the first beard appears, which is just the age Alcibiades is now?[2]

FRIEND So how do things stand now? Have you come from him? And how does the young man feel about you?

SOCRATES Well, I thought, and not least today. He said a great deal on my side and came to my defense, and in fact I've only just left him. But I want to tell you something strange. Although he was there, I paid him no attention, and I kept forgetting about him altogether. 309c

FRIEND And what could have happened between you and him to matter that much? Surely you haven't met anyone more beautiful, not in this city anyway.

1 Alcibiades (c. 450–404 BC), son of Clinias, later became a brilliant and notorious Athenian general. As a youth he was famous for his beauty, and Socrates' attachment to him was well known.

2 The line occurs twice in Homer (*Iliad* 24.348, *Odyssey* 10.279).

SOCRATES Yes, and far more beautiful.

FRIEND What do you mean? A citizen or a foreigner?

SOCRATES A foreigner.

FRIEND From where?

SOCRATES From Abdera.[3]

FRIEND And this foreigner seemed so beautiful to you that he struck you as more beautiful than the son of Clinias?

SOCRATES How could what is wisest not look more beautiful, my blessed friend?

FRIEND So you've met some wise man, Socrates, and that's where you've come from? 309d

SOCRATES Oh, the wisest man alive today, surely, if you think Protagoras is the wisest.

FRIEND Oh, what are you saying? Protagoras is in town?

SOCRATES This is already his third day.

FRIEND So you've just come from being with him?

SOCRATES 310a I certainly have, after a good deal of talking and listening.

FRIEND Then why don't you tell us about the conversation, if nothing's stopping you? Sit down here. Make the boy here get up.

SOCRATES Gladly. And I'll be grateful to you if you listen.

FRIEND And we'll be grateful to you if you tell it.

SOCRATES Then the gratitude will be double. Well then, listen.

3 Abdera, a Greek city on the coast of Thrace in the northern Aegean, was Protagoras' home.

HIPPOCRATES AT DAWN

Before daylight Hippocrates wakes Socrates, eager to become a pupil of Protagoras.

SOCRATES Last night, while it was still deep dark before dawn, Hippocrates, the son of Apollodorus and brother of Phason, started banging very hard on the 310b door with his stick. When someone opened it for him, he came straight in in a great hurry and called out in a loud voice, "Socrates, are you awake or asleep?" I recognized his voice and said, "That's Hippocrates. You're not bringing bad news, are you?" "Nothing," he said, "except good news." "That would be nice," I said. "But what is it? Why have you come at this hour?" "Protagoras has come," he said, standing over me. "The day before yesterday," I said. "Have you only just found out?" "Yes, by the gods," he said, "last night." 310c And as he spoke he felt for the bed, sat down by my feet and said, "Last night, yes. I got back very late from Oenoe." "You see, my slave Satyrus ran away from me. I actually meant to tell you I'd be going after him, but something else put it out of my head. When I got back, and we'd had dinner and were about to go to bed, that was when my brother told me Protagoras had come. Even then I set off to come straight to you, but then it seemed far too late at night. But 310d the moment sleep let go of me after my exhaustion, I got straight up and came here." Knowing his courage and his excitability, I said, "So what's that to you? Protagoras hasn't done you some wrong, has he?" He laughed and said, "By the gods, Socrates, he has: he alone is wise, and he doesn't make me wise." "Oh, but by Zeus," I said, "if you give him money and win him over, he'll make you wise too." "Zeus and all the gods," he said, "if only it came down to 310e that! I wouldn't hold back a thing of my own, or of my friends' either. But that's exactly why I've come to you now, so that you can talk to him on my behalf. For one thing, I'm too young. For another, I've never even seen Protagoras or heard a word from him. I was still a child the last time he was in town. But you know, Socrates, everyone praises

the man and says he's the wisest of men at speaking. So why don't we go to him, so we can 311a catch him at home? He's staying, I hear, with Callias son of Hipponicus. Come on, let's go."[4] And I said, "Let's not go there yet, my good friend—it's early—but let's get up and go out here into the courtyard and pass the time walking around until it gets light. Then let's go. Protagoras spends most of his time indoors, so don't worry: we'll most likely find him in."

After that we got up and walked around the courtyard. I wanted 311b to test Hippocrates' resolve, so I examined him with some questions. Tell me, Hippocrates, I said, you're now setting out to go to Protagoras and pay him money as a fee on your own behalf. Whom do you think you're going to, and what do you expect to become? Suppose you had it in mind to go to your namesake Hippocrates of Cos, the Asclepiad, and pay him money as a fee on your own behalf, and someone asked you, "Tell me, Hippocrates, you're going to pay 311c Hippocrates a fee because he's what?" What would you answer?—I'd say, he said, because he's a doctor.—"And to become what?"—A doctor, he said.—And if you had it in mind to go to Polyclitus of Argos or Phidias of Athens and pay them a fee on your own behalf, and someone asked you, "You mean to pay this money to Polyclitus and Phidias because they're what?" What would you answer?—I'd say, because they're sculptors.—"And to become what yourself?"—A sculptor, obviously.—All right, I said. 311d Now you and I are going to Protagoras, and we'll be ready to pay him money as a fee on your behalf: our own, if our funds stretch that far and we can win him over with them, and if not, we'll spend our friends' money too.[5] So if someone saw how terribly keen we are about this and asked us, "Tell me, Socrates and Hippocrates, you mean to pay Protagoras money because he's what?" What would we 311e answer him? What other name do we hear used of Prot-

4 Callias son of Hipponicus was reputed to be the richest man in Athens and was a lavish patron of sophists.

5 Hippocrates of Cos was the famous physician; the Asclepiads were a guild of doctors who claimed descent from the god Asclepius. Polyclitus and Phidias were the most celebrated sculptors of the day.

agoras? Phidias, we hear, is called a sculptor, and Homer a poet. What name of that sort do we hear for Protagoras?—Well, Socrates, he said, a sophist is what they call the man.—So we're going to pay our money to him as a sophist?—Exactly.—And if someone asked you this as well: 312a "And you yourself, what are you going to Protagoras to become?"—And he answered, blushing—for there was already a glimmer of daylight, so that I could see him clearly—If it's anything like the earlier cases, obviously to become a sophist.—And you, I said, by the gods: wouldn't you be ashamed to present yourself to the Greeks as a sophist?—Yes, by Zeus, Socrates, I would, if I'm to say what I really think.—Well then, Hippocrates, maybe that isn't the kind of learning you expect to get from Protagoras. 312b Maybe you expect the kind you got from your teacher of letters, your lyre teacher and your trainer?[6] You didn't learn any of those as a profession, to become a craftsman. You learned them as part of an education, the way a private citizen and a free man should.—Yes, he said, I do think the learning I'll get from Protagoras is more like that.

Then do you know what you're about to do, or doesn't it occur to you? I said.—About what?—That you're about to hand over your own soul 312c to be cared for by a man who is, as you say, a sophist. But what on earth a sophist is, I'd be surprised if you knew. And yet if you don't know that, you don't even know whom you're handing your soul over to, or whether it's to something good or something bad.—I think I do know, he said.—Then tell me, what do you think a sophist is?—I think, he said, that he is what his name says: the one who has knowledge of wise things.—But you could say that about painters and carpenters too, I said: that they are the ones who have knowledge of wise things. But 312d if someone asked us, "Painters have knowledge of which wise things?" we'd presumably tell him: of those that have to do with producing images. And so on with the rest. But if

6 Sophists were paid traveling teachers who offered instruction, above all in speaking and success in public life. The word is related to *sophos*, "wise," but had come to carry a suspect ring.

someone asked, “And the sophist, which wise things does he know?” what would we answer him? What kind of work is he master of?—What else could we say he is, Socrates, but a master at making people clever at speaking?—Perhaps, I said, we’d be telling the truth, but not enough of it. Our answer still calls for a further question: what does the sophist make people clever at speaking about? The lyre teacher, 312e I take it, makes people clever at speaking about the thing he makes them know, namely lyre playing. Isn’t that so?—Yes.—All right. Then what does the sophist make people clever at speaking about?—Obviously, about the thing he also makes them know?—Very likely. So what is this thing that the sophist both knows himself and makes his student know?—By Zeus, he said, I can’t tell you any more. 313a

After that I said: Well then? Do you know what kind of danger you’re walking into, staking your soul like this? If you had to entrust your body to someone, with the risk of its turning out healthy or diseased, you’d think long and hard about whether to entrust it or not. You’d call in your friends and family for advice and spend days on end considering it. But what you value more than your body is your soul, and everything of yours goes well or badly depending on whether it turns out good or bad. Yet about this you haven’t consulted your father or your brother 313b or any of us, your companions, on whether or not to entrust your soul to this newly arrived foreigner. Instead you heard about him last night, as you say, and you turn up at dawn without a word of discussion or advice about whether you ought to entrust yourself to him or not. And you’re ready to spend your own money and your friends’, as if you’d already decided that you absolutely must study with Protagoras. Yet you don’t know him, as you say, and you’ve never once 313c talked to him. You call him a sophist, but you obviously don’t know what a sophist is, and this is the man you’re about to entrust yourself to?—When he heard this he said, It seems so, Socrates, from what you say.—Then is the sophist, Hippocrates, really a kind of importer or retailer of the goods a soul feeds on? That’s certainly what he looks like to me.—But what does a soul feed on, Socrates?—On

things learned, of course, I said. And let's make sure, my friend, that the sophist doesn't deceive us by praising what he sells, the way the people who deal in the body's food do, 313d the importer and the retailer. They themselves, I take it, don't know which of the goods they deal in are good or bad for the body, though they praise everything they sell. Neither do the people who buy from them, unless one of them happens to be a trainer or a doctor. It's the same with those who carry lessons around from city to city, selling and peddling them to whoever wants them at the moment. They praise everything they sell. But some of them, my excellent friend, may well not know which of their wares are good or bad 313e for the soul either, and the same goes for the people who buy from them, unless one of them happens to be a doctor of the soul. So if you happen to know which of these are good and which are bad, it's safe for you to buy lessons from Protagoras or from anyone else. But if not, my blessed friend, watch out 314a that you don't gamble and take risks with what's dearest to you. There's actually a far greater risk in buying lessons than in buying food. When you buy food and drink from the retailer or the importer, you can carry them away in separate containers. Before you take them into your body by eating or drinking them, you can put them down at home and call in an expert for advice about what you should eat or drink and what not, and how much, and when. So the risk in buying 314b isn't great. But you can't carry lessons away in a separate container. Once you've paid the price, you have no choice but to take the lesson into your soul itself, learn it, and go away harmed or benefited. So let's look into these things with people older than we are. We're still too young to settle a matter this big. For now, though, since we've started, let's go and hear the man, and once we've heard him, let's consult others too. Protagoras isn't the only one there. 314c There's also Hippias of Elis, and Prodicus of Ceos too, I think, and many other wise men.[7]

That was our decision, and we set off. When we reached the doorway, we stood there discussing an argument that had come

up between us on the way. We didn't want to leave it unfinished; we wanted to settle it before going in, so we stood in the doorway and talked until we reached agreement. Now I think the doorkeeper, a eunuch, overheard us, and it seems 314d that because of the crowd of sophists he was fed up with people coming to the house. Anyway, when we knocked on the door, he opened it, saw us and said, "Ugh, sophists! He's busy." And at the same time he slammed the door with both hands as hard as he could. We knocked again, and he answered through the closed door, "You people, didn't you hear me say he's busy?" "But my good man," I said, "we haven't come to see Callias, and we aren't sophists. Don't worry. 314e We've come because we want to see Protagoras. So announce us." After that the fellow finally opened the door for us, reluctantly.

THE HOUSE OF CALLIAS

Socrates describes Protagoras, Hippias and Prodicus, each surrounded by admirers.

SOCRATES When we went in, we found Protagoras walking up and down in the portico. Walking with him in a line, on one side, were Callias son of Hipponicus, his half-brother 315a on his mother's side Paralus son of Pericles, and Charmides son of Glaucon. On the other side were Pericles' other son Xanthippus, Philippides son of Philomelus, and Antimoerus of Mende, who has the highest reputation of Protagoras' students and is studying professionally, to become a sophist. Most of the people following behind them and listening to the conversation seemed to be foreigners. Protagoras brings them from every city he passes through, enchanting them with his voice like 315b Orpheus, and they follow the voice, spellbound. But there were some locals in the chorus too. Watching this chorus was what delighted me most: how beautifully they took care never to get in Protagoras' way in front. Whenever he and the men with him turned

7 Hippias of Elis and Prodicus of Ceos were, with Protagoras, the most famous sophists of the day.

around, these listeners split neatly and in good order to one side and the other, wheeled around, and every time took up their places behind him, beautifully done.

"And after him I beheld," as Homer says, Hippias 315c of Elis, sitting on a high chair in the portico opposite. Around him on benches sat Eryximachus son of Acumenus, Phaedrus of Myrrhinus, Andron son of Androtion, and some foreigners, fellow citizens of his and others. They seemed to be asking Hippias questions about nature and astronomical matters concerning the heavens, while he, sitting on his chair, gave each of them his rulings and went through their questions in detail.[8]

And yes, I saw Tantalus too, for Prodicus of Ceos was 315d in town as well. He was in a room that Hipponicus used to use as a storeroom, but now, because of the number of guests, Callias had cleared it out too and turned it into guest quarters. Prodicus was still in bed, wrapped up in some fleeces and blankets, a great many of them, by the look of it. On the couches next to him sat Pausanias of Cerameis and, with Pausanias, a lad still quite young, fine and 315e good by nature, I think, and certainly very good-looking. I thought I heard that his name was Agathon, and I wouldn't be surprised if he happens to be Pausanias' beloved.[9] There was this lad, and both Adeimantuses, the son of Cepis and the son of Leucolophides, and some others could be seen. What they were discussing I couldn't make out from outside, though I was dying to hear Prodicus—for the man strikes me as all-wise 316a and divine. But because of the deepness of his voice, a sort of booming filled the room and made what was said unclear.

We'd only just come in when, right behind us, in came Alcibiades the beautiful, as you call him, and I agree, and Critias son of Callaeschrus.

8 Socrates borrows Odysseus' words from his tour of the underworld (*Odyssey* 11.601), casting the sophists as the famous dead; Tantalus, in the next sentence, comes from the same scene.

9 Agathon later became a celebrated tragic poet; he and Pausanias appear again in Plato's *Symposium*.

Once we were in, we spent a little more time looking all this over, and then went up to Protagoras, 316b and I said, Protagoras, Hippocrates here and I have come to see you.

Do you want to talk with me alone, he said, or with the others too?

It makes no difference to us, I said. Hear why we've come, and then decide for yourself.

Well then, he said, what have you come for?[10]

Hippocrates here is an Athenian, the son of Apollodorus, from a great and prosperous family, and by natural gifts he seems a match for anyone his age. My impression 316c is that he wants to make a name for himself in the city, and he believes he'd have the best chance of that if he studied with you. So now it's up to you to consider whether you think you should discuss this alone, with just us, or with others present.

You're right, Socrates, he said, to show forethought on my behalf. A foreigner goes into great cities and persuades the best of the young men there to abandon their association with others, relatives and strangers, older and younger, and to associate with him instead, on the grounds that they'll become better through 316d associating with him. A man who does this has to be careful, because no small amount of envy comes of it, and other kinds of hostility and plotting too. Now I say the sophist's art is ancient. But those of the men of old who practiced it were afraid of the resentment it attracts, so they made a disguise of it and covered it up. Some used poetry, like Homer, Hesiod and Simonides. Others used mystery rites and oracle-chanting, like Orpheus and Musaeus and their followers. Some, I've noticed, even used athletic training, like Iccus of Tarentum and, still alive today and a sophist second to none, 316e Herodicus of Selymbria, originally of Megara. Your own Agathocles made music his disguise, and he was a great sophist, and so did Pythoclides of Ceos and many others. All of these, as I say, were afraid of envy and used these arts as screens. But I 317a don't go along

10 Critias, a relative of Plato, later led the oligarchy of the Thirty that ruled Athens in 404–403 BC.

with any of them on this. I think they didn't achieve what they wanted at all, because they didn't escape the notice of the men with power in their cities, who are the very reason for these disguises. The many, after all, notice practically nothing; they just repeat whatever these men proclaim. Now to run away and fail to get away, and be caught in plain sight, is great folly even as an undertaking, [317b] and it can only make people far more hostile, since they think a man like that is a scoundrel on top of everything else. So I've taken the completely opposite road. I admit that I'm a sophist and that I educate people, and I think this precaution, admitting it rather than denying it, is better than theirs. I've worked out other precautions besides this one, so that, god willing, I suffer nothing terrible for [317c] admitting I'm a sophist. And yet I've been in the profession for many years now. Indeed, my years all told are many: there's none of you here whose father I couldn't be. So by far the most pleasant thing for me, if you're willing, would be to discuss all this in front of everyone in the house.

And I—for I suspected he wanted to show off to Prodicus and Hippias and preen himself on our having come as his admirers [317d] —said, Well then, why don't we call Prodicus and Hippias and the people with them too, so they can listen to us?

By all means, said Protagoras.

Then would you like us, said Callias, to set up seats in a circle, so you can sit down while you talk?

Everyone agreed that we should. We were all delighted at the prospect of hearing wise men, and we took hold of the benches and couches ourselves and arranged them beside Hippias, since the benches were already there. Meanwhile Callias and Alcibiades [317e] came bringing Prodicus, whom they had got up from his bed, along with Prodicus' companions.

When we were all seated together, Protagoras said, Now then, Socrates, since these people are here too, you can tell us what you mentioned to me a little while ago on the young man's behalf. [318a]

WHAT PROTAGORAS TEACHES

Protagoras promises good counsel and the art of politics; Socrates doubts that excellence can be taught.

SOCRATES And I said, Protagoras, I'll begin just where I did a moment ago, with what I came for. Hippocrates here happens to be eager to study with you. So he says he'd like to find out what he'll get out of it if he does. That's all we have to say.

Protagoras took this up and said, Young man, here is what you'll get if you study with me: on the very day you join me, you'll go home a better man, and the same again the next day, and every day you'll keep making progress toward the better. 318b

When I heard that, I said, Protagoras, there's nothing surprising in what you say; it's only to be expected. Even you, old and wise as you are, would become better if someone taught you something you didn't happen to know. But don't answer like that. Suppose Hippocrates here suddenly changed his mind and set his heart on studying with that young man who has only just come to town, Zeuxippus of Heraclea. And suppose he went to him, as he has now come to you, 318c and heard from him exactly what he heard from you: that every day he spent with him he would become better and make progress. If he asked him in turn,[11] "Better at what, exactly, and progress toward what?" Zeuxippus would tell him: at painting. And if he studied with Orthagoras of Thebes and heard from him exactly what he heard from you, and asked him what he would get better at day by day by studying with him, Orthagoras would say: at playing the flute. So you too, tell the young man, and me, since I'm asking on his 318d behalf: if Hippocrates here studies with Protagoras, he'll go away better on the very day he studies with him, and every day after that he'll make progress in the same way. Toward what, Protagoras, and in what?

And Protagoras, hearing this from me, said, You ask well, Socrates, and I enjoy answering those who ask well. If Hippo-

11 Zeuxippus is probably the famous painter better known as Zeuxis.

crates comes to me, he won't have the experience he would have had with any other sophist. The others treat the young shamefully. 318e The young have escaped the specialized arts, and these sophists drag them back against their will and push them into the arts again, teaching them arithmetic and astronomy and geometry and music—and as he said this he glanced at Hippias. But if he comes to me, he'll learn nothing except what he came for. What I teach is good counsel, both about one's own affairs, how best to manage one's household, 319a and about the city's affairs, how to be most capable of acting and speaking in public life.

Am I following what you're saying? I said. You seem to me to mean the art of politics, and to promise to make men good citizens.

That, Socrates, he said, is exactly what I profess.

What a fine skill you have, then, I said, if you really have it. To you of all people I'll say nothing but what I really think. I didn't think, Protagoras, that this could 319b be taught, but when you say it can, I don't see how I can disbelieve you. Still, it's only fair that I explain why I think it can't be taught, or provided by human beings to human beings. I say, as the other Greeks do too, that the Athenians are wise. Now I see that when we gather in the Assembly and the city has to take some action about building, they send for the builders to advise on the buildings; when it's about shipbuilding, the shipwrights; and the same with everything else 319c they consider learnable and teachable. But if anyone else tries to advise them whom they don't consider an expert, even if he's very handsome and rich and well-born, they're not a bit more willing to accept him for that. They laugh at him and shout him down until either the would-be speaker is shouted down and gives up of his own accord, or the archers drag him away or carry him out on the orders of the presiding officers.[12] That's how they act on matters they think are a matter

12 The archers were publicly owned slaves who kept order in Athens; the presiding officers (*prytaneis*) were the council members who ran the Assembly's meetings.

of skill. But when they have to deliberate about something to do with governing the 319d city, the man who stands up to advise them may just as well be a carpenter, a smith, a shoemaker, a merchant, a ship owner, rich or poor, well-born or not. And nobody throws it in these men's faces, as they did with the others, that without having learned it anywhere, without ever having had a teacher, he still tries to give advice. Clearly, then, they don't think it can be taught. And it isn't only the public life of the 319e city that's like this. In private life, too, the wisest and best of our citizens are unable to pass on to others this excellence that they have. Take Pericles, the father of these young men here. In everything that depended on teachers he educated them well and properly, 320a but in what he himself is wise in, he neither educates them himself nor hands them over to anyone else. They wander around grazing on their own, like sacred cattle let loose, in case they happen to stumble on excellence by themselves. Or, if you like, take Clinias, the younger brother of Alcibiades here. This same Pericles was his guardian, and fearing that Alcibiades would corrupt him, he took him away from his brother and placed him in Ariphron's house to be educated. Before six months were up, 320b he gave him back to Alcibiades, not knowing what to do with him.[13] And I could name a great many others for you who, though good themselves, never made anyone better, either in their own families or outside them. So I, Protagoras, looking at these facts, don't think excellence can be taught. But when I hear you say what you say, I waver, and I think there's something in it, because I consider you a man of wide experience who has learned a great deal and discovered a great deal for himself. So if you can show us more clearly that 320c excellence can be taught, don't keep it to yourself; show us.

13 "Excellence" translates *aretē*, which covers any way of being good at something; here it includes the "good counsel" and civic skill Protagoras claims to teach.

THE MYTH OF PROMETHEUS

Protagoras tells how Zeus gave every human being a share of shame and justice.

SOCRATES Why, Socrates, he said, I won't keep it to myself. But shall I show you by telling a story, as an older man to younger ones, or by going through it as an argument?

Many of those sitting around him replied that he should go through it whichever way he liked. Well then, he said, I think it will be more pleasant to tell you a story.

There was once a time when gods existed, but mortal kinds 320d did not. When the appointed time came for these too to be born, the gods molded them inside the earth from a mixture of earth and fire and everything that is blended from fire and earth. When they were about to bring them up into the light, they ordered Prometheus and Epimetheus to equip them and distribute powers to each kind as was fitting. Epimetheus begged Prometheus to let him do the distributing himself. "Once I've distributed," he said, "you inspect." Having persuaded him, he set to distributing. In distributing, to some he gave strength without speed, 320e while the weaker he equipped with speed. Some he armed, and for those to whom he gave an unarmed nature he devised some other power to keep them safe.[14] To those he wrapped in smallness he gave winged flight or a home underground; those he made large, he kept 321a safe by their very size. And so he distributed the rest, keeping things in balance. He devised all this taking care that no kind should be wiped out. When he had supplied them with ways of escaping destruction at one another's hands, he devised protection against the seasons sent by Zeus. He clothed them with thick hair and tough hides, enough to keep out the winter cold and able to keep out the heat too, so that when they went to bed these same things would serve each as its own natural bedding. And 321b he shod

14 Prometheus ("Forethought") and Epimetheus ("Afterthought") are Titan brothers in Greek myth.

some with hooves, others with hair and tough, bloodless skin. Next he provided different foods for different animals: for some, grass from the earth; for others, the fruit of trees; for others, roots. And to some he gave other animals' flesh as their food. To these he gave few offspring, and to those they preyed on, many, so as to preserve the kind. But Epimetheus was not altogether wise, and he didn't notice that 321c he had used up all the powers on the animals that lack reason. The human race was still left unequipped, and he was at a loss what to do with it. While he was at a loss, Prometheus came to inspect the distribution, and he saw the other animals well provided with everything, but human beings naked, unshod, without bedding and unarmed. And the appointed day was already at hand on which human beings too had to come out of the earth into the light. So Prometheus, at a loss to find any means of survival for human beings, 321d stole from Hephaestus and Athena their wisdom in the crafts, together with fire. Without fire there was no way anyone could acquire it or use it. And so he gave it to human beings as a gift. This is how human beings came to have the wisdom needed to make a living. But they didn't have the wisdom of politics, for that was with Zeus. There was no longer any chance for Prometheus to get into the citadel where Zeus dwelt, and besides, Zeus' guards were terrifying. But he slipped unseen into the workshop that Athena and Hephaestus shared, where 321e they practiced their arts together, stole Hephaestus' art of fire and Athena's art too, and gave them to human beings. From this, human beings came to have plenty of the means 322a of life. But later, thanks to Epimetheus, Prometheus was brought to justice for the theft, so the story goes.

Since human beings had a share in the divine portion, first of all, because of their kinship with the divine, they alone of animals believed in gods, and set about building altars and statues of gods. Then by their art they quickly articulated speech and words, and invented houses and clothes and shoes and bedding and the food that comes from the earth. Equipped in this way, human beings at first 322b lived scattered, and there were no cit-

ies. So they were being killed off by wild beasts, because they were weaker than the beasts in every way. Their craftsmanship was an adequate help in getting food, but it fell short in the war against the beasts, for they didn't yet have the art of politics, of which the art of war is a part. So they sought to band together and save themselves by founding cities. But whenever they banded together, they wronged one another, since they didn't have the art of politics, so they scattered again and were destroyed. 322c So Zeus, afraid that our race might be wiped out entirely, sent Hermes to bring shame and justice to human beings, so that there would be order in cities and bonds of friendship to draw people together. Hermes asked Zeus in what way he should give justice and shame to human beings: "Should I distribute these the way the arts have been distributed?[15] This is how they've been distributed: one person with medical skill is enough for many laymen, and the same goes for the other craftsmen. Shall I put justice and shame 322d among human beings this way too, or distribute them to all?" "To all," said Zeus, "and let all have a share. For cities could not come into being if only a few had a share in these, as with the other arts. And lay down a law from me: whoever is unable to share in shame and justice shall be put to death as a disease of the city." That, Socrates, is how it is, and that is why the Athenians, like everyone else, when the discussion is about excellence in carpentry or in some other craft, think only a few have any business giving advice, and if 322e someone outside the few offers advice, they won't put up with it, as you say—and rightly, say I. But when they come to deliberate on political 323a excellence, which must proceed entirely through justice and moderation, they rightly put up with everyone, on the grounds that everyone must share in this excellence at least, or else there would be no cities. That, Socrates, is the reason for it.

But so that you won't think you're being misled, here is another piece of evidence that all people really do believe that

15 "Shame" (*aidōs*) is a sense of shame and of respect for others; "justice" (*dikē*) is a sense of what is right and owed to others.

everyone shares in justice and the rest of political excellence. With the other kinds of excellence, as you say, if someone claims to be a good flute player, or good at any other art, when he isn't, people either laugh at him [323b] or get angry, and his family come and take him to task as if he were mad. But with justice and the rest of political excellence, even if they know someone is unjust, if he himself tells the truth about himself in front of many people, then what they considered moderation in the other case, telling the truth, they consider madness here. They say that everyone must claim to be just, whether they are or not, and that anyone who doesn't pretend to justice is mad, since everyone without exception [323c] must share in it in some way or other, or else not be among human beings at all.

So that much I maintain: they rightly accept everyone as an adviser on this excellence, because they think everyone has a share in it. Next I'll try to prove to you that they don't think it comes by nature or by chance, but that it can be taught, and that it comes through cultivation to whoever has it. Take all the bad qualities that people think others have [323d] by nature or by chance: no one gets angry with those who have them, or takes them to task, or teaches them, or punishes them, so that they won't be like that. People pity them. Who, for instance, is so foolish as to try anything of the kind with the ugly, or the small, or the weak? These things, I imagine, they know come to people by nature and chance, both the fine qualities and their opposites. But with the good things they think people get through cultivation, practice and teaching, [323e] if someone lacks them and has the opposite bad qualities instead, that's presumably where anger and punishment and reproof come in. Among these bad qualities are injustice and impiety and, [324a] in short, everything opposed to political excellence. Here everyone is angry with everyone and takes everyone to task, clearly on the grounds that it can be acquired through cultivation and learning. If you're willing to consider, Socrates, what punishing wrongdoers is actually meant to achieve, that alone will teach you that people do think excellence can be acquired. No one punishes wrongdo-

ers with his mind on the fact that they did wrong, and for that reason, unless he's taking mindless [324b] revenge like a wild beast. Someone who sets out to punish rationally doesn't exact the penalty for the sake of the past wrong, since he couldn't undo what has been done. He does it for the sake of the future, so that neither this man himself nor anyone else who sees him punished will do wrong again. And holding this view, he holds that excellence can be instilled by education; he punishes, after all, to deter. This, then, is the view of everyone who [324c] exacts penalties, privately or publicly. And people do exact penalties from those they think are doing wrong, and punish them—everyone does, and not least the Athenians, your fellow citizens. So by this argument the Athenians too are among those who think excellence can be instilled and taught. So, Socrates, that your fellow citizens are right to accept a smith and a shoemaker giving advice on political matters, and that they think excellence can be taught and instilled, has been sufficiently shown to you, at least as it [324d] seems to me.

WHY GOOD MEN HAVE ORDINARY SONS

Protagoras argues that everyone teaches excellence, so no single teacher stands out.

SOCRATES There remains the puzzle you raise about good men: why on earth good men teach their own sons the other things that depend on teachers, and make them wise in those, yet in the excellence in which they themselves are good they make them no better than anyone else. On this point, Socrates, I'll no longer tell you a story but give you an argument. Consider it this way. Is there or is there not some one thing that all the citizens must share in, [324e] if there is to be a city at all? For the solution to this puzzle of yours lies here and nowhere else. Suppose there is such a thing, and this one thing isn't carpentry or smithing or pottery, [325a] but justice and moderation and being pious—what, taken all together, I call a man's excellence. Suppose this is what everyone must share in, and every man must act with it,

whatever else he wants to learn or do, and never without it. Suppose that whoever doesn't share in it, child or man or woman, must be taught and punished until punishment makes him better, and that whoever doesn't respond to punishment and teaching must, as incurable, 325b be expelled from cities or put to death. If that is how things are, and that is its nature, and yet good men teach their sons everything else but not this, consider how strange these good men turn out to be. We've shown that they think it can be taught, both privately and publicly. It can be taught and cultivated, then. Do they really teach their sons the other things, where the penalty for not knowing them isn't death, while in the one case where the penalty for their children, if they aren't taught and cultivated toward excellence, is death and exile, 325c and on top of death the confiscation of property and, in a word, the ruin of their households—this they don't teach them, or take every possible care over? Surely we must think they do, Socrates. They begin when the children are small, and as long as they live they teach them and take them to task. As soon as a child understands what's said to him, nurse and mother and attendant and the father 325d himself compete over this, to make the child as good as possible. At every word and deed they teach him and point out that this is just and that unjust, this fine and that shameful, this pious and that impious, and "Do this, don't do that." If he obeys willingly, well and good. If not, they straighten him out with threats and blows, like a piece of wood that is warped and bent. After this they send them to teachers and tell them to care much more about 325e the children's good conduct than about their letters and lyre playing. The teachers do take care of this, and when the children have learned their letters and are about to understand what's written, as earlier they understood speech, they set before them on the benches the poems of good poets to read and make them learn them by heart. 326a These poems contain many admonitions and many tales, praises and eulogies of good men of old, so that the child will want to rival and imitate them and long to become like them. The lyre teachers, in the same way, take care of their

moderation and see that the young do nothing wrong. Besides this, once the children have learned to play the lyre, the teachers teach them the poems of other good poets, the lyric poets, setting them [326b] to the music of the lyre, and they make the rhythms and harmonies at home in the children's souls, so that they become gentler and, with more rhythm and harmony in them, more capable in speech and action. For the whole of human life needs rhythm and harmony. And then on top of this they send them to a trainer, so that with better bodies they can serve minds that are already good, [326c] and won't be forced to turn coward through bodily weakness, in war or anywhere else. Those most able to do this do it most, and the most able are the richest. Their sons start going to school earliest in life and leave latest. When they've finished with their teachers, the city in turn makes them learn the laws and live by them as a pattern, [326d] so that they won't act at random on their own. It's exactly like writing teachers with children who can't yet write well: they trace lines with the stylus, then hand over the tablet and make them write following the guide lines. In the same way the city traces out laws, the inventions of good lawgivers of old, and makes people rule and be ruled by them, and whoever steps outside them it punishes. And the name for this punishment, both among you [326e] and in many other places, is "straightening," since justice straightens.[16] With so much care taken over excellence, privately and publicly, are you surprised, Socrates, and puzzled about whether excellence can be taught? You shouldn't be surprised at that. It would be far more surprising if it couldn't be taught.

Why, then, do many sons of good fathers turn out worthless? Learn this too. It's nothing surprising, if what I said earlier was true: that in this matter, [327a] excellence, no one may be a layman if there's to be a city at all. For if what I'm saying is so—and it is so, more than anything—pick any other pursuit or subject you like and think it through. Suppose there could be no city unless

16 In Athens the "straightenings" (*euthynai*) were the audits every public official underwent at the end of his term of office.

we were all flute players, each as good as he could manage. And suppose everyone taught everyone else this, in private and in public, and scolded anyone who played badly, and nobody kept it to himself, just as now nobody keeps what is just and lawful to himself or 327b hides it, the way people do with other skills. For our justice and excellence toward one another benefit us, I think. That's why everyone is eager to tell and teach everyone what is just and lawful. Well, if in flute playing too we were just as eager and ungrudging about teaching one another, would you think, Socrates, he said, that the sons of good flute players would be any more likely to become good flute players than the sons of poor ones? I don't think so. Rather, whoever happened to have a son with the greatest natural gift for flute playing, that son 327c would have grown up to be distinguished, and whoever had an ungifted son would have seen him stay obscure. Often a good flute player's son would have turned out poor, and often a poor one's son good. But at any rate they'd all have been competent flute players compared with laymen who know nothing about flute playing. In the same way, you must suppose now that the man who seems to you the most unjust of all those brought up among laws and human beings is just, a craftsman in this very thing, if he had to be judged 327d against people who had no education, no law courts, no laws, no compulsion of any kind forcing them at every turn to care about excellence, but were some sort of wild men like those the poet Pherecrates put on stage last year at the Lenaea.[17] Really, if you found yourself among people like that, like the man-haters in that play's chorus, you'd be delighted to run into Eurybatus and Phrynondas, and you'd wail with longing for the wickedness of people here. 327e As it is, you're spoiled, Socrates, because everyone is a teacher of excellence as far as each is able, and so none of them looks like one to you. It's as if you looked for someone who teaches 328a people to speak Greek: not a single one would turn up. Nor, I think, if you looked for someone who could teach the

17 Pherecrates was a comic poet; his play *The Wild Men* was staged at the Lenaea, an Athenian winter festival with dramatic competitions.

sons of craftsmen the very craft they've learned from their father, as far as their father and his friends in the same trade were able to teach it—who could take them any further? It wouldn't be easy, I think, Socrates, for a teacher of these to turn up, whereas for those with no experience at all it would be perfectly easy. So it is with excellence and with everything else. But if there's anyone even a little better than 328b the rest of us at helping people along toward excellence, we should be glad of him.[18] I think I'm one of these, and that I can help a person become fine and good better than anyone else, in a way that's worth the fee I charge and even more, so much so that the student himself thinks so. That's why I've set up my way of charging the way I have. When someone has studied with me, if he's willing, he pays the sum I charge; 328c if not, he goes to a temple, swears an oath to what he says the lessons were worth, and deposits that amount.

That, Socrates, he said, is the story and the argument I've given you, to show that excellence can be taught and that the Athenians think so, and that it's no wonder good fathers have worthless sons and worthless fathers good ones. After all, the sons of Polyclitus, who are the same age as Paralus and Xanthippus here, are nothing compared to their father, and the same goes for the sons of other craftsmen. But it's 328d not yet fair to make this charge against these two: there's still hope for them, since they're young.

IS EXCELLENCE ONE OR MANY?

Socrates asks whether justice, moderation, piety, wisdom and courage are parts of one thing or names for it.

SOCRATES Protagoras, having put on a display of this length and this kind, stopped speaking. And I, spellbound, went on looking at him for a long time, as if he were going to say something more, eager to hear it. But when I realized that he really had finished, I somehow just managed to gather myself together,

18 Eurybatus and Phrynondas were proverbial scoundrels.

and I said, looking at Hippocrates: Son of Apollodorus, how grateful I am to you for urging me to come here! It means a great deal to me 328e to have heard what I've heard from Protagoras. Until now I used to think there was no human care by which good people become good; but now I'm persuaded. Except that one small thing stands in my way, which Protagoras will obviously clear up for me with ease, since he's cleared up so much already. For if you were to meet any of the 329a popular orators about these same matters, you might well hear speeches like this from Pericles or someone else who's good at speaking. But if you ask one of them a further question, they're like books: they have nothing to answer and can't ask anything themselves. If you question even some small point of what's been said, then just as bronze vessels, once struck, go on ringing for a long time unless someone puts a hand on them, so it is with the orators: asked 329b a small question, they stretch out a speech as long as a distance race. But Protagoras here is able to give long, fine speeches, as the present one shows, and he's also able, when questioned, to answer briefly, and when he asks, to wait and take in the answer, a combination few are equipped with. So now, Protagoras, I'm short of only one small thing to have it all, if you'd answer me this. You say that excellence can be taught, and if I'd believe any human being, I believe you. 329c But there's one thing that surprised me while you were speaking: fill in that gap in my soul. You said that Zeus sent justice and shame to human beings; and then again, at many points in your speech, you spoke of justice and moderation and piety and all the rest as if, taken together, they were one thing, excellence. So go through this for me precisely, in argument: is excellence one thing, and justice, moderation and piety parts of it, or are the things I just 329d listed all names of one and the same thing? That's what I still want to know.

Well, that's easy to answer, Socrates, he said: excellence is one thing, and the things you're asking about are parts of it.—Parts, I said, the way the parts of a face are parts, mouth and nose and eyes and ears? Or the way the parts of gold don't differ

at all from one another, either from each other or from the whole, except in size?—The first way, it seems to me, 329e Socrates: the way the parts of the face are related to the whole face.—Then do people also get a share of these parts of excellence some one part and some another, I said, or must anyone who gets one have them all?—Not at all, he said, since many people are brave but unjust, or just but not wise.—So these are parts 330a of excellence too, I said, wisdom and courage?—Most certainly, he said; and wisdom is the greatest of the parts.—And each of them, I said, is something different from the others?—Yes.—And does each of them also have its own power? Take the parts of the face: an eye isn't like the ears, and its power isn't the same either; nor is any of the others like another, whether in its power or in anything else. Is it the same, then, with the parts of excellence, that none is like 330b another, either in itself or in its power? Isn't it clear that it must be so, if it matches the example?—Well, it is so, Socrates, he said.—And I said: Then no part of excellence is like another: none is like knowledge, none like justice, none like courage, none like moderation, none like piety.—No, he said.—Come on, then, I said, let's look together at what sort of thing each of them is. First, this: 330c is justice some thing, or no thing at all? I think it is something; what about you?—So do I, he said.—Well, then: suppose someone asked you and me, "Protagoras and Socrates, tell me: this thing you named just now, justice—is it itself just, or unjust?" I'd answer him that it's just. How would you cast your vote? The same vote as mine, or a different one?—The same, he said.—Then justice is the sort of thing that is just: that's what I'd say in answer to the 330d questioner. Wouldn't you too?—Yes, he said.—Suppose he asked us next, "Don't you also say there's such a thing as piety?" We'd say yes, I think.—Yes, he said.—"And don't you say that this too is some thing?" We'd say so, wouldn't we?—He agreed to this too.—"And do you say this very thing is by nature the sort of thing that is impious, or the sort that is pious?" I'd be annoyed at the question, I said, and I'd say: Watch your tongue, man! Hardly anything else could be pious, if piety 330e itself isn't going to be

pious. What about you? Wouldn't you answer that way?—Certainly, he said.

Now suppose he then went on to ask us, "Then what were you saying a little while ago? Didn't I hear you right? You seemed to me to say that the parts of excellence are related to one another in such a way that none of them is like another." I'd say that he heard the rest right, but if he thinks I said this too, he misheard: Protagoras 331a here gave those answers; I was asking the questions. Then if he said, "Is this man telling the truth, Protagoras? Is it you who say that no part of excellence is like another? Is this claim yours?" what would you answer him?—I'd have to agree, Socrates, he said.

Then what shall we answer him, Protagoras, having agreed to this, if he asks us further, "So piety isn't the sort of thing that is just, and justice isn't the sort that is pious, but the sort that isn't pious; and piety is the sort that isn't just, but unjust 331b after all, and justice impious?" What shall we answer him? For my part, speaking for myself, I'd say both that justice is pious and that piety is just; and on your behalf too, if you'd let me, I'd give this same answer: that justice is either the same thing as piety or as close to it as can be, and above all that justice is like piety and piety like justice. But see whether you forbid me to answer this way, or whether you agree with it too.—It doesn't seem to me quite so simple, Socrates, he said, 331c that I should concede that justice is pious and piety just. There seems to me to be some difference in it. But what does it matter? he said. If you like, let justice be pious for us, and piety just.—Don't give me that, I said. I've no need to test this "if you like" and "if you think so," but you and me. And I say "you and me" because I think the argument would be best tested 331d if you took the "if" out of it.—Well, all the same, he said, justice does resemble piety somewhat. After all, anything resembles anything else in some way or other. White resembles black in some respect, and hard resembles soft, and so with the other things that seem most opposed to each other. And the things we said earlier have different powers and aren't like one another, the parts of the face—

these too resemble each other in some way or other, and are like one another. So in this way 331e you could prove, if you wanted, that even these are all similar to one another. But it isn't right to call things similar because they have some point of similarity, or dissimilar because they have some point of dissimilarity, when the similarity is very small.—And I was surprised, and said to him: Is that really how the just and the pious stand to each other in your view, that they have only some small similarity?—Not quite 332a that, he said, but not as you seem to me to think, either.—Well then, I said, since you seem to me to find this awkward, let's drop it and look at another of the things you said. Is there something you call folly?—He said there was.—Isn't wisdom the complete opposite of this thing?—I think so, he said.—And when people act rightly and beneficially, do they seem to you to be showing moderation in acting that way, or if they acted the opposite way?—Moderation, he said.—So 332b it's by moderation that they show moderation?—Necessarily.—And those who don't act rightly act foolishly, and don't show moderation in acting that way?—I agree, he said.—So acting foolishly is the opposite of acting with moderation?—He said so.—And what's done foolishly is done with folly, and what's done with moderation is done with moderation?—He agreed.—And if anything is done with strength, it's done strongly, and if with weakness, weakly?—He thought so.—And if with speed, quickly, and if with slowness, 332c slowly?—He said so.—And whatever is done in the same way is done by the same thing, and whatever is done in the opposite way, by the opposite?—He agreed.—Come on, then, I said: is there such a thing as the beautiful?—He granted it.—Does it have any opposite except the ugly?—No.—Well then? Is there such a thing as the good?—There is.—Does it have any opposite except the bad?—No.—Well then: is there such a thing as high pitch in the voice?—He said there was.—And it has no opposite other than low pitch?—He said no.—So, I said, each single one of the opposites has only one opposite, not many?—He agreed. 332d

Come on, then, I said, let's add up what we've agreed. Have we agreed that one thing has only one opposite, not more?—We have.—And that what is done in opposite ways is done by opposites?—He said so.—And we've agreed that what is done foolishly is done in the opposite way to what is done with moderation?—He said so.—And that what is done with moderation is done by moderation, and what is done foolishly by folly?— 332e He granted it.—Then if they're done in opposite ways, they'd be done by opposites?—Yes.—And one is done by moderation, the other by folly?—Yes.—In opposite ways?—Certainly.—So by things that are opposites?—Yes.—So folly is the opposite of moderation?—Apparently.—Now, do you remember that earlier we agreed that folly is the opposite of wisdom?—He agreed.—And that one thing has only one 333a opposite?—I do.—Then which of our statements shall we give up, Protagoras? That one thing has only one opposite? Or the one where it was said that wisdom is different from moderation, each being a part of excellence, and that besides being different they're dissimilar, both in themselves and in their powers, like the parts of the face? Which, then, shall we give up? These two statements together don't sound very musical: they aren't in tune and don't harmonize with each other. And how could they be in tune, if one thing 333b must have only one opposite and no more, while folly, which is one thing, plainly has both wisdom and moderation as its opposites? Isn't that so, Protagoras, I said, or is it somehow otherwise?—He agreed, and very reluctantly.—Then moderation and wisdom would be one thing? And earlier, again, justice and piety turned out to be pretty much the same.

Come on, Protagoras, I said, let's not tire, but examine the rest too. Does a person who does wrong 333c seem to you to be showing moderation, in that he does wrong?—I'd be ashamed to agree to that, Socrates, he said, though many people do say so.—Then shall I address my argument to them, I said, or to you?—If you like, he said, argue first against this view, the view of the many.—It makes no difference to me, as long as you're the one who answers, whether or not you hold these views yourself. It's the

argument above all that I'm examining; but it may well turn out that I, the one asking, and the one answering are examined too. 333d

At first Protagoras played hard to get with us—he complained that the argument was an awkward one—but then he agreed to answer.—Come on, then, I said, answer me from the beginning. Do some people seem to you to show moderation while doing wrong?—Let's say so, he said.—And by showing moderation you mean being sensible?—He said so.—And being sensible means deliberating well in doing wrong?—Let's say so, he said.—Is that, I said, if they do well by doing wrong, or if they do badly?—If they do well.—So you say there are things that are good?—I do.—Well then, I said, are good things those that are beneficial to human beings?— 333e Yes, by Zeus, he said, and even things that aren't beneficial to human beings I call good.—And it seemed to me that Protagoras was by now getting prickly and agitated and drawn up in battle order against answering. So when I saw him in that state, I was careful, and asked gently. Do you mean, Protagoras, I said, 334a things that aren't beneficial to any human being, or things that aren't beneficial at all? Do you call things like that good?—Not at all, he said. But I know many things that are of no benefit to human beings—foods and drinks and drugs and countless other things—and others that are beneficial; some that are neither to humans, but are to horses; some only to cattle, some to dogs; some to none of these, but to trees; and some that are good for a tree's roots but bad for its shoots. Manure, for instance, is good for all 334b plants when put around the roots, but if you were to pile it on the shoots and young branches, it ruins everything. Olive oil, too, is thoroughly bad for all plants and the worst enemy of the hair of every animal except human beings, while for human hair and the rest of the human body it's a help. So varied and many-sided a thing is the good that even here the same thing is good for the outside of a person's 334c body and very bad for the inside. That's why all doctors forbid the sick to use olive oil, except the very smallest

amount in what they're going to eat, just enough to take away the unpleasantness the nose senses in food and dishes.

LONG SPEECHES OR SHORT ANSWERS

Socrates threatens to leave, and the company argues over how the discussion should go on.

SOCRATES When he'd said this, the audience broke into loud applause at how well he'd spoken, and I said: Protagoras, I happen to be a forgetful sort of person, and if someone speaks at length to me, 334d I forget what the discussion is about. So just as, if I happened to be hard of hearing, you'd think that if you were going to talk with me you'd have to speak louder than you do to other people, so now too, since you've run into a forgetful man, cut your answers down for me and make them shorter, if I'm going to follow you.

How do you mean, answer briefly? Am I to give you answers shorter than they need to be? he said.

Certainly not, I said.

As long as they need to be, then? he said. 334e

Yes, I said.

Then am I to give you answers as long as I think they need to be, or as long as you think?

Well, I've heard, I said, that you're able yourself, and able to teach others, to speak on the same subjects at length, if you like, so that your speech never runs dry, and again briefly, 335a so that nobody could say it in fewer words than you. So if you're going to talk with me, use the second manner with me: short answers.

Socrates, he said, I've entered contests of argument with a great many people by now, and if I'd done what you're telling me to do and talked the way my opponent told me to talk, I'd have looked no better than anyone, and the name of Protagoras would never have become known among the Greeks.

And I—for I could see that he wasn't pleased with himself over his 335b earlier answers, and that he wouldn't willingly carry on the discussion as the one answering—thought it was no longer

my business to stay at the gathering, and said: Well, Protagoras, I'm not keen either on our meeting going on against your wishes. When you're willing to talk in a way I can follow, then I'll talk with you. You, as people say of you and as you say yourself, can hold a discussion either with long speeches or with short answers— 335c you're wise, after all—while I'm incapable of these long ones, though I wish I could manage them. But you, who can do both, ought to have made allowances for us, so that the conversation could happen. As it is, since you're not willing, and I'm busy and couldn't stay while you stretch out long speeches—there's somewhere I have to go—I'll be off. Though I'd probably have quite enjoyed hearing these from you too.

And as I said this I got up to leave. As I was getting up, Callias took hold of my hand with his right hand, 335d and with his left he grabbed this cloak of mine, and said: We won't let you go, Socrates. If you leave, our discussions won't be the same. So I beg you to stay with us. There's nothing I'd rather hear than you and Protagoras in discussion. Do us all this favor.

And I said—I'd already stood up to go—Son of Hipponicus, I've always admired your love of wisdom, and 335e I praise and love it now as well, so I'd like to do you a favor, if you asked me for something I could do. But as it is, it's as if you asked me to keep up with Crison of Himera, the runner, in his prime, or to race and keep pace with one of the long-distance runners or the all-day couriers. 336a I'd tell you that I want to keep up with them as they run far more than you want me to, but I just can't. If you want to see Crison and me running together, ask him to come down to my pace: I can't run fast, but he can run slowly.[19] So if you're eager to hear Protagoras and me, ask him to answer now the way he answered me at first, briefly and to the actual question. 336b Otherwise, what sort of discussion will it be? I always thought that being together in conversation was one thing and making public speeches another.

19 Crison of Himera was a celebrated sprinter, three times Olympic champion in the mid-fifth century BC.

But—you see?—he said, Socrates, Protagoras seems to have a fair point in thinking he should be allowed to talk the way he wants, and you the way you want.

Then Alcibiades broke in: That's not right, Callias, he said. Socrates here admits he's no hand at long speeches and concedes that to Protagoras; but when it comes to being able to converse 336c and knowing how to give and receive an argument, I'd be amazed if he concedes it to anyone alive. So if Protagoras, too, admits he's worse at conversation than Socrates, that's enough for Socrates. But if he lays claim to it, let him converse by asking and answering, not stretching out a long speech in reply to every question, fending off the arguments and refusing 336d to give an account, dragging it out until most of the audience has forgotten what the question was. Though I guarantee that Socrates won't forget, never mind his joking and saying he's forgetful. So it seems to me Socrates is being more reasonable. Each of us ought to state his own view.

After Alcibiades, I think, it was Critias who spoke: Prodicus and Hippias, Callias seems to me to be very much 336e on Protagoras' side, and Alcibiades always has to win whatever he throws himself into. But we have no need to join the fight on either side, Socrates' or Protagoras', but should jointly ask both of them not to break up the gathering halfway through. 337a

When he'd said this, Prodicus said: You seem to me to speak well, Critias. Those who attend discussions of this kind ought to be impartial listeners to both speakers, but not equal ones—for that is not the same thing. One must listen to both impartially, but not give an equal share to each: more to the wiser, less to the more ignorant. For my part, Protagoras and Socrates, I too think you should give way to each other and dispute about the arguments, but 337b not wrangle—for friends dispute with friends even out of goodwill, whereas it is opponents and enemies who wrangle with one another. In that way our gathering would be at its finest. You who speak would in that way most win the esteem of us listeners, rather than their praise—for esteem resides in the souls of the listeners, without deceit, while praise is often

found in the words of people who lie against their own opinion. 337c And we who listen would in that way most be gladdened, rather than pleased—for being gladdened belongs to one who learns something and gains understanding with the mind itself, while being pleased belongs to one who eats something or has some other pleasant experience with the body itself.

When Prodicus had said this, a great many of those present approved. After Prodicus, Hippias the wise spoke. Gentlemen, he said, all of you here present, I regard you all as kinsmen, family and fellow citizens— 337d by nature, not by convention. For like is by nature akin to like, but convention, a tyrant over human beings, forces many things against nature. So it would be shameful for us, who know the nature of things, who are the wisest of the Greeks, and who for this very reason have now come together from all Greece into the very council hall of wisdom, and into the greatest and most prosperous house of this city itself, to show nothing worthy of 337e this standing, and instead to quarrel with one another like the lowest of men. So I beg and advise you, Protagoras and Socrates, to come to terms, with us as arbitrators bringing you together 338a in the middle. You shouldn't insist on this precise style of discussion, the excessively brief one, if Protagoras doesn't like it, but let go and give the reins of the argument some slack, so that it may appear grander and more graceful to us. Nor should Protagoras, for his part, let out every rope and, running before the wind, flee into the open sea of words, leaving the land out of sight. Both of you should cut a middle course. So do that, and take my advice: choose an umpire, a chairman, a presiding officer, who 338b will keep each of your speeches to a reasonable length.

This pleased those present and everyone approved; Callias said he wouldn't let me go, and they asked me to choose a chairman. So I said it would be shameful to choose a referee for a discussion. If the one chosen is worse than we are, it wouldn't be right for the worse to preside over the better; and if he's our equal, that wouldn't be right either, since someone like us will do the same as we would, so that 338c choosing him will have

been pointless. But then you'll choose someone better than us. In truth, I think, you can't possibly choose anyone wiser than Protagoras here; and if you choose someone who is no better but say that he is, this too is an insult to him, as if you were choosing a chairman for some nobody—since as far as I'm concerned it makes no difference. But here's what I'm willing to do, so that the gathering and discussion you're eager for can go ahead. If Protagoras doesn't want 338d to answer, let him ask the questions and I'll answer, and at the same time I'll try to show him how I say the one answering ought to answer. And when I've answered as many questions as he wants to ask, let him in turn submit to giving an account to me in the same way. Then if he doesn't seem willing to answer the actual question asked, you and I together will beg him, as you begged me, not to ruin the gathering. 338e There's no need for a single chairman for this: you'll all preside together. Everyone agreed that this was what we should do. Protagoras was quite unwilling, but all the same he was forced to agree to ask questions and, when he'd asked enough, to give an account in his turn, answering briefly.

SIMONIDES' POEM

Protagoras claims a poem by Simonides contradicts itself, and Socrates offers his own reading.

SOCRATES So he began asking roughly like this. I think, Socrates, he said, that the greatest part of a man's education is being clever 339a about poetry. That means being able to understand what the poets say, which parts are composed correctly and which aren't, and knowing how to analyze them and give an account when questioned. And now the question will be about the same thing you and I are discussing now, excellence, only transferred to poetry; that's the only difference. Simonides says somewhere to Scopas, the son of Creon the Thessalian, that 339b "for a man to become truly good is, on the one hand, hard, foursquare in hands and feet and mind, fashioned without

fault." Do you know this song, or shall I go through the whole of it for you?[20]

And I said there was no need: I know it, and I happen to have given the song a good deal of attention.

Good, he said. Then do you think it's been composed well and correctly, or not?—Very well and correctly, I said.—And do you think it's well composed if the poet contradicts himself?—Not well, I said.—Then look at it 339c more closely, he said.—But, my good man, I've examined it enough.—Then you know, he said, that as the song goes on he says somewhere: "Nor does the saying of Pittacus ring right to me, though spoken by a wise man: hard, he said, it is to be good."[21] You realize that it's the same man who says both this and the earlier lines?—I know, I said.—Then do you think, he said, that these agree with those?—They seem to me to (though at the same time I was afraid he had a point). But, I said, don't they seem so to you?—How could 339d a man who says both these things seem to agree with himself? First he himself laid down that it's hard for a man to become truly good, and then, going a little further on in the poem, he's forgotten, and he blames Pittacus, who says the same thing as he does, that it is hard to be good, and says he won't accept it from him, though he's saying the same as himself. Yet when he blames someone for saying the same as himself, he obviously blames himself too, so that either the first statement or the later one is wrong.

When he said this, it drew loud applause and praise from many 339e of the listeners. And at first, as if I'd been hit by a good boxer, everything went dark and my head spun at his words and the others' applause. Then—to tell you the truth, so as to win some time to think about what the poet meant—I turn to Prodicus and, calling on him, Prodicus, I said, Simonides is your fellow citizen, you know: 340a it's only right for you to come to the

20 Simonides of Ceos (c. 556–468 BC) was a lyric poet; Scopas was a ruling noble of Thessaly. The poem survives only through this passage.

21 Pittacus of Mytilene on Lesbos (c. 640–568 BC) was a statesman counted among the Seven Sages.

man's rescue. So I think I'll call on you, the way Homer says Scamander, besieged by Achilles, called on Simois, saying, "Dear brother, let us both together hold back this man's might." I too call on you, so that Protagoras doesn't sack our Simonides.[22] For, indeed, the defense of Simonides needs that artistry of yours by which you distinguish wishing and 340b desiring as not the same thing, along with all those fine distinctions you drew just now. So now see whether you agree with me. For it doesn't seem to me that Simonides contradicts himself. You, Prodicus, give your opinion first: do you think becoming and being are the same thing, or different?—Different, by Zeus, said Prodicus.—Now, I said, in the first lines Simonides declared his own opinion, that it's hard for a man 340c to become truly good?—That's true, said Prodicus.—But Pittacus, I said, he blames not, as Protagoras thinks, for saying the same thing as himself, but for saying something different. Pittacus didn't say that the hard thing was to become good, as Simonides did, but to be good. And being and becoming, Protagoras, are not the same thing, as Prodicus here says. And if being isn't the same as becoming, Simonides doesn't contradict himself. And perhaps 340d Prodicus here and many others would say, with Hesiod, that it's hard to become good—for the gods have set sweat before excellence—but when one reaches its summit, then it is easy to possess, hard though it is.

When Prodicus heard this he praised me. But Protagoras said: Your correction, Socrates, contains a bigger mistake than the one you're correcting.

And I said: Then I've done harm, it seems, 340e Protagoras, and I'm a ridiculous sort of doctor: by treating the illness I make it worse.

Well, that's how it is, he said.

How so? I said.

22 Prodicus, like Simonides, came from the island of Ceos. In the *Iliad* (Book 21) the river Scamander calls on his brother river Simois for help against Achilles.

It would be great ignorance on the poet's part, he said, if he says that possessing excellence is such a trivial thing, when it's the hardest thing of all, as everyone thinks.

And I said: By Zeus, Prodicus here has turned up in our discussion at just the right moment. For it may well be, 341a Protagoras, that Prodicus' wisdom is something divine and ancient, going back to Simonides, or even older. You, experienced as you are in many other things, seem to be inexperienced in this one, not experienced as I am through being a student of Prodicus here. And now you don't seem to me to understand that Simonides perhaps didn't take this word "hard" the way you take it. It may be like the word "terrible," on which Prodicus here corrects me every time: when I'm praising you or someone else and say that Protagoras is a wise and terribly clever man, he asks 341b whether I'm not ashamed to call good things terrible. For the terrible, he says, is bad. At any rate, nobody ever speaks of "terrible wealth" or "terrible peace" or "terrible health," but of "terrible disease" and "terrible war" and "terrible poverty," since the terrible is bad. So perhaps the people of Ceos and Simonides, in their turn, take "hard" to mean bad, or something else that you don't understand. So let's ask Prodicus—it's only fair to ask him about Simonides' dialect: What did Simonides mean, Prodicus, by 341c "hard"?

Bad, he said.

So that's why he blames Pittacus, Prodicus, I said, for saying it is hard to be good—as if he'd heard him say that it's bad to be good.

Well, what else do you think Simonides means, Socrates, he said, but this? He's reproaching Pittacus for not knowing how to distinguish words correctly, since he was from Lesbos and brought up in a foreign dialect.

You hear Prodicus here, Protagoras, I said. 341d Have you anything to say to this?

And Protagoras said: It's nothing of the kind, Prodicus. I know perfectly well that Simonides meant by "hard" what the rest of

us mean: not bad, but whatever isn't easy and only comes about with a lot of trouble.

Why, I think so too, Protagoras, I said: that this is what Simonides means, and that Prodicus here knows it, but he's joking and, I suppose, testing you to see whether you'll be able to defend your own argument. For there's strong evidence that Simonides doesn't mean that "hard" [341e] is bad in the very next phrase. He says, "A god alone could have this privilege." Surely he isn't saying that it's bad to be good and then saying that the god alone could have this, assigning this privilege to the god alone. Prodicus would be making Simonides out to be some kind of reprobate and no Cean at all. But I'm willing to tell you what I think Simonides means in this song, [342a] if you'd like to test how I stand, as you put it, on poetry; or if you'd rather, I'll listen to you.[23]

Protagoras, hearing me say this, said: If you like, Socrates. And Prodicus and Hippias strongly urged me to, and so did the others.

Well then, I said, I'll try to go through for you what I think about this song. Philosophy is oldest and most plentiful among the Greeks in Crete and [342b] Sparta, and that's where the most sophists on earth are to be found. But they deny it and pretend to be ignorant, so that it won't become obvious that they surpass the Greeks in wisdom—like the sophists Protagoras was describing—and so that they'll seem to excel in fighting and courage instead. They think that if people found out what it is they really excel in, everyone would practice it: wisdom. As it is, by keeping that hidden, they've fooled the admirers of Sparta in other cities, who get their ears battered imitating [342c] them, bind on boxing thongs, are mad about athletic training and wear short cloaks, as though it were by these things that the Spartans have the upper hand over the Greeks. The Spartans, when they want to meet their own sophists freely and are tired of meeting them in secret, hold expulsions of foreigners—both of these Sparta-imitators and of any other foreigner who happens to be

23 The people of Ceos were proverbial for their sober, upright way of life.

in town—and meet with the sophists without the foreigners knowing. And they don't allow any of their young men 342d to go abroad to other cities, nor do the Cretans, so that they won't unlearn what they teach them. And in these cities it's not only men who pride themselves on their education, but women too.[24] You can see that I'm telling the truth, and that the Spartans are the best educated in philosophy and argument, in this way. If you're willing to talk with the most ordinary Spartan, you'll find 342e him seeming quite ordinary for most of the conversation. But then, at whatever point in the discussion it happens, he hurls in a remark worth noting, short and compact, like a skilled javelin-thrower, so that the person talking with him looks no better than a child. Some people today, and some in the past, have realized precisely this: that being Spartan is much more a matter of loving wisdom than of loving athletics, since they know that being able to utter remarks like that belongs to 343a a perfectly educated person. Among these were Thales of Miletus, Pittacus of Mytilene, Bias of Priene, our own Solon, Cleobulus of Lindus, Myson of Chen, and the seventh of them was said to be the Spartan Chilon. All these were admirers, lovers and students of Spartan education, and you can recognize their wisdom as being of this kind: short, memorable sayings spoken by each. These men also came together 343b and dedicated the first fruits of their wisdom to Apollo in the temple at Delphi, inscribing the words everyone celebrates, "Know yourself" and "Nothing too much." Why do I mention this? Because this was the ancients' way of doing philosophy: a kind of Spartan brevity. And in particular this saying of Pittacus was passed around privately, praised by the wise: "It is hard to be good." So Simonides, 343c being ambitious for a name for wisdom, realized that if he could throw this saying, like a famous wrestler, and get the better of it, he himself would become famous among the people of his day. So it's against this saying, and for this reason, scheming to cut it down, that he composed the whole song, as it seems to me.

24 Sparta periodically expelled foreigners; admirers of Spartan ways elsewhere copied their dress and their passion for boxing.

Let's all examine it together, then, to see whether what I say is true. The very beginning of the song would look mad if, wanting to say that it's hard for a man to become good, 343d he then threw in the "on the one hand." For it doesn't seem to have been thrown in for any reason at all, unless one supposes that Simonides is speaking as if quarreling with the saying of Pittacus: when Pittacus says that it is hard to be good, Simonides disputes it and says: No, to become a good man is, on the one hand, hard, Pittacus, truly—not truly good. He doesn't apply the "truly" to that, as if some people 343e were truly good and others good but not truly so—that would seem silly, and not like Simonides. Rather, one must take the "truly" in the song as displaced, and supply Pittacus' saying before it, roughly like this, as if we had Pittacus himself speaking and Simonides replying. Pittacus says: People, it is hard to be good; and Simonides 344a replies: Pittacus, what you say isn't true: not to be but to become, on the one hand, a man good, foursquare in hands and feet and mind, fashioned without fault, is hard, truly. Read this way, the "on the one hand" turns out to have been thrown in for a reason, and the "truly" to be rightly placed at the end. And everything that follows bears this out, that this is how it was meant. There's a great deal one could show about each of the 344b things said in the song, how well they're composed—for it's crafted with great charm and care—but it would take a long time to go through it that way. Let's go through its overall outline and its intention instead: that more than anything it is a refutation of Pittacus' saying, all the way through the song.

After this he goes on a little and says, as though he were setting out an argument, that to become a good man is hard, truly, but possible, at least for a while. But once you have become good, to stay 344c in that condition and be a good man, as you say, Pittacus, is impossible, and not for human beings: "a god alone could have this privilege," "but a man cannot help being bad, whom misfortune beyond resource casts down." Whom, then, does misfortune beyond resource cast down in the command of a ship? Clearly not the layman, since the layman is always down

already. You can't knock down someone who is already lying down. You can knock down someone who is standing, so that he ends up lying down, but not someone already lying 344d down. In the same way, misfortune beyond resource might at some point cast down the man who is resourceful, but not the one who is always without resource. A great storm falling on a helmsman could leave him without resource. A hard season coming on could leave a farmer without resource, and the same goes for a doctor. For the good man can become bad, as another poet also testifies, who said: "But a good man is at one time bad, at another good." 344e The bad man, though, can't become bad. He has to be bad always. So when misfortune beyond resource casts down the resourceful, wise and good man, "he cannot help being bad." But you say, Pittacus, "it is hard to be good." The truth is that becoming good is hard, though possible, while being good is impossible: "for every man who does well is good, and bad if he does badly." 345a What, then, is doing well with letters, and what makes a man good at letters? Clearly, learning them. And what kind of doing well makes a good doctor? Clearly, learning how to treat the sick. "And bad if he does badly": who, then, could become a bad doctor? Clearly someone who is, first, a doctor, and then a good doctor, since he's the one who could also become bad. We who are laymen in medicine could never, by doing badly, become doctors, or carpenters, or 345b anything else of the kind. And whoever couldn't become a doctor by doing badly clearly couldn't become a bad doctor either. In the same way the good man might at some point become bad too, through age, or hardship, or illness, or some other accident, for this is the only bad doing: being deprived of knowledge. But the bad man could never become bad, since he is bad always. If he is to become bad, he must first become good. So this part of the poem points the same way: 345c it isn't possible to be a good man, continuing good, but it is possible to become good, and for this same man to become bad as well; "and best for the longest time are those whom the gods love." All this, then, is aimed at Pittacus, and what comes next in the poem

makes it even clearer. For he says: "Therefore I shall never, seeking what cannot come to be, cast away my share of life on an empty, unachievable hope: an all-blameless human being, among all of us who reap the fruit of the broad-based earth. When I find him, I shall bring you word," 345d he says. That is how hard he goes after Pittacus' saying all through the poem. "But all I praise and love willingly who do nothing shameful; against necessity not even gods fight." This too is said with the same aim. Simonides was not so uneducated as to say that he praises those who willingly do nothing bad, as though there were people who do bad things willingly. I'm fairly confident of this much: none of the 345e wise thinks that any human being goes wrong willingly, or willingly does anything shameful or bad. They know well that everyone who does shameful and bad things does them unwillingly. So Simonides isn't saying that he praises whoever doesn't willingly do bad things. He says this "willingly" of himself. For he believed that a fine and good man often forces himself to become someone's friend and admirer, 346a to love and praise him: when, for instance, a man happens to have a difficult mother or father, or country, or something else of that kind. Wicked people, when something like this happens to them, look on it almost with pleasure. They make a show of blaming their parents or country and denouncing their wickedness, so that people won't reproach them or reprove them for neglecting them. So they blame them even more and add 346b enmities of their own choosing to the ones forced on them. Good people, though, keep it hidden and force themselves to praise. If they're angry with their parents or country for some wrong done them, they calm themselves and make their peace, compelling themselves to love and praise their own. And often, I think, Simonides himself found that he had to praise and extol a tyrant or someone else of that sort, not willingly but under compulsion. That is what he is saying to Pittacus too: It isn't, 346c Pittacus, because I'm fond of blaming that I blame you, since "for me it is enough if a man be not bad, nor too shiftless, a sound man who knows the justice that helps the city. Him I will not

fault—for I am not fond of faulting—for the race of fools is endless. All things are fine, I tell you, with which shameful things are not mixed." 346d He doesn't mean this as if he had said "All things are white, I tell you, with which black is not mixed," which would be ridiculous in many ways. He means that he himself accepts even what lies in between and doesn't blame it. "And I am not looking," he says, "for an all-blameless human being, among all of us who reap the fruit of the broad-based earth; when I find him, I shall bring you word." So on that account, at least, I shall praise no one. It's enough for me if a man is middling and does nothing bad, since "all I love and praise." Here he has used the dialect 346e of the Mytileneans, as one addressing Pittacus: "all I praise and love willingly." In reciting it you have to pause at "willingly." Then: "who do nothing shameful." But there are some I praise and love unwillingly. So if you had said, 347a even moderately, what was reasonable and true, Pittacus, I would never have blamed you. As it is, you are badly wrong, and about the most important matters, while seeming to tell the truth, and that is why I blame you. That, Prodicus and Protagoras, I said, is what I think Simonides had in mind when he composed this poem.[25]

And Hippias said: I think you too have given a good account of the poem, Socrates. But I also have 347b a fine speech about it, he said, which I'll present to you, if you like.

And Alcibiades said: Yes, Hippias, some other time. Right now it's only fair to do what Protagoras and Socrates agreed between them: if Protagoras still wants to ask questions, Socrates answers, and if he'd rather answer Socrates, then the other one asks.

25 *Epainēmi* ("I praise") is the Lesbian form of the verb, the dialect of Pittacus' Mytilene.

BACK TO THE ARGUMENT

Socrates sets poetry aside and asks Protagoras to resume the question about excellence.

SOCRATES And I said: For my part, I leave it to Protagoras to choose whichever he prefers. But if he's willing, let's leave odes and verses [347c] aside. The questions I asked you at first, Protagoras, I would gladly see through to the end, examining them with you. Talking about poetry seems to me very much like the drinking parties of second-rate, vulgar people. Being too uneducated to keep each other company over their wine by themselves, with their own voices and their own conversation, these people drive up the price [347d] of flute-girls. They pay a great deal for an alien voice, the voice of the flute, and keep each other company through that. But where the drinkers are fine and good men and educated, you won't see flute-girls or dancing-girls or harp-girls. You'll see them quite capable of keeping each other company without such nonsense and games, with their own voices, speaking and listening in turn in an orderly way, even when they [347e] drink a great deal of wine. Gatherings like ours are the same. If they include men such as most of us claim to be, they need no alien voice, not even poets. You can't question poets about what they mean, and when people bring them into the discussion, some say the poet means this and others that, arguing about something they have no way of settling. Men like that [348a] leave such gatherings alone and keep company with each other by themselves, testing one another and being tested in their own words. People like these are the ones I think you and I should rather imitate. Let's set the poets aside and carry on our discussion with each other by ourselves, testing the truth and ourselves. If you want to keep asking questions, I'm ready to put myself at your service as answerer. Or, if you like, put yourself at mine, so that we can bring to a conclusion the things we broke off in the middle of going through. [348b]

As I was saying these and other such things, Protagoras gave no clear sign which he would do. So Alcibiades looked at Callias and said: Callias, do you think Protagoras is behaving well now, either, refusing to make clear whether he'll give an account or not? I don't. Let him either discuss or say that he's unwilling to discuss, so that we know where we stand with him, and Socrates can discuss with someone else, or anyone else who likes with whoever he likes. 348c

And Protagoras was ashamed, or so it seemed to me, with Alcibiades saying this and Callias and nearly everyone else present begging him. Reluctantly he was brought round to discussing, and told me to ask him questions, since he would answer.

So I said: Protagoras, don't imagine that I'm discussing with you for any other purpose than to examine whatever puzzles me at the time. I think Homer is quite right when he says: 348d "When two go together, one sees before the other." Somehow all of us human beings are better equipped that way for every deed and word and thought. "But if one alone notices something," he immediately goes around looking for someone to show it to and to confirm it with, until he finds one. That is exactly why I'd rather discuss with you than with anyone else: I think you would examine best the matters 348e a decent man is likely to look into, and excellence above all. Who else but you?[26] You don't just think yourself fine and good, the way some people are decent themselves but can't make others so. You are both good yourself and able to make others good. And you trust yourself so much that, while others keep this art hidden, 349a you have had yourself openly proclaimed to all the Greeks. You named yourself a sophist and declared yourself a teacher of education and excellence, the first to think it right to charge a fee for it. How, then, could I not call on you to examine these things, and question and consult you? There's no way I couldn't. So now I want to take up again from the beginning the questions I first asked

26 The lines are from *Iliad* 10.224–226, where Diomedes asks for a companion on a night expedition.

about these things, partly to be reminded by you, partly to examine them together. The question, [349b] I believe, was this. Wisdom, moderation, courage, justice and piety: are these five names for one thing, or does each of these names have underlying it some distinct being, a thing that has its own power, each one unlike any of the others? You said they weren't names for one thing, but [349c] that each of these names applies to a distinct thing, and that all of them are parts of excellence. Not as the parts of gold are like one another and like the whole they are parts of, but as the parts of the face are unlike both the whole they are parts of and one another, each having its own power. If you still think now as you did then, say so. If you think somewhat differently, spell it out, since I won't hold it against you if you say something different now. I wouldn't be surprised if you were saying those things then to test [349d] me.

COURAGE

Protagoras holds that courage differs from the other parts; Socrates links it to knowledge and confidence.

SOCRATES Well, Socrates, he said, I tell you that all these are parts of excellence. Four of them are reasonably close to one another, but courage is very different from all of them. Here's how you'll know I'm telling the truth: you'll find many people who are utterly unjust, impious, licentious and ignorant, and yet exceptionally courageous. [349e]

Hold on, I said. What you say is worth examining. Do you mean that the courageous are confident, or something else?—Yes, and eager, he said, to go at what most people are afraid to approach.—Well now, do you say excellence is something fine, and is it as something fine that you offer yourself as its teacher?—The finest of things, he said, unless I'm mad.—Then is part of it shameful and part fine, I said, or is it fine as a whole?—Fine as a whole, surely, as fine as anything can be.—Do you know, then, who dive confidently into [350a] wells?—I do: divers.—Is that because they know how, or for some other reason?—Because

they know how.—And who are confident fighting on horseback? Skilled riders or those who can't ride?—Skilled riders.—And who are confident carrying light shields? Those trained in it, or those who aren't?—Those trained in it. And in everything else too, if that's what you're after, he said, those who know are more confident than those who don't, and more 350b confident themselves once they've learned than they were before.—But have you ever seen people, I said, who know nothing about any of these things and yet are confident in each of them?—I have, he said, and all too confident.—Then aren't these confident people courageous too?—Courage would be a shameful thing then, he said, since these people are mad.—Then what do you mean by the courageous, I said? Didn't you say they were the confident?—I still do, he said.— 350c Then these people, I said, who are confident in this way, turn out to be not courageous but mad? And in the other case, again, the wisest are also the most confident, and being most confident, the most courageous? And by this argument wisdom would be courage?

You aren't remembering properly, Socrates, he said, what I said in answering you. When you asked me whether the courageous are confident, I agreed. I wasn't asked whether the confident are courageous too; if you had asked me that then, I would have said 350d not all of them. And as for the courageous not being confident, you nowhere showed that I was wrong to agree to it. Next, you show that those who know are more confident than they were before and than others who don't know, and on that basis you think courage and wisdom are the same. Going about it this way, you might think strength was wisdom too. Going about it this way, you might first ask me whether the strong 350e are powerful, and I would say yes. Then whether those who know how to wrestle are more powerful than those who don't, and than they themselves were before they learned, and I would say yes. Once I had agreed to these, you could use these same proofs to say that by my own admission wisdom is strength. But I don't agree here either, anywhere, that the powerful are strong, only that the strong are powerful. 351a

Power and strength aren't the same. Power comes from knowledge, and from madness and passion too, but strength comes from nature and the good nurture of bodies. In the same way, in the other case, confidence and courage aren't the same. So it turns out that the courageous are confident, but not all the confident are courageous. Confidence comes to people from skill, and 351b from passion and madness too, as power does, but courage comes from the nature and good nurture of souls.

PLEASURE AND THE GOOD

Socrates asks whether living pleasantly is good and whether knowledge can be overcome by pleasure.

SOCRATES Do you say, Protagoras, I said, that some people live well and others badly?—He said he did.—Then do you think a person would be living well if he lived in distress and pain?—He said no.—What if he lived pleasantly to the end of his life? Don't you think he'd have lived well that way?—I do, he said.—So 351c living pleasantly is good, and living unpleasantly bad?—Yes, he said, provided he lived taking pleasure in fine things.—What's this, Protagoras? Surely you don't, like most people, call some pleasant things bad and some painful things good? What I mean is: insofar as things are pleasant, aren't they in that respect good, leaving aside anything else that may come of them? And painful things, likewise: aren't they bad insofar as they are painful?—I don't know, Socrates, he said, whether I should answer as simply as you put the question, 351d that all pleasant things are good and all painful things bad. It seems to me safer, not only for my present answer but for the whole rest of my life, to answer that there are some pleasant things that aren't good, and again some painful things that aren't bad, and some that are, and a third class that are neither, neither bad nor good.—By pleasant things, I said, don't you mean things that partake of pleasure 351e or produce pleasure?—Certainly, he said.—That's what I mean, then, when I ask whether they aren't good insofar as they're pleasant: I'm asking whether pleasure itself isn't a

good.—As you're always saying, Socrates, he said, let's examine it. If the inquiry seems reasonable and the pleasant and the good turn out to be the same, we'll agree. If not, then we'll dispute it.

Then would you like to lead the inquiry, I said, or shall I?

It's right that you should lead, he said, since you started this argument. 352a

Well, I said, perhaps it might become clear to us in some such way as this. Suppose someone were examining a person by his appearance, for his health or some other bodily function, and after seeing his face and hands said: "Come now, uncover your chest and back as well and show me, so I can examine you more clearly." I want something like that for our inquiry. Having seen that your attitude to the good and the pleasant is what you say, I need to say something like this: Come now, Protagoras, 352b uncover this part of your mind as well. What is your attitude to knowledge? Do you think about it as most people do, or differently? Most people think something like this about knowledge: that it isn't strong, or a leader, or a ruler. They don't think of it that way at all. They think that often, though a person has knowledge in him, it isn't knowledge that rules him but something else: sometimes anger, sometimes pleasure, sometimes pain, at times love, often fear. They simply 352c think of knowledge as if it were a slave, dragged around by all the rest. Do you think something like that about it too? Or do you think that knowledge is a fine thing, able to rule a person, and that if someone knows what is good and what is bad, nothing could ever overpower him into doing anything other than what knowledge commands, and that understanding is enough to come to a person's rescue?

I think just as you say, Socrates, he said. And besides, 352d it would be shameful for me, if for anyone, not to say that wisdom and knowledge are the most powerful of all things in human life.

That's well said, I replied, and true. Now you know that most people don't believe you and me. They say that many who know what is best are unwilling to do it, though they could, and do other things instead. And everyone I've asked what on earth the

cause of this is says that those who act this way do so because they are 352e overcome by pleasure, or pain, or overpowered by one of the things I mentioned just now.

Yes, Socrates, he said, I think people say many other things that are wrong too.

Come on, then, try with me to persuade people and teach them what this experience of theirs really is, the one they call being overcome 353a by pleasures and failing to do what is best because of them, though they know what it is. If we told them, You're wrong, people, you're mistaken, they might ask us: "Protagoras and Socrates, if this experience isn't being overcome by pleasure, then what on earth is it? What do you two say it is? Tell us."

But Socrates, why should we examine the opinion of most people, who say whatever comes into their heads? 353b

I think, I said, that this will help us find out about courage, and how it relates to the other parts of excellence. So if you're content to stand by what we agreed just now, that I should lead the way I think it will become clearest, follow me. If you'd rather not, and if you prefer, I'll drop it.

No, he said, you're right. Carry on as you began. 353c

Again, then, I said, suppose they asked us: "Then what do you say it is, this thing we were calling being overcome by pleasures?" I would say to them: Listen, then. Protagoras and I will try to explain it to you. Don't you say, people, that this happens to you in cases like these: often, overpowered by food and drink and sex, which are pleasant, you still do these things, though you know they're bad?—They'd say so.—Then you and I would ask them again: In what way do you say they're bad? 353d Is it because they give this pleasure at the moment, and each of them is pleasant, or because later on they cause diseases and poverty and bring about many other such things? Or, even if one of them brought about none of this later and only gave enjoyment, would they still be bad, just because they make a person enjoy himself, in whatever way? Do we suppose, Protagoras, that they would answer anything other than that these things are bad not

because of the immediate pleasure itself and what it produces, 353e but because of what comes later, diseases and the rest?—I think, said Protagoras, that most people would answer that.—Then in causing diseases they cause pains, and in causing poverty they cause pains? They would agree, I think.—Protagoras assented.—Then doesn't it appear to you, people, as Protagoras and I say, that these things are bad for no other reason than that they end in pains and deprive you of other 354a pleasures? Would they agree?—We both thought so.—Then suppose we asked them the opposite: People, you who say, on the other hand, that good things are painful, don't you mean things like athletic training, military campaigns, and doctors' treatments by cautery, surgery, drugs and starvation diets? Don't you mean that these are good, but painful? Would they say so?—He agreed. —Then 354b do you call them good because at the moment they bring the most extreme pain and suffering, or because later on they result in health and fitness of body, the preservation of cities, rule over others, and wealth? They would say the latter, I think.—He agreed.—And are these things good for any other reason than that they end in pleasures and in relief from pains and the warding off of them? Or can you name some other end 354c you look to when you call them good, other than pleasures and pains? They would say not, I think.—I don't think so either, said Protagoras.—Then you pursue pleasure as something good and avoid pain as something bad?—He agreed.—So this is what you consider bad, pain, and pleasure good, since you call even enjoyment itself bad when it deprives you of greater pleasures than it contains, or brings about pains greater than the 354d pleasures in it. For if you called enjoyment itself bad on some other ground, looking to some other end, you could tell us what it was. But you won't be able to.—I don't think they will either, said Protagoras.—And isn't it the same again with being in pain itself? Do you call being in pain itself good just when it either rids you of pains greater than those it contains or brings about pleasures greater than its pains? For if you look to some other end when you call being in pain 354e good, other than the one I mention,

you can tell us what it is. But you won't be able to.—What you say is true, said Protagoras.

Again, then, people, I said, suppose you asked me: "Why on earth do you go on about this at such length and in so many ways?" I would say: Forgive me. First, it isn't easy to show what this thing you call being overcome by pleasures actually is. And second, all the proofs depend on it. But even now you can still take it back, 355a if you can somehow say that the good is something other than pleasure, or the bad something other than pain. Or is it enough for you to live out your life pleasantly, without pains? If it is enough, and you can't say that anything is good or bad unless it ends in these, then listen to what follows. I tell you that if this is so, your account becomes ridiculous. You say that a person often knows that bad things are bad and does them all the same, though he could refrain, because he is led on and carried away 355b by pleasures. And again you say that a person who knows what is good is unwilling to do it because of immediate pleasures, being overcome by them. How ridiculous this is will become quite clear if we stop using many names at once, pleasant, painful, good and bad, and instead, since these have turned out to be two things, call them by two names as well: first good and bad, and then again pleasant 355c and painful. With that settled, let's say: A person knows that bad things are bad and does them all the same. Now if someone asks us, "Why?" Because he's overcome, we'll say. "By what?" he'll ask us. And we can no longer say "by pleasure," since pleasure has taken another name instead, "the good." So let us answer him and say: Because he's overcome. "By what?" he'll say. By the good, we'll say, by Zeus! Now if the person asking us happens to be insolent, he'll laugh 355d and say: "What a ridiculous thing you're saying, that a person does bad things, knowing that they're bad, when he shouldn't do them, because he's overcome by good things! Is it," he'll say, "because in you the bad things aren't worth enough to win out over the good ones, or because they are?" Clearly we'll answer that they aren't worth enough, since otherwise the person we say is overcome by pleasures

wouldn't have gone wrong. "And in what respect," he may say, "are good things unequal in worth to bad ones, or bad things to good? Is it in any other respect than when one lot is greater and the other [355e] smaller? Or when one lot is more numerous and the other fewer?" We won't be able to name anything but that. "Clearly, then," he'll say, "by this being overcome you mean taking greater bad things in exchange for lesser good ones." So much for that. Now let's switch the names back to pleasant and painful for these same things, and say: A person does—before we said bad things, now let's say painful things—knowing that they are painful, because he is overcome [356a] by pleasant things, clearly when these aren't worth enough to win. And what other disparity in worth is there between pleasure and pain than one exceeding or falling short of the other? That is, their being greater and smaller than each other, more and fewer, and more and less intense. Now if someone were to say, "But Socrates, what is pleasant at the moment is very different from what is pleasant or painful later on," I would reply: Different in anything but pleasure and pain? There's nothing else it could be different in. No: like [356b] someone who is good at weighing, put the pleasant things together and the painful things together, set both the near and the distant on the scale, and say which side is more. If you weigh pleasant things against pleasant, you must always take the greater and the more. If painful against painful, the fewer and the smaller. If pleasant against painful, then if the painful are outweighed by the pleasant, whether the near by the distant or the distant by the near, you must do the action that contains these. But [356c] if the pleasant are outweighed by the painful, you mustn't do it. Is it in any way otherwise, people? I would ask. I know they couldn't say otherwise.—He agreed too.

THE ART OF MEASUREMENT

Socrates argues that weighing pleasures and pains rightly would be the salvation of life.

SOCRATES Since this is so, I'll say, answer me this. Do the same magnitudes look larger to your sight close up and smaller from far away, or not?—They'll say they do.—And thicknesses and numbers likewise? And equal sounds louder close up and softer from far away?—They would say so.—Now if 356d our doing well depended on this, on doing and choosing large lengths and avoiding and not doing small ones, what would turn out to be the salvation of our life? The art of measurement, or the power of appearance? Doesn't that power lead us astray, and make us often take up the same things now one way, now the other, and regret both our actions and our choices between large and small? Whereas the art of measurement would have robbed this appearance of its authority, and by revealing 356e the truth would have given the soul peace, abiding by the truth, and would have saved our life. Would people agree, in view of this, that the art of measurement would save us, or some other art?—The art of measurement, he agreed.—And what if the salvation of our life lay in choosing odd and even, when we had to choose rightly the greater and when the lesser, whether of the same kind against itself or of one against the other, and whether near or far? What would save our 357a life? Wouldn't it be knowledge? And wouldn't it be a kind of measurement, since the art deals with excess and deficiency? And since it deals with odd and even, could it be anything but arithmetic? Would people agree with us or not?—Protagoras too thought they would agree.—Very well, people. Since the salvation of our life has turned out to lie in the right choice of pleasure and pain, of more and fewer, 357b greater and smaller, farther and nearer, doesn't it appear, first of all, to be measurement, since it is an inquiry into excess and deficiency and equality relative to one another?—It has to be.—And since it is measurement, it must surely be an art and a knowledge.—

They'll agree.—Which art and which knowledge it is, we'll examine another time. That it is knowledge is enough for the proof that Protagoras and I [357c] have to give in answer to your question. You asked it, if you remember, when we were agreeing with each other that nothing is more powerful than knowledge, and that wherever it is present it always prevails over pleasure and everything else. You, though, said that pleasure often prevails even over the man who knows. When we didn't agree with you, you went on to ask us: "Protagoras and Socrates, if this experience isn't being overcome by pleasure, then what on earth is it? What do you say it is? Tell [357d] us." Now if we had told you then and there that it was ignorance, you would have laughed at us. But if you laugh at us now, you'll be laughing at yourselves too. For you have agreed that those who go wrong in their choice of pleasures and pains, which is to say of good and bad things, go wrong through a lack of knowledge. And not just knowledge, but the kind you agreed a moment ago was measurement. And a wrong action done [357e] without knowledge, as you surely know yourselves, is done through ignorance. So this is what being overcome by pleasure is: ignorance, the greatest ignorance there is. Protagoras here claims to be a doctor for it, and so do Prodicus and Hippias. But because you think it is something other than ignorance, you neither go yourselves nor send your children to these sophists here, the teachers of these things, on the ground that it can't be taught. Instead you hold on to your money and won't give it to them, and so you fare badly both in private and in public life. [358a]

That is how we would have answered most people. But now I ask you, Hippias and Prodicus, along with Protagoras (let the argument be shared with you too), whether you think what I say is true or false.—Everyone thought what had been said was tremendously true.—So you agree, I said, that the pleasant is good and the painful bad. I must beg Prodicus here to excuse me from his distinctions between names. Whether you call it pleasant or delightful or enjoyable, or however and from whatever source you like to name [358b] such things, my excellent Prodicus, answer

me on the point I mean.—Prodicus laughed and agreed, and so did the others.—Well then, gentlemen, I said, what about this? All actions aimed at this, at living without pain and pleasantly, aren't they fine and beneficial? And isn't a fine action good and beneficial?—They agreed.—Then if the pleasant is good, I said, no one who knows or believes that something else is better than 358c what he is doing, and possible, goes on doing what he's doing when he could do the better. Nor is being defeated by oneself anything other than ignorance, nor being master of oneself anything other than wisdom.—Everyone agreed.—Well, then? Do you call ignorance something like this: having a false belief and being mistaken about matters of great importance?—Everyone agreed to this too.—Then isn't it the case, I said, that no one willingly goes toward bad things, or toward what he thinks bad? Nor 358d is it, it seems, in human nature to be willing to go toward what one thinks bad instead of the good. And when someone is forced to choose one of two bad things, no one will choose the greater when he could choose the lesser?—All of us agreed to all of this.—Well, then, I said, is there something you call dread and fear? And is it what I mean? (I'm speaking to you, Prodicus.) I mean an expectation of something bad, whether you call it fear or dread.—Protagoras and Hippias thought this was both dread and fear, 358e Prodicus that it was dread, but not fear.—It makes no difference, Prodicus, I said. The point is this. If what we said before is true, will any human being be willing to go toward what he dreads, when he could go toward what he doesn't? Or is that impossible, given what we have agreed? For it has been agreed that what a person dreads he thinks bad, and no one willingly goes toward or takes what he thinks bad.—Everyone 359a agreed to this too.

COURAGE IS WISDOM

Socrates argues that cowardice is ignorance of what is to be feared, so courage is wisdom.

SOCRATES With this laid down, Prodicus and Hippias, I said, let Protagoras here defend to us how his first answer is right. Not his very first answer: then he said that of the five parts of excellence none was like any other, each having its own distinct power. I don't mean that, but what he said later. Later he said that four of them were reasonably close to one [359b] another, but that one, courage, differed very much from the others. And he said I would know it by this evidence: You'll find, Socrates, people who are utterly impious, unjust, licentious and ignorant, yet supremely courageous, and from this you will know that courage is very different from the other parts of excellence. I was very surprised at that answer right then, and even more so since I have gone through these things with you. Anyway, I asked him whether he meant that the courageous are confident, and he said, [359c] Yes, and eager too. Do you remember giving that answer, Protagoras? I said.—He agreed he did.—Come on, then, I said, tell us: toward what do you say the courageous are eager to go? Toward the same things as cowards?—He said no.—Toward different things, then?—Yes, he said.—Do cowards go toward things that inspire confidence, and the courageous toward frightening things?—So people say, Socrates.—That's true, I said, but that's not [359d] what I'm asking. Toward what do you say the courageous are eager to go? Toward frightening things, believing them to be frightening, or toward things that aren't?—But that, he said, was just shown to be impossible, in the arguments you were making.—That's true too, I said. So if that was correctly shown, no one goes toward what he thinks frightening, since being defeated by oneself was found to be ignorance.—He agreed.—But then everyone goes toward what they are confident about, cowards and courageous alike, and in this respect cowards and courageous go toward the same [359e] things.—But surely,

Socrates, he said, what cowards go toward and what the courageous go toward are complete opposites. Take war: the one lot are willing to go to war, the others aren't.—Is going to war fine, I said, or shameful?—Fine, he said.—Then if it's fine, we agreed earlier that it's good too, since we agreed that all fine actions are good.—True, and I always think so.—And rightly, I said. 360a But which do you say are unwilling to go to war, though it is fine and good?—The cowards, he said.—Then if it's fine and good, I said, is it also pleasant?—That has been agreed, at any rate, he said.—So are the cowards, knowing it, unwilling to go toward what is finer and better and more pleasant?—But if we agree to that as well, he said, we'll wreck our earlier agreements.—And what about the courageous man? Doesn't he go toward what is finer and better and more pleasant?—We have to agree, he said.—So in general the 360b courageous don't feel shameful fears when they're afraid, or shameful confidence when they're confident?—True, he said.—And if not shameful, aren't they fine?—He agreed.—And if fine, then good too?—Yes.—Whereas cowards, the rash and the mad, on the contrary, feel shameful fears and shameful confidence?—He agreed.—And is it through anything other than lack of understanding and ignorance that they are confident about what is shameful and bad?—That's 360c so, he said.—Well, then? That through which cowards are cowards, do you call it cowardice or courage?—Cowardice, he said.—And didn't it turn out that they are cowards through ignorance of what is frightening?—Certainly, he said.—So it is through this ignorance that they are cowards?—He agreed.—And that through which they are cowards is, you agree, cowardice?—He assented.—Then ignorance of what is and isn't frightening would be cowardice?—He nodded.—But surely, I said, courage is the opposite 360d of cowardice.—He said yes.—And wisdom about what is and isn't frightening is the opposite of ignorance of these things?—Here too he still nodded.—And ignorance of these things is cowardice?—Here he nodded very reluctantly.—So wisdom about what is and isn't frightening is courage, being the opposite of ignorance of these things?—At this he was no longer willing even to nod, and kept silent.—And I

said: What's this, Protagoras? You neither say yes to my question nor no?—Finish it yourself, he said.—I'll ask you just one more thing, I said: 360e do you still think, as you did at first, that some people are utterly ignorant and yet supremely courageous?—You seem to me, Socrates, he said, to be set on winning by making me the one who answers. So I'll do you this favor and say that, given what we have agreed, it seems to me impossible.

THE REVERSAL

Socrates notes that he and Protagoras have switched sides on whether excellence can be taught.

SOCRATES Really, I said, I'm asking all these questions for no other reason than that I want to examine how matters stand with excellence, and what excellence itself is. For I know that once this 361a became clear, that other question would become perfectly clear too, the one on which you and I each spun out a long speech, I saying that excellence can't be taught, you that it can. And it seems to me that the outcome of our argument just now is accusing us and laughing at us, like a person, and if it found a voice it would say: "You're strange people, Socrates and Protagoras. You, who said earlier that excellence can't be taught, are now bent on contradicting yourself, 361b trying to show that everything is knowledge, justice and moderation and courage alike, which is the way excellence would most clearly turn out to be teachable. If excellence were something other than knowledge, as Protagoras was trying to say, it clearly couldn't be taught. But now, if it turns out to be knowledge through and through, as you are bent on showing, Socrates, it will be astonishing if it can't be taught. Protagoras, on the other hand, who assumed then that it could be taught, now seems bent on the opposite, on showing it to be almost anything 361c rather than knowledge. And that way it would be least teachable of all." So, Protagoras, seeing all this terribly tangled and turned upside down, I am very eager for it to become clear. I'd like us to go through all this and arrive at what excellence is, and then exam-

ine again whether it can be taught or not, so that your Epimetheus doesn't trip us up and deceive us in our inquiry [361d] too, just as he neglected us in the distribution, according to you. In the myth, too, I liked Prometheus better than Epimetheus. It is by following him and taking forethought for my whole life that I busy myself with all these things. And if you were willing, as I said at the start, I would be very glad to look into them with you.

And Protagoras said: I commend your eagerness, Socrates, and the way you work through an argument. I don't think I'm a bad man [361e] in other respects, and I'm the least envious of men. I've told many people, in fact, that of all those I meet I admire you by far the most, and of those your age far above all. And I say that I wouldn't be surprised if you became one of the men renowned for wisdom. We'll go through these matters another time, whenever you like. But now it's time to turn to something else. [362a]

Well, I said, that's what we should do, if you think so. In fact it has long been time for me to go where I said I was going. I stayed only as a favor to the beautiful Callias.

When these things had been said and heard, we left.[27]

27 "The beautiful Callias" puns on his name, which echoes *kalos*, "beautiful."