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Protagoras and the Myth of Plato's *Protagoras*

1 Preliminaries

The 'Great Speech' of Protagoras in Plato's *Protagoras* (320c–328d) is an inexhaustibly rich text, and important for many different inquiries. My concern here is with the question of what we can learn from the Speech, and in particular from the Myth which takes up the first part of it (Plat. *Prot.* 320d–322d), about the historical Protagoras himself. I will attempt here to reconstruct the likely theses and themes of a plausible Protagorean *Urtext* – that is to say, a written work or display-speech, *epideixis*, by Protagoras himself, which one may hypothesize was used by Plato as a source. I will try to show that we can gain some insight in this way into the ideas of the historical Protagoras about religion, democracy, and the art of speech (*logos*).

Of course, any such *Urtext* is entirely hypothetical, and any attempt to recover its contents can only be highly speculative. However, I think the speculation is worthwhile. Our early evidence for Protagoras' ideas is appallingly meagre, and the *Protagoras* itself is far and away the most potentially valuable source we have.[1] Fortunately, Plato's portrayal in the *Protagoras* is nuanced and philosophically rich; whether to count it as essentially sympathetic or critical is a delicate question, but Protagoras here is at any rate far from being a generic straw-man sophist.[2] Moreover, we may reasonably expect that the Myth serves

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1 As Theodor Gomperz convincingly argued, the *Protagoras* and the *Theaetetus* are incompatible. We must choose which of Plato's representations of Protagoras to take as historically grounded; and literary, historical, and philosophical considerations unanimously support a preference for the *Protagoras* (Gomperz 1901–1912, vol. 1, 458). Cf. Levi 1940, 286.

2 I cannot here argue the case for Plato's engagement with Protagoras in the *Protagoras* as a whole being largely constructive, and will generally set aside the question of how far Plato himself would endorse the views presented in the ‚Great Speech'. For a synoptic reading of the dialogue with which I broadly agree, cf. Gagarin 1969. Beresford 2013 argues that the Protagorean *Urtext* was an exercise in anti-traditional ‚rationalistic' explanation, so that Plato's attitude must be, on theological grounds, one of deep hostility. But this seems to me to render Plato's procedures perplexing. If his ultimate purpose is to critique Protagoras as an atheist,

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some distinctive and constructive philosophical purposes. For the Myth is somewhat disproportionate and oddly framed in relation to its dialectical context: though it addresses part of Socrates' challenge by explaining why the Athenians might reasonably allow all citizens to participate in politics (Plat. *Prot.* 319b–e, cf. 322e–323a), nothing about the Myth directly supports the all-important ultimate conclusion that virtue is *taught*, especially not in the way that Protagoras claims to be a teacher.[3] The prominence of the Myth thus suggests that it might well have further philosophical purposes of its own, some of which might relate to Protagoras himself.

So we may approach the Great Speech with at least a heuristic optimism about its value as a source for the political ideas of the historical Protagoras.[4] At the same time, it is very difficult to imagine that it straightforwardly *reproduces* a Protagorean work, in the way, for example, that Xenophon is often taken to have transmitted Prodicus' *epideixis* on the Choice of Heracles (*Memorabilia* 1,1,21–33). That seems not to be the way Plato operates. The 'speech of Lysias' in the *Phaedrus* is very unlikely to be simply Lysias; no one seriously believes that Socrates got the *Menexenus* from Aspasia; and it is a long time since anyone has read the *Timaeus* as a plagiarized rewrite of the *Timaeus Locrus*. Apart from anything else, Plato is surely too great an egoist (despite the determinedly impersonal *form* of his writings) for uncreative borrowing – too ferocious a competitor in the ancient Greek *agôn* of the wise, in which his philosophical enterprise must be situated.[5] Often his agonistic aims require *bricolage*: Plato often acts as a kind of philosophical impresario, reworking and resituating the ideas of others. But in every case he creates something new, and at this distance we cannot hope to subtract his alterations with any confidence or precision. In the particular case at hand, there is the further complication that, given Protagoras' great fame, Plato's intended reader must be supposed to have had *some* prior familiarity with his ideas. Taken together, these points leave us with a complex and delicate set of interpretive constraints. The Great Speech must have been *at once* somehow recognizably Protagorean, an evocative representation of his

why confusingly represent him as the propounder of a myth, especially one in which moral norms come from Zeus?

3 At most, in this regard the Myth is an odd sort of *eikos* argument, giving a plausible account of *how it might have come to be* that virtue is (and is generally considered to be) taught.

4 See also, from another angle, the measured remarks of Taylor 1991, 78–79.

5 On the importance of the agonistic context, cf. Lloyd 1987, 50–108 – from whom I borrow the term ‚egoism', though he uses it differently, for first-personal modes of presentation –, Nightingale 1995 and Barney 1998.

known commitments, *and* an impressively ingenious novelty, redounding to Plato's own credit as author.[6]

Now there are two ways in which the Great Speech could meet these opposed constraints coherently, and even with elegance. First, the Speech might be Protagorean in its doctrinal commitments, yet Platonic in its focus and agenda. Plato may have shifted central points to the periphery and vice versa, drawing out implications which Protagoras had never thought through for new purposes of his own. Second, the Speech could combine continuity in philosophical content with transformations in literary *form*. We have plenty of other evidence for Plato as a brilliantly creative *mythopoiêtês*; so we might reasonably conjecture that in the Myth, he is playfully imposing his own form on source material from a different genre.[7] Nor is it difficult to imagine what that genre might have been. As a number of scholars have argued, it is easy to imagine Protagoras as author of an *Urtext* in *Kulturentstehungslehre* or *Kulturgeschichte* form, covering much the same prehistorical ground as the Myth.[8] Such a text would fit nicely into the well-established tradition which Karl Reinhardt traced back to Democritus (according to tradition, of course, Protagoras' teacher, cf. Diogenes Laertius 9,50), on the basis of family resemblances among later texts on the rise of civilization.[9] And as has often been noted in this connection, Diogenes Laertius' booklist for Protagoras includes the tantalizing, highly suggestive title 'On the Original Disposition of Things' (*Peri tês en archêi katastaseôs*) (D. L. 9,55).

I will adopt the postulate of a Protagorean *Urtext* for the Great Speech, in the form of a naturalistic *Kulturgeschichte*, as a working hypothesis in the rest of this paper. To be clear, this is not because the Myth as we have it *could not* have been the work of Protagoras himself. True, Protagoras was famously an agnostic about the gods (80 B 4 DK). And we have relatively good and early evidence (from Timon) that he was hounded out of Athens on religious grounds (Sext. Emp. *Adv. M.* IX 57). But there would still be no inconsistency in his having used a myth for the presentation of his ideas. Even an atheist may deploy a myth as a useful method of exposition, so long as it presents a detachable philosophical content which the reader can extract by 'demythologization' – as we will shortly

6 Cf. Manuwald 2013, 163–164.

7 Contra Manuwald 2013, 166–169.

8 Most notably in recent years, Beresford 2013.

9 Reinhardt 1912; cf. Cole 1990, Utzinger 2003: the relevant authors include Lucretius, Vitruvius, and Diodorus Siculus. But see Dodds 1973, 10–11 and Kahn 1981, 100 as well as references in Cole *passim*, for doubts as to the identification of Democritus in particular as the source of the tradition. A wide range of relevant texts are collected and helpfully discussed in Lovejoy/Boas 1935.

do with the Myth of the Great Speech. And an agnostic can deploy myth with even greater ease. He need only stipulate that he remains agnostic on this very question – whether the myth is true in literal or only in demythologized terms – thus leaving the interpretive choice open to his audience. So I do not mean to claim that the mythic form must be Plato's because it could not have been Protagoras' – only that it is *likely* to be Plato's creation, on the basis of the general considerations of authorial strategy noted above.

2 The argument of the Myth

Demythologized, the Myth of the Great Speech is easily read as a clear and philosophically powerful argument – a kind of thought-experiment, in fact, designed to help us identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for human flourishing. In imagining the initial state of the human race, before any of the gifts of Prometheus, we are being asked to imagine human existence with all our rational capacities and civilized practices subtracted (Plat. *Prot.* 320d–321c). The question is posed: could human beings, given this limitation to our purely physical capacities, survive? Answer: No: we are physically weak and adaptively impoverished relative to other animals, and would die out. Next question: what then needs to be added? The gifts of Prometheus represent a first proposed answer: the crafts, or rather the kind of wisdom necessary to develop them (along with their indispensable material precondition, fire) (Plat. *Prot.* 321c–322b). Will that be sufficient? Again no: the fully realized crafts are still insufficient (even on the implausible supposition that they could be attained by human beings incapable of civic life); and adding in religious practices and the rudiments of language is no help either. Why? Because human beings need above all to live in communities and to cooperate, if only to defend themselves against wild animals; but without justice they cannot cooperate, and will destroy each other (Plat. *Prot.* 322b–c). And this in turn points us to the right answer. The *sine qua non* for human flourishing can only be the factor which makes cooperative, sustainable city life possible, namely the common possession of civic virtue. Therefore all human beings must share in justice and shame (and whatever other dispositions 'civic virtue' might be supposed to involve).[10] It seems indisputable that, whatever its other content and purposes, this analytical point is the principal one which the Myth is deployed to make. It is thus above all what we might call an *insufficiency argument* – or rather, strictly speaking, a series of them –, arguing that *neither* non-rational human nature *nor* craft-rationality *nor* any other factor distinct from civic virtue (language, religion, material culture) suffices to make possible human flourishing.[11] And if the elements of civilization here contrasted with civic virtue seem on reflection to depend on it themselves (could the arts *really* flourish without a division of labour, which implies social cooperation?), so much the better for Protagoras' point. That is, we may be meant to see in the end not only that civil society is impossible without justice, but that none of the other elements of civilization distinguished from it here are really independently achievable either, so that the whole argument is *per impossibile* in the first place.[12]

Now an important question is whether we should view the Myth as expressing only this atemporal, analytical argument, or also a *historical* narrative, with the temporal distinction between the first and second distributions retained as part of its demythologized content. Read as a historical narrative, it would belong to a familiar genre, *Kulturgeschichte*; and I've already suggested this probably *was* the form of any Protagorean *Urtext*. So this would perhaps be the more natural interpretation of Plato's text as well. But Plato's version is rather unsatisfying so read; for it does not even hint at any demythologized explanation of *how* humans might have come to acquire justice, having lacked it at first. More generally, as a *Kulturgeschichte* the Myth is rather perfunctory.[13] There is here none of the gradual, step-by-step progression we find in other early narratives of the rise of civilization, nor any attention to the stages by which individual arts develop; and given that the *technai* are only really of use given a cooperative division of labour (as Plato well knows, cf. *Republic* II, 369e–370e), the presentation of their development as *prior* to justice seems historically wrong anyway. Since reading the Myth as a historical narrative has so little to add, it seems to me that Plato at most intends to leave this interpretive question open:

10 This is emphasised by Manuwald 2013 as the central thesis here, and I agree that it is reasonable to attribute it to the historical Protagoras (164–165).

11 At a very high level of abstraction, the argument thus has some formal similarities with other arguments in which Plato calls on us to "strip away" extrinsic variables in order to detect whether some X is as such sufficient for Y: for instance, the argument at *Phlb.* 20d–21e that the life of pleasure simply as such (as a mollusk might enjoy it, for instance) could not constitute the good.

12 In this it might resemble another Platonic story of human beginnings, the 'city of pigs' in *Republic* II, which I have argued should on reflection be seen to be not a genuinely possible society (Barney 2001).

13 Cf. Manuwald 1999, 178–179; 2013, 172–173, though his talk of "discrepancies" and "inconsistencies" seems to me too strong.

his version of the Myth is essentially the analytical, 'thought-experiment' exercise described above.

As has been recognised before,[14] the demythologized content of the Myth has another important point to make. For it is a contribution to the ancient debate, originating in the 5th century but clearly still alive and urgent in Plato's day, over the normative standing of justice. The Myth addresses the *topos*, is justice a matter of convention (*nomos*) or nature (*phusis*)? And it offers a clear, yet complex and sophisticated answer. The answer is 'both', and Protagoras' position here is strikingly similar to that of the Anonymus Iamblichi, who claims:[15]

> ἔτι τοίνυν οὐκ ἐπὶ *πλεονεξίαν* ὁρμᾶν δεῖ, οὐδὲ τὸ κράτος τὸ ἐπὶ τῇ πλεονεξίᾳ ἡγεῖσθαι ἀρετὴν εἶναι, τὸ δὲ τῶν νόμων ὑπακούειν δειλίαν· πονηροτάτη γὰρ αὕτη ἡ διάνοιά ἐστι, καὶ ἐξ αὐτῆς πάντα τἀναντία τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς γίγνεται, κακία τε καὶ βλάβη. εἰ γὰρ ἔφυσαν μὲν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀδύνατοι καθ' ἕνα ζῆν, συνῆλθον δὲ πρὸς ἀλλήλους τῇ ἀνάγκῃ εἴκοντες, πᾶσα δὲ ἡ ζωὴ αὐτοῖς εὕρηται καὶ τὰ τεχνήματα πρὸς ταύτην, σὺν ἀλλήλοις δὲ εἶναι αὐτοὺς κἂν ἀνομίαι διαιτᾶσθαι οὐχ οἷόν τε (μείζω γὰρ αὐτοῖς ζημίαν ‹ἂν› οὕτω γίγνεσθαι ἐκείνης τῆς κατὰ ἕνα διαίτης), διὰ ταύτας τοίνυν τὰς ἀνάγκας τόν τε νόμον καὶ τὸ δίκαιον ἐμβασιλεύειν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ οὐδαμῇ μεταστῆναι ἂν αὐτά· φύσει γὰρ ἰσχυρὰ ἐνδεδέσθαι ταῦτα.
>
> Again, one should not pursue *pleonexia*, nor consider that power which is based on it is virtue, or that to obey the laws is cowardice; for this attitude of mind is most wicked, and from it arises everything that is opposite to what is good, to wit, evil and harm. For if in fact men are by nature unsuited to living in isolation, and have formed associations with one another under pressure of necessity, and if the whole of life and its inventions have been developed by them for this end, and if they cannot associate with one another without the observance of law (for this would be a greater source of suffering to them than living in isolation), because of all these necessities law and justice hold the kingship among men, and can in no way be displaced; for they are firmly fixed in us by nature.
>
> (Anon. Iambl. [= 89 DK] 6,1, Dillon/Gergel 2003 transl. revised)

14 E.g. Beresford 2013, 148–158, Kerferd 1981, 126 – though each, as it seems to me, gives only one side of Protagoras' answer.

15 I take no stand on the intriguing question of whether the Anon. Iambl. might in fact be Protagoras himself. De Romilly 1992, 168–171, notes both the similarities between the two accounts and some interesting respects in which the Anon.'s position seems more nuanced or advanced.

The Anonymus is here attacking a view like that of Callicles, Thrasymachus, Glaucon, or (as I read him) Antiphon – the view that the pursuit of *pleonexia* is normal and natural for human beings. His argument is one about the authority or normative standing of justice, one which appeals (as his opponent also does) to claims about human nature. Because we are all vulnerable and interdependent, he claims, 'law and justice hold the kingship' among us; they are 'fixed in us by nature'. This is meant to rebut the argument that law and justice are purely social creations, ones which put inappropriate and dispensable brakes on human nature. (Note that neither side of the argument here is appealing simply to self-interest, or at least not solely and directly. The question is rather what way of life is in accordance with human nature, taken to impose rational norms on our conduct; here [if not earlier] we can see the origins of the ethical 'naturalism' so prominent in later Greek ethics.)

Now though the position of the Anon. Iambl. is clearly framed as a response to the arguments of Antiphon and his kin, it is also the recovery of a very ancient and we might say 'conservative' position, found in Hesiod's *Works and Days*:[16]

> τόνδε γὰρ ἀνθρώποισι νόμον διέταξε Κρονίων,
> ἰχθύσι μὲν καὶ θηρσὶ καὶ οἰωνοῖς πετεηνοῖς
> ἔσθειν ἀλλήλους, ἐπεὶ οὐ δίκη ἐστὶ μετ' αὐτοῖς·
> ἀνθρώποισι δ' ἔδωκε δίκην, ἣ πολλὸν ἀρίστη
> γίνεται·
>
> For the son of Kronos ordained this law for human beings:
> That fish and beasts and winged birds
> Should eat each other, since there is no justice in them;
> But to humans he gave justice, which proves the best by far.
>
> (Hes. *Op.* 276–280)

So the conventions which sustain justice (in the relevant broad sense of law-abiding, non-pleonectic, cooperative behaviour) are deeply natural to us. To reduce it to a slogan, Hesiod and the Anon. Iambl. both claim that for human beings, *nomos* IS *phusis*; and that seems to be the position of Plato's Protagoras as well. For here in the Myth, exactly as in Hesiod, we have a distribution of justice *by Zeus himself*, to the human species exclusively and universally, marking us out as distinct from the other animals and superior to them. And this is, as Hesiod shows, the canonical way to express the thought that justice is neces-

16 As noted by Decleva Caizzi 1999, 319, Kahn 1981, 107, and in a more general way Levi 1940 "traditionalism", 296) and de Romilly 1992 ch. 6 ("Reconstruction from the Tabula Rasa").

sary, distinctive, and above all natural to us as human beings.[17] So it is no coincidence that Protagorean justice has all the markers of the 'natural' in the context of the *nomos-phusis* contrast of his era: it is universal, permanent, necessary, and authoritative in setting norms for us.[18]

These points are largely familiar, but have not been connected as clearly as they should be with the question of the Protagorean *Urtext*. For this philosophical agenda – the refutation of the critique of justice as merely conventional – is clearly a project of Plato's own, and makes it much easier to see why Plato would transform a Protagorean *Kulturgeschichte* into a Myth. A *Kulturgeschichte* is a historical narrative; and a historical narrative showing the necessity of justice can hardly be anything but a story about the establishment of social conventions. It would be hard for such a narrative not to at least *seem* to reduce justice to a matter of merely human imposition, thus losing the point which is made clearly by the more abstract, analytical, quasi-atemporal mode of the Myth (and by the still more abstract argument of the Anonymus Iamblichi): that justice has the normative authority belonging to what is given by nature. Protagoras' *Urtext* might well have argued eloquently, as its Platonic counterpart does, for the importance of justice as the source of human flourishing, and yet failed to make its metaethical position clear.

So if, as I hypothesise, Plato has transformed a Protagorean *Kulturgeschichte* into an ingenious and diverting Myth, his point in doing so would not just be to show off. Rather, he is likely to be resolving what was ambiguous, or at least open to misunderstanding, in the original version, and – perhaps rather audaciously – claiming Protagoras for his own side of the debate. This helps to make sense of the otherwise curiously *belated* air of the Myth – the fact that it is naturally read as a response to the work of thinkers somewhat younger than Protagoras himself. Not so much younger that it would be chronologically impossible for Protagoras himself to have argued against them; but still, the dialectic seems odd. If however the vital point about *nomos* and *phusis* was *not* clearly made in the Protagorean original, we can allow that the Myth is what it looks like, *a response to* Antiphon and kindred views (including those which may have been

17 Contra Kerferd 1953, it does not tell against this that Protagoras later denies that justice is "natural" in the sense of being independent of teaching and learning (Plat. *Prot.* 323c). The historical Protagoras is said to have held, sensibly enough, that teaching needs nature and practice both (80 B 3 DK).

18 Contrast, for instance, Hermogenes' conventionalist position on the correctness of names in the *Cratylus*: names *vary* among different communities, they can be *changed* with no loss of correctness; and therefore our acts of imposition are *sufficient* for their correctness (Plat. *Crat.* 383a–5e).

constructed by Plato himself, e.g. Callicles). It may also be worth mentioning here that we have no independent evidence that Protagoras himself ever used the *nomos-phusis* framework in regards to any topic. The schema looms so large in our meager evidence for sophistic debates that we find it natural to think of as a conceptual framework common to all; but in fact nothing shows that it goes back as far as Protagoras himself.

My hypothesis so far, then, is that a Protagorean *Urtext* stands behind the Great Speech and the Myth in particular, but that, being in *Kulturgeschichte* form, it gave only a blurry account of the normative authority of justice; and that Plato has recast it in mythic terms not least in order to correct that. This makes his strategy one of rational reconstruction and sympathetic appropriation: Plato is disambiguating Protagoras in order to enlist him in the Hesiodic tradition, and mobilize him against his more subversive successors. In fact he is using Protagoras in some of the same ways in which he (I would argue) uses Parmenides in the *Parmenides*: the great man returns to clear up some misunderstandings about his rather ambiguous text, making it clear where he stands in relation to the later dialectic (namely, on Plato's side!) and offering a road map for philosophical progress. In the case of the *Protagoras*, the Great Speech, with its insistence on the natural authority of justice, its picture of human beings as inherently social, and its complex account of moral education, points clearly forward to Plato's own account of justice in Books II–IV of the *Republic*.[19]

3 Protagorean politics: Religion

If this is right, then it confirms my initial suggestion that the Great Speech is likely to differ from the Protagorean *Urtext* in its agenda and emphases; and it is worth asking what those of the original might have been. I think we can identify two points which, while marginal in the Platonic Myth, might have been – indeed, philosophically speaking, *ought* to have been – of central importance to Protagoras himself. To see how Protagoras himself might have proceeded, we need to begin by noting that not every *Kulturgeschichte* was a neutral and comprehensive historical survey. Some of our surviving evidence seems to reveal a strong emphasis on a single area of development or indeed an *argument*, typi-

19 Cf. the striking enumeration of shared points in Vegetti 2004, 157, and the role of the *Protagoras* as "plaque tournante entre les dialogues de la première période et la *République*" according to Brisson 1975, 35.

cally for a tendentious evaluative claim about what factor most deserves credit for human flourishing. Thus Posidonius later claims that all improvements in human existence have been owed to philosophical wisdom (*apud* Sen. *Epist.* 90).[20] Unless Plato's transposition to Myth has changed (and impoverished) it beyond all recognition, the Protagorean *Urtext* must have had this kind of selective focus and partisan agenda, consisting not in a full narrative of the rise of civilization but in an argument for justice as its principal cause.[21] As such, it would be above all a historicized version of the claims we find in the Anonymus Iamblichi. In the rest of this paper, I will develop three further, complementary points which would have been easily integrated with a Protagorean argument along these lines.

The first has to do with religion. Immediately after Protagoras tells us of the emergence of human beings, armed with the 'first distribution' of fire and wisdom for the crafts, he specifies that religious practice originated at the same time:

> Ἐπειδὴ δὲ ὁ ἄνθρωπος θείας μετέσχε μοίρας, πρῶτον μὲν διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ συγγένειαν ζῴων μόνον θεοὺς ἐνόμισεν, καὶ ἐπεχείρει βωμούς τε ἱδρύεσθαι καὶ ἀγάλματα θεῶν· ἔπειτα φωνὴν καὶ ὀνόματα ταχὺ διηρθρώσατο τῇ τέχνῃ, καὶ οἰκήσεις καὶ ἐσθῆτας καὶ ὑποδέσεις καὶ στρωμνὰς καὶ τὰς ἐκ γῆς τροφὰς ηὕρετο.
>
> Since humans had a share of the divine dispension, first because of their kinship with the god they alone among animals worshipped the gods, and erected altars and sacred images. Then they quickly by craft articulated speech and words, and devised houses, clothes, shoes, and blankets, and the nourishing fruits of the earth.[22]
>
> (Plat. *Prot.* 322a)

It is striking that religion and language here are mentioned even in advance of the development of the crafts themselves, though whether this is intended to represent a temporal ordering is again unclear.[23] The phrasing here has also been found puzzling and problematic: what do this 'share' and 'kinship' amount to? Do they just refer to the partaking by humans in craft-wisdom,[24] or

20 For other examples cf. Cole 1990, 6–7.

21 Cf. Manuwald 1999, 178: the oddities and emphases of the Myth show that "Protagoras gar nicht originär eine Kulturentstehungslehre bieten, sondern auf der Grundlage von und in Auseinandersetzung mit einer oder mehreren vorhanden Kulturtheorien einen für seine Tätigkeit besonders wichtigen Aspekt [...] akzentuiert hervorheben wollte."

22 Translations from the *Protagoras* are by Lombardo/Bell 1992, sometimes with revisions.

23 Manuwald 1999, 192 suggests, plausibly, that religion and language are specified as canonical features which, like the crafts, distinguish humans from the other animals.

24 As Taylor 1991, 84 plausibly suggests.

to something more? Is there perhaps a hint at the Xenophanean critique of traditional religion as anthropomorphic, reinforced by the emphasis on sacred images?[25] These are tantalizing questions, but I want to set them aside in favour of a more central point which has not received the attention it deserves. This is that religion (whatever its precise source and significance) goes with the first distribution and so *not with the second.* This is important because it implies that religious belief makes no contribution to justice:[26] Protagoras is pointing out – quietly, indirectly, but unambiguously – that worshipping the gods does nothing to make people behave decently to each other. As we saw above, the Myth as a whole operates as a sort of thought-experiment, and more specifically an insufficiency argument. So too on this point. Imagine human beings with altars and icons, but with no civic institutions designed to instill virtue – no practices of moral education, exhortation, or correction. Would their religious practice be sufficient for social order and cooperation? Surely not. Or at any rate it would depend on what kind of gods they recognised: Zeus Xenios, protector of vulnerable travelers, or some ferocious, amoral superpower? But people indifferent to civic virtue would surely follow gods in their own image – like Polyphemus the Cyclops in the *Odyssey*, who prays to his father Poseidon for revenge, yet refuses to recognise the gods as moral arbiters and rejects any moral duties to strangers. A *moralized* religion might be sufficient for the practice of justice; but why and how would one ever arise, in a society with no prior attachment to any moral norms?[27]

Though it is only briefly visible in Plato's version, this point might well have figured as an important theme in Protagoras' *Urtext*. It certainly *should* have done. For, like the Myth as a whole, this point serves as a powerful contribution to 5th century sophistic debate. In fact, it is most easily understood as a rebuttal to the kind of etiology of religion we see in the famous *Sisyphus* fragment. That

25 Cf. Denyer 2008, 106 *ad loc.*, also Thein 2003, 64–66. Müller 1976 offers a thorough and intriguing discussion of this passage in conjunction with our other evidence for Protagoras' religious views.

26 Vegetti 2004, 147 notes "l'insufficienza del culto", but seems to me to understate the importance of the point. Cf. also Müller 1976, 316 n. 17.

27 The Cyclops is the great paradigm of a lawless, pre-social, quasi-human form of life. The Cyclopean attitude to religion is interestingly nuanced. Polyphemus warns Odysseus that they do not defer to Zeus or the gods generally as moral arbiters (Hom. *Od.* 9,265–273), and we see nothing of altars or icons. On the other hand he himself is quite literally akin to Poseidon, and prays to him – successfully – for revenge (Hom. *Od.* 9,525). So they have some traffic with the gods, and it is based on a very concrete *suggeneia*; it just is not moralized, and so not the kind of religion that does a vulnerable traveler any good.

text, probably by Critias (but representing the speech of a character in a satyr play, so that its relation to his own beliefs can only be guessed at), proposes that religion was first devised as a supplement to the law. The argument of the fragment is, like the Myth, an insufficiency argument, distinguishing three stages of human existence. The first is an obviously unsatisfactory, sub-human state of 'bestial anarchy' and the rule of force. This is rectified by the imposition of law and justice (here the work of a purely human elite), with punishment instituted for wrongdoers. But this is still inadequate, since secret lawbreaking escapes human notice and so cannot be punished. (This point is of course also crucial to the conventionalist critique of Antiphon, and Glaucon & Adeimantus as well.) The wise elite solve this problem by introducing belief in – and fear of – a race of all-seeing, all-knowing gods, whose punishment cannot be escaped. This innovation is presented as *the* origin of religion, with no further basis or function for it hinted at. In sum, belief in the gods is the product of a human convention, devised by the wise to ensure social order. The Myth of the *Protagoras* presents the reverse diachronic sequence: religion comes naturally to us, but the ethical norms and restraints which preserve the law are independent of it and come later. Protagoras actually agrees with the *Sisyphus* author that *nomos* and its usual enforcement mechanisms are insufficient in themselves to ensure law-abidingness, and that what is required is a widely *internalized* inhibition against wrongdoing.[28] He just does not think that religion can do the job. Instead, civic virtue needs to be valued directly and in itself. Each generation of citizens must raise the next to be the kind of people who will be ashamed to do wrong, and who will rebuke and punish wrongdoing in others; the only rationale either necessary or sufficient for that is the true, non-supernatural one that to do so is necessary for civic life itself.[29]

28 As Beresford 2013, 155–158 has emphasised, the "second distribution" of the Myth should not be confused with the mere institution of a social contract: justice, civic virtue, and most obviously shame are psychological dispositions inhibiting us against wrongdoing, *not* just external mechanisms designed to punish or prevent it (contra e.g. Denyer 2008 *ad loc.*). It is perhaps a sign of this that Protagoras says remarkably little about "law" in the Myth, even though law and justice are closely collocated in the most obvious comparison texts (including the *Works and Days* and the Anonymus Iamblichi), and though in the *logos* part of the Speech the learning of virtue turns out to be a matter of internalizing the law (Plat. *Prot.* 326c–d, cf. 327c6–d2). This is perhaps in part to avoid muddying the point about *nomos* and *phusis* as *sources* of normative authority which I identified above; but it also helps to make it clear that the necessary gifts are essentially psychological, with social institutions as just a means of reinforcement.

29 It might seem to tell against my reading that Protagoras occasionally throws in "piety" as a virtue along with justice, moderation, and civic virtue in the latter part of the Great Speech

In the context of Plato's Myth, Protagoras' brief reference to religion does no real work. It is puzzling in the manner of a vestigial limb – so much so that scholars have generally not been able to see what point it makes at all. But a proclamation of the independence of morality from religion would have been of enormous significance to Protagoras himself. For Protagoras is famously the first known agnostic (80 B 4 DK); and the Myth, seen in this light, amounts to a powerful defense of that agnosticism against rival positions and critiques. Protagoras would be saying: "Unlike the *Sisyphus* author, or Antiphon, I hold that justice is in a sense natural – which is what Hesiod really meant all along by presenting it as a gift of Zeus. As such, it is universal, necessary, and has normative authority over us as human beings. But it does not follow – as you traditionalists might assume – that justice depends on religion. Think it over and you will see that a belief in gods could do nothing to induce the practice of justice in a society where it was not already valued independently. And given that it is not sufficient, there is no reason to think that religion is necessary for justice either. Thus we can acknowledge our ignorance of the divine without threatening morality and the social order. For even if belief in the traditional gods dies out, our human need for cooperation will remain the same, and so will our capacity to teach and learn justice from each other. So fear not: I come not to debunk justice, but to explain its true origin and value, setting it on a firm and rational footing."[30]

(*asebeia:* Plat. *Prot.* 324a1; *to hosion einai:* Plat. *Prot.* 325a1). But it is unproblematic for Protagoras' position if religious belief *plus* justice and shame results in a moralized piety. The point stands that if (for instance) people believe that piety demands decent behaviour to strangers, it will be because they believe that justice demands it and that the gods care about justice. Neither belief can be derived from the ‚first distribution' by itself.

30 The association of religion with the first gifts rather than the second also makes an important point which is the converse of the one I stress above: religion is independent of justice and civil society, and in some sense prior to it (also a point which tells against the *Sisyphus* etiology). As Tad Brennan points out to me, this is actually an important Platonic point: Plato himself believes that we are essentially akin to the gods (Plat. *Tim.* 41a–44c), and that this kinship, expressed in our capacity for rational activity and contemplation, goes deeper than our social and political capacities (cf. also Van Riel 2012, 161–162). Seen from this angle, Plato would be repurposing a Protagorean point here, rather than just passively retaining it.

4 Protagorean politics: Universalism

Protagoras' reference to religion is not the only point at which the Myth quietly commits him to a claim of enormous ethical significance, one which was plausibly of central importance to Protagoras himself. Another obvious example is the way in which the distribution to humans of the capacity for justice and civic virtue is (except for a few freak cases and educational failures) absolutely *universal*. This implies that justice and shame are adequately cultivated in *every* sustainable human society, however alien their customs may look, and that Greeks and barbarians are not fundamentally different in their capacities for it. This is not relativism; on the contrary, Protagoras' naturalism about justice must be counted as a kind of metaethical realism.[31] But his presentation of justice as universal entails a respect for other societies which might easily be confused with relativism: the two positions share the crucial implication that every society gets justice at least approximately right. So this 'universalist' thesis could well have been an important part of the Protagorean reality behind the 'relativist' position associated with him in the *Theaetetus* – even if the two are not ultimately compatible, and even if the *Theaetetus* makes it pretty plain that most of that position is Plato's own construction.

This universalism has other noteworthy features. One which Plato's Protagoras *does* make a point of is that even the contribution of nature (*phusis*) to virtue is not *hereditary*. The distribution of justice, or any capacity, is new with each generation: there is no reason to expect that the son of a distinguished political leader will have the same natural ability. (The claim of a fairly radical democrat, surely, implying a non-traditionalist conception of how 'nature' works and a rejection of aristocratic claims to ethical deference or political privilege.)[32] Yet another remarkable feature is that the universal distribution extends to women. Women are included in the 'second distribution' implicitly in his talk of *pantes anthrôpoi* at 322dff.; and then explicitly in references to the *trophos* and *mêtêr* as teachers at 325c6–d1. Most striking is the specific inclusion of women as themselves involved in moral teaching and punishment (*kai gunaika:* Plat. *Prot.* 325a6) – even though Protagoras has just before casually referred to 'the virtue of a *man*' (*anêr*). Protagoras is thus going out of his way to commit to the rather radical thesis that women have the same kind of capacity for civic

31 Contra Taylor 1991, 83–84, Manuwald 2013, 166 et al.; cf. Levi 1940, 295.

32 For an interesting reading of the Speech as an expression of democratic theory, cf. Farrar 1988, 77–98.

virtue as men (contra e.g. Gorgias *apud* Plat. *Men.* 71d–72a); indeed he gives us no reason to suppose that they generally have any less of it (as Plato will, alas, assume in *Republic* V).[33]

Putting together these three points, it seems fair to describe Plato's Protagoras as a radical *universalist egalitarian* about civic virtue: on his view, we have no reason to suppose that Greeks are any better at it than non-Greeks, or men than women, or aristocrats than plebeians.[34] Individuals differ in their degree of virtue, certainly, but there is no particular pattern to the distribution of their capacities; and anyway the results they attain are equally dependent on how they are taught. So what matters is to have a set of social and educational arrangements which will maximize the fulfilment of virtue by all, to whatever extent their capacities allow. The *Protagoras* makes little or nothing of this radically progressive ethical and political stance; but it is hard to believe that it was similarly unmarked in Protagoras' own work.

5 Protagorean politics: Logos

I have argued so far that the Great Speech, and the Myth in particular, commits Plato's Protagoras to three claims: (1) that the *sine qua non* of human flourishing is our natural capacity for justice; (2) that this capacity and its realization are unrelated to religion; and (3) that this capacity is realized collectively by every enduring society and, isolated aberrations aside, by every human individual. And while the starting-point of my argument, the postulation of a Protagorean *Urtext* behind the Great Speech, was entirely speculative, these observations are not. Thesis (1) is the central and explicit point of the Myth; and while (2) and (3)

33 Diogenes Laertius reports, rather shockingly, that according to both Aristoxenus and Favorinus, Plato's *Republic* was largely lifted from Protagoras' *Antilogiai* (3,37. 57). The question of what anyone might have had in mind by such a claim is easily connected with the curious fact that Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusai* seems to parody ideas reminiscent of Plato's *Republic* V, decades before the latter could have been written. Like Adam, I am intrigued by the idea that this might support the hypothesis of a Protagorean source for Plato's feminism, but ultimately sceptical (1902, vol. 1, 346–356).

34 This point should not be confused with readings of the Myth which take it as a Protagorean-Platonic apologia for Athenian democracy, responding to Socrates' critical questioning at Plat. *Prot.* 319a–320b (e.g. Gavray 2017, 162–78). My observations here are about aspects of the Myth which Plato chooses *not* to highlight, which we might infer to be inherited from his source material; and by the standards of this species-wide egalitarianism, Athenian democracy is far from defensible.

are left unremarked, they are unambiguously entailed by what Protagoras *does* say, lying latent in the Speech like unexploded bombs. This is itself a rather striking interpretive *explanandum*; and one possible explanation is that they were sufficiently prominent in Protagoras' own work that Plato felt he could not suppress them altogether, irrelevant to his own purposes though they might be.

Now these points, and (2) in particular, prompt a further question to which Protagoras ought to have had an answer. To what exactly *do* we owe our capacity for justice, if not to religious belief (or, for that matter, to an extrinsic 'social contract')? Can we further demythologize the 'second distribution'; and if so what remains? The Speech does not explicitly answer this question or even clearly frame it. But it does suggest an answer which – returning now to the realm of speculation – might well have been central to Protagoras' own work.

I will begin with two puzzles about the second distribution which have not been widely noticed. The first is: what exactly *do* Zeus and Hermes transmit to human beings? The immediate and tautological answer, 'justice' or 'civic virtue', is on reflection not quite right (though for convenience I have been speaking in these terms myself, and will continue to do so). My point here is not about the shifting, overlapping terminology Protagoras uses (justice, shame, temperance, civic virtue and so on) – though one does wonder exactly how all these concepts are related, and why he refuses to stick to any one of them. I have in mind a cruder question: what do these things collectively *consist* in or amount to? What exactly does Zeus do when he distributes them to all human beings? For this is in fact something of a puzzle. Protagoras is emphatic that civic virtue is *not* a 'natural' endowment in the sense of being one which people have from birth or develop automatically. He says flat out, "people do *not* regard this virtue as natural or self-generated, but as something taught and carefully developed in those in whom it is developed" (Plat. *Prot.* 323c). We have to be taught, and it is important to his argument that some gain more from that teaching than others. So, more carefully put, the second distribution can only be of a natural *capacity* for a certain kind of learning.

So far, so good: but this presses the question of what that capacity consists in. *What is it* in virtue of which we human beings are capable of acquiring the social virtues? This is after all a substantive, urgent, and still-open question of moral psychology: to what do we owe our remarkable capacity to learn justice? Is the capacity for justice to be identified with empathy, say, or a genetic predisposition for reciprocal altruism, or our ability to learn cooperative strategies in iterated prisoners' dilemmas, or Kantian pure practical reason? Which human capacity ultimately underwrites our ability to become members of a moralized civil society? The Myth should prompt us to reflect on this still-debated question; it would be nice to think that Protagoras himself had an answer.

There is also a second, related puzzle as to how this capacity is distributed. Protagoras presents a little dialogue between Zeus and Hermes in order to suggest, with some fanfare, that it is *not* distributed like the other crafts (Plat. *Prot.* 322c–323a). That is part of the point of the separate second distribution: unlike the other crafts, justice is special in being *universal*. And this might seem to help with our first question, for it at least suggests that the relevant capacity must be of a special *kind*, and detached from other kinds of rationality: humans are as a species 'hard-wired' for justice in a way we are not for other skills.

However, as initially presented, this aspect of the second distribution turns out to be misleading. For later on, in order to explain how outstanding men may come to have worthless sons (one of Socrates' pieces of evidence for the claim that virtue is unteachable), Protagoras offers a thought-experiment about a 'control case' of a *technê*, flute-playing (Plat. *Prot.* 327a–c). Imagine that flute-playing were necessary to a sustainable human society in the way that justice is. In that case everyone would assiduously teach flute-playing to everyone; and nearly everybody would learn to play the flute adequately. But some people would play much better than others due to differences in their natural abilities, and the children of the best flute-players would have no special advantage. (This anti-heredity position is, as I've noted above, a key feature of Protagoras' universalist egalitarianism.) Now these predictions imply that, according to Protagoras, flute-playing ability *is in fact* distributed in exactly the same way that justice is – namely, universally but with a great range among individuals (a range which is, again, 'natural' but not hereditary). The only difference is that, as things now stand, those who are untalented at flute-playing are generally under no particular pressure to become adequate at it. So it turns out that the second distribution is not really *structurally* special at all. Justice is distinctively 'distributed' only inasmuch as our social practices are designed to make it so. It is universal simply in the sense that it is universally taught.

Now Protagoras also draws to our attention the fact that there is another skill distributed in just the same way. In order to make plausible the claim that justice is taught by all to all, Protagoras introduces an analogy with language learning: "here everyone is a teacher of virtue, to the best of his ability, and you can't see a single one. You might as well look for a teacher of Greek; you wouldn't find a single one either" (Plat. *Prot.* 327e–328a). The analogy also appears in the *First Alcibiades*. Here Alcibiades, under pressure from Socrates to say how and from whom he learned about justice, falls back on saying that he learned it in the same way as everyone, i.e. from other people in general. And

when challenged by Socrates, he insists that ordinary people are competent teachers of some important things: "For example, I learned how to speak Greek from them; I couldn't tell you who my teacher was, but I give the credit to the very people you say are no good at teaching." Socrates in fact admits the point: "Yes, my noble friend, people in general are good teachers of that, and it would be only fair to praise them for their teaching" (Plat. *Alc.* I 111a). However, he insists, justice is a different case: for people disagree continually about what things are just, and their disputes show that they do not understand it, which is not true of non-moral language use.

The parallel between justice and language is only a parallel, albeit a striking one, in the *Protagoras*; but the *Alcibiades* shows that the two cases overlap. For, as the second part of the Great Speech brings out, the teaching of social and moral norms, and their application in judgement and exhortation, is one of the central things we use language to do. So the two crafts are enmeshed with each other. And this in turn suggests a simplifying hypothesis: perhaps the gift of Zeus – what our mysterious, universally shared natural capacity for justice consists in – is just the capacity for moral *discourse* itself.

Three points within the Speech lend this hypothesis some support. First – and to address what would otherwise be an obvious objection – the Myth otherwise leaves it a bit unclear where the capacity for language – language in full, that is, the *logos* of the politician or moral teacher – *does* come in. In the passage I quoted earlier in relation to religion, right after the first distribution, humans are said to have had voice (*phônê*) along with religion and technology, and to have articulated names (*onomata*) (Plat. *Prot.* 322a5–6). This might seem to rule out my reading, on which language would constitute the essential gift of the *second* distribution. However, this initial distribution seems to pick out only a very primitive capacity.[35] For *phônê*, voice, is something we share with the animals (cf. LSJ *s. v.*); and to have articulated or distinguished *onomata*, names, is only to have got as far as using different phonetic strings to refer to different objects. In the *Kulturgeschichte* tradition exemplified by Diodorus, thought to go back to Democritus, the development of language is typically a central theme calling for a complex multi-stage history, one closely intertwined with a general narrative of social, intellectual, and political progress.[36] Four or five stages in

35 As Gavray 2017 also notes (169 n. 3), likewise relating the point to the reading of Aelius Aristides.

36 Cf. Cole 1990, ch. 4 and *passim*. As Cole notes, "[...] it is characteristic of the whole tradition of *Kulturgeschichte* with which we are examining to draw a close connection between the common speech and the common social usages prevalent among a given people" (109, cf. 75

the development of language are distinguished: *phônê* is associated with the very first of these, the articulation of words (*diarthroun tas lexeis*) with the second (Diod. Sic. I 8,2–3). Achievements reserved for later stages include the creation of a *lingua franca* out of the idiolects used by scattered groups – a task for a lawgiver –, and the giving of names to objects which at first lacked them. Protagoras' phrasing, then, seems meant to pick out the initial human possession of a language which is primitive, incomplete, and not yet widely shared or used for very sophisticated purposes. Presumably in a full Protagorean *Kulturgeschichte*, as in its surviving 'Democritean' counterparts, human beings would naturally be led on to further improvements once the process of articulate naming had begun. Seen in this context, the second distribution can be read precisely as a mythic representation of that prehistoric moment at which humans attained a language *sufficiently widely shared, comprehensive, and sophisticated* to enable moral and political persuasion.

Consider also a second point of detail. The second distribution is managed by Zeus *and Hermes*. Zeus' role is obvious: he represents the power of justice, and his role is the same as in the original Hesiodic version of the argument that *nomos* is our *phusis*. But why Hermes? His deployment as Zeus' messenger adds little or nothing to the story here. On the face of it, his important function is as Zeus' *interlocutor*, allowing for the little dialogue in which the universal distribution of justice is made explicit. But if we again press the demythologizing question – if there *is* a philosophically substantive claim here, what would it be? – there is again an obvious answer available. Elsewhere the significance of Hermes in Plato is as *the god of language* (*Crat.* 407e–8b). So for Hermes to transmit the justice of Zeus to humans is just how we should expect Plato to represent, in mythic form, the claim that language makes possible civic virtue.[37]

Finally and most obviously, that *logos* enables us to teach and learn justice is what the second part of the Speech does in fact show. That is, civic virtue *does* depend centrally on human use of language – and on linguistic capacities of a sophisticated, distinctively human order. This dependence comes out in a number of ways. People manifest their political virtue by speaking in the assembly (Plat. *Prot.* 322e–323a); they present themselves verbally as practitioners of jus-

and Lucr. 5,1019–1020). Cole 1990, 86 also suspects that behind Polybius' account of the development of moral *ennoiai* lurks an account of the origin of the terms themselves.

37 In Diodorus' *Kulturgeschichte* too, Hermes seems to intervene at a secondary, higher stage of the elaboration of language (cf. Cole 1990, 108). Hermes is also *logos* for Tzetzes (Cole 1990, 21), and naturally Aelius Aristides' version of the myth plays on the association as well (396–399). This is not meant to exclude the way in which, within the structure of the Myth as Plato presents it, Hermes is marked by association with *mêtis*: see Brisson 1975, 23–28.

tice, whether they really possess it or not (Plat. *Prot.* 323c); they use language as a vehicle of reproach and punishment (Plat. *Prot.* 323d). Above all, the means by which they teach virtue to the young are strikingly enmeshed with speech: the most notable of these means are direct exhortation (Plat. *Prot.* 325d) and study of the words of the poets (Plat. *Prot.* 325e–326a). Protagoras does also list forms of moral training and practice which depend on non-verbal activities, such as musical rhythms and physical training; but even here it's hard to imagine the teacher managing without verbal instruction and exhortation. In sum, *logos* in the full sense – our capacity for rational, persuasive moral and political discourse – is what Protagoras in fact presents as the key precondition for the common acquisition of justice. And thus it is the obvious candidate for the capacity which makes it possible.

My suggestion, then, is that this claim – that *logos* is what makes possible civil society and human flourishing – is a kind of spectre haunting the Great Speech, a ghost left over from the Protagorean *Urtext* in which it was a central theme. Protagoras' *Kulturgeschichte* in that case was not a neutral survey of the rise of civilization, but a hymn of praise to his own métier, arguing that directly or indirectly all the factors contributing to human flourishing are owed to justice, *which is in turn owed* to our faculty of rational persuasive speech. In case this reading sounds overly speculative or far-fetched, it should be noted that we have more than a few later ancient texts which argue precisely this in the course of praising the art of speech or rhetoric, and that these bear strong intertextual relations to each other and to the Great Speech. In fact, Aelius Aristides presents a retelling of the *Protagoras* Myth in which this is its wholly explicit point. In his *Against Plato in Defense of Oratory*, Aristides argues that it is oratory (*rhêtorikê*) which enables human survival and flourishing (*Or.* II,394–403 Behr). He supports this by retelling the *Protagoras* Myth, with no attribution and with a number of interesting twists. Here the central claim of the Myth is that it is oratory, associated or identified with the power of *logos*, which is the gift of Zeus (acting together with Prometheus and Hermes); it was sent to save desperate pre-political humans from the ravages of the beasts by making communities possible. The distribution is *not* egalitarian: oratory is given only to the best and noblest, so that they will be able to save themselves and others (Aristid. *Or.* II,397). They succeed: cities are established, and with them laws, constitutions, thanks-offerings to the gods, and the dominion of man over the earth. The priority of oratory to law and justice is stressed: it gives rise to them, preserves them 'like some sleepless guard' (Aristid. *Or.* II,401), and given its broader relevance to all human dealings, would continue to be needed even if injustice disappeared.

This central thesis is also explicit, in demythologized form, in another, far older 'hymn to *Logos*'. This is Isocrates' magnificent defence of speech in the *Nicocles* (5–9), repeated later in the *Antidosis*:

(253) [1] Οὐκοῦν χρὴ καὶ περὶ τῶν λόγων τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχειν διάνοιαν, ἥνπερ καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων, καὶ μὴ περὶ τῶν ὁμοίων τἀναντία γιγνώσκειν, μηδὲ πρὸς τοιοῦτον πρᾶγμα δυσμενῶς φαίνεσθαι διακειμένους, ὃ πάντων ἐνόντων ἐν τῇ τῶν ἀνθρώπων φύσει πλείστων ἀγαθῶν αἴτιόν ἐστιν. [2] Τοῖς μὲν γὰρ ἄλλοις οἷς ἔχομεν [...] οὐδὲν τῶν ζῴων διαφέρομεν, ἀλλὰ πολλῶν καὶ τῷ τάχει καὶ τῇ ῥώμῃ καὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις εὐπορίαις καταδεέστεροι τυγχάνομεν ὄντες· (254) [3] ἐγγενομένου δ' ἡμῖν τοῦ πείθειν ἀλλήλους καὶ δηλοῦν πρὸς ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς, περὶ ὧν ἂν βουληθῶμεν, οὐ μόνον τοῦ θηριωδῶς ζῆν ἀπηλλάγημεν, [4] ἀλλὰ καὶ συνελθόντες πόλεις ᾠκίσαμεν καὶ νόμους ἐθέμεθα καὶ τέχνας εὕρομεν καὶ σχεδὸν ἅπαντα τὰ δι' ἡμῶν μεμηχανημένα λόγος ἡμῖν ἐστιν ὁ συγκατασκευάσας. (255) [5] Οὗτος γὰρ περὶ τῶν δικαίων καὶ τῶν ἀδίκων καὶ τῶν καλῶν καὶ τῶν αἰσχρῶν ἐνομοθέτησεν, ὧν μὴ διαταχθέντων οὐκ ἂν οἷοί τ' ἦμεν οἰκεῖν μετ' ἀλλήλων. [6] Τούτῳ καὶ τοὺς κακοὺς ἐξελέγχομεν καὶ τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς ἐγκωμιάζομεν. Διὰ τούτου τούς τ' ἀνοήτους παιδεύομεν καὶ τοὺς φρονίμους δοκιμάζομεν· [7] τὸ γὰρ λέγειν ὡς δεῖ τοῦ φρονεῖν εὖ μέγιστον σημεῖον ποιούμεθα, καὶ λόγος ἀληθὴς καὶ νόμιμος καὶ δίκαιος ψυχῆς ἀγαθῆς καὶ πιστῆς εἴδωλόν ἐστιν. (256) [8] Μετὰ τούτου καὶ περὶ τῶν ἀμφισβητησίμων ἀγωνιζόμεθα καὶ περὶ τῶν ἀγνοουμένων σκοπούμεθα· [9] ταῖς γὰρ πίστεσιν, αἷς τοὺς ἄλλους λέγοντες πείθομεν, ταῖς αὐταῖς ταύταις βουλευόμενοι χρώμεθα, [10] καὶ ῥητορικοὺς μὲν καλοῦμεν τοὺς ἐν τῷ πλήθει λέγειν δυναμένους, εὐβούλους δὲ νομίζομεν, οἵτινες ἂν αὑτοὶ πρὸς αὑτοὺς ἄριστα περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων διαλεχθῶσιν. (257) [11] Εἰ δὲ δεῖ συλλήβδην περὶ τῆς δυνάμεως ταύτης εἰπεῖν, οὐδὲν τῶν φρονίμως πραττομένων εὑρήσομεν ἀλόγως γιγνόμενον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἔργων καὶ τῶν διανοημάτων ἁπάντων ἡγεμόνα λόγον ὄντα, καὶ μάλιστα χρωμένους αὐτῷ τοὺς πλεῖστον νοῦν ἔχοντας. Ὧν οὐδὲν ἐνθυμηθεὶς Λυσίμαχος κατηγορεῖν ἐτόλμησε τῶν ἐπιθυμούντων τοιούτου πράγματος, ὃ τοσούτων τὸ πλῆθος καὶ τηλικούτων τὸ μέγεθος ἀγαθῶν αἴτιόν ἐστιν.

(253) [1] Thus we should have the same understanding of speaking as we do of other things, and not judge similar cases in the opposite way, or show hostility toward this faculty, which of all natural human powers is responsible for the greatest goods. [2] For in our other faculties [...] we do not differ from other animals, and in fact we are inferior to many in speed, strength, and other resources. (254) [3] But since there has arisen in us the ability to persuade one another and to make clear to ourselves what we want, not only do we avoid living like beasts, [4] but we have come together, built cities, made laws, and invented arts: and speech is responsible for nearly all our inventions. (255) [5] For it is this which has set down laws concerning justice and injustice, and fine and shameful things; and without these ordinances we could not live with one another. [6] By it we refute the bad and praise the good; through it, we educate the ignorant and recognise the intelligent. [7] We regard speaking well to be the clearest sign of a good mind, which it requires, and truthful, lawful, and just speech we consider the image of a good and faithful soul. (256) [8] With speech we both fight over contentious matters and investigate the unknown. [9] For the same considerations by which we persuade others, we use in our own deliberations. [10] And while we call those able to speak in a crowd 'good speakers', we consider those who best discuss matters with themselves to have 'good judgement'. (257) [11] If one

> must summarize the power of discourse, we will discover that nothing done prudently occurs without speech, that speech is the leader both of all actions and thoughts, and that the most intelligent people use it most of all.
>
> (Isocr., *Antidosis* 253–257, transl. Mirhady/Too 2000, revised with help from Norlin; numbering mine)

It has not always been noticed that this hymn to Logos too is a *Kulturgeschichte*, of admittedly a very abstract and incomplete kind. Like other 'argumentative' exercises in the genre, it addresses the question: *to what factor above all* do we owe civilization and human flourishing (in [1] above)? Its answer begins in [2] with the same starting-point as the *Protagoras* Myth: other animals have natural advantages which humans lack. We are in fact a uniquely *dis*advantaged species, so that our supremacy calls for special explanation. Thus we can make the question more precise by asking: what factor above all compensates for human physical weaknesses? The answer seems clear: our ability to communicate, which is the necessary basis for cities, laws, and arts. The narrative in [4]–[5] is notably different from that of the Myth, and more natural: for here the *technai* are subsequent to the civic life which justice makes possible. But under this runs a deeper kinship. For Isocrates is stressing for *logos* the point which Protagoras stresses for justice: that the other arts could be of no *use* to us without it. As he goes on to explain in [5]–[11], what is necessary for civic life is our ability to persuade each other about the just and unjust and the fine and shameful – a point which recalls Protagoras' emphasis on both justice and *aidôs*, and his account of moral education and exhortation. Language – here quite clearly not the mere ability to pick out objects with phonemes, but *logos*, our rational capacity to express our thoughts and persuade each other – is the vehicle of teaching and consensus-building, and therefore of civilization.

It is no coincidence that this argument for the foundational role of speech in civilization is the culmination of Isocrates' defence of the art he teaches – the *technê logôn* – as the most valuable of all arts. Indeed, he claims, it is identical with the art of sound deliberation ([9]–[11]) and the closest thing there is to a teachable political virtue ([5], [9], [10], cf. *Ant.* 274–275). This art builds on the capacities and practices for persuasive speech which we all share; we standardly value and rely upon these as essential, he argues, and so it is absurd to turn against them when they are cultivated deliberately and raised to the level of an art.[38] To reduce it to slogan form: for Isocrates, the *technê logôn* – his own art –

38 This broader argument involves adopting a sophistic defence against the objection that this art is subject to dangerous abuse, for which its teacher is legitimately blamed: cf. Barney 2010.

just IS the *politikê technê*. Isocrates is rarely a radical innovator, and we can catch glimpses of similar positions in other texts of the era. The *Dissoi Logoi*, which betrays a strong Protagorean influence,[39] also argues that it's the person with the art of speaking who can best advise the city (*Diss. log.* [= 90 DK] 8,6), and who knows justice and the laws (8,9–10). From a different angle, that of individual self-interest, Gorgias in Plato's *Gorgias* likewise presents the art of speaking as a kind of master art, able to cover all topics and bend all other professions to its own purposes; he also says that it is the source of freedom, the 'greatest of all human goods', and of power in each city (Plat. *Gorg.* 452d).

Aelius Aristides and Isocrates are both pushing the analytical project of the *Protagoras* Myth to a deeper level, asking a philosophically profound question left unexplored in Plato's version. Granted that, as the insufficiency arguments of the Myth show, the practice of justice is the *sine qua non* for all the factors which contribute to human flourishing, what in turn is the *sine qua non* for justice? Plato is uninterested in this question for his purposes in the *Protagoras*; but there is a powerful answer to it offered in the ancient rhetorical tradition. My suggestion is that this answer went back to the beginning, to a Protagorean source which was the *Urtext* both for Plato and for the hymns of praise of *logos* found in the later rhetoricians.[40] In further support of this, Plato does represent Protagoras as anticipating Isocrates' project in some central respects. For he presents himself as able to refine, at a higher and more technical level, the capacities for civic virtue – and rational deliberation in particular – which are taught by all to all.[41] Our evidence as a whole, including the *Protagoras* itself,

39 See Robinson 1979.

40 A further text to be noted in support of this hypothesis is the Anonymus Iamblichi, which, as noted above, presents a demythologized version of the *Protagoras* Myth in order to argue that law and justice are natural to us. Iamblichus appropriates this text for his *Protreptic* because its argument is well adapted to his own proof that philosophy must be practiced as the key to social order and human happiness. But the praise of philosophy does not seem to have belonged to his source text. As I hope to argue elsewhere, we should ask what in the original text would have filled the hole left when we subtract Iamblichus' praise of philosophy: praise of the art of *logos*, along the lines we find in Isocrates and Aelius, is a very plausible candidate.

41 Note that after the initial contrast with the other crafts, the language of *technê* largely disappears from Protagoras' account of civic virtue. That makes sense if Protagoras sees the common possession of the virtue as merely rudimentary, and is presenting himself as the skilled professional who can teach it at an advanced, technical level. Just as ordinary people gain minimal competence in Greek, but not mastery of political speech, so too all of us have some share in civic virtue but not to the point where it constitutes a *technê*. At the higher level taught by Protagoras (and as spelled out by Isocrates), the arts of *logos* and *politikê* converge in an art of rational public deliberation and persuasion. (Of course, absent some further argu-

gives us good reason to suppose that Protagoras was the inventor of the *technê logôn* conceived in these expansive and ambitious terms, and thus the first to argue that its possessor could also thereby teach civic virtue at an elite level. In Plato, the Great Speech ostends his credentials for doing so; and in the *Urtext*, I would suggest, the real Protagoras is very likely to have anticipated Isocrates in making a political case for the supreme value of his art, as constitutive of a 'higher education' in political virtue. That argument remains just barely visible, like the ruins of an archaic temple reused in a classical one, underneath Plato's appropriations of Protagorean thought.

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ment, this conception no longer gives any real support to the view Protagoras is supposed to be vindicating, namely the Athenian assumption that all citizens are qualified to speak on political matters; presumably this is why it is left latent in the Platonic text. For worries about the latent undemocratic implications of Protagoras' teaching, and associated tensions within the Great Speech, cf. Adkins 1973.)

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Catalin Partenie

Justice and Ideas in Plato's *Republic*

Plato argues in the *Republic* that in both the city and the soul, justice is the well-functioning of their parts. There are now plenty of books about the well-functioning of organizations, cities, and one's psyche, but their authors do not call it "justice". One such book, published in French in 2017 (under the title *Foutez-vous la paix!*, by Fabrice Midal), goes even further and claims that to reach inner peace and psychic well-functioning we have to stop reasoning completely. Anyway, why does Plato insist that justice is, in both city and soul, the well-functioning of their parts? This is the main question I shall address in my essay.

1 Justice in the city and the soul

What is justice?

This is not an easy question, Socrates tells his interlocutors, after a first round of not very convincing attempts to answering it. But he has an idea. If people lacking keen eyesight were told to read small letters from a distance, and if they noticed the same letters existing elsewhere in a larger size, they would examine the larger ones first, and then the smaller ones. We should do the same, says Socrates: "There is the justice of a single man and also the justice of a whole city" (Plat. *Resp.* II, 368e),[1] and it is the same in both; and, since a city is bigger than a man, it will be easier to first see what justice in the city is, and then in man.

Nobody has any objection and Socrates imagines a city (Kallipolis) that has three classes: the rulers, the military, and the workers. After a long and arduous

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1 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Plato are from the translations included in Cooper 1997: G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve (*Republic*), A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff (*Phaedrus*), and Donald J. Zeyl (*Timaeus*).