

2009

Bitter Knowledge: Socrates and Teaching by Disillusionment Appendix A - the Protagoras

Thomas D. Eisele

University of Cincinnati College of Law, thomas.eisele@uc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.law.uc.edu/fac_pubs

Part of the [Law and Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Legal History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Eisele, Thomas D., "Bitter Knowledge: Socrates and Teaching by Disillusionment Appendix A - the Protagoras" (2009). *Faculty Articles and Other Publications*. 253.

https://scholarship.law.uc.edu/fac_pubs/253

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Law Faculty Scholarship at University of Cincinnati College of Law Scholarship and Publications. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Articles and Other Publications by an authorized administrator of University of Cincinnati College of Law Scholarship and Publications. For more information, please contact ken.hirsh@uc.edu.

PREFATORY NOTE [ADDED IN 2015]

It was been suggested (and here I am thinking in particular of comments made by Professor William Prior) that my book, *Bitter Knowledge*, would benefit from a more comprehensive attention to the argumentative details of the dialogues studied there. Professor Prior specifically suggests that, if we were to be given more of their argumentation, we might better appreciate the motivation or the disposition of the speakers in the dialogues under study.

The book as designed, as submitted in typescript, and as accepted for publication, included three appendices. These appendices comprised detailed outlines of the speakers and events portrayed in, respectively, the *Protagoras*, the *Meno*, and the *Theaetetus*. They were intended to add depth and context to the analyses and discussions in the book's three chapters devoted to those dialogues. Unfortunately, during the production process, the editorial decision was made to cut the appendices, despite my objection.

My book does not explore these three dialogues along the traditional lines of eliciting and analyzing the doctrinal features embedded within the discussions portrayed, which doctrines (about virtue, or justice, or the Forms, etc.) may be ascribed to Plato. I knew that my approach was untraditional in this regard, and that I risked losing some readers due to my lack of attention to those doctrinal features. I did not run this risk lightly, nor did I think the resultant loss inconsequential. I did believe, however, that certain other features in the Platonic corpus had been under-attended and under-appreciated, and it was toward those features – largely pedagogical dimensions of teaching and learning – that I mostly gave my attention in the core of the book.

The appendices, in their collection of the complex weave of speakers and themes and events and arguments within each individual dialogue, were meant to illustrate how educative lessons were interwoven with doctrinal concerns by the master-craftsman, Plato, in his depictions of Socrates talking and interacting with others. It seemed to me that, as much as Socrates denied or refused the mantle of teacher, most famously in the *Apology*, his actions belied his denials. In this respect, I was following the lead of Seth Benardete, whose book entitled, *The Argument of the Action*, nicely teaches us the lesson that the action of a text has an argument of its own, if we can but elucidate it. Putting my own particular spin on Benardete's insight, one might say that *Bitter Knowledge* focuses our attention throughout on the action (or activity) of the argument, rather than on the doctrinal aspects of the argument.

I regret that these appendices, as further illustrations of my characterization of the various participants in these conversational inquiries, were dropped from the book as published. So, I make them available, for whatever assistance they may be to readers of *Bitter Knowledge* at this late date.

T.D.E.

Copyright © 2015 Thomas D. Eisele. All rights reserved.

Appendix A – the *Protagoras*

Conversational Groupings:

- A. Socrates and Companion [309a-310a].
- B. Socrates and Hippocrates [310a-314c].
- C. Socrates, Hippocrates, and Protagoras [314c-320c].
- D. Protagoras [his long speech] [320c-328d].
- E. Socrates and Protagoras [328d-334c].
- F. Interlude (with the audience) [crisis in the conversation] [334c-338e].
- G. Socrates and Protagoras [338e-341d].
- H. Socrates [his long speech] [341e-347a].
- I. Socrates and Protagoras [347b-362a].

An Outline of the Speakers, Events, and Topics in the *Protagoras*

- 1. Socrates and Companion converse [309a-310a].**
 - a. Companion: “Where do you come from, Socrates? And yet I need hardly ask the question, for I know ...” [309a].
 - b. Socrates: “... But shall I tell you a strange thing? ...” [309b].
 - c. Companion: “What is the meaning of this? ...” [309c].
 - d. Socrates: “... Listen then” [310a].

2. Socrates and Hippocrates: “Do you know what you are doing?” [310a-314c].

- a. Hippocrates, the eager student [310a-311a].
 - i. Socrates: “Has Protagoras robbed you of something?” [310d].
 - ii. Hippocrates: “Yes, indeed, he has, Socrates, of the wisdom which he keeps from me” [310d].
 - iii. Hippocrates: “... all men praise him, Socrates; he is reputed to be the most accomplished of speakers” [310e].
- b. Socrates tests Hippocrates [311a-314b].
 - i. “Tell me, Hippocrates, ... what is he to whom you are going and what will he make of you?” [311b].
 - ii. “You are going to commit your soul to the care of a man whom you call a Sophist. And yet I hardly think that you know what a Sophist is; ...” [312b-c].
 - iii. “[K]nowledge is the food of the soul” [313c].
 - iv. Socrates appeals to the image of “a physician of the soul” [313e].
 - v. “But you cannot buy knowledge and carry it away in another vessel; when you have paid for it you must receive it into the soul and go on your way, either greatly harmed or greatly benefited” [314b].
 - vi. “These things let us investigate with our elders ...” [314b].

3. **Socrates and Hippocrates seek an audience with Protagoras [314c-316b].**
 - a. Entry denied by the doorkeeper [314c-d].
 - b. Protagoras' promenade [314e-315b].
 - c. A gathering of elders [315c-316a].
 - d. Socrates: "Protagoras, my friend Hippocrates here and I have come to see you" [316b].
 - e. Protagoras: "Do you wish ... to speak with me alone or in the presence of the company?" [316b].

4. **Socrates and Protagoras discuss what Protagoras as a teacher can offer Hippocrates [316b-334c].**
 - a. Protagoras explains what he can teach Hippocrates [316b-319a].
 - i. Protagoras thanks Socrates for his consideration of Protagoras' delicate position as a foreigner in Athens [316c].
 - ii. Appearing in disguise ("the art of the Sophist") [316d-317b].
 - iii. Protagoras' self-proclamation: "I take an entirely opposite course and acknowledge myself to be a Sophist and instructor of mankind. Such an open acknowledgment appears to me to be a better sort of caution than concealment" [317b].
 - iv. Socrates begins again (the purport of his visit) [318a].
 - v. Protagoras' claim, or boast: "Young man, if you associate with me, on the very first day you will be in a position to return home a better man than

you came, and better on the second day than on the first, and better every day than you were on the day before" [318a].

- vi. Socrates: "... please answer in a different way ..." [318b].
 - vii. Protagoras: "You ask good questions, Socrates, and I like to answer a question which is well put" [318d].
 - viii. Socrates: "Do I understand you, ... and is your meaning that you teach the art of politics, and that you promise to make men good citizens?" [319a].
 - ix. Protagoras: "That, Socrates, is exactly the profession which I make" [319a].
- b. Socrates inquires into politics and virtue [319a-328d].
- i. Socrates: "Then, ... you possess a noble art, indeed, if you really do possess it. For I will freely confess to you, Protagoras, that I have a doubt whether this art is capable of being taught, and yet I know not how to disbelieve your assertion" [319a-b].
 - ii. Socrates explains to Protagoras why he is of the opinion that this art cannot be taught or communicated, and he gives some examples of instances where "the best and wisest of our citizens are unable to impart their political wisdom to others" [319b-320b].
 - iii. Socrates: "I wish that you would, if possible, show me a little more clearly that virtue can be taught. Will you be so good?" [320b-c].

[Protagoras gives his long speech on politics and virtue [320c-328d].]

- iv. Protagoras tells a story of how the gods made human beings [the task of Prometheus and Epimetheus; and the gift of Hermes] [320c-323a].
 - v. A “further proof” that all humans have a share of virtue [323a-c].
 - vi. Protagoras further shows that virtue does not come from luck or by nature; it is taught and comes from “taking pains” [323c-324d].
 - vii. Protagoras leaves myth and resumes the argument: Why good men cannot teach virtue to their sons [324d-326e].
 - viii. Protagoras: “All men are teachers of virtue, each one according to his ability” [326e-328c].
 - ix. “Such is my myth, Socrates, and such is the argument by which I endeavor to show that virtue may be taught, and that this is the opinion of the Athenians” [328c-d].
- c. Socrates and Protagoras inquire into the unity of virtue [328d-334c].
- i. Socrates: “I would not have missed the speech of Protagoras for a great deal. For I used to imagine that no human care could make men good; but I know better now. Yet I have still one very small difficulty which I am sure that Protagoras will easily explain, as he has already explained so much” [328d-e].
 - ii. Socrates: “Now I, Protagoras, want to ask you a little question, which if you will only answer, I shall be quite satisfied” [329b].
 - iii. Socrates: “Now I want you to tell me exactly whether virtue is one whole, of which justice and self-control and piety are parts; or whether all these

are only the names of one and the same thing. That is the doubt which still lingers in my mind" [329c-d].

- iv. Protagoras: "There is no difficulty, Socrates, in answering ..." [329d].
- v. The parts of virtue "are related to one another as the parts of a face are related to the whole face" [329e].
- vi. They discuss the unity of justice and piety [330c-332a].
- vii. They discuss the unity of wisdom and self-control [332a-333b].
- viii. They discuss the unity of self-control and justice [333b-334c].

[Protagoras gives a short concluding speech [334a-c].]

5. Critical interlude (with the audience): A crisis occurs in the conversation--Shall this discussion continue; and, if so, how? [334c-338e].

- a. Socrates: "Protagoras, I have a wretched memory, and when anyone makes a long speech to me I never remember what he is talking about. ... I will ask you to cut your answers shorter, if you would take me with you" [334c-d].
- b. Protagoras: "Socrates, ... many a battle of words have I fought, and if I had followed the method of disputation which my adversaries desired, as you want me to do, I should have been no better than another, and the name of Protagoras would not have spread all over Hellas" [335a].
- c. Socrates rises to leave [335c].
- d. Callias begs Socrates to remain ("Do not deny the company this pleasure") [335c-d].

- e. Socrates: "... discussion is one thing, and making an oration is quite another, in my humble opinion" [336b].
- f. Alcibiades intervenes (in defense of Socrates) [336b-d].
- g. Other eminent members of the company--Critias, Prodicus, and Hippias--chime in, each speaking as a non-partisan [336d-338b].
- h. Socrates accepts the proposal to continue the discussion, modifying the suggestion such that no umpire or overseer is chosen, but rather each member of the company is treated as equally able to audit and judge the merits of the speakers and the ensuing conversation ("Let me tell you then what I will do in order that the conversation and discussion may go on as you desire") [338b-e].

[Socrates and Protagoras reach a compact for continuing the discussion [338d-e].]

6. Socrates and Protagoras continue their conversation [338e-360e].

- a. Protagoras tests Socrates' skill in poetry [338e-339e].
 - i. Protagoras: "... skill in poetry is the principal part of education; and this I conceive to be the ability to understand which compositions of the poets are correct, and which are not, and to know how to distinguish between them and, when asked, give the reasons" [338e-339a].
 - ii. Protagoras: "I propose to transfer the question which you and I have been discussing to the domain of poetry; we will speak as before of virtue, but in reference to a passage of a poet" [339a].

- b. Socrates interprets a poem--part parody, part rehabilitation [339e-347a].
 - i. Prodicus helps to distract Protagoras [339e-341d].
 - ii. Socrates makes his own long speech--a parody of Protagoras [341e-347a].
 - iii. Socrates draws a startling moral from his explication of the poem: "For no wise man, as I believe, will allow that any human being errs voluntarily, or voluntarily does evil and base actions; but they are very well aware that all who do evil and base things do them against their will" [345d-e].

[brief interruption]

 - iv. Hippias attempts to intervene in the conversation (offering his own interpretation of the poem under discussion), but Alcibiades rejects his attempt: "At present we must abide by the compact which was made between Socrates and Protagoras, to the effect that as long as Protagoras is willing to ask, Socrates should answer; or that if he would rather answer, then that Socrates should ask" [347b].
- c. A plea to renew the original inquiry [347b-349b].
 - i. Socrates: "I would rather have done with poems and odes, if [Protagoras] does not object, and come back to the question about which I was asking you at first, Protagoras, and by your help make an end of that investigation" [347b-c].
 - ii. Socrates appeals to "a company like this of ours, and men such as we profess to be," as being a group in which we "do not require the help of another's voice, or of the poets whom you cannot interrogate about the

meaning of what they are saying" Such a group is a company of "real gentlemen and men of education" [347d-e].

- iii. Socrates seeks to "put one another to the proof in conversation" [348a].
 - iv. Socrates: "Leaving the poets and keeping to ourselves, let us try the mettle of one another and make proof of the truth in conversation" [348a].
 - v. Protagoras is induced, or shamed, into participating [348b-c].
 - vi. Socrates: "Do not imagine, Protagoras, that I have any other interest in asking questions of you but that of clearing up my own problems as they arise. For I think that Homer was very right in saying that 'When two go together, one sees before the other,' for all men who have a companion are readier in deed, word, or thought; ..." [348c-d].
- d. Once again, Socrates asks, Protagoras answers [348e-351e].
- i. Socrates: "... although other Sophists conceal their profession, you [Protagoras] proclaim openly in the face of all Hellas that you are a Sophist or teacher of virtue and education, and are the first who demanded pay in return. How then can I do otherwise than invite you to the investigation of these subjects, and ask questions and consult with you? I must, indeed" [348e-349a].
 - ii. Socrates: "If I am not mistaken, the question was this: Are wisdom and self-control and courage and justice and piety five names which denote the same thing? Or is there, corresponding to each of these names, a separate underlying reality, a thing with its own peculiar function, no one of them

- being like any other of them?" [349b].
- iii. Investigating the difference between courage and wisdom, or their possible unity [349d-351b].
 - iv. Socrates' apparent hedonism: "I say that things are good in so far as they are pleasant if they have no consequences of another sort, and in so far as they are painful they are bad" [351c].
 - v. Protagoras: "According to your favorite mode of speech, Socrates, 'let us investigate this,' ...; and if the investigation is to the point, and the result proves that pleasure and good are really the same, then we will agree; but if not, then we will argue" [351e].
- e. Protagoras and Socrates join forces against "the rest of the world" [351e-356c].
- i. Protagoras: "You ought to take the lead ...; for you are the author of the discussion" [351e].
 - ii. Socrates: "Uncover your mind to me, Protagoras, and reveal your attitude toward knowledge, that I may know whether or not you agree with the rest of the world. Now the rest of the world are of opinion that knowledge is not a powerful, lordly, commanding thing; ..." [352a-b].
 - iii. Protagoras: "I agree with you, Socrates, ...; and not only so, but I, above all other men, am bound to say that wisdom and knowledge are the mightiest of human things" [352c-d].
 - iv. Protagoras: "But why, Socrates, need we investigate the opinion of the many, who just say anything that comes to their head?" [353a].

- v. Socrates: "I believe ... that they may be of use in helping us to discover how courage is related to the other parts of virtue" [353b].
 - vi. Socrates: "Suppose again ... that the world says to me, to what purpose do you spend many words and speak in many ways on this subject? Excuse me, friends, I should reply; but in the first place it is not easy to explain what that is which you call 'being overcome by pleasure'; and the whole argument turns upon this" [354e].
 - vii. A complicated argument about good and evil, and corresponding pleasure and pain, ensues [355a-356c].
- f. Renewal of the joint inquiry into the nature of virtue [356c-357c].
- i. Socrates: "Now suppose doing well to consist in doing or choosing the greater, and in not doing or in avoiding the less, what would be the saving principle of human life? Would it be the art of measuring or the power of appearance?" [356c-d].
 - ii. Socrates: "But the art of measurement would invalidate the power of appearance and, showing the truth, would fain teach the soul at last to find lasting rest in the truth, and would thus save our life. Would not mankind generally acknowledge that the art which accomplishes this result is the art of measurement?" [356d-e].
 - iii. Getting the world to assent to the authoritative power of knowledge (here, "a knowledge of measuring, since this is the art that has to do with excess and defect") [356e-357a].

- iv. Socrates: "... seeing that the salvation of human life has been found to consist in the right choice of pleasures and pains, in the choice of the more and the fewer, and the greater and the less, ... this, as possessing measure, must undeniably also be an art and science?" [357a-b].
- v. Socrates: "The nature of this art or science will be a matter of future consideration; but the demonstration *that* it is a science has been adequately made, and that is what you [the world, the company at hand] asked of me and Protagoras" [357b-c].
- vi. Socrates: "... both of us were agreeing that there was nothing mightier than knowledge, and that knowledge, in whatever existing, must prevail over pleasure and all other things" [357c].
- g. Conclusion contra common opinion: Ignorance is the cause of wrong-doing [357c-358d].
 - i. Socrates: "And you are also aware that the erring act which is done without knowledge is done in ignorance" [357e].
 - ii. Socrates: "And our friends Protagoras and Prodicus and Hippias declare that they are the physicians of ignorance; but you, who are under the mistaken impression that ignorance is not the cause, and that the art of which I am speaking cannot be taught, neither go yourselves, nor send your children to the Sophists, who are the teachers of these things; you are concerned about your money and give them none; and the result is that you are the worse off both in public and private life" [357e].

- iii. Socrates: "Let us suppose this be our answer to the world in general" [358a].
 - iv. Socrates: "And is not ignorance the having a false opinion and being deceived about important matters?" [358c].
 - v. Socrates: "Then, ... no man voluntarily pursues evil, or that which he thinks to be evil. To pursue what one believes to be evil rather than what is good is not in human nature; and when a man is compelled to choose one of two evils, no one will choose the greater when he may have the less" [358c-d].
- h. Courage is wisdom [358d-360e].
- i. A brief examination of the premises of Protagoras' previous argument that courage is very different from the other parts of virtue [358d-359c].
 - ii. The difference between the brave man and the coward [359c-360c].
 - iii. Socrates: "And have they not been shown to be cowards through their ignorance of dangers? ... And because of that ignorance they are cowards? ... Then the ignorance of what is and is not fearful is cowardice?" [360c].
 - iv. Socrates: "Then the wisdom which knows what are and are not fearful things is opposed to the ignorance of them? ... And the ignorance of them is cowardice? ... And the knowledge of that which is and is not fearful is courage, and is opposed to the ignorance of these things?" [360d].
 - v. At this point, Protagoras would no longer assent, but was silent [360d].

vi. Protagoras: "Finish the argument by yourself, It is contentious of you, Socrates, to make me answer" [360d-e].

7. Inconclusive, rueful conclusion: If virtue is knowledge, then can it be taught? [360e-362a].

- a. Socrates: "My only object ... in continuing with my questions has been the desire to ascertain facts about virtue and what virtue itself is" [360e-361a].
- b. Socrates: "The result of our discussion appears to me to be singular. For if the argument had a human voice, that voice would be heard laughing at us ..." [361a].
- c. Socrates and Protagoras seem to have switched sides--Socrates now seems to wish to contend that virtue is knowledge (such that virtue can be taught); and Protagoras now seems to want to argue that virtue is anything but knowledge (such that virtue cannot be taught) [361a-c].
- d. Socrates: "Now I, Protagoras, perceiving this terrible confusion, have a great desire that it should be cleared up. And I should like to carry on the discussion until we finally ascertain what virtue is, and to investigate whether it is capable of being taught or not, ..." [361c].
- e. Protagoras: "Socrates, I am not of a base nature, and I am the last man in the world to be envious. I cannot but applaud your energy and your conduct of an argument. ... Let us come back to the subject at some future time of your choice; at present we had better turn to something else" [361d-e].