PROTAGORAS

The reader who is interested only in Plato's philosophy would do well to pass over the first part of the Protagoras, *the first three-quarters of it, in fact, up to the discussion about pleasure and pain when Socrates begins to speak in earnest. In this the familiar Platonic doctrine is brought out that no man does evil voluntarily, that is, thinking it to be evil, and the conclusion is reached—not only Platonic, but essentially and peculiarly Greek—that virtue is one with wisdom and that wickedness has its roots in ignorance.*

To the general reader, however, the dialogue is second to none in giving a picture of Greek life, above all, of the intensity of interest the Athenians took in the purely intellectual. The eager lad who wakes Socrates before daybreak begging to be introduced to the great teacher Protagoras, just arrived in Athens, has many counterparts in the large company he and Socrates find when they enter the house where the man of wisdom is staying. All want to learn from him and they finally persuade him to take on an argument with Socrates which, most understandably, he is reluctant to do. The result, however, is not what one would expect, Protagoras' complete defeat. Far from that, he is shown to have the better reason a number of times and Socrates not only appears as occasionally advocating the worse, but even now and then splitting hairs and being tiresome.

The dialogue is a little comedy. Plato is amusing himself, laughing at everyone, including his beloved master, showing up, but very pleasantly, good old Protagoras' amiable vanity, taking a sly dig at a distinguished teacher's passion for finicky verbal distinctions, and giving gravely another's advice to Socrates to pay some attention to talking elegantly, not merely briefly and accurately. A final delightful picture of the Athenians emerges, their charming manners, never affected by the hottest argument, their love of fair play, and, when it is settled that there shall be a discussion, how all of them felt great delight "at the prospect of listening to wise men."

FRIEND: Where have you come from, Socrates? No doubt from pursuit of the captivating Alcibiades. Certainly when I saw him only a day or two ago, he seemed to be still a handsome man, but between ourselves, Socrates, 'man' is the word. He's actually growing a beard. 309

SOCRATES: What of it? Aren't you an enthusiast for Homer, who says that the most charming age is that of the youth with his first beard, just the age of Alcibiades now? b

FRIEND: Well what's the news? Have you just left the young man, and how is he disposed toward you?

SOCRATES: Very well, I think, particularly today, since he came to my assistance and spoke up for me at some length. For as you guessed, I have only just left him. But I will tell you a surprising thing. Although he was present, I had no thought for him, and often forgot him altogether.

FRIEND: Why, what can have happened between you and him to make such a difference? You surely can't have met someone more handsome—not in Athens at least? c

SOCRATES: Yes, much more.

FRIEND: Really? An Athenian or a foreigner?

SOCRATES: A foreigner.

FRIEND: Where from?

SOCRATES: Abdera.

FRIEND: And this stranger struck you as such a handsome person that you put him above the son of Clinias in that respect?

SOCRATES: Yes. Must not perfect wisdom take the palm for handsomeness?

FRIEND: You mean you have just been meeting some wise man?

SOCRATES: Say rather the wisest man now living, if you agree that that description fits Protagoras. d

FRIEND: What? Protagoras is in Athens?

SOCRATES: And has been for two days.

FRIEND: And you have just now come from seeing him?

SOCRATES: Yes, we had a long talk together. 310

FRIEND: Then lose no time in telling me about your conversation, if you are free. Sit down here; the slave will make room for you.

SOCRATES: Certainly I shall, and be grateful to you for listening.

FRIEND: And I to you for your story.

SOCRATES: That means a favor on both sides. Listen then.

Last night, a little before daybreak, Hippocrates, son of Apollodorus, Phason's brother, knocked violently on my door with his stick, and when it was opened, came straight in in a great hurry and shouted out, Socrates, are you awake or asleep? b

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From *Protagoras and Meno*, translated and with an introduction by W. K. C. Guthrie (Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1956).

I recognized his voice and said, That will be Hippocrates. No bad news I hope?

Nothing but good, he replied.

I'm glad to hear it, said I. What is it then, and what brings you here at such an hour?

Protagoras has arrived, he said, taking his stand beside me.

The day before yesterday. Have you only just found out?

Only last evening.

c As he said this he felt for the bed and sat by my feet, adding, Yes, yesterday evening, when I got back late from Oenoe. My slave Satyrus had run away from me. I meant to let you know that I was going after him, but something put it out of my head. When I got back and we had had dinner and were just going to bed, my brother mentioned to me that Protagoras had come. Late as it was, I nearly d came to see you straightaway; then I decided it was really too far into the night, but as soon as I had slept off my tiredness, I got up at once and came here as you see.

I recognized his determination and the state of excitement he was in, and asked him, What is your concern in this? Has Protagoras done you any harm?

Of course he has, Socrates, replied Hippocrates laughing. He keeps his wisdom to himself instead of sharing it with me.

Not at all, said I. If you pay him sufficient to persuade him, he will make you wise too.

e If it were only a question of that! he said despairingly. I shouldn't keep back a penny of my own money, or my friends' money either. But this is just the reason why I have come to you, to persuade you to speak to him on my behalf. For one thing I am too young, and for another I have never seen nor heard Protagoras. Last time he came to Athens I was still a child. But you know, Socrates, everyone is singing his praises and saying that he is the cleverest of speakers. Do let's 311 pay him a visit at once, to make sure of finding him in. He's staying, so I'm told, with Callias, son of Hipponicus. Come on.

My dear Hippocrates, I said, we can't go there at this early hour. Let's come out here into the courtyard and walk around it to pass the time until it gets light. Then we can go. Protagoras spends most of his time indoors, so don't worry; we are pretty sure to catch him there.

So then we got up and walked about in the courtyard, and to try b Hippocrates' mettle I began to examine and question him. Tell me this, Hippocrates, I said. It is your present intention to go to Protagoras and pay him money as a fee on your behalf. Now whom do you think you are going to, and what will he make of you? Suppose for instance you had it in mind to go to your namesake Hippocrates of Cos, the doctor, and pay him a fee on your own behalf, and someone c asked you in what capacity you thought of Hippocrates with the intention of paying him, what would you answer?

I should say, in his capacity as a doctor.

And what would you hope to become?

A doctor.

And suppose your idea was to go to Polyclitus of Argos or Phidias of Athens and pay them fees for your own benefit, and someone asked you in what capacity you thought of paying this money to them, what would you answer?

I should say, in their capacity as sculptors.

To make you what?

A sculptor, obviously.

Right, said I. Now here are you and I going to Protagoras prepared d to pay him money as a fee for you—our own if it is enough to satisfy him, or if not, our friends' resources thrown in as well. If then, seeing us so full of enthusiasm, someone should ask, Tell me, Socrates and Hippocrates, what do you suppose Protagoras is, that you intend to pay him money? what should we answer him? What particular name do we hear attached to Protagoras in the sort of way that Phidias is e called a sculptor and Homer a poet?

Well, Sophist, I suppose, Socrates, is the name generally given to him.

Then it is as a Sophist that we will go to him and pay him?

Yes.

And if you had to face the further question, What do you yourself hope to become by your association with Protagoras? 312

He blushed at this—there was already a streak of daylight to betray him—and replied, If this is like the other cases, I must say 'to become a Sophist.'

But wouldn't a man like you be ashamed, said I, to face your fellow countrymen as a Sophist?

If I am to speak my real mind, I certainly should.

Perhaps then this is not the kind of instruction you expect to get from Protagoras, but rather the kind you got from the school- b masters who taught you letters and music and gymnastics. You didn't learn these for professional purposes, to become a practitioner, but in the way of liberal education, as a layman and a gentleman should.

That exactly describes, said he, the sort of instruction I expect from Protagoras.

Well then, I went on, do you understand what you are now going to do, or not?

In what respect?

I mean that you are going to entrust the care of your soul to a c man who is, in your own words, a Sophist, though I should be surprised if you know just what a Sophist is. And yet if you don't know that, you don't know to whom you are entrusting your soul, nor whether he represents something good or bad.

I think I know, said he.

Tell me then, what do you think a Sophist is?

I suppose, as the name implies, one who has knowledge of wise things.

One could say the same, said I, of painters and builders, that they are those who have knowledge of wise things. But if we were
d asked what *sort* of wisdom painters understand, we should reply, wisdom concerned with the making of likenesses, and so on with the others. If then we were asked what sort of wise things the Sophist has knowledge of, what should we answer? Of what is he the master?

The only answer we could give is that he is master of the art of making clever speakers.

Well, our answer might be true, but would hardly be sufficient. It invites the further question, On what matter does the Sophist make
e one a clever speaker? For example, the teacher of lyre playing I suppose makes people clever at speaking on his own subject, namely lyre playing, doesn't he?

Yes.

Well, on what subject does the Sophist make clever speakers?

Obviously on the subject of which he imparts knowledge.

Very probably. And what is this subject on which the Sophist is both an expert himself and can make his pupil expert?

313 I give up, he said. I can't tell you.

Well then, I continued, do you realize the sort of danger to which you are going to expose your soul? If it were a case of putting your body into the hands of someone and risking the treatment's turning out beneficial or the reverse, you would ponder deeply whether to entrust it to him or not, and would spend many days over the question, calling on the counsel of your friends and relations. But when it comes to something which you value more highly than your body, namely your soul—something on whose beneficial or harmful treat-
b ment your whole welfare depends—you have not consulted either your father or your brother or any of us who are your friends on the question whether or not to entrust your soul to this stranger who has arrived among us. On the contrary, having heard the news in the evening, so you tell me, here you come at dawn, not to discuss or consult me on this question of whether or not to entrust yourself to Protagoras, but ready to spend both your own money and that of your friends as if you had already made up your mind that you must at all costs associate with this man—whom you say you do not know and
c have never spoken to, but call a Sophist, and then turn out not to know what a Sophist is though you intend to put yourself into his hands.

When he heard this he said, It looks like it, Socrates, from what you say.

Can we say then, Hippocrates, that a Sophist is really a merchant

or peddler of the goods by which a soul is nourished? To me he appears to be something like that.

But what is it that nourishes a soul?

What it learns, presumably, I said. And we must see that the Sophist in commending his wares does not deceive us, like the wholesaler and the retailer who deal in food for the body. These people do not know themselves which of the wares they offer is good or bad for d the body, but in selling them praise all alike, and those who buy from them don't know either, unless one of them happens to be a trainer or a doctor. So too those who take the various subjects of knowledge from city to city, and offer them for sale retail to whoever wants them, commend everything that they have for sale, but it may be, my dear Hippocrates, that some of these men also are ignorant of the beneficial or harmful effects on the soul of what they have for sale, and e so too are those who buy from them, unless one of them happens to be a physician of the soul. If then you chance to be an expert in discerning which of them is good or bad, it is safe for you to buy knowledge from Protagoras or anyone else, but if not, take care you don't find yourself gambling dangerously with all of you that is dearest to 314 you. Indeed the risk you run in purchasing knowledge is much greater than that in buying provisions. When you buy food and drink, you can carry it away from the shop or warehouse in a receptacle, and before you receive it into your body by eating or drinking you can store it away at home and take the advice of an expert as to what you should eat and drink and what not, and how much you should consume and when; so there is not much risk in the actual purchase. But knowledge cannot be taken away in a parcel. When you have paid for it b you must receive it straight into the soul. You go away having learned it and are benefited or harmed accordingly. So I suggest we give this matter some thought, not only by ourselves, but also with those who are older than we, for we are still rather young to examine such a large problem. However, now let us carry out our plan to go and hear the man, and when we have heard him we can bring others into our consultations also, for Protagoras is not here by himself. There is Hippias of Elis, and I think Prodicus of Ceos too, and many other wise c men.

Having agreed on this we started out. When we found ourselves in the doorway, we stood there and continued a discussion which had arisen between us on the way. So that we might not leave it unfinished, but have it out before we went in, we were standing in the doorway talking until we should reach agreement. I believe the porter, a eunuch, overheard us, and it seems likely that the crowd of Sophists d had put him in a bad temper with visitors. At any rate when we knocked at the door he opened it, saw us and said, Ha, Sophists! He's busy. And thereupon he slammed the door as hard as he could with

both hands. We knocked again, and he answered through the closed door, Didn't you hear me say he's busy?

My good man, I said, we have not come to see Callias and we are
e not Sophists. Cheer up. It is Protagoras we want to see, so announce us. So at last the fellow reluctantly opened the door to us.

When we were inside, we came upon Protagoras walking in the portico, and walking with him in a long line were, on one side Callias, son of Hipponicus; his stepbrother Paralus, the son of Pericles; and
315 Charmides, son of Glaucon; and on the other side Pericles' other son, Xanthippus; Philippides, son of Philomelus; and Antimoerus of Mende, the most eminent of Protagoras' pupils, who is studying professionally, to become a Sophist. Those who followed behind listening to their conversation seemed to be for the most part foreigners—Protagoras draws them from every city that he passes through, charming them with his voice like Orpheus, and they follow spellbound
b —but there were some Athenians in the band as well. As I looked at the party I was delighted to notice what special care they took never to get in front or to be in Protagoras' way. When he and those with him turned round, the listeners divided this way and that in perfect order, and executing a circular movement took their places each time in the rear. It was beautiful.

'After that I recognized,' [1] as Homer says, Hippias of Elis, sitting
c on a seat of honor in the opposite portico, and around him were seated on benches Eryximachus, son of Acumenus, and Phaedrus of Myrrhinus and Andron, son of Androtion, with some fellow citizens of his and other foreigners. They appeared to be asking him questions on natural science, particularly astronomy, while he gave each his explanation ex cathedra and held forth on their problems.

d 'And there too spied I Tantalus' [2]—for Prodicus of Ceos was also in town, and was occupying a room which Hipponicus used to use for storage, but now owing to the number of people staying in the house Callias had cleared it out and made it into a guest room. Prodicus was still in bed, wrapped up in rugs and blankets, and plenty of them, as far as one could see, and beside him on the neighboring couches sat Pausanias from Cerameis and with him someone who was still a young boy—a lad of fine character I think, and certainly very good-looking.
e I think I heard that his name is Agathon, and I shouldn't be surprised if Pausanias is particularly attached to him. Well there was this boy and the two Adimantuses—the son of Cepis and the son of Leucolophides—and a few others. But what they were talking about I couldn't discover from outside, although I was very keen to hear
316 Prodicus, whom I regard as a man of inspired genius. You see, he has such a deep voice that there was a kind of booming noise in the room which drowned the words. Just after we had come in, there entered

[1] *Odyssey* 11.601. [2] *Odyssey* 11.582.

close on our heels the handsome Alcibiades as you call him—and I quite agree—and Critias, son of Callaeschrus.

When we entered, then, we paused for a few moments to drink b in the scene and then approached Protagoras, and I said, Protagoras, this is Hippocrates, and it is you that we have come to see.

Do you wish to speak to me alone, he asked, or with the others?

It is all the same to us, I replied. Hear what we have come for and then decide for yourself.

And what have you come for?

Hippocrates here is one of our citizens, son of Apollodorus. He comes of a great and prosperous family, and is considered the equal of any of his contemporaries in natural gifts. I think he is anxious to c make a name for himself in the city, and he believes that the most likely way to success is to become a pupil of yours. So now it is for you to decide whether you think this calls for a conversation between ourselves or with others.

I appreciate your forethought on my behalf, Socrates. A man has to be careful when he visits powerful cities as a foreigner, and induces their most promising young men to forsake the company of others, relatives or acquaintances, older or younger, and consort with him on the grounds that his conversation will improve them. Such conduct d arouses no small resentment and various forms of hostility and intrigue. Personally I hold that the Sophist's art is an ancient one, but that those who put their hand to it in former times, fearing the odium which it brings, adopted a disguise and worked under cover. Some used poetry as a screen, for instance Homer and Hesiod and Simonides; others religious rites and prophecy, like Orpheus and Musaeus and their school; some even—so I have noticed—physical training, like Iccus of Tarentum and in our own day Herodicus of Selymbria, the former Megarian, as great a Sophist as any. Music was e used as cover by your own Agathocles, a great Sophist, and Pythoclides of Ceos and many others. All of them, as I say, used these arts as a screen to escape malice. I myself, however, am not of their mind in 317 this. I don't believe they accomplished their purpose, for they did not pass unobserved by the men who held the reins of power in their cities, though it is on their account that these disguises are adopted; the mass of people notice nothing, but simply echo what the leaders tell them. Now to run away and fail to escape, but be discovered instead, turns the attempt into sheer folly, and cannot fail to arouse even greater hostility, for people think that the man who behaves like this b is in addition to his other faults an unprincipled rogue. I therefore have always gone the opposite way to my predecessors'. I admit to being a Sophist and an educator, and I consider this a better precaution than the other—admission rather than denial. I have devised other precautions as well, so that, if heaven will forgive the boast, I come to no harm through being a confessed Sophist, though I have c

been many years in the profession. Indeed I am getting on in life now —so far as age goes I might be the father of any one of you—so if there is anything you want of me, I should much prefer to say my say in front of the whole company.

Thereupon, suspecting that he wanted to display his skill to Prodicus and Hippias and get some glory from the fact that we had come as his professed admirers, I remarked, Then why should we not
d call Prodicus and Hippias, and the people who are with them, to listen to us?

By all means, said Protagoras.

Would you like to make a regular circle, said Callias, so that you can talk sitting down?

Everyone agreed that this was the thing to do, and at the prospect of listening to wise men we all eagerly took hold of the benches and couches with our own hands and arranged them beside Hippias,
e where the benches were. Meanwhile Callias and Alcibiades got Prodicus out of bed and fetched him along with his companions.

When we were all seated, Protagoras began, Now that these gentlemen are present, Socrates, perhaps you will say something about the matter you mentioned to me just now on this young man's
318 behalf.

I can only begin as I did before, by telling you of our purpose in coming. Hippocrates has a feeling that he would like to become one of your followers. He says therefore that he would be glad to be told what effect it will have on him. That is all we have to say.

Then Protagoras replied, Young man, if you come to me, your gain will be this. The very day you join me, you will go home a better man, and the same the next day. Each day you will make progress toward a better state.

b On hearing this I said, Protagoras, what you say is not at all surprising, but very natural. Even you, for all your years and wisdom, would become better, if someone were to teach you something that you didn't happen to know. Please don't answer like this, but give us the kind of reply that Hippocrates would get if he suddenly changed his mind and took a fancy to study with that young man who has just lately come to live at Athens, Zeuxippus of Heraclea. Suppose he went to him, just as he has come to you, and heard him say the same thing,
c that each day he spent with him he would get better and make progress, and asked him the further question, 'What shall I get better at, and where shall I make progress?' Zeuxippus would say, 'In painting.' Or if he were with Orthagoras of Thebes, and having heard the same reply as he got from you, went on to ask in what respect he would get daily better by being with him, Orthagoras would say, 'In playing the flute.' Now give a similar answer to the lad and to me who am putting
d the question for him. Hippocrates, by becoming a pupil of Protagoras, will, on the very day he joins him, go home a better man, and on each

successive day will make similar progress—toward what, Protagoras, and better at what?

Protagoras heard me out and said, You put your questions well, and I enjoy answering good questioners. When he comes to me, Hippocrates will not be put through the same things that another Sophist would inflict on him. The others treat their pupils badly; these young men, who have deliberately turned their backs on specialization, e they take and plunge into special studies again, teaching them arithmetic and astronomy and geometry and music—here he glanced at Hippias—but from me he will learn only what he has come to learn. What is that subject? The proper care of his personal affairs, so that he may best manage his own household, and also of the state's affairs, so as to become a real power in the city, both as speaker and man of 319 action.

Do I follow you? said I. I take you to be describing the art of politics, and promising to make men good citizens.

That, said he, is exactly what I profess to do.

Then it is a truly splendid accomplishment that you have mastered, said I, if indeed you have mastered it. I warn you that you will hear nothing from me but my real mind. The fact is, I did not think b this was something that could be taught, though when you say otherwise I cannot doubt your word. But it is up to me to say why I believe it cannot be taught nor furnished by one man to another. I hold that the Athenians, like the rest of the Hellenes, are sensible people. Now when we meet in the Assembly, then if the state is faced with some building project, I observe that the architects are sent for and consulted about the proposed structures, and when it is a matter of shipbuilding, the naval designers, and so on with everything which the Assembly regards as a subject for learning and teaching. If anyone c else tries to give advice, whom they do not consider an expert, however handsome or wealthy or nobly born he may be, it makes no difference; the members reject him noisily and with contempt, until either he is shouted down and desists, or else he is dragged off or ejected by the police on the orders of the presiding magistrates. That is how they behave over subjects they consider technical. But when it is something to do with the government of the country that is to be debated, d the man who gets up to advise them may be a builder or equally well a blacksmith or a shoemaker, merchant or shipowner, rich or poor, of good family or none. No one brings it up against any of these, as against those I have just mentioned, that here is a man who without any technical qualifications, unable to point to anybody as his teacher, is yet trying to give advice. The reason must be that they do not think this is a subject that can be taught.

And you must not suppose that this is true only of the community at large. Individually also the wisest and best of our countrymen are e unable to hand on to others the virtue which they possess. Pericles, for

instance, the father of these two boys, gave them the very best education in everything that depends on teaching, but in his own special
320 kind of wisdom he neither trains them himself nor hands them over to any other instructor; they simply browse around on their own like sacred cattle, on the chance of picking up virtue automatically. To take a different example, Clinias, the younger brother of Alcibiades here, is a ward of that same Pericles, who for fear that Alcibiades would corrupt him, took him away and tried to give him a better upbringing by placing him in the household of Ariphron. Before six months were out, Ariphron gave him back; he could make nothing of
b him. I could mention plenty of others too, excellent men themselves, who never made anyone else better, either their own relatives or others.

With these facts in mind, Protagoras, I do not believe that virtue can be taught. But when I hear you speaking as I do, my skepticism is shaken and I suppose there is truth in what you say, for I regard you as a man of wide experience, deep learning, and original thought. If then you can demonstrate more plainly to us that virtue
c is something that can be taught, please don't hoard your wisdom but explain.

I shall not be a miser, Socrates, he replied. Now shall I, as an old man speaking to his juniors, put my explanation in the form of a story, or give it as a reasoned argument?

Many of the audience answered that he should relate it in whichever form he pleased.

Then I think, he said, it will be pleasanter to tell you a story.

Once upon a time, there existed gods but no mortal creatures.
d When the appointed time came for these also to be born, the gods formed them within the earth out of a mixture of earth and fire and the substances which are compounded from earth and fire. And when they were ready to bring them to the light, they charged Prometheus and Epimetheus with the task of equipping them and allotting suitable powers to each kind. Now Epimetheus begged Prometheus to allow him to do the distribution himself—'and when I have done it,' he said, 'you can review it.' So he persuaded him and set to work. In his allotment he gave to some creatures strength without speed, and
e equipped the weaker kinds with speed. Some he armed with weapons, while to the unarmed he gave some other faculty and so contrived means for their preservation. To those that he endowed with smallness, he granted winged flight or a dwelling underground; to those which he increased in stature, their size itself was a protection. Thus
321 he made his whole distribution on a principle of compensation, being careful by these devices that no species should be destroyed.

When he had sufficiently provided means of escape from mutual slaughter, he contrived their comfort against the seasons sent from Zeus, clothing them with thick hair or hard skins sufficient to ward

off the winter's cold, and effective also against heat, and he b
planned that when they went to bed, the same coverings should
serve as proper and natural bedclothes for each species. He shod them
also, some with hoofs, others with hard and bloodless skin.

Next he appointed different sorts of food for them—to some
the grass of the earth, to others the fruit of trees, to others roots. Some
he allowed to gain their nourishment by devouring other animals, and
these he made less prolific, while he bestowed fertility on their vic-
tims, and so preserved the species.

Now Epimetheus was not a particularly clever person, and before
he realized it he had used up all the available powers on the brute c
beasts, and being left with the human race on his hands unprovided
for, did not know what to do with them. While he was puzzling about
this, Prometheus came to inspect the work, and found the other ani-
mals well off for everything, but man naked, unshod, unbedded, and
unarmed, and already the appointed day had come, when man too
was to emerge from within the earth into the daylight. Prome-
theus therefore, being at a loss to provide any means of salvation
for man, stole from Hephaestus and Athena the gift of skill in the arts, d
together with fire—for without fire it was impossible for anyone to
possess or use this skill—and bestowed it on man. In this way man ac-
quired sufficient resources to keep himself alive, but had no political
wisdom. This was in the keeping of Zeus, and Prometheus no longer
had the right of entry to the citadel where Zeus dwelt; moreover the
sentinels of Zeus were terrible. But into the dwelling shared by Athena
and Hephaestus, in which they practiced their art, he penetrated by e
stealth, and carrying off Hephaestus' art of working with fire, and
the art of Athena as well, he gave them to man. Through this gift man
had the means of life, but Prometheus, so the story says, thanks to 322
Epimetheus, had later on to stand his trial for theft.

Since, then, man had a share in the portion of the gods, in the
first place because of his divine kinship he alone among living crea-
tures believed in gods, and set to work to erect altars and images of
them. Secondly, by the art which they possessed, men soon discovered
articulate speech and names, and invented houses and clothes and
shoes and bedding and got food from the earth.

Thus provided for, they lived at first in scattered groups; there
were no cities. Consequently they were devoured by wild beasts, since b
they were in every respect the weaker, and their technical skill,
though a sufficient aid to their nurture, did not extend to making war
on the beasts, for they had not the art of politics, of which the art of
war is a part. They sought therefore to save themselves by coming to-
gether and founding fortified cities, but when they gathered in com-
munities they injured one another for want of political skill, and so
scattered again and continued to be devoured. Zeus therefore, fearing c
the total destruction of our race, sent Hermes to impart to men the

qualities of respect for others and a sense of justice, so as to bring order into our cities and create a bond of friendship and union.

Hermes asked Zeus in what manner he was to bestow these gifts on men. 'Shall I distribute them as the arts were distributed—that is, on the principle that one trained doctor suffices for many laymen, and so with the other experts? Shall I distribute justice and respect for their fellows in this way, or to all alike?'

d 'To all,' said Zeus. 'Let all have their share. There could never be cities if only a few shared in these virtues, as in the arts. Moreover, you must lay it down as my law that if anyone is incapable of acquiring his share of these two virtues he shall be put to death as a plague to the city.'

Thus it is, Socrates, and from this cause, that in a debate involving skill in building, or in any other craft, the Athenians, like other e men, believe that few are capable of giving advice, and if someone outside those few volunteers to advise them, then as you say, they do 323 not tolerate it—rightly so, in my submission. But when the subject of their counsel involves political wisdom, which must always follow the path of justice and moderation, they listen to every man's opinion, for they think that everyone must share in this kind of virtue; otherwise the state could not exist. That, Socrates, is the reason for this.

Here is another proof that I am not deceiving you in saying that all men do in fact believe that everyone shares a sense of justice and civic virtue. In specialized skills, as you say, if a man claims to be good at the flute or at some other art when he is not, people either b laugh at him or are annoyed, and his family restrain him as if he were crazy. But when it comes to justice and civic virtue as a whole, even if someone is known to be wicked, yet if he publicly tells the truth about himself, his truthfulness, which in the other case was counted a virtue, is here considered madness. Everyone, it is said, ought to say he is good, whether he is or not, and whoever does not make such a claim is out of his mind, for a man cannot be without some share in c justice, or he would not be human.

So much then for the point that men rightly take all alike into their counsels concerning virtue of this sort, because they believe that all have a share in it. I shall next try to demonstrate to you that they do not regard it as innate or automatic, but as acquired by instruction and taking thought. No one is angered by the faults which d are believed to be due to nature or chance, nor do people rebuke or teach or punish those who exhibit them, in the hope of curing them; they simply pity them. Who would be so foolish as to treat in that way the ugly or dwarfish or weak? Everyone knows that it is nature or chance which gives this kind of characteristics to a man, both the good and the bad. But it is otherwise with the good qualities which are thought to be acquired through care and practice and instruction. It e is the absence of these, surely, and the presence of the corresponding

vices, that call forth indignation and punishment and admonition. Among these faults are to be put injustice and irreligion and in general everything that is contrary to civic virtue. In this field indigna- 324
tion and admonition are universal, evidently because of a belief that such virtue can be acquired by taking thought or by instruction. Just consider the function of punishment, Socrates, in relation to the wrongdoer. That will be enough to show you that men believe it possible to impart goodness. In punishing wrongdoers, no one concentrates on the fact that a man has done wrong in the past, or punishes him on that account, unless taking blind vengeance like a beast. No, b
punishment is not inflicted by a rational man for the sake of the crime that has been committed—after all one cannot undo what is past—but for the sake of the future, to prevent either the same man or, by the spectacle of his punishment, someone else, from doing wrong again. But to hold such a view amounts to holding that virtue can be instilled by education; at all events the punishment is inflicted as a deterrent. This then is the view held by all who inflict it c
whether privately or publicly. And your fellow countrymen, the Athenians, certainly do inflict punishment and correction on supposed wrongdoers, as do others also. This argument therefore shows that they too think it possible to impart and teach goodness. d

I think that I have now sufficiently demonstrated to you, first that your countrymen act reasonably in accepting the advice of smith and shoemaker on political matters, and secondly, that they do believe goodness to be something imparted by teaching. There remains the question which troubles you about good men—why it is that whereas they teach their sons the subjects that depend on instruction, and make them expert in these things, yet in their own brand of goodness they do not make them any better than others. On this, Socrates, I will offer you a plain argument rather than a parable as I did before. Think of it like this. Is there or is there not some one thing in which all citizens must share, if a state is to exist at all? In the answer e
to this question, if anywhere, lies the solution of your difficulty. If there is, and this one essential is not the art of building or forging or pottery but justice and moderation and holiness of life, or to concen- 325
trate it into a single whole, manly virtue—if, I say, it is this in which all must share and which must enter into every man's actions whatever other occupation he chooses to learn and practice; if the one who lacks it, man, woman, or child, must be instructed and corrected until by punishment he is reformed, and whoever does not respond to punishment and instruction must be expelled from the state or put b
to death as incurable—if all this is true, and in these circumstances our good men teach their sons other accomplishments but not this one thing, then think what extraordinary people good men must be! We have already shown that they believe it can be taught, both publicly and privately. But although virtue can be taught and cultivated, yet it

seems they have their sons instructed in other arts, ignorance of which is no matter for capital punishment, but although if they are left ignorant of virtue and morally uncultivated they may be punished c by death or exile—and not only death but alienation of property and in a word the ruin of their estates—are we to suppose that they neglect this side of their education? Don't they rather bestow every care and attention upon it? *Of course they do, Socrates.* They teach and admonish them from earliest childhood and throughout their lives. As soon as a child can understand what is said to him, nurse, mother, d tutor, and the father himself vie with each other to make him as good as possible, instructing him through everything he does or says, pointing out, 'This is right and that is wrong, this honorable and that disgraceful, this holy, that impious; do this, don't do that.' If he is obedient, well and good. If not, they straighten him with threats and beatings, like a warped and twisted plank.

Later on when they send the children to school, their instructions to the masters lay much more emphasis on good behavior than e on letters or music. The teachers take good care of this, and when boys have learned their letters and are ready to understand the written 326 word as formerly the spoken, they set the works of good poets before them on their desks to read and make them learn them by heart, poems containing much admonition and many stories, eulogies, and panegyrics of the good men of old, so that the child may be inspired to imitate them and long to be like them.

The music masters by analogous methods instill self-control and deter the young from evil-doing. And when they have learned to play the lyre, they teach them the works of good poets of another sort, b namely the lyrical, which they accompany on the lyre, familiarizing the minds of the children with the rhythms and melodies. By this means they become more civilized, more balanced, and better adjusted in themselves and so more capable in whatever they say or do, for rhythm and harmonious adjustment are essential to the whole of human life.

Over and above this, they are sent to a trainer, so that a good mind may have a good body to serve it, and no one be forced by physi- c cal weakness to play the coward in war and other ordeals.

All this is done by those best able to do it—that is, by the wealthy—and it is their sons who start their education at the earliest age and continue it the longest. When they have finished with teachers, the state compels them to learn the laws and use them as a pattern for their life, lest left to themselves they should drift aimlessly. You know how, when children are not yet good at writing, the writing d master traces outlines with the pencil before giving them the slate, and makes them follow the lines as a guide in their own writing; well, similarly the state sets up the laws, which are inventions of good lawgivers of ancient times, and compels the citizens to rule and be ruled

in accordance with them. Whoever strays outside the lines, it punishes, and the name given to this punishment both among yourselves e
and in many other places is correction, intimating that the penalty corrects or guides.

Seeing then that all this care is taken over virtue, both individually and by the state, are you surprised that virtue should be teachable, and puzzled to know whether it is? There is nothing to be surprised at. The wonder would be if it were not teachable.

Why then, you ask, do many sons of good men turn out worthless? I will tell you this too. It is nothing surprising, if what I said earlier was true, that this faculty, virtue, is something in which no one 327
may be a layman if a state is to exist at all. If it is as I say—and most assuredly it is—consider the matter with the substitution of any art you like. Suppose a state could not exist unless we were all flute players to the best of our ability, and everyone taught everyone else that art both privately and publicly, and scolded the bad flute player, and no one held back on this subject any more than anyone b
now begrudges information on what is right and lawful or makes a secret of it as of certain other techniques. After all, it is to our advantage that our neighbor should be just and virtuous, and therefore everyone gladly talks about it to everyone else and instructs him in justice and the law. If then, as I say, it were so with flute playing, and we all showed equal eagerness and willingness to teach one another, do you think, Socrates, that the sons of good players would become good players in their turn any more than the sons of bad ones? Not so, I think, but whoever had a son with the greatest natural talent for the flute, his son would rise to fame, and a son without this talent would c
remain in obscurity. The son of a good performer would often be a poor one, and vice versa, but at any rate all would be good enough in comparison with someone who knew nothing of flute playing at all.

Now apply this analogy to our present condition. The man who in a civilized and humane society appears to you the most wicked must be thought just—a practitioner, as one might say, of justice—if one has to judge him in comparison with men who have neither edu- d
cation nor courts of justice nor laws nor any constraint compelling them to be continually heedful of virtue—savages in fact like those whom the playwright Pherecrates brought onto the stage at last year's Lenaea. If you found yourself among such people—people like the man-haters of his chorus—you would be only too glad to meet a Eurybatus and a Phrynondas, and would bitterly regret the very depravity of our own society. But as it is you are spoiled, Socrates, e
in that all are teachers of virtue to the best of their ability, and so you think that no one is. In the same way if you asked who teaches the 328
Greek language you would not find anyone, and again if you looked for a teacher of the sons of our artisans in the craft which they have in fact learned from their father to the best of their ability, and from his

friends in the same trade, there again I don't think it would be easy to point to a master, though in the case of a complete tyro it would be easy enough. Thus it is with virtue and everything else, so that if we can find someone only a little better than the others at advancing us on the road to virtue, we must be content.

b My claim is that I am one of these, rather better than anyone else at helping a man to acquire a good and noble character, worthy indeed of the fee which I charge and even more, as my pupils themselves agree. On this account I have adopted the following method of assessing my payment. Anyone who comes to learn from me may either c pay the fee I ask for or, if he prefers, go to a temple, state on oath what he believes to be the worth of my instruction, and deposit that amount.

There, Socrates, you have both the parable and the argument by which I have sought to show that virtue is teachable and that the Athenians believe it to be so, and that at the same time it is quite natural for the sons of good fathers to turn out good for nothing, and vice versa. Why, even the sons of Polyclitus, who are contemporaries of Paralus and Xanthippus here, cannot hold a candle to their father, nor can the sons of many other craftsmen. But it is too early to bring d such a charge against these two; they are young, and there is still promise in them.

Here Protagoras brought to an end his long and magnificent display of eloquence. For a long time I gazed at him spellbound, eager to catch any further word that he might utter. When I saw that he had really finished, I collected myself with an effort and said, turning to Hippocrates: Son of Apollodorus, how grateful I am to you for induce ing me to come here. To have heard what Protagoras has just said is something I value very highly. I used to think that it was by no human diligence that good men acquired their goodness, but now I am convinced. There is just one small thing holding me back, which Protagoras I know will easily explain, now that he has instructed us on 329 so many points. It is true that if a man talked on these matters with any of our popular orators, he might possibly hear similar discourses from Pericles or some other proficient speaker, but if one asks any of them an additional question, like books they cannot either answer or ask a question on their own account. Ask them the smallest thing supplementary to what they have said, and like a gong which booms out when you strike it and goes on until you lay a hand on it, so b our orators at a tiny question spin out a regular Marathon of speech. Protagoras on the other hand, though he is perfectly capable of long and splendid speeches as we have seen, has also the faculty of answering a question briefly, and when he asks one himself, of waiting and listening to the answer—a rare accomplishment.

Now then, Protagoras, there is just one small question left, your answer to which will give me all I want. You say that virtue is teach-

able, and there is no one I would believe sooner than you. But there is one thing which took me by surprise in your speech, and I should like c you to fill this gap in my mind. You said that Zeus bestowed on men justice and respect for their fellows, and again at several points in your discourse justice and self-control and holiness and the rest were mentioned as if together they made up one thing, virtue. This is the point I want you to state for me with more precision. Is virtue a single whole, and are justice and self-control and holiness parts of it, or are these latter all names for one and the same thing? That is d what I still want to know.

Well, that is easy to answer, said he. Virtue is one, and the qualities you ask about are parts of it.

Do you mean, said I, as the parts of a face are parts—mouth, nose, eyes, and ears—or like the parts of a piece of gold, which do not differ from one another or from the whole except in size?

In the first way, I should say—that is, they are in the relation of the parts of a face to the whole. e

Then do men so share in these parts of virtue that some have one and some another, or must a man who possesses one of them possess them all?

By no means. Many men are brave but unjust, and others are just but not wise.

Are these also parts of virtue? said I. Wisdom, I mean, and courage?

Most emphatically. Wisdom indeed is the greatest of the parts. 330

And each of them is different from the others?

Yes.

Has each also its own function? In a face, the eye is not like the ear nor has it the same function. Nor do the other parts resemble one another in function any more than in other respects. Is this how the parts of virtue differ, both in themselves and in their function? It b must be so, I suppose, if the parallel holds good.

Yes it is so, Socrates.

Then no other part of virtue resembles knowledge or justice or courage or temperance or holiness.

He agreed.

Now let us consider together what sort of thing each is. First of all, is there such a thing as justice or not? I think there is. c

So do I, he said.

Well, if someone asked you and me, 'Tell me, you two, this thing that you mentioned a moment ago—justice—is it itself just or unjust?' I myself should answer that it was just. Which way would you vote?

The same as you, he said.

Then we would both answer that justice is of such a nature as to be just?

d He agreed.

If he next asked, 'You say that there is also such a thing as holiness?' we should agree I suppose?

Yes.

'Meaning that holiness too is a thing?' We should still assent?

He agreed again.

'Do you then say that this thing is of a nature to be holy or unholy?' Personally I should be annoyed at this, and say, 'What a blasphemous question! Nothing else could well be holy if we won't allow e holiness itself to be so.' What about you? Wouldn't that be your answer?

Certainly, he said.

Suppose now he went on to ask us, 'But what did you say a few minutes ago? Didn't I hear you rightly? I thought you said that the 331 parts of virtue are so related that one does not resemble the other.' For my part I should reply, 'You have got most of it right, but your ears deceived you if you think I said that myself. It was Protagoras' answer to a question I put.' Now if he asks you, 'Is this true, Protagoras? Is it you who say that one part of virtue does not resemble another? Is this your statement?'—what would you answer?

I should have to admit it, he said.

Then having agreed about this, what shall we say if he goes on to ask, 'Then it is not the nature of holiness to be something just, nor of justice to be holy; it will be not-holy, and holiness will be not-just— b that is, unjust, and justice unholy?' What shall we answer? I should say on my own behalf that justice is holy and holiness just, and on your behalf, if you would allow me, I should make the same reply, that justice is either the same thing as holiness or very like it, and that justice unquestionably resembles holiness and holiness justice. Are you going to prevent me from making this answer, or do you agree with me?

I don't think it is quite so simple, Socrates. I can't really admit c that justice is holy and holiness just; I think there is some difference there. However, he said, what does it matter? If you like, let us assume that justice is holy and holiness just.

Excuse me, I said. It isn't this 'if you like' and 'if that's what you think' that I want us to examine, but you and me ourselves. What I mean is, I think the argument will be most fairly tested, if we take the 'if' out of it.

d Well of course, he replied, justice does have some resemblance to holiness. After all, everything resembles everything else up to a point. There is a sense in which white resembles black, and hard soft, and so on with all other things that present the most contrary appearances. Even the parts of the face, which we described earlier as having different functions and not being like each other, have a certain resemblance and are like each other in some way. So by your

method you can prove, if you want to, that they too all resemble one another. But it is not right to call things similar because they have e some one point of similarity, even when the resemblance is very slight, any more than to call things dissimilar that have some point of dissimilarity.

At this I said in some surprise, And is this how you suppose justice to be related to holiness, that there is only a slight resemblance between them?

Not quite that, but not on the other hand in the way that you seem to believe.

Well, said I, this line of argument doesn't seem to be agreeable to 332 you, so let us drop it and look at something else that you said. You recognize the existence of folly?

Yes.

Is not wisdom altogether contrary to it?

Yes.

And when men act rightly and advantageously, do you regard them as acting temperately or not?

Temperately.

That is to say with temperance?

Of course. b

And those who act wrongly act foolishly, and in doing so do not behave temperately?

He agreed.

Then foolish behavior is the opposite of temperate?

Yes.

And foolish behavior is the outcome of folly, and temperate of temperance?

Yes.

If something is done with strength, it is done strongly, and if with weakness weakly, if with speed quickly, and if with slowness slowly?

Yes.

What is done in the same manner is done by the same agency, c and if contrariwise, by the contrary?

He agreed.

Again, said I, you recognize the existence of the fair?

He did.

Has it any contrary except the foul?

No.

And the good too you recognize?

Yes.

Has it any contrary except the bad?

No.

And also high pitch in sound? And has it any other contrary but low?

No.

In short, said I, to everything that admits of a contrary there is one contrary and no more.

He conceded the point.

d Now, said I, let us recapitulate our points of agreement. We agreed that each thing has one contrary and no more, that what is done in a contrary manner is done by a contrary agency, that a foolish action is contrary to a temperate one, and that a temperate action is performed with temperance and a foolish one with folly.

e He admitted all this.

If then what is done in a contrary manner is done by a contrary agency, and one action is performed with temperance and the other with folly—in a contrary manner and so by contrary agencies—then folly is the contrary of temperance.

It seems so.

Now you remember our earlier agreement that folly was the contrary of wisdom?

Yes.

And that one thing has one contrary?

Certainly.

333 Then which statement are we to give up? The dictum 'one thing one contrary' or the statement that wisdom is a distinct thing from temperance, both being parts of virtue, and that in addition to each being distinct they are dissimilar both in themselves and in their functions, like the parts of a face? Which shall we renounce? The two statements are not very harmonious. They don't chime well together or fit in with each other. How could they, if one thing can have only b one opposite, and yet though folly is only one thing, temperance as well as wisdom appears to be contrary to it? Isn't that the way of it, Protagoras?

He agreed, though most reluctantly.

Then must not temperance and wisdom be the same, just as earlier justice and holiness turned out to be much the same? Come now, Protagoras, we must not falter, but complete our inquiry. Do you think that a man who commits an injustice acts temperately in c committing it?

For my part I should be ashamed to agree to that, he replied. Of course many people do.

Well, shall I direct my argument against them or against you?

If you wish, he said, argue first against the proposition of the many.

It is all the same to me, said I, provided you make the replies, whether it is your own opinion or not. It is the argument itself that I wish to probe, though it may turn out that both I who question and you who answer are equally under scrutiny.

d At first Protagoras began to make difficulties, alleging that it

would be hard to conduct a discussion on these terms, but in the end he agreed to answer.

Good, said I. Now let us start from the beginning. You believe that some people show temperance in doing wrong?

We will suppose so, he said.

And to show temperance is to show good sense?

Yes.

Which means that in doing wrong they have planned well?

So be it.

If their wrongdoing is successful or unsuccessful?

If it is successful.

You agree that some things are good?

Yes.

And do you mean by good those things which are beneficial to men?

Not only those, he said. Even if they are not beneficial to me, I e
still call them good.

At this point I thought Protagoras was beginning to bristle, ready for a quarrel and preparing to do battle with his answers. Seeing this I became more cautious and proceeded gently with my questioning: Do you mean things which are beneficial to no human being, or things 334
that are not beneficial at all? Do you call them good also?

Of course not, he said. But I know plenty of things—foods, drinks, drugs, and many others—which are harmful to men, and others which are beneficial, and others again which, so far as men are concerned, are neither, but are harmful or beneficial to horses, and others only to cattle or dogs. Some have no effect on animals, but only on trees, and some again are good for the roots of trees but injurious to the young growths. Manure, for instance, is good for all plants b
when applied to their roots, but utterly destructive if put on the shoots or young branches. Or take olive oil. It is very bad for plants, and most inimical to the hair of all animals except man, whereas men find it of service both to the hair and to the rest of the body. So diverse and multiform is goodness that even with us the same thing is good when applied externally but deadly when taken internally. Thus all c
doctors forbid the sick to use oil in preparing their food, except in the very smallest quantities, just enough to counteract the disagreeable smell which food and sauces may have for them.

The audience vigorously applauded this speech. Then said I, I'm a forgetful sort of man, Protagoras, and if someone speaks at length, I lose the thread of the argument. If I were a little deaf, you would d
recognize the necessity of raising your voice if you wanted to talk to me; so now since you find me forgetful, cut down your answers and make them shorter if I am to follow you.

What do you mean by 'make my answers short'? Am I to make them shorter than the subject demands?

Of course not.

As long as is necessary then?

e Yes.

As long a reply as *I* think necessary, or *you*?

What they told me, I answered, is that you have the gift both of speaking yourself and of teaching others to speak, just as you prefer—either at length, so that you never run dry, or so shortly that no one 335 could beat you for brevity. If then you are going to talk to me, please use the second method and be brief.

Frankly, Socrates, said he, I have fought many a contest of words, and if I had done as you bid me, that is, adopted the method chosen by my opponent, I should have proved no better than anyone else, nor would the name of Protagoras have been heard of in Greece.

I saw that he was dissatisfied with his own performance in the answers he had given, and would not of his own free will continue in b the role of answerer, and it seemed to me that it was not my business to remain any longer in the discussions. Well, I said, I have no wish myself to insist on continuing our conversation in a way that you don't approve. I will talk with you another time, when you are willing to converse so that I can follow. You for your part, as others say and you say for yourself, can carry on a discussion both in long and short c speeches, for you are a gifted man. I on the other hand cannot manage these long speeches—I wish I could. It was for you, who can do both, to indulge me and so make our discussion possible. But since you would rather not, and I have something to do and could not stay while you spin out your long speeches, I will leave you. I really ought to be going. Otherwise I should probably be glad to hear them.

With these words I got up to leave. As I did so Callias caught my d hand with his right hand, and with his left took hold of this old coat of mine and said, We shan't let you go, Socrates. Our talk won't be the same without you. Please stay with us. There is nothing that I would rather listen to than a conversation between you and Protagoras. You will be doing us all a kindness.

I was already standing up to go, and answered, Son of Hipponicus, I have always admired your enthusiasm for wisdom. Believe e me, I praise and love you for it now, and would gladly do what you wish, if your request were within my power to fulfill. But it's as if you were to ask me to keep up with Crison, the runner from Himera, when he was in his prime, or to run a race against some three-miler or 336 Marathon champion. I would say that to run with them would please me even more than it would please you, but I can't do it. If you want to see me and Crison running together, you must ask him to lower his standards, for I can't run fast, but he can run slowly. So if you want to hear Protagoras and me, ask him to go on answering me as he did at first, briefly and keeping to the point of my questions. How can

we have a discussion otherwise? Personally I thought that companionable talk was one thing, and public speaking another. b

But don't you see, Socrates? he said. Protagoras is surely right in thinking that he is entitled to talk in the way that suits him, just as much as you are.

Here Alcibiades broke in. No, no, Callias, he said. Socrates admits frankly that long speeches are beyond him and that Protagoras has the better of him there, but in discussion and the intelligent give-and-take of arguments I doubt if he would give any man best. If Protagoras in his turn admits that Socrates beats him in discussion, Socrates will be satisfied. But if he maintains his claim, let him continue the discussion with question and answer, not meeting every question with a long oration, eluding the arguments and refusing to meet them properly, spinning it out until most of his hearers have forgotten what the question was about—not that Socrates will be the one to forget it. I'll guarantee that, in spite of his little joke about being forgetful. I hold then that what Socrates proposes is the more reasonable, and I suppose it's right for each of us to say what he thinks. c d

After Alcibiades, so far as I remember, it was Critias who spoke, addressing his remarks to Prodicus and Hippias. Callias, he said, seems to me to be very much on the side of Protagoras, and Alcibiades is always out to win when he takes up a cause. But it is not for us to be partisans either of Socrates or of Protagoras. Let us implore them both alike not to break up the discussion in mid-career. e

Hearing this, Prodicus began, You are quite right, Critias. Those who are present at discussions of this kind must divide their attention between the speakers impartially, but not equally. The two things are not the same. They must hear both alike, but not give equal weight to each. More should be given to the wiser, and less to the other. I add my plea, Protagoras and Socrates, that you should be reconciled. Let your conversation be a discussion, not a dispute. A discussion is carried on among friends with good will, but a dispute is between rivals and enemies. In this way our meeting will be best conducted. You, the speakers, will be esteemed by us—esteemed, I say, not praised; for esteem is a genuine feeling in the hearts of the audience, whereas praise is often on the lips of men belying their true conviction—and we who listen will experience enjoyment rather than pleasure. Enjoyment can result from learning and partaking in the intellectual activity of the mind alone, but pleasure arises rather from eating or other forms of physical indulgence. 337 b c

So said Prodicus, and a large number of those present expressed agreement. After him the wise Hippias spoke up. Gentlemen, he said, I count you all my kinsmen and family and fellow citizens—by nature, not by convention. By nature like is kin to like, but custom, the tyrant of mankind, does much violence to nature. For us then who d

understand the nature of things, who are the intellectual leaders of Greece and in virtue of that very fact are now assembled in Athens, the center and shrine of Greek wisdom, and in this the finest house of
e that city, it would be a disgrace if we produced nothing worthy of our fame but fell to bickering like the lowest of mankind.

And so my request and my advice to you, Protagoras and Socrates, is to be reconciled, allowing us to act as mediators and bring you
338 together in a compromise. Socrates should not insist on the strict forms of discussion, carried on through the briefest of exchanges, if it is unwelcome to Protagoras, but should give way and slacken the reins of his discourse, so that it may wear for us a more dignified and elegant air, and Protagoras should refrain from shaking out every reef and running before the wind, launching out on a sea of words till he is out of sight of land. Let both take a middle course. Do this, take my advice, and appoint an arbitrator, referee, or president to preserve a
b moderate length in the speeches of both of you.

This counsel won general consent and a round of applause. Callias refused to let me go and they told us to choose an overseer. But I said that it would be unfitting to choose an arbitrator over our words. If he were a man of lesser attainments, it would be wrong to set him over his betters, and if he were someone like ourselves it would still not be proper, for in resembling us he would act like us,
c and his appointment would be superfluous.

Well then, you will say, we will choose someone superior. But the fact is, in my opinion, that it would be impossible for you to choose anyone wiser than Protagoras, and if you choose some lesser man and pretend he is better, this again would be to insult him, appointing someone over him as if he were a nobody. For myself I am indifferent.

I have another proposal to enable our discussion to proceed as
d you wish it to. If Protagoras is unwilling to give replies, let him be the questioner and I will answer, and at the same time try to show him how, in my submission, the respondent should speak. When I have answered as many questions as he likes to put, let him in return render similar account to me. Then if he does not seem to wish to answer a question as put, you and I will appeal to him jointly, as you did to me, not to spoil the discussion. For this purpose we have no need of a
e single arbitrator; you will all keep watch on us together.

Everyone thought this was the right way to proceed. Protagoras was most unwilling, but he had to agree to be the questioner, and then when he had questioned me sufficiently, to submit himself to me in turn and make brief replies.

He began his questions something like this. In my view, Soc-
339 rates, the most important part of a man's education is to become an authority on poetry. This means being able to criticize the good and bad points of a poem with understanding, to know how to distinguish them, and give one's reasons when asked. My question to you therefore

will concern the subject of our present discussion, namely virtue, but transferred to the realm of poetry. That will be the only difference. Simonides in one of his poems says to Scopas, son of Creon of Thessaly,

> Hard is it on the one hand to become b
> A good man truly, hands and feet and mind
> Foursquare, wrought without blame.

Do you know the piece, or should I recite it all to you?

There is no need, I said. I know it and have given it quite a lot of study.

Good. Now do you think it a beautiful and well-written poem?

Yes, both beautiful and well written.

And do you think a poem beautifully written if the poet contradicts himself?

No.

Then look at it more closely.

But really I have given it enough thought. c

Then you must know that as the poem proceeds he says:

> Nor do I count as sure the oft-quoted word
> Of Pittacus, though wise indeed he was
> Who spoke it. To be noble, said the sage,
> Is hard.

You understand that this is the same poet as wrote the previous lines?

Yes.

Then you think the two passages are consistent?

For my part I do, said I, though not without a fear that he might be right. Don't you?

How can a man be thought consistent when he says both these d things? First he lays it down himself that it is hard for a man to become truly good; then when he is a little further on in the poem he forgets. He finds fault with Pittacus, who said the same thing as he did himself, that it is hard to be noble, and refuses to accept it from him; but in censuring the man who said the same as he does, he obviously censures himself. Either his first or his second statement is wrong.

This sally evoked praise and applause from many of the audience, and at first I was like a man who has been hit by a good boxer; at e his words and the applause things went dark and I felt giddy. Then I turned to Prodicus—and to tell you the truth, this was a move to gain time to consider what the poet meant—and appealed to him by name. Prodicus, I said, Simonides is of course your fellow citizen; you ought to come to his aid. I think I will call on you as the river 340 Scamander in Homer called on the Simois when hard pressed by Achilles, with the words:

Dear brother, let us both together stem the hero's might.[3]

So I appeal to you lest our Simonides be sacked by Protagoras like another Troy, since truly to justify Simonides calls for that art of yours
b whereby you discern the difference between 'wish' and 'desire' and make all those other elegant distinctions which we heard just now. So see whether you agree with me. I don't believe Simonides contradicts himself. Now let us have your opinion first. Do you think 'to become' and 'to be' are the same, or different?

Different, most certainly, said Prodicus.

Well, at the beginning Simonides gave his own view, that it is
c difficult to become a good man, didn't he?

True, said Prodicus.

But as for Pittacus, he censures him not, as Protagoras thinks, for saying the same thing, but something different. According to Pittacus, the difficulty is not to *become* noble, as Simonides said it was, but to *be*. As Prodicus says, Protagoras, to be and to become are not the same; and if to be is not the same as to become, Simonides is not contradicting himself. I shouldn't be surprised if Prodicus and many oth-
d ers would agree with Hesiod that it is difficult to *become* good—he says, you remember,

The gods have put sweat on the path to virtue,

but when

The summit's reached,
Hard though it was, thenceforth the task is light
To keep it.[4]

Prodicus commended my explanation, but Protagoras said, Your justification, Socrates, involves a greater error than the one it sets out to defend.

It seems then, said I, that I have done harm, and am a contempti-
e ble physician, whose cure inflames the disease.

Well, it is so.

Explain, said I.

The poet must be very stupid, if he says that it is such a light matter to hold on to virtue, when everyone agrees that there is nothing more difficult.

To this I rejoined, It's a remarkably lucky thing that our friend Prodicus happens to be present at this discussion. I have a notion that his branch of wisdom is an old and god-given one, beginning perhaps
341 with Simonides or going even further back. Your learning covers many things but not, it appears, this. You are not acquainted with it as I have become through being a pupil of Prodicus. So now I don't think you understand that Simonides may not have taken this word

[3] *Iliad* 21.308. [4] *Works and Days* 289.

'hard' as you do. It may be like the word 'terrible' which Prodicus is always scolding me about, when in praising you or someone else I say, 'Protagoras is a terribly clever person.' He asks me if I'm not ashamed b to call good things terrible. What is terrible, he says, is bad. No one speaks of 'terrible wealth' or 'terrible peace,' but rather of 'a terrible disease,' 'a terrible war,' 'terrible poverty.' Perhaps then the Ceans and Simonides understand 'hard' as connoting something bad, or something else which you don't know. Let's ask Prodicus, for he is the right man to ask about the dialect of Simonides. Prodicus, what does c Simonides mean by 'hard'?

Bad, he replied.

Then that is why he blames Pittacus for saying, 'It is hard to be noble,' just as if he had heard him saying that it was bad to be noble.

What else do you suppose Simonides means? said Prodicus. He is reproaching Pittacus with not knowing how to distinguish meanings properly, being a Lesbian and brought up in a barbarous dialect.

Do you hear that, Protagoras? said I. Have you anything to say d to it?

It is not at all like that, said Protagoras. I know very well that by 'hard' Simonides meant what the rest of us mean—not 'bad,' but what is not easy, only accomplished with much effort.

I believe myself that that is what Simonides meant, said I, and I am sure Prodicus knew it. He is joking, and wants to test your ability to stand up for your own opinion. Actually the very next e words provide ample proof that Simonides did not equate 'hard' with 'bad.' He goes on,

A god alone can have this privilege,

and presumably he does not first say 'it is bad to be noble' and then add that only a god could achieve it, and allot it as a privilege entirely divine. That would mean that Prodicus is calling Simonides quite unprincipled and no true Cean. However, I am ready to tell you my own opinion of Simonides' meaning in this song, if you wish to test my 342 skill in poetry, as you call it, but if you prefer it I will listen to you.

Please speak if you will, said Protagoras when he heard this, and Prodicus, Hippias, and the others urged me strongly.

Well then, said I, I will try to expound to you the view that I take. The most ancient and fertile homes of philosophy among the Greeks are Crete and Sparta, where are to be found more Sophists than anywhere on earth. But they conceal their wisdom like the b Sophists Protagoras spoke of, and pretend to be fools, so that their superiority over the rest of Greece may not be known to lie in wisdom, but seem to consist in fighting and courage. Their idea is that if their real excellence became known, everyone would set to work to become wise. By this disguise they have taken in the pro-Spartans in other

cities, who to emulate them go about with bruised ears, bind their
c hands with thongs, take to physical training, and wear short cloaks, under the impression that these are the practices which have made the Spartans a great power in Greece; whereas the Spartans, when they want to resort freely to their wise men and are tired of meeting them in secret, expel all resident aliens, whether they be sympathizers with the Spartan way of life or not, and converse with the Sophists
d unbeknown to any foreigners. Conversely they don't allow any of their youths to go abroad, for fear they should forget what they have learned at home. No more do the Cretans. And in these states there are not only men but also women who are proud of their intellectual culture.

Now this is how you may know that I am telling the truth and that the Spartans are the best educated in philosophy and speaking. If you talk to the most ordinary Spartan, you will find that for
e most of the time he shows himself a quite unimpressive speaker. But then, at some chance point in the conversation, like a brilliant marksman he shoots in a telling phrase, brief and taut, showing up whoever is talking to him to be as helpless as a child.

Now there are some, both at the present day and in the past, who have tumbled to this fact, namely that to be Spartan implies a taste for intellectual rather than physical exercise, for they realize that to
343 frame such utterances is a mark of the highest culture. Of these were Thales of Miletus, Pittacus of Mytilene, Bias of Priene, our own Solon, Cleobulus of Lindus, and Myson of Chen, and the seventh of their company, we are told, was a Spartan, Chilon. All these were emulators, admirers, and disciples of Spartan culture, and their wisdom may be recognized as belonging to the same category, consisting of pithy and
b memorable dicta uttered by each. Moreover they met together and dedicated the first fruits of their wisdom to Apollo in his temple at Delphi, inscribing those words which are on everyone's lips, 'Know thyself' and 'Nothing too much.'

I mention these facts to make the point that, among the ancients, this Laconic brevity was the characteristic expression of philosophy. In particular this saying of Pittacus, 'Hard is it to be noble,' got into circulation privately and earned the approval of the wise. It occurred
c therefore to Simonides, with his philosophical ambitions, that if he could floor this favorite maxim with a triumphant knockout, he would become the favorite of his own day. In my judgment he wrote the whole poem against the saying of Pittacus and on its account, in a deliberate effort to damage its fame.

Now let us all examine it together, to see whether I am right. At the very beginning of the poem, it seems crazy, if he wished to say
d that it is hard to become a good man, that he should then insert 'on the one hand.' The insertion seems to make no sense, except on the supposition that Simonides is speaking polemically against the saying of

Pittacus. Pittacus said, 'Hard is it to be noble,' and Simonides replied, disputing the point, 'No, to *become* a good man is hard truly'—not, by the way, 'to become truly good'—he does not refer the 'truly' to that, as e
if some men were truly good and others good but not truly so. That would strike people as silly and unlike Simonides. We must transpose the word 'truly' in the poem, thus as it were implying the saying of Pittacus before it, as if he spoke first and Simonides were answering his words. Thus, 'O men, hard is it to be noble,' and Simonides replies, 344
'That is not true, Pittacus; not to *be* but to *become* a good man, four-square in hands and feet and mind, wrought without blame, that is hard truly.'

On this view we find that 'on the one hand' comes in reasonably, and that 'truly' finds its proper place at the end. Everything that follows bears out my opinion that this is the sense. Much could be said about each phrase in the poem to testify to the excellence of its com- b
position—it is indeed an elegant and well-thought-out production—but to go through it in such detail would take too long. Nevertheless let us review its general character and intention, which is undoubtedly to constitute, throughout its length, a refutation of the saying of Pittacus.

A little further on Simonides says, as if he were developing an argument, that although to become a good man is truly difficult, yet it is possible, for a while at least, 'but having become good, to remain in c
this state and *be* a good man—which is what you were speaking of, Pittacus—is impossible and superhuman. This is the privilege of a god alone, whereas

> He cannot but be bad, whom once
> Misfortune irredeemable casts down.'

Now who is cast down by irredeemable misfortune in the management of a ship? Clearly not the passenger, for he has *been* down all the time. You cannot knock down a man who is lying on the ground; you can only knock him down if he is standing, and put him on the ground. In the same way irredeemable misfortune may cast down the re- d
sourceful, but not the man who is helpless all the time. The steersman may be reduced to helplessness by the onset of a great storm, the farmer by a bad season, and the doctor from some analogous misfortune. For the good may become bad, as another poet has testified in the line,

> The good are sometimes bad and sometimes noble,

but the bad man cannot become bad, but *is* so of necessity. So it is that e
the resourceful and wise and good, when irredeemable disaster brings him to nought, cannot but be bad.

You say, Pittacus, 'Hard is it to be noble,' whereas to *become* noble is hard, though possible, but to *be* so is impossible,

> For when he fares well every man is good,
> But in ill faring, evil.

345 Now what is faring well in letters, and what makes a man good at them? Clearly the learning of them. And what is the faring well that makes a good doctor? Clearly it is learning how to heal the sick. 'But in ill faring, evil.' Who is it who becomes a bad doctor? Clearly a man who is both a doctor and a good doctor; he might become a bad doctor also. But we who are laymen in medicine could never by faring ill become doctors or builders or any other kind of technician, and he who
b cannot by faring badly become a doctor cannot, obviously, become a bad doctor. Even so the good man may as easily be made bad, by lapse of time or fatigue or illness or some other accident, seeing that this is the only real ill faring, to be deprived of knowledge. But the bad man cannot be made bad, for he is so all the time. If he is to *become* bad, he
c must first become good. Thus this part of the poem also teaches the same lesson, that to be a good man—continuing good—is not possible, but a man may *become* good, and the same man bad, and those are best for the longest time whom the gods love.

All this, then, is aimed at Pittacus, and the next bit even more plainly so, for he goes on,

> Then never shall I vainly cast away
> In hopeless search my little share of life,
> Seeking a thing impossible to be,
> A man all blameless, among those who reap
> The fruit of the broad earth. But should I find him
> I'll send you word.

d See how violently, throughout the poem, he attacks the saying of Pittacus—

> But all who do no baseness willingly
> I praise and love. The gods themselves strive not
> Against necessity.

This is all to the same purpose. Simonides was not so ignorant as to say that he praised all who did no evil voluntarily, as if there were any
e who did evil voluntarily. For myself I am fairly certain that no wise man believes anyone sins willingly or willingly perpetrates any evil or base act. They know very well that all evil or base action is involuntary. So here Simonides is not saying that he praises whoever does no evil willingly. The word 'willingly' applies to himself. His view was
346 that a good man often forces himself into love and praise, as when someone's mother or father or native land is unsympathetic to him. The less worthy, when they find themselves in such a position, seem to accept it happily and expose the unworthiness of parents or country with reproaches and denunciations, so that they may neglect their duty toward them without thereby incurring the blame or reproaches of

others. They even exaggerate their censure and add gratuitous hostil- b
ity to that which cannot be helped. Good men on the other hand conceal such faults and are constrained to praise, and if they feel anger at some wrong done to them by parents or country, they calm themselves and seek reconciliation, compelling themselves to love and praise their own kin. No doubt Simonides had in mind that he himself had often eulogized a tyrant or someone of that stamp not of his own free will but under compulsion.

This then is addressed to Pittacus in particular, as if to say, My reason for blaming you, Pittacus, is not that I am a faultfinder, for c

> to me that man suffices
> Who is not bad nor overweak, but sound
> In heart and knowing righteousness, the weal
> Of nations. I shall find no fault with him—

I am not, he says, a censorious man—

> For beyond number is the tribe of fools.

So, he implies, if anyone takes pleasure in faultfinding, he may have his fill in censuring them.

> All is fair that is unmixed with foul.

He does not say this in the sense in which he might say, 'all is white d
that is unmixed with black'—that would be ridiculous on many counts —but meaning that for his part he accepts without censure the middle state. I do not seek, he has said,

> A man all blameless, among those who reap
> The fruit of the broad earth. But should I find him
> I'll send you word.

If I wait for perfection I shall praise no one. For me it is enough if he reach the mean and do no evil, since

> I praise and love all—

note that he uses the Lesbian dialect here because he is addressing Pittacus— e

> I praise and love all willingly

—this is where the pause is to be made in speaking it, at 'willingly'—

> Who do no baseness,

though there are those whom I praise and love against my will. If then you spoke with an even moderate degree of reasonableness and truth, Pittacus, I should never blame you. But as it is you have made an ut- 347
terly false statement about something of the highest import, and it passes for true. For that I do blame you.

That, gentlemen, I concluded, is my interpretation of the mind of Simonides in writing this poem.

This exposition of yours, said Hippias, seems to me highly meri-
b torious. However, I also have an interesting thesis on the poem, which I will expound to you if you wish.

Yes, another time, Hippias, said Alcibiades. But at present Socrates and Protagoras must carry out their agreement. Let Socrates reply if Protagoras wants to ask further questions, or if he prefers to answer Socrates, then let Socrates do the questioning.

Then, said I, I leave it to Protagoras to do whichever pleases him.
c But if he is agreeable, I suggest we leave the subject of songs and poems, for I should be glad to reach a conclusion, Protagoras, in a joint investigation with you, on the matters about which I asked you at the beginning. Conversation about poetry reminds me too much of the wine parties of second-rate and commonplace people. Such men, being too uneducated to entertain themselves as they drink by using
d their own voices and conversational resources, put up the price of female musicians, paying well for the hire of an extraneous voice—that of the pipe—and find their entertainment in its warblings. But where the drinkers are men of worth and culture, you will find no girls piping or dancing or harping. They are quite capable of enjoying their own company without such frivolous nonsense, using their own voices in sober discussion and each taking his turn to speak or listen—even
e if the drinking is really heavy. In the same way gatherings like our own, if they consist of men such as most of us claim to be, call for no extraneous voices—not even of poets. No one can interrogate poets about what they say, and most often when they are introduced into the discussion some say the poet's meaning is one thing and some another, for the topic is one on which nobody can produce a conclusive argument. The best people avoid such discussions, and entertain each
348 other from their own resources, testing one another's mettle in what they have to say themselves. These are the people, in my opinion, whom you and I should follow, setting the poets aside and conducting the conversation on the basis of our own ideas. It is the truth, and our own minds, that we should be testing. If you want to go on with your questions, I am ready to offer myself as an answerer, or, if you prefer, be my respondent, to bring to its conclusion the discussion which we broke off in the middle.

b When I said this, and more to the same effect, Protagoras gave no clear indication of which he would do. Alcibiades then glanced at Callias and said, Do you still approve of what Protagoras is doing, refusing to say whether or not he will be the answerer? I don't. Let him either continue the discussion or tell us that he is unwilling, so that we may know where we are with him, and Socrates can talk to someone else, or any of the rest of us start a conversation.

These words of Alcibiades, and requests from Callias and almost c
all those present, made Protagoras feel ashamed, or so I thought, and induced him to return reluctantly to the discussion. He said therefore that he would answer and told me to put my questions.

Protagoras, I began, please don't think that I have any other purpose in this discussion than to investigate questions which continually baffle me. I believe Homer hit a nail on the head when he said, 'If two go together, one perceives before the other.' [5] Somehow we all feel d
better fortified in this way for any action or speech or thought. But to continue the quotation, 'If one alone perceive'—why he goes off at once looking for someone to whom he can show his idea and with whom he can confirm it, and will not rest till he finds him. That is why I would rather talk to you than to anyone else, because I think you are the most capable of elucidating the kind of questions that a good man gives his mind to, and in particular the question of virtue. After e
all, whom else should I look for? Not only are you, as you believe, an excellent member of society yourself—there are some men very good in themselves who cannot pass on their good qualities to others—but you have also the ability to make others good, and with such confidence that although some have made a secret of their art you openly 349
announce yourself to the Greeks by the name of Sophist and set up as a teacher of culture and virtue, the first to claim payment for this service. Naturally I must call on you for assistance in pondering these subjects and enlist you with me by asking you questions. It could not be otherwise.

I want then to go back to the beginning, to my first questions to you on this subject. Some things I want you to remind me of, and others I want to investigate with your help. The question, if I am not mistaken, was this. Wisdom, temperance, courage, justice, and holiness b
are five terms. Do they stand for a single reality, or has each term a particular entity underlying it, a reality with its own separate function, each different from the other? Your answer was that they are not names for the same thing, but that each of these terms applies to its c
own separate reality, and that all these things are parts of virtue, not like the parts of a lump of gold all homogeneous with each other and with the whole of which they are parts, but like the parts of a face, resembling neither the whole nor each other and each having a separate function. If you are still of the same mind, say so, but if not, then declare yourself. I certainly shall not hold you to your words if you now express yourself differently. Very likely you spoke as you did to test me.

No, he said. My view is that all these are parts of virtue, and that d
four of them resemble each other fairly closely, but courage is very

[5] *Iliad* 10.224.

different from all the rest. The proof of what I say is that you can find many men who are quite unjust, unholy, intemperate, and ignorant, yet outstandingly courageous.

e Stop, said I. What you say merits investigation. Do you qualify the courageous as confident, or in any other way?

As confident, yes, and keen to meet dangers from which most men shrink in fear.

Then again, you consider virtue an honorable thing, and it is on the assumption that it is honorable that you offer to teach it?

Unless I am quite mad, it is the most honorable of all things.

Part base and part honorable, I asked, or all honorable?

All honorable, as honorable as can be.

350 Now do you know which men plunge fearlessly into tanks?

Yes, divers.

Is that because they know their job or for some other reason?

Because they know their job.

And what men feel confidence in a cavalry engagement—trained or untrained riders?

Trained.

And in fighting with the light shield—peltasts or nonpeltasts?

Peltasts. And this holds good generally, if that is what you are after. Those with the relevant knowledge have more confidence than b those without it, and more when they have learned the job than they themselves had before.

But, said I, have you ever seen men with no understanding of any of these dangerous occupations who yet plunge into them with confidence?

Indeed yes, with only too much confidence.

Then does not their confidence involve courage too?

No, for if so, courage would be something to be ashamed of. Such men are mad.

How then do you define the courageous? Did you not say they were the confident?

Yes, I still maintain it.

c Well, those who are thus ignorantly confident show themselves not courageous but mad, and conversely, in the other case it is the wisest that are also most confident, and therefore most courageous? On this argument it is their knowledge that must be courage.

No, Socrates, he said. You have not remembered rightly what I said in my reply. When you asked me whether the courageous are confident, I agreed, but I was not asked whether the confident are also courageous—if you had asked me that at the time, I should have said d 'not all of them'—and you have nowhere disproved my admission by showing that the courageous are not confident. Further, when you argue that those who have knowledge are more confident than they were before, and also than others who are ignorant, and thereupon con-

clude that courage and wisdom are the same thing, you might as well go on and conclude that physical strength is knowledge. First of all you would proceed to ask me whether the strong are powerful, and I should agree. Next, whether those who know how to wrestle are more e
powerful than those who do not, and more powerful after they have learned than before; again I should agree, and it would then be open to you to say, adducing the same proofs, that on my own admission wisdom is physical strength. But here again I nowhere admit that the powerful are strong, only that the strong are powerful. Power and 351
strength are not the same. Power can result from knowledge, and also from madness or passion, whereas strength is a matter of natural constitution and bodily nurture. Similarly in our present discussion, I deny that confidence and courage are the same, and it follows that the courageous are confident but not all the confident are courageous. Confidence, like power, may be born of skill, or equally of madness or passion, but courage is a matter of nature and the proper nurture of b
the soul.

Well, said I, you speak of some men living well, and others badly?

He agreed.

Do you think then that a man would be living well who passed his life in pain and vexation?

No.

But if he lived it out to the end with enjoyment, you would count him as having lived well?

Yes.

Then to live pleasurably is good, to live painfully bad? c

Yes, if one's pleasure is in what is honorable.

What's this, Protagoras? Surely you don't follow the common opinion that some pleasures are bad and some pains good? I mean to say, in so far as they are pleasant, are they not also good, leaving aside any consequence that they may entail? And in the same way pains, in so far as they are painful, are bad?

I'm not sure Socrates, he said, whether I ought to give an answer as unqualified as your question suggests, and say that everything d
pleasant is good, and everything painful evil. But with a view not only to my present answer but to the whole of the rest of my life, I believe it is safest to reply that there are some pleasures which are not good, and some pains which are not evil, others on the other hand which are, and a third class which are neither evil nor good.

Meaning by pleasures, said I, what partakes of pleasure or gives it?

Certainly.

My question then is, whether they are not, qua pleasant, good. I am asking in fact whether pleasure itself is not a good thing. e

Let us, he replied, as you are so fond of saying yourself, investigate the question; then if the proposition we are examining seems

reasonable, and pleasant and good appear identical, we shall agree on it. If not, that will be the time to differ.

Good, said I. Will you lead the inquiry or should I?

It is for you to take the lead, since you introduced the subject.

352 I wonder then, said I, if we can make it clear to ourselves like this. If a man were trying to judge, by external appearance, of another's health or some particular physical function, he might look at his face and hands and then say, 'Let me see your chest and back too, so that I may make a more satisfactory examination.' Something like this is what I want for our present inquiry. Observing that your attitude to the good and the pleasant is what you say, I want to go on something like this. Now uncover another part of your mind, Protag- b oras. What is your attitude to knowledge? Do you share the common view about that also? Most people think, in general terms, that it is nothing strong, no leading or ruling element. They don't see it like that. They hold that it is not the knowledge that a man possesses which governs him, but something else—now passion, now pleasure, now pain, sometimes love, and frequently fear. They just think of c knowledge as a slave, pushed around by all the other affections. Is this your view too, or would you rather say that knowledge is a fine thing quite capable of ruling a man, and that if he can distinguish good from evil, nothing will force him to act otherwise than as knowledge dictates, since wisdom is all the reinforcement he needs?

Not only is this my view, replied Protagoras, but I above all men d should think it shame to speak of wisdom and knowledge as anything but the most powerful elements in human life.

Well and truly answered, said I. But I expect you know that most men don't believe us. They maintain that there are many who recognize the best but are unwilling to act on it. It may be open to them, but they do otherwise. Whenever I ask what can be the reason for this, e they answer that those who act in this way are overcome by pleasure or pain or some other of the things I mentioned just now.

Well, Socrates, it's by no means uncommon for people to say what is not correct.

Then come with me and try to convince them, and show what really happens when they speak of being overcome by pleasure and 353 therefore, though recognizing what is best, failing to do it. If we simply declare, 'You are wrong, and what you say is false,' they will ask us, 'If it is not being overcome by pleasure, what can it be? What do you two say it is? Tell us.'

But why must we look into the opinions of the common man, who says whatever comes into his head?

b I believe, I replied, that it will help us to find out how courage is related to the other parts of virtue. So if you are content to keep to our decision, that I should lead the way in whatever direction I think we

shall best see the light, then follow me. Otherwise, if you wish, I shall give it up.

No, you are right, he said. Carry on as you have begun.

To return then, If they should ask us, 'What is your name for c
what we called being worsted by pleasure?' I should reply, 'Listen. Protagoras and I will try to explain it to you. We take it that you say this happens to you when, for example, you are overcome by the desire of food or drink or sex—which are pleasant things—and though *you recognize them as evil, nevertheless indulge in them.*' They would agree. Then we should ask them, 'In what respect do you call them evil? Is it because for the moment each of them provides its pleasure and is pleasant, or because they lay up for the future disease or pov- d
erty or suchlike? If they led to none of these things, but produced pure enjoyment, would they nevertheless be evils—no matter why or how they give enjoyment?' Can we expect any other answer than this, that they are not evil on account of the actual momentary pleasure which they produce, but on account of their consequences, disease and the e
rest?

I believe that would be their answer, said Protagoras.

'Well, to cause disease and poverty is to cause pain.' They would agree, I think?

He nodded.

'So the only reason why these pleasures seem to you to be evil is, we suggest, that they result in pains and deprive us of future pleasures.' Would they agree?

We both thought they would. 354

Now suppose we asked them the converse question. 'You say also that pains may be good. You mean, I take it, such things as physical training, military campaigns, doctors' treatment involving cautery or the knife or drugs or starvation diet? These, you say, are good but painful?' Would they agree?

They would.

'Do you then call them good in virtue of the fact that at the time b
they cause extreme pain and agony, or because in the future there result from them health, bodily well-being, the safety of one's country, dominion over others, wealth?' The latter, I think they would agree.

Protagoras thought so too.

'And are they good for any other reason than that their outcome is pleasure and the cessation or prevention of pain? Can you say that you have any other end in mind, when you call them good, than pleas- c
ures or pains?' I think they would say no.

I too, said he.

'So you pursue pleasure as being good, and shun pain as evil?'

He agreed.

'Then your idea of evil is pain, and of good is pleasure. Even

enjoying yourself you call evil whenever it leads to the loss of a pleasure greater than its own, or lays up pains that outweigh its pleasures.
d If it is in any other sense, or without anything else in mind, that you call enjoyment evil, no doubt you could tell us what it is, but you cannot.'

I agree that they cannot, said Protagoras.

'Isn't it the same when we turn back to pain? To suffer pain you call good when it either rids us of greater pains than its own or leads to pleasures that outweigh them. If you have anything else in mind
e when you call the actual suffering of pain a good thing, you could tell us what it is, but you cannot.'

True, said Protagoras.

'Now my good people,' I went on, 'if you ask me what is the point of all this rigmarole, I beg your indulgence. It isn't easy to explain the real meaning of what you call being overcome by pleasure, and any explanation is bound up with this point. You may still change your
355 minds, if you can say that the good is anything other than pleasure, or evil other than pain. Is it sufficient for you to live life through with pleasure and without pain? If so, and you can mention no good or evil which cannot in the last resort be reduced to these, then listen to my next point.

'This position makes your argument ridiculous. You say that a man often recognizes evil actions as evil, yet commits them, under no
b compulsion, because he is led on and distracted by pleasure, and on the other hand that, recognizing the good, he refrains from following it because he is overcome by the pleasures of the moment. The absurdity of this will become evident if we stop using all these names together—pleasant, painful, good, and evil—and since they have turned out to be only two, call them by only two names—first of all good and evil, and only at a different stage pleasure and pain. Having
c agreed on this, suppose we now say that a man does evil though he recognizes it as evil. Why? Because he is overcome. By what? We can no longer say by pleasure, because it has changed its name to good. Overcome, we say. By what, we are asked. By the good, I suppose we shall say. I fear that if our questioner is ill-mannered, he will laugh
d and retort, What ridiculous nonsense, for a man to do evil, knowing it is evil and that he ought not to do it, because he is overcome by good. Am I to suppose that the good in you is or is not a match for the evil? Clearly we shall reply that the good is not a match; otherwise the man whom we speak of as being overcome by pleasure would not have done wrong. And in what way, he may say, does good fail to be a match for evil, or evil for good? Is it not by being greater or smaller, more or
e less than the other? We shall have to agree. Then by being overcome you must mean taking greater evil in exchange for lesser good.

'Having noted this result, suppose we reinstate the names pleasant and painful for the same phenomena, thus: A man does—*evil* we

said before, but now we shall say *painful* actions, knowing them to be painful, because overcome by pleasures—pleasures, obviously, which were not a match for the pains. And what meaning can we attach to the phrase *not a match for,* when used of pleasure in relation to pain, 356
except the excess or deficiency of one as compared with the other? It depends on whether one is greater or smaller, more or less intense than the other. If anyone objects that there is a great difference between present pleasure and pleasure or pain in the future, I shall reply that the difference cannot be one of anything else but pleasure and pain. So like an expert in weighing, put the pleasures and the pains to- b
gether, set both the near and distant in the balance, and say which is the greater quantity. In weighing pleasures against pleasures, one must always choose the greater and the more; in weighing pains against pains, the smaller and the less; whereas in weighing pleasures against pains, if the pleasures exceed the pains, whether the distant, the near, or vice versa, one must take the course which brings those pleasures; but if the pains outweigh the pleasures, avoid it. Is this not c
so, good people?' I should say, and I am sure they could not deny it.

Protagoras agreed.

'That being so then, answer me this,' I shall go on. 'The same magnitudes seem greater to the eye from near at hand than they do from a distance. This is true of thickness and also of number, and sounds of equal loudness seem greater near at hand than at a distance. If now our happiness consisted in doing, I mean in choosing, greater d
lengths and avoiding smaller, where would lie salvation? In the art of measurement or in the impression made by appearances? Haven't we seen that the appearance leads us astray and throws us into confusion so that in our actions and our choices between great and small we are constantly accepting and rejecting the same things, whereas the metric art would have canceled the effect of the impression, and by re- e
vealing the true state of affairs would have caused the soul to live in peace and quiet and abide in the truth, thus saving our life?' Faced with these considerations, would people agree that our salvation would lie in the art of measurement?

He agreed that they would.

'Again, what if our welfare lay in the choice of odd and even numbers, in knowing when the greater number must rightly be chosen and when the less, whether each sort in relation to itself or one in relation to the other, and whether they were near or distant? What would assure us a good life then? Surely knowledge, and specifically 357
a science of measurement, since the required skill lies in the estimation of excess and defect—or to be more precise, arithmetic, since it deals with odd and even numbers.' Would people agree with us?

Protagoras thought they would.

'Well then,' I shall say, 'since our salvation in life has turned out to lie in the correct choice of pleasure and pain—more or less, greater

b or smaller, nearer or more distant—is it not in the first place a question of measurement, consisting as it does in a consideration of relative excess, defect, or equality?'

It must be.

'And if so, it must be a special skill or branch of knowledge.'

Yes, they will agree.

'What skill, or what branch of knowledge it is, we shall leave till later; the fact itself is enough for the purposes of the explanation c which you have asked for from Protagoras and me. To remind you of your question, it arose because we two agreed that there was nothing more powerful than knowledge, but that wherever it is found it always has the mastery over pleasure and everything else. You on the other hand, who maintain that pleasure often masters even the man who knows, asked us to say what this experience really is, if it is not being d mastered by pleasure. If we had answered you straight off that it is ignorance, you would have laughed at us, but if you laugh at us now, you will be laughing at yourselves as well, for you have agreed that when people make a wrong choice of pleasures and pains—that is, of good and evil—the cause of their mistake is lack of knowledge. We can go further, and call it, as you have already agreed, a science of e measurement, and you know yourselves that a wrong action which is done without knowledge is done in ignorance. So that is what being mastered by pleasure really is—ignorance, and most serious ignorance, the fault which Protagoras, Prodicus, and Hippias profess to cure. You on the other hand, because you believe it to be something else, neither go nor send your children to these Sophists, who are the experts in such matters. Holding that it is nothing that can be taught, you are careful with your money and withhold it from them—a bad policy both for yourselves and for the community.'

That then is the answer we should make to the ordinary run of 358 people, and I ask you—Hippias and Prodicus as well as Protagoras, for I want you to share our discussion—whether you think what I say is true.

They all agreed most emphatically that it was true.

You agree then, said I, that the pleasant is good and the painful bad. I ask exemption from Prodicus' precise verbal distinctions. Whether you call it pleasant, agreeable, or enjoyable, my dear Prodi- b cus, or whatever name you like to apply to it, please answer in the sense of my request.

Prodicus laughed and assented, and so did the others.

Well, here is another point, I continued. All actions aimed at this end, namely a pleasant and painless life, must be fine actions, that is, good and beneficial.

They agreed.

Then if the pleasant is the good, no one who either knows or be-

lieves that there is another possible course of action, better than the one he is following, will ever continue on his present course when he c might choose the better. To 'act beneath yourself' is the result of pure ignorance; to 'be your own master' is wisdom.

All agreed.

And may we define ignorance as having a false opinion and being mistaken on matters of great moment?

They approved this too.

Then it must follow that no one willingly goes to meet evil or what he thinks to be evil. To make for what one believes to be evil, instead of making for the good, is not, it seems, in human nature, and when faced with the choice of two evils no one will choose the greater d when he might choose the less.

General agreement again.

Now you recognize the emotion of fear or terror. I wonder if you conceive it as I do? I say this to you, Prodicus. Whether you call it fear or terror, I define it as expectation of evil.

Protagoras and Hippias thought this covered both fear and terror, but Prodicus said it applied to fear but not to terror.

Well, Prodicus, said I, it makes no difference. This is the point. If e what I have said is true, will anyone be willing to go to meet what he fears, when it is open to him to go in the opposite direction? Do not our agreed conclusions make this impossible? It is admitted that what he fears he regards as evil, and that no one willingly meets or accepts what he thinks evil.

They all assented. 359

On this agreed basis, I went on, let Protagoras make his defense and show us how his original answer can be right. I don't mean what he said at the very beginning, when he maintained that there were five parts of virtue none of which resembled any other, and that each had its separate function, but what he said later, that four of them are fairly similar, but one, namely courage, is quite different from the b rest. This, he said, the following evidence would show me: 'You will find, Socrates, men who are utterly impious, unjust, licentious, and ignorant, yet very brave, which will show you that courage is quite different from the other parts of virtue.' I was much surprised by this answer at the time, and now that we have had this discussion it surprises me even more. Anyway, I asked him if he described the brave as confident, and he replied, 'Yes, and eager.' Do you remember saying this, c Protagoras?

He admitted it.

Tell me then, said I, in what direction are the brave eager to go? Toward the same things as cowards?

No.

Toward something else then?

Yes.

Is it that cowards go to meet what inspires confidence, and brave men to what is terrible?

So men say, Socrates.

I know they do, but that was not my question. What do *you* say
d brave men go eagerly to meet? Is it what is terrible, knowing it to be terrible?

Your own argument has shown that to be impossible.

True again, so that if my argument was sound, no one goes to meet what he believes to be terrible, since not being one's own master was shown to be due to ignorance.

He admitted this.

But as for what inspires confidence, everyone makes for that, cowards and brave men alike, and thus cowards and brave men make
e for the same things.

Whatever you say, he replied. What the coward makes for is precisely the opposite of what the brave man makes for. For instance, the brave are willing to enter battle; the others are not.

Is this willingness an honorable thing, or disgraceful?

Honorable, said he.

Then if honorable, we agreed earlier that it is good, for we agreed that all honorable actions are good.

That is true, and I still think so.

360 Quite rightly too, said I. But which class did you say were unwilling to enter battle although that is a fine and good thing to do?

The cowards, he replied.

Well, if it is honorable and good, it is also pleasant.

We certainly agreed to that.

Then do the cowards act with knowledge when they refuse to approach what is the more honorable and better and pleasanter thing?

If we say so, he replied, we shall confound our former conclusions.

Now take the brave man. He makes for what is more honorable, better, and pleasanter?

I cannot deny it.

b And in general when the brave feel fear, there is no disgrace in their fears, nor in their confidence when they are confident?

True.

So both are honorable, and if honorable then good?

Yes.

Cowards on the other hand, and likewise the rash and the mad, feel fears or confidence which are discreditable, and can they exhibit discreditable fear or confidence from any other cause than ignorance?

No.

c Well then, is it cowardice or courage that makes a man a coward?

Cowardice.

Yet we have seen that it is ignorance of what is to be feared that makes them cowards; and if this ignorance makes them cowards, and you agree that what makes them cowards is cowardice, ignorance of what is and is not to be feared must be cowardice.

He nodded. d

Well, courage is the opposite of cowardice.

He agreed.

And knowledge of what is and is not to be feared is the opposite of ignorance of these things.

He nodded again.

Which is cowardice.

Here he assented with great reluctance.

Therefore knowledge of what is and is not to be feared is courage.

At this point he could no longer bring himself to assent, but was silent; so I said, What, Protagoras, won't you say either yes or no to my questions?

Finish it yourself, said he.

Just one more question first, I replied. Do you still believe, as you e did at first, that men can be utterly ignorant yet very brave?

You seem to be bent on having your own way, Socrates, and getting me to give the answers; so to humor you, I will say that on our agreed assumptions it seems to be impossible.

I assure you, said I, that in asking all these questions I have nothing else in view but my desire to learn the truth about virtue and what it is in itself. I know that if we could be clear about that, it would 361 throw the fullest light on the question over which you and I have spun such a coil of argument, I maintaining that virtue was not teachable and you that it was. It seems to me that the present outcome of our talk is pointing at us, like a human adversary, the finger of accusation and scorn. If it had a voice it would say, 'What an absurd pair you are, Socrates and Protagoras. One of you, having said at the beginning that virtue is not teachable, now is bent upon contradicting b himself by trying to demonstrate that everything is knowledge—justice, temperance, and courage alike—which is the best way to prove that virtue *is* teachable. If virtue were something other than knowledge, as Protagoras tried to prove, obviously it could not be taught. But if it turns out to be, as a single whole, knowledge—which is what you are urging, Socrates—then it will be most surprising if it cannot be taught. Protagoras on the other hand, who at the beginning supposed it to be teachable, now on the contrary seems to be bent on showing that it is almost anything rather than knowledge, and this would c make it least likely to be teachable.'

For my part, Protagoras, when I see the subject in such utter confusion I feel the liveliest desire to clear it up. I should like to follow up our present talk with a determined attack on virtue itself and its essential nature. Then we could return to the question whether or

not it can be taught, thus guarding against the possibility that your
d Epimetheus might trip us up and cheat us in our inquiry, just as according to the story he overlooked us in the distribution. I liked Prometheus in the myth better than Epimetheus; so I follow his lead and spend my time on all these matters as a means of taking forethought for my whole life. If you should be willing, then as I said at the beginning, you are the one with whom I would most gladly share the inquiry.

I congratulate you on your keenness, Socrates, responded Protagoras, and your skill in exposition. I hope I am not too bad a charac-
e ter, and I am the last man to be jealous. I have told a great many people that I never met anyone I admire nearly as much as you, certainly not among your contemporaries, and I say now that I should not be surprised if you became one of our leading philosophers. Well, we will talk of these matters at some future meeting, whenever you like, but now it is time to turn to other things.

362 So be it, said I, if that is your wish. Indeed I ought long ago to have kept the appointment I mentioned. I only stayed as a concession to the blandishments of Callias.

That was the end of the conversation, and we went away.