8

Plato's Refutation of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*

I

According to Protagoras, 'a man is the measure of all things, of those that
are that they are, and of those that are not that they are not' (*Tht.* 152 A
2–4).[1] In *Theaetetus* 169 D–171 D, Plato argues that Protagoras' measure
doctrine (P) is in some sense self-refuting.[2] It is unclear, however, precisely
how we are to understand the measure doctrine, and so it is also unclear
whether Plato succeeds in refuting it.

Plato is often thought to portray Protagoras as a relativist, according to
whom no beliefs are absolutely true, or true *simpliciter*; rather, all beliefs
are true only *for* those who hold them.[3] It is well known, however, that if

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[1] This is generally agreed to be a quotation from Protagoras. For other occurrences of
it, see Plato, *Cra.* 385 E 6–386 A 3; Sextus Empiricus, *M.* 7. 60–1; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*
9. 51. I should note that my concern throughout this chapter is primarily with Plato's
portrayal of Protagoras, not with the historical Protagoras. However, since Plato is one of
our main sources of information about the historical Protagoras, looking at how he portrays
Protagoras presumably gives us some indication of Protagoras' views: though one of course
can't rule out the possibility that Plato misinterpreted him.

[2] Sextus Empiricus, *M.* 7. 389–90, calls the argument a *peritropē*, literally a turn about
or around, hence a refutation, though Sextus generally uses the term for a *self*-refutation
in particular. For detailed discussion, see M. F. Burnyeat, 'Protagoras and Self-Refutation
in Later Greek Philosophy', *Philosophical Review*, 85 (1976) 44–69. (As Burnyeat explains,
to say that p is self-refuting needn't be to say that p, all by itself, implies not-p; rather, p
plus at least one ancillary premiss implies not-p, where there are constraints on what sorts
of ancillary premisses are appropriate.) Plato doesn't himself call his argument a *peritropē*.
But at 169 E 7–8, he says that he aims to refute the measure doctrine from Protagoras' own
words (*ek tou ekeinou logou*). Cf. *Euthd.* 286 B –C, where he says that the Protagorean view,
that it is not possible to contradict, 'always seems remarkable to me, turning both other
theses and also itself upside down [*anatrepein*]' (286 C 3–5); I take it that *anatrepein*, like
peritrepein, indicates a self-refutation.

[3] See e.g. Burnyeat, 'Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Later Greek Philosophy'; and 'Pro-
tagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', *Philosophical Review*, 85 (1976) 172–95,
repr. in S. Everson (ed.), *Epistemology* (Companions to Ancient Thought, 1; Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1990), 39–59 (original pagination). I shall from now on gener-
ally cite these two papers by page number alone, and references to them will generally
be given in the text. I discuss the second of these papers in detail in 'Relativism and

Plato takes Protagoras to be a relativist, various difficulties arise. First and foremost among them is that Plato's arguments do not seem to succeed in refuting relativism. In particular, at several crucial junctures he omits the qualifier 'for one' in places where the relativist would insist on it. As Gregory Vlastos puts it:[4]

Protagoras is very fussy about adding 'for ...' after 'true' or 'is' or 'real', while his thickheaded interlocutor keeps ignoring the difference. Even Plato himself is not as strict as he should be on this point. While he puts in the 'for ...' almost invariably while *reporting or describing* Protagoras's doctrine (not only at 170a, but at 152bc, 158a, and all through 166c–167c, where the repetition gets almost tiresome, and then again at 171e–172a; also at *Crat* 385e–386d), he sometimes drops it in the course of *arguing* against Protagoras (e.g., in the 'exquisite' argument at 171a), thereby vitiating his own polemic.

Actually, Vlastos overstates the extent to which Plato includes the qualifiers in reporting Protagoras' position. Even here he often omits them, representing Protagoras as holding that all beliefs are *true*, not that they are true *for those who hold them*.[5] This, of course, is another count against a relativist reading: the text often fails to describe Protagoras in the requisite way.

Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*: Plato, Protagoras, and Burnyeat', in J. Gentzler (ed.), *Method in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 138–63.

Others who seem to understand the measure doctrine in roughly the same way as Burnyeat include J. McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus*, trans. with notes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 169–73; D. Bostock, *Plato's* Theaetetus (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 89–92; K. M. Sayre, *Plato's Analytic Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 87–90; R. Waterfield, *Plato: Theaetetus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), 172–6; C. C. W. Taylor, *Plato: Protagoras*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), at e.g. p. 83; R. M. Dancy, 'Theaetetus's First Baby: *Theaetetus* 151e–160e', *Philosophical Topics*, 15 (1987), 61–108. There are some differences among these authors which need not concern us here; see ch. 6 above.

I follow Burnyeat in using 'absolutely true', 'true *simpliciter*', and 'true period' interchangeably.

[4] G. Vlastos, 'Introduction', in *Plato: Protagoras* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), xiv n. 29. Though Vlastos thinks that the omission of the qualifiers vitiates Plato's argument, I'm not sure that he takes Protagoras to be a relativist, as I understand that position here; see 'Relativism and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', n. 18.

Commentators who take Protagoras to be a relativist, and who agree with Vlastos that Plato fails to refute Protagoras, include McDowell, Bostock, Sayre, and Waterfield. Though all these authors believe that Plato fails to refute relativism from the logical point of view, some of them believe that he none the less raises serious difficulties for Protagoras; see e.g. McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus*, 171.

Of course, even if Plato fails to refute relativism, it does not follow that he was not trying to refute it. Nor does everyone agree that he fails to refute it; Burnyeat, for example, believes that he succeeds. I challenge his interpretation in 'Relativism and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*'.

[5] For places where the qualifiers are omitted, see (in addition to the self-refutation pas-

There are also further difficulties for a relativist reading. For example, other ancient commentators do not view Protagoras as a relativist; rather, they view him as what I shall call an *infallibilist*, according to whom all beliefs are absolutely true, or true *simpliciter*. This is how Aristotle and Sextus, for example, view him.[6] It would be surprising if Plato were the only ancient commentator to view Protagoras as an infallibilist. Moreover, not only do other ancient commentators portray Protagoras as an infallibilist, but they also use against him an argument quite like Plato's. Yet, as Burnyeat remarks, it would be 'curious' (p. 46) if the same argument were brought to bear against two such different—indeed incompatible—positions.

On the interpretation that I shall propose, we do not face these difficulties. For I shall argue that Plato, like other ancient commentators, portrays Protagoras as an infallibilist: he is not the odd man out. Moreover, his arguments fare far better against infallibilism than they do against relativism. We shall also see that the text is quite naturally read as I shall read it. A further bonus of my interpretation is that, as I argue in Chapters 6 and 7, Plato portrays Protagoras as an infallibilist in *Theaetetus* 151–60;[7] and surely it is desirable that he interpret Protagoras in the same way both when he initially articulates his position and when he refutes it.[8]

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sage that we shall come to) 161 c 2–3, 161 d 5–7, 162 a 1, 167 b 1, 167 c 2 (on which see McDowell's note ad loc.), 172 b 6, 179 c 2, 179 c 4, 179 b–d. It's important to note that in some of the places where a qualifier occurs, the point is to express, not relativism about truth, but the relational nature of some properties, which is quite a different matter. I discuss this in ch. 6.

[6] See Aristotle, *Metaph. Γ* 5, *K* 6; Sextus Empiricus, *M.* 7. 60–4; *PH* 1. 216–19; cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 9. 51. It's worth noting that, although Aristotle and Sextus portray Protagoras as holding that all beliefs are true, they also associate *pros ti* with him. Burnyeat, 'Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Later Greek Philosophy', 46 n. 3, thinks this shows that they ascribe both infallibilism and relativism to Protagoras. My own view is that they do not use '*pros ti*' to indicate relativism, as I understand that notion here.

I use 'infallibilism' to capture the fact that, on this view, we are all infallible in our beliefs, in the sense that, if A believes p, p is true. Burnyeat uses 'subjectivism' for this view. There are of course interpretations of Protagoras, and of Plato's portrayal of him, besides relativism and infallibilism. I none the less focus on these two interpretations because (i) relativism is such a familiar interpretation, yet (ii) I favour infallibilism.

[7] I summarize the essential argument on behalf of this claim below, in describing the role of Heracleitus.

[8] That is, it is desirable that Plato satisfy what, in ch. 6, I call the univocity criterion. Univocity does not mean that Plato cannot or should not canvas more than one interpretation of Protagoras. (That he does so is argued by R. Ketchum, 'Plato's "Refutation" of Protagorean Relativism: *Theaetetus* 170–171', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 10 (1992), 73–105.) Rather, the point is that if he portrays Protagoras as an infallibilist in the 150s, then, when he argues against Protagoras, he should argue against infallibilism.

II

It will help, to begin with, to provide a more detailed account of relativism and infallibilism. Relativism has, of course, been understood in many different ways, both in general and in connection with the *Theaetetus*. I shall generally focus here on what I take to be the best recent account, that proposed by Burnyeat. According to Burnyeat, Protagoras is a relativist about *truth*; he offers a theory of truth, according to which all truth is relative.[9] In particular, Burnyeat argues that Protagoras accepts a biconditional: p is true for A if, and only if, A believes p. What, on this view, does 'p is true for A' mean? Burnyeat argues that the phrase is equivalent to, but not synonymous with, 'A believes p' (pp. 181–2). I think it's difficult to be sure precisely what 'p is true for A' means, if not 'A believes p'; but I shall not press that point here. For present purposes, the crucial point is that on Burnyeat's interpretation the qualifier 'for one' indicates that Protagoras denies that any propositions are absolutely true or true *simpliciter*. On a variant of this view (though not one endorsed by Burnyeat), 'for one' indicates a novel understanding of the truth predicate: 'true' *means* 'true-for-a-person'.[10] On both views, the qualifiers are ineliminable; one cannot move from 'p is true for A' to 'p is true'. For the whole point of relativism is to say that no propositions are flat-out true.[11]

On the view I favour, by contrast, Protagoras is an infallibilist. He claims

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[9] See e.g. 'Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', 181. In what follows, I shall generally simply speak of relativism, meaning thereby relativism about truth, as I explain that notion here.

[10] For this interpretation, see e.g. T. D. J. Chappell, 'Does Protagoras Refute Himself?', *Classical Quarterly*, NS 45 (1995), 333–8. On yet another view, the claim is that 'true' as ordinarily understood is meaningless (and not just uninstantiated). McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus*, 171, may hold this view; see also S. Tigner, 'The "Exquisite" Argument at *Theaetetus* 171a', *Mnemosyne*, 4th series, 24 (1971), 366–9.

[11] Here there are two complications. First, there is dispute as to whether (P) is itself a merely relative truth or is exempted from its scope. In the latter case, Protagoras admits the existence of one absolute truth, viz. (P) itself. As I explain in 'Relativism and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', I think Burnyeat vacillates between these two views. In this chapter I shall assume that, whether (P) is to be understood along relativist or infallibilist lines, it falls within its scope. (None the less, I shall occasionally indicate what difference it makes to Plato's argument if (P) does not fall within its scope.) I do so because this seems to be Plato's view; see Argument II (3) and note ad loc. (In 'Relativism and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', by contrast, I assumed that (P) does not fall within its own scope.) Secondly, Burnyeat argues that in one special case, where 'p' is the measure doctrine, it is legitimate to drop the qualifier in arguing against relativism. I criticize this argument in 'Relativism and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', and I shall assume here that, even where 'p' is the measure doctrine, it is not legitimate to drop the qualifier in arguing against relativism.

that (i) all beliefs are absolutely true, and (ii) there are no truths that are not believed: p is true if and only if it is believed.[12] On this view, Protagoras does not deny that any statements are absolutely true; nor does he have a novel understanding of the truth predicate. Rather, he thinks that all beliefs are guaranteed to be true—absolutely true, or true *simpliciter*. He offers, not a theory of truth, but an account of the conditions under which statements are true: they are true if and only if believed. On this view, 'for one' doesn't block the implication that any statements are absolutely true; on the contrary, the move from 'p is true for A' to 'p is true' is always legitimate.

We can already see one outstanding advantage of the infallibilist reading: on it, Plato is entitled to omit the qualifiers, as he so often and conspicuously does; whereas he is not entitled to omit them if he is arguing against relativism. Of course, it doesn't follow that Plato therefore succeeds in refuting infallibilism: his arguments could fail for other reasons. Still, it's an important advantage of my reading that Plato is entitled to omit the qualifiers.

One might think that this advantage needs to be set against the following disadvantage: Burnyeat believes that infallibilism is an 'arid' view that 'no one is likely to defend', but he takes relativism to be an 'intriguing' view 'which some think is still unrefuted' (p. 46). For consider Plato's initial example of a case of seemingly conflicting appearances: the wind seems cold to me but not to you (*Tht.* 152 B 1–C 3). According to the relativist, we should infer that the wind is cold for me but not for you, in the sense that we are both right in a way, though not in a way that involves contradiction, since neither of our beliefs is true (or false) *simpliciter*. Burnyeat argues that infallibilism, by contrast, 'is in clear violation of the law of contradiction, since it allows one person's judgment that something is so and another person's judgment that it is not so both to be true together' (p. 46). If infallibilism but not relativism is in clear violation of the principle of noncontradiction (PNC), then relativism might well seem to be the more plausible view.

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[12] N. Denyer, *Language, Thought and Falsehood in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1991), considers but rejects something like this interpretation of Protagoras; see e.g. p. 87. Note that (i) and (ii) mean that p is true if and only if *someone* believes p. In saying that Protagoras accepts this biconditional, I retract a claim made in 'Relativism and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', where I suggested that Protagoras only accepts the conditional, that if A believes p, then p is true. Though I therefore now agree with Burnyeat that Protagoras accepts a biconditional, we differ over what the relevant biconditional is. This difference is at least partly due to the fact that I take Protagoras to be an infallibilist, whereas Burnyeat takes him to be a relativist.

However, Burnyeat is too quick in claiming that infallibilism is in *clear* violation of PNC. To be sure, he is correct if the world is as we ordinarily take it to be, if it consists of stable, intersubjectively available objects. But in the first part of the *Theaetetus* (151–60), Plato defends Protagoras by means of a Heracleitean ontology; this allows him to argue that seemingly conflicting perceptual beliefs do not conflict.[13] How this can be so is explained in different ways as the dialectic unfolds: initially it is suggested that the wind changes between our two utterances. Eventually it is suggested that we are talking about different winds: I was talking about a cold one, and you were talking about one that is not cold.[14] In either case, both of our beliefs are true—true *simpliciter*—and they are so without contradiction. Infallibilism is therefore not in *clear* violation of PNC, and so it is not *as* 'crude' (p. 46) a view as one might initially take it to be.

The fact that Plato defends Protagoras with a Heracleitean ontology indicates two things. First, it shows that Protagoras *wants* to preserve PNC; he would be worried if it could be shown that he is committed to violating it. If he didn't care about preserving PNC, there'd be no need to introduce a Heracleitean ontology. Protagoras could just say: 'Of course (P) violates PNC, given that people hold conflicting beliefs. But what do I care?' It's precisely because he *does* care that Plato troubles to offer him Heracleitus' support.[15]

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[13] In my view, Heracleiteanism is invoked only in connection with first-order perceptual beliefs, such as 'The wind is cold', 'The wine is sweet'. (However, Protagoras has quite a broad view of what can be perceived. At 156 B 4–6, for example, he counts 'pleasures, pains, desires, fears, and others' as perceptions. None the less, there seem to be some limits, which are never clearly specified, on what counts as a perception.) Bostock, *Plato's Theatetus*, 90, seems to agree. McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus*, 168 n. (d), may disagree. S. Waterlow, 'Protagoras and Inconsistency', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 59 (1977), 19–36, definitely disagrees. (My view is in many ways close to Waterlow's, but this is one central difference between us. See n. 15 for another one.) On this issue, see also G. Kerferd, 'Plato's Account of the Relativism of Protagoras', *Durham University Journal*, 42 (1949), 20–6.

[14] There is dispute as to whether Plato eventually (on Protagoras' behalf) introduces private objects, or only public objects with relational properties. I think 159 A–160 c suggests that private objects are on board; but contrast M. Matthen, 'Perception, Relativism, and Truth: Reflections on Plato's *Theaetetus* 152–160', *Dialogue*, 24 (1985), 33–58. The issue is also discussed by Kerferd.

[15] Similarly, I take it that if Protagoras said that it is impossible to contradict (*ouk estin antilegein*, *Euthd.* 286 B–C; cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 9. 53), it was because he wanted to preserve PNC, yet, if all beliefs are true, and it is possible to contradict (in the strict logical sense), then PNC breaks down. Contrast Waterlow, who thinks that, for Protagoras, 'respect for those [logical] laws is no more than an idle fetish' ('Protagoras and Inconsistency', 25, cf. 23). I'm not sure whether Waterlow thinks that Protagoras' views in fact violate PNC. The first complete paragraph on p. 26 says that 'the views which Plato ascribes to Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* entail the same denial', viz. of 'the law of non-contradiction'. But the second complete paragraph says that it would be 'ineffective' to argue that Protagoras' position is

Secondly, the fact that Plato supports Protagoras with a Heracleitean ontology is evidence, independent of the self-refutation argument, in favour of infallibilism. For if Protagoras is an infallibilist (who cares about PNC), then it's clear why he welcomes Heracleitus' support: Heracleitus offers an ontology that allows seemingly conflicting appearances, at least in the perceptual sphere, to be true—absolutely true—without contradiction. Relativism, by contrast, does not need to appeal to any ontology in order to resolve the problem of conflicting appearances. It resolves the problem, not by introducing a special ontology, but by interpreting the truth predicate in a novel way, or by denying that any propositions are flat-out true. Infallibilism does not have an unusual understanding of the truth predicate, nor does it deny that any propositions are flat-out true. Rather, it has an unusual understanding of the conditions under which objects have properties, or under which propositions are true: a proposition is true if and only if it is believed.

III

These preliminaries out of the way, we can now turn to the details of the text. Discussions of Plato's refutation of Protagoras generally focus on 171 A 6 ff. This is perhaps not surprising, given that Plato himself says that it is 'especially clever' (*kompsotaton*, 171 A 6). But it is important to see that this passage is not self-standing. Rather, it is the culmination of an intricate series of arguments, the first of which occurs in 170 A–C. There are, in fact, three linked passages: 170 A–C; a transitional passage (170 C 5–E 6); and then a third passage (170 E 7–171 D 8), of which the 'especially clever' argument is one part. I shall explore each of these passages in turn, beginning with the first.

inconsistent, since Plato 'provides his Protagoras with the means to avoid ever being caught in self-contradiction'; nor, she thinks, does Plato's Protagoras allow that two people can ever contradict one another. See also pp. 20–1. On her view, if no one can contradict himself, and if no two people can contradict one another, then PNC doesn't break down.

One might argue that *Protagoras* doesn't care about PNC; rather, *we* do and so, since Plato wants us to take Protagoras' position seriously, he tries to give it a run for its money by showing that, whether or not Protagoras cares about preserving PNC, he can in fact do so, at least for first-order perceptual beliefs. However, Plato often puts the relevant points in Protagoras' mouth. That is, he doesn't merely say that this is what *we* could say; he says that this is what *Protagoras* would say. Of course, one might argue that Protagoras says this merely to assuage us and not because he believes it. Such hypotheses are difficult to refute, but neither is there any reason to accept them.

Plato first argues as follows (170 A 3–C 5):[16]

SOC. He says, doesn't he, that what seems [*to dokoun*] to anyone actually is for the person to whom it seems [*dokei*]?

THEO. Yes.

SOC. Well, now, Protagoras, we too are talking about the beliefs [*doxai*] of a man, or rather of all men, when we say that there isn't anyone who doesn't think [*hēgeisthai*] that he's wiser than others in some respects, whereas others are wiser than him in other respects. In the greatest of dangers, when people are in trouble on campaigns, or in diseases, or at sea, they treat the leading men in each sphere like gods, expecting them to be their saviours, because they're superior precisely in respect of knowledge. The whole of human life is surely full of people looking for teachers and leaders for themselves and other animals, and for what they do; and, on the other hand, of people who think themselves capable of teaching and capable of leading. Now what can we say, in all these cases, except that men themselves think [*hēgeisthai*] that there is wisdom and ignorance [*amathia*][17] in them?

THEO. Nothing.

SOC. And they think that wisdom is true thinking [*dianoian*] and that ignorance is false belief?

THEO. Of course.

SOC. Well then, how are we to deal with your theory, Protagoras? Should we say that people always believe things that are true? Or that they sometimes believe things that are true and sometimes things that are false? Because from both alternatives it follows, I think, that they don't always believe things that are true, but believe both ⟨truths and falsehoods⟩.

We may formulate this reasoning as follows:

Argument I

(1) (P): As things seem to one, so they are to one.

(2) Each person thinks that he is wiser than others in some respects, and that others are wiser than him in other respects, where wisdom involves having true beliefs and ignorance involves having false beliefs.

(3) Either (a) all beliefs are true, or (b) some beliefs are false.

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[16] Here and elsewhere I generally follow McDowell's translation. However, I generally use 'belief' and its cognates for '*doxa*' and its cognates (McDowell uses judgement'), 'think' for '*hēgeisthai*' (McDowell uses 'believe'), and 'judge' for '*krinein*' (McDowell uses 'decide'). So far as I can tell, Plato uses these terms interchangeably.

[17] In the present context, '*amathia*' means something more like stupidity or folly than simply not knowing, as is clear from the fact that Plato goes on to say that *amathia* involves false beliefs. 'Ignorance' can be used both for stupidity and for simply not knowing; I use it rather than e.g. 'stupidity', simply because this often makes for smoother prose.

(4) If (3a) is true, then the belief expressed in (2) is true, in which case there are some false beliefs.

(5) If (3b) is true, then there are some false beliefs.

(6) Therefore whether or not all beliefs are true, there are some false beliefs.

(7) Therefore there are some false beliefs.

(8) Therefore not-(P).

(1) simply states (P), and so it is obviously acceptable to Protagoras— although there is of course controversy about precisely what (P) says.

(2) is complex and requires careful scrutiny.[18] First, it contains an analysis of wisdom and ignorance: wisdom involves having true beliefs; ignorance involves having false beliefs. Secondly, it makes a comparative claim: each person thinks that he is *wiser* than others in some respects, and that others are wiser than him in other respects. Now, one might think that A can be wiser than B without A's being wise, just as one person can be richer than another without either's being rich. However—and this is a third point—Plato seems to intend not just the comparative claim but also the corresponding categorical claim. That is, each person thinks that he is *wise* about some matters (and so has true beliefs about those matters) on which others are ignorant and so have false beliefs. Similarly, each person thinks that he is ignorant about some matters (and so has false beliefs about those matters) on which others are wise and so have true beliefs. Hence Plato says that 'men themselves think that there is wisdom and ignorance in them'. It follows that everyone believes that there are genuinely conflicting beliefs, in the sense that everyone believes that there are cases in which A believes p and B believes not-p, and one of p and not-p is true, the other false. Finally, it's important to be clear that (2) *doesn't* say that *there are* false beliefs, or conflicting beliefs in the sense just explained. Rather, it says that people *believe* these things.

Various aspects of (2) will be important to us at different stages. However, in Argument I, which is our present concern, the main crucial feature is the claim that people believe that there are false beliefs. Hence I shall focus on this aspect of (2) for the remainder of this section.

It's clear why (2) says, not that there are false beliefs, but that people believe that there are. For it would beg the question against both relativism and infallibilism to assume that there are false beliefs, since both positions

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deny that there are.[19] Accordingly, (2) says instead that everyone *believes* that there are false beliefs.

But even once this point is understood, (2) still appears to be at any rate false since, again, neither relativists nor infallibilists believe that there are false beliefs, and so not *everyone* believes it.[20] However, we can easily avoid this difficulty by replacing 'each person' with 'everyone but Protagoras and his followers' or, for short, 'some people'; nor does this affect the validity of the argument. Accordingly, let us replace (2) with:[21]

(2′) Some people believe that each person is wiser than others in some respects, and that others are wiser in other respects, where wisdom involves having true beliefs and ignorance involves having false beliefs.

Is (2′) acceptable to relativists or infallibilists? McDowell seems to think that it is acceptable to relativists. For he takes Protagoras to be a relativist, and he says that 'It is, arguably, in the spirit of [(P)] to assume that people are authoritative, not just about the truth of their own judgements, but about what judgements they are.'[22] McDowell seems to make two points: first, that according to Protagoras there is a fact of the matter about the contents of beliefs; and second, that each person is authoritative about the contents of their beliefs. The first point, however, so far from being acceptable to an extreme global relativist, begs the question against him by admitting that

[19] As we have seen (n. 11), some relativists exempt the statement of relativism from its scope. Hence one might say that some relativists think that there can be one false belief, namely, the belief that relativism is false; and (2) might be acceptable to such a relativist. However, as we've also seen (n. 11), this doesn't seem to be the version of relativism that Plato assumes here. Moreover, 170 A–C emphasizes that people think there are many false beliefs, including first-order beliefs about, for example, how to navigate or heal someone.

[20] To be sure, Plato eventually concludes that everyone, including Protagoras, believes that there are false beliefs (at e.g. 171 D 5–7). But he is not entitled to assume this yet; on the contrary, it is something he is trying to prove.

[21] One might argue that Plato never intended (2), but only (2′). In support of this suggestion, see *phamen* in 170 A 7, with *phēsei* in 170 A 3. Note too that in 170 B 5–6 Plato just says that 'men' (170 B 5–6) believe this. 170 C 5–8 speaks of Protagoras and his followers.

[22] McDowell, *Plato:* Theaetetus, 171. He believes that, though this is in the spirit of (P), it none the less leads to a difficulty for (P). For if people are authoritative about the contents of their beliefs, and if Protagoras' opponents believe that there are absolutely false beliefs, then Protagoras will have to admit that the notion of absolute truth makes sense. For this point, see also Tigner, 'The "Exquisite" Argument at *Theaetetus* 171a'. In my view, however, Plato never suggests that Protagoras denies that the notion of absolute truth makes sense. Though Burnyeat thinks that Plato portrays Protagoras as a relativist rather than as an infallibilist, he seems to agree with me on this point.

there is a fact of the matter about the contents of beliefs.[23] Here, then, is one strike against a relativist reading.

It does not, however, beg the question against infallibilism to assume that there is a fact of the matter about the contents of beliefs, at least insofar as the infallibilist admits the existence of absolute truths.[24] So Plato is entitled to (2′) if he is arguing against infallibiism, but not if he is arguing against extreme global relativism.

(3) is also problematical in an argument against relativism but not in one against infallibilism. For (3) omits the qualifiers on which the relativist insists.[25] In place of (3), the relativist favours:

(3′) All beliefs are true for those who hold them.

But from (3′), it is not clear how to mount a valid argument against relativism. For example, in place of (4), we seem to be entitled only to:[26]

(4′) If (3′) is true, then the belief that some people have—namely, that each person is wiser than others in some respects, and that others are wiser in other respects, where wisdom involves having true beliefs and ignorance involves having false beliefs—is true for those who hold that belief.

[23] This point is also made by White. Unlike me, however; White thinks that Protagoras is an extreme global relativist; he then argues that Plato (perhaps unwittingly) begs the question against him in just this way. Of course, (2′) would not beg the question against a more moderate version of relativism that exempts the contents of beliefs from its scope. But Burnyeat, for one, at some points takes Protagoras to hold an extreme form of relativism, according to which *all* truth is relative to belief ('Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', 179), in which case truths about the contents of beliefs ought to be thus relative as well. (2′) would also beg the question against a version of relativism that exempts only the statement of relativism from its scope.

[24] However, infallibilism also says that there are no truths that are not believed. So if it's true that A believes p, A (or someone) must believe that A believes p; and if it's true that A (or someone) believes that A believes p, then someone must believe that too, and so on, it seems, *ad infinitum.* This might seem to be a vicious infinite regress. Still, it is hardly a defect in Plato's argument if he assumes a premiss that Protagoras is committed to but that leads him into trouble. (And perhaps one might argue that, on some accounts of belief, the premiss does not lead to a vicious infinite regress.) In thinking about this issue, I have benefited both from White's paper and from questions by Victor Caston.

[25] One might argue that if Protagoras is a relativist who believes that the statement of relativism is absolutely true, then he accepts (3b); and if he accepts (3b), he accepts (3). But if the relativist accepts (3) in virtue of accepting (3b), then she can say that even though she is in this sense committed to (7), the inference to (8) fails, since all that has been shown is that there can be one false belief, namely, the belief that relativism is false, and that is something the relativist (on this interpretation) is happy to agree with.

[26] I have weakened 'everyone' in (4) to 'some people' in (4′), to correspond to my weakening of (2) to (2′).

But (4´) seems perfectly compatible with relativism.

Hence, if Plato's argument is aimed against relativism, it is either question-begging or invalid. It begs the question as written, since (3) omits the qualifiers. If they are added in, as in (3´), the argument becomes invalid.

Though (3) is unacceptable to the relativist, it is acceptable to the infallibilist. For the infallibilist accepts (3a); indeed, (3a) simply states infallibilism.[27] If she accepts (3a), she accepts (3).[28]

If we assume for the moment that Protagoras is an infallibilist, then we can see how the rest of the argument goes. If, as (3a) says (i.e. if, as infallibilism says), all beliefs are true, then the belief that some people have—namely, that each person is wiser than others in some respects, and that others are wiser in other respects, where wisdom involves having true beliefs and ignorance involves having false beliefs—is true, and so there are false beliefs. If (3b) is true, then again there are false beliefs; for that is simply what (3b) says. Hence, whether (3a) or (3b) is true, there are false beliefs. And if there are any false beliefs, then infallibilism is false; for infallibilism says that all beliefs are true.

On the infallibilist reading, then, Plato has a valid and, in my view, neat and elegant argument. It is in the form of a dilemma, one horn of which is a self-refutation or, to use Sextus' label, a *peritropē* of infallibilism.[29] This horn derives the falsity of infallibilism by assuming infallibilism, along with the empirical premiss that people believe that there are false beliefs. The overall idea of the dilemma is that whether or not (3a) is true, there are false beliefs, given that people believe that there are.

We have seen, then, that if Argument I is aimed against relativism, it seems to be either question-begging or invalid, whereas it succeeds against infallibilism.[30] We have also seen that the text is quite naturally read as I have read it. These are good reasons for supposing that Plato aims to refute

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[27] Or perhaps we should say that infallibilism implies but is not equivalent to (3a). For infallibilism says not only that all beliefs are true but also that there are no truths that are not believed; this latter claim is not explicit in (3a).

[28] This is so whether (3) is of the form (p or not-p), or of the form (p or q). For whichever of these forms (3) takes, (3b) implies the falsity of infallibilism, and that is the crucial point for my purposes. Alternatively, one might rewrite (3) as follows: 'Either (a) all beliefs are true, or (b) not all beliefs are true'. This clearly puts (3) in the form of (p or not-p), and allows Plato's argument to go through.

[29] See n. 2.

[30] We've seen, though, that (2) is too strong; but this is easily remedied by replacing (2) with (2´). This difficulty is neutral as between relativism and infallibilism. Denyer, *Language, Thought and Falsehood in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 95–6, briefly considers something like my interpretation of Argument I, but he is less impressed with it than I am.

infallibilism rather than relativism.[31] Still, let us press further and see what happens in the next stages of the argument.

IV

We next get a transitional passage which, as the opening *gar* ('for') suggests, aims to elucidate Argument I. Plato writes (170 c 5–8):[32]

For [*gar*] consider, Theodorus, whether you, or any of Protagoras' followers, would be willing to contend that no one ever thinks of another that he's ignorant and believes falsely.

Theodorus replies: 'No, that's incredible [*apiston*], Socrates' (170 c 9), to which Socrates replies in turn: 'Still, that's what the theory that a man is the measure of all things is necessarily committed to' (*eis touto ge anankēs hēkei*, 170 d 1–2).

Why so? Well, according to Argument I, we can refute (P) by assuming (P), along with the additional premiss (=I (2)) that people believe that

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[31] Burnyeat takes Argument I to be the most difficult passage to square with a relativist reading ('Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', 189). Unfortunately, he does not discuss it in any detail, saying 'I do not wish to undertake these further exegetical inquiries here' (189). But he does discuss it briefly in n. 19, where he says that it is cryptic, that Theodorus accordingly asks for clarification, and that the clarification fits the relativist account. He seems to think this licenses us to supply the qualifiers in the necessary places. I suggested above that if we do so, the argument becomes invalid. Burnyeat does not say how he would overcome this objection, but perhaps he thinks that Argument I can be read in something like the way in which he reads Argument II. (But if so, I am not sure why he thinks that Argument I is the *most* problematic for him: why, on this suggestion, is it any more problematic than Argument II?) If Burnyeat thinks that Argument I can be understood in something like the way in which he explains Argument II, then perhaps the argument so read is vulnerable to the same objections I bring to bear against his reading of Argument II (for which see 'Relativism and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*').

In this same note, Burnyeat says that it is 'possible . . . to understand the text as stating or implying . . . the following variant of the *peritropē* argument'—and he then lays out what seems to me to be a *peritropē* of infallibililsm. So he seems to agree with me that the text *can* be read as I have suggested it *should* be read, though he says that this reading is 'not obligatory'.

[32] 170 a 6–9 (=I (2)) claims not only that people take *others* to have false beliefs, but also that they take *themselves* to have false beliefs; yet Plato does not mention (here) that, to preserve (P), Protagoras will have to abandon this latter claim as well. One might think he fails to mention this on the ground that no one can coherently take oneself to have a false belief. However, although it might be incoherent to say 'I believe p, and I believe that p is false', one can coherently think that one has some false beliefs or other, even if one doesn't think, of any particular belief one holds, that it is false. (Cf. 'Any remaining errors are my own'.) And Plato does later consider the first-person case (of taking oneself to have a false belief). Indeed, as we'll see, he thinks that the third-person case (of taking others to have false beliefs) has implications for the first-person case.

everyone has (and so others have) false beliefs.[33] Since (P) plus this premiss imply not-(P), Protagoras has to reject that premiss if he is to preserve (P).[34] But this is not a result he is happy with. On the contrary, it's 'incredible' to suppose that Protagoras, any more than anyone else, would deny that people take others to have false beliefs. None the less, he can't allow this consistently with maintaining (P).

Theodorus understandably asks for clarification, whereupon Socrates says (170 D 4–E 6):

SOC. When you've judged [*krinein*] something by yourself, and express a belief about it to me, let's grant that, as Protagoras' theory has it, that's true for you. But what about the rest of us? Is it impossible for us to get to make judgements about your judgement? Or do we always decide that your beliefs are true? Isn't it rather the case that on every occasion there are countless people who have beliefs opposed to yours and contend against you [*machontai antidoxazontes*], thinking that what you judge and think is false?

THEO. Good heavens, yes, Socrates, countless thousands, as Homer puts it; they give me all the trouble in the world.

SOC. Well now, do you want us to say that what you believe on those occasions is true for you but false for those countless people?

THEO. It looks as if we must, at any rate as far as the theory is concerned.

The reasoning seems to go as follows:

Transitional Passage

    (1) A believes p.
    (2) (P).
    (3) Therefore, p is true for A.
    (4) Countless others believe that A's belief that p is false.
    (5) Therefore p is false for countless others.
    (6) Therefore p is true for A but false for countless others.

Protagoras favours (4); that is, he allows that people take others to have false beliefs. However, in context this leads to (6). And Protagoras is not happy about having to accept (6). Yet, to avoid it, he has to reject (4), and say instead that no one ever takes others to have false beliefs. Plato suggests

[33] As we've seen, I (2) claims more than that people believe that everyone has some false beliefs, but since this is the crucial aspect of I (2) for present purposes, I shall continue to focus on it for now. I shall from now on generally use '(2)' rather than '(2′)'.

[34] That this is Plato's point is noticed by McDowell, *Plato:* Theaetetus, 169–70. (But Mc-Dowell says that 170 C 5–D 2 denies that 'all men believe that some judgements are false'. What it denies, however, is that anyone ever takes others to have false beliefs.) See also Burnyeat, 'Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', 189 n. 19; and Ketchum, 'Plato's "Refutation" of Protagorean Relativism', 98 n. 36.

two ways of circumventing (4): one might say that no one has access to anyone else's beliefs (or, at least, no one has any attitude, one way or the other, to the beliefs of others); or one might say that everyone takes others' beliefs to be all of them true (170 D 6–8). But Plato suggests that Protagoras would be unhappy at having to accept either of these views; he prefers to say that people have access to one another's beliefs, and sometimes take others to have false beliefs.[35] Yet if he continues to say this, he must say that there are cases in which p is true for A but false for B; and he is not happy about having to say that either.

If Protagoras is a relativist, it's difficult to see what the point of the present passage is. For Plato suggests that Protagoras *objects* to (6). Yet the relativist, so far from objecting to the claim that, in some cases, p is true for A but false for others, insists on this way of speaking; it is the locution he introduces in order to dissolve the problem of conflicting appearances. Perhaps the best one can do, on behalf of a relativist reading of the present passage, is to say that, although it is unclear *at this stage* why Protagoras should object to (6), later stages make it clear.[36] We will need to see, then, whether they do so.

It's already absolutely clear, however, why (6) is objectionable to Protagoras if he's an infallibilist; for on infallibilism, we may drop the qualifiers and infer that p is true and false, in which case it's necessarily false. On this reading, Plato is hinting that infallibilism, coupled with the fact that people take others to have false beliefs, leads to necessary falsehoods, and so is to be rejected.[37]

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[35] This is quite interesting. One might think that Protagoras would be quite happy to say that 'we always decide that your beliefs are true': after all, Protagoras is an infallibilist, so he thinks that all beliefs are true. If everyone thinks that others' beliefs are all of them true, then, it might seem, everyone else is an infallibilist too (unless they take themselves to have false beliefs). Yet Plato seems to think that Protagoras would prefer to say that people sometimes take others to have false beliefs. But if Protagoras says this, he seems to admit that others aren't infallibilists. Why should he be anxious to *deny* that others are infallibilists? Denyer in effect suggests one possibility (though he is not addressing my worry): that Protagoras accepts 'our everyday standards for telling who believes what' (*Language, Thought and Falsehood in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 90); and by those standards, people do take others to have false beliefs. (But why should he accept those standards? Elsewhere he shows himself quite willing to reject ordinary beliefs. Why would he baulk here?) Cf. the discussion below, of Argument II (10)–(11).

Notice that another way in which Protagoras might in principle seek to evade (6) is by rejecting the inference from (4) to (5). Waterlow seems to think that that is what Protagoras would do; see 'Protagoras and Inconsistency', 29 ff. (Here, however, she is discussing not the present passage, but what I call Argument II. I touch on her view below.)

[36] I owe this suggestion to Gisela Striker.

[37] Waterlow, 'Protagoras and Inconsistency', 23, argues that if Plato tries to refute Protagoras by showing that his position is necessarily false, he 'flagrantly begs the question

Although we can thus see how an infallibilist reading of the present passage goes, there might seem to be a problem for it. For in contrast to Argument I (and, as we shall see, Argument II), the present passage uses the qualifiers precisely where the relativist would want them (170 D 5–6, E 4–5). This might be thought to show that Protagoras is being portrayed as a relativist after all.[38]

However, whether the qualifiers support relativism depends on how they are understood. They would presumably support relativism if they introduced a special concept of relative truth, being-true-for-a-person, or if they were meant to block the implication that any propositions are true *simpliciter*. But I do not think that is how they should be understood. Rather, to say that p is true for A but false for others is only to say that p is true in A's view, but false in the view of others; that is, A thinks that p is true, whereas others think that it is false. The dative is the dative of 'person judging';[39] it is not meant to block the implication that any propositions are absolutely true or true *simpliciter*.[40] On this view, the qualifiers do not indicate relativism.

against Protagoras. For the issue is, precisely, whether opinions can be false'. (She is discussing 171 A 6–c 7, but the issue is relevant here.) I agree that Protagoras claims that all beliefs are true. However, as we've seen, he also wants to hold on to PNC. Hence if it can be shown that his position leads to a breakdown of PNC, in virtue of being necessarily false, then he will abandon (P). (This assumes that, if forced to choose between PNC and (P), he will retain PNC.) My disagreement with Waterlow here therefore stems from our different views about Protagoras' attitude to PNC. See above, sect. I, and n. 15.

[38] So Burnyeat believes: see 'Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', 189.

[39] Waterlow understands the dative in 170 D 5 in this way, and so she too denies that it indicates 'a special concept of relative truth' ('Protagoras and Inconsistency', 34). (At p. 31 n. 16 she cites A. W. Matthiae, *A Copious Greek Grammar*, trans. E. V. Blomfield, 2nd edn. (2 vols.; Cambridge: Murray, 1820–1), vol. ii, § 389, for this usage. Matthiae writes that 'The dative is often put, especially with *hōs*, in order to show that a proposition is affirmed, not as generally true, but as valid only with respect to a certain person, consequently relatively and subjectively'; 'it expresses the opinion or judgment of a person'. His two explanations are not clearly equivalent. The first suggests relativism; the second does not do so. Whatever Matthiae intended, I use 'dative of person judging' to mean only that the person making the judgement takes it to be true.) However, Waterlow thinks that the datives in 170 E 4–5 are more congenial to a special concept of truth ('Protagoras and Inconsistency', 35). In the end she concludes that they need not be interpreted this way; but she doesn't seem to think that they are datives of person judging either. I'm not sure why. My own view is that the datives in the two passages should all be understood in the same way, as datives of person judging.

[40] One might object to this reading of the datives on the ground that 170 D 4–6 seems to say that Protagoras' theory licenses us to move from the claim that A believes p to the claim that p is true for A; on my reading of the datives, we don't need Protagorean licence for this move. However, although it is true that, on my reading, the inference is not *specially* licensed by (P), it is licensed by (P); so perhaps Plato is emphasizing that, as promised, he is not begging the question against Protagoras.

Still, one might wonder why, on infallibilism, the qualifiers are so conspicuously highlighted here. The point, I take it, is to emphasize that there are cases in which beliefs do genuinely conflict (*machontai antidoxazontes*, 170 D 8–9). That there are such cases is not to be taken for granted. On the contrary, as we've seen, Protagoras' strategy in the first part of the *Theaetetus* is to emphasize that what seem to be conflicting appearances in fact are not. Rather, with Heracleitus' support, he argues that the wind (for example) has changed between our seemingly conflicting utterances, or that we were talking about different winds. That's how, despite being an infallibilist, he was able to hold on to PNC (as he wants to do) in at least some cases.

Though this explains the presence of the qualifiers, and in a way congenial to an infallibiist interpretation, it raises a difficulty: Argument I assumes that people *believe* that beliefs conflict, in the sense that one is true, the other false.[41] Plato now goes further and says that beliefs *do* conflict in this sense—in which case some beliefs *are* true and others false. Is Plato entitled to say this? Doesn't it unfairly ignore Protagoras' Heracleitean strategy?

I'm not sure. But one possible answer is quite simple: (P) claims that all beliefs are true. Argument I makes it clear that one belief people have is that there are conflicting beliefs. Given (P), their belief must be true, and so there are conflicting beliefs. The present claim, that there are conflicting beliefs, therefore just draws out a point implicit in Argument I.

I've offered a simple explanation of why Plato feels entitled both to ignore Protagoras' Heracleitean strategy and to assume that there are after all cases of conflicting appearances. There are also further explanations worth considering. For example, in the first part of the *Theaetetus*, the Heracleitean strategy is used only in connection with first-order perceptual beliefs.[42] Perhaps Plato thinks that, although this strategy works (or is at any rate initially plausible) in such cases, it doesn't work elsewhere. Although the present passage doesn't say what belief is at issue here, perhaps Plato assumes that it is not a first-order perceptual belief, and that that is why the beliefs countenanced here can genuinely conflict.

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[41] I mentioned this aspect of I (2) when the premiss was first discussed, but then left it to one side since it was not crucial in Argument I. Now, however, it becomes important. That Argument I uses as a premiss not the claim that there are false beliefs, but that people believe that there are, whereas the transitional passage says that there are genuinely conflicting beliefs, is also emphasized by White. However, our explanations of how this move is effected are quite different.

[42] See above, n. 13.

That this is Plato's view is suggested by a comment he makes later. At 179 c he says that there are many ways in which one could refute Protagoras 'and show that not every judgement of every person is true. But when it's a question of each person's present experience, from which there come to be his perceptions and the judgements which conform to them—well, it's harder to refute these latter and show that they're not true.' So Plato thinks that the self-refutation passage shows that not *all* beliefs are true (notice, in support of infallibilism, the absence of the qualifiers); but he doesn't think it shows that not all *perceptual* beliefs are true.[43]

But this leads to another question: *why* does Plato think that the Heracleitean strategy is restricted to the perceptual sphere? Once again, I'm not sure. But perhaps he thinks that, although someone *could* extend it further, *Protagoras* would not do so. After all, Protagoras sets himself up as a teacher, in which case he must allow the possibility of communication. But surely, if I can communicate my beliefs to you, you might sometimes disagree with me and think that some of my beliefs are wrong.[44] Perhaps an infallibilist need not allow communication, in which case perhaps Plato doesn't refute that version of infallibilism. Still, perhaps he can refute Protagoras' version of infallibilism.

Or perhaps he thinks that the Heracleitean strategy can't really be deployed outside the perceptual sphere; it's not just a quirk of Protagoras' to restrict it in this way. Here the thought might be that, although we can make intuitive sense of the wind's changing and perhaps even of our having access to different winds, it's much more difficult to say how we might hope to resolve a dispute as to whether, say, $2 + 2 = 4$ along similar lines.

Whichever of these interpretations we favour (and no doubt there are others worth considering),[45] the fact remains that, for whatever reason,

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[43] I take it that 181–3, coupled with 184–6, defends the further claim that neither are all perceptions, or all perceptual beliefs, true. So first Plato argues that not all beliefs whatsoever are true; then he argues that neither are all perceptual beliefs true.

[44] However, that Protagoras denies the possibility of interpersonal disagreement is argued by D. Glidden, 'Protagorean Relativism and the Cyrenaics', in N. Rescher (ed.), *Studies in Epistemology* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975 = *American Philosophical Quarterly* Monograph Series, 9), 113–40 at 115, 120–1. See also Burnyeat, 'Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', 181–2: 'Protagoras' contention that genuine disagreement is impossible'.

[45] Here is one of them. Suppose one agrees with me that our present passage aims to refute Protagoras without giving him the benefit of the Heracleitean strategy (outside the perceptual sphere). Still, one might argue, in 181–3 Plato *does* consider how Protagoras fares if he is allowed to deploy that strategy more widely. On this view, 181–3 argues that,

Plato at this point ignores Protagoras' Heracleitean strategy, and assumes that there are genuinely conflicting beliefs between different people. Given this assumption, it is clear how he can refute Protagoras—if Protagoras is an infallibiist.

V

Plato next argues as follows (170 E 7–171 C 7):

SOC. And what about Protagoras himself? Isn't it necessarily the case that, if he didn't himself think a man is the measure, and if the masses don't either, as indeed they don't, then that *Truth* which he wrote wasn't ⟨the truth⟩ for anyone? Whereas if he did think so himself, but the masses don't share his view, then, in the first place, it's more ⟨the case⟩ that it isn't ⟨the truth⟩ than that it is: more in the proportion by which those to whom it doesn't seem ⟨to be the case⟩ outnumber those to whom it does.

THEO. That must be so, if it's indeed going to be or not be ⟨the case⟩ according to each individual belief.

SOC. And secondly, it involves this especially clever [*kompsotaton*] result: Protagoras agrees that everyone believes the things which are. In doing that, he's surely conceding that the opinion of those who have opposing beliefs [*antidoxa-zontōn*] about his own belief—that is, their belief that what he thinks is false—is true.

THEO. Certainly.

SOC. So if he admits that their opinion is true—that is, the opinion of those who believe that what he thinks is false—he would seem to be conceding that his own opinion is false?

THEO. He must be.

SOC. But the others don't concede that what they think is false?[46]

if Heracleiteanism is thus extended, language breaks down—in which case Protagoras can't even articulate, let alone defend, his position. So 170–1, taken together with 181–3, in effect constitutes a dilemma: if Heracleiteanism is restricted to the perceptual sphere, as in 170–1, then (P) (plus a further premiss) violates PNC and so is to be rejected. If, as in 181–3, we seek to avoid this result by extending Heracleiteanism further, then (P) can't even be coherently stated, and so it is again to be rejected. In formulating this alternative, I am indebted to an audience at Ohio State University, especially Allan Silverman.

I myself do not think that 181–3 countenances an expanded role for Heracleiteanism; rather, it is still restricted to the perceptual sphere (see n. 43). I none the less mention this alternative interpretation, since it allows one to argue that even if (contrary to my view) Plato at some stage considers an expanded role for Heracleiteanism, he would not be at fault in ignoring that fact in 170–1. Rather, on this interpretation one could say that he first rebuts Protagoras on the assumption that Heracleiteanism is restricted, and then on the assumption that it is not.

[46] In 171 B 4–5, I follow W and read *heautous*, rather than BT's *heautois*.

THEO. No.

SOC. And Protagoras, again, admits that that belief of theirs is true, too, according to what he has written.

THEO. Evidently.

SOC. So his theory will be disputed by everyone, beginning with Protagoras himself; or rather, Protagoras himself will agree that it's wrong. When he concedes that someone who contradicts him [*tanantia legonti*] believes truly, he will himself be conceding that a dog, or an ordinary man, isn't the measure of so much as one thing that he hasn't come to know. Isn't that so?

THEO. Yes.

SOC. Well, then, since it's disputed by everyone, it would seem that Protagoras' *Truth* isn't true for anyone: not for anyone else, and not for Protagoras himself.

We may formulate the argument as follows:[47]

Argument II

(1) If no one believes (P), then (P) isn't ⟨true⟩ for anyone. (170 E 7–171 A 1)

(2) Only Protagoras believes (P); no one else shares his view. (171 A 1)

[(3) (P). (171 A 4–5)][48]

(4) [Therefore] it depends on each individual belief whether (P) is or is not ⟨true⟩. (171 A 4–5)

(5) Therefore it's more ⟨the case⟩ that (P) is not ⟨true⟩ than that it is ⟨true⟩. (171 A 1–3)

(6) Protagoras believes that all beliefs are true. (171 A 8–9)

(7) Everyone but Protagoras believes that Protagoras' belief—that (P) is true—is false. (171 A 6–8)[49]

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[47] I have supplied the steps enclosed in square brackets. The material enclosed in angle brackets indicates how I think the elliptical Greek should be expanded. In some cases I have altered the order in which Plato introduces various premisses, in order to clarify the logical structure of his argument.

[48] Plato doesn't explicitly mention (P) as a premiss in his argument. However, 171 A 4–5 seems to assume it.

[49] The text at this point actually only speaks of 'those' (e.g. 171 B 4) who believe that Protagoras' belief—that (P) is true—is false: it isn't explicitly said that everyone but Protagoras believes that his belief is false. However, 171 B 9–10 says that (P) is disputed by everyone; for this conclusion to follow, 'the others' must include everyone but Protagoras. A similar problem arises with 170 E 7–171 A 2: Plato says that 'the many' (*hoi polloi*, 170 E 8; cf. *to plēthos*, 171 A 1) do not believe (P); he then infers that, if Protagoras doesn't either, then the *Truth* wasn't true for anyone (*mēdeni*, 170 E 9). For this conclusion to follow, 'the many' must include everyone but Protagoras, just as, in this passage, 'the others' must include everyone but Protagoras.

(8) Therefore Protagoras believes that everyone else's belief—that his belief, that (P) is true, is false—is true. (171 A 6–8; B 1–2)

(9) Therefore Protagoras believes that his belief, that (P) is true, is false. (171 B 1–2)

(10) The others won't concede that their belief—that Protagoras' belief, that (P) is true, is false—is false. (171 B 4)

(11) Protagoras agrees that everyone else's belief—i.e. their belief that Protagoras' belief, that (P) is true, is false—is true. (171 B 6–7)

(12) Therefore [whether or not Protagoras believes (P),] everyone believes that (P) is false. (171 B 9–C 2, C 5)

(13) Therefore (P) isn't true for anyone. (171 C 5–7)

Let's look first at (1). Like the transitional passage, (1) uses the qualifiers where a relativist would want them. Does this support a relativist reading? As before, that depends on how the qualifiers are understood. I favour the same account here as the one I proposed earlier: 'true for one' means 'true, in one's view'.[50] Once again, the dative does not indicate a special sense or kind of truth, being true-for-someone; nor is it meant to block the implication that any propositions are true *simpliciter*. To say that p is not true for A is simply to say that p is not true in A's view, i.e. according to A. On this interpretation, (1) makes the perfectly correct but seemingly innocuous point that, if no one believes (P), then (P) isn't true in anyone's view, that is, no one takes it to be true, no one believes it.[51]

I take it that Protagoras is happy to accept the *conditional* expressed in (1); but, at least initially, he thinks that its *antecedent* is false, for he thinks that *he* believes (P). (2)–(5) temporarily concede this to Protagoras. But, Plato argues, no one else shares his view: that is, everyone else

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[50] The Greek literally says that Protagoras' '*Truth* isn't for anyone': 'is' (*einai*) is not explicitly complemented. As is well known, *einai* can be understood in a variety of ways. So a further question about (1) is how to understand *einai* here. Waterlow takes it to be existential. She argues that Plato means that 'What Protagoras in his book asserted to be the case would be the case (or: would be a fact or reality) for no one'; she concludes that 'the point concerns relativity of fact', not of truth ('Protagoras and Inconsistency', 34–5). I agree that Plato is not adverting to a special concept of relative truth. But the overall structure of the passage, coupled with the parallel passage in 171 A 6 (which explicitly supplies *alēthēs*), suggests that we are meant to supply *alēthē* in 170 E 9. So I take Plato to be saying that if no one believes (P), (P) isn't true for anyone. Hence we need to ask what 'true for one' means in the present context.

[51] Contrast Burnyeat, 'Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', 177, who thinks that (1) is an argument against Protagoras. Although (1) *seems* innocuous, we'll see later that it raises difficulties for Protagoras.

thinks that (P) is false.[52] Plato infers that (given (P)) (P) is more false than true.[53]

(2)–(5) are—with one notable wrinkle to be discussed shortly—an instance of the transitional passage just discussed. In the transitional passage, Plato considers the abstract case in which A believes p, and others believe that A's belief is false; he infers that p is true for A but false for others. Plato now considers the case in which A = Protagoras, p = (P), and then there is everyone else. That is, Protagoras believes (P), but everyone else thinks that his belief is false. As I've said, Plato infers that (given (P)) (P) is more false than true.

The wrinkle is obvious: in the transitional passage, Plato explicitly infers only that p is true for A but false for others: the qualifiers are in place. Here he infers, not that (P) is true for Protagoras but false for others, but that (P) is more false than true. Why are the qualifiers omitted here, but in place in the transitional passage?

If one favours a relativist reading, one might reply that Plato intended the qualifiers; the omission is inadvertent. In this case, all Plato is saying here is that (P) is false for more people than it is true for. He is perfectly entitled to this claim; but it has no anti-relativist force. Another possibility, again on the assumption that Plato aims to refute relativism, is that he intentionally omitted the qualifiers, in the false belief that he is entitled to do so. In this case, (2)–(5) do constitute an argument against Protagoras, but one that fails in a by now familiar way.

We noted earlier that it was difficult to see what the point of the transitional passage is, if Protagoras is a relativist; but, it was suggested, perhaps later passages will make the point clear. (2)–(5) do not do so; or, at any

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[52] The claim that no one shares Protagoras' view—that is, that no one else believes (P)—might mean either that (i) everyone else thinks that (P) is false, or that (ii) everyone else either thinks that (P) is false, or has no views about it one way or the other. (7) explicitly says that everyone but Protagoras thinks that (P) is false (or, more precisely, that everyone but Protagoras thinks that his belief, that (P) is true, is false); and that passage seems to be taking up the present claim. So I take (2) likewise to mean that everyone else thinks that (P) is false. I ask later about the connection between not believing (P), on the one hand, and believing that it is false, on the other.

One might argue that the claim that only Protagoras believes (P) is too strong: surely there are other Protagoreans about? If so, (2) should be altered to: (2′) Only Protagoras and his followers believe (P). With (2′), we can infer (5) only if there are fewer Protagoreans than non-Protagoreans. But Plato seems to assume just that: see n. 54.

[53] Plato doesn't explicitly say that (P) is more false than true. He says that 'it's more ⟨the case⟩ that it is not than that it is'. One might argue, as Waterlow does in connection with (1), that we shouldn't supply 'true' (see above, n. 50). I would give similar reasons for supplying 'true' here to those I gave for supplying it in (1). The connection with the transitional passage, which I go on to discuss, also supports this interpretation.

rate, if they aim to do so, they fail in their purpose. For either they do not argue against relativism at all, or else they advance a fallacious argument against it.

Suppose, however, that Plato aims to refute infallibilism. In that case, the present passage follows on quite nicely from the transitional passage. As we've seen, Plato says that there are cases in which p is true for A but false for others, where this was a result that was unwelcome to Protagoras. Plato didn't explain there why this was unwelcome to Protagoras. But if Protagoras is an infallibilist, the reason is clear; for we can then drop the qualifiers and infer that p is both true and false, in which case it is necessarily false. The present passage supplements the transitional passage by making this point explicit.[54] Indeed it rubs the point in, by showing that (P) in particular turns out to be both true and false, and so necessarily false: it's not just any old belief that suffers this unfortunate fate, but Protagoras' belief in (P).

On this reading, (2)–(5) constitute another *peritropē* of (P), one that draws on the transitional passage: given (P), and the empirical assumption that only Protagoras believes (P), whereas others believe that it is false, it follows that (P) is both true and false, and so it is necessarily false.[55]

This *peritropē* is, not surprisingly, quite closely related not only to the transitional passage but also to Argument I.[56] In Argument I, (P), plus the belief that there are false beliefs, implies not-(P). In II (2)–(5), (P), plus

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[54] More exactly, Plato says that (P) is more false than true. Why does he speak in this latter way, rather than saying that (P) is both true (because believed by Protagoras) and false (because believed false by everyone else)? Perhaps he means that (P) is false on more occasions than it is true on. Consider, for example, Plato's discussion of the compresence of opposites in *Republic* V, where he at one point asks: 'Is any of the manys what someone says it is, then, any more than it is not what he says it is?' (479 B 9–10). Though the issue is complicated, I take him to mean that some sensibles are both beautiful and ugly, just and unjust, etc. That something is no more beautiful than ugly, or just than unjust, means that it is not one to the exclusion of the other, since it is both. By parity of reasoning, then, perhaps in saying that (P) is more false than true, Plato means that it is both true and false—but false on more occasions, or more often, since it is more often taken to be false. See the last paragraph of n. 52. Contrast Ketchum, 'Plato's "Refutation" of Protagorean Relativism', 100.

[55] Hence I disagree with McDowell, *Plato:* Theaetetus, 170, who thinks that (5) 'is clearly incidental. Its derivation is suspect'. Burnyeat says that (5) is 'ambiguous: it is not clear whether Socrates wants to infer simply that the doctrine is false for more people than it is true for . . . or whether he tries to go beyond this to the conclusion that it is more false than true in some absolute sense' ('Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', 183). He seems to think that in the latter case, Plato 'is to be censured', and that the move is 'questionable'. On the interpretation I've defended, however, the move is not questionable, and Plato is not to be censured.

[56] Not surprisingly because, as we've seen, the transitional passage aims to elucidate Argument I.

the belief that (P) is false, implies not-(P). To be sure, the two ancillary premisses differ: Argument I supplies the premiss that people believe that there are false beliefs (where the beliefs in view seem to be primarily first-order beliefs about how, for example, to navigate or to heal); whereas here the additional premiss is that people believe that (P) is false. However, these two premisses are closely related: presumably any clear-headed person who believes that there are false beliefs also believes that (P) is false, for (P) says that all beliefs are true.[57]

VI

At this point, (P) has been refuted twice over: once in Argument I and then again in II (2)–(5). What, then, is the point of the especially clever argument that follows (=(1), (6)–(13))? Let us turn, finally, to it.

We might note, to begin with, that (7) seems too strong: perhaps not everyone but Protagoras believes that (P) is false. But we can easily accommodate this point by taking (7) to mean 'Everyone but Protagoras and his followers . . .' (cf. 170 c 5–7); this is, moreover, all Plato needs for his argument.[58] But let us leave this difficulty to one side and turn to some other issues.

It has often been noted that, like the other arguments we have explored, this one too seems to fail if it is aimed against relativism. For example, if Protagoras is a relativist, he would reject (6) in favour of:

(6′) Protagoras believes that all beliefs are true for those who hold them.

Similarly, if Protagoras is a relativist, he would reject (8) in favour of (8′):

[57] Burnyeat, 'Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', 189 n. 19, criticizes McDowell for assimilating Argument I to Argument II; he does so on the ground that McDowell doesn't distinguish between the two ancillary premisses. Though I agree that the two premisses differ, they are more closely related than Burnyeat seems to allow.

[58] See n. 49; and also the parallel discussions of premiss (2) in Argument I and of premiss (2) in Argument II. (Indeed, II (7) basically restates II (2); Plato is now going to use it to prove another point.) If we alter (7) in this way, then we will of course also need to make corresponding adjustments in some other premisses. (8), for example, would become: 'Therefore Protagoras and his followers believe . . .'.

Even if we alter (7) in the way suggested, one might still find it too strong. For one might think that there are many people who are not in any obvious sense followers of Protagoras who do not believe that (P) is false, for the simple reason that they have never heard of it, or who have no attitude to it one way or the other. Perhaps Plato assumes that they are tacitly committed to believing that (P) is false since, as Argument I points out, they believe that there are false beliefs; see further below. See also Ketchum, 'Plato's "Refutation" of Protagorean Realtivism', 77–8.

(8') Therefore Protagoras believes that everyone else's belief—that his belief, that (P) is true, is false—is true for them.

(6) and (8), that is, omit the qualifier, 'for one', on which the relativist insists. Once again, then, either Plato begs the question against relativism by omitting the qualifiers, or else he wrote carelessly and really intended (6') and (8'). In this latter case, he still fails to refute relativism, since it is not clear how we can proceed beyond (8') to (9). Hence neither does this passage explain why a relativist should mind saying that there are cases where p is true for A but false for others; or, if it aims to do so, it fails in its purpose.[59]

Once again, however, the argument fares far better if it is aimed against infallibilism. (2)–(5) allow that Protagoras (though no one else) believes (P). Plato now argues that in fact no one, not even Protagoras, believes (P). For suppose that Protagoras, but no one else, believes (P). Well, if Protagoras believes (P), he believes that all beliefs are true. But in that case, as (8) points out, he believes that the belief that everyone else has—that his belief, that (P) is true, is false—is true. But if he believes that that belief of theirs is true, then he believes that his belief—that (P) is true—is false (9). For if one believes that A's belief that p is true, then one believes that p is true.[60] Hence, since Protagoras believes that the belief that others have—that his belief, that (P) is true, is false—is true, he believes that his belief,

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[59] Hence neither does the especially clever argument fulfil the promise of explaining why a relativist should, after all, mind having to say that there are cases in which p is true for A but false for others; see sect. IV. In 'Relativism and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', I provide a fuller account of *why* I think the especially clever argument fails to refute relativism.

[60] Waterlow, "Protagoras and Inconsistency", 31, agrees that 'The fact that someone agrees with an opinion would normally be taken as ground for ascribing the opinion *to him*'. But, she adds, 'the normal rules do not apply in Protagoras' case' (ibid.). Her reason seems to be that she thinks Protagoras will deploy his Heracleitean strategy even here, and say that his opponents' belief is true of a reality private to them; but, for Protagoras to have to endorse their belief in his own right, there would also have to be a corresponding reality private to him, but he need not admit this (cf. p. 30). If, however, I'm right to suggest that Protagoras invokes Heracleiteanism only to defuse seemingly conflicting appearances in the perceptual sphere, then 'the normal rules' do apply in the case currently under discussion, and Plato is entitled to move from (8) to (9). (The same is true of the transitional passage's move from (4) to (5); see above, n. 35.)

Here it may be significant that Plato doesn't simply say that Protagoras believes (P), whereas others believe that (P) is false. Rather, he says that others believe *that Protagoras's belief, that (P) is true, is false*; and that Protagoras believes that *their belief* is true. Perhaps he speaks in this latter way to make it clear that there is some one belief (Protagoras' belief that (P) is true) about which Protagoras and his opponents initially have genuinely conflicting views ('initially', because Plato argues that that conflict leads Protagoras to abandon his view). The former way of speaking might leave it open that the appearance of conflict is not genuine, on the ground that they are speaking about different things.

Once Plato has made this point, however, he feels free to speak, not just of Protagoras

that (P) is true, is false. If he believes that his belief, that (P) is true, is false, then he believes that (P) is false.

In the transitional passage, Plato contents himself with pointing out that sometimes appearances genuinely conflict: there are cases in which A believes p, and others believe that p is false, and one of these two beliefs is true, the other false. In II (2)–(5), he focuses on a specific case of conflicting appearances, one in which A = Protagoras, and p = (P). Given (P), it follows that (P) is true (since Protagoras believes it) and false (since others believe that it is false). Plato then argues that Protagoras will have to accept the results just described. But in accepting the claim that *others* believe that (P) is false, he has to accept that it is false, given his view that all beliefs are true. This leads to a different and more striking case of conflicting appearances: for Protagoras himself is now the subject of conflicting appearances. On the one hand, he believes (P); on the other hand, he's just been forced to believe that (P) is false. Plato begins with a case of *interpersonal* conflicting appearances: Protagoras believes (P), whereas others believe that it is false. He then shows that this leads to a case of *intrapersonal* conflict: Protagoras initially believes (P); but given the argument just rehearsed, he is forced to believe that (P) is false.[61]

Protagoras could avoid this unhappy result if he could get others to abandon their belief that his belief, that (P) is true, is false. However, this is not empirically possible: 'the others don't concede that what they think is false' (10); that is, they will continue to think that their belief is true.[62]

and others having conflicting beliefs about *his belief that* (P) *is true*, but also of their having conflicting beliefs about *the truth of* (P). Hence I shall sometimes speak in this latter way as well.

[61] Cf. Aristotle, *Metaph.* Γ 4: 'Further, it follows that all would then be right and all would be in error, and *our opponent himself confesses himself to be in error*' (1008^a28–30). Cf. also Γ 5, 1009^a7–12: 'For on the one hand, if all opinions and appearances are true, all statements must be at the same time true and false. For many men hold beliefs in which they conflict with one another, and all think those mistaken who have not the same opinions as themselves; so that the same thing must be and not be.'

If Protagoras were to invoke his Heracleitean strategy here, perhaps he could argue that we do not have a case of intrapersonal conflict; rather, Protagoras-at-t_1 believes (P) and a different person, Protagoras-at-t_2, believes that (P) is false. In this case, what might seem to be intrapersonal conflict turns out to be another case of interpersonal conflict. Cf. *Tht.* 166 B 5–C 2, and Waterlow, 'Protagoras and Inconsistency', 26–7. But it's not clear to me that Protagoras-at-t_1 can't have conflicting beliefs at t_1.

[62] Recall that the transitional passage says that, to save (P), Protagoras will have to say that no one ever believes that others have false beliefs; but it's *apiston* to suppose that Protagoras would say that. As in the transitional passage, so here: Plato assumes that Protagoras will not abandon the view that people take others to have false beliefs. He acknowledges the fact that they think this; and they can't be brought to think otherwise.

Protagoras has to admit that this belief of theirs is also true (11). (10)–(11) therefore block a possible escape route.[63]

But in that case it follows that everyone, including Protagoras, believes that (P) is false (12) ('his theory will be disputed by everyone, beginning with Protagoras himself', 171 B 9–10; cf. 171 B 10–c 5).

Having argued that everyone, including Protagoras, believes that (P) is false, Plato infers that (P) isn't true for anyone (171 c 5–7 = premiss (13)). Is this inference justified? (1) says that if no one believes (P), then (P) isn't true for anyone. One might think that, to infer the consequent of (1)—that (P) isn't true for anyone—Plato has to establish its antecedent, that no one believes (P). But what he has established is that everyone believes that (P) is false. One might argue that it doesn't follow from the fact that everyone believes that (P) is false that no one believes (P). For people can, after all, have contradictory beliefs, and perhaps this is one of them.

Perhaps Plato would reply as follows. According to Argument I, everyone but Protagoras and his followers believes that there are false beliefs.[64] This commits them to believing that (P) is false. For though it's reasonable to say that people don't believe all the consequences of their explicit beliefs, it's also reasonable to say that they believe their obvious consequences. And if someone believes there are false beliefs, then it's reasonable to say that she believes that (P) is false. To be sure, she might not have heard of (P); the content of her belief might not be '(P) is false'. None the less, she is committed to believing that not all beliefs are true, and that commits her to believing that (P) is false. So, everyone but Protagoras and his followers believes that (P) is false. Nor, Plato assumes, do they believe anything that commits them to believing (P) simultaneously. Hence, although people can have contradictory beliefs, Plato assumes that non-Protagoreans, at any rate, don't have this one. (This is an empirical assumption of Plato's, one that might or might not be true.)

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[63] For a quite different explanation of the point of (10)–(11), one along relativist lines, see E. Emilsson, 'Plato's Self-Refutation Argument in *Theaetetus* 171 AC Revisited', *Phronesis*, 39 (1994), 136–49. I find the objections he raises for his interpretation on p. 143 more troubling than he does.

Protagoras might try saying that people don't *really* believe that his belief, that (P) is true, is false; but in this case, it would appear that they falsely believe that they have this belief, and so by a different route it can be proven that there are false beliefs. One route derives the falsity of (P) by relying on the premiss that people take others to have false beliefs; the other route relies on the premiss that people have false beliefs about what their own beliefs are. (In this latter case, people would not be authoritative about what their beliefs are. In a sense, perhaps the first route shows this too.)

[64] Strictly speaking, Argument I says that *everyone* believes this; but see the discussion of I (2) and (2').

What, however, about Protagoras and his followers? Mightn't *they* agree that (P) is false, yet continue to believe (P)? Not if I have been right to say that Protagoras is eager to hold on to PNC. For if he continues to believe (P), yet agrees that it is false, then (given that he is an infallibilist) he'll have to conclude that it's true and false. Once he is brought to believe that (P) is false, he'll have to abandon his belief in (P), if he is to hold on to PNC.[65]

VII

Why is this passage highlighted as being especially clever? The explanation can't, or at any rate shouldn't, be that it is only here that (P) is refuted. For (P) was refuted long ago, in Argument I, and then again in II (2)–(5). I think Plato uses the label to capture two points. First, consider again the overall structure of our three passages (Argument I, the transitional passage, and Argument II). Argument I assumes (P), along with the obvious empirical fact that people believe that there are false beliefs, and genuinely conflicting beliefs. This allows us to infer that there are false beliefs, in which case (P) is false. The transitional passage reiterates that if we assume (P), then not only do people *believe* that there are genuinely conflicting beliefs, but in fact *there are* genuinely conflicting beliefs and so false beliefs. Once again, then, (P) is false. II (2)–(5) describes a particular case of conflicting beliefs: Protagoras believes (P), whereas everyone else believes that it is false. Given (P), these conflicting beliefs must be true, and so (P) is both true and false, and so it is false. This proves the falsity of (P) by appealing to a striking case of *interpersonal* conflict. The especially clever passage goes one step further. It shows how the case of interpersonal conflicting appearances just considered leads to a case of *intrapersonal* conflicting appearances. In particular, Protagoras himself believes (P); but at the same time, he is forced to believe that it is false. It's not just, as before, that Protagoras believes (P) whereas others believe that it is necessarily false.

Secondly, once Protagoras is forced into this uncomfortable position, he has to abandon (P). Indeed, the main focus of the especially clever passage isn't so much on the direct refutation of (P), as on showing that Protagoras

[65] This again assumes that, if forced to choose between PNC and (P), Protagoras will opt for PNC. What about infallibilists who don't care about PNC? Perhaps here Plato would follow Aristotle's lead and say that 'what one says need not be what one supposes to be true' (*Metaph.* 1005^{b}25–6), and no one can really believe not-PNC; hence any purported infallibilist will in fact be one who believes PNC, and so one who will accept Plato's argument. Alternatively, perhaps here one would have to say that Plato refutes only Protagoras' brand of infallibilism, and not all possible versions of it.

accepts the previous arguments, with the result that he can no longer believe (P). Plato is here commenting, not just on the logic of the situation, but on Protagoras' acceptance of it. So the argument is also especially clever in that it is a double *peritropē*: it is a *peritropē* both of (P) and of the claim that Protagoras believes (P). By assuming (P), we can again (given certain empirical facts) prove that (P) is false. By assuming that Protagoras believes (P), we can show (given certain empirical facts) that Protagoras does not believe (P).

Plato's label therefore seems to me to be justified. But we can best appreciate his cleverness by seeing the passage in its overall context. For it is not an independent argument, but one that builds on preceding results. Indeed, all three of the passages that we have explored seem to me to be quite clever. Moreover, Plato's arguments are not just clever but also largely successful[66]—if, that is, he aims to refute not relativism but infallibilism.[67]

[66] Along the way we've registered a couple of worries. For example, some premisses seem too strong; and I've asked whether Plato is entitled to move from the claim that everyone thinks that (P) is false to the claim that no one believes (P). There are also questions to be raised about whether the fact (as it seems to me) that Plato restricts the Heracleitean strategy to the perceptual sphere is unfair to Protagoras—though I've suggested, without pursuing the point fully, that it is not.

[67] Earlier versions of this chapter were read at Harvard University, Ohio State University, and the Classical Seminar in Corpus Christi College, Oxford. I thank the audiences on these occasions—especially Gisela Striker, Victor Caston, Lindsay Judson, and Lesley Brown—for helpful comments. I am also grateful to Christopher Taylor (my commentator at Corpus) for helpful written comments and for many helpful discussions.