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PROTAGORAS AND SELF-REFUTATION IN PLATO'S THEAETETUS

M. F. BURNYEAT

THIS paper is a sequel to an earlier one in which I discussed an argument in Sextus Empiricus (*M* 7.389-390) directed against the sophist Protagoras and his doctrine that man is the measure of all things.[1] Sextus interprets Protagoras' famous proclamation "Man is the measure of all things" as the subjectivist thesis that every appearance whatsoever is true, and his argument is that the thesis is self-refuting because one of the things that appears (is judged) to be the case is that not every appearance is true: if, as the subjectivist holds, every appearance is true, but at the same time it appears that not every appearance is true, then it follows that not every appearance is true. The problem was to discover how this argument could be classified as a *peritrope* or self-refutation. My suggestion was that in a context where it can be presupposed that subjectivism meets with disagreement, the second premise is guaranteed to hold and we can argue straightforwardly that if subjectivism is true, it is false. Such a context, I proposed, would be established by the dialectical debates toward which Greek logical reflections were typically directed, and it is this dialectical setting which provides the key to Protagoras' self-refutation.

But the real Protagoras did not hold the subjectivist thesis. As the earlier paper explained, the more authentic interpretation of Protagoras is that given in Plato's *Theaetetus,* according to which he was a relativist who maintained that every judgment is true *for* (in relation to) the person whose judgment it is; that is what the doctrine that man is the measure of all things originally stood for, not the crude subjectivism that Sextus refutes. So it is natural to ask how the charge of self-refutation fares against the subtler relativism of the sophist himself.

The question has both a philosophical and a historical aspect. From Plato to Husserl and John Anderson, philosophers of various persuasions have found it important to show that Protagoras' doc-

[1] "Protagoras and Self-refutation in Later Greek Philosophy," *Philosophical Review,* (1975), p. 44.

trine of relative truth is self-refuting,[2] and it would be satisfying to know whether the case can be made out. Historically, there is a problem about Plato's venture at the task in the *Theaetetus*. Sextus claims to derive his self-refutation argument from Plato (and before him from Democritus), and what looks like the identical argument to Sextus' is indeed presented in the *Theaetetus* as a triumphant overturning of Protagoras' philosophy. Yet Protagoras in that dialogue, as in the best modern reconstructions of the sophist's own doctrine, is a strict relativist whose position appears to invalidate the very basis of the argument.

Both aspects of the question will concern us here. My aim is to offer a resolution of the historical puzzle which will also help to clarify some of the philosophical issues that cloud the notion of relative truth.

Here, to begin with, is the well-known passage in Plato's own words:

> Secondly, it [the *Truth* that Protagoras wrote] has this most exquisite feature:[3] on the subject of his own view, agreeing that everyone judges what is so, he for his part [Protagoras] presumably concedes to be true the opinion of those who judge the opposite to him in that they think that he is mistaken .... Accordingly, he would concede that his own view is false, if he agrees that the opinion of those who think him mistaken is true [*Theaetetus* 171*ab*].

On the face of it, the argument is as follows:

If *(A)* every judgment is true,
and *(B)* it is judged that *(A)* is false,
then *(C)* it is true that *(A)* is false
and, consequently, *(D) (A)* is false.

If this analysis of the passage is correct, Plato's version of the *peritrope* of Protagoras speaks of judgments instead of appearances, but otherwise it does not differ in any logically important respect from the argument in Sextus. Plato's Protagoras, however, unlike Sextus',

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[2] Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. by J. N. Findlay (London, 1970), I, 138 ff.; John Anderson, "Marxist Philosophy," *Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy* (1935); cited from his *Studies in Empirical Philosophy* (Sydney, 1962), p. 294. Husserl's concern is to attack psychologism in logic, Anderson's to refute the notion of historically relative truth advocated in Engels' *Anti-Dühring*.

[3] ἔπειτα ... ἔχει, continuing πρῶτον μὲν κτλ. (171*a*2), has therefore the same subject as δοκεῖ (171*a*2-3) and ἔσται (171*a*4-5), *viz.* ταύτην τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἣν ἐκεῖνος ἔγραψεν from 170*e*9-171*a*1.

does not hold that every judgment is true (period) but—very differently—that every judgment is true *for* the person whose judgment it is. The difference is crucial. Starting from an adequately formulated relativism,

(M) Every judgment is true *for* the person whose judgment it is,

and given

(N) It is judged that *(M)* is false,

all that can be inferred is that

(O) *(M)* is false—or "*(M)* is false" is true—*for* the person who judges it to be so.

This establishes that the Measure doctrine is false for Protagoras' opponents but not yet that it is false for Protagoras himself; consequently, his relativism is not so far shown to be self-refuting. His thesis that every judgment is true for the person whose judgment it is does not commit him to endorsing whatever anyone thinks as true for himself as well as for the person who thinks it; hence it does not require him to concede the truth of his opponents' opinion that he is mistaken. Or so it is generally thought.

The position, then, is this: the argument as it stands in the text appears to be an *ignoratio elenchi,* starting out from a subjectivist position, *(A),* which Protagoras did not hold, and recasting in the relativistic mould of *(M)* yields only the seemingly harmless conclusion that the Measure doctrine is false for Protagoras' opponents. An impasse so obviously unsatisfactory should give us pause. Critics from George Grote to Gregory Vlastos have protested at the way Socrates at the climactic moment drops the relativizing qualifiers with which Protagoras specifies for whom a judgment is true,[4] but few have thought it necessary to wonder why Plato should make Socrates proceed in this fashion and none, to my mind, has convincingly explained his foisting upon Protagoras the unrelativized premise *(A).*

Vlastos writes:

> Protagoras is very fussy about adding "for . . ." after "true" or "is" or "real." . . . Even Plato himself is not as careful as he should be on this

[4] George Grote, *Plato and the other Companions of Sokrates*[3] (London, 1875), II, 347 ff.; Gregory Vlastos, Introduction to the Library of Liberal Arts *Plato's Protagoras* (Indianapolis and New York, 1956), p. xiv, n. 29; also W. G. Runciman, *Plato's Later Epistemology* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 16, Kenneth M. Sayre, *Plato's Analytic Method* (Chicago and London, 1969), pp. 87-88.

point. While he puts in the "for . . ." almost invariably while *reporting* or *describing* Protagoras' doctrine (not only at 170*a*, but at 152*b*,*c*, 158*a*, and all through 166*c*-167*c*, where the repetition gets almost tiresome, and then again at 171*e*-172*a*; also at *Crat.* 385*e*-386*d*), he sometimes drops it in the course of *arguing* against Protagoras (e.g., in the "exquisite" argument at 171*a*), thereby inadvertently vitiating his own polemic.

On reading this I want to ask: can we be satisfied with a simple diagnosis of inadvertence if Plato is so conscientious in reporting Protagoras' doctrine? How could he be blind to the omission of the qualifiers from a key argument against a position he has so carefully described? Runciman, on the other hand, suggests that Plato may be consciously overstating his case.[5] But what would be the point of deliberately overstating one's case to the extent of making it a case against a position quite other than its official target?

The task of explanation becomes harder still if we attend to the context in which the self-refutation argument occurs. This is at a stage in the dialogue after the youthful Theaetetus has conceded a series of objections (161*c*-164*b*) against the Protagorean doctrine (more precisely, they are objections to Theaetetus' definition of knowledge as perception, but the dialogue takes this definition to be equivalent to the Protagorean doctrine, so that objections to either tell against both; compare 164*d* with 151*e*-152*a*, 160*de*). These criticisms having been discounted as verbal and superficial (164*c*), and Protagoras thoroughly defended against them (166*a*-168*c*), Theodorus is prevailed upon to replace Theaetetus as Socrates' interlocutor—in order that the distinguished mathematician's maturity and professional sense of rigor shall ensure more serious and responsible treatment for the ideas of his friend Protagoras (cf. 162*e*, 168*b*-169*d*). In effect, then, Socrates begins the section which concerns us with a promise to deal fairly and justly with Protagoras

[5] Runciman, *loc. cit.*, relying on remarks made at the conclusion of the argument (171*cd*) in which Socrates entertains the idea that Protagoras might pop up with an answer. The passage in question will be discussed in due course. It has helped to trigger a third view, that the omission of the qualifiers is deliberate but ironic, recently put forward by Edward N. Lee, " 'Hoist with His Own Petard': Ironic and Comic Elements in Plato's Critique of Protagoras (*Tht.* 161-171)" in E. N. Lee, A. P. D. Mourelatos, R. M. Rorty (eds.), *Exegesis and Argument, Studies in Greek Philosophy presented to Gregory Vlastos (Phronesis,* supp. vol. I [1973]); I discuss Lee's interpretation in nn. 6 and 23 below.

(cf. 167*e*).[6] Not only that, but since for chronological reasons Protagoras cannot be present to defend his thesis in person,[7] Socrates offers the further safeguard that he will use Protagoras' own work to authorize the admission he intends to elicit, rather than rely, as before, on the judgment of himself and his interlocutor as to what Protagoras would or should be willing to admit (169*de*). The refutation of Protagoras is to be derived directly from Protagoras' own statements, together with the empirical fact, which Protagoras cannot credibly deny, that other people think that what Protagoras says is false. The whole section is peppered with references to Protagoras' book *Truth* and its thesis that man is the measure of all things (170*c*2, *d*1-2, *d*5, 170*e*9-171*a*1, 171*b*7, *c*6); twice Socrates even makes a direct address to its defunct author, Protagoras himself (170*a*6, *c*2). And in embarking on this project of refuting Protagoras out of his own book Socrates opens with a perfectly fair and responsible statement of the main thesis of that work:

> He says, does he not, that what seems to each person is so for the person to whom it seems?

To which Theodorus replies, "Yes, he does say that" (170*a*).

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[6] Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-239, has done valuable service to the dialogue by calling attention to the deep irony that pervades the speeches in which Socrates impersonates Protagoras demanding serious and responsible dialectical treatment for his theory (162*de*, 168*b*), not long after Socrates has pointed out that, if Protagoras' account of truth *is* taken seriously, dialectic or the testing by argument and discussion of people's views and theories becomes a farce (161*e*-162*a*). But this does not annul the promise to deal fairly with Protagoras or make ironic the refutation which carries it out. On the contrary, the irony is in the fact that one such as Protagoras demands, is promised, and finally (as we shall see) *is* given a refutation of unexceptionable seriousness. The joke is rather spoiled when Lee finds elements of irony in the refutation itself. He claims that, by omitting the qualifiers on which Protagoras insists, Socrates teaches an ironic lesson about the conditions for asserting anything that can significantly be discussed or denied. This suggestion will concern us in due course (n. 23 below)—I think it overdoes the irony and fails to mend Socrates' logic—but it should be said at once that Lee is open to the same damaging objection as Runciman: it ought to be *Protagoras* who is attacked (whether seriously or ironically), and this ought to mean beginning from *(M)* rather than *(A)*. In fact, there is not a word in Lee's discussion about the omission of the qualifier in premise *(A)* and how *that* tallies with the (admittedly ironic) palaver about securing justice for Protagoras. Yet precisely what justice involves here is a man's right to be judged by the views he really holds (168*bc* with 167*e*).

[7] The dramatic date of the dialogue is 399 B.C., well after the death of Protagoras.

After such a beginning it would be nothing less than perverse dishonesty were Plato without reason to make Socrates argue in the sequel in a way that depended for its damaging effect on omission of the relativizing qualifiers. I need hardly say that perverse dishonesty is not a charge to be leveled lightly against a philosopher of Plato's stature and integrity. But the only way to forestall it is to work over the text in the hope that a more detailed understanding of what is going on will present Socrates' reasoning in a new aspect.

We can make a start by looking into the more immediate context of the self-refutation argument, which is merely the last in a closely knit sequence of three linked arguments against Protagoras. The sequence goes as follows. Either (1) Protagoras himself did not believe the *Truth* he wrote, in which case, since no one else does, it is not (*sc.* the truth) for anybody at all (170*e*7-170*a*1).[8] Or (2) he did believe it, but the majority of people do not share his opinion, in which case two things follow. First, *(a)* the more the adherents of his *Truth* are outnumbered by people who do not believe it, the more it is not (*sc.* the truth) than it is. "Necessarily," replies Theodorus, "at least if it is to be and not to be (*sc.* the truth) according as each person believes or does not believe it" (171*a*1-5). Secondly, *(b)* Protagoras is caught by the *peritrope* argument as quoted earlier (171*ab*), and this leads eventually to the same conclusion as argument (1)—namely, that his doctrine is not true for anybody at all, not even for the sophist himself (171*c*5-7). It is (2) *(b)* that has pre-empted the attention; it is, of course, highlighted by Socrates as the really exquisite one. But the neglect of its companion arguments has meant that critics have overlooked the evidence these provide that Plato thinks Protagoras vulnerable to objections which do *not* depend on omission of the relativizing qualifiers. For the first argument of the trio certainly uses the appropriate qualifier, and the second is not unambiguously at fault in this respect. But before discussing the significance of this evidence, we need a more formal statement of the position against which the three arguments are directed.

I quoted earlier the formulation "What seems to each person is so for the person to whom it seems" (170*a*). This lays it down that (for all persons *x* and all propositions *p*)

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[8] F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London, 1935), p. 78, translates as if the conditional εἰ μέν κτλ. were contrary to fact: "Supposing that not even he believed . . . then this Truth . . . would not be true for anyone." The Greek does not present it as such (there is no ἄν), but as one limb of a dilemma: whether he believed it or did not believe it, in either case it *is* not true for anybody.

*P*1. If it seems to *x* that *p*,[9] then it is true for *x* that *p*.

*P*1 is indeed Protagoras' major contribution to the extreme empiricist epistemology which the dialogue elaborates out of Theaetetus' definition of knowledge as perception. It guarantees that, no matter how "wild" and variable (from the common-sense point of view) a person's experience may be, the judgments he is led to will be true for him, giving him certain knowledge of how things are for him. If, as Protagoras holds, all things are for each person exactly as they appear to him, no one can be mistaken about the reality that confronts him, of which he is the sole authoritative judge (measure). But it is clear that Plato also understands Protagoras to make the further claim that nothing is true for a person unless it seems to him to be so, unless he believes it. In other words, the converse rule also holds:

*P*2. If it is true for *x* that *p*, then it seems to *x* that *p*;

which is equivalent to

*P*3. If it does not seem to *x* that *p*, then it is not true for *x* that *p*.

That is to say, Protagoras has to defend the equivalence of "It seems to *x* that *p*" and "It is true for *x* that *p*," not merely an implication from the former to the latter.

Protagoras commits himself to the full equivalence when he claims that man (*sc.* each man) is the measure not only of what is (*sc.* for him), but also of what is not (*sc.* for him). At least, when Plato first quotes the original dictum in full, "Man is the measure of all things, of those that are, that they are, and of those that are not, that they are not," he explains it in terms of the example of two people in the wind, one of whom feels cold while the other does not; in which situation Protagoras would have us believe that the wind is cold for one of them and is not so for the other (152*b*). Here, to derive the Protagorean reading of the example we need *P*1 to tell us that the wind is cold for the one who feels cold and *P*3 to tell us that it is not cold for the second person. For it was not said that the second person feels warm in the wind, or even that he feels the wind is not cold; given either of these as premise, to conclude that the wind is not cold for him we would need no more than

$P1_N$ If it seems to *x* that not-*p*, then it is true for *x* that not-*p*.

which is a simple substitution instance of *P*1. What was said of the second person was simply that he does not feel cold. On Protagoras'

[9] Alternatively, if *x* believes/judges that *p*; cf. my earlier article, *op. cit.*, n. 2.

view, then, if the wind does not appear cold to someone, that is sufficient grounds to assert that it is not cold for him, and this means that we must include *P*3 (or its equivalent *P*2) in any complete formulation of the doctrine that man is the measure of all things. The doctrine maintains that "It seems to *x* that *p*" both implies and is implied by "It is true for *x* that *p*."

That being so, we need not be surprised that *P*3 should come into play in the arguments that currently concern us. Consider the first of the triple sequence, the argument that if the Measure doctrine does not seem true either to Protagoras or to anyone else, then it is not true for anyone at all. Clearly, to argue thus is to assert *P*3 for the special case where *p* is the Measure doctrine itself: if it does not seem to anyone that the Measure doctrine is true, then it is not true for anyone. And if *P*3 is part of Protagoras' theory, the argument is that the theory lands Protagoras in trouble when it is applied to itself.

We may ask why the theory should have to apply to itself, as it is made to do in all three arguments of the sequence. Plato does not consider the possibility that Protagoras might claim for his doctrine a special status exempting it from being counted as one among the propositions with which it deals. Elsewhere, in fact, Plato insists strongly that a philosophical theory must be statable without infringing itself; thus in the *Sophist* he holds it against monism that several terms enter into the formulation of it (244*bd*), and he finds that a certain late-learners' view of predication has only to be stated for it to refute itself (252*c*). But even waiving twentieth-century qualms about self-applicability, there is a question that urgently needs to be asked. (It is perhaps a measure of the pull exerted by the exquisite argument that no commentator, to my knowledge, has asked it.) Why is it an *objection* to Protagoras that, on his own showing, if no one believes his theory it is not true for anybody? Protagoras might for various reasons be embarrassed to admit this, but would he be refuted? Is it so surprising that a theory according to which all truth is relative to belief should itself be no more than a relative truth, true only for someone who believes it? More important, how does this show that there is something wrong with the theory?

There can be no doubt that Socrates presents the point as an objection; so much is guaranteed by the position of the argument in the sequence of three. Our task is to understand why. The solution I want to propose is that Plato takes it that, if relativism is not true for someone, it does not hold of that person's judgments and beliefs.

Suppose the person in question is Socrates. Applying his doctrine

to Socrates, Protagoras maintains that (for all propositions p)

$P1_S$ If it seems to Socrates that p, then it is true for Socrates that p.

and

$P3_S$ If it does not seem to Socrates that p, then it is not true for Socrates that p.

Socrates replies that he profoundly disagrees. For a start,

$S1$ It does not seem to Socrates that, ($P1_S$) if it seems to Socrates that p, then it is true for Socrates that p.

This is a plain matter of fact which Protagoras cannot credibly deny. And having asserted the conjunction of $P1_S$ and $P3_S$, Protagoras is committed to agreeing that $S1$ is equivalent to

$S2$ It is not true for Socrates that, ($P1_S$) if it seems to Socrates that p, then it is true for Socrates that p.

All this is simply to say that on Protagoras' theory, since Socrates does not believe $P1$, it is not true for him, and a fortiori it is not true for him in its application to his own judgments and beliefs ($P1_S$). But simple as the deduction is, its conclusion $S2$ requires interpretation. For it involves that curious locution "true for Socrates," and it is time to inquire more closely into the meaning of the relativized idioms that Protagoras uses to formulate his views.

One thing we know is that "It is true for Socrates that p" is to be equivalent to "It seems to Socrates that p"; if one of these is true the other is the same, and so too if either is false they both are. But it is, I think, a mistake to suppose on that account that the two statements have the same meaning, that the novel locution "true for Socrates" simply means the same as the more familiar "seems true to Socrates" or "is believed by Socrates."

This is a mistake that has been made in both ancient and modern discussions of Protagoras and his self-refutation. John Passmore, for example, wonders (rhetorically) what it can mean to say that a proposition is true for someone other than that he thinks it true.[10] Again, there is an argument in Sextus with the form (though not in this case the name) of a *peritrope* argument against Protagoras' opponents, according to which, if someone asserts that man is not the

[10] *Philosophical Reasoning* (London, 1961), p. 67, quoted below. The conflation is prominent also in Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 246-248, 253, and important for his account of the self-refutation argument; see n. 23 below.

criterion of all things, he will confirm that man is the criterion of all things, since he is a man, asserting what appears to him, and thereby conceding that the very thing he says is one of the things that appears to him (*M* 7.61). This rather feeble argument received an approving endorsement from Grote, who in similar vein writes as if Protagoras were saying no more than that in discussing any proposition, the Measure doctrine included, all anyone can do is express his own conviction, belief or disbelief, and the reasons which seem to him to justify it.[11] But Socrates says as much himself at 171*d*,[12] in an ironical comment on the triple refutation he has just concluded. Specifically, his comment is that Protagoras might pop up with an answer, but in his absence we have to make the best use we can of our own powers of reasoning and continue to say what seems to us to be the case. Protagoras must mean more. Otherwise why should he press us to adopt his relativized idiom and trumpet the equivalence of "It is true for *x* that *p*" and "It seems to *x* that *p*" as a substantive and important discovery about our beliefs? If the equivalence were mere synonymy, *P*1 and *P*2 would both reduce to the bare tautology

*P*0 If it seems to *x* that *p*, then it seems to *x* that *p*.

And to borrow a timely remark that Socrates makes early on in the dialogue (152*b*), it is not likely that a clever man like Protagoras was merely waffling.

Protagoras' theory is, after all, a theory of truth and a theory of truth must link judgments to something else—the world, as philosophers often put it, though for a relativist the world has to be relativized to each individual. To speak of how things appear to someone is to describe his state of mind, but to say that things are for him as they appear is to point beyond his state of mind to the way things actually are, not indeed in the world *tout court* (for Protagoras there is no such thing), but in the world as it is for him, in his world. What this relativistic world will be like if Protagoras' theory of truth is taken seriously, the dialogue explains in terms of the Heraclitean doctrine of flux.[13] Plato uses the notion of flux to describe an ontological setting which satisfies Protagoras' contention that

[11] *Op. cit.*, pp. 349-350. The endorsement of the argument in Sextus is in a note on p. 352. Equally misguided are those who, embarrassed by Sextus' argument, would make it better by textual emendation; cf. Werner Heintz, *Studien zu Sextus Empiricus* (Halle, 1932), pp. 88-94, for proposals by Jaeger and himself.

[12] As Grote points out in a note, *op. cit.*, p. 350!

[13] I must here simply state what I take to be the outcome of *Theaetetus* 152*a*-160*d*, without dwelling on the many exegetical questions that arise along the way.

genuine disagreement is impossible and no one's judgment can be corrected either by another person or by the judgment-maker himself at another time. The outcome of this Heraclitean interpretation of Protagoras is that each of us lives in a private world constituted by a succession of momentary appearances, all of which are true in that world quite independently of what happens next in a given world. In a given world—say, that of Socrates—whatever appears to him is then and there the case ($P1_S$) and nothing is the case unless it then and there appears to him ($P3_S$). Such is the kind of world presupposed by Protagoras' doctrine that each man is the measure of all things.

Accordingly, $S2$ is not to be disarmed on the grounds that it is merely a novel way of expressing $S1$. On Protagoras' philosophy $S1$ has immediate and drastic consequences for how things are in Socrates' world, and these consequences are what $S2$ seeks to express. We might paraphrase $S2$, therefore, by

> $S3$ It is not true in Socrates' world that, if it seems to Socrates that p, then it is true in Socrates' world that p.

$S3$ seems to say that in Socrates' world it is not a sufficient condition for the truth of a proposition that it seem true to Socrates. A parallel argument from Socrates' disbelief in $P3_S$ will yield the conclusion that it is not a necessary condition either. And if the same reasoning applies to everyone who does not believe the Measure doctrine, which in argument (1) is everyone, the conclusion that the doctrine is not true for anyone is both validly deduced and highly damaging to Protagoras. No one lives in a world in which his mere belief in a proposition is either a sufficient or a necessary condition for its truth (in that world). But that everyone lives in such a world is precisely what the Measure doctrine asserts. Given, therefore, the assumption on which argument (1) is based, that not even Protagoras himself believes his philosophy, Protagoras' position becomes utterly self-contradictory: he claims that everyone lives in his own relativistic world, yet at the same time he is forced by that very claim to admit that no one does.

But we can now see that Protagoras' position would be equally inconsistent if, asserting as he does that everyone lives in his own relativistic world, he could be forced to admit that some people do not. That, in fact, seems to be the essential point of the second argument in the sequence, (2)*(a)*, which says that even if Protagoras did believe his doctrine, it is that much less true than it is false in

proportion as the number of people who do not believe it is greater than the number of those who do. Admittedly, the conclusion of this argument 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, which on the understanding we have just reached would mean that it holds of fewer people's beliefs than it fails for, or whether he tries to go beyond this to the conclusion that it is more false than true in some absolute sense. If the latter, then he has already begun to relax his grip on the relativizing qualifiers before he gets to the *peritrope* argument (2) *(b)*.[14] Supposing, however, that he is to be censured on this score, his argument can still be regarded as an extension, albeit a questionable one, of the correct point that Protagoras can be forced into inconsistency if there is anyone who does not believe his doctrine—indeed if there are people who do not believe it for the simple reason that they have never heard of it. For on Protagoras' own showing such persons do not, as Protagoras alleges we all do, live in a world in which their mere belief in a proposition is a sufficient and necessary condition for its truth (in that world).

All this somewhat alters the position with regard to argument (2) *(b)* of the sequence. The position was that the argument Plato appears to give starts out from an unrelativized premise *(A)* which Protagoras does not hold, while the argument to which Plato is entitled, the argument under *(M)* which respects the role of the qualifiers, leads only to the seemingly harmless conclusion *(O)* that the Measure doctrine is false for Protagoras' opponents. But we now have reason to ask whether *(O)* really is as harmless as it is generally thought to be.[15] The evidence of the earlier arguments of the sequence, as I have interpreted them, is that Plato for one would not think it harmless. If the Measure doctrine's being false for a whole lot of people means that Protagoras' *Truth* does not, as it purported

[14] Either way, Plato evidently enjoys the irony of measuring the extent of truth Protagoras can claim for his theory by counting heads. Such a procedure should be anathema to Protagoras, since one great argument for making truth relative to *each* man is that otherwise truth will be decided by the arbitrary weight of numbers, what is called truth absolute being nothing but what seems to the majority to be the case (for this line of reasoning in association with Protagorean ideas, cf. Aristotle, *Met.* 1009*b*1-7 and the analogous argument at *Theaet.* 158*de*).

[15] *E.g.*, Sayre, *op. cit.*, p. 88, describes the result that the Measure doctrine is true for Protagoras and false for someone else as "neither here nor there as far as the original thesis is concerned."

to do, give a valid theory of truth for their judgments and beliefs, and this unhappy consequence *(O)* follows from the assertion of the Measure doctrine *(M)* together with the undeniable fact *(N)* that *(M)* is judged false by all those people, then *(M)* is indeed self-refuting; at least, it is self-refuting in the same sense and in the same sort of dialectical context as I sketched in my earlier paper when discussing Sextus' version of the argument under *(A)*. That being so, we should at least consider the possibility that the argument under *(M)* is the argument Plato intends all along. A hypothesis which credits Plato with an argument that is both valid and relevant is at least as deserving of notice as hypotheses which accuse him of inadvertence, conscious overstatement, or perverse dishonesty.

Let us be clear what this new hypothesis asks us to suppose. First, we are to understand "true" in "Every judgment is true" *(A)* to mean: true for the person whose judgment it is. Just this, of course, is what we expect to find after the initial reference to Protagoras' own view (171*a*7), which *(A)* is meant to formulate. Furthermore, if *(A)* is not so understood, what the opponents disagree with when they judge that *(A)* is false will not be the view of Protagoras; that is, not only Socrates' argument but Protagoras' opponents too will be guilty of a striking irrelevance. Second, having once adopted the appropriate reading of "true," we must stick to it throughout the argument. Thus the conclusion *(C)* which follows from *(A)*, so understood, together with the empirical premise *(B)*, is that it is true for the person whose judgment it is—in this case, Protagoras' opponents—that the Measure doctrine is false; and the further conclusion *(D)* which follows from that is that the doctrine is false for these same people. In a sense, therefore, we need only to give Plato the benefit of the doubt once, the first time he omits the qualifier, where charity is easiest, and the requirements of consistency will carry us through the rest of the argument. I would claim, at any rate, that this, the most charitable hypothesis, asks rather less of one's credulity than the rival suggestions of inadvertence, conscious overstatement, and perverse dishonesty, all of which compound the error they attribute to Plato by making his argument commit the philosophical sin of irrelevance as well.

It should be emphasized that the hypothesis is meant to deal only with Protagoras' predications of "true" and "false," not with his opponents' use of those terms. Their opinion is *correctly* represented by the unrelativized occurrence of the predicate "false" in *(B)* or *(N)*. The opponents are people who hold the doctrine of Man the Mea-

sure to be false without qualification, not merely false for themselves, for in rejecting Protagoras' philosophy they *eo ipso* reject at the same time his idea that the ordinary man's predications of "true" and "false" stand in need of relativizing completion. In this instance omission of the qualifier is a virtue, not a defect in Plato's exposition.[16]

Having thus delimited the nature and scope of my hypothesis, I should like now to plead that it has one major advantage over its rivals, that it explains, or explains better, why the *peritrope* (if with Sextus we may continue to call it that) yields only an interim conclusion. I have insisted that the *peritrope* argument is not meant to stand on its own but is part of a more complex structure of reasoning formed by the sequence of three linked refutations. Within that

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[16] Cp. 170*b*8-9 where the ordinary man's concept of expertise *(sophia)* is (partially) explained in terms of the ordinary absolute concept of truth: the ordinary man thinks that expertise is true judgment and ignorance is false judgment, where this means true and false *simpliciter*.

Others who have appreciated the point are Steven S. Tigner, "The 'Exquisite' Argument at *Tht.* 171*a*" *(Mnemosyne,* 1971), and John McDowell, *Plato Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1973), p. 171, but they further suppose there is a difficulty in it for Protagoras—the difficulty, namely, that if he must allow his opponents to say that the Measure doctrine is false without qualification, this commits him to recognizing or making sense of the ordinary, absolute concept of truth and falsity. But what exactly is the difficulty? Protagoras' theory is a theory about the unrelativized predications of the form "*x* is *F*," "*x* is *G*," with which people ordinarily express their views, and as such it can cover unrelativized predications of "true" and "false" no less than ordinary predications of "hot" and "cold," "large" and "small," etc. What the theory cannot countenance is that such predications should be *true* as they stand, without a completion specifying for whom they are true—but that they are so true as they stand could hardly be established at this stage of the argument from the mere fact that Protagoras' opponents express their opposition in ordinary nonrelativistic language (Tigner's contrary view is based on faulty reasoning, exposed by Lee, *op. cit.,* pp. 244-245).

On the other hand, the presence of one (justifiably) unrelativized premise might suggest, by way of explanation of the other unjustified one, that Plato was confused by the need to handle qualified and unqualified predications of "true" and "false" at the same time; cf. esp. 171*b*1-2 where he moves from "The opponents think that Protagoras' view is mistaken" to "Protagoras concedes that his own view is false." I would prefer this hypothesis to those of inadvertence, overstatement, and perverse dishonesty, but it seems unlikely all the same. The move at 171*b*1-2, for example, is explicitly licensed by Protagoras' agreement that his opponents' opinion is true, which at once takes us back to the question of how we are to understand *(A)*. It is perhaps significant that Plato reserves the verb ψεύδεσθαι, to be mistaken, for the opponents' unqualified views: Protagoras, they think, is mistaken (171*a*8,*b*2), while they themselves are not (171*b*4). Protagoras' judgments, by contrast, use the adjectives "true" and "false" throughout 171*a*8-*b*11.

structure it serves to complete the dilemma posed at 170*e*-171*a*. Either Protagoras did not believe the Measure doctrine or he did. If he did not, then, since no one else does either, the doctrine is not true for anybody. That was argument (1). The other limb of the dilemma is complicated by the subdivision into (2)*(a)* and (2)*(b)*, but its eventual outcome is meant to be the same: supposing Protagoras did believe his doctrine, it still follows that the doctrine is not true for anyone. This outcome is reached—and the argument is not complete until then—when Socrates is in a position to conclude that since Protagoras' *Truth* is disputed by everyone, Protagoras included, it is not true for anyone at all (171*c*5-7). (Notice that the conclusion is expressed in properly relativistic terms, no less than on its first appearance as the conclusion of argument [1].) To get to the point where he can deliver this crowning blow, Socrates has to show that Protagoras joins with everyone else in disputing his theory of truth. That is the function of the *peritrope,* to demonstrate that Protagoras' own belief in his doctrine counts for naught: he is committed, despite himself, to agreeing with other people that it is false. False *simpliciter* or false for them? If *(D)* is taken at face value, as saying that Protagoras' view is false *simpliciter,* Socrates would seem to have completed his refutation by 171*b*2, where my original quotation of the *peritrope* passage ended. He would have established that the theory in *(A)*—never mind that it is not Protagoras' real theory—is false, that Protagoras must accept it as false, and consequently also (though by now it hardly matters) that it is false for Protagoras. In the text, however, Socrates has quite a lot more to say.

In the first place, my quotation left a dangling "for his part" (171*a*6: μέν) introducing Protagoras' judgment on his opponents' opinion that his theory is false. This is picked up at 171*b*4 (δέ γ') and a contrast is drawn with the opponents' own judgment on this opinion of theirs, which is, of course, that it is not mistaken but the correct opinion to hold:

> Whereas they, for their part, do not concede that they are mistaken .... And he, once more, from what he has written agrees that this judgment also is true [171*b*].

This judgment also Protagoras will have to admit is true if he is to be consistent with what he wrote; the further reference to Protagoras' written doctrine, right in the middle of the refutation, sharpens the difficulty of the inadvertence and overstatement hypotheses. On my

reading, by contrast, all we have here is a small but perfectly correct point which can be unraveled as follows: Protagoras must concede that his opponents' judgment that their opinion that his theory is false *(simpliciter)* is not false but true *(simpliciter)* is itself true—*for* the opponents whose judgment it is.

More important, however, than this extra turn of the screw is that Socrates next proceeds to argue that since Protagoras joins with everyone else in disputing his theory, it is not true for anyone, neither for him nor for anyone else.

> It is disputed, then, by everyone, beginning with Protagoras—or rather, it is agreed by him, when he concedes to the person who says the opposite that he judges truly—when he does that, even Protagoras himself concedes that neither a dog nor any man you chance to meet is a measure concerning anything at all he has not learnt.[17] Is that not so? . . . Accordingly, since it is disputed by everyone, Protagoras' *Truth* cannot be true for anyone: not for anyone else and not for Protagoras himself [171*bc*].

My hypothesis makes intelligible the need for this last stage of the argument. If *(D)* is understood as stating no more than that the Measure doctrine is false for Protagoras' opponents—that is, *(D)* = *(O)*—Socrates at 171*b*2 still has work to do to get from Protagoras'

[17] After the urbane irony of the "exquisite" paragraph, this strikingly anacoluthic sentence with its jerky syntax comes like a sudden crescendo of quite savage triumph. If that does catch the tone, it would help to explain Theodorus' shocked comment at the end of the argument, "We are running down my old friend too hard, Socrates" and Socrates' unrelenting reply, "But, my friend, it is unclear if we are also overrunning what is correct" (171*c*8-10). I would like to think that while Theodorus is prepared for Protagoras to be refuted—he has, after all, undertaken to see the discussion through to the point where it can be decided whether it is his friend's philosophy or his own claims to expertise that must give way (169*a*)—he is taken aback by the spectacular form in which the refutation finally comes, with Protagoras himself joining the ranks of the many who dispute the doctrine that man is the measure of all things. Certainly Socrates in his speech of 171*c*9-171*d*7 is as cuttingly sarcastic as anywhere in the dialogue. Later, when Theodorus has had time to reflect, his considered view of the substance of the argument is that it is conclusive against Protagoras (179*b*). This verdict is not to be discounted on the grounds that Theodorus is an old man who prefers digressions to philosophic argument (Sayre, *op. cit.*, p. 90, n. 29, alluding to 177*c*). Theodorus is old and a bit stiff for argumentative combat (162*b*), but we have seen enough of the great mathematician's dramatic stature in this part of the dialogue to know that his opinion is to be taken seriously. In any case, the context at 179*b* precludes doing otherwise.

acceptance of this to his final conclusion that the doctrine is false for Protagoras as well as for his opponent.

How does he manage the further step? Protagoras' undoing, he says, is his admission that an opponent who contradicts him judges truly (171*b*9-11). To admit that is to admit that a dog or any man you like to pick is not the measure of anything at all, unless he has acquired knowledge *(sc.* objective knowledge in the ordinary sense) of the thing in question (171*c*1-3). This I take to be a reference to the claim of the Measure doctrine to give a theory of truth for the judgments of any and every man, and of his dog too if it is insisted that dogs are capable of judgment.[18] And we can understand the reference, even while construing Protagoras to mean that the judgment opposed to his assertion of the Measure doctrine is true *for* the opponent whose judgment it is, if we recall what was said earlier about the connection between S_2 and S_3. I suggest, in fact, that Socrates is drawing that connection here. He is pointing out that what it means for the Measure doctrine to be false for someone is that he is not a Protagorean measure: which is to say that his mere belief in a proposition is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for that proposition to be true in some relativistic sense. Thus it is from Protagoras' admission that the Measure doctrine fails to give a generally valid theory of truth that Socrates finally infers that the doctrine is not true for Protagoras or for anyone else (171*c*5-7).

This yields the following account of argument (2) *(b)* as a whole. The *peritrope* gets Protagoras to accept the interim conclusion that his theory is false for others. But to admit this, it is argued, is to admit that not everyone is a Protagorean measure. Hence it follows from Protagoras' admission that his theory is false for others that it is false for himself as well. There is a passage from "*p* is false for Protagoras' opponents" to "*p* is false for Protagoras"—in the one special case where *p* is the Measure doctrine itself *(M).* And it is this passage that has still to be made after the interim conclusion has been reached at 171*b*.

Such is the reading that my hypothesis suggests for this troublesome section of the dialogue. As a hypothesis to explain what Plato is up to here it is, I submit, superior to the rival hypotheses with which

[18] A dig at Protagoras—one of several—for putting other animals on a level with man as regards cognitive capacities (cf. 161*c*, 171*e* with 154*a*, 162*e*, 167*b*). As becomes clear at 186*bc*, the skirmishing on this topic dramatizes fundamental philosophical disagreement over the nature and interrelations of perception, judgment, and knowledge.

I have contrasted it, but a full treatment would require an equally close examination of an earlier paragraph where the qualifiers are omitted, 170*c*, and of the section 170*de* between that and the triple sequence which is a model of clarity in the matter of putting in the qualifiers when Protagoras is speaking and leaving them out when other people's judgments are reported. All this is to be weighed in the balance and compared with other places in the dialogue where Plato omits the qualifiers (there are, in fact, a number of places where this happens, though none is so problematic as the one under discussion). But I do not wish to undertake these further exegetical inquiries here.[19] I have recommended my hypothesis, and with more in view than that it should carry conviction as an account of Plato's procedure. It embodies a philosophical claim which I am anxious should stand in its own right—namely, the claim that the argument under *(M)* is not the harmless thing that defenders of Protagoras have always taken it to be. About this I have a little more to say.

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[19] Dogmatically, however, by way of orientation: the argument at 170*c* is a dilemma forced on Protagoras by the fact that people believe, contrary to the Measure doctrine, that mistakes and false judgments occur. If they are right to think that there is false judgment, there is. But equally, if they are wrong in this or any other judgment of theirs, then there is false judgment (for here is an instance of it). So, whether right or wrong, their opinion spells trouble for Protagoras in the form of a conclusion, the existence of false judgment, which he must deny. Accordingly, Socrates goes on to claim that to dodge the dilemma a Protagorean will have no recourse but to deny, quite implausibly, that people do think each other ignorant and guilty of false judgment (170*cd*).

Now it is possible, but not obligatory, to understand the text as stating or implying for the first limb of the dilemma not the straightforward inference just given but the following variant of the *peritrope* argument:

> If *(A)* every judgment is true,
> and *(B)'* it is judged that some judgment is false,
> then *(C)'* it is true that some judgment is false
> and, consequently, *(D) (A)* is false.

(It is not possible, because it simply does not square with the text, to read back the exquisite *peritrope* with *(B)* or *(N)* in place of *(B)'*, as does McDowell, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-170.) Either way, the refutation is so cryptic that Theodorus naturally asks for an explanation (170*d*3). Socrates responds by prefacing his triple refutation with a lucid and entirely accurate account (170*de*), first of the key idea that one may think another person's judgment is false, and second of what Protagoras' theory commits him to saying about the situation. The effect of this intervening paragraph is to give a model treatment of the qualifiers to be applied both to the subsequent refutation—it is, in fact, the model followed by my reading of those arguments—and, so far as may be needed, to the preceding refutation at 170*c* also.

My argument has assumed, as I think Plato's arguments all assume, that Protagoras puts forward his doctrine as a valid theory of truth for everyone's judgments and beliefs. It is meant to be true of those judgments and beliefs; what it asserts of them it asserts, implicitly at least, to be true (period). Now it is often said that to assert something *is* to assert it to be true. (What is meant is, roughly, that in assertion one manifests an intention of presenting a truth, not that everyone who makes an assertion explicitly predicates truth of some proposition or describes himself as propounding something true; these would themselves be assertions like any other.) The point is no doubt correct. But we must be careful not to use it against Protagoras in a question-begging way. Passmore, for example, writes:

> [E]ven if we can make some sense of the description of *p* as being "true for *x*"—and what can we take it to mean except that "*x* thinks *p* is true" which at once raises the question whether it *is* true?—Protagoras is still asserting that "*p* is true for *x*" and "*p* is not true for *y*"; these propositions he is taking to be true. It has to be true not only for *x* but for everybody that "*p* is true for *x*" since this is exactly what is involved in asserting that "man is the measure of all things."
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> The fundamental criticism of Protagoras can now be put thus: to engage in discourse at all he has to assert that something is the case.[20]

No doubt Protagoras must assert something to be the case. There is certainly no lack of assurance in the way he begins his book: "Man is the measure of all things, of those that are, that they are, and of those that are not, that they are not." No qualifier is attached to this assertion of his. Nor to his assertion of its consequences, that the wind is cold for *x*, that it is not cold for *y*, and so on. But will Protagoras, when cornered, admit that he asserts these things as truth absolute? We should at least consider whether it is open to Protagoras to reply that he asserts the Measure doctrine and its consequences to be true only for himself. For if he can make this defense, we will have to mount the self-refutation not from *(M)* as it stands but from

> (M_P) It is true for Protagoras that every judgment is true for the person whose judgment it is.

[20] *Op. cit.*, p. 67. Passmore's criticism is a more developed version of the one by John Anderson mentioned earlier, n. 2 above.

And from this it is not so clear how the argument is to proceed.

Here I would like to bring in the curious image Socrates presents at 171*d* of Protagoras sticking his head up above the ground to rebut Socrates' arguments, and then disappearing to run away. Plato does not tell us what objection he envisages bringing Protagoras back from the underworld, but I doubt he would have written this way if he thought it a good one.[21] In fact, it could not be a good reply because, if it were, in showing Socrates and Theodorus to be mistaken it would at the same time prove Protagoras wrong as well, since on his theory no one is mistaken if they say what seems to them to be the case (cf. 170*c* and *Euthydemus* 287*e*-288*a*). Socrates' irony at this point is far from gentle. And that may be all there is to it: no objection is specified because none is possible.

Even if Protagoras cannot attack Socrates, however, he might try to defend himself. It seems a significant element in the image that he runs away after delivering his rejoinder; he is not prepared to stay and defend it in discussion.[22] The implication is at least that the reply, whatever it is, will not stand up to discussion. I fancy that the irony is more pointed still, and that what the only reply left amounts to is a refusal to submit to dialectical discussion.

For is this not what Protagoras would be doing if he insisted that he asserted the Measure doctrine as true for himself and himself alone? That would mean dropping the thesis that *(M)* is true of and in Socrates' world and replacing it by the completely solipsistic claim that it is only in Protagoras' world that *(M)* is true of and in Socrates' world, where Socrates' world is now *incorporated* into that of Protagoras. If this sounds incoherent, that is not to be wondered at, for what sense can we make of the idea that Socrates and his world exist only for Protagoras? Socrates cannot be expected to find it intelligible; he cannot identify with the counterpart that bears his name in Protagoras' world. If Protagoras does not speak to the human condition, does not put forward his claim that each of us lives in our own relativistic world as something we can all discuss and, possibly, come to accept, but simply asserts solipsistically that he, for his part, lives in a world in which this is so, then indeed there is no discussing with him. His world and his theory go to the grave with him, and Socrates

[21] As Runciman's hypothesis requires; cf. n. 5 above.

[22] So H. Schmidt, "Kritischer Commentar zu Platos Theätet" (*Jahrbücher für klassische Philologie,* 9 Supp.-Bd. 1877-1878), pp. 492-493.

is fully entitled to leave them there and get on with his inquiry.[23]

But really even this is too generous to Protagoras, to allow that he can buy safety for his theory at the price of solipsism. The truth is that he is still asserting something—namely, (M_P) itself—and asserting it without qualification. This is no accident. In setting up a relativist theory like that of Protagoras one begins with a distinction between, on the one hand, the unrelativized predications with which people, Protagoras among them, ordinarily express how things appear to them to be, whether it is that the wind is cold or that some proposition is true, and, on the other hand, the relativist's account of these statements, which is that they are true, and their predicates hold of the things they are ascribed to, for and only for the person whose judgment the statement expresses. Now consider the state-

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[23] I can now pick up a thread from nn. 5-6 above and comment on Lee's interpretation of the self-refutation passage, an interpretation which revolves around the confessedly bizarre suggestion that the image of Protagoras' return at 171*d* presents the sophist as a plant rooted in the ground (Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 249 ff., comparing Aristotle, *Met.* 1006*a*13-15). It seems an overwhelming objection to this idea that, if reduced to a plant, Protagoras could hardly run away after delivering his rejoinder (171*d*3: οἴχοιτο ἀποτρέχων, which Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 251, has to place outside the image), and the question of the meaning of the image, though well raised, is not as novel as Lee repeatedly avers. In fact, on behalf of the nineteenth-century scholars who did discuss the matter, it should be said that they came up with at least two answers quite as persuasive as Lee's.

One interpretation takes note of the fact that the image uses a pair of verbs, ἀνακύπτειν and καταδῦναι, which often describe the actions of, respectively, lifting the head out of and plunging down into water (cf., e.g., *Phaedo* 109*de*) and connects it with the rather well-attested biographical detail that Protagoras died by drowning (according to the oldest source, the fourth-century B.C. historian Philochorus *apud* Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, IX, 55, his ship went down when he was on his way to Sicily). The explanation of the image then is that to bring Protagoras back from the dead Plato quite naturally has him raise his head out of the waves and sink back again; thus August Bernhard Krische, *Forschungen auf dem Gebiete der alten Philosophie*, I (Göttingen, 1840), 141; Anne Johan Vitringa, *Disquisitio de Protagorae vita et philosophia* (Gröningen, 1852), p. 54; Hermann Müller-Strübing, "Protagorea. Zu den Vögeln des Aristophanes" (*Neue Jahrbücher für Philologie und Pädagogik* [1880], Erste Abteilung), pp. 96-97. Protagoras' running away is a difficulty for this interpretation too, and a further objection is that the reappearance is located "right here" (171*d*1: ἐντεῦθεν)—i.e., in the palaestra or wrestling school where the dialogue is set (cf. 144*c* and the wrestling metaphor of 162*b*, 169*ac*). So one may prefer an alternative interpretation according to which Protagoras emerges from the ground just as far as the neck because that is the way ghosts appeared in the Greek theater, coming up through an opening in the stage; thus Karl Steinhart in Steinhart-Müller, *Platons sämmtliche Werke*, III (Leipzig, 1852), 206, n. 32; F. A. Paley, *The Theaetetus of Plato* (London and Cambridge, 1875), p. 59, n. 1; Schmidt, *loc. cit.*

ments which formulate the results of relativization, propositions such as "The wind is cold for me" and "The Measure doctrine is true for Protagoras." More generally, suppose that, instead of speaking with the vulgar, we tailor our speech to the facts as the theorist sees them, explicitly relativizing our statements. Then, surely, to avoid applying the doctrine twice over, we must put their truth conditions in absolute terms. That is, a proposition of the form "x is F" is true (relatively) for person a, if and only if "x is F for a" is true (absolutely). Call this the principle of translation. Such a principle is needed, I submit, if we are to be able to give sense to the notion of relative truth and operate with it in reasoning.

There would seem, then, to be a whole series of absolute truths to which Protagoras commits himself by propounding a relativist

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But perhaps simpler and better than any of these would be the following, suggested by the interpretation I have offered of the philosophical point at issue. It is not Protagoras' carriage or demeanor that matters, nor the mechanics of his reappearance, but the fact that, coming from and retreating to another world than ours, he does not really leave the underworld when, supposedly, he pops up to refute Socrates and Theodorus for talking nonsense (cf. 171*d*2-3). His "refutation" or defense, in other words, just *is* a refusal to enter fully into a common world with his opponents for discussion. And that, I have argued, is a fair characterization of the move from *(M)* to (M_P), the only and the obvious move left to Protagoras now that he has been refuted on the basis of the *Truth* as he actually wrote it.

So much for the image itself. Lee's interpretation of it is designed to support an account of the *peritrope* argument (*op. cit.*, pp. 242 ff.) which, as I understand it, involves two chief claims: *(a)* that the effect of the qualifiers is to make Protagoras' statements a mere record of his and his opponents' subjective attitude, so that Protagoras must omit them if he is to present a thesis that can significantly be discussed or denied—although then, of course, he becomes liable to Socrates' refutation; *(b)* that once Protagoras starts putting in the qualifiers to avoid the refutation, he must in consistency go all the way to (M_P), so that he ends up saying nothing that can seriously be discussed. On this basis, Lee suggests that Socrates' omission of the qualifiers is a deliberate irony. It shows Protagoras what is required if he is to be "taken seriously," in accordance with his own demand, as one who has something to say, and what consequences then follow, and leaves him the uncomforting alternative of withdrawing to the reduced and, as Lee thinks, plantlike posture of (M_P).

My quarrel with this theory is in part that certain of its supporting props do not stand firm under examination: see n. 10 above on the understanding of the qualifiers premised in *(a)*, n. 6 on the role of irony in the passage and the importance of the missing qualifier in *(A)*, while as for *(b)*, Protagoras is only bound to go all the way to (M_P) if Socrates successfully shows, in all seriousness, that he cannot stop at *(M)*. I think, and have argued, that Socrates does show this, but by hard logic not by ironical insinuation, which is all that Lee offers. Thus while I agree with Lee about where Protagoras ends up, our interpretations diverge fundamentally on what it takes to get him there.

theory of truth: the wind is cold for me, the wind is not cold for you, and so on. Equivalently, when a person a states that some proposition p is true, and the Measure doctrine declares that p is true (relatively) for a, this in turn means, by the principle of translation, that "p is true for a" is true (absolutely). In particular, if Protagoras puts forward his relativism and agrees that this doctrine, in consequence of itself and his belief in it, is true for him, he must still acknowledge it to be an absolute truth that the Measure doctrine is true for Protagoras (M_P).

It may be objected here that the predicate "true" is a special case. In its absolute use it allows indefinite reiteration of the prefix "It is true that . . .," since any proposition p is true if and only if "It is true that p" is true, which it is if and only if "It is true that it is true that p" is true, and so on indefinitely. That being so, why should not Protagoras adopt a relativistic analogue of the prefix "It is true that . . ." and say of the alleged absolute truths that they are not what they appear to be—it is not absolutely true, but only true for Protagoras, that the wind is cold for me? This is not likely to be true for Protagoras' opponents who, if they know what they are about, will say that the wind may appear cold to me but whether it is cold or not is another matter. And if, in the face of Protagoras' attempt to empty the dispute of content, the opponents go further and deny that it is even true for Protagoras that the wind is cold for me,[24] cannot Protagoras come back again with "It is true for Protagoras that it is true for Protagoras that the wind is cold for me"? And so on indefinitely?

No, Protagoras cannot evade the principle of translation by this maneuver. His position is supposed to be that x is F or p is true for a just in case it appears to a or a judges that x is F or p is true; and this is not an arbitrary connection or one that can be abandoned without our losing grip on the notion of relative truth. Protagoras, as Socrates keeps saying, is a clever fellow, but he is not so clever that there is no limit to the complexity of the propositions he can understand and so judge to be true. Therefore, the relativistic prefix "It is true for Protagoras that . . .," unlike the absolute prefix, admits of only limited reiteration. At some point, though we may not be able to say just where, Protagoras must stop and take a stand. And once committed, if only in principle, to an absolute truth, he can no

[24] They could say this on the grounds that nothing is true for Protagoras: once his theory is rejected, its concept of relative truth will lack application.

longer maintain that all truth is relative and any judgment whatsoever true only for the person(s) whose judgment it is.

In the end, therefore, Passmore's criticism is essentially correct. No amount of maneuvering with his relativizing qualifiers will extricate Protagoras from the commitment to truth absolute which is bound up with the very act of assertion. To assert is to assert that p—as Passmore puts it, that something is the case—and if p, indeed if and only if p, then p is true (period). This principle, which relativism attempts to circumvent, must be acknowledged by any speaker. How clearly Plato saw that, I hesitate to say. But at some level it is surely what he is reacting to.[25]

University College London

[25] This paper was completed during my tenure of a Radcliffe Fellowship. I am grateful to the Radcliffe Trust for the leisure this gave me and to University College London for allowing me to take up the Fellowship. The inspiration for the paper and the conviction that its final conclusion is the right one to aim for goes back to a lecture I heard Bernard Williams give as long ago as 1964. I owe thanks to him and to David Wiggins, Christopher Kirwan, and Richard Sorabji for pointing out at meetings in London and Cambridge fallacies I committed in successive attempts to vindicate or make sense of Plato's argument. If, as I hope, I have got it right now, that is in no small measure due to other people's encouraging corrections.