Measuring sincerity: Socrates' dialogue with Protagoras

MARY MARGARET McCABE

Plato's Socrates practises philosophy by asking questions; and perhaps this is the sole inspiration of the dialogue form, to imitate the best way of going about the business of philosophy. This might explain the minimalism of the late dialogues. By this time, some suppose, Plato had decided that the methods of Socrates were pretty dull and unproductive after all; he replaces them first by the superb vision of the *Republic*, and later offers an entirely fresh and different account of dialectic to replace it. Correspondingly, the *Republic* is a great speech (interrupted by conversation), while the *Sophist* and the *Politicus* are as dramatic as collection and division is exciting. I shall ask whether this story is true.

Notice, first of all, what it assumes about the relation between the form of a dialogue and the methodology that the dialogue advances: that the people engaged in the drama of a dialogue actually practise whatever method the argument proposes. This assumption is simple-minded in at least three respects: first, the division between drama and argument is taken to be clear cut; second, the drama is seen as a mere imitation of, or an exemplification of, the argument; and third, the philosophical conclusions of the dialogue are taken to appear in the argument alone, and to be so determinate that they can be imitated in the drama itself. I suggest that there is a much more flexible relation between the different parts of a dialogue. In particular, the drama in which an argument may appear can be itself argumentative, indeed peculiarly reflective upon the principles and the assumptions of the argument embedded within it.[1]

In the early dialogues, Socrates wanders the streets of Athens, bumping into men engaged in their affairs and insistently questioning them on what they are about. Socrates asks because he wants to know and because he claims to be ignorant himself. He ironically commends his interlocutor's expertise and then, by careful analysis, shows his interlocutor to be in an even worse cognitive case. For when the interlocutor defines some ethical notion Socrates elicits from him a whole collection of his sincere beliefs and assumptions, and then shows that

DIALOGOS | Hellenic Studies Review | Number 5 (1998)
MM McCabe | Measuring sincerity: Socrates' dialogue with Protagoras | pp. 40-64

those beliefs are inconsistent with the proposed definition. This, famously, results in dismay, irritation, even apoplectic horror on the part of the interlocutor.

You can see why they gave Socrates the hemlock. His methods are not only maddening for his victims; they also seem pretty destructive.[2] For showing a set of propositions inconsistent shows that at least one of them must be false; but it does not show which one. The elenchus does not seem to offer positive progress unless the exposure of inconsistency is itself positive (e.g. *Gorgias* 482b-c). So the elenchus may be barren and negative.[3] Matters may be made worse when Socrates insists that he knows nothing anyway (e.g. *Apology* 21b-c; *Euthyphro* 5a-b; *Charmides* 165b-c). Why does he do that? Does he intend to undermine anything his interlocutor believes, and thus save him from the horrors of doxosophy? Then Socrates' arguments may be therapeutic; but are they any more productive than sophistry? Or does Socrates have some knowledge himself which protects the argument from the wastes of scepticism? If he does, how is that knowledge immune from the elenchus?

Consider first of all the *foundationalist objection.* It might be plausible to think that the structure of knowledge or truth is based on a small number of foundational pieces of knowledge, or truths. If that is so, it might further be plausible to think that these truths are arrived at in a different way from the way which reveals the structure dependent on them.[4] But if Socrates takes the elenchus to be the only route to knowledge, and if the elenchus attends particularly, or worse still exclusively, to the coherence of someone's beliefs, it has no way either of anchoring those beliefs to independent principles or of arriving at first principles. This objection, indeed, might be one whose force Plato himself felt. The epistemology of the *Republic*, after all, looks foundationalist (the forms, and the unhypothesized beginning, are the foundations of knowledge, 511b; and the method of coming to know the foundations is different from the method of setting out the structure of knowledge as a whole, 510b, 511b[5]); so when Plato comes to reconsider the methods of Socrates in later dialogues – notably the *Theaetetus* – does he reject them for this reason? Or is there any way in which Socrates *redivivus* [6] – as I claim he is in the *Theaetetus* – might arrive at principles?

In the early dialogues, again, Socrates' arguments seem also relentlessly *ad hominem*. The interlocutor is often exhorted to 'say what he believes'. [7] Why should sincerity be a condition on the interlocutor?[8] Socrates might be commanding good faith; his interlocutors should tell (what they take to be) the truth, and not lie. It would be – we might suppose – vital to honest discussion that all the parties are

sincere in their pronouncements. The sincerity condition, on that account, is an ethical constraint; and it is particularly addressed to what people say. Or, in asking that his interlocutor say what he believes, Socrates could be demanding access to what he believes – on the grounds that what someone believes is a good starting point for inquiry. In this case, sincerity is a methodological constraint, addressed rather to what people genuinely believe.

Now if sincerity is a quite general condition for philosophical method, we might suppose that the first constraint, that of sincere speech, ought to depend on the second, that of genuine beliefs: for the first demands that there be some transparent (truthful) correlation betwen what is said and what is believed, and the second offers an explanation of why what individuals believe is of interest to us in the first place: namely that these beliefs are genuinely held by the interlocutor.[9] But is the demand for genuine beliefs reasonable or productive? How does the uncovering of genuine beliefs promote inquiry into the truth? Of course, we are ready to claim that what we believe, we believe to be true. But we might also be ready to concede (all the more so after an encounter with Socrates) that not all our beliefs can be true. In that case is it reasonable to suppose that what people (contingently, subjectively) believe is a good starting point for inquiry?[10] Is philosophical inquiry concerned with what you or I happen to believe, rather than with what is impersonal or objectively or analytically true? Is this just a soppy approach to the doing of philosophy? Propositions can be entertained and discussed perfectly satisfactorily without being believed: sincerity does not matter. I shall call this second objection to Socrates the *analytic complaint.*[11]

Suppose you and I are having an argument – say on the propriety of eating carrots; and suppose we proceed by the sequential examination of a thesis and its consequences. Why should it make any difference whether or not you actually believe the thesis you put up for examination? If you propose that carrots have souls, in order to wonder what would happen to your diet if they did, could you not, at the same time, actually believe that carrots are soulless, or could you not actually care less? Arguments seem to be indifferent to who believes them, careless of whether anyone at all is committed to their premisses. (Even dialectical arguments which start from contradictory and exhaustive premisses need not suppose that each premiss is believed by someone: consider here Plato's *Parmenides.*) Or so the thoroughgoing analytic philosopher might say. Analytic philosophers nowadays get their knickers in a twist about possible worlds and our doppelgängers on them; they seem to countenance these sorts of arguments with

no hesitation at their daftness: if carrots could have souls, there is in fact a possible world somewhere with ensouled carrots in it. What would happen if, to argue about this, one of us has to believe it?

Thirdly, and connectedly, there is the problem of Socratic dialogue. If genuine beliefs are the starting point for inquiry, why do they need to be expressed in speech? Of course, they do need to be uttered out loud if they are to be examined in a dialogue with someone else. But why should dialogue, even twice mediated by the sincerity condition (that what is said is sincerely said, expressing beliefs genuinely held by the interlocutors), be the right way of proceeding in philosophy? Why is the best method of philosophy to question others (e.g. *Apology* 30a ff.; 41b; *Charmides* 166d; *Gorgias* 472b), rather than just to wonder alone? If the sincerity condition claims that we should take what people believe as the starting point of inquiry, why should we prefer what other people believe to what we believe ourselves? Does Socrates – or Plato – have good grounds for supposing that this investigation of other people is the best way of arriving at the truth? Or does it just look good in the dialogue form? I call this problem the *Socratic challenge.*

The Socrates of the early dialogues does, I think, subscribe to a version of the sincerity condition, so that he takes the analytic complaint to be ill-founded. He does so, however, not for reasons of sentiment, nor because he supposes that his interlocutors need to display good character (some of them do not); and he does so apparently without violating his own concern to discover the truth. He takes sincerity, that is, to be a methodological constraint. Sometimes he is investigating someone else's claim to knowledge; the interlocutor is asked to set out what he purports to know; and the elenchus works against him just when these claims to knowledge turn out unfounded. That strategy, of course, will only work if the interlocutor thinks that he does know whatever he claims: so he is committed to the truth of his proposals, he says what he believes (see here *Euthyphro* 9d; *Charmides* 165b-c; 166c-d). Sometimes the discussion directly concerns some practical matter (this may be wide – 'how best to live?' or narrow – 'should Socrates escape from prison?'); on these occasions the parties to the discussion need mutual honesty in order to come up with a consistent plan of action: their sincerity is dictated by the fact that it must issue in real action (both Crito and Thrasymachus are asked to answer *mê para doxan*: *Crito* 49d;[12] *Republic* 346a). On occasions like this, still, honesty matters instrumentally, because it reveals genuine beliefs, beliefs to be acted upon. Sometimes the question of sincerity determines the scope of the belief set to be discussed: here that a particular

interlocutor believes a proposition is grounds for including it in the set of beliefs to be considered. Since the objective here is to collect a set of beliefs, and to examine their structure, it does not matter whether the interlocutor is a 'real' character in the debate, or imaginary, represented by a stand-in (see here Protagoras' standing in for 'the many' at *Protagoras* 333c and again at 351 ff., or the question of the authorship of the thesis '*sôphrosunê* [self-control? temperance?[13]] is knowing oneself' at *Charmides* 164c ff.). But the beliefs examined are still taken to be genuine in the sense that they authentically belong to the belief-set. And on at least two other occasions sincere utterances are held to be indicative of the truth. At *Charmides* 159a Charmides is supposed to conduct the discussion with Socrates on the basis that if he is himself *sôphrôn* he will know what *sôphrosunê* is. The thought here is that *sôphrosunê* in the soul is transparent to the person who has it; so Charmides' accurate reporting of what he sees in himself will be what the inquiry needs (or that would be so, if in fact Charmides turned out to be *sôphrôn* in the right way). And at *Gorgias* 482a ff. Socrates exhorts Callicles to be consistent with his real self, exploiting a contrast, established earlier in the dialogue (466a ff.), between what you really believe or really want (which coincides with what is really good for you, and with the real structure of the world) and what you only think you want (which is no indicator of the truth). Since we all really believe, for example, that happiness is what we want, then we all have deep beliefs which are true. Within us, then, lies the truth; only sincere (honest) scrutiny could reveal it.

These arguments demand sincerity in the sense that the interlocutor should truthfully express his genuine beliefs: in each case it is the beliefs, not their expression, which are Socrates' primary concern. Taken together, however, these passages explain sincerity only piecemeal; and they do not show why, even if sincerity mattered for the Socrates of the early dialogues, sincerity should continue to matter for Plato after he has proposed the immense structure of objective reality of the middle books of the *Republic*. And this then provokes a further question about the representation of the elenchus in dialogue. Since the elenchus is especially person to person, sincerity seems appropriate to it: sincerity reflects the insistence that dialogue, as the Socrates of the early dialogues seems to conceive it, investigates what people believe, rather than, for example, considering two opposed views in an entirely detached way. But even if sincerity is a condition within the elenchus as it is represented, why should it be a condition of the representation itself: why should Socrates' constraints on argument require

Plato to use the dialogue form? And why should that condition transcend both historical and literary circumstance and become a constraint on all philosophizing? Even if Socrates thought sincerity mattered, why would Plato? Why, except out of *pietas*, should Plato advocate the use of dialogue for doing philosophy?

The Protagoras of the *Theaetetus* is, it turns out, as ardent an exponent of sincerity as Socrates: 'he says somewhere that man "is the measure of all things, of the things that are how they are, of the things that are not how they are not"' (φησὶ γάρ που πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστι, τῶν δὲ μὴ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν, *Theaetetus* 152a). Protagoras notices that if I find this wind cold, then my opinion is incontrovertible just because it is entirely private to me (you can't really comment);[14] cold, therefore, the wind *is* for me.[15] If you find it hot, your opinion is incontrovertible too; hot, therefore the wind is for you. But suppose this is true for all my judgements, just because any judgement I make is private to me and so incontrovertible. So then for 'all things', they are for me as I find them; and likewise, things are for you as you find them, too. Contrariwise, if something is not for me, then I do not find it so; and the same goes for you. In that case, every truth is relative to the person who finds it so, if and only if they find it so.[16] This means, of course, that truth and appearances are identical in scope: every appearance is true, every truth is an appearance. What is more, the scope of truth and appearance define reality (if Protagoras subscribes to Heraclitus' secret doctrine): there is nothing independent of appearance. Truth, appearance and reality are coextensive. So 'each person is self-sufficient as to wisdom'.[17]

> ΣΩ. Τοῦδε τοίνυν πρῶτον πάλιν ἀντιλαβώμεθα οὗπερ τὸ πρότερον, καὶ ἴδωμεν ὀρθῶς ἢ οὐκ ὀρθῶς ἐδυσχεραίνομεν ἐπιτιμῶντες τῷ λόγῳ ὅτι αὐτάρκη ἕκαστον εἰς φρόνησιν ἐποίει, καὶ ἡμῖν συνεχώρησεν ὁ Πρωταγόρας περί τε τοῦ ἀμείνονος καὶ χείρονος διαφέρειν τινάς, οὓς δὴ καὶ εἶναι σοφούς.
>
> *Socrates.* First let us deal with the point we tackled before, and let us see whether we were right or wrong to criticize that argument which made each man self-sufficient as to wisdom; and right or wrong to have Protagoras concede that some people are superior in judging better and worse, and that these are the wise.[18] (*Theaetetus* 169d)

Does this commit Protagoras to sincerity, either to sincere speech or to the expression of genuine beliefs? Is it possible for Protagoras either to lie, or to entertain a proposition which he does not believe?

Consider lying first. If Protagoras allows himself to lie, then he must concede that he can utter falsehoods. This, however, will be impossible if he claims that there is no such thing as falsehood on the grounds that relativism is both true and exhaustive of all our beliefs.[19] And that claim – that truth is relative to us, and is just what we believe, whenever we believe it – appears to be exactly what Protagoras wishes to maintain, both throughout the long preliminary investigation of his position (161a ff.) and when the final stages of the refutation begin (170c). Any utterance which Protagoras might make, that is, is either expressive of his beliefs, in which case it is true; or it is not expressive of his beliefs . In the latter case, it seems, it is meaningless, not false; such an utterance would not be a genuine utterance at all.[20] Protagoras cannot lie.

Nor can Protagoras do other than express his genuine beliefs. To entertain a proposition is to be uncommitted to its truth; but this does not imply that it has no truth value, or that its truth value is indifferent (just that it is indifferent to you). Protagoras, however, defines truth, reality and belief interchangeably; the truth value of p just is someone's believing it, its being the case in someone's world. But if truth cannot be detached from belief, then the non-committal stance of 'entertaining a proposition' makes no sense. In the relativist world of Protagoras, truth and genuine beliefs go hand in hand: whenever I believe something, it is the case for me; and whenever something is the case for me, I believe it. So Protagoras must be committed to sincerity: he can only express his genuine beliefs; and only his genuine beliefs can be considered by him.[21] Sincerity, on this account, is *indiscriminate*: all appearances, all beliefs and all utterances are sincere.

This is why everyone is self-sufficient as to wisdom: everyone is relatively right, at any time, because how things appear to someone at a time is how they are for them, at that time. Beliefs, appearances and the way things are for someone will be individuated by the time at which they occur: each appearance will be a separate cognitive episode. Now suppose that each appearance corresponds to a proposition, and that propositions are only the correlates of appearances.[22] No proposition can stand in any relation to another proposition which might allow one to contradict another, on pain of falsehood, or failures to appear, creeping in. But then the relations between beliefs, just as between propositions, need to be severely restricted to the appearances themselves.[23] The relation between any

belief and any other in my belief-set is just that each of them is believed by me – there are no logical relations between them (such as the relations of consistency, of entailment, or of inconsistency either). Being wise, then, is just collecting beliefs (never interrelating them). I shall call this *agglomerative relativism.*

What is more, for it to continue to be true that everything I believe is true for me, there is no room in Protagoras' account for reflectiveness on my own beliefs, no room for higher-order beliefs which may consider, include or reject the first-order beliefs acquired by my immediate measuring of my world. The only sort of reflectiveness I might be allowed is awareness that I have such and such a belief now – I could not, for example, wonder whether that belief was in fact true after all, since its truth is exactly equivalent to my believing it (and thus to its being so, for me).[24] This is the sense in which I am self-sufficient as to wisdom: my agglomerated beliefs are all at a single level. I shall call this *flat relativism.*[25]

If Protagoras maintains that his relativism is both agglomerative and flat, he rejects two features which might be thought essential to argument: first, that there are complex (non-agglomerated) relations between propositions or beliefs; and second, that we might reflect on both the beliefs and the relations between them in argument. Against such a denial, can either Socrates or Plato show that there are indeed genuine, non-agglomerative relations between propositions? Or show that reflection is not flat? Or, indeed, that sincerity should be discriminating? I mean here show, not just obstinately insist: Protagoras' logic and his epistemology are radical; but they are not necessarily false.

Plato sees that Socrates is in a tricky position here. Protagoras appropriates the ideas which Socrates might call his own – sincerity, belief, truth – and undermines the key notions of Socratic logic and epistemology: consistency, systematicity and reflectiveness.[26] Consider sincerity. Socrates may Protagoreanize, and find that truth, belief and the expression of belief turn up at once, so that sincerity is indiscriminate:

> ΣΩ. "Οταν σὺ κρίνας τι παρὰ σαυτῷ πρός με ἀποφαίνῃ περί τινος δόξαν, σοὶ μὲν δὴ τοῦτο κατὰ τὸν ἐκείνου λόγον ἀληθὲς ἔστω ...
>
> *Soc.* Whenever you make a judgement for yourself and express your belief to me, and let this – according to his theory – be true ... (*Theaetetus* 170d4)

Compare this with Socrates' complaint to Callicles, which takes sincerity to be both important and discriminating:

ΣΩ. Διαφθείρεις, ὦ Καλλίκλεις, τοὺς πρώτους λόγους, καὶ οὐκ ἂν ἔτι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἱκανῶς τὰ ὄντα ἐξετάζοις, εἴπερ παρὰ τὰ δοκοῦντα σαυτῷ ἐρεῖς.

Soc. You will destroy your first arguments, Callicles, and you will no longer be investigating what is the case adequately with me, if you speak contrary to what you believe for yourself. (*Gorgias* 495a)

Or consider the question 'who is wise?', the subject, after all, of the inquiries of the *Apology*. To Protagoras, people differ in their beliefs just because one person's beliefs are separate from another's; their separation is the only way in which beliefs, and belief-sets, can be compared.[27] For Socrates, cognitive differences between people – if there is such a thing as objective knowledge – necessarily reflect one person's superiority over another. This allows the possibility – even if so far an unactualized one – that there might be someone who is wise. Socrates and Protagoras, that is, differ about difference.[28] Protagoras (as he is imagined by Socrates) claims:

ἐγὼ γάρ φημι μὲν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἔχειν ὡς γέγραφα· μέτρον γὰρ ἕκαστον ἡμῶν εἶναι τῶν τε ὄντων καὶ μή, μυρίον μέντοι διαφέρειν ἕτερον ἑτέρου αὐτῷ τούτῳ, ὅτι τῷ μὲν ἄλλα ἔστι τε καὶ φαίνεται, τῷ δὲ ἄλλα.

I say that the truth is as I have written it; for each of us is the measure of the things that are and the things that are not, but in thousands of ways one person differs from another for this very reason, that some things are and appear to one, other things to the other. (*Theaetetus* 166d)

But Socrates retorts:

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν, ὦ Πρωταγόρα, καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀνθρώπου, μᾶλλον δὲ πάντων ἀνθρώπων δόξας λέγομεν, καὶ φαμὲν οὐδένα ὅντινα οὐ τὰ μὲν αὐτὸν ἡγεῖσθαι τῶν ἄλλων σοφώτερον, τὰ δὲ ἄλλους ἑαυτοῦ, καὶ ἔν γε τοῖς μεγίστοις κινδύνοις, ὅταν ἐν στρατείαις ἢ νόσοις ἢ ἐν θαλάττῃ χειμάζωνται, ὥσπερ πρὸς θεοὺς ἔχειν τοὺς ἐν ἑκάστοις ἄρχοντας, σωτῆρας σφῶν προσδοκῶντας, οὐκ ἄλλῳ τῳ διαφέροντας ἢ τῷ εἰδέναι.

> *Soc.* Well, Protagoras, we speak the beliefs of a man – or rather of all men – and we say that there is no-one who does not think that in some respects he is wiser than others, and that in other respects others are wiser than him; and at moments of crisis, when people are in trouble in battle or in sickness or at sea, they treat their leaders as if they were gods, expecting them to be their saviours, and supposing that the leaders differ from them in no other way than by knowledge. (*Theaetetus* 170a-b)

If Socrates tries to argue against Protagoras, therefore, he needs to defend the possibility of argument ,as well as his own account of the nature of knowledge and belief, without merely begging the question against his opponent. What is more, Socrates needs to defend his own peculiar style of argument – the method of considering and testing the opinions of each other. For Protagoras challenges Socrates in Socrates' own terms, familiar from the *Apology* and the *Gorgias*:

> ΣΩ. Ταῦτά τε δὴ πάντα ὅσα ἡμεῖς ἐπαμύνοντες αὐτῷ λέγομεν, καὶ ὁμόσε οἶμαι χωρήσεται καταφρονῶν ἡμῶν καὶ λέγων· Οὗτος δὴ ὁ Σωκράτης ὁ χρηστός, ἐπειδὴ αὐτῷ παιδίον τι ἐρωτηθὲν ἔδεισεν εἰ οἷόν τε τὸν αὐτὸν τὸ αὐτὸ μεμνῆσθαι ἅμα καὶ μὴ εἰδέναι, καὶ δεῖσαν ἀπέφησεν διὰ τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι προορᾶν, γέλωτα δὴ τὸν ἐμὲ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἀπέδειξεν. τὸ δέ, ὦ ῥᾳθυμότατε Σώκρατες, τῇδ' ἔχει· ὅταν τι τῶν ἐμῶν δι' ἐρωτήσεως σκοπῇς, ἐὰν μὲν ὁ ἐρωτηθεὶς οἷάπερ ἂν ἐγὼ ἀποκριναίμην ἀποκρινάμενος σφάλληται, ἐγὼ ἐλέγχομαι, εἰ δὲ ἀλλοῖα, αὐτὸς ὁ ἐρωτηθείς...ἀδικεῖν δ' ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ, ὅταν τις μὴ χωρὶς μὲν ὡς ἀγωνιζόμενος τὰς διατριβὰς ποιῆται, χωρὶς δὲ διαλεγόμενος, καὶ ἐν μὲν τῷ παίζῃ τε καὶ σφάλλῃ καθ' ὅσον ἂν δύνηται, ἐν δὲ τῷ διαλέγεσθαι σπουδάζῃ τε καὶ ἐπανορθοῖ τὸν προσδιαλεγόμενον, ἐκεῖνα μόνα αὐτῷ ἐνδεικνύμενος τὰ σφάλματα, ἃ αὐτὸς ὑφ' ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν προτέρων συνουσιῶν παρεκέκρουστο. ἂν μὲν γὰρ οὕτω ποιῇς, ἑαυτοὺς αἰτιάσονται οἱ προσδιατρίβοντές σοι τῆς αὑτῶν ταραχῆς καὶ ἀπορίας ἀλλ' οὐ σέ, καὶ σὲ μὲν διώξονται καὶ φιλήσουσιν, αὐτοὺς δὲ μισήσουσι καὶ φεύξονται ἀφ' ἑαυτῶν εἰς φιλοσοφίαν, ἵν' ἄλλοι γενόμενοι ἀπαλλαγῶσι τῶν οἵ πρότερον ἦσαν.

> *Soc.* He will say all these things that we have said in his defence, and yet

> I think he will still come along and despise us, saying: 'This Socrates is a fine chap, frightening a little boy by asking whether it is possible for the same person to remember the same thing and not to know it; when the boy, unable to see ahead, said "no", Socrates made me look laughable in his argument. But, Socrates, you lazy fellow, investigate this matter by questioning, and if the person who is questioned answers the question as I would answer it, and giving that answer he comes to grief, then I am refuted; but if otherwise, it is he who is refuted.... It is possible to do wrong in this sort of case, when someone refuses to distinguish between competition and dialectic, where in the first case he might play and trip people up as much as possible, but in the latter he should be serious and keep helping his interlocutor to his feet, only showing up those of his mistakes which are made by the man himself, or because of his previous associations. If you do this, then those who consort with you will blame themselves for their confusion and their bewilderment; and they will follow you and love you, but hate themselves and flee from themselves towards philosophy, so that they may become other than they are, and slough off their former selves.' (*Theaetetus* 165e-6a, 167e-8a)

Socrates has begun his argument against the sophist by offering counter-examples to the claim that 'man is the measure of all things'. Protagoras objects that he is merely playing with words, when he should be taking the argument seriously (compare e.g. *Euthydemus* 277d ff.). So he should start again from the beginning, and proceed, perhaps by question and answer, but most of all with justice and propriety (this demands proper sequence as well as good will). His argument should not be competitive, but properly dialectical (does this mean that it should examine for consistency?), correcting the interlocutor only when he makes a mistake thanks to himself or to the company he has kept (the argument should investigate the interlocutor's genuine beliefs). In this way Socrates will ensure that his interlocutors do not blame him for their mistakes; and that they will 'flee from themselves towards philosophy'. (Notice the very loud echo of Socrates' discussion with Callicles at *Gorgias* 482; notice also the echo at *Sophist* 230b, where the Eleatic Stranger is describing the noble sophist.) The argument with Protagoras is no less a challenge for Socrates; the methods of sophistry and the methods of Socrates seem to be direct competitors:

ΣΩ. ταῦτα πῶς μὴ φῶμεν δημούμενον λέγειν τὸν Πρωταγόραν; τὸ δὲ δὴ ἐμόν τε καὶ τῆς ἐμῆς τέχνης τῆς μαιευτικῆς σιγῶ ὅσον γέλωτα ὀφλισκάνομεν, οἶμαι δὲ καὶ σύμπασα ἡ τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι πραγματεία. τὸ γὰρ ἐπισκοπεῖν καὶ ἐπιχειρεῖν ἐλέγχειν τὰς ἀλλήλων φαντασίας τε καὶ δόξας, ὀρθὰς ἑκάστου οὔσας, οὐ μακρὰ μὲν καὶ διωλύγιος φλυαρία, εἰ ἀληθὴς ἡ Ἀλήθεια Πρωταγόρου ἀλλὰ μὴ παίζουσα ἐκ τοῦ ἀδύτου τῆς βίβλου ἐφθέγξατο;

Soc. How can we deny that Protagoras was playing to the gallery when he spoke? I keep silent about my own affairs and my art of midwifery, and how ridiculous that looks – and likewise, I think, the whole business of dialectic. For to consider and to try and test each other's appearances and opinions, when each person's are correct, would surely be a long, an immense nonsense, if the Truth of Protagoras is true, and he was not joking when he gave utterance from the sanctuary of his book? (*Theaetetus* 161e-2a)

If Socrates must subject Protagoras' doctrine to serious dialectical investigation, he must investigate what Protagoras himself believed. But it is hard to see just who this Protagoras is.

ΣΩ. Οὔ τι ἄν, οἶμαι, ὦ φίλε, εἴπερ γε ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ ἑτέρου μύθου ἔζη, ἀλλὰ πολλὰ ἂν ἤμυνε· νῦν δὲ ὀρφανὸν αὐτὸν ἡμεῖς προπηλακίζομεν. καὶ γὰρ οὐδ' οἱ ἐπίτροποι, οὓς Πρωταγόρας κατέλιπεν, βοηθεῖν ἐθέλουσιν, ὧν Θεόδωρος εἷς ὅδε. ἀλλὰ δὴ αὐτοὶ κινδυνεύσομεν τοῦ δικαίου ἕνεκ' αὐτῷ βοηθεῖν.
ΘΕΟ. Οὐ γὰρ ἐγώ, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον Καλλίας ὁ Ἱππονίκου τῶν ἐκείνου ἐπίτροπος· ἡμεῖς δέ πως θᾶττον ἐκ τῶν ψιλῶν λόγων πρὸς τὴν γεωμετρίαν ἀπενεύσαμεν. χάριν γε μέντοι σοὶ ἕξομεν ἐὰν αὐτῷ βοηθῇς.
ΣΩ. Καλῶς λέγεις, ὦ Θεόδωρε. σκέψαι οὖν τήν γ' ἐμὴν βοήθειαν.

Soc. It would not be so, my friend, if the father of the first thesis were alive; no, he would have many things to say in its defence. But now we are harassing it, a poor orphan. And even the guardians Protagoras left behind – of whom Theodorus here is one – are unwilling to come to its aid. For

> justice's sake we shall probably have to help it.
> *Theo.* Well, Socrates, I am not Protagoras' executor – Callias the son of Hipponicus is. For I soon changed course from abstract discussion to geometry. But we should be grateful to you if you would come to its aid.
> *Soc.* Fair enough, Theodorus. See if *this* helps, then. (*Theaetetus* 164e-5a)

The man himself is dead. (We should remember that this is not an historical necessity, but a part of Plato's own fiction.) If Protagoras is not there, how can the process of question and answer investigate his genuine beliefs, especially if those are determined by relative truth? If Protagoras is not there, how can he be sincere? Someone needs to represent him – Theaetetus perhaps; then as the argument proceeds and gets more serious, the more serious Theodorus (notice 168c ff.). But sometimes it is Socrates himself who represents Protagoras: either by talking about him, or by constructing an elaborate dialogue with him, so that the argument both refers to him in the third person and represents him in the first. Finally, Socrates imagines the sophist sticking his head out of the ground and then running away; at this point Protagoras only appears in bits. As a consequence, each time an opinion is advanced on the sophist's behalf, it is disavowed and questioned. This slipperiness may be to Protagoras' advantage if the refutation relies on attributing determinate beliefs to him; it is to Socrates' disadvantage if it revives the analytic complaint: is this any way to go about investigating the truth of a theory?

The argument proper for the refutation of Protagoras proceeds in three stages (170e-1d):

i) There are *differences of opinion* among people, especially about the expertise of others. Sometimes people think they are wiser than others, and sometimes that others are wiser than themselves. So they think that men sometimes believe truly, sometimes falsely; and that others can be ignorant or wrong (170a-b). Moreover, we agree that it is true that people have these beliefs. So does Protagoras; and on his own principles these beliefs must be true for the person who believes them.

ii) (170d-e) Socrates shifts to a direct (first- and second- person) conversation with Theodorus, representing Protagoras. 'Suppose,' Socrates says,' you make a judgement, which is true for you. Suppose then you express your judgement to me. Can I judge your judgement? Or (on the theory) must I always find it true? Or doesn't it happen, each time, that ten thousand people disagree, and judge you wrong, just when you judge yourself right?' What happens – Socrates is asking

– when we reflect on the beliefs of others? Must we always suppose them to be true?

iii) (170e-171c). Suppose, then, Protagoras reflects on the measure doctrine itself. Either the measure doctrine is false for him, or it is true for him. If it is false for him, there is no-one for whom it is true. If it is true for him, but false for the majority, then it will fail to be the case as many times as there are people who find it so. More subtly, if Protagoras admits that those who dispute the measure doctrine find the measure doctrine 'false-for-them', he admits that they are right. So he concedes, on his doctrine, that his opinions are false, if he agrees that the opinions of those who think he is wrong are true. But they don't concede the reverse, that they themselves are wrong. Accordingly:

> ΣΩ. Ἐξ ἁπάντων ἄρα ἀπὸ Πρωταγόρου ἀρξαμένων ἀμφισβητήσεται, μᾶλλον δὲ ὑπό γε ἐκείνου ὁμολογήσεται, ὅταν τῷ τἀναντία λέγοντι συγχωρῇ ἀληθῆ αὐτὸν δοξάζειν, τότε καὶ ὁ Πρωταγόρας αὐτὸς συγχωρήσεται μήτε κύνα μήτε τὸν ἐπιτυχόντα ἄνθρωπον μέτρον εἶναι μηδὲ περὶ ἑνὸς οὗ ἂν μὴ μάθῃ.
>
> *Soc.* By everyone, beginning with Protagoras himself, it will be disputed; or rather it will be agreed by him that whenever he concedes that someone who says the opposite from him has a true belief, then Protagoras himself will concede that neither a dog nor any man whatever is a measure of a single thing which he has not learned. (*Theaetetus* 171b-c)

How damaging are these arguments to Protagoras? Many have found them either fallacious or silly, and so have supposed him immune to them.[29] He buys that immunity, however, at a price. The first argument concludes that Protagoras cannot dispute the truth of the opinions of others. Nor can he; but that need not imply that he thereby rejects his own truths, so long as both his opinion and the opinions of others are insulated by their relative qualifiers. He needs then to insist that others' truths have no bearing on his (indeed, to avoid contradicting himself, he needs to insist the same about his own truths). So he needs to be an agglomerative relativist.

What of the second objection? If you say 'p is true for me', and I judge what you say, I may say either 'It is true for me (that p[30] is true for you)' or 'It is false for me (that p is true for you)'. Protagoras, however, can only say 'It is true for

me (that p is true for you)', since he denies the possibility of falsehood. For Protagoras, to 'judge' someone else's belief is for him either to have the appearance (that p is true for that someone) or to have no appearance at all. So any judgement he makes on someone else's beliefs must be of the form: 'It is true for me (that p is true for you)'. What appearance does this report? 'That p is true for you'. In that case, Protagoras' reflection seems to be, not on p, but on your judgement that p. Indeed, the relative qualifiers ought to block any reflection on p, simpliciter, in this case; when they are nested in this way ('It is true for me that p is true for you') they protect the innermost proposition, 'p', from direct scrutiny. But in any case, it is hard to see how we could say that Protagoras is reflecting on, or judging, your appearance at all, when he simply reports his appearance of your appearance. Reflection in an ordinary sense, we might say, supposes that my judgement can decide one way or the other about its object ('Is p true for you or not?'). Protagoras' reporting of his appearance of your appearance cannot be any other way than the appearance just turned up. This is not recognizable as reflection on your appearance at all. Protagorean relativism disallows higher-order reflection because it disallows anything like the detached stance which higher-order reflection would demand. Protagorean relativism is flat.

But in that case it is hard to see how we can make sense – in a Protagorean world – of the public activity of judging other people's beliefs, of reflecting on other truths. After all, Protagoras began by insisting on privacy (cf. 166c4).[31] Now, in more extreme fashion, he must insist on flat relativism, where each of my beliefs is to be true and not susceptible to judgement by higher-order beliefs. Indeed, for the incurable relativist there is no such thing as reflecting on other people's truths, since every reflection is blocked by the qualification 'true *for me*'. The illusion of publicity,[32] that is, which was created by the suggestion that we could judge other people's judgements is just an illusion; the privacy of the beliefs allowed by relativism is absolute.

Protagoras might respond that this is not, after all, hopeless solipsism. For several people may in fact have the same belief. So is their truth absolute? Protagoras need not think so: their truth is simply the sum of all their truths (this, you might say, is an agglomerative account of absolute truth). In that case – as Socrates points out – truth is a majority verdict, and popular dissatisfaction with 'Man is the Measure' endangers it.

Does it? If, on Protagoras' theory, his opponent's view must be true for him, this does not imply that the falsity of Protagoras' doctrine is true for Protagoras.

Damage may be done, however, not so much by the truth of Protagoras' opponent's view, but by the admission by Protagoras that it is true; the danger is not that the rest of the world might be right (which would not matter to the thoroughgoing relativist) but in Protagoras' agreement that the rest of the world may be right, in sharp contrast to the rest of the world's disagreement with him. Why should the relativist mind that? If no-one else takes relativism to be true, no-one else supposes that Protagoras is right just because he thinks he is right; while he thinks they are right because they think so. But then disagreement with everyone else is inaccessible to him: all he can ever do is agree. Protagoras, consequently, must have a non-standard account of publicity (it is illusory) ; a non-standard account of the relations between beliefs (they are both flat and agglomerative); and a non-standard account of agreement (where Protagoras agrees with both his own truths and the truth of everyone else's truths).

Once again, however, is Protagoras' heterodoxy dangerous to him? Burnyeat has argued that the self-refutation goes through just by attacking Protagoras' notion of 'being a *measure*'.[33] If for Protagoras whatever appears to me is for me and whatever is for me appears to me, then my world (what is for me) will consist exactly of my appearances. But in case I have the appearance that this is not the case (that is, if I suppose that I am not the measure of my world) then, *eo ipso*, I am not the measure of my world. In that case, I am a counter-example to the doctrine; and one which Protagoras must concede to be such. It is worth noticing several features about this ingenious construal. First, being a measure is, on this account, transparent: I am a measure if and only if I appear to myself to be a measure. Protagoras could only block the inference, 'I am not a measure if I appear to myself not to be one', if he disallows that transparency – for example by disallowing reflection on being a measure, by continuing to insist that relativism is flat. Secondly, if I am a measure, I measure the totality of things that are for me: but I measure them agglomeratively, not in any more structured way. Measuring, that is to say, is moment by individual moment, and provides no whole structure within which those moments are to be assessed. Measuring just is being in that moment. But then what else would it be? Is there more to the way things are for me than their being for me, one by one?

Protagoras has, then, a thoroughly queer notion of the relation between each person and their beliefs.[34] What is more, this is revealed by the frame dialogue itself. Protagoras is dead, so someone else must defend his theory. Socrates tries, and so does Theodorus; but Protagoras is just not there. At first, that is the trouble:

Socrates and Theodorus do not have him there to agree to the conclusions they have advanced. Perhaps they have no authority to make concessions on his behalf; if the man himself were present, perhaps he would not agree.[35] But can it matter whether the Protagoras who agrees with both his own truths and the truth of everyone else's truths is present to agree? Can that Protagoras take responsibility for his own views? Are his views recognizably his, rather than mere cognitive episodes in his world? In some sense, they are. For the relativist, my beliefs are in an important way mine – I am responsible for them, I have authority over them just because they are *my* beliefs, they are true for me. But they are true for me just because they occur to me. They stand in no relation (other than an agglomerative one) to my other beliefs; and they are distinct from your beliefs not because I have reflected upon their difference from yours (reflection is denied by the flat relativist), but merely because it is to me that they appear and not to you. As a consequence, the relativist has to deny any sense in which my authority over my beliefs is differential, in the following sense. I – who am no relativist! – have authority over my beliefs not just because they happen to be mine (and you over yours, just because they happen to be yours) but also because in maintaining them, in asserting them, I disagree with, disavow, refuse responsibility for yours.[36] The notion of my authority over my beliefs, that is to say, says something about the way those beliefs are related to other beliefs which I do *not* hold, over which I have *no* authority; and it suggests that in holding beliefs which I recognize both as mine and as members of my belief set, I hold them reflectively. (Not all my beliefs, of course, are thus reflectively held; but some of them are, and most of them could be.) This the sophist tries to deny, by claiming that the contrast between my views and yours is empty, since the comparison of one belief of one person with another belief of another person cannot transcend their privacy.

But this puts Socrates in a difficult position when it comes to attacking Protagoras in argument, and an even more difficult position if he must defend his own, differential account of argument. For Protagoras' position is so radical that it demands that we either reformulate or justify all our conditions for argument. Every move Socrates makes could be repudiated by Protagoras on principle. He cannot even show Protagoras to be inconsistent, given that on Protagorean principles the relation of consistency, which is itself the logical relation of agreement, does not apply to my beliefs, since each is entirely insulated from any other. So consistency does not matter. But if consistency does not matter, the sequence of argument disintegrates, and the notion of contradiction, refutation

and proof disappears with it. Any attempt at a counter-argument will simply beg the question. Protagoras seems unrefutable.

You might be forgiven for thinking that here rhetoric – or despair – takes over. Socrates closes the self-refutation thus:

> ΣΩ. Ἀλλά τοι, ὦ φίλε, ἄδηλον εἰ καὶ παραθέομεν τὸ ὀρθόν. εἰκός γε ἄρα ἐκεῖνον πρεσβύτερον ὄντα σοφώτερον ἡμῶν εἶναι· καὶ εἰ αὐτίκα ἐντεῦθεν ἀνακύψειε μέχρι τοῦ αὐχένος, πολλὰ ἂν ἐμέ τε ἐλέγξας ληροῦντα, ὡς τὸ εἰκός, καὶ σὲ ὁμολογοῦντα, καταδὺς ἂν οἴχοιτο ἀποτρέχων. ἀλλ' ἡμῖν ἀνάγκη οἶμαι χρῆσθαι ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς ὁποῖοί τινές ἐσμεν, καὶ τὰ δοκοῦντα ἀεὶ ταῦτα λέγειν.
>
> *Soc.* Perhaps we are running off course, my friend. Indeed it is likely that the man himself, who is older than us, is wiser than we are. And if suddenly just here he were to stick his head out of the ground from the neck up, he would refute me for talking a great deal of nonsense, as I probably am, and you for agreeing, and then duck his head down and run away. But we, I think, should treat ourselves as who we are, and always say the things which seem to us to be. (*Theaetetus* 171c-d)

Plato defeats Protagoras, we might complain, just by representing him as not turning up – all we get are bits of him, and even they don't stick around. Plato uses a (merely) literary device, that is to say, to avoid a direct argument with Protagoras. Similarly, he defends Socrates by showing him as a stalwart (Socrates can 'treat himself as he is and always say the things which seem to him to be') and not by offering him a good argument. What is going on here? Why are Protagoras and Socrates presented in the way they are?

I had thought that the real problem here was whether Protagoras – who has Heraclitean leanings – could persist long enough, or with enough concreteness, to engage in conversation; I had thought that the challenge was to Protagoras' inadequate account of personal identity.[37] But there is more to it than that. Socrates needs not only to show that Protagoras is wrong, but also to defend his own account of argument. This defence is not provided merely by pointing to the way in which Protagoras commits himself to a world in which he himself can be no self. The encounter between Socrates and Protagoras contrasts two different accounts of *what it is to believe*.

For Protagoras, belief, like sincerity, is undifferentiated. My beliefs are my sincere beliefs just because they are mine; and if they are not mine, I don't believe them. So sincerity, measuring, agreeing and taking responsibility for my beliefs, are *ad hoc*: they occur just if they occur. Socrates, by contrast, gives a differential account of sincerity, where what I really believe is contrasted with what I do not believe. But this is not, as it would be for Protagoras, merely explained in terms of a boundary between what I happen to believe and what I happen not to; instead, my beliefs are explained in terms of two contrasts.

The first is a logical one: what I believe is directly contrasted with what I do not believe, where that is construed in terms of what may contradict what I believe. Believing p just is not believing ~p. The content of beliefs, that is to say, is enmeshed in a complex of logical relations. Beliefs are not merely agglomerative. This logical structuring of belief renders my beliefs properly subject to the scrutiny of the elenchus.

The second contrast is epistemological: between first-order beliefs and reflections on them. This contrast allows me to entertain a belief without being committed to its truth, just by virtue of reflecting on it. This does not, however, suppose that there could be a stance of being generally non-committal (where entertaining beliefs could become a way of life); for the reflection on lower-order beliefs is itself construed as a sincere belief. Entertaining a belief, that is, is parasitic on having a belief: and that is because having a belief is understood in terms of sincerity. Sincerity, in turn, is differential: my sincere beliefs are those over which I have authority, in contradistinction from those beliefs which are held by others. For that to make sense, propositions cannot be strictly relativized to persons; but nor are they to be detached from the person who believes them altogether. Belief is both fundamentally personal and fundamentally susceptible to scrutiny: in this sense, Socrates' account of belief gives him a response to the Socratic challenge, to the objection that philosophy need not be a collective enterprise.

So the argument with Protagoras shows up Socrates' version of what it is to believe: sincere, reflective, public and differential. And just these conditions on belief are observed by the Socratic method of question and answer, as it appears in the early dialogues. The Socratic approach to philosophy now appears to be neither weakly *ad hominem* nor merely soppy: the analytic complaint too, I suggest, has its first answer here.

But Socrates may still be vulnerable to the foundationalist objection. His

present account of belief is self-contained (offset as it is against Protagoras' alternative account). But can it be justified? This is a matter of first principle: if the elenchus itself merely explores consistency, on what principle does the elenchus itself depend? Why should I care for the Socratic account of belief rather than for any other?

Consider once again the drama of the confrontation between Socrates and the (variously represented) Protagoras. Protagoras cannot defend his position dialectically (that is, in the Socratic terms he lays down at the beginning of the passage), because he does not subscribe to Socratic principles. He is also not allowed to defend himself dialectically (as, in the fiction of the encounter, he himself points out) because he is either dead, or absent, or in bits. How far is this drama connected with the argument?

Directly, I suggest. Protagoras' own theory explains who we are ('measures') in terms of what we believe; and it describes those beliefs as private and piecemeal. But this undermines any systematic account of who we are by disallowing any account of how our beliefs are held together, or of how they are differentiated from the beliefs of others. This is why it is hard to see who exactly is Protagoras here. Socrates, by contrast, distinguishes between my beliefs and yours; he identifies my beliefs as those which I have authority to accept or deny, those which I call mine; and he supposes that those beliefs may be subject to my own reflective scrutiny. The first principle here is a rationalist one: that I am a person who has beliefs in such a way that those beliefs are related (not agglomerated); that they are ordered (not flat); and that it is I who am in charge of them. Socrates supposes, therefore, that what it is for me to believe is determined by who I am.[38] He also supposes that who I am can be investigated by investigating my beliefs: this is why sincerity matters.

Where does this first principle come from? Not directly from the elenchus: if the elenchus relies on consistency and reflectiveness, it cannot show that consistency and reflectiveness are reliable. And not directly from Socrates' arguments against Protagoras, which merely stand off Socrates' account of belief against the sophist's. Protagoras cannot be defeated by deductive argument, simply because his theory denies the possibility of argument. But thereby his theory can give no account of who he himself is: there is no Protagoras for whom 'man is the measure' is true, not only because Protagoras is fragmented, but because his beliefs have no consistency or stability. But this is revealed, not in the argument proper, but in the dramatic frame. The frame insists, that is, that the 'Protagoras'

with whom Socrates imagined a dialogue is an illusion, a *fiction.*

The complaint that this is mere rhetoric turns out to be a narrow-minded approach to what argument is. If all argument is deductive, either the starting points must be fixed beforehand, or argument merely produces coherent sets of propositions, or it goes round in circles. There is, then, no way of uncovering the starting points by argument. Plato escapes this consequence by embedding his arguments in a context, in a drama where people propose theories and defend them. As the context shows, Protagoras has a theory which incorporates a vacuous account of who he is and an untenable account of what it is to believe; as a consequence, this person who defends such a theory is himself fragmented and cut off by the theory itself. But this is not merely a graphic representation of why we should dislike the theory; it is a reason why the theory itself cannot be coherently held by someone who lives a continuous life and holds beliefs in a differential way. Socrates, conversely, has an account of argument which follows from a rich and complex account of who we are, relying as it does on the structured way in which reasoned beliefs must be held. So the holding of a theory about rational belief depends – on this account – on what it is to be the person who holds such a theory. Which shall we have – Protagoras or Socrates? Which sort of life would you lead? The choice is nothing without the dialogue, just as the argument is safe from the foundationalist objection only if we see it in context. While the argument within the frame is unable to show directly that Protagoras is wrong, the frame itself, by reflecting on the conditions for argument, both attacks Protagoras' first principle and shows Socrates' own method to be legitimate. And that this is what is happening is shown quite clearly by the way in which the topic of the frame reflection (what it is to believe) is itself at issue in the framed argument (how can we judge beliefs?). Now the point here is not that the principles according to which arguments are to be done are themselves either unreflective, or grasped by some intuition granted by literary form, not by philosophical argument.[39] Rather, the frame itself has argumentative content, reflecting as it does on a series of conditions for genuine rational belief. The frame is reflective; and reflectiveness is itself a mark of philosophical activity (thinking about thinking). The relation betwen the dramatic frame and the framed argument, therefore, is the relation of higher-order reflection to its object. The frame is not just there for fun – it's there for philosophy.

NOTES

This paper had its origins in the W.B. Stanford Memorial Lectures at Trinity College, Dublin, in February 1996; it forms part of a longer project, 'Philosophical positions: Plato's dramatization of first principles'; my thanks to my hosts in Dublin (John Dillon and Kathy Coleman) for their permission to publish an excerpt here. In a form close to the present one this paper was delivered to the Southern Association for Ancient Philosophy in September 1996. My warm thanks to both audiences and particularly to Tad Brennan, Myles Burnyeat, John Cleary, Nick Denyer, Chris Gill, Verity Harte, Christopher Rowe, Vasilis Politis, Malcolm Schofield, Robert Wardy, Raphael Woolf, as well as to the editors and two anonymous referees.

1 Of course, this claim is not new, although the view of the Platonic dialogues which I reject is still commonplace. There has been a great deal of work done recently, however, on just how the dialogue form is to be understood: see, for example, the papers collected in J.C. Klagge and N.D. Smith (eds.), *Methods of Interpreting Plato and his Dialogues* (Oxford 1992), and in C. Gill and M.M.McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato* (Oxford 1996).

2 There is, particularly since Gregory Vlastos' work on Socrates, a huge literature on the subject of the elenchus. Vlastos' original paper, 'The Socratic Elenchus', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983) with comments by Richard Kraut and a response by Vlastos, was followed up in *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Cambridge 1991) and then revised for *Socratic Studies* (Cambridge 1994). This then sparked a positive industry on Socrates: some of the important essays are usefully collected by H.H. Benson (ed.), *Essays in the Philosophy of Socrates* (Oxford 1992), and Benson himself has recently published a lengthy study of the elenchus: 'The dissolution of the problem of the elenchus', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 13 (1995) 45-112.

3 Inevitably, some have argued that this appearance is misleading, and that the elenchus is (somehow) a vehicle for the discovery or the disclosure of positive doctrine: on this see again Vlastos, *Socrates* and, from a different perspective, T. Irwin, *Plato's Ethics* (Oxford 1994), chs. 1-5.

4 I adopt here a fairly loose notion of foundationalism. For an ancient approach to this problem, see, of course, Aristotle's discussion at *An.Po.* 71b17 ff.

5 Indeed it seems plausible to suppose that the difference between coming to know the principles and deriving the structure of knowledge from those principles is not just a matter of the direction in which the inquiry leads, but also a matter for different cognitive capacities. The derivation process is discursive and systematic; but we arrive at the unhypothesized beginning by a process more akin to the immediacy of perception: cf. the imagery of grasping at 511b, and – if the unhypothesized beginning is the same thing as the form of the good – the vision of the form of the good at 517c which precedes the reasoning that the form of the good is the explanation of everything good and fine.

6 Compare Dorothea Frede's claims for the Socrates of the *Philebus*, 'The hedonist's conversion', in Gill and McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato*. In these late dialogues Socrates is *redivivus*, I think, in the sense that Plato begins to reconsider some of the methods used in the early dialogues, and to reflect on their philosophical justification: a reconsideration which had been left aside in the great works of the middle period.

7 This is Vlastos' expression, 'Elenchus', 35. Vlastos cites four texts: *Grg.* 500b; *Rep.* 346a; *Cr.* 49c-d; *Prt.* 331c.

8 Myles Burnyeat objected to me in discussion that there are no good grounds for believing that 'say what you believe' is a condition on the elenchus. This objection made me rethink my account of the sincerity condition, and I am extremely grateful for the provocation. However, I still think that there are good grounds for the sincerity condition, although perhaps those grounds are not the ones we might expect. It is worth noticing that it is usually taken for granted; cf. e.g. Benson, '*Dissolution*', 92 n. 122, who supposes that if an argument fails to meet the sincerity condition, it doesn't count as

a proper Socratic elenchus.

9 I am grateful to an anonymous referee for making me spell this distinction out.

10 More – is this something we find it easy to suppose that *Plato* thought, whatever Aristotle may have said about the many and the wise?

11 Even Aristotle might make it: compare *Met.* 995a24 ff. which allows dialectical puzzles to be contrived. More vehement might be the sceptic or even the Zenonian, who supposed that we might entertain the premisses of a dilemma without deciding on their truth in advance.

12 I am grateful to both Myles Burnyeat and Verity Harte for discussion of this passage.

13 One of the many delights of the *Charmides* to the Anglophone reader is the desperate task of translating *sôphrosunê* .

14 Is Protagoras' argument that you can't comment because the appearance is in my mind, or because it is inalienably mine? J. McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus* (Oxford 1973) 143, argues persuasively, I think, for the latter, and against a post-Cartesian interpretation of Protagoras' view.

15 For discussion here, see esp. M.F. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato* (Indianapolis 1990); and, for a more detailed account of the refutation of Protagoras, 'Protagoras and self-refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', *Philosophical Review* 85 (1976) 172-95. Recent work on this difficult passage abounds: note in particular G.Fine on the exact specification of Protagoras' view in Gill and McCabe, *Form and Argument.* I touch on some of these issues in *Plato's Individuals* (Princeton 1994) chs. 5, 9.

16 See Burnyeat, 'Self-Refutation', on this equivalence claim. It is needed to support Protagoras' extreme claim that everything is true (for whomsoever it is true for) which turns out to be both the expression of his extreme relativism and its downfall. What is more, it well expresses Protagoras' alliance with Heraclitus, which demands a non-phenomenalist account of Protagorean appearances (see above, n. 14). The formula needs, perhaps, to be supplemented by the claim that there are no non-appearances: appearances are co-extensive with what there is.

17 Protagoras maintains throughout that we can still understand the difference between the wise and the foolish by appeal to their judgements of value. One might suppose in that case that Plato's use of φρόνησις to describe Protagoras' view, a word which may have practical connotations even earlier than Aristotle, is sharp practice.

18 The translation of this passage is tricky; I follow Levett here in punctuating with a comma after ἐποίει, and taking συνεχώρησεν as coordinate with ἐδυσχεραίνομεν.

19 In an interesting defence of moderate relativism from the charge of self-refutation, Steven Hales ('A Consistent Relativism', *Mind,* 106 [1997] 33-52) first formulates relativism as 'everything is relative', which he takes to be equivalent to 'every proposition is true in some perspective and untrue in another'. This view, he argues, is self-refuting, where the moderate ' whatever is true is relatively true', is not. Protagorean relativism is both stronger than Hales' stronger version, and less vulnerable to self-refutation: for Protagoras denies the second conjunct, that that there is a perspective from which relative propositions are untrue. This allows him a kind of relativism which is pragmatic: all he does is utter from whatever perspective he is in at a time; and difficult to deal with, from a dialectical point of view (Hales dismisses this kind of relativism briskly, 38).

20 A similar (but, significantly, not identical) sophistic strategy was advanced by Prodicus and reiterated in the *Sophist.* If truths are about what is, and there is no 'what is not', there is nothing for falsehoods to be about, so there are no falsehoods. The *Sophist* suggests a realist view, that statements will be true just as they are meaningful about some external reality. The *Theaetetus*, which connects Protagoras' position to Heraclitus', seems to suppose that the beliefs of the relativist and the states of affairs about which they are generate each other in a mutual process.

21 One of my anonymous referees suggests that this will be absurd – not only does it deny Protagoras the possibility of constructing the *muthos* of the *Protagoras*; it also removes from him the possibility of any other speech acts than assertion. Of course the Protagoras of the *Theaetetus* may well be a relativist of an entirely different sort from his namesake in the eponymous dialogue (the latter, for

example, may merely be a cultural relativist). And the absurdity of Protagoras' position within this dialogue is exactly – on the account I offer – what Plato is trying to expose. However, he does so progressively, so that Protagoras' speech acts become increasingly limited as the encounter between him and Socrates goes on.

22 Protagoras cannot have any account of a proposition which would allow it to be independent of the appearance it expresses, nor which would allow a proposition to be independent of an utterance either. For him propositions and statements will be indistinguishable in content.

23 Could there be genuine logical relations within an appearance, or within a proposition? It is, Protagoras might admit, possible that any given appearance might be complex, so that it could be expressed in terms, say, of a conditional 'if p then q'. But consistently with that conditional being true (as a whole) just because it appears to me to be true, I could, of course, believe ~p. However, my saying to myself 'Not p' is either part of the content of the original appearance, which would then be the complex '(p->q)& ~p', or it would be the content of another appearance. Protagoras needs to insist that agglomerative relativism holds *between appearances*. If he still allows that appearances may be logically complex internally, he will need a new account of the individuation of propositions to replace the account that has propositions corresponding to individual appearances (i.e. one which will allow him to individuate sub-propositions within the appearance); and this principle itself is liable to introduce contradiction and inconsistency. (Protagoras would need to rule out, from the beginning, appearances which were directly inconsistent, such as 'p&~p'; and this elimination would have to be done on the basis of something other than the veridicality of the appearance itself: and then the measure doctrine would be at risk.) Moreover, a logic internal to individual appearances would have to be restricted to those appearances, individually, and would be too weak to support any generalized principles such as the Law of Non-Contradiction. Agglomerative relativism would still hold between appearances.

24 Malcolm Schofield asks me whether Protagoras could not say, 'I wonder whether I have this appearance now?' I see two reasons why he could not say this or why, if he did, it would not constitute a second-order judgement at all. First, the truth of the appearance just is its appearing to me: as it appears, so it is for me. In that case there would be no (so to speak psychological) room to wonder whether there is such an appearance, no scope for doubt: these are psychological events, not speculations. Secondly, Protagoras' question to himself would have to be put in terms of a disjunction: 'I wonder whether p or ~p'. If the choice is to be a genuine one, there must be some sense to be made of the logical relation expressed in 'p or ~p'. But that logical relation is determined by at least the Law of Non-Contradiction; and that law is a non-agglomerative one: it demands relations between propositions which are more complex than mere addition. Protagoras, however, to conclude that everyone is self-sufficient as to wisdom, must deny that sort of logic.

25 Flat relativism is risky just because it removes from the flat relativist any space for making higher-order claims, such as the claim that relativism is true. This feature of flat relativism, however, is not terminal. Protagoras' problem is the combination of agglomerative and flat relativism.

26 This feature of Socrates' procedure is amply attested by his disavowal of knowledge. He saw, with clarity, that thinking about thinking is one of the marks of philosophizing. To that extent it is unreasonable to suppose he was only interested in ethics, and not in epistemology or methodology. Better to say, perhaps, that the demarcation of different bits of what philosophers do is spurious.

27 The difference is, as it were, merely local – this collection of beliefs over here, belonging to this person, is different from that set over there belonging to someone else; the beliefs cannot be compared with each other in any other way. Even that is tricky; after all, with only flat and agglomerative relativism to play with, how are we to know where one person's beliefs end and another's begin?

28 In these passages Plato exploits an ambiguity in διαφέρειν : it may describe simple non-identity or difference (= 'be different from') or it may involve a value judgement (= 'be superior to').

29 First of all, the argument has not shown that if the measure doctrine is true it is false. For the

argument has not (expressly has not) depended on dropping the relative qualifiers as that conclusion would demand. Moreover, the argument has not shown that it is damaging for Protagoras to say that the measure doctrine is true for just whoever it is true for; the argument has not shown that it is damaging to insist on a private world, to be a solipsist. Instead, Socrates suggests that if Protagoras concedes the truth to his opponents, then he denies that man is the measure; from this Socrates concludes further (171c5: note the inferential connectives) that Protagoras must suppose the measure doctrine to be false.

30 Or ~p in the case where p is false for you.

31 Cf above n. 14; this notion of privacy seems connected to my ownership of the belief or the appearance, rather than to the fact that the appearance turns up in my mind.

32 I use this expression in contrast to the Protagorean claim of privacy: here the publicity of a belief just is its susceptibility to public scrutiny.

33 Burnyeat, 'Self-refutation in the *Theaetetus*'.

34 Protagoras has said that 'each person is self-sufficient as to wisdom' (φρόνησις). What does that mean? It reformulates the measure doctrine – as things are for each person, so they are true for that person' – in at least two vital respects. First, when Protagoras is introduced at 152 ff., his theory is presented as a theory about truth; here by contrast (and as a consequence of the intervening argument) the focus of attention is wisdom. Second, the first version of the theory relied on the notion of the privacy of my beliefs; now Protagoras is interested in the self-sufficiency of the believer. The effect of these differences is to shift our attention away from more austerely epistemological concepts towards ethical ones; and thus towards questions of continuing lives and the way they are lived.

35 Here Plato seems, unexpectedly, to pay serious attention to historical accuracy (169d10 ff.). But this, of course, is no reason to treat the dialogue as an historical document: Plato chose to give the discussion a dramatic date when Protagoras was already dead.

36 The notion of responsibility I employ here is not to effect a distinction between those of my beliefs that are somehow my fault, and those which are not, nor to set this account of judgement against a background of the question of free will. Rather I try here to identify the sense in which my beliefs belong to me, count as mine (irrespective of their origin): perhaps the closest notion of responsibility is the Stoic account of the actions which happen through my nature. Likewise, as I have suggested, the notion of privacy which applies to Protagorean judgements is not to be understood against a background of the problems of scepticism and incorrigibility, but rather in the context of the relativist's insistence on indexing everything to persons.

37 McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, ch. 9

38 The logical relations here are complex. Being a continuous and whole person is, it seems, necessary for me to have beliefs in the way Socrates supposes I have them. But is Socrates here committed to the converse, that having complex beliefs is necessary for being a whole person? If he has an account of persons based on, for example, biological criteria, or physical ones, then he might not make this claim; nor would he if he supposed that personhood required merely the capacity to have complex beliefs (although Protagoras, it seems, does not even have that). I have argued elsewhere, however, that Plato views personhood as honorific, something which we do not have as a matter of fact but to which we may aspire by cultivating rationality. In this sense, the complexity of my beliefs, and their ordering, is what confers the honour of being a person on me; thus complex beliefs are after all necessary for being a person. Cf. here *Plato's Individuals,* ch. 9.

39 This might be, I suppose, to take one route out of the foundationalist puzzle, by arguing that principles are arrived at by different cognitive means than the theorems derived from them. I should reiterate here that the contrast between literature and philosophy, which some use to explain the difference between the frame and the arguments, is one which I reject, not least because I contend that there is nothing here that is not philosophy: there is no separate 'literary' activity going on.