

Johannes M. van Ophuijsen, Marlein van Raalte, and Peter Stork, eds.

Protagoras of Abdera: The Man, His Measure (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), xi + 332 pp. \$162. ISBN 9789004251205.

Neither of the two recent collections on Greek political theory reconstruct Protagoras' political theory.¹ Nor have any of the last quarter-century's dissertations on Protagoras systematized his political outlook.² All the same, research on Protagoras and the Platonic dialogues animating Protagoras has remained robust.³ In the present volume's smart, comprehensive, and original uptake of that scholarship – and of practically all the ancient testimonia of Protagoras – we now have an excellent starting point for any future study of Protagoras' political ideas and relevance.⁴ Indeed, the editors dedicate it to C.M.J. Sicking, who went so far as to think, as Ineke Sluiter writes, 'that Protagoras' ideas about what constitutes a good society was a viable and competitive alternative to Plato's'.

The volume is not about Protagoras' positions on civic life *per se*. The author of the Introduction (Johannes van Ophuijsen, 'Protagoras of Abdera: *Amicus homo magis amica veritas*', pp. 1-9) claims that the collection focuses on the twin themes of relativism and naturalism (the latter in contrast to transcendentalism and conventionalism). He would have scholars interpret Protagorean material with boldness and charity, seeking a coherent program where predecessors have seen only one-off statements and inadequately supported intuitions. This sketching of a complete picture requires, he notes, sieving out possible Platonic distortion and Aristotelian dismissal. The authors of this collection do so with serious philological and philosophical rigour. It is in addition to their purification and optimistic reconstitution of Protagoras' complex

1 C.J. Rowe and M. Schofield, eds., *The Cambridge history of Greek and Roman political thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and R. Balot, ed., *A companion to Greek and Roman political thought* (Chichester/Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

2 A search by title on ProQuest UMI Dissertation Publishing shows thirteen dissertations exclusively or largely about Plato's *Protagoras* and five about Protagoras himself.

3 I merely add to the present volume's remarkable 45-page bibliography these valuable studies: R. Drake, 'Extraneous voices: orphaned and adopted texts in the *Protagoras*', *Epoché*, 10 (2005), pp. 1-20; L. Apfel, *The Advent of Pluralism: Diversity and Conflict in the Age of Sophocles* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 44-112; F. Trivigno, 'The value of interpretation in Plato's *Protagoras*', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 51:4 (2013), pp. 509-43.

4 The volume issues from a Leiden symposium on Protagoras in July 2007. There are allusions to a forthcoming edition of the Protagorean fragments and testimonia by some of the contributors to this volume: T. van Berkel, N. Notomi, M. van Raalte, and A. Rademaker, eds., *Sources for Protagoras* (Leiden).

views on epistemology, rhetoric, pedagogy, and even metaphysics, that most of the authors aim also to establish the political upshot of Protagoras' thinking, and treat the social and moral consequences of his views as of primary significance. In what follows, I limit myself to identifying the consequences for political reflection in the most politically-interesting chapters, acknowledging here that I found every chapter of the volume to meet a high level of usefulness and plausibility.⁵

Protagoras was the 'first sophist', the ancients said; whether this is true, what this means, and what significance the naming holds for our understanding of him, are the topics of Noburu Notomi's 'A Protagonist of the Sophistic Movement: Protagoras in Historiography' (pp. 11-36). Noburu believes that Protagoras' 'man is the measure' thesis – probably found in his book *Alêtheia* ('Truth') – had the effect of draining meaning out of the idea of 'truth' and thus undermining philosophy's goal to 'pursu[e] truth and knowledge through arguments (*logos*)'. Attempts to categorize Protagoras' profession and intellectual goals – given his anti-philosophical stance, his 'sophistry' – had a paradoxical result. To take his position seriously would require treating it as a well-formed contribution to philosophy; but by hypothesis it was *against* philosophy, and so not a contribution *to* philosophy; thus it couldn't be taken seriously; and yet philosophy's inability to take a charge against it seriously would itself show a serious weakness in philosophy; and so philosophy would have to take it seriously. Thus Protagoras founds, or stands in for, the anxiety and instability in the relation between 'philosophy' and 'sophistry', and thus perhaps even between philosophy and public life. Noburu draws from a wonderfully broad selection of testimonia about Protagoras, and helpfully delineates three readings of the 'man is the measure' doctrine (pp. 26-31). Noburu's is not the complete story, of course. His distinctions among the use of the word 'sophist' suggests that he should or could have seen the word 'philosophy' as also polyvalent, as the diverse uses of it in the fifth and fourth century reveal. Further, Noburu claims that whether or not Protagorean relativism is self-refuting, it 'is not a mere philosophical puzzle, . . . [but] offers a radical challenge to the possibility of philosophy'. Yet in the deliberative contest of political possibilities, if extreme relativism cannot defend itself, we might doubt the urgency of its challenge.⁶ And as a serious contender to philosophy, we might wonder what

5 The editing and presentation is excellent, and the work includes an index locorum and general index.

6 For the self-refutation arguments against Protagoras' position, see L. Castagnoli, *Ancient Self-Refutation: The Logic and History of Self-Refutation Argument from Democritus to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 40-67.

good the 'man is the measure' purports to do, especially as self- or civic-improvement are concerned.

The next chapter (Tazuko A. van Berkel, 'Made to Measure: Protagoras' *metron*', pp. 37-67) takes up not the disciplinary agonism initiated by the 'man is the measure' thesis but the semantics and pragmatics of the sentence itself. The author translates the most likely formulation of the sentence as follows:

Of all things the measure (*metron*) is man, of those that are (the case), that/how they are (the case), and of those that are not (the case), that/how they are not (the case).⁷

She reminds us that this sentence, cliché as it now may be, is bizarre. How can a 'man' be a 'measure'? Tools, or canons, or norms – 'measures' – are standards or criteria of judgment that people use; people are the 'measurers', the ones who deploy these standards or check phenomena against the criteria. Thus Protagoras must have been using *metron* metaphorically. The content of that metaphor would come from the accumulated resonances of the term *metron* in other departments of life. Van Berkel suggests a brilliant range of resonances the term would evoke. One is the use of *metron* in wisdom literature, which praises *metriotês* ('measuredness'). She notes μέτρον ἄριστον ('measure is best'), μηδὲν ἄγαν ('nothing too much'), μέτρα φυλάσσεσθαι· καιρὸς δ' ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἄριστος ('preserve the measure: appropriateness in everything is best'), and lines from Theognis and Pindar. Whereas these aristocratic authors aim to ground moral norms in the objective fabric of reality, Protagoras appears to say that humans are responsible for projecting due measure onto their reality. The term *metron* also arises in epistemology, where giving something's measure stood in for giving its essence. In politics, measure was connected with democratic land-division and commerce, and more generally with *nomos* against *phusis*, since measures and weights were 'tokens of civilization'. Thus together, 'man is the measure' funnels into one claim 'the νόμος/φύσις-debate, political issues related to property assessment, taxation and imperialism, ethical issues of self-restraint, reciprocity and fair distribution, and medico-epistemological questions of the possibility and accuracy of knowledge' (p. 58). Van Berkel concludes this great chapter by claiming that Protagoras is a 'perspectivist', who believes that we see everything unavoidably first-personally, and she speculates that his view came from his experience with intercity travel.

7 πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστι, τῶν δὲ οὐκ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν, Sextus Empiricus *Against the Mathematicians* 7.60 = DK 80 B1, II.263.3-5.

Michele Corradi's 'Τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν: Aristotle, Plato, and the ἐπάγγελμα of Protagoras' (pp. 69-86) notes that outside Plato, the Protagorean 'making the weaker argument stronger' – along with the observation of the possibility of antilogy – is treated as part of his sophistic and rhetorical insight (or cynicism). But Plato treats it as part of his purportedly city-improving pedagogical technique. Thus Protagoras probably unified rhetoric, philosophy, and *paideia*.

We know that Protagoras' educational curriculum included ὀρθοέπεια ('correctness of utterance'). Yet some units, on grammatical gender and verbal mood, sound esoteric and only mysteriously productive of improved political judgment. Adriaan Rademaker's 'The Most Correct Account: Protagoras on Language' (pp. 87-111) argues for an instrumental connection between Protagoras' practical linguistics and his pedagogical goals. Narrow analyses of words, phrases, and sentences contribute to larger-scale analyses of Homeric and other poetic texts, tasks propaedeutic to oratorical expertise. All Greek education aimed at preparing students for participation in a verbally-mediated political life. Whereas many thought poetry could do its work alone, by providing models for salutary imitation, Protagoras advocated a critical attitude toward it. This critical attitude contributed both to a deeper understanding of the moral exemplars and to practice detecting inconsistencies in speeches. Protagoras probably prized this latter skill: 'the political implication of [the man is the measure thesis] seems to be that man has to decide issues or right and wrong by his own standards, without appeal to an external, superhuman authority', and this human standard is that of consistency. Majority rule through cooperative speech sorts through policy proposals by checking whether they cohere with other more deeply held beliefs. Rademaker thereby seems to link Protagoras with Prodicus and Isocrates as men who saw political *areté* as coming from attention to the details of language.

Paul Demont's chapter on political efficacy in the *Protagoras* (pp. 113-138) establishes parallels between medicine and politics, and argues that the dialogue advocates a patient-centred judgment of efficacy.

The seventh chapter, Adam Beresford's 'Fangs, Feathers, & Fairness: Protagoras on the Origins of Right and Wrong' (pp. 139-162), reads Protagoras' speech in the *Protagoras* as an etiology of morality founded in the origins of species, and one that the historical Protagoras surely propounded. Indeed, the content of that speech fits squarely in the tradition occupied notably by Democritus. Protagoras obscures his agnosticism behind gods who symbolize natural forces. Epimetheus, 'lack of forethought', represents the random chance of natural selection and our learning from mistakes. Prometheus,

'forethought', represents human intelligence. 'We think in order to live'; and so too morality is a tool of survival, as much as fangs or feathers are. Protagoras claims that 'ethical predispositions came to be part of human nature and human character because they enabled us to survive, and that those predispositions themselves, combined with an upbringing that activates them and develops them, provide us with our reasons – the familiar, *fully ethical* reasons – for treating each other the way we do'. This explains democratic practice better than social-contract theory does, and explains how 'crude and non-rational forms of teaching (repetition, parental anger, peer pressure, spankings, reading the *Odyssey*, etc.)' could have any effect: we are *primed* to improve in such and such a way.

Bernd Manuwald ('Protagoras' Myth in Plato's *Protagoras*: Fiction or Testimony?' pp. 163-177) gives further reason to think that Plato represents Protagoras' views with accuracy. The key idea is that 'all human beings share or must share respect for the rights of others or self-restraint and justice, or else human societies could not exist'. But Manuwald disagrees with Beresford otherwise. He thinks the speech is unresponsive to Socrates' concerns, and is inconsistent. He suggests that it reflects one of Protagoras' set-speech proreptic addresses, revealing mainly that the sophist's ambit is the one most important for the life of the *polis*. Manuwald and Beresford do not discuss each other's chapters.

Paul Woodruff's chapter, '*Euboulia* as the Skill Protagoras Taught' (pp. 179-193), was first published five years ago, and draws from material from 1999.⁸ Woodruff argues that 'good judgment', which must serve in both political and domestic contexts, is 'the virtue that helps us to deliberate well in the absence of knowledge'. (He does not observe that in this formulation it might be like *promêtheia*, the virtue Socrates embodies in the *Protagoras* 316c5 and 361d4.) This involves 'the ability to negotiate defeasible argument well in practical affairs'. Skill in antilogy will be part of this, since such a skill involves the ability to 'identify and present plausibly the reasons on either side of a debate'.

The last three chapters concern relativism: Arnaud Macé, 'Privatising Perception: Plato's Protagoreanism (*Theaetetus* 154b-157c)', pp. 195-216; Job van Eck, 'Perceptual Relativism and Change in the Secret Doctrine in Plato's *Theaetetus* 152-160', pp. 217-232; and Ugo Zilioli, 'Protagoras through Plato and Aristotle: A Case for the Philosophical Significance of Ancient Relativism',

8 P. Woodruff, '*Euboulia*: how might good judgment be taught?', *Lampas*, 41 (2008), pp. 252-262, and 'Paideia and Good Judgment', in D.M. Steiner, ed., *Philosophy of Education: Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*, 3 (1999), pp. 63-75.

pp. 233-258. Macé argues that from Plato's perspective, Protagoras' 'private perception' prevents any *koinon* ('commonality') and thus undermines democracy, superficially the political constitution with the most commonality.

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